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**Faculty of Management**  
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Conceptualization and Interventions of Social Inclusion  
in Higher Education Institutions

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## Abstract

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The contrast of the recently assumed values of efficiency and productivity, with equity and social inclusion, creates an interesting context to study social inclusion policies in higher education institutions (HEIs). Higher education (HE) practices towards social inclusion are known to vary enormously, and the experiences of HEIs in Western developed nations are well documented. However, the phenomenon has gone surprisingly unexplored in other contexts. This study aims at exploring the experiences with social inclusion of a single HEI, the Autonomous University of Queretaro (Mexico), and to develop a context-sensitive model for analyzing the conceptualization and the institutional policies for social inclusion in HEIs. The study engages with the context of the university, by looking at hierarchical structures unveiled by postcolonial theorists. Postcolonialism is a contemporary global condition in which ethnic, sexual, epistemological, economic, and gender hierarchical relations are observable in modern day societies. The impact of postcolonialism in HE is rarely explored, yet highly relevant, especially in the discussions around social inclusion. Through interviews with students, faculty members and administrators, the qualitative case study explores the conceptualization of social inclusion in the university and the forms in which it compares to the policies for social inclusion at place. A context-sensitive model is designed and presented in the study. The model enables the exploration of both the conceptualization and the policies or interventions of social inclusion in the case study university, and can eventually be utilized to analyze the experiences of other HEIs. The result findings include the model itself, feedback on the utility of the model for the case university and other HEIs in other contexts, and practical recommendations for the case university.

## Contents

Abstract.....	ii
Contents.....	iii
List of Figures.....	v
List of Tables.....	v
Acknowledgements .....	vii
Chapter 1. The research problem.....	1
1.1 Introduction to social inclusion policies in higher education .....	1
1.2 The research gap .....	2
1.2.1 Previous studies on institutional policies for social inclusion in HE .....	2
1.2.2 Research choices based on the gap .....	7
1.3 Research objectives and questions.....	8
1.4 Significance of the study.....	10
1.5 Key concepts.....	10
1.5.1 The postcolonial context .....	11
1.5.2 The concept of policy .....	12
1.6 Structure of the study .....	14
Chapter 2. The research phenomenon .....	15
2.1 Social inclusion in higher education.....	15
2.2 Benefits and potential challenges .....	16
2.2.1 Neoliberal trends .....	17
2.2.2 The focus on access and the merit-based system .....	18
2.2.3 The indigenization of HE and other calls to decolonize HE.....	20
Chapter 3. The analytical framework .....	22
3.1 Introduction to the model.....	22
3.2 Gidley's layered figures.....	23
3.3 The proposed model.....	27
Chapter 4. The case .....	32
4.1 Higher education and social inclusion in Mexico.....	32
4.2 Legislation and national policies .....	34
4.3 The Autonomous University of Queretaro .....	37
Chapter 5. The research methodology.....	42
5.1 Research philosophy .....	42

5.2 Selection of the case study .....	44
5.3 Data sources and data collection .....	46
5.3.1 Interviews .....	47
5.3.2 Policy-related documents .....	49
5.4 Data analysis .....	50
5.5 Limitations of the methodology .....	51
Chapter 6. The research findings and discussion .....	53
6.1 The neoliberal ideology .....	53
6.1.1 Conceptualization .....	54
6.1.2 Interventions .....	58
6.2 The social justice ideology .....	61
6.2.1 Conceptualizations .....	62
6.1.2 Interventions .....	65
6.3 The social transformation ideology .....	67
6.3.1 Conceptualizations .....	68
6.3.2 Interventions .....	70
6.4 Summary of the findings .....	74
Chapter 7. The research conclusions .....	76
7.1 Main findings and conclusions .....	76
7.2 Limitations of the study .....	78
7.3 Implications for further research .....	79
References .....	80
Appendices .....	87
Appendix A. Interview guide for project administrators .....	87
Appendix B. Interview guide for beneficiaries of the interventions .....	89

## **List of Figures**

Figure 1. Gidley’s Spectrum of Ideologies Underlying Social Inclusion Theory and Policy.....	24
Figure 2. Gidley’s Access, Participation and Success in Social Inclusion Interventions. ....	26
Figure 3. Conceptualizations and interventions of social inclusion in higher education. ....	30
Figure 4. The neoliberal ideology: Extract from Figure 3.....	54
Figure 5. The social justice ideology: Extract from Figure 3.....	62
Figure 6. The social transformation ideology: Extract from Figure 3.....	67
Figure 7. Summary of the findings.....	75

## **List of Tables**

Table 1. Public and private HEIs in Mexico. ....	33
Table 2. UAQ's basic information. ....	38
Table 3. Classification of interviewees according to their role in the university. ....	47
Table 4. Interview-related information.....	48

*In loving memory of my father,  
Oscar Becerra Chavarín. 1958-2016*

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# Chapter 1. The research problem

## 1.1 Introduction to social inclusion policies in higher education

The demand for inclusive universities and widening participation in higher education (HE) has grown considerably in recent decades, despite the shifting role of HE in many parts of the world, from a “national and cultural” function to an “economic rationale” (Huisman & Van der Wende, 2004). This new “economic rationale” in HE refers to many governments across the globe striving for international competitiveness at the same time that they are reducing the budget for education, research, and development (see Blyth, 2013). Such changing priorities and budget cuts from the government are forcing higher education institutions (HEIs) to increase their productivity, expand their sources of income, and reduce costs at the expense of neglecting their social and political role in societies to a greater or lesser extent (for some studies on these trends in Latin America, see Torres & Schugurensky, 2002; in OECD countries, Douglass, 2010; globally, Tilak, 2005). In that context, the initiatives that aim at the development of inclusive universities face a lack of support from governments and a “hostile environment” (Nunan, George & McCausland, 2000, abstract) in universities with new market-oriented ideologies dominating the decision-making and policy processes (Hardy & Woodcock, 2015).

Pressure to develop inclusive universities comes from different directions. While the governments provide less economic support to HEIs, *inclusion* becomes a buzzword in an increasing number of national accreditation and quality assurance systems (Martin & Stella, 2007; Martin, 2010). At the same time, societies demand more inclusive universities that are ready to take in a more diverse community, protect the rights of traditionally underserved groups, and set the example of egalitarian societies. Similarly, university communities and students and staff members who belong to traditionally underserved communities are asking to be involved in the development and implementation of policies, and in the general decision-making and democratic processes of the universities. With so much pressure from different stakeholders, universities are left with no option but to strive for inclusion.

However, HEIs are many times alone in their efforts to reduce exclusion, for the national laws for equal access are many times unspecific, and there is a striking lack of national policies for the development of inclusive universities. In that sense, governments delegate the

responsibility of fostering equality to HEIs, who have to develop internal strategies and policies to cope with the demands, and implement them in already unwelcoming environments.

Under today's 'neoliberal common sense' in HE (Torres, 2011), HEIs around the globe share the challenge of promoting social inclusion and equity, while maintaining efficiency and quality (Gupta, 2006). The contrast of these values creates an interesting context for the social inclusion policies in HEIs, that are known to "vary enormously" (Hughes, 2015 p. 303) from institution to institution. Thereupon, many questions arise: How are HEIs dealing with the pressure of creating more inclusive environments with little or no support from the government -either through national policies or direct funding? How are the policies for inclusion impacted by the change in the values of HEIs? What shapes does social inclusion take in different HEIs in different contexts? How are institutional policies for inclusion responding to the needs of university communities? Whose voices are heard and whose are missing in the policy processes regarding social inclusion? Ultimately, how are the institutional policies for inclusion impacting the access, participation, and success in HE of traditionally underserved groups?

## 1.2 The research gap

### 1.2.1 Previous studies on institutional policies for social inclusion in HE

While a fair number of studies on social inclusion in HE at national level have been developed in many historical and geographical contexts in the last forty years; at the institutional and regional level, the topic has gone under examined for decades (Kezar, 2010). Therefore, little is known about the challenges and the impact of institutions and their policies on the access, participation, and success of students that belong to traditionally underserved groups.

I conducted a literature review of the studies on social inclusion in HE that focus specifically on social inclusion at the institutional or individual level. I looked for articles and other kinds of research papers from as many countries and regions as possible. The search was done in English, Spanish and Portuguese, the languages in which I am fluent. I looked for papers that discussed experiences and practices of HEIs in regard to social inclusion. I tried to find papers that focused on social inclusion in HE in general, as well as on the access,

participation and success in HE of traditionally underserved groups, such as Indigenous peoples, those living with disabilities, those coming from low-income families, first generation students, ethnic minorities, women, and combinations of those, among others. I explored regional and international journals in different fields such as higher education, policy studies, inclusive education, disability studies, gender studies, queer studies, and Indigenous studies.

After the literature review, I was able to corroborate Kezar's (2010) observation that the amount of existing studies on social inclusion in HE at the institutional and the individual level is limited. Moreover, I found out that most of the studies at these levels possess three common characteristics:

- 1) They concentrate in certain geographical areas, such as the USA and Canada (e.g. Morfin, Perez, Parker, Lynn & Arrona, 2006; Rankin, 2005), Australia and New Zealand (e.g. Claiborne, Cornforth, Gibson & Smith, 2011; Devlin, 2009), or Europe (e.g. Deem & Morley, 2006; Crozier, Reay, Clayton, Colliander & Grinstead, 2008), which limits the scientific understanding of social inclusion in HEIs to the Anglo-European context<sup>1</sup>;
- 2) they focus on only one dimension of social exclusion, either economic status (e.g. Perna, Lundy-Wagner, Yee, Brill, & Tadal, 2010; Crozier, Reay, Clayton, Colliander & Grinstead, 2008), gender or sexual minorities (e.g. Case, Kanenberg & Tittsworth, 2012; Ellis, 2009), disability (e.g. Mutanga & Walker, 2015; Claiborne, Cornforth, Gibson & Smith, 2011), or ethnicity (e.g. Hurtado, Inkelas, Briggs & Rhee, 1997; Rankin & Reason, 2005). By assuming a one-dimensional perspective, the researchers might make the mistake of erasing the relations between different dimensions of social exclusion and homogenizing the targeted social group;
- 3) finally, they utilize theoretical and conceptual frameworks that are specific to Western developed countries (e.g. critical race theory, feminist critical theory, post-

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<sup>1</sup> A limitation of this finding is that the literature review that lead to it was conducted only in English, Spanish and Portuguese. However, a great number of articles from all over the world are published in English each year, and it was still almost impossible to find any research done on institutional policies or actions towards social inclusion in HEIs outside of the mentioned countries. It is also worth noting that, in Spanish, research on the topic was almost inexistent, despite the fact that more of 20 countries in the world use Spanish in their academic production.

structuralist approaches, etc.) and have a limited explanatory power when trying to understand social inclusion in other contexts.

***Concentration in certain geographical areas.*** The fact that most of the research on institutional policies for inclusion in HE concentrates in Western developed countries means that there is very little known about the experiences of HEIs in other national, regional and local idiosyncrasies. Specifically, there is a clear gap regarding the understanding of the very same concept of social inclusion in HEIs in non-Western developing contexts, and how that understanding is reflected in the policies. Moreover, little is known of the challenges that the institutions are facing, the ways in which the policies answer to those challenges and, ultimately, how those policies impact the access, participation, and success of underprivileged members of their societies.

The misrepresentation of the experiences of HEIs in non-Western, developing, and postcolonial nations is of particular importance when discussing diversity and inclusion in HE since the conceptualizations of these phenomena differ from one society to another. Concepts such as gender, disability, and ethnicity are social constructs rather than biological concepts, which makes them dynamic and not universal to every society.

The statement that social inclusion is conceptualized differently in different contexts is easily revealed when looking at, for example, ethnicity. Ethnicity possess a different meaning and is lesser or more determinant as a dimension of social exclusion in HE in countries such as Ethiopia, Mexico, or the USA, for instance. In the USA, for example, race, and ethnicity have acquired different meanings due to historical events such the abuse and segregation of Native Americans, the slavery of Africans and African-Americans, and the migration waves from Europe or, more recently, Mexico and Central America (see Sanders, 2000). This influences the participation in HE of students coming from black, native or Hispanic communities, for example. Low-income, discrimination, and legal barriers for undocumented migrants are among the most studied topics in the literature regarding social inclusion in HE in the USA. In Ethiopia, on the other hand, ethnicity is closely related to political and economic power; a relationship that has been proved to prevailed even after legislative attempts to unify the country under a so-called ethnic-based federalism (see Aalen, 2011). In the case of Ethiopia, ethnicity, gender and the intersection of both is the main focus in the studies on social inclusion in HE. Meanwhile, in Mexico, the blend of Indigenous, European and African cultures resulted in a diverse majority of a mixed-race population, a small group of white

population that enjoys great privileges, and a relatively small number of Indigenous and Afro-Mexican population that suffers exclusion in many societal dimensions, including HE (see Paz, 1985).

Despite the enormous relevance of recognizing that inclusion and diversity have unique complexities and meanings in different local, national, and international contexts, there is a notable lack of research on institutional policies for social inclusion in HE in countries in Asia, Africa, Latin America, and the Caribbean. The lack of research on the topic in these areas is surprising considering that countries in these places have the highest levels of Indigenous population, influential traditional gender roles, and outrageous levels of poverty and inequality. These factors impact directly on the degree of access to HE and other public services.

***Focus on only one dimension of social exclusion.*** Most of the studies on social inclusion in HE at the institutional level focus on only one dimension of social exclusion. There are some trends in the most studied dimensions of social exclusion according to the origin and context of the research. As pointed by Kezar (2010), the discussion of social inclusion in HE in the countries of her compilation (USA, UK and Canada) has a focus on ethnicity and, to some extent, on gender and sexual minorities. Australian research on social inclusion in HEs focuses on specific underprivileged groups such as Indigenous Australians, and individuals living with homelessness, disability, health and/or mental health issues (Gidley, Hampson, Wheeler & Bereded-Samuel, 2010). These studies rarely look at the interconnections between different dimensions of social exclusion. The one-dimensional understanding of social exclusion permeates the analysis and evaluation of the policies and, consequently, affects the levels of social inclusion achieved by those institutional policies and measures.

Additionally, some studies focus on the institutional policies for inclusion in HE of students with disabilities. Researchers in this area have focused on individual and institutional experiences with disabilities (e.g. Fuller, Healey, Bradley & Hall, 2004; Claiborne, Cornforth, Gibson & Smith, 2011), and even the so called “invisible disabilities” such as dyslexia, attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder, or mental illness (e.g. Mullins & Preyde, 2011; Matthews, 2009). This research has reflected positively on the access, participation, and success of thousands of HE students that have some kind of disability. However, at the institutional level, the topic is more commonly approached as a pedagogical and practical barrier, rather than a social or political matter. Also, despite the fact that conditions of

disability are strongly linked to others forms of social exclusion, such as poverty (Singal, 2013), these connections are rarely explored in the literature regarding institutional policies in HE.

Studies on institutional financial aid policies in HE and their relation to opportunity and stratification, such as Bowen, Kurzweil, Tobin & Pichler's (2006), have concluded that while HEIs promote similar admission and graduation opportunities to students with high academic ability regardless of their socioeconomic status, they reinforce stratification by enrolling a very small number of students from low-income families. The studies that focus on financial aid policies, greatly advance scientific understanding of the challenges and benefits of including low-income students, however, very often they erase other dimensions of social exclusion that are strongly linked to economic challenges. By looking at only one dimension of social exclusion as an independent variable, these studies are homogenizing the targeted social group and becoming oblivious to the ways in which these forms of social exclusion interconnect and create singular forms of oppression and unique experiences (Crenshaw, 1989). Poverty in Latin America is indeed feminized and indigenized (Herrera & Duhaime, 2014) and linked with disability. In Mexico, for example, almost a third of the households with one or more disabled members are among the two poorest deciles of the population (INEGI, 2012). In that sense, the underrepresentation of low-income students in HE in Latin America relates directly to the exclusion of individuals living with disability, those of Indigenous and Afro-Latino origin, and the women in those groups.

***Applicability of theoretical and conceptual frameworks.*** As stated before, in the existing studies on social inclusion in HE at the institutional level, there are obvious trends. The concentration of research in specific contexts such as the USA, Canada, and Australia, and the inclination of the studies to utilize a one-dimensional perspective to social inclusion is directly linked with the theoretical and conceptual frameworks that are utilized in that research. For example, in the USA, where most of the studies concentrate in gender or ethnicity as dimensions of social exclusion, critical perspectives to policy analysis have been preferred. These policy studies utilize theories and concepts of sociology or political science developed by other American scholars, such as critical race theory or feminist theory, and adapt them to different methodologies of policy analysis (e.g. Morfin, Perez, Parker, Lynn & Arrona, 2006). More recently, other approaches, such as those based on post-structuralism (e.g. Kezar, 2010) or campus climate approaches for analyzing inclusion policies for gender

minorities (e.g. Rankin, 2006) or ethnic minorities (e.g. Rankin & Reason, 2005), have also been proposed as an alternative to traditional approaches to policy analysis.

The theoretical and conceptual approaches to policy studies have proven to be useful to examine the institutional policies for social inclusion in very specific contexts, such as the USA, Canada, and Australia, and usually with a focus on only one dimension of social exclusion. However, when analyzing social inclusion in other national and institutional contexts -as opposed to Western developed nations-, these theoretical perspectives might not be sensitive to the characteristics exclusive to non-Western postcolonial. Some examples of these characteristics include the forms of corruption inside and outside the institutions, the politicization of the decision-making practices of the universities, the soft and hard power of certain stakeholders, and, ultimately, the different conceptualization of social constructs, among others. More specifically, in the case of postcolonial contexts, the theoretical and conceptual frameworks developed in Western nations by Western scholars fail to unveil the deep-rooted effects of colonialism and imperialism in modern societies. The relevance of considering postcolonialism when conducting research in modern day societies is discussed further in this chapter.

### 1.2.2 Research choices based on the gap

In short, there is a clear need to research policies for inclusion in HE at the institutional level, as opposed to the national level. More studies at the institutional level would contribute to the understanding of HEIs' experiences with social inclusion, and the ways in which their institutional policies impact the access, participation, and success of underprivileged students. Moreover, those studies on institutional policies have to:

- 1) be in different social and historical contexts besides those of Western developed nations,
- 2) have a focus on more than one dimension of social exclusion and the relationships among them (intersectional perspective),
- 3) and utilize conceptual and methodological frameworks that are sensitive to the social, political, economic, and historical context in which the policies are being developed and implemented.

As a response to this research gap, this study (1) attempts to widen the understanding of social inclusion in HEIs in other cultural, economic, and historical contexts -as opposed to Western developed countries- by exploring the case of the Autonomous University of Queretaro (UAQ) in Mexico, as an example of a postcolonial context. With the concept of intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989) in mind, this study (2) does not look at dimensions of social exclusion as independent but rather focuses on the relationships that result from the interconnections of them. Therefore, the so-called *policies for inclusion* that this study explores, include a wide range of university's activities that contribute to social inclusion in many dimensions. Further in this chapter, I present the definition and delimitation of the concept of policy utilized in this study. Finally, the study (3) takes a critical perspective to construct an overview of the different conceptualizations of social inclusion of members of the university community, and analyze the institutional policies. The idea of identifying the conceptualization of social inclusion in the case university derives from the understanding that social inclusion, gender, disability, ethnicity and other dimensions of social exclusion are social constructs that take specific nuances in different contexts.

### 1.3 Research objectives and questions

The general aim of this study is *to shine new light on the social inclusion experiences of HEIs in postcolonial contexts, and to create a context-sensitive model for analyzing the conceptualization and the institutional policies for social inclusion in HEIs*. These objectives are pursued through the exploration of the case study of the Autonomous University of Queretaro, in Mexico. In the methodology chapter (Chapter 5), the rationale behind the selection of this university is explained.

For this study, I have developed a model to use as an analytical framework. The model (1) enables the exploration of social inclusion as a concept in the university community at the case study university; and (2) allows for a comparison of such conceptualization with the policies at place in the case university. The model serves as a tool for mapping the conceptualization and the policies at place, and provides a visualization of the matches and mismatches of the policy and practice of social inclusion at a single institution. In this research, the model is applied in the case of the Autonomous University of Queretaro in Mexico. In further studies, and with the feedback from this case study, the model could be

adapted and developed to serve as a tool for exploring the conceptualization of social inclusion in other HEIs and its relation with the institutional policies for social inclusion.

More specifically, the model provides information to better understand the conceptualization of social inclusion of different members of the university community such as university administrators, students, and faculty members. Additionally, the model unveils the ways in which said conceptualizations are expressed in the policies for social inclusion of the case university.

This information results in the issuing of recommendations towards a better fit between the concept of social inclusion and the policies for it in the case university.

With the model, the case study answers the following questions:

1. How is social inclusion conceptualized in the Autonomous University of Queretaro?
2. How does that conceptualization compare to the institutional policies for social inclusion of the Autonomous University of Queretaro?

The notion of *conceptualization* is central to this study. When I ask for the conceptualization of social inclusion in the case university, I am trying to understand what the university community understands by social inclusion. In order to comprehensibly understand the concept of social inclusion in the university, I look for discourses around social inclusion in interviews with university leaders, mid-level administrators, students and faculty members, as well as in policy-related texts. The importance of identifying the conceptualization of the case university, and not simply taking the definition from the literature, derives from the epistemological base of social constructionism. Social constructionism argues that the forms in which we understand the world and its phenomena are “historically and culturally specific” (Burr, 2015 p. 4). In that sense, the concept of social inclusion and its dimensions such as gender, ethnicity, disability, and poverty, are social constructs that are dynamic and have endemic nuances.

On one hand, with the first question, I am looking to identify the conceptualization of social inclusion in the case university and give an account of the perspectives of different members of the university community. On the other hand, with the second question, I connect that conceptualization of social inclusion with the institutional policies for social inclusion that

were being developed and implemented at the time of the interviews. By making the connection between the concept and the policies, I compare them to each other and look for connecting and differing points. Answering this question could unveil which and whose understandings of social inclusion are prioritized in the policies of the case university and in which ways. With this information, recommendations towards a better fit between conceptualization of the phenomenon and the policies around it could be issued, as well as feedback of the model for further development.

## 1.4 Significance of the study

The findings of this study contribute to widening the understanding of social inclusion in HE in postcolonial contexts mainly in two senses, namely, (1) through the development of a context sensitive model that could be utilized in other HEIs as a tool to compare policy and practice of social inclusion; and (2) through the exploration of a case study that sets an example of the misses, merits, and peculiarities of promoting social inclusion in a university in a postcolonial country.

Specifically, the findings of this study could be useful for HEIs in postcolonial contexts that have recently decided to take on the great effort that social inclusion involves, or that are finding hurdles mid-way. Moreover, scholars, and policymakers interested in the role of different university communities in the policy making process, specifically, in policies for social inclusion in HE, might find in this study an example to unveil included and disregarded voices in said processes. Ultimately, this study is useful to the policy makers in the institution of the case study, as it is crucial to point out that the final objective of critical policy studies is not the analysis itself, but the institutional transformation and improvement that draws from informed critiques.

## 1.5 Key concepts

Central to this thesis are the concepts of *social inclusion*, *postcolonial context* and *policy*. The concept of *social inclusion* is discussed extensively in Chapter 2 of this paper, while the remaining two key concepts are discussed in this section.

### 1.5.1 The postcolonial context

Occasionally, postcolonialism is understood as an unclearly defined period of time after the colonization ceases to rule and nations gain their independence. When used with this meaning, everything that is defined as postcolonial belongs in the past, to the tumultuous first years of an independent nation. However, in this study, the designation of postcolonial is based on that of postcolonial studies (also referred to as postcolonialism) that rather give an account of modern day societies.

The misinterpretations around the term *postcolonial* are often related to the confusion between the concepts of colonialism, neocolonialism, and postcolonialism. Gayatri Spivak, Indian postcolonial theorist, discussed *colonialism* as the territorial imperialist movement between the 16th and 20th century; *neocolonialism* as the dominant economic, political and cultural processes that arose in the 20th century; and *postcolonialism* as a contemporary global condition (Alexa Linhard, 2002). In that sense, a postcolonial context is not one that belongs in the past, but in a modern day society that was once under the rule of colonization.

In the postcolonial perspective, colonization is not just a period in the history of a nation, but a major series of events that has shaped today's geopolitical system, and that, in modern societies, is perceived in the power structures, identities, and understanding of reality. As Gilbert & Tompkins (1996, p. 2) have put it:

*“Not a naive teleological sequence which supersedes colonialism, postcolonialism is, rather, an engagement with and contestation of colonialism discourses, power structures and social hierarchies. Colonisation is insidious: it invades far more than political chambers and extends well beyond independence celebrations. Its effects shape language, education, religion, artistic sensitivities, and, increasingly, popular culture. A theory of post-colonialism must, then, respond to more than the merely chronological construction of post-independence and to more than just the discursive experience of imperialism”.*

Castro-Gómez & Grosfoguel (2007), Colombian and Puerto Rican scholars, argue that the independence processes of the 19th and 20th century focused on decolonizing legal and political structures but did not succeed -nor even attempted- to decolonize racial, ethnic, sexual, epistemological, economic, and gender hierarchical relations. According to the authors, and to postcolonial scholars in general, those relations of power imposed during colonialism still affect today's societies.

As it is many times the case in social phenomena, postcolonialism is not a universal and static interpretation of today's world, but a compilation of perspectives from scholars in the fields of literature, social sciences, economics, and history, among others. Postcolonialism is an umbrella concept that covers the experiences of multiple nations and societies that were marked with colonial history.

In Mexican society, where the case university of this study exists, the relations of ethnicity, gender, poverty, disability, and others dimensions of social exclusion are defined by power structures and identities of a postcolonial society. Mexico was conquered and colonized by the Spanish Empire in 1521 and during the three centuries that followed. The colonization of the Mexican people by the Spanish Crown was characterized by the murder and marginalization of the Indigenous communities, the imposition of Christianity, and the economic exploitation. These and other oppressive power structures that were imposed during colonial times are perpetuated in today's society. They are revealed in the marginalization of the Indigenous and Afro-Mexican communities; the economic and social privileges of the white population; the strong influence of traditional Catholic values in the political and public sphere; the overt and subtle expressions of institutionalized sexism and classism; and the close relations of poverty, disability, indigeneity and low educational level.

In this study, I refer to these oppressive power relations, when I describe Mexico as a postcolonial context. Furthermore, when I use the term *postcolonial contexts*, I refer to societies that were in the colonized extreme of global history and whose language, education, religion, values, artistic sensitivities, politics, and identities are permeated by the old and the modern colonialism and imperialism.

### 1.5.2 The concept of policy

There are two essential components in the concept of policy: (1) what policy is and (2) where it exists. The theoretical approach determines the first constituent and to operationalize it is a philosophical and ontological endeavor. On the other hand, the second component corresponds to a practical consideration of similar importance.

This study takes a critical stance to policy analysis, and so does the conceptualization of policy. Easton (1953) and Anderson (1979) answered to the question *what is policy* by stating that policy is the "authoritative allocation of values." This definition was later borrowed by Prunty (1985) when the author challenged traditional policy analysis and called for more

critical policy analysis approaches. Prunty (1985) answered the question of *what is policy* by defining it as “the legitimization of values.” With that definition, the analysis of policy acquired a political characteristic that was missing in traditional studies before the 1980’s. Since values are subjective, Prunty’s definition of policy implies that somebody’s values and agenda are being prioritized over others’. Since then, unveiling power structures in the policy processes has become one of the major characteristics of critical policy analysis.

The answer to the question of *where does policy exist*, however, is not tied to a theoretical approach in particular, but it is rather a practical consideration that varies from study to study. Policy analysts have answered this question in different forms, from very narrow to very broad interpretations.

The narrowest approaches locate policies exclusively in texts. In contrast, other scholars find policies in the processes around the texts, namely “agenda setting, production of policy texts, implementation... and evaluation” (Rizvi & Lingard, 2009). For the purpose of this study, Rizvi & Lingard’s understanding of policy is somehow problematic because it puts text in the center of the analysis, rather than actions or decisions. The tradition of issuing policies in paper, is not a costume that all institutions host, including the HEI of this study in particular.

Other analysts with wider understandings, such as Dye (1992), spot policies in “whatever governments choose to do or not to do.” Despite seeming simplistic and referring only to public policy as opposed to a broader conceptualization that would include institutional policies, Dye’s definition carries an important assumption. Dye states that “sometimes non-decision-making is as much an expression of policy as are the actual decisions made” (Rizvi & Lingard, 2009 p. 4).

This study combines Dye’s (1992) and Rizvi & Lingard’s (2009) interpretations of policy to answer the question of *where does policy exist*. The idea that sometimes not assuming a clear institutional stance is an expression of policy in itself is borrowed from Dye. On the other hand, the idea of locating policies in processes rather than exclusively in texts is borrowed from Rizvi and Lingard.

In summary, this study answers the question of *what is policy* by using a definition of the critical policy analysis perspective, namely the “legitimization of values” (Easton, 1953; Anderson, 1979; Prunty, 1985) of the authorities. Furthermore, this study’s answer to the question *where does policy exist* combines Dye’s (1992) and Rizvi and Lingard’s (2009)

understandings, and states that policy exists in both the targeted actions and lack of actions of the authorities. From the perspective of this study, policies are not always expressed in texts, but rather in actions, such as programs, initiatives, allocation of funds, and others, depending on the level of institutionalization of the policies and the practices of the organization. The term policy and intervention (see Chapter 3) are used interchangeably in this paper.

## 1.6 Structure of the study

The overall structure of this study takes the form of seven chapters, including these introductory chapter. Chapter 2 is engaged with social inclusion in HE as a research phenomenon. I discuss the definition of the term, as well as the benefits and potential challenges for the development of social inclusion in HE. In Chapter 3, I present the analytical framework developed for this study, as well as the theoretical considerations and previous models on which it is based. In Chapter 4, I discuss the case of this study. I begin by briefly describing HE in Mexico and the status of social inclusion in the country. In this chapter I also discuss the national policies for inclusion and I present the case university in detail. Chapter 5 is concerned with the methodology used in this study, its philosophical basis and its limitations. In Chapter 6, I provide an analysis and discussion of the research findings, and support them with samples from the interviews and auxiliary figures. Finally, in Chapter 7, I provide a summary and critique of the findings, as well as implications of the findings to future research. Final reflections on the uses and limitations of the model used as analytical framework are also provided in this last chapter.

## Chapter 2. The research phenomenon

This chapter is divided in two main sections. In the first section, Social inclusion in higher education, I present the global context for the implementation of social inclusion practices in HE, the main elements of the phenomenon and its definition, as well as a brief review of the most common policies for social inclusion in HE. In the second section, Benefits and potential challenges, I briefly present the main academic discussions regarding the benefits of social inclusion inside and outside HEIs, as well as the main challenges faced by social inclusion initiatives in HE.

### 2.1 Social inclusion in higher education

In the last couple of decades, there has been a shift in the policies that enabled a relatively greater reach of HE to societies and individuals in the world. Globally, the enrolment rate in HE went from 15.5 percent in 1995 to 34.4 in 2014 (UIS, 2017). In the Anglo-European context, HE went from a good of the few to a right of the many. Today, almost all European nations enroll upwards of 50 percent of the age cohort (Ibid). Moreover, with much more modest increases in the enrolment rates than those in the Anglo-European nations, HEIs in the so-called transitioning economies in Latin America and Asia have HE enrolment rates of 30 percent and higher (Ibid). However, too many nations in the world have not been able to reach the 15 percent enrolment rate threshold, and present slow growth rates. The average in African Sub-Saharan countries, which have the lowest participation rates, reached only 8.5 percent in 2014 (Ibid). These inequalities of access to HE are not only observable in international comparisons, but are also evident in individual nations.

Unfortunately, everywhere in the world, access, participation, and success in HE are still the privileges of selected groups of society. Research has shown that the massification of HE in most nations has disproportionately benefited richer families and, thus, widen participation gaps between the rich and the poor (Blanden & Machin, 2004; Bowen, Kurzweil, Tobin & Pichler, 2006). Data show that almost every nation in the world, including those in the Anglo-European and transitioning economies, have failed to include underprivileged groups in HE in ways that would better represent the demographics of their societies (UIS, 2017). Furthermore, beyond the inequality of access, researchers have also discussed and documented the experiences of the so-called non-traditional students in HEIs. First generation

HE students, immigrants and children of immigrants, Indigenous people, individuals living with disability, in homelessness or in poverty, not only face bigger economic and social challenges to participate and conclude their studies than the most privileged students, but also lack feelings of belonging, legitimacy and entitlement that privileged students demonstrate (Langa Rosado & David, 2006).

As a response, governments and institutions around the globe have developed global, national and institutional strategies towards social inclusion in HE. Most of these strategies focus on providing access to HE to traditionally underserved groups of society and increasing their retention and graduation rates. Factors such as gender, ethnicity, parental social class and education, disability, age, and place of residency have been identified as the most relevant in a variety of contexts. In that sense, social inclusion policies usually include affirmative actions that aim at diminishing the negative impact of those factors in the access, participation and success of individuals in HE. The most common affirmative actions include scholarship schemes, mentoring programs, grants for the improvement of HEIs' infrastructure, and access quotas, among others.

The term *social inclusion* is usually defined in opposition to social exclusion. Social exclusion was first used in France by the New Labor government in the 1990s (Barry & Hallett, 1998). It was soon borrowed in social sciences to explain the process in which certain members of society are systematically denied full access to services, opportunities, and resources that constitute individual rights and are fundamental to their development in a society. Some of these rights include, but are not limited to housing, employment, democratic participation, information, and education.

In the context of HE, social inclusion is defined in relation to three key elements or phases: access, participation, and success. These three elements are imaginary hiatuses that help us understand the HE path of individuals, specifically of those belonging to traditionally underserved groups of society. After gaining access to HE, these individuals are also referred to as non-traditional students.

## 2.2 Benefits and potential challenges

The benefits and challenges associated with social inclusion in HE have been explored through the lenses of several areas of study such as economics, pedagogy, Indigenous studies,

political sciences, and sociology, among others. The complexity of the phenomenon and the multiple perspectives to it, have developed into a wide variety of academic discussions and topics. For this section, I have selected three of these topics that are most relevant to this study, namely neoliberal trends, the focus on access and merit-based system, and the indigenization of HE. These three topics were selected because, in addition to being popular topics in the literature of HE and social inclusion in general, they are central in the academic discussions in Latin America and are highly relevant to understand social inclusion in Mexican HE.

### 2.2.1 Neoliberal trends

In the last few decades, the traditional notion of HE as a public good and a social investment is being challenged by a neoliberal agenda rooted in dynamics of globalization (Torres & Schugurensky, 2002). According to UCLA's professor, Carlos Alberto Torres (2011), the impact of the neoliberal agenda in HE around the globe is observable in four primary areas: efficiency and accountability, accreditation and universalization, international competitiveness, and privatization.

Though global trends such as neoliberalism are promoted, resisted and negotiated in different ways in every nation and institution, changes associated with the neoliberal agenda in the values of HE and in its every aspects, such as policy-making, governance, organization, and academic work and identity are noticeable worldwide (Huisman & Van der Wende, 2004; Nunan, George & McCausland, 2000; Douglass, 2010; Torres & Schugurensky, 2002; Alcántara, 2008). The effects of neoliberal trends in the development of social inclusion in HE in Latin America have been observed and documented in the literature (e.g. Torres & Schugurensky, 2002; Yarzabal, 2001; López Guerra & Flores Chávez, 2006; Yarza, Rojas & López, 2016). The specific case of Mexican HE has also been documented (e.g. Alcántara, 2008; Perez-Castro, 2014; Aboites, 2012). These studies have confirmed the effect of budget cuts and less public support to HE in detriment of social inclusion initiatives. The historical value of HE in Latin America and Mexico as a political and social figure is being compromised in a search for economic sustainability.

Globally, the traditional values of HE, such as equity, autonomy, and social transformation are being replaced by efficiency, excellence, and profitability (Torres & Schugurensky, 2002; Gupta 2006; Huisman & Van der Wende, 2004; Nunan, George & McCausland, 2000;

Douglass, 2010; Hardy & Woodcock, 2015). This change in the values of HE has proven to be a challenge for social inclusion initiatives (Gupta, 2006; Hardy & Woodcock, 2015) for these new values impose an ‘economic rationale’ to HE (Huisman & Van der Wende, 2004), that is many times incompatible with the goals of social inclusion initiatives. Such incompatibility can be observed, for example, in the effects of the diversification of HE funding on social inclusion, and in the tension between the goals of social inclusion initiatives and the value of profitability and productivity.

The new models of HE value revenue-making potential and high levels of productivity over social justice and equality of opportunities. In those models, social inclusion initiatives are many times seen as expenditures, rather than investments for social transformation inside and outside HE. Workers, students and other members of the university communities working towards social inclusion are faced with a paradox: while, HEIs are expected to cultivate social inclusion and provide services for an increasingly diverse community, their initiatives to do so lack national and institutional support and are introduced in ‘hostile environments’ (Nunan, George & McCausland, 2000) where they are regarded as incompatible with the institutional priorities of efficiency and excellence.

As documented by other researchers (e.g. Ahmed, 2012), social inclusion in HE is many times seen as a symbolic commitment rather than an institutional goal. The commitment is observable at many levels: governments commit to social inclusion through legislation (e.g. The Equality Act 2012 in the UK or the National Council to prevent discrimination in 2003 in Mexico); universities include the terms “diversity”, “equity”, and “inclusion” in their mission and vision statements; national, regional and institutional projects are launched; diversity/inclusion officers are appointed. Yet the projects lack economic support and continuity. Sustainability of the projects is not ensured through institutionalization mechanisms, which constitutes one of the biggest threat to social inclusion in the neoliberal world.

### 2.2.2 The focus on access and the merit-based system

Historically, three stages in the policy of access to HE have been identified: ‘inherited merit’, equality of rights, and equity or ‘equality of opportunity’ (Roemer, 2009). When access to HE relied on ‘inherited merit’, HE was a right only for the elite. ‘Inherited merit’ happened at some point in all the HE systems in the world (Clancy & Goastellec, 2007). In colonial times,

when Europeans funded HEIs in the colonies, HEIs were undoubtedly an exclusive privilege of their children and the children of the elite. During the 20th century, with the rise of human rights and the massification of HE, inherited merit was officially abandoned and equality of rights became the norm. The idea that HE should be accessible to everyone regardless of their social origin was widely spread. Formal barriers to women and ethnic groups were eliminated progressively, and admission tests or open access to secondary education graduates were introduced or reinforced (Ibid). At this stage of the policy of access to HE history, the merit-based access system to HE began and was further enhanced by systematic enforcement of entrance requirements and access examinations. The idea of equality of rights associated with HE is still present today, and numerous national legislations and international organizations, such as UNESCO have helped legitimizing it:

*"Everyone has the right to education... higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit." -UNESCO's Universal Declaration of Human Rights*

The equality of access policy has provided opportunity to access HE to a great number of groups who were denied access before. As useful and important as it is today, it lacks the critical perspective to social structures that still represent barriers to a great number of possible HE students. While the formal barriers were eliminated, inequalities of access to HE are still present in the form of structural barriers, such as poverty, lack of pedagogical support for people with disabilities, neglecting of indigenous epistemic perspectives to education and research, among others.

Finally, the last stage in the history of policies of access to HE is equity, defined as a equality of opportunities (Roemer, 2009). In this stage, scholars and policymakers make a case of eliminating "differences in the opportunity structure" (Clancy & Goastellec, 2007, p.139) that constitute a barrier to HE access. In that sense, affirmative action measures, such as quotas and mentoring support, scholarships, inclusive education initiatives, and epistemological transformation were introduced as an attempt to amend some of these differences.

Still today, one of the biggest challenges regarding access to HE in the world is that the transition from equality of rights to equality of opportunities is not yet finalized. In many cases, the right of everyone to HE can be found in the legislation, yet the measures whereby this right can be made effective are not specified. The responsibility to ensure access is led to HEIs, whose jurisdiction is limited to those individuals who already are privileged enough to

have graduated from secondary education and have the social capital to aspire to HE. In that sense, public policy actions such as raising aspirations (Burke, 2013) and ensuring access to high quality basic education for everyone present an alternative. Affirmative actions that are accompanied by extra support to HEIs in their efforts to include non-traditional students and ensure their attainment in HE are known to have had certain level of success, yet to road towards inclusive HE is still being constructed.

### 2.2.3 The indigenization of HE and other calls to decolonize HE

The topic of indigenization of HE has become a popular discussion among HE scholars in areas where the Indigenous population is reclaiming their right to HE, and has become a global transformative movement. Indigenous scholars in Canada and the US (e.g. Harris, 2002; Marker, 2004; Battiste, 2017; Pidgeon, 2016), Malawi (e.g. Zeleza, 2009), Kenya (e.g. Mazrui, 2002), Polynesian Islands (e.g. Thaman, 2003) and other regions of the world have discussed the epistemological paradoxes of Indigenous HE. In Latin America, the topic of indigenization of HE and the decolonization of it, has been approached widely from the pedagogical and epistemological perspective (e.g. Arévalo, 2010) and the intercultural studies (e.g. Martínez Cortés, 2015; Juncosa, 2014), among other fields. From the thought of Fraire or the Indigenous and feminist movements of Latin America, new proposals have been developing, for example, the so-called “epistemology of the South” (Mendoza, 2010), and other Indigenous proposals.

As disjointed global movements that have initiated in different regions at the same time, the meanings and practices of the indigenization of HE vary enormously. Yet, one of the communalities is the call for not only a greater inclusion of Indigenous peoples in HE, but also the inclusion of Indigenous epistemic views on education, knowledge and research. Canadian Indigenous researcher, Michelle Pidgeon, describes indigenization of HE as “the meaningful inclusion of Indigenous knowledge(s), in the everyday fabric of the institution, from policies to practices across all levels, not just in curriculum” (Pidgeon, 2016, p. 79). The call for the indigenization of HE is an array of different attempts to include local knowledge and topics in the HE structures and to provide spaces for them to develop. In that sense, the call for the indigenization of HE is also a call for the decolonization of it. The decolonization of HE is a critique to modernity, a critique to the methods, the scholars, the topics and even the languages (e.g. Mazrui, 2002) that have been privileged by Western academia (de Oliveira Andreotti, Stein, Ahenakew & Hunt, 2015).

The indigenization of HE and other calls for the decolonization of HE are relevant in the discussion of social inclusion in HE because they have become righteous attempts to include local and regional perspectives to research and education. Both the right to access and participation of Indigenous peoples in HE, as well as the integration of more diverse epistemic paradigms are important components in the discussion of inclusion in HE.

More specifically, scholars have called for a revision of concepts and methods that are often taken for granted. For example, the concepts of knowledge, learning and wisdom that are often overlooked by Western scholars, are central in the work of Indigenous scholars (e.g. Thaman, 2003; Harris, 2002), mainly because, in many cases, the understanding of these concepts in mainstream HE differ from that of the Indigenous thoughts. Those epistemological differences impact greatly the experiences of Indigenous students, professors, and researchers in HE. In their seminal work, Kirkness and Barnhardt (1991) discuss the experiences of Indigenous students in HE in Canada and the US and express the urgency for HE to become sensitive to Indigenous student's needs, namely "the need for a higher education system that *respects* them for who they are, that is *relevant* to their view of the world, that offers *reciprocity* in their relationships with others, and that helps them exercise *responsibility* over their own lives". The four R's of Kirkness and Barnhardt have inspired scholars to continue documenting the experiences of Indigenous students in HE and their own experiences as Indigenous scholars (e.g. Marker, 2004; Pidgeon, 2008).

Today, the topic of epistemological diversity in HE is gaining momentum. In Mexico, for example, the so called "intercultural universities" are integrating praxis and social organization models of the Indigenous communities that they serve (e.g. Lebrato, 2016). While there is still a long way before the mainstream research and teaching practices suffer deep epistemic transformations, the possibilities that intercultural universities are offering are already getting the attention of Mexican and Latin American researchers, and might set the example for other HEIs in the region.

## Chapter 3. The analytical framework

To answer the questions of this study -*how social inclusion is conceptualized in the Autonomous University of Queretaro, and how that conceptualization compares to the institutional policies for social inclusion of the Autonomous University of Queretaro-*, I have designed a model that serves as the analytical framework. The academic foundations of the model as well as the model itself are described in the following pages.

### 3.1 Introduction to the model

The analytical framework presented in this chapter is a meta-research model that discusses the relations between ideologies, discourses, levels of institutional transformation, and interventions available in the academic literature on social inclusion policy and practice in HE. I constructed the model to be able to operationalize the conceptualization of social inclusion in the case university and to compare that conceptualization to the policies for social inclusion in a systematic way. It is a first attempt to develop a context-sensitive model that enables the construction of a social inclusion concept in a HEI and its relationship with the respective policies at place. The model was built using Gidley's (in Gidley, Hampson, Wheeler & Bereded-Samuel, 2010) figure of *Spectrum of Ideologies Underlying Social Inclusion Theory and Policy* (Figure 1), and figure of *Access, Participation and Success in Social Inclusion Interventions* (Figure 2), as well as Palomar Vereá's (2005) institutional levels of transformation. In addition to those sources, the model was complemented with my observations from the corresponding literature review on the phenomenon of question, social inclusion in HE, in the study areas of higher education studies, political sciences, pedagogy, gender and feminist studies, ethnic studies, Indigenous studies and sociology.

The model that I have constructed consists of two sections. First, the model can be used to map the understandings and experiences of social inclusion in a HEI, through the discourse and rhetorics of members of the university community, namely, students, faculty members and administrators. This first use of the model constitute what here is called the *conceptualization* of social inclusion in the case university. Second, the model can also be a tool to map the current policies of the HEI towards social inclusion. The policies might include programs, actions, and other events that respond to the diversity in the institution. In the model, these actions are called HE *interventions*.

After mapping both the conceptualization and the interventions, the model provides a visualization of the meeting points in which the policies and the experiences of those in the university convey. In the same way, the mapping allows for observing the discrepancies that might be found between the policies of the HEI in question and the needs and experiences of its community.

### 3.2 Gidley's layered figures

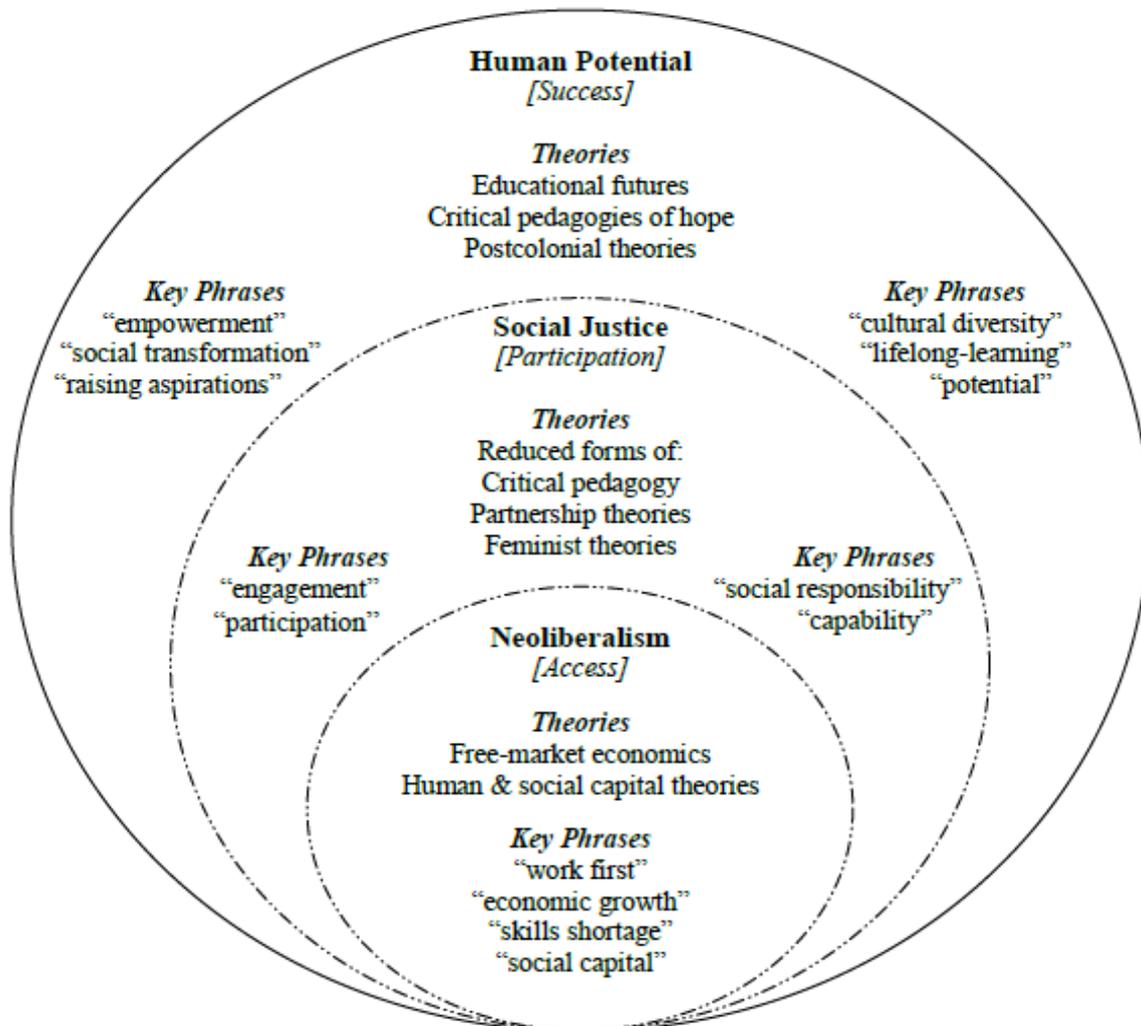
In her article with other Australian researchers (Gidley et al., 2010), Gidley presents her nested model *Spectrum of ideologies underlying social inclusion theory and practice* (Figure 1) for an “integrative analysis of the theory and practice literature on social inclusion in higher education” (abstract). The model presents a layered view of the ideologies underlying the theory and policy of social inclusion in HE. In each of these ideologies, social inclusion is understood differently and it is studied through the perspectives of different theories. The narrowest interpretation of social inclusion is that of the neoliberal ideology in which social inclusion is understood as *access*. Embraced by the social justice ideology, interpretations of social inclusion as *participation or engagement* offer a broader perspective. However, the broadest interpretation corresponds to the lens of human potential ideology in which social inclusion is seen as *success through empowerment*.

According to Gidley et al. (2010), in the neoliberal ideology, the main purpose is economic growth towards global competition, which makes social inclusion in HE a mere investment in human capital and a response to skills shortages. The neoliberal perspective of social inclusion as access, reduces social inclusion to numbers and percentages that very rarely reflect student participation and success. The neoliberal agenda is seen to advocate for a “free-market, privatised approach to higher education with [funding] concentration in a small number of elite institutions whereby small numbers of individuals may excel at the expense of others.” (p.10).

In the social justice ideology, in which social inclusion is understood in terms of participation and engagement, the main focus is on human rights, egalitarianism of opportunities, and human dignity. In this sense, the role of universities includes participation in university-community partnerships that are “intentional” rather than “reactive” (Thompson, 2008 in Gidley et al, 2010) and have the goal of regional and community development rather than

economic gain. The social justice interpretations of social inclusion involve dialogues that arise “from the full ecology of interests regardless of power” (Gidley et al. 2010, p. 11).

**Figure 1. Gidley’s Spectrum of Ideologies Underlying Social Inclusion Theory and Policy.**



Source: Gidley © 2009 in Gidley et al., 2010 p. 8.

Finally, the human potential ideology offers the most embracing perspective to social inclusion. The concept goes beyond economic access and equal right to everyone, and becomes a proposal to “maximise the potential of each human being... supporting broader cultural transformation” (Gidley et al. 2010, p. 11). The notion that all human beings, including those who have been marginalized, are multidimensional and possess needs and interests that go beyond their role in the political economy of a nation is central to the theory or practice underpinned by the human potential ideology. Under this ideology the employment of possibility models rather than deficiency models in social inclusion in HE is a

common characteristic. In addition, calls to challenge traditional epistemic traditions in HE, such as the decolonization of knowledge and the indigenization of HE are embraced by this ideology.

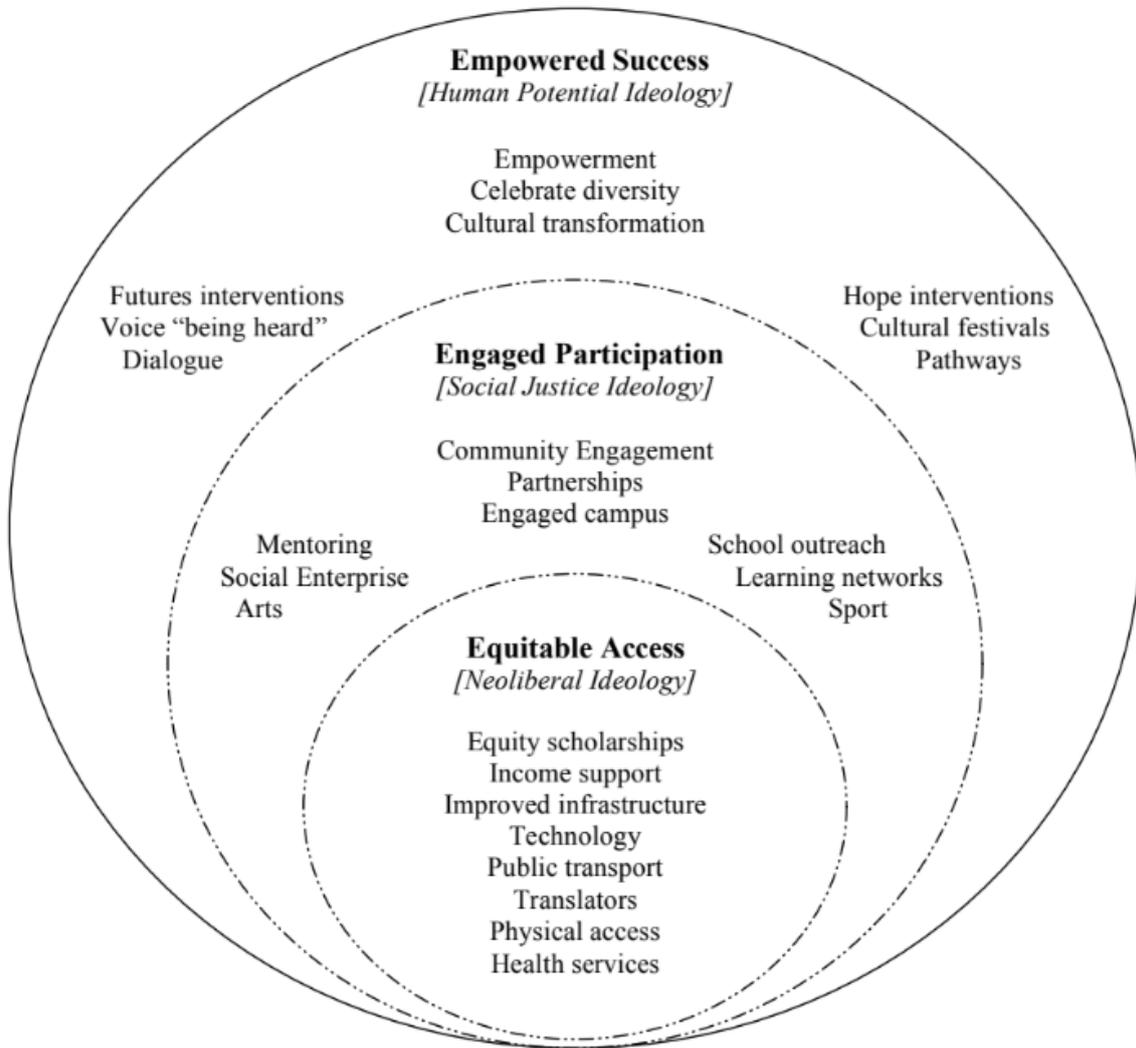
*“A crucial difference between these theories [those aligned with the human potential ideology] and much of neoliberal theory is that there is no one ideal -e.g. European, or Anglo-American- model of human development. Rather the notion of cultural and individual diversity is embraced whereby individuals are socially included, not so that they “fit in” or “are assimilated into” some pre-existing Westerncentric society or factory model of education, but rather that they bring with them the richness of their individual difference.”*  
(Gidley et al. 2010, p. 12-13).

In addition to the *Spectrum of Ideologies Underlying Social Inclusion Theory and Policy* figure, Gidley et al. (2010) present a second figure called *Access, Participation and Success in Social Inclusion Interventions* (Figure 2). This second figure, as the name suggests, discusses some examples of social inclusion interventions that focus either in access, participation and success. The authors lay emphasis on the idea that interventions at all stages of social inclusion -access, participation and success, respectively- are necessary to build social inclusion in HE, regardless of the “apparent” ideology that underpins them (p.13).

According to Gidley et al. (2010), the social inclusion interventions that are underpinned by the neoliberal agenda tend to focus on “the economic benefits of social inclusion” and rely on economic investments. These interventions include scholarships and income support, improved regional infrastructures such as public transportation to rural and isolated areas, architectural modifications for students with motor disabilities, and teaching and translation assistance, psychological and physical health services. According to the authors, these interventions are not less important than the other two types of interventions and can be seen as the “stepping stones” (p. 13) in the social inclusion agenda.

The social inclusion interventions that are related to the social justice ideology are grounded on critical social theory and, in addition to economic investment, involve social interventions. Some examples of these interventions include community engagement programs and partnerships, social entrepreneurship, mentoring programs, learning networks, art and sport interventions, and school outreach programs (Gidley et al., 2010).

**Figure 2. Gidley’s Access, Participation and Success in Social Inclusion Interventions.**



**Source: Gidley © 2009 in Gidley et al., 2010 p. 14.**

Finally, Gidley et al. (2010) state that the social inclusion interventions grounded in the human potential ideology develop from positive psychology and pedagogy theories and have a focus on empowerment and transformation. Some of the interventions of this type are programs that work with alternative pathways to HE (known in the related literature as *pathways*), intercultural and interreligious dialogues, ‘positive future’ interventions, and ‘hope’ interventions (see Burke, 2013).

### 3.3 The proposed model

While Gidley's layered views on the theory and practice of HE are excellent tools to understand the theorization of social inclusion in HE and the categorization of many of the current and historic social inclusion interventions, they have certain limitations in their explanatory power for the purposes of this research. Instead, I have designed a model that merges some of the concepts of both of Gidley's models and presents several new elements and relationships between those elements. I have documented those changes in this section.

(1) First of all, some of the elements of Gidley's models are not clearly defined. The concepts of access, participation and success, widely used in the social inclusion in HE literature and present in Gidley's models have been defined by authors in different ways. Access, for example, seems to be used by Gidley et al, (2010) as a synonym of admission when they state that "[access to HE] is fundamental, but it does not necessarily lead to active participation, engagement, empowerment or success." (p. 15). Yet, the authors never clarify their definition of either access, participation, or success. This is an important note, since other authors have defined access to be beyond entry, an open opportunity to participate of learning environments such as inclusive pedagogy, and support services (Burke, 2013).

For the purposes of this research and the optimal use of the model, I have defined the three key elements or phases of social inclusion in HE: access, participation, and success. **Access**, refers to the opportunity of admission to a HEI. Challenges or barriers in this phase are usually related to low levels of economic, cultural and social capital. Moreover, non-traditional student experiences in HE are framed under the term **participation**. Challenges in this phase are usually related to students' levels of accessibility to democratic, academic, infrastructural, emotional, and other communal resources in and around HE. Finally, **success** refers to students' completion and attainment of the study degree, and it is commonly seen as the final goal of the social inclusion initiatives in HE. Research, practice and policy on social inclusion in HE develop around these three elements or phases.

(2) Secondly, Gidley's figures respond to a general understanding of social inclusion at the national and international levels, rather than possessing an institutional focus as in the case of this study. The social inclusion "interventions" of Gidley's figures represent the "practice" section of their layered model and can be interpreted as national and international interventions, as well as institutional. With the reviews of literature that I have conducted for

this study, I have collected a wide number of social inclusion interventions that can be implemented in HEIs. I have then categorized the new interventions into Gidley's three ideologies and focuses, in order to complement the figures with institutional practices for social inclusion around the globe and specifically in HEIs in non-Western nations or with similar contexts to Mexico in terms of multiculturalism and inequalities.

(3) Thirdly, Gidley's layered figures of social inclusion theory and practice in HE lack more elements corresponding to the "practice" part of social inclusion in HE, which is very important to this study and to any study that looks for institutional transformation and meaningful connections between theory and practice. In that sense, Palomar Vereá's (2005) four levels of transformation are a great compliment to Gidley's figures, since they discuss the spaces for transformation in HEIs.

In her work, Mexican researcher, Cristina Palomar Vereá (2005) observes four levels in which the gender perspective can be observed and studied in a university: demographic, academic, institutional and epistemological levels. While her work focuses on gender, these four levels can also serve to explore diversity and inclusion in a university. Based on her contribution, I have redefined the four levels in ways that include the forms in which social inclusion and diversity can be studied in a HEI. These concepts are included in the model.

The **demographic level**, where the presence of women –in the case of the study, also members of other traditionally underserved groups of society- in the different spaces in the HE system can be analyzed. This level includes access to the universities, the distribution of student and staff population in the areas of study, the presence of members of underserved groups in leadership positions, and so on. The **academic level**, on the other hand, includes the introduction of gender and women's studies as areas of study or, in this case, the spaces where issues related to diversity and inclusion have been mainstreamed in the curriculum content. This level includes undergraduate and graduate programs, as well as modules included in certain programs of study, or specific research areas. At the **institutional level**, the policies and programs of the institution that focus on fostering diversity and promoting inclusion are studied. The critical analysis of the hierarchies inside the institutions, and the role they play in the decision-making process and the implementation of educational policies are also part of this level. Finally, the **epistemic level** includes the exhaustive academic analysis of the implicit values, philosophy and views shared by the members of the community towards inclusion and diversity.

All four levels have a descriptive function when trying to understand the degree of social inclusion in the HEI, but they also have a prescriptive function. According to Palomar Vereá's interpretation, to achieve meaningful levels of transformation in a HEI, interventions at the four levels are required.

(4) Finally, the fourth and biggest change to the model is the one that corresponds to the third underpinning (in terms of Gidley et al., 2010) or general ideology. As described before, Gidley's models are constructed with three ideologies as a base: neoliberalism, social justice and human potential. As opposed, the model presented in this research (Figure 3), discusses social inclusion as studied and practiced with the ideologies of neoliberalism and social justice, but rather than Gidley's human potential, the third ideology is social transformation.

This decision was triggered by Gidley's et al. (2010) vague differentiation between the second and third ideology, as well as by the connections I drew from the literature review. In their article, the authors confess that "while it might be difficult to accurately discern the difference between the previous [those of social justice] and subsequent [those of human potential] programs in terms of underlying values, and indeed there is much overlap between the ideologies, theories and approaches, it is a matter of emphasis" (p. 16). They continue by suggesting that the first have a focus on participation, and the second, on "success, empowerment and maximising human potential" (Ibid.)

This differentiation seems rather vague and responds to an actual overlapping between both ideologies. Instead, the model presented here, builds on one of the few differentiations mentioned by Gidley et al., that of social transformation. The authors quote Olsson (2008 in Gidley et al., 2010) regarding the understanding of social inclusion as "the moral imperative of working with the complexity of humanity" and the awareness that "education is transformative" not only to human beings, but also to societies. In that sense, in the model designed for this paper (Figure 3), the third ideology is that of social transformation. With the perspective of the social transformation ideology, the discourses and the policies revolve around the idea of making HE a space for individuals to develop their potential as human beings outside of any economic role, with the complexities of their human condition. This idea of human potential is framed by the goal of meaningful demographic, academic, institutional, and epistemic transformation inside the institution with the ultimate aim of achieving social transformation.

**Figure 3. Conceptualizations and interventions of social inclusion in higher education.**

		<span style="color: blue;">■</span> Conceptualization <span style="color: orange;">■</span> Interventions		
General ideologies	Focus	Discourses around social inclusion	Institutional policies	Levels of transformation
Neoliberalism	Access	Equitable access, rational choice, meritocracy, utilitarianism	Scholarships and other financing opportunities, inclusive infrastructure, inclusive pedagogical resources, remedial courses	Demographic
Social Justice	Participation	Social responsibility, engagement and belonging, passive no-discrimination	Mentoring and follow-up activities, learning networks, awareness campaigns, psychosocial support, student experience and support activities	Academic & institutional
Social transformation	Participation & success	Human potential, lifelong learning potential, social reproduction, local and regional impact	Institutional transformation, academic mainstreaming, community engagement, strong student involvement in decision-making	Institutional & epistemological

**Source: Author. Based on Gidley et al. (2010) and Palomar Verea (2005).**

In general, the model presented in this chapter is the result of the integration of both of Gidley’s models with four new additional elements. The changes include, first, the definition of the key concepts of social inclusion, namely access, participation, and success; second, the addition of new social inclusion interventions at the institutional level; third, the integration of Palomar Verea’s (2005) four levels of transformation to the model; and, finally, the development of the elements of the third general ideology, social transformation.

The model introduced in this chapter allows for an observation of the matches and mismatches between HEI communities’ experiences and conceptualizations of social inclusion with the relevant policies at place in the HEI. However, this model does not contain all the range of discourses around social inclusion, neither the full array of institutional interventions. In that sense, the model is an organic guide to categorize some of the

discourses and the interventions of social inclusion in HEIs. By organic, I refer to the possibility of constant adaptation by new social inclusion research and practice.

## Chapter 4. The case

In this chapter, I introduce the case of this study and the context where it sets. First, I present an overview of the Mexican HE system and how socially inclusive it is. I support this section with statistics and Mexican researchers' perspectives of the current situation in Mexico regarding the participation in HE of member of traditionally underrepresented groups. Second, I describe Mexican legislation stand on social inclusion in (higher) education and discuss the main national policies for social inclusion in Mexican HE. In this section, I have chosen to focus on two main groups of social inclusion policies, namely scholarships schemes and the establishment of intercultural universities. Finally, in the third section of this chapter, I describe the case study university. There, I present a general overview of the university, the academic programs, the funding system, the staff members, and the management and administration.

### 4.1 Higher education and social inclusion in Mexico

Mexico has a wide and diverse HE system that includes private institutions, federal and state public universities, technological and polytechnic universities, among others. As documented in Table 1, as March 2017, there were 841 public HEIs (SES, 2017) and 1216 private institutions (ANUIES, 2017). The public system serves about 70 percent of the total enrolment, and the rest is served by the private sector. With a handful of exceptions, the HEIs that are better positioned in the rankings and enjoy higher prestige are public. Many small private universities focus on only one or two areas of study.

The Ministry of Education (Secretaría de Educación Pública, or SEP) through the Sub-ministry of Higher Education (Subsecretaría de Educación Superior, or SES) administers the HE system. Among the attributions of the Sub-ministry of Higher Education are to regulate degrees and professional qualifications, to develop and manage public policies, to allocate federal funds to public universities through grant competitions, and to offer scholarships to students of public institutions (SEP, 2005).

The Sub-Ministry of Higher Education directly coordinates some of the public HEIs, such as the technological and polytechnic universities, and the government appoints the rectors and other high officials. However, other public HEIs, such as some state and federal universities,

have higher degrees of autonomy and elect the high officials through internal democratic processes. All public HEIs are at least partially funded by the government.

**Table 1. Public and private HEIs in Mexico.**

<b>Public Higher Education Institutions</b>	<b>841</b>
Federal Public Universities	9
Public State Universities	57
Technological Institutes	266
Technological Universities	114
Polytechnic Universities	62
Intercultural Universities	11
Research centers that issue HE degrees	30
Normal Universities	207
Other HE institutions	85
<b>Private Higher Education Institutions</b>	<b>1216</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>2057</b>

Sources: SES, 2017; ANUIES, 2017.

According to data from UNESCO, in the late 1990s, Mexican HE went from an ‘elitist system’ to a ‘mass system’ by achieving a 15 percent access to HE of the relevant age cohort. Today, according to the same organization, that percentage has duplicated and 31 percent of the relevant age cohort enrolls in HE.

However, the national average is deceptive in a country like Mexico where inequalities abound. For example, the rate of access to HE of the relevant age group in Mexico City, the capital of the country, is four times higher than that in Chiapas (Schmelkes, 2013), one of the poorest states that also has one of the highest percentage of Indigenous population in the country. By 2013, it was estimated that only one percent of the HE student population in Mexico was Indigenous (Schmelkes, 2013). This occurs in a country where around 25 percent of the population identifies as Indigenous and/or Afro-Mexicans (INEGI, 2015). Moreover, out of the 7.2 million of Mexicans living with a disability and the 15.9 million

living with a limitation<sup>2</sup>, only 5.7 percent of them have obtained a HE degree (INEGI, 2015). Unfortunately, HE in Mexico remains a privilege of only a few groups of society while some other groups are still facing enormous challenges to participate of HE and other public services.

As identified in the literature, belonging to a low-income family is a highly relevant variable with a negative impact in the access, participation and success in HE in Mexico (Bracho, 2005). However, considering that the dimensions of social exclusion are not independent, but rather interconnected variables (Crenshaw, 1989), the exclusion of low-income students in HE is directly related to the exclusion of other groups of society. Undeniably, poverty in Mexico is feminized and indigenized (Herrera & Duhaime, 2014) and directly related to disability (Perez-Castro, 2014). The close relationship of poverty with gender, indigeneity and disability negatively reflects on the educational opportunities of individuals belonging to one or more of those groups, especially at the HE level.

## 4.2 Legislation and national policies

The Political Constitution of the United Mexican States refers to human and civil rights in its first 29 articles. The first three articles of the constitution are especially relevant to discussions around equity of access to HE. The first article declares that everyone is equal before the law, and in 2000, an addition was made that explicitly states the right of every Mexican not to be discriminated. The second one recognizes the multicultural and Indigenous composition of the nation. Finally, the third one refers to the right of all Mexican citizens to basic education, and the State obligation to provide free education (including HE), and support scientific research and dissemination of the culture.

Specific regulations on education are enshrined in the General Law of Education, which was last modified in June 2016. Article 32 of this law declares that:

*“The education authorities will take actions to establish conditions that (1) allow each individual to fully exercise their right to education, (2) promote higher levels*

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<sup>2</sup> According to the classification of the National Institute of Statistics and Geography (known in Mexico as INEGI), people with a *disability* are those who report having “a lot of difficulty” to perform a list of activities provided by the institute, or are not able to perform them whatsoever. People with a *limitation* are those who report “moderate or low difficulty” to perform them. The activities include walking, moving lower and upper extremities, seeing, learning, remembering, focusing, listening, getting dressed, bathing, eating, communicating verbally, and others.

*of educational equity, and (3) ensure equal opportunities of access and participation in educational services.”<sup>3</sup>*

In the same law, it is stated that these actions to promote equity include developing programs with gender perspective, providing scholarships and financial support to students coming from economically disadvantaged groups, and developing compensatory programs for federal states that lag the farthest behind in terms of education. Yet, the law is not clear as to delegate specific responsibilities to public institutions, including the financing of the programs.

With the basis on the Mexican law, many policies have been launched in an attempt to increase the rate of access, retention, and attainment to HE of vulnerable groups of society. The policies implemented in the last decades aiming at achieving a higher degree of equity in Mexican HE include scholarships for students, targeted grant competitions, and the establishment of intercultural universities, among others.

Some of the most commonly mentioned policy efforts to diminish inequalities in Mexican HE take the form of scholarship schemes. It is important to mention that these scholarships do not belong to a great national policy, but they are rather independent initiatives that happen to have some common characteristics. The scholarships are targeted for students from low-income families that are enrolled in public HEIs. The scholarships cover either enrolment, maintenance, transportation or graduation costs. Most of these scholarships are mutually exclusive, which means that students cannot benefit from more than one at the same time. The scholarships might be provided by national, state level or municipal government, the Ministry of education, the National Council of Science and Technology (CONACyT), the National Commission for the Development of Indigenous Peoples (CDI), other public institutions, or the HEIs themselves.

There are also some scholarships that are specific for Indigenous students as well as affirmative actions in the allocation of general population scholarships. The Sub-ministry of Higher Education manages a national scholarship scheme that was launched two decades ago and that includes different types of scholarships for Mexican students of HE. This scholarship program comprise affirmative actions for Indigenous students. There are also initiatives that provide scholarships to young Indigenous in the states with higher numbers of Indigenous peoples; these scholarships are promoted as “full and comprehensive”, however, the money that the students receive from these scholarships is hardly enough to pay for a simple student

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<sup>3</sup> My translation.

room or some food, but not both. The National Council for Science and Technology, also provides scholarships whose main target group are Indigenous graduate students and researchers; they are usually the result of agreements with research centers and universities in the country and abroad; the recipients of these scholarships are usually a small group of 10-20 students or researchers every year.

While it is true that the economic disadvantages of Indigenous population represent an enormous obstacle to participate in HE for them, the challenges are usually much more complex than that. Low participation of Indigenous students in Mexican HE is related not only to financial restraints, but also remote location and precarious or dangerous public transportation, community traditions, (re)productive age, low quality basic education, limited aspirations, gender, discrimination, harassment, including other factors and, usually, a combination of several. Scholarships for minorities focus on only one dimension of social exclusion, economic marginalization, and make the mistake of homogenizing the targeted social group and ignoring other relationships between socioeconomic and sociocultural dimensions and identities.

Another one of the national policies for social inclusion in HE includes the establishment of intercultural universities. Intercultural universities are educational projects organized by the General Coordination of Intercultural and Bilingual Education (known as CGEIB), a body that is accountable to the Ministry of Education. The first intercultural university was established in 2003; today there are eleven. The institutions receive students of Indigenous origin and other sectors of the population that are interested in the development of Indigenous or rural communities. They regularly meet and exchange experiences with other intercultural universities or similar projects in Latin America. Mexican intercultural universities share three main goals, namely “(1) to restore, treasure, and revitalize the Indigenous languages, cultures, knowledge and experiences; (2) to direct the professional education of the students towards learning experiences that are closer to their context; (3) to establish a communication and interaction bridge with the community”<sup>4</sup> (CGEIB, 2013). Some of the intercultural characteristics of these universities are shared by other HEIs in the country (Rojas-Cortés & González-Apodaca, 2016), yet only the intercultural universities have the support and direction of CGEIB.

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<sup>4</sup> My translation

Today, after almost 15 years since their establishment, intercultural universities face financial and political challenges. Despite being national projects, the federal government has delegated its responsibilities from the beginning. In the last decade, the national budget for the General Coordination of Intercultural and Bilingual Education (CGEIB) was reduced drastically (Observatorio Ciudadano de los Pueblos Indígenas, 2012), which affected the development and continuation of the intercultural universities. Moreover, in her work, Schmelkes (2008) discusses the “political functionality” of the intercultural universities, in which the federal and state government see the creation of the projects as a form to silencing discontent among the Indigenous population. This “political functionality”, in many cases, affects the academic quality of the institutions. The appointments of rectors and other important decision-making actors in the universities is related to the political affinity with the public administrators in power at the moment and, the use of academics and students for political proselytism has been exposed by the media.

Regarding the case of the inclusion of students with disabilities, some universities have implemented measures to attend the need of this sector of the population, but these practices have rarely been promoted to become institutional policies, and remain isolated actions. Moreover, at the national level there is no program or policy to favors the inclusion of people with disabilities in HE (Pérez-Castro, 2016).

According to Pérez-Castro (2016), the main strategies for inclusion conducted by universities in the country can be categorized in four groups. First, those who focus on integrating the problematic of disability in HE in institutional policies and norms; second, the academic and financial support to disabled students; third, those aimed at improving physical and information accessibility; and finally, other measures and services such as job banks, population census and awareness campaigns.

### 4.3 The Autonomous University of Queretaro

The Autonomous University of Queretaro (known as UAQ), founded in February 1951, is a public state funded university in Queretaro, Mexico. Its autonomy, understood as the capacity to organize their own academic and management affairs, as well as to decide on their internal allocation of funds (UAQ, 2007), was granted in 1959 by the Queretaro state government.

UAQ is a comprehensive university with a historically strong focus on teaching activities, and a growing involvement in research activities. Currently, only 12 percent of the student population is enrolled in a postgraduate program<sup>5</sup> (UAQ, 2015). However, at the national level, UAQ is one of the 10 universities with more postgraduate programs accredited by the National Program of Quality Postgraduate Programs (known as PNPQ), and number one in the state (UAQ, 2017).

Traditionally, UAQ's position in national rankings is between 8-20 among the more than 2000 private and public HEIs, and in the first 10 places among public universities in the country. In the last few years, UAQ has considerably improved its ranking classification in regional and national rankings. In the Latin American QS university ranking, for example, UAQ went from position 151 in 2014 and 2015, to 139 in 2016, being citations per paper, web impact, and faculty staff with PhD its most competitive criteria.

**Table 2. UAQ's basic information.**

<b>Foundation</b>	February, 1951
<b>Status</b>	Public state university
<b>Location</b>	Queretaro, Mexico
<b>Budget</b>	Approximately 90 million euros
<b>Number of faculties</b>	13
<b>Enrolled students</b>	21,812
<b>Number of academic programs</b>	187

**Source: UAQ, 2015; UAQ, 2017.**

Specific information on the diversity of the student population was unavailable for being considered sensitive data.

**Academic programs.** UAQ offers 187 academic programs in different areas of study (UAQ, 2015). The education offering of the university includes bachelor, specialization, master, and PhD programs that are equivalent to the cycles of HE promoted with the Bologna process. In

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<sup>5</sup> In this study, 'postgraduate programs' are understood as all academic programs offered by the university that require participants to have obtained at least a bachelor's degree. Postgraduate programs offered by UAQ include: specializations (e.g. medical specializations), master programs, and PhD programs.

addition, the university also offers two professional degree programs that amount to half the credits of a regular bachelor degree.

As many other public universities in Mexico, UAQ has a subordinated secondary education (Escuela de Bachilleres) system. Students graduating from said secondary education system do not have secured places in the bachelor programs of the university, nor a preferential treatment. However, students and staff members of the secondary education system do participate in the university's democratic activities and decision-making processes. UAQ's secondary education system is out of the scope of this research and it is not discussed any further, nor considered in the statistics presented here whatsoever.

According to the number of students enrolled in each academic program, the biggest areas of study in the university are accounting and administration, law, and engineering (UAQ, 2015). However, the programs of the faculties of philosophy, engineering, and medicine are typically among the top 10 positions in national rankings (UAQ, 2017).

The university has 13 faculties, namely: faculty of fine arts, natural sciences, political sciences, accounting and administration, law, nursing, philosophy, informatics, engineering, language and literature, medicine, psychology, and chemistry. These faculties are scattered in 13 campuses, 6 of which are located in the capital city of the state and its metropolitan area and host the majority of the student population.

**Funding.** UAQ's budget is made up of the sum of three main sources: public money, resources obtained through grant competitions, and services and fees.

Public money is the biggest source of funding for the university. It is divided into the federal budget and the Queretaro state budget. For the year 2017, UAQ's public budget is approximately 82 million euros of which the federal government contributed with 60 million euros, and the state government with 22 million euros.

Another source of budget for the university is the financial resources obtained through grant competitions. Every year, this source constitutes roughly 10 percent or less of the university's budget. These are public resources that are granted to different HEIs and research centers in the country through competitions. The resources can be allocated to projects or researchers in particular, or directly to the HEIs for specific purposes. For example, the Multiple Contributions Fund (Fondo de Aportaciones Múltiples, or FAM) is a federal government

financial resource aimed at building and developing educational spaces in public state universities. In 2016, UAQ obtained approximately 900,000 euros from this fund (UAQ, 2017).

Finally, the university obtains financial resources through tuition fees and other services that it provides. This funding source is usually not even one percent of the university budget because the tuition fees are merely symbolic (approximately 75 euros per semester) and many times exempted by the university, and most of the services provided by the university to the community are free of charge or at a very low cost.

**Staff members.** The Autonomous University of Queretaro has a total of 2338 (UAQ, 2015) lecturers, of which only 530 are hired as fulltime employees of the university. In addition, UAQ has 494 researchers, of which 385 have the full-time status. According to the National Council of Science and Technology (CONACyT), 300 researchers at UAQ have acquired the distinction from the National System of Researchers (SNI), a national reference of high academic standards and extensive research experience. UAQ is the HEI with more researchers with the SNI distinction in the state and among the top 10 in the country. On the other hand, there are 1060 non-academic employees in the university, including the rector, senior managers, coordinators, assistants, and maintenance and security staff. The employees are registered under one of two unions of workers. There is one union for non-academic employees of the university (STEUAQ), and one union for academic employees (SUPAUAQ). Tensions between the unions and the administration of the university have sometimes evolved into strikes.

**Management and administration.** As mentioned before, UAQ has autonomy regarding their administration. The principles of democracy and accountability guide the activities of the university, as described in this section. However, due to the constant election periods, there is lack of administrative continuity and long periods of instability.

The highest authority in the university is the University Council. It is formed by the rector (president of the council), the academic dean (secretary of the council), coordinators of the academic areas, directors of the 13 faculties, the president of the student federation, three designated council members (a representative of the state level government, and a representative of each of the workers unions), and several elected council members (one professor and two students from each faculty, elected by the professors and the students,

respectively). The council meets every month in meetings open to the university community and recorded, transcribed and published.

Besides their role as president of the university council, the rector serves as the legal figure of the university and the general administrator. In addition to their other activities, the rector presents annual reports to the university council. The rector is also responsible for the designation of a great number of high officer administrators, such as university deans, heads of research for every area, the general attorney, degree coordinators, and project leaders, among others. A new rector is elected every three years and can only be reelected once. Students, faculty members and administrative personnel all have the right to vote for their chosen candidate, however, according to the number of staff members and students of every faculty, some votes have a heavier weight than others. As October 2017, the election period has started and the next rector will assume their new role in January 2018.

The university also has administrative units whose deans are designated by the rector. These units include academic secretary, administrative secretary, finance secretary, comptroller secretary, university extension secretary, particular secretary and general attorney office. Other important administrative and decision-making bodies of the university include the planning committee, the council of research and postgraduate programs, the technical council of the academic areas, and the faculties and institutes. The directors of each faculty are also elected by the students and academic staff of each faculty during different periods and processes designated by every faculty.

## Chapter 5. The research methodology

As stated in Chapter 1, the overall purpose of this study is to shine new light on the social inclusion experiences of HEIs in postcolonial contexts, and to create a context-sensitive model for analyzing the conceptualization and the institutional policies for social inclusion in HEIs. The study presented here is a qualitative research and an exploratory case study of a single HEI, the Autonomous University of Queretaro in Mexico. With the study, I seek to identify the ways in which social inclusion is conceptualized in the university and how those conceptualizations compare to the relevant policies at place. To achieve those objectives, I developed a model (see Chapter 4) that helps me answer two research questions: how is social inclusion conceptualized in the Autonomous University of Queretaro? And how does that conceptualization compare to the institutional policies for social inclusion of the Autonomous University of Queretaro? This chapter outlines the research strategy that guided the processes for applying the model and answering these questions. Included in the methodological description are details about research philosophy, selection of the case study, data sources, data collection, analysis procedures, and limitations of the study.

### 5.1 Research philosophy

In social research, some philosophical introduction that connects theory, data, and the phenomenon in question is needed. As researchers, the questions of how we understand reality and knowledge and, ultimately, how we connect our data and methods to the phenomenon in question are fundamental. For this study, social constructionism forms the philosophical basis to understand reality and social phenomena. In turn, postcolonial theory serves as a perspective through which the nuances of the context are explored in depth. The relations between social constructionism and postcolonial theory with each other and with this research are explored briefly in this section.

In her seminal work, Burr (2015) describes social constructionism as a wide “family” of perspectives that are in no way exclusive to a field or narrowly defined, but that instead share four key characteristics. *First*, the perspective of social constructionism takes a critical stance towards taken-for-granted knowledge. In other words, social constructionism challenges positivist thought and it is suspicious of assumptions. *Second*, in social constructionism, our understanding of the world and the categories and concepts that we use are historically and

culturally specific. This means that the ways in which we understand the world are not only relative to cultures and periods of history, but they are also dependent upon social and economic “arrangements” dominating the culture at the certain time. *Third*, in social constructionism knowledge is sustained by social processes. This means that our knowledge of the world is a result, not of an objective observation of it, but rather of our social interactions and common agreements. *Fourth* and finally, from the perspective of social constructionism, knowledge goes together with social actions. Our negotiated understandings of the world have the power of sustaining or excluding some patterns of social action.

A very relevant characteristic of the perspective of social constructionism is the importance of language and discourse. The connection of social constructionism with this research and the model I designed for it (see Chapter 3) lies on the understanding of these two concepts. In social constructionism, language is seen as a precondition for thought and as a form of social action. This means that our concepts and categories are acquired and reproduced through language. When people use language, the world is constructed (Burr, 2015). In that sense, I am interested in the ways in which member of the university community use language to construct the concept of social inclusion, and develop interventions of social inclusion, which is, in essence, social action. In other words, the way in which people use language to discuss social inclusion in the university is social action in itself, but it also translates into policies of social inclusion, which are also social actions. Discourse, on the other hand, refers to a particular way of representing a ‘topic’, in foucaultian terms. According to Burr (2015, p.74-75) a discourse refers to “a set of meanings, metaphors, representations, images, stories, statements and so on that in some way together reproduce a particular version of events”. This means that, surrounding one topic, there might be a variety of different discourses. In the case of this research, the ‘topic’ of social inclusion is constructed by people in the university community through the use of various discourses that are categorized into three main groups or ideologies (see Figure 3).

Moreover, social constructionism has its origins in British and North American psychologists and sociologists. It is a philosophical understanding of our world and covers numerous other theories and schools of thoughts. In fact, social constructionism is a way of understanding knowledge and, in extension, a way of conducting research. On the other hand, postcolonial theory (see Chapter 1) has emerged from the combined influences of Asian, African and Latin American scholars in the fields of literature, social sciences, economics, and history. It

is concerned with concepts and categories, and the ways that context influences them. This is worth mentioning because it exemplifies important dissimilarities between social constructionism and postcolonial theory. They were both developed within distinct contexts, with different topics of interests, and in different areas of study.

Postcolonial theories, as described in Chapter 1, convey an array of academic and artistic engagements with and contestations of colonialism discourses, power structures, and social hierarchies in contemporary societies (Gilbert & Tompkins, 1996). Postcolonial theorists challenge the ‘elitist biases’ of academia and art that favors Eurocentric and androcentric views. They seek to turn the focus on the ‘unheard voices’ (Curiel, 2007).

In my research, I have used social constructionism as a philosophical view of knowledge and ultimately, language and discourse, and the postcolonial perspective as an in-depth engagement with context. It is not my intention to fit the postcolonial thought developed by non-Western scholars in the perspective of social constructionism, but rather to prove that they have certain meeting points. For that purpose, I have used three of Burr’s (2015) key assumption of social constructionism as a point of comparison. *First*, the critical perspective of social constructionism is also a core element of the postcolonial theories. In the case of the postcolonial scholars, the critical perspective is oriented at challenging Eurocentric modernity and organizing the local and endemic research and thought (Martins, 2011) of the so-called ‘nations of the South’. In that sense, the taken-for-granted knowledge is that with Eurocentric views that stills permeates societies in the South as a result of colonialism and contemporary geopolitics. *Second*, the historical and cultural specificity of social constructionism is very relevant to the postcolonial thought. For postcolonial theorists being critical goes hand in hand with engaging with the context and examining local thoughts and perspectives (Mignolo, 1995; Curiel, 2007). Finally, *third*, the idea that knowledge is sustained by social practices is shared by many postcolonial scholars. In postcolonial theories, the construction of knowledge is a process in which the configuration of power must be plural and diversified (Martins, 2011).

## 5.2 Selection of the case study

In research methodology, there is not a straightforward definition for *case* or *case study*, since it comes with different associations in research. For example, the *cases* of medical or psychological studies differ greatly from the *cases* typically explored in business studies, as

Hammond and Wellington (2013) explain in their collection of key concepts in research. For this study, the term is used to refer to the in-depth exploration of a phenomenon or topic, social inclusion, in a particular context, the Autonomous University of Queretaro (UAQ). In this sense, the selected university is not just a research site, but rather a complex social institution that provides the context for the phenomenon in question. I have selected a qualitative methodology and a case study to this study because, as pointed by Creswell (2013) and Merriam (1998), case study methodology is useful when there is a need to analyze a phenomenon and the human experiences that derive from that phenomenon in a specific historical and regional context.

As it is usual with research, the process of designing this study and making decisions for it were not lineal. I understood from the beginning that selecting a university was a crucial decision. I decided to select a university in Mexico, my home country, because I wanted to provide examples of how social inclusion looks in universities outside of the traditionally researched areas (see Chapter 1), and because I had the desire to contribute back.

For some months I looked carefully at the cases of several universities in the country. While there are certain universities in Mexico that are leading and innovating in becoming inclusive spaces, they have certain advantages that most of the universities in Mexico do not have. For example, they are either private universities with considerable economic support from private sources, or they are small specialized universities with only a few academic programs.

To select a case university, I developed a selection criteria:

- *First*, the university had to be a public university, since those are the universities where social inclusion interventions have a bigger impact in the community in general, as opposed to private universities where mostly the elite can benefit from inclusion policies.
- *Second*, the university had to be a comprehensive university, so that the field of study and level of specialization of the university were not relevant variables.
- *Third*, the social inclusion work at the university had to be on early stages, so that the findings from this research were of use to the improvement of the initiatives.
- *Fourth*, the university had to agree to the study being conducted and had certain interest in considering the findings of this research for further development of the initiatives.

The Autonomous University of Queretaro (UAQ), in central Mexico, proved to be a great candidate. First, the university is a public state university with a medium size population of students compared to other universities in the country. In the last few years it has been improving their position in rankings and gaining relevance in the region. The university has a wide diversity of programs and students, and it has just recently started to develop programs aiming at the inclusion of certain groups of students. Their programs for social inclusion have been launched only a few years back and are battling with the hurdles of settling in. Additionally, the university has campuses in Indigenous regions of the state and is launching programs aiming at local development and production. Finally, after the election process of a new rector, at the end of 2017, a new administration will take control in January 2018, which means it is a good time to reevaluate the current policies and make changes if necessary.

In addition, my familiarity with the institution was of importance when selecting the university. My roles as a student for seven years, an administration intern for almost two years, and a lecturer for six months gave me understanding of the complexity of the university. During my active years in the university, I became familiar with the culture of the institution. This helped me during the data collection process for this study and provided me with a general understanding of the institution and the particularities of social inclusion in the specific context. I also gained contacts that facilitated those processes and that made me confident that the recommendations product of this research will be considered.

### 5.3 Data sources and data collection

During November 2016 and the following months, I collected data from the university website and conducted several informal interviews to assess the situation and understand how to proceed. After the initial assessment, I identified certain social inclusion programs and other related policies taking place at the university and started contacting possible interviewees. In January 2017, I conducted eight interviews with members of the university community and selected a few policy related documents. The details of the interviews and the policy related documents are described in this section.

### 5.3.1 Interviews

The main source of data of this study consists of interviews with members of the university community. During the period between January 5 and 13, 2017, I visited UAQ in Mexico and, there, I conducted eight semi-structured in-depth interviews with students, university administrators and faculty members of the university (see Table 3 and 4).

The interviews were conducted during the few days that I was able to travel to Mexico. Due to this time constraint, I could only meet eight interviewees. When I was back in Finland, I tried to contact other possible interviewees via email, but did not receive any positive response. The limitations to this research that derive from the amount of interviews is discussed in the last section of this chapter.

For the purpose of covering the identities of the interviewees, I have classified their roles in the university in four categories (Table 3). Most of the eight interviewees have more than one role in the university. All of the interviewees are related to social inclusion policies in one way or another: they are members of communities targeted by the policies, they are directly involved in the programs for social inclusion, they are high-ranking administrators of the university, or some combination of those.

**Table 3. Classification of interviewees according to their role in the university.**

<b>Role of the interviewee</b>	<b>Description of the role</b>
Student	Student enrolled in at least one of the higher education programs of the university.
Faculty member	Academic staff member that has the role of lecturer, researcher or both in the university.
High-ranking administrator	Administrative staff member with jurisdiction in the whole university who is either elected by the university council or selected directly by one of those elected.
Project administrator	Administrative staff member that is directly involved in the administration of a project or an initiative for social inclusion in the university.

Before conducting the interviews, I identified key interviewees that would direct me to other possible interviewees. Those first selected interviewees included one high-ranking administrator and three project administrators. From the first interviews, I identified other

projects and initiatives for social inclusion in the university and got in contact with the project administrators. In addition, I also contacted members of the communities targeted by the projects through the project administrators.

The duration of the interviews varies from 30 minutes to 1 hour and 25 minutes. Seven of the eight interviews were recorded on audio files and later transcribed, in addition to my notes during the interviews. The interviewee of the only unrecorded interview had a hearing impairment and their voice was almost undetectable to the audio recorder. With previous agreement with this interviewee, I took extensive notes during the interview and supported my questions with written material.

**Table 4. Interview-related information.**

<b>CODE</b>	<b>Role of the interviewee</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Duration</b>
INT1	High-ranking administrator	05.01.2017	30 minutes
INT2	Project administrator, student	05.01.2017	45 minutes
INT3	Student	08.01.2017	45 minutes
INT4	Project administrator	10.01.2017	1 hour and 10 minutes
INT5	Project administrator, faculty member	10.01.2017	1 hour and 25 minutes
INT6	High-ranking administrator, faculty member	13.01.2017	50 minutes
INT7	High-ranking administrator, faculty member	13.01.2017	40 minutes
INT8	Faculty member	13.01.2017	40 minutes

Because of the different roles of every interviewee and the specific information that I could get from each of them, I had to develop several interview guides (see Appendices). I designed an interview guide for high-ranking administrators, one for project administrators, and one more for the direct beneficiaries of the social inclusion interventions, such as students, faculty members, and administrative staff that belong to a traditionally underserved group.

The questions for the interviewees were related to their experiences with the policies for social inclusion, their understanding of the phenomena, and their university experience in general. I used Palomar Vereá's (2005) levels of institutional transformation, namely

demographic, academic, institutional and epistemological levels, as a general guide for the design of the questions. I deliberately avoided the use of the three general ideologies and the discourses of social inclusion (see Chapter 3) in the questions. This omission was made with the purpose of not forcing interviewees' responses into the concepts and notions of the analytical framework, since I was interested in seeing if the responses of the interviewees in fact related to those concepts in the model.

### 5.3.2 Policy-related documents

As a supportive source of information to the interviews, I selected a few policy-related documents. These documents are used as source of information for the description of the case, as well as references during the analysis process.

It is worth clarifying that the number of policy related documents is limited because they only serve as complementary sources of information. The focus of this study is indeed on the information collected from the interviews.

**Mission and vision statement of the university.** Both the mission and vision statements can be found in the university's website. The mission consists of two paragraphs. The first paragraph identifies the main activities of the university and provides an evaluative description them. The second paragraph discusses briefly the links of the university with the regional and national context. The vision, on the other hand, is a more extensive description of the 2025 vision of the university. It describes the desire of gaining more prestige and relevance at the national and international level by becoming and 'excellence institution'. It continues by listing and describing 14 characteristics of the 'excellence institution' they are to become. Some of this characteristics are relevant to understanding the institutional position regarding social inclusion.

**Fourth and fifth annual rector's report.** As described in Chapter 4, every year the rector and their working team provide a report of the administration activities to the university council and the university community in general. These reports usually contain a description of the developments of the university during the year and the main administrative activities. The fourth annual report includes the activities conducted during the 2015, and consists of 52 pages. The fifth annual report includes the administrative activities of the year 2016 and has

47 pages. The reports were presented and published in February of 2016 and 2017, respectively.

## 5.4 Data analysis

As described in Chapter 3, the model designed for this study and used as analytical framework consists of two different sections. First, part of the model corresponds to the *conceptualization* of social inclusion. This section of the model is mainly engaged with the discourses around social inclusion. The data for this section comes mainly from the interviews. The second part of the model focuses on the policies for social inclusion and it is known as the *interventions*. The data for this section comes both from the interviews and the policy related documents. Once the conceptualization and the interventions are identified and categorized, they can be mapped in the model and organized according to the ideologies that underpin them. The mapping of the conceptualizations and interventions in the model allows for a comparison of both and a detail investigation of the matches and mismatches between both.

The data analysis for this study followed the three steps of data analysis, compiled by Hammond and Wellington (2013). According to the authors, the analysis of data for a research is usually organized in three steps:

- Data reduction - data is selected, coded, sorted into themes and categorized;
- Data display - data is organized using visual means and other forms of representation;
- Conclusion drawing - the relationships within data are interpreted.

**Data reduction.** For this step, I selected the relevant data from the interviews and the policy-related documents, and sorted into themes. First, the data related to the *conceptualization* of social inclusion was organized. For this process, the ‘discourses around social inclusion’ compiled in the analytical framework (see Figure 3) were used as a guide. The objective for this process was to look themes and patterns in the ways in which the interviewed members of the university community discussed social inclusion. These themes and patterns constitute what in social constructionism is known as discourses (see section 5.1 of this chapter). Second, the data related to the *interventions* of social inclusion was also organized. For this

part, I looked in all the sources of information for all the programs, actions, activities and events in the university that engaged with diversity and social inclusion.

**Data display.** For this step, all the selected and categorized data from the previous source was mapped according to the analytical framework. First, the identified discourses related to the *conceptualization* of social inclusion were organized according to the framework. This included looking at the focus and the general ideologies reflected on those discourses. Then, the collected list of *interventions* for social inclusion were also organized according to the framework.

**Conclusion drawing.** In this last step, the *conceptualizations* and *interventions* were compared and interpreted. The objective at this point was to look for matches and mismatches between the interpretations and experiences of members of the university community with social inclusion, or their conceptualization of social inclusion, and the intervention for social inclusion, or the policies, at place. For this step, I also tried to make sense of the data that did not fit in the model, but that might be relevant in the discussion.

## 5.5 Limitations of the methodology

The limitations of the methodology include those particular to qualitative studies and case studies. While qualitative case studies are excellent for collecting firsthand information and in-depth knowledge, the findings of these studies cannot always be generalized. For this specific research, this limitation is relevant to the findings related to the case university. However, the findings of this study related to the utility of the designed model are not affected by this limitation and are still significant to the academic discussion in social inclusion in HE, as discussed extensively in the conclusions chapter.

Moreover, the biggest limitation of the methodology is related to the amount of interviews conducted for this study. While the interviews were in-depth and of considerable duration, eight interviews is still a limited number for this kind of study. Despite my attempts to collect more interviews from other members of the university community, only eight interviews were conducted. This amount of interviews is conflicting not only because the number is small, but also because only two students were interviewed. More interviews to students belonging to other traditionally underserved communities could have been conducted.

Despite this limitation, it was possible to collect relevant and useful information from the data, and to conduct the data analysis as planned, as discussed in the conclusions chapter.

## Chapter 6. The research findings and discussion

As mentioned before, the general aim of this study is to shine new light on the social inclusion experiences of HEIs in postcolonial contexts, and to create a context-sensitive model for analyzing the conceptualization and the institutional policies for social inclusion in HEIs. These objectives are pursued through the exploration of the case study of the Autonomous University of Queretaro (UAQ), in Mexico. More specifically, I seek to answer two research questions:

1. How is social inclusion conceptualized in the Autonomous University of Queretaro?
2. How does that conceptualization compare to the institutional policies for social inclusion of the Autonomous University of Queretaro?

In this chapter, I provide an analysis of the case study using the analytical framework (Chapter 3) to organize, analyze, and contrast the results. This chapter is divided in three main sections. Each of them corresponds to the three general ideologies that, according to the model used as analytical framework (Figure 3), underpin the conceptualizations and interventions of social inclusion in HE: neoliberalism, social justice, and social transformation.

In each of the sections, I provide a discussion of the found conceptualizations and interventions that relate to the corresponding ideology. The search for the conceptualizations and the interventions of social inclusion in the case university correspond to the first and second research questions of this study, respectively.

At the end of this chapter, I provide a summary of the findings. This section includes a brief description of the main findings as well as a figure (Figure 7) that takes the form of the analytical framework and provides keywords of the findings.

### 6.1 The neoliberal ideology

According to the analytical framework, when underpinned by the neoliberal ideology, the conceptualizations and interventions of social inclusion have a strong focus on access and concentrate at transforming the demographic level of the HEIs. This means that, in the cases where the neoliberal ideology prevails, social inclusion is discussed and practiced with the

focus of providing access to traditionally underserved members of the community, as opposed to other ideologies that also focus on the participation and success in HE of those members. Under this ideology, the discourses and the practices for social inclusion concentrate in observing diversity mainly at the demographic level and, to certain extent, neglecting the academic, institutional and epistemological level. According to the model, in this ideology, social inclusion is conceptualized through discourses such as equitable access, rational choice, meritocracy and utilitarianism; while the interventions for social inclusion comprise, among others, scholarships and other financial opportunities, inclusive infrastructure, inclusive pedagogical resources, and remedial courses. The section of the analytical framework model corresponding to the neoliberal ideology is presented in Figure 4.

**Figure 4. The neoliberal ideology: Extract from Figure 3.**

General ideologies	Focus	Discourses around social inclusion	Institutional policies	Levels of transformation
Neoliberalism	Access	Equitable access, rational choice, meritocracy, utilitarianism	Scholarships and other financing opportunities, inclusive infrastructure, inclusive pedagogical resources, remedial courses	Demographic

**Source: Author. See Figure 3 for full model.**

In the following pages, I discuss and analyze the conceptualizations and interventions of social inclusion found in the data that are in alignment with the neoliberal ideology.

### 6.1.1 Conceptualization

The meritocratic system in HE refers to the practices that favor academic and extra-academic merits, such as entrance examination results, academic background, voluntary work or active participation in extracurricular activities, as entrance requirements to HE. As noted by Clancy & Goastellec (2007), the meritocratic system in HE was introduced during the 20<sup>th</sup> century

when formal barriers to women and ethnic groups were eliminated progressively, and admission tests or open access to secondary education graduates were introduced. This system is widely used today.

I observed the discourse of meritocracy as social inclusion several times in the interviews. For example, when asked about the measures that the university was taking to include more students from Indigenous communities, INT1, a high-ranking administrator, commented:

*“We have discovered that among those groups, there are very talented people. The Indigenous students that we have are excellent and committed students. They do not fail any subject. They have great grades. It motivates us to keep inviting people. We want to go and get them from the communities. We want to find the best ones and support them to get in. This year, there is even a small part of the budget allocated to go and rescue the best students from those communities”.*

–INT1

When INT1 states that the current Indigenous students at the university are excellent students, and that the university is motivated to keep receiving and even actively looking for students from those communities, the interviewee implies that the university is able and willing to provide access to those students, therefore include them. However, when INT1 states that they want to find the best students from the Indigenous communities and “rescue” them, the interviewee is also implying that the university is willing to support only the best students from these communities. The discourse of meritocracy is then also describing an act of social exclusion because it carries the notion that only the best students from the Indigenous communities are worthy of the extra support provided by the university to gain access.

It is worth noting that, while social inclusion is sometimes conceptualized through the discourse of meritocracy, the term is also used to conceptualize social exclusion. Although access to HE is determined by meritocratic structures for all students, not only those belonging to underprivileged groups, students coming from vulnerable communities are likely at a disadvantage when competing with other students. When the neoliberal ideology dominates, universities tend to strive for quality to be able to compete with each other. As Gidley et al., (2010) suggest, in this case, the notion of meritocracy is linked with that of quality, which motivates universities to make social inclusion practices available to only the best students from socially disadvantaged groups.

While the entrance process might seem fair at first sight because it consist of the same evaluation for all students, without affirmative and supportive actions, it does not ensure

equitable access. In the case of students from vulnerable communities, such as students living in poverty, from remote communities, or with some kind of disability, affirmative actions and extra support greatly improve their chances of gaining access to the university. This process is experienced differently by each student, depending on their privileges or the lack of them. After being asked about their experience, INT3, student of the university, commented the following:

*“I think that we can all see inequality. We might all see it, but we experience it differently. We all have to compete to gain a place, sure. But some were concerned only with taking the entrance exam, they were not concerned with the money to pay for the exam or the registration. I was concerned with getting the money for transportation from my community to the university, with where I was going to spend that night, with getting the money for the exam itself, with which meal I would have to skip to afford the trip... Some others had trouble already with the exam guide. Maybe they did not have electricity at home to use the computer, or did not even have a computer, maybe they had to print the whole thing... I think that it is easy to say that just because there is an entrance exam, the selection is fair, but that is not the case.” –INT3*

For members of vulnerable communities, such as Indigenous students or from economically disadvantaged groups, the social inclusion interventions during the entrance process are crucial and could be the difference between having opportunity of access or not, as INT 6, high-ranking administrator and faculty member, comments:

*“The economic support provided or facilitated by the university contributes a lot to the inclusion of students from vulnerable communities. For example, some students start off with a huge disadvantage if they cannot afford the induction course or the entrance exam fee. Without the university making an exemption of their fees, they would not even have the opportunity to try. They would be left out from the beginning, just because they do not have enough money. Without the support of the university, many people would not be here today.” –INT6*

This comment from INT6 is especially relevant when considering that, as described in Chapter 4, in Mexico, many of the dimensions of social exclusion in HE, such as belonging to an Indigenous community, being a woman, having some kind of disability, being a young parent, or any combination of those are very often associated with poverty (Bracho, 2005; Herrera & Duhaime, 2014; Perez-Castro, 2014).

In that sense, making social inclusion practices available only to the best students of vulnerable groups is highly linked to social exclusion in HE. This notion of meritocracy as a

discourse to conceptualize social exclusion can be more clearly observed in the comment of INT3, a student of the university, who states:

*“Many [students at the university] do not have to prove their value, to show why they are there. They just have the right to be there, even without good grades. I have to prove my value. I have to be an excellent student; they just have to be.” – INT3*

Besides the economic factor, another important aspect to consider to ensure equitable access in the university is related to inclusive infrastructure for students with motor disabilities and individualized support to students with sensory disabilities. In this matter, INT7, high-ranking administrator and faculty member, commented:

*“For the candidates with disabilities, from the beginning we decided to do our best to support them. We agreed that we were not going to just give away places, but that we would provide them with the tools and resources necessary for them to participate in the selection process. For a person with a severe visual impairment, for example, it is difficult or even impossible to take the entrance exam alone with the computer just like the other candidates. We want to make sure that this person can actually take the exam.” –INT7*

The comment of INT7 relates to one of the most common measures taken by universities to support candidates with disabilities to access the HEI in question. That is, besides the financial support and more inclusive infrastructure, the provision of support during the entrance examination, such as reading assistants or a braille version of the exam (Pérez-Castro, 2016).

Supporting students from vulnerable communities to gain access to the university is just one of the steps in the way towards inclusive universities. The focus on access in the conceptualization and the interventions of social inclusion in the university is very important, but cannot be the only one.

As described in the literature, with the relatively recent focus on performance, accreditation, and competitiveness brought to HE through neoliberal reforms (Torres, 2011), another of the common discourses around social inclusion in universities is that of utilitarianism. In many cases, the promotion of social inclusion and diversity responds to external pressure such as government qualifications or policies. When this occurs, the risk of seeing the value of social inclusion only in its utility to gain prestige and resources is high. For INT4, project

administrator, this perspective from some of the administrators of the university is observable:

*“For people in the central administration, it is important to support inclusion because, as a public institution, the university has to have open doors for everyone. But for mid-level administrators, it is all about the certifications. The current requirements for certain certifications include some elements related to educational equity and vulnerable groups.” –INT4*

Likewise, INT5, also project administrator and faculty member, recognizes these perspectives and even goes as far as stating that the discourse of social inclusion as a utility diminishes the value and impact of the social inclusion practices:

*“Quite often, the topics of diversity or inclusion are associated to economic resources and accreditations, and not to social transformation. It becomes a checklist: now we have ramps for the disabled, now the gender perspective is a topic in the curriculum, now we are giving them scholarships... And so the policies are not taken seriously, the objectives become getting accredited and not creating an impact. [...] Attending and understanding diversity in the university will not happen through top-down policies. We need to mainstream from the bottom-up, together, through constant dialogue and reflection.” –INT5*

The risks hidden in the discourse of social inclusion as a tool, that INT5 identifies, are also documented by Ahmed (2012) in her book about the work of diversity officers in the UK. Ahmed and the participants of her study describe experiencing resistance and lack of understanding of diversity or inclusion in their universities. The notions of social inclusion or diversity are seen as ‘empty commitments’ implemented just for the sake of national and international regulations or to promote the university as a positive and ‘happy’ space. These ways of understanding social inclusion and diversity provide misleading and utilitarian images that allow “inequalities to be concealed and thus reproduced” (Ahmed, 2012, p. 72).

### 6.1.2 Interventions

Below, there is a list of the interventions related to access and the neoliberal ideology at place in the university at the moment of the interviews.

**Scholarships and other financial support.** There is a scholarship department in the university that works directly with scholarships coordinators in each faculty. At the time of conducting the interviews, the department had a catalogue of 30 different types of scholarships or other kind of support financed both by internal and external resources, and

administrated either by the university or governmental bodies. The money accumulated from the internal and external scholarships and partial or complete fee exemptions during the year 2016 reached a bit more than 12 million Euros. With this amount, 15600 students were benefited. The sources of this information are internal reports of the university shown to me during the interview with a high-ranking administrator.

The specific scholarships designated to underprivileged students included:

- scholarships and mentoring support for students with disabilities;
- scholarships for students who are single mothers;
- fee exemptions and mentoring support to Indigenous students;
- and, several types of scholarships for economically disadvantaged students.

When inquired about the motivation of the institution to create and sustain this kind of support for students from vulnerable groups, INT6, high-ranking administrator and faculty member, commented:

*“During this administration, the amount of scholarships and the amount of money invested in them grew considerably with the objective of preventing drop-outs due to lack of financial resources. [...] We employ the so-called positive discrimination when creating and granting these scholarships. And that is a very good thing to do, despite some criticism. Positive discrimination is a way to even out the conditions and opportunities.” –INT6*

The criticisms, as reported by INT6, come from other students and faculty members of the university. They are expressions of inconformity for the financial support provided to certain groups of students, such as single mothers.

*“Unfortunately, we live in a very conservative society. When we opened the scholarship program for students who are single mothers, some people were offended and told us that it was unacceptable that the university was promoting young pregnancy. We have had to defend this initiative a lot and make it clear that nobody gets pregnant just to get 1500 pesos [approximately 70 euros] per month. This is a way of supporting our students, this is a way of preventing drop-outs. And it’s actually working.” –INT6*

**Inclusive infrastructure.** The main project of the university dealing with the development of inclusive infrastructure is La UAQ incluye a todos [UAQ includes everyone]. As reported in the interviews, it is a project established in 2014 as an effort to identify, organize and develop the activities of inclusion of students with disabilities that, before the creation of La UAQ

include a todos, were isolated interventions. Among others, one of the main working lines of the project is coordinating the development of inclusive infrastructure in the university, through the creation or maintenance of accessible routes in the campuses of the university. Their developments in infrastructure include ramps, podotactile floors, and signage in braille.

When inquired about the kind of disabilities that the project is engaged with, INT4 commented:

*“We started working with motor disabilities because physical barriers hinder disabled people from studying at the university and even just visiting it. It used to be impossible for a person with restricted mobility to come to the university. Still now, it is complicated in some areas of the university because of the topography. So, the first phase of the project was about accessibility and motor disabilities. [...] We also worked with sensorial disabilities, for example, the podotactile floor for people with visual disability. [...] But working with people with intellectual or psychosocial disabilities is a very complex thing. We have not started with that yet.” –INT4*

La UAQ incluye a todos has other lines of work that I describe in other sections of this chapter, according to the general ideology that they are related to, as shown in Figure 3.

**Inclusive pedagogical resources.** Another working line of La UAQ incluye a todos has to do with what in the model (Figure 3) is known as inclusive pedagogical resources. One of these resources is the establishment of an area of the central library of the university that provides printed, audio, and digital material to people with visual disabilities. In addition, at the moment of conducting the interviews, the university was looking for an interpreter of Mexican sign language, to replace the previous one who had left recently. In addition, La UAQ incluye a todos supports with advisory services to lecturers of the university who attend students with disabilities. In this respect, INT4 recalled a situation where some of the professors of a student with a sensorial disability were not prepared to attend the student:

*“We talked to the professors and let them know what the specific needs of the student were and what they could do to develop a fair and respectful teacher-student relationship. There were professors who really did not know how to deal with the situation. The professor of [a field of study] told us that the whole situation was too much for her. Other professors told us that they did not know how to evaluate the student, for example. So, we tried to give them all the information we had and meet with them regularly. In addition, we trained one of the teachers so that he could support the other teachers too.” –INT4*

Situations like the one just described by INT4 make clear that there is a lot of work that still has to be done. If situations like this have to be handled one by one, it means that not all the professors of the university are qualified to attend students with sensorial disabilities. This is a challenge that some of the university administrators recognize and that are working on solving.

**Remedial courses.** Finally, at the moment of the interviews, a pilot project for a one year long part-time remedial course was being planned in coordination with La UAQ include a todos. The remedial course is intended to support candidates to some of the academic programs of the university. They were preparing to attend between 20 and 25 candidates that included people with disabilities, people living in poverty and people from Indigenous communities. When asked about the objectives of the project, INT4 commented:

*“The objective is detecting possible academic deficiencies, psycho-pedagogical needs, and other urgencies. We want to provide them with the necessary tools to successfully face the regular entrance process of the university and, hopefully, all the stages of the university until completion of the degree.” –INT4*

While remedial courses are social inclusion interventions relatively common in universities, it is an example of how the government quite often delegates its responsibilities to the university. It is not rare that remedial courses are financed by universities, even though the candidates that participate in those courses are not yet, and some will never be, students of the university. As described in Chapter 1, often universities are left alone in their efforts to reduce exclusion, for the national laws for equal access are many times unspecific, and there is a striking lack of national policies. In the case of Mexico, there is not a single comprehensive national level policy to include and attend students with disability in HE, for example (Pérez-Castro, 2016).

## 6.2 The social justice ideology

According to the model used as analytical framework, when the social justice ideology dominates the conceptualizations and interventions of social inclusion in the HEI, in addition to access, the focus is on the participation of the students who belong to traditionally underrepresented groups. In this case, diversity is mainly observed beyond the demographic level, and mainly at the academic and institutional level. The discourses present in the conceptualization of social inclusion that are influenced by the social justice ideology include social responsibility, engagement and belonging, and a passive no-discrimination approach.

In addition, the social inclusion interventions affected by this ideology comprise, among others, mentoring and follow-up activities, learning networks, awareness campaigns, psychosocial support, and student experience and support activities. The section of the analytical framework model corresponding to the social justice ideology is presented in Figure 5.

**Figure 5. The social justice ideology: Extract from Figure 3.**

Conceptualization		Interventions		
General ideologies	Focus	Discourses around social inclusion	Institutional policies	Levels of transformation
Social Justice	Participation	Social responsibility, engagement and belonging, passive no-discrimination	Mentoring and follow-up activities, learning networks, awareness campaigns, psychosocial support, student experience and support activities	Academic & institutional

**Source: Author. See Figure 3 for full model.**

In the following pages, I discuss and analyze the conceptualizations and interventions of social inclusion found in the data that are influenced by the social justice ideology.

### 6.2.1 Conceptualizations

According to Gidley et al. (2010), when social inclusion is interpreted through the perspective of the social justice ideology, it is seen as a matter of human rights, egalitarianism of opportunities, and fairness for all. In that sense, access and participation in HE are seen as the means to equality of opportunities in society at general but, at the same time, as an opportunity whose equal access and participation must be ensured.

In that sense, the social inclusion is motivated by creating an environment of opportunities for those who come from an underprivileged background, the access and participation in HE, as it is expressed by INT4, project administrator:

*“...public education is the only thing capable of changing the luck of those who are born with bad luck. To me that says it all. I believe that. I believe that public*

*education is the only thing that can help. If you are born with certain characteristics of origin, or abilities, or any other characteristic that makes you face the world with a higher degree of difficulty, then the only place where you can change your luck is in the school.” –INT4*

Also aligned with this ideology, the discourses of no-discrimination are used when discussing social inclusion. These discourses indicate the commitment of individuals and institutions to not excluding other members of the university commitment on the basis of their identities. In the following example, INT1, high ranking administrator in the university, uses this discourse:

*“We have no instruction to restrict nor limit diversity in any way. We accept and recognize that there are faculties that have a specific type of diversity. It’s part of the everyday life of the university. And, for example, if someone with certain characteristics wants to take part of the university council meetings, of course they can do it with no problem”. –INT1*

While this could be interpreted as a sign of a healthy relation towards diversity in the institution, quite often it reflects a passive positioning towards inclusion and even an ‘empty commitment’ to it (Ahmed, 2012). To provide meaningful equality of opportunities to participate in the university, these discourses must always be accompanied by specific measures and affirmative actions that guarantee no-discrimination.

With the social justice ideology, another discourse that is usually present when discussing inclusion and diversity in HE is that of the levels of engagement and belonging of members of the university community. As pointed out by Langa Rosado & David (2006), students perceive different degrees of legitimacy in HE depending on their ‘familial habituses’. While students whose affiliations belong to privileged groups of society present feelings of entitlement throughout their university life, students coming from underprivileged communities often deal with the needs of justifying their choices of being students.

When discussing some of the challenges faced during their university life, INT3, student of the university, commented:

*“Sometimes I think that I will not make it because they are all children of lawyers and I am renting, and my family does not even understand what university is quite well, and today I will not have dinner... It is overwhelming sometimes” –INT3*

Moreover, when asked to elaborate on their familial situation and how that plays a role in their student life, INT3 reported:

*“Studying in the university, I believe is very different for me than for my classmates. Because, for example, when I arrived to the university, at the begging I felt very bad because I would think that I was at the university and my siblings could barely read, they only went to primary school... why am I here and they are not?” –INT3*

These feelings of lack of belonging affect students’ experiences overall, and even force them to hide their identities when possible, as expressed by INT5, project administrator and faculty member:

*“I have had Indigenous students whose classmates do not know that they are Indigenous. And they do not have a very nice time. They are hiding their identity all the time. They do not mention that they speak an Indigenous language, but their Spanish is different and it is not clear for the others why. That affects greatly their relationships in the student community.” –INT5*

While feelings of lack of belonging affect students from many underserved groups, for Indigenous students the disconnection between what they have been taught in their families and communities clashes with what they experience at the university. Harris (2002, p.188) illustrates this with the example of the Western model of knowledge production that values presumably objective scientific methods as the only sources of knowledge, as opposed to “spirit, emotion and intuition as important sources of understanding” in some Indigenous perspectives.

Another example of this contrast of perspectives experienced by some students is reported by INT3 when discussing competition in the university:

*“[In the university] it is about competition. Someone else has to lose for you to win. You get a place, but someone else is left out. To me, that is very difficult to accept. It is different in my community. People help each other. If you do not have, the other one gives you. If you need something, but cannot afford it, the other one says ‘I help you now and when I need something, you help me’. That is very different from being at the university.” –INT3*

Students from traditionally underserved groups of society experience these and other dissimilarities between their previous experiences and the practices at the university. In that sense, certain social inclusion interventions can smooth and decrease these and other feelings of exclusion and provide meaningful considerations and integrations of the diversity of the student body into the practices of the university.

### 6.1.2 Interventions

Below, there is a list of the interventions related to participation and the social justice ideology at place in the university at the moment of the interviews.

**Mentoring and follow-up activities.** At the moment of the interviews, there were certain activities related to mentoring and follow-up of students. The mentoring activities were monitored by the scholarship departments and were targeted at students from underprivileged communities receiving some kind of financial support, especially those students with disabilities and those of Indigenous background. These mentoring activities were directed at identifying students' needs and redirecting them to other services provided by the university.

In this regard, INT6 commented:

*“The point is not only providing them with financial support and that is it. We have to follow-up with how they are doing and support them, too” –INT6*

In the case of the support project for students with disabilities, for example, the project started only including financial support and, later on, it became a more comprehensive project that includes mentoring and follow up activities, as INT4 reports:

*“When the calling for scholarship applicants was launched, we noticed that a lot of the students who could apply did not fulfill all the requirements, such as the minimum grade average and the minimum number of credits per semester. So we made the application less tight, and we started talking to them and asking them questions regarding their grades and working loads. This gradually became a more comprehensive project. We are now following their experiences and having a more direct contact with them, their mentors and the coordinators of their programs.” –INT4*

**Learning networks.** While there was no evidence or comments of learning networks specifically for underprivileged students, the department in charge of tutoring is currently working with some of those studying and providing them with other kinds of academic support. As INT2, project administrator and student, notes, upon request students from these groups can get access to academic mentorship:

*“We support them with questions or extra classes. We provide course-related tutorship, whenever they request it.” –INT2*

In addition, some of the Indigenous students are provided with cost-free English courses through the language courses of the university.

**Awareness campaigns.** Through La UAQ incluye a todos project, awareness workshops targeted at the administrative, academic staff or students are being conducted. The main topics of these workshops is the sensitization of the university staff about the needs and experiences of students and staff members with disabilities.

Regarding the impact of this campaigns, INT4, project administrator, commented:

*“The awareness campaigns with the administrative staff have been very successful. There is a lot of sensitiveness and they are very willing to get involved. We have also organized a couple of workshops for faculty members. In those cases, reception was not very good. Once, we had a very wide call and only 11 professors show up. The group was very interested, but it was a very small group. [...] Sadly, there is still a very strong stigma towards people with disabilities. It is very hard for us. There is a great need for awareness and the reach [of the awareness campaigns] has been very narrow. I would be very happy if one person from each faculty would take the workshop and then replicate that in their faculty. We have not been able to do that. It is going very slowly. We have not managed to have the impact we are expecting” –INT4*

This sentiment of lack of engagement of the academic staff, reported by INT4, was also identified by INT7, high ranking administrator and faculty member:

*“We have had great reception with administrative and support staff, but we are still seeing a lack of commitment from the academic staff. They have other priorities.” –INT7*

**Student experience and support activities.** Three groups of activities and services regarding student experience and support activities for underprivileged students were identified:

- Daycare facility created and administrated by the university
- Workshops and seminars
- Other support activities

The daycare facility was established in April of 2014 with the objective of providing child care and attention to the children of single or young parents who were studying at the university. The started providing the service to 19 children. At the moment of the interviews, there were 72 children being taken care of in the facilities. As a way of guaranteeing the permanence of the project after the change of administration, a full facility inside the campus of the university was being built at the moment of the interviews. One part of the project is financed with university funds while other part is subsidized by the federal government through the Ministry of Social Development.

There are also independently organized workshops and seminars targeted at certain groups of students. For personal reasons, students and faculty members who are also activists organize these events to discuss some of the topics and challenges that their communities endure inside and outside of the university.

Finally, other services directed at the general student community might be beneficial for students from underserved groups. These activities include cultural and sport activities, health services, legal and academic advisory, nutritional care and psychological support.

### 6.3 The social transformation ideology

According to the analytical framework, when the social transformation ideology is the dominant one, social inclusion conceptualizations and interventions have a focus on the participation and success in HE of students from traditionally underserved groups. This means that the discourses and policies for social inclusion are directed at transforming, beyond the demographic and academic layers, the institutional and epistemological levels of the HEI. The discourses present in the conceptualization of social inclusion underpinned by the social transformation ideology include human potential, lifelong learning potential, social reproduction, and local and regional impact. In accordance, the social inclusion policies that are influenced by the social transformation ideology comprise, among others, institutional transformation, academic mainstreaming, community engagement, and strong student engagement in decision making. The section of the analytical framework model corresponding to the social transformation ideology is presented in Figure 6.

In the following pages, I discuss and analyze the conceptualizations and interventions of social inclusion found in the data that are permeated by the social transformation ideology.

**Figure 6. The social transformation ideology: Extract from Figure 3.**

Conceptualization		Interventions		
General ideologies	Focus	Discourses around social inclusion	Institutional policies	Levels of transformation
Social transformation	Participation & success	Human potential, lifelong learning potential, social reproduction, local and regional impact	Institutional transformation, academic mainstreaming, community engagement, strong student involvement in decision-making	Institutional & epistemological

**Source: Author. See Figure 3 for full model.**

### 6.3.1 Conceptualizations

According to Gidley et al. (2010) human potential is one of the most inclusive and holistic interpretations of social inclusion. It carries the notion that all human beings, including those from disadvantaged communities “have needs and interests that go beyond their role in the political economy of a nation” (p.11). In that sense, the inclusion of individuals in HE refers to an important part of their empowerment and full participation in society. Social inclusion is then a “moral imperative of working with the complexity of humanity and having awareness that education is transformative” [Olsson, 2008, (cited in Gidley et al. 2010 p. 11-12)].

The conceptualization of social inclusion through the discourse of human potential, can be observed in the comments of INT3, student of the university:

*“I am finally in the university. I tell myself that I can do it. I want it very much. I am struggling with financial issues. My family is not with me. It is a challenge, but it is a challenge I need to take. Not because it is an obligation, or to get a job. I need to do it because it is my dream and anyone should be able to do it and enjoy it. It is complicated because even if we all have the same dream, not everyone has the same opportunities.” –INT3*

In the quotation, INT3 is referring to those interests and aspirations that go beyond their economic role in society, at the same time they are acknowledging that not everyone has the same opportunities to pursue those aspirations.

The notion that education is transformative, is discussed by scholars and activists aligned with the human potential discourse, such as those working with transformative pedagogies of hope (see Freire, 1970 and 1995; Bassett, 2005) or postcolonial epistemologies in HE (see Juncosa, 2014). The transformation that education, and HE specifically, brings within, can be observed in the comment of INT3, when they recognize the role of their identity and that of the university in their personal development and values:

*“University has woken me to see that there are more things beyond what I could see before, that I can accomplish a lot, and that I am capable. My Indigenous identity, that I cherish and that makes me a part of something bigger, gives me the sense of contribution, of teaching and sharing what I know.” –INT3*

Such transformation and empowerment can be invigorated through social inclusion interventions targeted at those who are in disadvantaged positions. Regarding the specific example of the affirmative actions implemented by the university targeting single mothers that are students, INT6, high ranking administrator reflected:

*“[The interventions] have given them strength. The scholarships give them certain autonomy, but the access to day care gives them even more autonomy. Financially, we are more or less supporting them, but being able to leave their child in a space like our day care means that they don’t have to depend on a family member or a friend. They feel more included, more acknowledged, more respected and, especially, more empowered.” –INT6*

In other members of the university community, such as INT4, project administrator, the human potential discourse was also present when discussing their personal motivation to work in social inclusion initiatives in the university:

*“Through the university they [students with disabilities] can meet other people, look opportunities for themselves and make their surroundings aware of the human diversity and the needs that are born from that diversity. [...] At the end, with a working model of inclusive education, the beneficiaries are not only those who are being included, but the whole university community.” –INT4*

In that sense, INT4 is also referring to the corollary transformation of the institutions when supporting inclusion in meaningful ways. The transformation that comes with individual empowerment. Such institutional transformation is also related to the discourse of social reproduction.

The discourse of social reproduction calls for social inclusion as a mechanism to transform societies from within. When INT3, student of the university, is asked why it is important that

the university support students coming from traditionally underserved communities, INT3 replies:

*“I hope that those who come after me, the next generations of my community and other communities get supported too, so that one day that support is not needed”*

–INT3

When INT3 implies that social inclusion initiatives might not be needed one day, they refer to the possibility to transform societies, to reproduce the notion of inclusion so deeply in the system that equality of opportunities become a given and social inclusion, a need of the past.

The notion that universities reproduce structures of society, such as privilege and oppression is taken and reconstructed in the social reproduction discourse around social inclusion. It is reconstructed to ask the open question of what is the potential of universities to practice equality so that it is reproduced back in society at large. In that regard, INT5, project administrator and faculty member, notes:

*“We are aiming at mainstreaming the gender perspective not only in the institution, but also in the community. That social transformation can only happen indirectly, through our graduates of all the academic programs of the university. Now, we [staff working in the project] are doing it, but our goal is that every alumni carries those notions in their professional life. [...] We want them to reflect in their context and avoid contributing to the continuity of inequalities... that in their professional and personal life they challenge structures of inequality.”* –INT5

When social inclusion is conceptualized through social reproduction, the goals of the initiatives for inclusion engaged with the university community and, ultimately, with society in general.

### 6.3.2 Interventions

Below, there is a list of the interventions related to participation and success, and the social transformation ideology at place in the university at the moment of the interviews.

**Institutional transformation.** Rather than being a specific measure, institutional transformation refers to the impact that social inclusion activities have in the institution. This transformation might refer to the degree of institutionalization of the social inclusion projects, the level of acceptance of diversity among the university community, and the ways in which the structures of the university support, allow or challenge exclusion.

One of the biggest challenges to institutional transformation in the university has to do with administrative continuity. As explored in Chapter 4, every three years a new rector is elected. The new rector selects an administration team that takes the responsibilities of the previous administration. The fate of the projects is decided then by the new team. The projects, including those dedicated to social inclusion, are constantly dealing with instability and lack of continuity, as INT4 and INT5 report:

*“The issue with the institutional policies in the university is that they have temporality, which is the time that the administrations last. So, since we are about to ‘close’ one administration, it is important to leave everything ready. We have to produce planning manuals so that the ones who continue the work here know how to do it.” –INT4*

*“In the last three years, we have been trying to institutionalize our project, to become an institution with legal figure inside the university. Now we are project, and projects have expiration dates. That represents a lot of challenges. [...] With the change of administration, we run the risk of losing the facilities we were given during this administration, of having the project taken away from us, or even seeing the project completely disappear.” –INT5*

There is not much that the project administrators can do to avoid the risks that come with the change of administration. One of the solution is looking for forms of institutionalizing the projects, as reported by INT5, or developing guides for the next administrators, as reported by INT4. In addition, students can defend the projects and pressure the new administration to continue to support those projects. In this regard, INT 6 reported:

*“Because it is a project that is located outside of the university, it is very easy that the new administration is not interested in maintaining the project, so they tear it down. But if your hand over the project to the university community, they will defend it, if necessary.” –INT6*

Regarding the degrees of acceptance to diversity in the university community, INT4 commented:

*“In the case of the students with disabilities, I have not seen a lot of progress regarding the attitudes of some members of the university community. Unfortunately, there is still a lot of resistance. [...] It is true that people see the changes in the sense that there are more access ramps and elevators. However, since they are still not used very often, the impact is not so big. The impact will be noted when we manage to gain access to more people with disabilities. Then, the university community will see that the inclusion process is much simpler because of all those modifications to the infrastructure.” –INT4*

As INT4 reflects, social inclusion interventions have an impact in two senses. First, when they support the inclusion of students from underserved communities, and second, when people of the general university community come into contact with the interventions and the students directly benefiting from those interventions. This last case, is also reported by INT6:

*“They would come and say that they are here for some affair with the single mother’s scholarship, and people would turn and look at them. So, we were discussing whether or not we should change the name of the scholarship. But one problem is that we are not used to call stuff by their name. The fact that we call them single mothers has made people seeing it as something acceptable”. –INT6*

In addition, the degree of acceptance towards the interventions of social inclusion can vary among staff and students, as commented by INT5:

*“The director of [a faculty of the university] told us that the gender perspective was just a trend. Quite often that is their understanding of the topic. They do not understand that there is an epistemological platform, and a wide variety of discourses and lines of theory. [...] Another director said once that there is no point in our work, that people do not change, that they come to the university being chauvinist and they will leave the university the same way. That is the size of the discourses we have to deal with. There is rejection and ignorance. But there is also a lot of interest and support, especially from the students. [...] They want access to our written material, they ask us to support them with their thesis, and they volunteer here.” –INT5*

**Academic mainstreaming.** At the time of conducting the interviews, several academic programs and courses related to social inclusion were offered by the university. The revision of the complete curricula of the almost 200 academic programs of the university is a difficult task whose potential to deliver the desired results for this report is doubtful due to hidden topics, unreported curriculum modifications, and elective courses. For this reason, the information presented here with regard to the academic programs and courses is not an exact report, but rather a collection of examples of the academic activities of the university that relate in some form to social inclusion. Some of this activities include:

- At least three first degree programs where the topic of inclusive education was present in the curriculum,
- at least three faculties that offered the course of Mexican sign language as an elective course,
- plans to open a continuing education course (known as *diplomado* in Mexico) dedicated to the bilingual education model for people with hearing disabilities,

- a couple of continuing education courses targeted at professors and administrators of the university in the topic of gender perspective,
- plans to open a master program in gender studies, and
- a specialization in families with a focus in the gender perspective in one of the faculties.

**Strong student involvement in decision making.** This intervention is related to the level of involvement of underprivileged students in the general decision-making processes of the university, as well as in the social inclusion initiatives. When the social transformation ideology is underpinning the social inclusion interventions, quite often students are strongly involved in the decision-making processes.

I could not find any intervention particularly designed to integrate students from underprivileged communities in the general decision-making processes of the university. However, some of the interviewees reported students being actively involved in the development of social inclusion initiatives. For example, INT4 commented:

*“[A project administrator] did not define the accessibility routes and the staff did not define the routes. It was users of wheelchairs who did it. We asked them to explore the university with the intention to find the best routes. They informed us where and how the routes should be. The same in the case of the design of the podotactile floor. A couple of students of [faculty of the university] who have visual disabilities supported us. They told us where, how and with what characteristics it had to be installed. We have also looked for the support of associations and organizations that work with disability, so that they tell us how to do things. It is important that this kind of work is not based only in good intentions. The modifications have to work.” –INT4*

The active involvement of students from underserved communities in the decision-making process has to be accompanied by reactive attitudes of administrators. However, it is important that the administrators take a proactive approach to develop the interventions too. Passive attitudes that are only responses to students’ demands, run the risk of not reaching all the students and possible students who could benefit from the interventions. In the following example, INT2 reports a passive attitude towards the provision of support to students, while INT3 comments in their experience of not being able to benefit from the interventions available because they did not know of their existence:

*“Up until now, only women have ask for this support. But it should be open for men too. We want to include more students in the project, but only a few students*

*have approached us. Every once in a while, one comes and asks for support.”-  
INT2*

*“At the beginning, when I was starting, I did not know [a high-ranking administrator] or [a project administrator], so I did not get any support. I had to pay for everything. It was very difficult.” –INT3*

While it is important to respond to students’ needs and suggestions and to support their active involvement in the decision-making processes, a proactive attitude from the administration can ensure that the interventions benefit a greater number of students.

## 6.4 Summary of the findings

When using the model to analyze, organize and contrast the results, I have found that the discourses used to conceptualize social inclusion in the case study university are underpinned by the three general ideologies proposed in the model. However, and despite the limited amount of data, some patterns were observed.

Aligned with the neoliberal ideologies, the most common discourses were equitable access, meritocracy and utilitarianism. These discourses were mostly used by high ranking administrators. The only time that a student used the meritocracy discourse, they use it discuss social exclusion rather than inclusion. The interventions related to this methodology were abundant and, as described by the interviewees, introduced with no major resistance.

Regarding the social justice ideology, the main discourses used to describe social inclusion were those of social responsibility, engagement and belonging, and passive no-discrimination. These discourses were mainly used by project administrators and students. Interventions underpinned by the social justice ideology included were abundant and only some resistance, especially from faculty members, was reported.

Finally, in regard to the social transformation ideology, the most common discourses used when discussing social inclusion were those of human potential and social reproduction. These discourses were found in the words of most of the interviews, including high-ranking administrators, project administrators and students. Interventions aligned with the social transformation ideology were not abundant compared to the other ideologies and were introduced with several resistance from certain members of the university community.

A summary of the research findings, in the form of the analytical framework, can be found in Figure 7.

**Figure 7. Summary of the findings.**

<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around; align-items: center;"> <span style="color: blue;">■</span> Conceptualization           <span style="color: orange;">■</span> Interventions         </div>			
Ideology, focus and level of transformation	Discourses around social inclusion according to the data		Institutional policies found
NEOLIBERAL IDEOLOGY, focus on access and the demographic level	Main discourses	Equitable access, meritocracy, utilitarianism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Scholarships and fee exemptions</li> <li>-Inclusive infrastructure</li> <li>-Library for students with visual disability</li> <li>-Interpreters of sign language</li> <li>-Remedial courses</li> </ul>
	Roles of interviewees	Mostly high-ranking administrators	
SOCIAL JUSTICE IDEOLOGY, focus on participation, and on the academic and institutional levels	Main discourses	Social responsibility, engagement and belonging, passive no-discrimination	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Mentoring and follow-up activities</li> <li>-Academic support</li> <li>-Awareness campaigns for administrators and faculty members</li> <li>-Psychosocial support</li> <li>-Day care system</li> <li>-Workshops and seminars</li> </ul>
	Roles of interviewees	Mostly project administrators and students	
SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION IDEOLOGY, focus on participation and success, and on the insitutional and epistemological levels	Main discourses	Human potential, social reproduction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Institutional transformation and some resistance to it, as well as administrative inestability</li> <li>-Academic mainstreaming</li> <li>-Strong student involvement in decision-making in social inclusion programs, but no evidence of strong student involvement in general decision-making</li> </ul>
	Roles of interviewees	Most of the interviewees	

## Chapter 7. The research conclusions

### 7.1 Main findings and conclusions

While there are still many questions left unanswered regarding HEIs' experiences with social inclusion, especially those in postcolonial contexts, I have aimed in this study to shine new light on the social inclusion practices of one HEI in that context. To do so, I developed a model which enables the exploration of both the policies and the practices of social inclusion in the case study university, and which can eventually be utilized to analyze the experiences of other HEIs.

With the help of the model, I have answered the research questions that guided this study. For the first question, how social inclusion is conceptualized in the case university, I identified some of the discourses used by members of the university community to conceptualize social inclusion, as well as some of the policies for social inclusion in the university. To answer the second question, how the conceptualization compares to the policies for social inclusion in the case university, the model has also allowed me to compare these conceptualizations and the policies with regard of the main ideologies that underpin them, the focus that they possess, and the potential spaces for transformations that they enable.

The main findings of the case study, that answer the research questions, are the following. I found out that among the interviewed members of the university community, social inclusion is conceptualized through discourses aligned with the three main ideologies presented in the model. In addition, there are social inclusion interventions in the case study university that are also aligned with all three ideologies, and most of the interventions proposed in the model were found in the case university. Some nuances and patterns were found in the use of discourses and the impact of the interventions. For example, despite the fact that most of the interviewees conceptualize social inclusion with discourses underpinned by the social transformation ideology, the interventions aligned with this ideology are, reportedly, challenged with resistance from other members of the university community and even systematic resistance. The interventions aligned with the social transformation ideology not only face more resistance than the interventions aligned with the other ideologies, but also are less abundant. Additionally, I found out that the discourses from the neoliberal ideology were mostly used by high-ranking administrators, while the discourses from the social justice

ideology were used by those interviewees with the roles of project administrators and students. I also found out that, while some of the interviewed high-ranking administrators described social inclusion with the discourse of meritocracy, this same discourse is used by at least one student to conceptualize social exclusion.

Additionally, the findings from the case university illuminate the utility of the model designed for this study. Some clues of the potential of the model to analyze other HEIs' experiences with social inclusion, as well as its strengths and limitations in that endeavor were noted. First, I discovered that the ways in which the interviewees discussed social inclusion could be easily related to the concepts in the model. Similarly, the social inclusion interventions at place in the case university corresponded to those listed in the model. This implies that, while the model was based partly on theoretical approximations of social inclusion in HE, there is a relation of these understandings with the experiences and practices of social inclusion in the case university. The observation of these connections between theory and practice was enabled by the model. Moreover, the model allowed me to map both the conceptualizations and the interventions for social inclusion, which facilitated the comparison between the two of them.

As discussed in Chapter 3, Gidley's figures (Gidley, et al., 2010) that serve as base for the model designed for this study (Figure 3) and the model itself are the result of systematic observations of how social inclusion in HE is studied and discussed in the academic literature. In that sense, all the discourses and interventions that I found in the data and that were connected to the model are examples of linkages between the practices of social inclusion in a university and the previous academic discussions. The discourses of equitable access, meritocracy, and utilitarianism that I identified in the data, for example, were previously used by Clancy & Goastellec (2007), Perez-Castro (2014), Ahmed (2012), or Torres (2011), as discussed in the previous chapter. However, Gidley's figures and the model designed for this study are different to those studies because they are not mere academic reflections, but meta-academic reflections. In other words, Gidley's figures and the model I developed for this study are academic observations on other academic observations. Gidley's figures and the model presented in this study provide answers to the questions: how is social inclusion discussed in the academic literature? Which ideologies underpin the perspectives and frameworks that researchers use when studying social inclusion? What is the focus of the

academic discussions around social inclusion? And also, what interventions are linked to social inclusion in HE according to the literature?

The natural inquiry becomes, then, how this study and the model that I designed for it contribute to the academic discussion of social inclusion and in which ways that contribution is different from that of Gidley et al. (2010), for example. As I mentioned before, both Gidley's figures and the model I designed are meta-academic observations, which means they are highly theoretical. The main risk of relying highly on theory is that the connections with practice tend to be difficult to make. As discussed in Chapter 3, Gidley's figures lightly engage with the practical sides of social inclusion, but focus mainly on the theoretical sides. It was not Gidley's intention to apply the model to a single HEI, but to provide an overview of the academic discussion on social inclusion in HE. In contrast, the model that I designed had the focus on applicability from the beginning. Relying heavily on Gidley's theoretical base allowed me to take the focus back to the practices of social inclusion in HEIs. I added practical elements to the model, such as Palomar Vereá's (2005) levels of transformation, as well as additional institutional interventions from the literature reviews that I conducted. I made sure that the model was context-sensitive by including interventions taken from examples of HEIs in non-Western countries, and also by not assuming a definition of social inclusion, but rather providing a tool to find it from the discourses of members of the university community. Finally, by using the model to analyze the experiences with social inclusion of a HEI, I provided one example of the connection between theory on social inclusion in HE and the practice of social inclusion in HEIs.

## 7.2 Limitations of the study

The implications of these findings related to the model in the academic discussion of social inclusion in HE are highly relevant. The model has proven to be a useful tool in the analysis of the policy and practice of social inclusion in HEIs. However, the model showed one main limitation. Rather than illustrating specific points of action to develop better and more meaningful policies of social inclusion, it provides insights regarding the experiences of university community members with social inclusion as a phenomenon and the practices that enable its development. The descriptive nature of the model can enlighten the forms that social inclusion takes in the university and the status of the policies, but to enable meaningful institutional transformation, it perhaps needs to be complemented with another study that

takes the understanding of the matches and mismatches of the conceptualizations and the interventions of social inclusion to a deeper level.

In addition to the limitations of the model, I identified one major limitation of the case study. As discussed in the methodology chapter (Chapter 5), the main limitation of this study is related to the amount of available data. Due to time and distance-related constraints, only eight interviews were conducted for this research. The information provided by the eight interviewees was too limited to provide conclusive results regarding the analysis of the policies of social inclusion in the university, yet it was enough to answer the research questions that guided the study and to provide insights in the utility of the model. Moreover, the findings of this research are not meant to be conclusive, but to provide a first general understanding of the social inclusion phenomenon in the case university.

### 7.3 Implications for further research

Considering the limitations of the case study and the model proposed in this paper, a recommendation for a second study with a quantitative method that considers a wider sample of participants and that follows up the findings of this study could be developed as a complement. In that sense, with the present study and the second proposed study, specific practical implications for the case university could be issued, and a methodology for analyzing policies of social inclusion in HEIs might develop.

We must develop tools and methods of analysis that involve the experiences and understandings of members of the university community, and which, in that sense, are sensitive to the contexts in which the HEIs develop. Such an analysis must allow for differences of opinion, paradoxes, and even discomfort in its gaze. Only then can we move forward with the work of developing inclusive universities and better opportunities for all members of society.

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## Appendices

### Appendix A. Interview guide for project administrators

#### Introductory questions

1. Name and position(s) in the university, time working in the university or for the project, other relevant information regarding the interviewee.

#### About the project

2. General information of the project
  - a. Target population
  - b. Lines of work, main tasks
  - c. Relevant statistics
  - d. Objective of the project
  - e. How is the project financed
  - f. Mission and vision
  - g. Future of the project
  - h. How are decisions made?
  - i. Inter and intra institutional alliances/affiliations/agreements of the project
3. Origin of the project
  - a. What kind of internal and external motivations/pressure lead to the creation of the project?
  - b. How has the project evolved?
  - c. What kind of institutional support does the project have?
4. Impact of the project
  - a. Challenges and accomplishments
  - b. What is done and what is left to do?
  - c. How has the university community received the project?
  - d. Why is the project relevant to the university and the community?
  - e. How does the project impact diversity in the university?
  - f. What do you think that the university community expects from your project?

#### Regarding social inclusion

5. What does social inclusion mean?
6. How does the project and other projects support social inclusion?
7. Is social inclusion important? Why and how?
8. Is it important to promote diversity in the university? Why?

9. Who benefits from the development of social inclusion? Why?

Personal experience

10. From your experience, how has the university community change regarding diversity and inclusion over the years?

11. What is like to work in the university?

12. What does the university and your work in the university mean to you?

13. What are you motivations to work in the project and in the university?

14. What are the challenges of your position in the university?

## **Appendix B. Interview guide for beneficiaries of the interventions**

### Introductory questions

1. Name and role in the university, field of study, other relevant information regarding the interviewee.
2. How would you describe your experience in the university?

### Challenges and accomplishments

3. Have you face any challenge during your university journey?
  - a. What kind of challenges
  - b. How did/do you deal with the challenges?
  - c. What has the university or persons in the university do to support you with those challenges?
4. What accomplishments have you achieve in the university?
  - a. How did you accomplish them?
  - b. Why are those accomplishments?
  - c. Did you receive any support to accomplish them? From who?

### University experience

5. Do you perceive an inclusive environment in the university?
6. Have you experience any kind of discrimination in the university? If so, how do you deal with it? What kind of support did you receive from the university? Were you satisfied with how things ended?
7. How is your relationship with teachers/students/administrative staff?
8. What kind of services/support do you expect from the university?

### Regarding social inclusion

9. What does social inclusion mean to you?
10. In your opinion and experience, how does the university support social inclusion?
11. Is social inclusion important? Why and how?
12. Is it important to promote diversity in the university? Why?
13. Who benefits from the development of social inclusion? Why?

### Personal experience

14. From your experience, how has the university community change regarding diversity and inclusion over the years?
15. What is like to work/study in the university?
16. What does the university mean to you?

17. What are your motivations to work in the project and in the university?
18. What are the challenges of your position in the university?