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**Social Justice Debate and College Access in Latin America:  
Merit or Need? The Role of Educational Institutions and  
States in Broadening Access to Higher Education in the  
Region**

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**Abstract:** During the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Latin America experienced an intense economic growth that increased access in the school system. In this context, the paper analyzes four different programs from Bolivia (Intercultural Community Indigenous Universities), Brazil (Quotas Law), Chile (Follow up and Effective Access to Higher Education Program) and Ecuador (Scholarship Program based on Quotas) aimed at improving the participation of marginalized students in the university from three different perspectives. First, conceptually, the paper analyzes the governance of these programs in terms of what are the institutional arrangements that define who is responsible for solving this source of inequality in higher education. Second, the study looks at the concepts of equality, fairness, merit, need and diversity behind the different initiatives presented, using the social justice debate. Thirdly, the paper uses the framework of analysis of different types of access programs to study the scope, components and arrangements of the policies. The results show a high level of heterogeneity in the characteristics and focuses of the programs, which allows to deepen the discussion on the role of access to higher education in the region.

**Key words:** Latin America, Higher Education, Equity, Access

### **El debate sobre la justicia social y el acceso a la Educación Superior en América Latina. ¿Mérito o necesidad? El rol de las instituciones educativas y el Estado en la ampliación del acceso a la Educación Superior en la región**

**Resumen:** Durante la década del 2000, los países de América Latina exhibieron importantes procesos de crecimiento económico y el incremento del acceso a su sistema escolar. En este contexto, el artículo analiza cuatro programas de acceso en América Latina: Las Universidades Indígenas Comunitarias Interculturales Productivas (Bolivia), la Ley de Cuotas (Brasil), el Programa de Acceso y Seguimiento Efectivo a la Educación Superior (Chile) y el Programa de Becas de Cuotas (Ecuador), con el objetivo de analizar la participación y acceso de estudiantes históricamente marginados desde tres perspectivas diferentes. En primer lugar, conceptualmente, el trabajo analiza la gobernanza de estos programas en términos de los arreglos institucionales que definen quién es responsable de resolver las fuentes de desigualdad en el acceso a la educación superior. En segundo lugar, el estudio analiza los conceptos de igualdad, equidad, mérito, inclusión y diversidad que están detrás de las diferentes iniciativas, utilizando como marco interpretativo los debates sobre la justicia social. En tercer lugar, el documento utiliza el análisis comparativo para estudiar el alcance, los componentes y los arreglos de estas políticas. Los resultados muestran un alto nivel de heterogeneidad en las características y enfoques de los programas, lo que permite profundizar el debate sobre el papel del acceso a la educación superior en la región.

**Palabras clave:** América Latina, Educación Superior, Equidad, Acceso

### **Debate de justiça social e acesso à faculdade na América Latina: mérito ou necessidade? O papel das instituições e estados na ampliação do acesso ao ensino superior na região**

**Resumo:** Durante a década de 2000, os países da América Latina foram palco de dinâmicas significativas de crescimento económico e de incremento do acesso ao sistema escolar. Neste contexto, o artigo analisa quatro programas da Bolívia (Universidades Indígenas Comunitárias Interculturais Produtivas), Brasil (Lei de Cotas), Chile (Programa de Acesso e Acompanhamento

Efetivo na Educação Superior) e Equador (Programa de Bolsas de Cotas) com o objetivo de refletir sobre a participação e o acesso de estudantes historicamente marginalizados a partir de três perspectivas diferentes. Em primeiro lugar, conceitualmente, o trabalho analisa a gestão destes programas em termos das soluções institucionais que definem quem é responsável pela resolução das fontes de desigualdade no acesso à educação superior. Em segundo lugar, o estudo analisa os conceitos de igualdade, equidade, mérito, inclusão e diversidade que estão por detrás das diferentes iniciativas, usando como enquadramento interpretativo os debates sobre a justiça social. Em terceiro lugar, o artigo utiliza o quadro de análise de diferentes tipos de programas de acesso para estudar o alcance, os componentes e as soluções destas políticas. Os resultados mostram um elevado nível de heterogeneidade nas características e enfoques dos programas, o que permite aprofundar o debate sobre o papel do acesso à educação superior na região.

**Palavras-chave:** América Latina, Educação superior, Equidade, Acesso

### **Social Justice Debate and College Access in Latin America: Merit or Need? The Role of Educational Institutions and States in Broadening Access to Higher Education in the Region**

During the decade of the 2000, Latin America experienced intense economic growth that increased access in the school system for populations historically marginalized (Rivas, 2015), a phenomenon that also led to higher expectations and demand for higher education. Currently, more than 20 million people study in about 10,000 Higher Education Institutions (HEI) (Brunner & Miranda, 2016). As a consequence of this increase in demand for higher education, the debate about who should enroll in college and under what conditions has intensified, especially in recent years (Brunner, & Villalobos, 2014). Likewise, the question of who is responsible for the development of college access policies has become relevant, as both higher education institutions and States have taken initiatives to increase enrollment among low-income groups and racial and cultural minorities (Aponte-Hernández, 2008).

Considering this scenario, this paper analyzes four innovative programs from Bolivia, Brazil, Chile and Ecuador aimed at improving the participation of marginalized students in the university from three different perspectives. First, conceptually, the paper analyzes the governance of these programs in terms of what are the institutional arrangements that define who is responsible for solving this source of inequality in higher education. Second, the study looks at the concepts of equity, merit, fairness, need and diversity behind the different initiatives presented, using the debate of social justice as a framework. Thirdly, the paper uses the framework of analysis of different types of access programs (Perna, Rowan-Keynon, Bell, Thomas & Chunyan, 2008) to study the scope, components and arrangements of the policies. The analysis shows the existence of important tensions regarding the role of higher education in the promotion of social justice, as well as multiple forms of accountability of these processes, reflecting different forms to deal with inequality in higher education in Latin America.

The paper is divided into four sections. First, it presents the conceptual framework. Second, the article presents the methodology used in the study. In third place, it describes and analyzes the four policies studied, accounting for their similarities and differences. Finally, there is a section of discussion and conclusions.

## Conceptual Framework

### Promoting Equal Access to Higher Education: Who is Responsible?

The question of who is responsible for making access to higher education more equitable is related to the concept of governance. The concept of governance has been used to shape the idea of a new way of governing under the credo of “*less government and more governance*” (Aguilar, 2008; Mayntz, 1998; Van Kersbergen & Van Waarden, 2004). Decision-making in the modern, globalized world has moved away from a state-centred, hierarchic model to a more horizontal, corporatist system in which different actors participate, representing the three pillars: i) state; ii) market and; iii) society (Kehm, 2011; Rock & Rojas, 2012). In this context, governance is used as an analytical category to explain the governing arrangements and mechanisms that exist between the different stakeholders (Curry & Fischer, 1986).

Clark (1983) claims there are three ideal-type models of governance towards which systems of higher education may converge: a state-centered system, a market system, or a guided system dominated by academic oligarchies. Most countries have higher education systems that are a combination of these three ideal-types but with an inclination towards one of them<sup>1</sup>. In higher education systems in which market forces prevail and institutions are forced to compete for resources, as in the majority of Latin American countries, tensions may rise between institutional interests and social interests (Giroux, 2002; Leišytė, 2007; Parsons, 2014). This creates challenges for the college access debate as equity and diversity are considered to be important social values, but promoting college access among low-income students and students from other socially and academically disadvantaged groups is not always in line with institutional interests (for example, when resources are allocated based on academic performance). Moreover, Clark (1983) points out that in guided systems, dominating interests of the educational elites are sometimes portrayed as representing “the public interest”. For instance, proponents of access based in standardized tests results will motivate students from all backgrounds to perform at higher levels. However, since students from socially dominant groups are generally more likely to achieve higher results in these types of tests, they will disproportionately benefit from such policies to the detriment of social diversity (Conner & Rabovsky, 2011).

Bergan (2005) argues that even in systems dominated by the market or with high levels of institutional autonomy, the State has an important role defending the public interest and generating improvements to provide more equitable access. In fact, despite the above-mentioned shift in governance, public involvement in higher education has increased after 150 countries united at the 2009 UNESCO World Conference on Higher Education adopted a declaration acknowledging higher education as a “public good” and calling on governments to consolidate their social responsibility role through inclusive education policies (UNESCO, 2009). At the same time, institutions are increasingly held responsible for social inclusion and diversity of their student bodies (Vasilescu et al., 2010). This shows the delicate balance that exists in coordinated systems between the different actors that participate in policymaking processes, making it difficult to determine who

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<sup>1</sup> During the last decades, several authors have shown the weaknesses of the Clark’s scheme to show some of the emergent features in higher education systems, such as the growth of networks between institutions, the importance of non-academic communities or the invasion of the economic logic in the educational space, especially in universities (Brennan, 2010; Brunner & Pedraja, 2017; Ordorika, 2014). In spite of this, from our perspective, the three elements highlighted by Clark (state, market and society) show an important part of the tension with respect to the actors *responsible* for the creation and promotion of policies of access to higher education, central aim of the paper.

is responsible for the access policies. Jones (2010) warns that when an issue involves multiple governments, institutions, and stakeholders but there is no leadership and no agreement on responsibility, this may affect the efficiency and efficacy of policies designed to address the problem.

Moreover, the tension between State control and institutional autonomy makes it even more difficult to design a coherent policy to broaden access to higher education, as public policies that set racial quotas or influence in some other way on who gets admitted into college can be seen by institutions as a violation of their autonomy (Millett, 1982). However, if increasing college access and diversity in higher education are considered important social and educational goals, States do have a responsibility to intervene when institutions do not have the capacity to reduce the income or racial or ethnic gap in college access (NCPPE, 2005; Van der Steeg, 2005). In Latin America, most governments use financial instruments (mostly student loans and scholarships) to promote university enrollment of underrepresented groups, especially in the last decades. Direct interference in admissions is less common although some countries have experimented with special admissions policies that sometimes coexist with programs at the institutional level (Brunner & Villalobos, 2014).

### **The Debate of Social Justice in the Access to Higher Education: An Overview**

The debate around the role of education systems in the promotion of social justice is intense and long-standing. Authors such as Brighouse (2002) or Gewirtz (2006) have shown how, at the foundational basis of contemporary educational systems, different political and ideological perspectives related to social justice coexist, especially due to the role of social production and reproduction in this social field (Bourdieu & Passeron, 2000). In this sense, Gale (2000) recognizes three main notions of social justice in education: i) distributive justice (related to the fairness around the distribution of resources); ii) retributive justice (related to the fairness around the competition for social and material goods) and; iii) recognitive justice (related to recognizing differences and commonality amongst sociocultural groups). This implies holding a multidimensional notion of justice that is contextualized to each society, and it takes shape through institutional interactions. Such institutional interactions are regarded as internal elements of the higher education system (Nieuwenhuis, 2010).

Incorporating these different perspectives of educational justice in higher education represents a major challenge because they appear contradictory. In this way, Patton, Shahjahan & Osei-Kofi (2010) point out to the need of generating a holistic, multi-faced and contextualized approach to understanding the concept of social justice in higher education. Considering this perspective, Nelson, Creagh & Clarke (2012) identify five topics related to social justice in higher education: i) self-determination; ii) equity; iii) participation; iv) rights; and, v) access. In the case of access, Young (2006) indicates that distributive justice is crucial, since it allows designing systems that provide equal resources for admission to higher education. At the same time, Gewirtz (1998, 2006) highlights the relevance of retributive justice, considering the bias (cultural, social or political) of the selection mechanisms in higher education, as well as the importance of recognitive justice, due to the processes of discrimination that many students experience in accessing higher education.

In general, equality of opportunity and equality of outcomes are the two main concepts used to refer to social justice in access to higher education. On the one hand, equality of opportunity is considered a primary value of the education system, being at the core of the college access debate. It is frequently assumed that equality of opportunity can be easily established and verified as, in essence, it comes down to one principle: fair competition based on individual merit. This means that every student that has the capabilities to succeed in higher education, independently of his or her race, ethnicity and socioeconomic status, should have the opportunity to go to college (Hall, 2012). However, in effect, equality of opportunity is a much more complex concept as there are different

ways of interpreting “fair competition” and “individual merit”. Advocates of the equal opportunity theory usually interpret fair competition as equal treatment, meaning that all students have to go through the same admission processes and have to comply with the same requirements. Metaphors associated with this view of fair competition are “leveling the playing field” and “starting gate equality” (Roemer & Trannoy, 2015). Policies such as merit-based admission decisions and merit-based financial aid are deemed to be the most effective in guaranteeing equality of opportunity as all applicants are assessed by the same objective criteria (Autin et al., 2015; Mickelson, 2002). Implicitly or explicitly, these policies recognize that it is possible to empirically determine the two basic components of merit in each student: talent and effort (Young, 1958).

In this line, political philosophers and economists, starting with Rawls (1971) and followed by Sen (1980), Dworkin (1981) and Cohen (1989) have contributed to the equal opportunity debate with ideas about personal responsibility and morally acceptable inequality. They argue that a certain degree of inequality of outcomes is acceptable if different outcomes are the result of individuals’ personal preferences, capabilities and effort and not by social (or genetic) factors beyond their control. According to this line of thought, in a context of equal opportunities (“a leveled playing field”) the responsibility for individual merit (understood as academic achievement), lies entirely with the individual, making it a fair selection criterion (Husén, 1974; Lemann, 2000; Nozick, 1991).

However, several authors (even Rawls himself) have questioned this notion of individual merit as they claim that aspirations, skills and the willingness to make an effort in itself are influenced by social and family circumstances (Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Dubet, 2011; Mickelson, 2002; Rawls, 1971). Moreover, in line with Bourdieu’s social reproduction theory (Bourdieu & Passeron, 2000), some have argued that the criteria most frequently used to assess merit, i.e., standardized test scores and high school GPA, are defined in a manner congenial to the cultural and idiosyncratic strengths of students who belong to socially dominant groups (Dubet, 2005; Oakes et al., 2002; Rothstein, 2004; Uhlmann & Cohen, 2005).

For these reasons, many authors propose a model of distribution based on student needs, in which rewards and benefits are allocated based on what individuals are most in need of in order to reduce inequalities in social positions (Deutsch, 1975; Phillips, 2004; Walton et al., 2013). This is the main difference between equality of opportunities and equality of outcomes (also referred to as equality of place) and it is sometimes explained as the difference between “equity” and “equality”. Whereas the first conception of social justice considers a certain degree of inequality of outcomes as morally acceptable, as long as opportunities are open to all, the second seeks to draw-in the structure of social positions making it as equal as possible (Dubet, 2011; Miller, 1999). On the contrary, whereas according to the equality concept inequalities in processes (i.e., differential treatment) are fair if they lead to more equal outcomes, equity demands equal treatment in order for a system to be considered just (Espinoza, 2007).

In higher education, the equality of outcomes theory, which relies on the principle of corrective justice, has been used to justify the implementation of affirmative action policies. Affirmative action is a form of positive discrimination that seeks to remedy past and contemporary injustices such as racial discrimination and social exclusion. It gives a preferential treatment to socially disadvantaged groups in order to increase their representation in higher education and to reduce inequalities in attainment (Bell, 1972; Didou, & Remedi, 2009; Harwood, 1993; Moses, et al., 2014). The fundamental argument for these policies is that in unequal societies where there exist structural social and educational inequities it is impossible to achieve a just, that is, equal system without taking into account the distribution of outcomes (Espinoza, 2007; Ribeiro, 2014). Thus, instead of leveling the playing field, advocates of equality of outcomes support measures that take social and individual circumstances into consideration to detect sources of inequality and correct them by providing special encouragement and support (Samoff, 1996). Examples of these are need-

based admissions and financial aid policies that favor students from low-income families and ethnic and racial minorities with the ultimate goal of achieving a more socially diverse student population (i.e., equality of attainment)<sup>2</sup>.

In general, governments and higher education institutions justify the use of affirmative action policies that enhance the enrollment of students from underrepresented groups arguing that diversity has important educational and social benefits. A number of international meetings of delegates, including educators, policymakers, and researchers have been held over the last years to analyze how diversity in higher education is linked to social well-being, sustainable development and democracy (for instance, seminars sponsored by the Inter-university Framework Program for Equity and Social Cohesion Policies in Higher Education in Latin America [RIAIPE 3] and by the Ford Foundation's Campus Diversity Initiative). There is a growing body of research that supports the diversity argument (Gurin et al., 2002; Milem & Hakuta, 2000; Orfield, 2001; Smith, 1997; Teodoro et al., 2013). One research approach links diversity experience during the college years to monetary and non-monetary returns to students and the larger community in terms of graduation rates, labor market performance, and participation in social programs for underserved communities (e.g., Bello, 2009; Bolaños, 2009; Bowen & Bok, 1998; Bowen, Bok, & Burkhart, 1999; Komaromy et al., 1996).

## Methodology

This paper compares four recent policies on inclusive access to higher education in Latin America using a comparative approach, which is appropriate when the objective lies more on understanding how different units observed respond to different structures, contexts, motivations and pressures than in accounting for the results in terms of efficacy of one unit with respect to others (Schuetze & Slowey, 2002). In this sense, a comparative method allows us to identify the differences and similarities in the way in which policies that seek to expand access to higher education to historically marginalized social groups have been designed and implemented over the last decade, considering different political, social and educational contexts. Moreover, considering that "the way the policy is formulated is highly contextualized and its implementation even more dependent on context, and on the other hand, politics travels globally and has a profound impact in places far removed from its origins. In such circumstances, comparative research on educational policy is growing in relevance" (Bray, Adamson & Mason, 2014, p. 240).

This comparative approach is carried out following the methodology of analysis of the case studies. The case studies focus on the deep understanding of cases that on the one hand are unique and different but on the other, share certain similarities (Stake, 1995). A case study approach focuses more on the specificity of the case rather than on its interaction with others, and understands the case as a bounded system, where attention goes to the object rather than its processes (Stake, 1995). In this article, the cases are comprised of four affirmative action policies in different countries, which account for distinctive approaches to inclusive access to higher education.

The strategy and dimensions of analysis are based on Perna et al. (2008), who identify four central dimensions for comparing types of access policies: i) actors participating; ii) academic knowledge and funding components; iii) population; and iv) degrees of implementation. Analyzing

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<sup>2</sup> Opponents of affirmative action policies claim that it is a different form of discrimination but discrimination nonetheless. They believe that it is not fair to assess students based on their skin color or other factors they have no control over, even if it is to compensate for structural inequities (Hettinger, 1997; Wasson, 2004). Moreover, they argue that preferential treatment may have counterproductive effects as it undermines the self-esteem of already vulnerable groups for suggesting they are not able to receive benefits based on their talent and skills alone (Steele, 1997).

differences and similarities in these key aspects across educational policies can shed light on the notions of social justice underlying each case.

The programs analyzed come from Bolivia, Brazil, Chile and Ecuador. We selected programs that differ in the origin of their design (from institutions of higher education or education policy initiatives), their scope (national, regional, local), and their target population. At the same time, there are important differences in the political context, structure and development dynamics of the higher education system that create particularities for each of the cases presented. Thus, for example, there are significant differences in terms of the magnitude of higher education systems, with Brazil representing the largest education system. There are also differences in coverage of the higher education system, with Brazil and Chile representing countries of high coverage in comparison to Ecuador and Bolivia. Also, in Brazil and Chile, the predominance of private higher education institutions over public ones as suppliers of education services is an interesting aspect for the analysis of access policies with a strong social justice sense. Moreover, although in the four cases the development of these policies is part of higher education systems that have undergone important reforms during the last decade, in some cases it occurs in scenarios of greater confrontation (Chile and Ecuador) than in others (Brazil and Bolivia). Another difference represented in the cases is the origin of these policies, or the precedents that give life to the programs reviewed here. We chose two cases (Bolivia and Ecuador) where the initiatives are proposed from the central level, aligned with objectives of national programs that seek to impact in different areas of social life, and two (Brazil and Chile) where policies emerge in response to initiatives either locally or emanating from the same higher education institutions (Brunner & Villalobos, 2014). Besides the characteristics of the educational systems, the four cases come from countries with different economic situations. On the one hand, Chile (15,691 USD) and Brazil (15,473 USD) are in the group of countries with the higher GDP per capita in Latin America, Ecuador (11,474 USD) is around the median of GDP per capita in the region, and Bolivia (6,953 USD) is one of countries with lowest GDP per capita in 2015 (in all cases, in Purchasing Power Parity, PPP) (World Bank Data, 2017).

The review of the four programs included official documentation, institutional reports and academic articles that, on the one hand, contextualized the scenario in which each of these initiatives emerged, and on the other hand, provided the main foundations and objectives, as well as the general characteristics of the program and their target population. Finally, we considered some of the implementation results so far.

### **Results: Four Experiences of Inclusive Access Programs in Higher Education in Latin America**

Around the world, inclusive access programs for higher education have undergone an important expansion in the last decades, especially in USA and United Kingdom (Perna, 2006). Logically, this expansion has been characterized by the multiplication and dissemination of different methods, objectives, implementation processes, public objectives, and characteristics of these programs (Perna, Rowan-Keynon, Bell, Thomas & Chunyan, 2008). In the case of Latin American countries, the inclusive access programs of higher education developed in the last few decades have been generally linked to other reforms in the educational field. In our case, we select four programs from four different countries, which represent paradigmatic cases that consider different ways of implementing and developing programs of inclusive access to higher education.

The following four subsections present each of the cases under analysis. The subsections are organized in a similar way to facilitate reading, specifically the structure considers: a) a brief description of the context and trends in the last years for higher education in each country; b) the

particular context in which the policy arises; c) the program objectives, main characteristics, target population and mode of implementation; d) the results of these initiatives known so far; and, e) a brief reflection on the notions of social justice that underlies each one.

### **Follow up and Effective Access to Higher Education Program (PACE), Chile**

In 2016, the Chilean higher education system was composed of 159 institutions, including 62 universities and 97 vocational centers (43 professional institutes and 54 technical training centers). The system is composed mostly of private institutions. In fact, out of the 62 universities, 44 are private, and most of them did not receive financial subsidy from the State. With this expansion in private higher education institutions, the role of the State has gradually declined. Nowadays, there is a consensus on the need for the presence of the State in the regulation and funding of the system, where it has historically been inclined to fund universities through subsidies to demand.

In terms of enrollment, the system has been characterized by the accelerated expansion of demand and supply, which, for some authors, is currently reaching its limits of growth (Brunner & Miranda, 2016). However, despite this growth, the access to higher education in Chile continues to show inequitable trends. Although the socioeconomic gap between students who enter higher education has recently diminished, equity at entry remains one of the central issues of the higher education system, especially because of the economic barriers for accessing higher education, since Chile is the OECD country with the highest proportion of private spending on total expenditure on education (Brunner and Villalobos, 2014). Currently, the higher education system is in a stage of intense debate, which has been reflected in the proposals for this education level made by Michelle Bachelet's government, which includes topics such as limiting public funding to for-profit institutions, changes in funding schemes, public funding and elimination of tuition fees for the most disadvantaged segments of the populations, new policies for access and the enhancement of the public supply of higher education (Brunner & Miranda, 2016).

The Follow up and Effective Access to Higher Education Program (PACE, *Programa de Acompañamiento y Acceso Efectivo a la Educación Superior*) emerged as the first public policy for inclusive enrollment to higher education at a national level. The main objective of PACE is to restore the right to higher education, ensuring effective access to students from vulnerable schools who have demonstrated high levels of performance in their educational contexts (MINEDUC, 2015a; MINEDUC, 2015b). In its implementation PACE aims at improving equality, diversity, and quality in higher education, while also inspiring higher educational expectations on low socioeconomic status (SES) students who are still in secondary school (Escudero, 2015). In contrast to other programs developed by universities in Chile<sup>3</sup>, PACE is a program designed and funded by the Ministry of Education, and its implementation depends directly on collaboration and coordination between the Regional Ministerial Departments (SEREMIS), the principals of the beneficiary schools and the universities who participate in the programs<sup>4</sup> (Escudero 2015).

In terms of implementation, the program consists of two main components. The first component includes coaching as well as academic and socioemotional support to vulnerable students through a scheme of collaboration between higher education institutions who work in conjunction with beneficiary schools (MINEDUC, 2015e). Each higher education institution (HEI)

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<sup>3</sup> As *Propedéutico* programs implemented previously by some universities and supported by UNESCO.

<sup>4</sup> HEIs participants in the pilot stage should be associated to UNESCO *Propedéutico* Programs, offer the Academic Leveling Scholarship (BNA) and belong to CRUCH, the Council of Rectors of Chilean Universities, which groups the most traditional public and private Chilean universities. After the pilot stage, both universities belonging to the CRUCH and institutions outside this organization that comply with some quality requirements have been able to participate in the program.

supports schools through three main dimensions of the program. The first focuses on academic and socioemotional support initiatives for students, schools and communities. This entails that HEIs offer academic preparation and teacher support oriented to the use of new pedagogical techniques. Also, HEIs offer vocational exploration activities and development of socio-emotional skills. Finally, HEIs promote the linking with school communities, complementing program activities with others arising from the community and funded through processes of participatory budgeting. All of these dimensions are planned according to the context of the school and the academic objectives defined by the participating HEIs (MINEDUC, 2015d; MINEDUC, 2015e).

The second component consists of guaranteeing spaces for enrollment in higher education to beneficiary students whose performance ranks among the top 15% of each class in the participating schools<sup>5</sup> (MINEDUC, 2015f). This also entails providing support for students during the early years of higher education with the goal of achieving retention and graduation (MINEDUC, 2015f). In order to apply for a guaranteed space in higher education through PACE, the students must complete a variety of academic requirements situated at the school level instead of results in the national standardized admission test (*Prueba de Selección Universitaria*, PSU<sup>6</sup>). These situated requirements are: i) to graduate with a grade point average ranking between, at least, 700-710 points<sup>7</sup> or to be within the top 15% GPA performance of their graduation cohort in the school; ii) to take at least three different tests of the PSU (mathematics and language are required) without requirement of a minimum score<sup>8</sup>; iii) to satisfactorily pass the preparation stage of the program that takes place during high school; iv) to have studied in a partnered school for at least the last two years of high school; v) to have attended classes at least 85% of the school calendar year; and vi) to have demonstrated an improvement and growth in the evaluation process of the program during high school (MINEDUC, 2015b). In the case that there are more applicants than spaces available in the undergraduate programs offered by the universities participating in PACE, the distribution of spaces for enrollment takes place in relation to several indicators related to the program, which are called weighted PACE points (PPP). The PPP is based on the GPA ranking of the students, their attendance to PACE activities, their vocational interests, and there is also a bonus on these points in relation to the region of residence of the students.

The PACE pilot program began in 2014 in partnership with 5 different universities, who worked with 7,614 11<sup>th</sup>-grade-students in 69 different marginalized schools in 6 out of the 15 regions of the country. The participant schools were selected based on specific criteria. In the pilot program, they had to have Student Vulnerability Index (IVE) equal to or higher than 60%, they had to be a non-profit school<sup>9</sup>, they had to be participants in the Preferential Student Voucher program, and be associated with an UNESCO recognized preparatory or *Propedéutico* program. The five universities were identified and chosen because they had an UNESCO recognized preparatory program, and Academic Leveling Scholarships (*Beca de Nivelación Académica*, BNA) (MINEDUC, 2015e). In 2015,

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<sup>5</sup> According to the GPA comparison among students of the same cohort.

<sup>6</sup> PSU is composed by three exams, math, language and an elective test on social or natural sciences. The test has a range of scores that goes from 150 to 850, with a mean of 500 and a standard deviation of 110 points.

<sup>7</sup> This is a standardized measure of the grade point average calculated by the admission testing institution, namely, Department for Educational Records, Measurement and Assessment (DEMRE) at the *Universidad de Chile* (UCH).

<sup>8</sup> Even without a minimum score, PSU is mandatory to PACE students.

<sup>9</sup> It is important to state that nearly two thirds of the enrollment in the Chilean school system attends private-subsidized voucher schools that were allowed to be for-profit institutions. This situation is gradually changing according to the schedule included in the Inclusion Law of 2014, which forbids selection of students, charging student fees and making private profit in schools that receive public funding.

the program provided support to 53,362 students from 356 schools in 292 local districts (out of 345), 95.5% of which were public (MINEDUC, 2016). This same year the program also expanded its coverage incorporating 29 higher education institutions.

Preliminary evaluations of the pilot PACE program suggest that an essential factor for the success of the program is to give school teachers a prominent role in the process and support them in incorporating innovative pedagogical elements in their teaching. The results of the assessment also show the key role played by activities that strengthen the self-esteem of students as a way of both preparing them for life into college (Escudero, 2015) and promoting high expectations among participating students for pursuing higher education (MINEDUC, 2015c). Among the upcoming challenges, there is the scaling up of coverage of the program<sup>10</sup>. In 2016, when the program started officially, the first cohort of 484 students benefiting from guaranteed PACE quotas at the five HEIs participating in the pilot stage enrolled in higher education. In 2017, the expectation is that 4,642 students enter 27 universities, one Technical Training Center (CFT) and one Professional Institute (IP) participating in the second cohort.

The description of PACE shows that it embraces strongly the idea of meritocracy situated in context. Such an approach in PACE still prizes individual effort and commitment of the students to the activities of the program. However, in this “situated-meritocracy” students in each school compete among them for placements in a higher education institution. This contrasts with the hegemonic conception of “universal-meritocracy”, which compares the merit of students independently of their school of origin through the results of standardized admission tests. In this way, the selective nature of the higher education system prevails, but using different forms of selection that make competition for placements more context bounded.

### **Intercultural Community Indigenous Universities (Unibol), Bolivia**

The Bolivian higher education system is composed of universities and vocational institutes. The number of institutions has increased due to the rise of private universities, as it has happened in most countries in Latin America. The Bolivian State has predominantly maintained a funding role in higher education, with a scarce involvement as a quality regulator. In fact, although the “*Avelino Siñañi-Elizardo Pérez Education Law*” was enacted in 2010 and created the Plurinational Agency for the Evaluation and Accreditation of Higher Education, to date there is no progress in creating the National Commission on Accreditation of University Careers. In Bolivia public universities receive a State subsidy which comes largely from the Direct Tax on Hydrocarbons (*Impuesto Directo sobre los Hidrocarburos*, HDI), while private universities do not receive funding from the State and must be funded through tuition fees and income for consultancy, research and other activities (Brunner & Miranda, 2016).

On the other hand, enrollment has shown a steady increase in recent years, but in a smaller proportion to the growth seen in years prior to 2010. As in all the countries of the region, admission to higher education in Bolivia is strongly conditioned by the socioeconomic origin of the students. However, along with Chile, Bolivia is one of the countries with the highest proportion of students from the poorest quintile enrolled in tertiary education (24.8%).

The Bolivian government’s educational reforms have not had the same impact in the higher education sector as they have had in the school system. In the 80’s and 90’s a major expansion of private higher education institutions took place, with an increase of the enrollment in this level. Therefore, the actual government has emphasized the inclusion of historically excluded sectors from higher education over the regulation and standards of quality. This is mainly due to the opposition of public and private universities that historically have had a high degree of autonomy in relation to

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<sup>10</sup> The magnitude of scaling up depends on the yearly budgetary availability.

regulations (Rodríguez Ostría, 2014).

Since the Bolivian president Evo Morales was first elected in 2006, the concept of “decolonization” has played a central role in government policies. This concept proposes that it is necessary to value the heterogeneity of indigenous groups from Bolivia, promoting the ideological, epistemological and cultural characteristics of indigenous population (Callejas, 2014). This is not a movement for denying the preexistent Western ideas and values, but a conceptual way for achieving a different logic of complementarity (Mato 2012). The latter has implied that policy decision-makers who traditionally were part of the high income political class of the country were replaced by decision-makers predominantly coming from indigenous groups that were the most underrepresented sectors of the Bolivian society (Rodríguez Ostría, 2014). Educational policies have not been the exception. The *Avelino Siñañi-Elizardo Pérez Act* reaffirms the decolonizing character of all educational policies at all levels of education, with the purpose of ensuring equal rights for all the Bolivians, forbidding any discriminatory action because of ethnicity, race, socioeconomic status, religion, culture, among others.

Within this context, during 2008 three Unibol Universities were created. Although the experience of indigenous universities in Latin America is not new—as is the case of Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador y Nicaragua (Mato, 2014)—the Bolivian experience is unique because it is not based on affirmative action criteria such as quotas for admission to higher education (Orías, 2011). Thus, the creation of these universities is based in three critical educational principles: decolonization, productivity and community (Quispe, 2012).

These foundational principles are related to the characteristics and development of these universities. Therefore, it is not surprising that indigenous universities are located in the departments of La Paz, Cochabamba and Chuquiscas, regions that have been symbolically and historically participants of the indigenous resistance (Orías, 2011). In terms of administration, these are public universities under the Ministry of Education regulation, but conducted by indigenous communities. They started to function between the second semester of 2009 and the first semester of 2010 with a clear direction of offering, at first, only undergraduate programs in fields that were considered relevant to the communities and that could contribute to the economic development of the indigenous population<sup>11</sup>. However, after some years of implementation the results showed that the academic paths offered by these institutions are more aligned with a Western view of science than an indigenous cosmovision.

To apply to Unibol universities applicants are required to speak an indigenous language of the region where the university is located (Quechua, Aymara or Guarani) and to hand in a recommendation letter from an indigenous community organization. During the time the students are enrolled in college they are accountable for their academic performance to the local community. All these characteristics make the Bolivian experience very distinctive from others in the Latin American region. During the first years of implementation, the debate has been focused in the inclusion feature of the policy. Some critical views have pointed out that the policy has a segregationist aspect dividing Bolivians in different “ethnic buckets” (Orías, 2011). Also, students prefer universities located in the main cities of the country instead of institutions located in rural areas. This is explained because of the difference in the quality of faculty, infrastructure or the desire of living in an environment closer to the Western culture. Finally, there has been a problem of overlapping of programs offered by indigenous universities and the decentralized campus of autonomous public universities. In the year 2013, only 0.5% of the university population attended indigenous universities, showing that the policy still has a minor impact in the Bolivian higher

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<sup>11</sup> Altiplanic Agronomy, Tropical Agronomy, Food industry, Forestry and fish farming, Textile industry, Hydrocarbon engineering, Veterinary and Zootechnics

education system (Rodríguez Ostría, 2014). This has generated doubts regarding the implementation and efficacy of the policy.

The Unibol universities aim at fostering access to higher education of historically excluded indigenous groups. It pursues equality through creating specific institutions for indigenous populations and connecting these institutions with the local communities and their needs. The search for equality in access has to be understood in the context of a highly cultural and linguistic diverse country in which indigenous groups have been historically neglected. The policy relies on a broader criterion of need—more social than individual—to focus its efforts in opening access to higher education to specific indigenous groups. Once students enter the university, there is an accountability system that uses the principle of meritocracy which expects that admitted students perform adequately in the university. Finally, it is interesting to note that this policy seeks to promote the social mobility of the different indigenous groups. In this realm, it is also important to note, as critics have underlined, that this policy arrangement may create segregation and avoid the contact among different ethnic groups in the country, an argument that has been partially addressed by some authors (Orías, 2011). This may reduce the possibilities of social mobility for Unibol graduates if educational credentials interact with the social capital in opening opportunities of development for university graduates.

In sum, Unibol universities reflect the difficulties of establishing a social justice policy based on the notion of equity in a culturally diverse society. It seems that indigenous universities seek to achieve two different and apparently contradictory objectives. On the one hand, Unibol universities seek to empower indigenous cultures via policies based on affirmative action that enhance access to higher education for indigenous groups. On the other hand, Unibol universities use the notion of merit related to the community engagement of the applicants which is used as an integral part of the selection process for accessing the university.

### **Quotas' Law, Brazil**

As many countries in the region, the Brazilian higher education system is currently composed of more private than public institutions. Moreover, unlike what happens in secondary education where the most prestigious institutions are those of the private sector, the opposite occurs in higher education in which private institutions have arisen mainly to absorb the excess demand for the highly selective public universities (McCowan, 2007). Between the years 2000 and 2013, Brazil experienced a high relative growth of higher education enrollment, with growth of just over 2.6% per year. This increase in enrollment is strongly concentrated in the private sector, which accounts for 73% of the total enrollment in higher education, only surpassed by Chile where enrollment in private institutions represents 75% of the total. In terms of composition, Brazil is one of the countries with the most unequal admission to higher education in the region, with access highly correlated with the socio-economic background of the students. In Brazil, as in the case of Chile, there is an entrance exam (named vestibular) which results are strongly correlated with the quality of secondary institutions (most of them private) or with the attendance to preparatory courses which should be paid by the families of the students (McCowan, 2007). In fact, only 5.4% of the poorest population quintile participates in higher education (Brunner & Miranda, 2016). Thus, one of the main characteristics of the Brazilian higher education system is that, given a scenario of profound competitiveness for entering public education, private institutions are the ones that have adopted - under their own terms- a character of social responsibility with the lower income groups. However, the high costs for families related to attending these private institutions remain an important barrier to entry into the system.

Beyond these significant inequalities in the educational field, Brazilian social classes have been historically characterized by racial diversity and racial inequality (Rochetti, 2004; Tannuri-

Pianto & Francis, 2012). While almost half of the population is composed of black (pretos) or mulatos (pardos), their access to higher education is still minimal. This is reflected both in the enrollment process as in the composition of faculty in the most important universities of the country (De Carvalho, 2004). In this context, the quota policy for higher education access aims to reducing the inequalities in the Brazilian social structures through public universities. This means a re-conceptualization of the universities' social function by embracing integration as a principle, which is a main characteristic of the best universities in the world (De Carvalho, 2004). The quota policy ensures a specific number of enrollment slots for students based on their ethnicity or socio-economic status. This policy was implemented because of the pressures of social movements and the commitments that Brazil acquired by adhering to the UN Conference against Racism in 2001 (Telles & Paixao, 2013).

Since August 2012, the quota policy has been implemented in all federal universities in the country (Act 12711), establishing that 50% of enrollment in higher education institutions must be reserved for students based on race, ethnicity or socioeconomic level. Since then, the policy has passed through several versions. During the 1990s, only some universities (like the State University of Campinas and Federal University of Minas Gerais) implemented affirmative action policies that added some points to the applications of blacks and mulatos, but without ensuring their entry into the universities. In 2002, the federal universities of the State of Rio de Janeiro began to develop a quota policy, which expanded rapidly (Tannuri-Pianto & Francis, 2012; Telles & Paixao, 2013). In the expansion process of the policy, the social and academic debate (especially inside the universities) has been quite intense. Recent studies have shown many resistances that the quota policy have generated among students, academics, researchers and authorities (Carvalho, 2003; 2005; Siqueira, 2004), which have motivated changes in the policy over time.

The current quota policy establishes a set of requirements for university access, which can be classified in four categories: 1) racial origin and being a public high school student add points in the score in the admission to higher education test; 2) quota policy for public high school students without distinction of race; 3) quota policy based on race or indigenous ethnicity that requires race verification; 4) policy quotas based on self-identification as a member of a racial or ethnic group. It should be noted that the race-based quota policy is set according to the proportion of mulatos and pretos represented in each state. Because the Brazilian government does not prioritize any of these categories, universities choose those that are more aligned with their own goals and necessities (Childs & Stromquist, 2015).

To date there is an important number of academic publications that assess the impact of the quota policy in the Brazilian higher education system. Overall, the evaluation and discussion encompass four areas: i) purpose and target population; ii) admission system and composition of the higher education population, iii) academic outcomes; iv) national centrality of the policy.

Regarding the purpose and target population, the academic debate has been focused on the first stages of implementation of the policy and the relevance of a policy focused on a specific racial population. Critical views about the policy argue the lack of relevance of the policy and the difficulty of distinguishing who complies with the racial requirement, since in Brazil half of the population self-identifies as non-white, and close to 80% declare to have an African or indigenous origin (Rochetti, 2004). Although this last argument has been rebated in recent publications (Tannuri-Pianto & Francis, 2012; Telles & Paixao, 2013) the Quota Act aims at providing access to higher education to marginalized students, and many of the initiatives of the universities have emphasized the racial component as a way to accomplish such aim (Telles & Paixao, 2013).

Regarding the admission processes and the composition of the higher education student body, there is consensus about the success of the policy as a means to diversify the higher education population from a racial and socio-economic point of view (Tannuri-Pianto & Francis, 2012). In

relation to the academic outcomes of the beneficiaries of this policy, research shows that there is no difference in academic outcomes when comparing students admitted through the quota mechanism and those who accessed by the traditional way (Tannuri-Pianto & Francis, 2012). Childs and Stromquist (2015) also concluded that there is no decrease in the quality of institutions that promote the policy. Finally, the policy has had a positive impact on the promotion of a “black” identity of students of color (Tannuri-Pianto & Francis, 2011) and the strength of the policy in situating racial discrimination as a relevant topic of public discussion (Telles & Paixao, 2013).

The Quotas’ Law in Brazil and its characteristics show an effort to pursue equality in access through two principles. On the one hand, the policy relies on the principle of “need”, defining it mainly in racial terms, although it also prioritizes students graduating from public high schools. On the other hand, such policy aims also at diversifying the student bodies in universities by integrating black and mulato students, who also are mainly from low socioeconomic status. It is interesting also to note that this policy opens the space of autonomy for universities for deciding which of the different types of admission requirements apply in their institution. This feature may create important differences in the operation and consequences of the policy in each institution. On the negative side, the variation in policy implementation could lead to the creation of different forms of exclusion shaped by the type of mechanism used in each university, distorting the original objective (based strongly on the notion of equality) of the policy. On the positive side, the freedom to choose the preferred method for implementing the quotas can open the space to serve the needs of the specific context in which the university is located.

The case of the quota policy in Brazil reflects the negotiations between the universities and the State, in which the policy aims at introducing the notions of equality in a system strongly marked for market-based arrangements. The changes in the notions of race, the transformation of access criteria and the gradual implementation of the policy clearly reflex the tension in these negotiations, a feature that shows the limit of an access policy created from a “top-down” perspective.

### **Scholarship Program Based on Quotas in Ecuador**

In 2015 there were 59 universities in Ecuador, of which 18 were private, funded through student fees without receiving public funds, eight were co-financed by student fees and public funds and 33 were public. The supply of programs is similar between the public and private sectors. The Ecuadorian State is one which most invested in education in the region. If the average GDP expenditure on education in Latin America is 1%, Ecuador increased this indicator between 2010 and 2016 from 1.6% to 2.0%. These resources are distributed among public and private universities according to criteria based on quality, efficiency, equity, justice and academic excellence. Furthermore, private universities that receive public funds must grant scholarships (LOES, 2010).

In Ecuador enrollment in higher education grew significantly since 2012. In that year, a unified test for the admission process for public higher education in the country (ENES Exam) began. This examination sought to regulate the application process by applying a merit-based test that assessed skills, with a low relation to the content of the secondary education curriculum. Unlike countries like Chile and Brazil, in Ecuador 60% of the undergraduate enrollment is concentrated in public institutions. Although, as in all countries of the region, tertiary students are concentrated in the highest income quintiles of the population, but the case of Ecuador is not one of the most segregated. The participation rate of students in the poorest quintile is close to 11%, versus a 36% share of the richest quintile. This difference is narrower than in most countries in the region (Brunner & Miranda, 2016).

It is possible to distinguish three development phases in higher education in Ecuador. The first one, during the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, was characterized by the incipient development of the Ecuadorian university system, which was oriented mainly to benefit the urban elite. The second

phase, in the 1970s and 1980s, was characterized by the influences of neo-liberal policies in higher education, which allowed major processes of growth, differentiation and commodification of tertiary education. Finally, during the last years of 20<sup>th</sup> century and at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the development of the higher education system experienced a process massification through increases in enrollment of middle-class population and a greater demand of professionals from the labor market (Gómez, Llerena, & Castro, 2015; UNESCO, 2006). The criticisms to the massification process point out that even though enrollment rates have grown, there are still important portions of the population without access, comprised especially by the 20% of the poorest population, which includes a great proportion of indigenous people and afro-descendants (Ramírez, 2013; Salvador, 2013).

The Organic Law of Higher Education (2010) generated a new framework for the system. In addition to the introduction of new application and admission systems to higher education (National Leveling and Admissions System), it strengthened regulation. In fact, between 2012 and 2013, 15 private universities of poor quality were closed and in 2013 the first accreditation process was carried out on the basis of which the universities of the system were classified according to their internal quality.

Within this context, the Scholarship Program based on Quotas is an affirmative action mechanism framed within a larger national policy conducted by the National Secretary of Development in Ecuador (Senplades), named National Plan of Well-Being 2013-2017, (*Plan Nacional del Buen Vivir 2013-2017*) that encompasses 12 long-term goals in the areas of democratization, economic development, education, culture, environmental sustainability, among others (Senplades, 2014). Specifically, the program, conducted by the National Secretary of Higher Education, Science, Technology and Innovation (SENESCYT), aims at democratizing access to higher education, including historically marginalized populations, people with disabilities and low-income people (Di Caudo, 2015). One of the critical aims of this policy is creating equality in educational opportunities for all the Ecuadorian population and contributing to the quality of education, understanding the latter as a process of learning in diverse environments, and promoting the social integration in universities (Di Caudo, 2015).

The program started with a pilot phase in 2014 in five private universities that agreed to participate with the SENESCYT. Since 2016, the quota policy is mandatory in all private universities that receive public funding in the country. The program aims at ensuring access, retention and graduation for the most marginalized population. To access to the benefits of this policy—which funds tuition fees and opens the opportunity to apply for a stipend—it is required to have a minimum score in the admission test for higher education (Higher Education National Test, ENES)<sup>12</sup> and to demonstrate that the student is part of a marginalized group either because of low income or being part of ethnic, refugee or disability group. Once the student is admitted in the university, each institution assumes the commitment of retention of these students, offering academic and administrative help and counselling. The pilot included 510 students as beneficiaries of the policy.

The results of the policy evaluation are still preliminary. An ethnographic study about the university insertion of the program beneficiaries in a particular university, showed that the discourse of university authorities and those who have conducted the implementation of the policy have changed from an emphasis in the relevance of “merit” as a key aspect for the admission and retention of students, to an emphasis in the role of counselling to achieve successful educational

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<sup>12</sup> Since the year 2016, ENES has been unified with the *Ser Bachiller* exam, establishing in a single process the obtention of a high school diploma and the application to higher education institutions.

trajectories (Di Caudo, 2015). Because this role is a task of each particular university, it seems that the success or failure of the policy relies on the particular efforts and capabilities of each higher education institution in order to stop students' disruptive trajectories or drop out. Finally, the study emphasizes the high value that the university community has about this policy.

The perspective of this policy shows a combination of the criteria of merit and need in providing access opportunities to higher education. First, by requiring a minimum score in the admission test the policy relies on the traditional concept of merit, in which all the students applying to the university compete on the basis of a standardized test. Here it is important to note that standardized test results are highly correlated with the socioeconomic status of the students in countries with high levels of economic inequality (Treviño et al., 2015), and this may mean that a high portion of low SES students cannot surpass the barrier of the cut-score in the test. For such a reason an important portion of the disadvantaged population may not have access to this benefit. Second, once students have surpassed the barrier of the standardized test, there is a need-based policy in order to avoid that students pay for tuition by providing them with a scholarship and, also, with the opportunity to apply for a stipend. Again, this idea recognizes student needs but seems to ignore that the economic barriers for accessing and graduating from higher education are related to both the payment of tuition and having the necessary means for living while studying.

## Discussion

This article aimed at understanding the social justice debates that have impregnated the configuration of policies that seek to broaden access to higher education for marginalized populations in the region. The article analyzes four cases of policies implemented in the region aimed at promoting equal access to higher education.

Conceptually, the study uses two complementary frameworks for analyzing the tensions in the debates about social justice and access to higher education. On the one hand, the study uses Clark's notions of the three ideal types of higher education systems (State-centered, market and dominated by academic oligarchies) to shed light on the tensions that arise in the design and creation of policies for equalizing access to higher education. Using this framework, the evidence of the cases show that in Brazil, Chile and Ecuador, for different reasons, public institutions have made little progress to increase access to higher education for marginalized populations. The logic of high selectivity in the admissions processes prevailed in public higher education institutions. Such situation, coupled with the liberalization of the educational market, allowed the creation of private universities and higher education institutions that fulfilled the demand for higher education created by the increasing levels of coverage of the school systems and education attainment of the population. In this regard, there is a tension in the perceived role that public and private education institutions should play, because private institutions were the ones offering access to marginalized populations. However, it is fair to recognize that there might be economic motivations for opening access to these populations in some private education institutions, instead of a social equality objective. The case of Bolivia is different from the rest, because in the policy of intercultural universities the State played a central role in their creation and funding. But the centrality of the State is coupled with a decentralization of admission decisions with the participation of local communities instead of having market incentives to open access, as it seems to be the case with the proliferation of private supply of higher education in the other countries.

From a different perspective, the policies vary in their scope. In Brazil and Ecuador private provision has been a key factor in increasing access to higher education, although the policies also aligned public institutions with the purpose of equalizing access. In Chile, the policy has almost a

national scope in terms of municipalities, and it covers nearly 15% of the students in the last year of high school. The case of Bolivia and Ecuador have still a very limited scope because the new universities in Bolivia only serve 0.5% of the total enrollment in higher education, while only 510 students participated in the Ecuadorian pilot. The efficacy of the policies seems to be marked by the configuration of the higher education systems in terms of State, market and oligarchies. The governance of education systems plays a role in terms of the flexibility for action of higher education institutions. This flexibility is reflected in the fact, for example, that in Chile a public university took the lead in designing admission programs for equalizing access to higher education without State support or direction. In such case, both public and private universities followed the leader and created their own programs. On a more general level, and although it is not the purpose of this paper, it seems plausible to propose that highly privatized systems pose incentives for increasing access opportunities due to the economic motivations of the institutions. In these same systems, public institutions seem to face internal and external constraints to rapidly respond to the demand for access to higher education. There is some ground to support the latter in the case of Bolivia and Brazil, in which the way in which the State tries to respond to the demand for access has been limited in scope because the demand for higher education seems to prefer more traditional institutions and academic tracks, as the creation of traditional careers in the same intercultural universities suggests. However, the policies in the four cases analyzed show the relevant role of the State not in terms of provision but in terms of governance by establishing rules and incentives that can both improve the access of marginalized populations to higher education while, at the same time, aiming at safeguarding the quality of the institutions. In relation to quality, Bolivia, Ecuador and Chile established laws and mechanisms of accreditation and quality control, although with different degrees of implementation at the time of performing these analyses. In the case of Brazil, the quotas law seems to rely in the quality of public universities which is promoted by existing policies different from those analyzed in this article.

On the other hand, the study uses a conceptual framework to analyze social justice that is twofold. First, it incorporates the definitions of retributive, distributive and recognitive justice. Second, the framework deals with the notions of merit and need. Now, entering into the analysis of the situation of social justice, it is important to state that countries seem to have arrived to the conclusion that it was necessary to design and implement policies that changed the patterns of access to higher education. This seems to have been influenced by the fact that countries were successful in increasing both access and graduation of students in the school system (Rivas, 2015), with the consequent social pressure for increasing opportunities to continue studies in higher education. However, the decision of equalizing access has led to rather different policies in each country, a feature related to the particular political circumstances and perceived needs in terms of governance of the higher education systems.

Faced with the challenge of increasing and equalizing access to higher education the policies under analysis reflect that countries have defined this issue as a problem of fair competence amongst students. This means that implicitly the policies are impregnated by the concept of retributive justice and, at to a lesser degree they are shaped by distributive justice notions in the way they provide scholarships and stipends. The main challenge of the policies is to advance in incorporating elements of recognitive justice to recognize the self-determination and the cultural self-perception of the students in the admission processes. In this realm, the case of Unibol in Bolivia represents an exception, because it aims at dealing with issues of self-determination and self-perception of cultural groups. However, this policy faces the issues of the deeply ingrained perception among the population of the prestige of traditional universities and careers, which may limit the coverage of these universities. This situation poses the challenge of leveraging the prestige of these new universities to improve their capacity of attracting students.

A more general conclusion on debate on social justice is that higher education systems seem to consider social justices as something external to their design and operation. For such reason, it has been necessary the design of specific policies to add mechanisms related to social justice in the workings of higher education systems as indicated by Nieuwenhuis (2010). In terms of the concepts of need and merit, the policies analyzed show a combination of the two elements in their design, although a notion of situated or contextual merit prevails. This means that programs include a merit component using results from standardized tests or the GPA in high school as indicators in which the students have to compete. However, instead of competing with the whole cohort of students applying to the university, these programs require students to be at the top of the rankings in their high schools, to achieve a minimum score in the test, or to compete with peers of the same population group. The policy in Chile uses a measure that can be called situated-merit, in which students compete with their peers in the same school in terms of academic performance. Here, the concept of merit involves considering the differences in social origin of the students by measuring academic performance of students sharing the same school, who also tend to share similar socioeconomic characteristics. The indigenous universities in Bolivia show a focus on the need of specific population groups who speak an indigenous language. The concept of merit is also present in this policy, but measured in relation to the connection of students with their communities, which materializes as having a letter of recommendation from the community as a requirement for admission. The case of Brazil shows a combination of concepts, depending on the type of mechanism that the universities select to implement the quota law. In general, in the case of Brazil, the quota law focuses on need as the primary concept for inclusion in higher education; however, this concept may be complemented with others of merit through the admission requirements such as test scores and academic performance in school. In Ecuador, although the policy is aimed at low SES students, the policy underscore merit, as measured through test scores in a standardized test. This means that all the applicants are measured with the same scale, regardless of their social origin. Such conception of merit can put low SES students in disadvantage in relation to students with higher levels of income. Finally, in Bolivia the notion of merit is related not to test scores or GPA, but to the level of involvement of students in their local communities because students have to demonstrate to community leaders high levels of commitment towards their social group. This assertion assumes that community leaders would provide the letters of recommendation to applicants on the basis of their commitment to the community and not using other criteria such as kinship or clientelistic relation, among others.

In sum, in the policies analyzed there is a tension between merit and need in which the concept of merit prevails as the axis that structures policy design. This means that the concept of social justice in access to higher education is predominantly based on notion of equality of opportunity. It is interesting to note that the elements of equality of opportunity apply to the policies of the four countries, independently of the ideological stance—that may categorized to center-left in Chile to left in Bolivia and Ecuador—of the administrations that created the program. Another issue in the tension of merit and need is related to policy outcomes. In Brazil and Ecuador the policy seems to be successful in terms of increasing access, but not necessarily in retention and graduation, because the policy seems to assume that once the access barriers are eroded students from marginalized groups are ready to succeed by themselves in higher education. Again, the notion of merit is installed in the policy design. Meanwhile, in Bolivia the policy is facing challenges for attracting sufficient students to the intercultural universities because of the differential in prestige between these newly created institutions and traditional universities installed in cities. Finally, in Chile, the program has a need-based component which takes the form of support to students after entering to the university, a feature that involves two elements. The first is a notion of student needs in policy design by introducing a component of academic and socio-emotional support, especially

during the initial periods of participation in higher education. The second element is the recognition that eroding access barriers is only one step in the quest for equality of opportunity, and that a second step of academic and socioemotional support is necessary in order to increase the probabilities that students go beyond access and are able to finish their higher education studies.

Besides the concepts of merit and need, the policies described here can also be classified within a specific range of access policies. Resuming the analysis model based on Perna et al. (2008), the policies can be analyzed in relation to four dimensions: a) actors participating; b) academic, knowledge and funding components; c) population; and, d) degrees of implementation. In relation to participating actors, the policies presented here involve the government and the institutions of higher education. In the case of Chile high schools also participate, and in the Bolivian Unibol policy the local indigenous community is also part of the initiative. The components of the programs differ across cases. In Bolivia, Brazil and Ecuador the components of the policies are mainly funding, although combined with some adjustments in the admission processes. In the Scholarship of Ecuador the program has also a knowledge component focused on supporting students once they enter into the university. PACE in Chile has a combination of the three types of components because it includes academic support before entering the university, knowledge support once students are admitted into the university and funding support. It is important to state that the type of funding support varies, because all the policies include tuition fees, but not all fund the living expenses of students, which represent a key barrier for access and completion of higher education for marginalized students.

The target population also varies in the different policies, but in all cases the main objective is to integrate population groups that have been traditionally excluded from the university. In Chile the policy is aimed at low SES students through their high schools. The Ecuadorian policy includes low SES students, but it has also a broader scope by including students who are part of a marginalized ethnic, refugee or disability group. In Bolivia the specific indigenous groups represent the target population, while in Brazil the policy originally focalizes on black and mulato populations. It is important to state that these ethnic and racial groups in Ecuador and Brazil are overrepresented among the low SES populations. In all the cases, except in Bolivia, the policies focus on high performing students during the school years, with different ways of measuring such performance. The initiatives presented do not necessarily go beyond the idea of access to the university, regardless of the field of study and the quality or selectivity of the university.

In the dimension of degree of implementation, all the policies start their implementation when students apply or enter to the university. The only exception is represented by PACE in Chile, because the program works with high schools during 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grades.

The policies presented here have not been fully assessed, for different reasons that are not of interest in this article, but that poses a question about the effectiveness of the programs. Such effectiveness should be judged in relation to the specific social context in which the policies were created. This means taking into account the original definition of the problem in each country, as well as the intermediate and final aims of the policies. Here it is important to collect both quantitative and qualitative information to learn about the outcomes of the policy and understand the social and cultural challenges that marginalized populations face when entering to the university, which represents an unknown contexts in relation to their previous life experiences.

There are two more general issues regarding the context in which these policies were designed and implemented. First, it is important to note that the region started these policies at the end of a very positive economic cycle for Latin America. In that period the economies steadily grew, the percentage of population living in poverty decreased dramatically and school access and educational attainment of the new generations also improved steadily (Rivas, 2015). Within that regional scenario, it is also necessary to take into account that the countries under analysis have

different levels of economic development, as stated in the article. However, it is interesting to note that despite such differences in economic development—and ideological stance of their governments—the concept of equality of opportunities prevailed in the design of policies. The second element is related to the political cycle. In this realm, the arrival left-oriented governments seem to be a plausible explanation for the installation of these policies. The combination of the economic cycle (which brought an increase in public budgets) and the political cycle seem to have shaped the design of policies to enhance access to higher education for the most marginalized groups. The arrival of the Party of Workers in Brazil brought the creation of focalized social policies applied nationwide. In Ecuador the idea of “good living” was installed by the “citizen-revolution” government of Correa, and the policies to equalize access respond to such broader political context. The policies of “decolonization” would have not be possible without the arrival of the government of Morales in Bolivia. In Chile, the second period of Bachelet as president implied a leaning towards the left of the governing coalition that installed an intense agenda of educational reforms. In sum, the economic and political cycles may also have allowed for the creation of these policies, which results in the long run should be matter of future studies.

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