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## Between Community and University: A Collaborative Ethnography with Young Graduates from a Mexican Intercultural University

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**ABSTRACT**

Intercultural higher education in Mexico aims at creating new, culturally and linguistically adapted professional profiles in order to empower indigenous youth and their communities. For about a decade, so-called intercultural universities have been emerging in rural and indigenous contexts which offer academic courses with an intercultural approach in indigenous languages, in communication, in sustainability, in health and in law. In this contribution we reflect upon the methodology employed in a collaborative ethnography carried out with one of these new Mexican intercultural universities, the *Universidad Veracruzana Intercultural* (UVI) and particularly with their alumni. We present findings obtained throughout ten years of collaborative-ethnographic field work that combines principles of an “activist anthropology” and of a “doubly reflexive ethnography”. Our article analyzes how in the course of the process of educational interculturalization new methodological solutions appear and how these nourish, rejuvenate and decolonize classical anthropological ethnography, which remains all too monological and extractivist in its orientation.

**KEY WORDS**

Collaborative ethnography, reflexivity, intercultural education, intercultural university, indigenous peoples.

**ENTRE COMUNIDAD Y UNIVERSIDAD: UNA ETNOGRAFÍA COLABORATIVA CON JÓVENES EGRESADAS/OS DE UNA UNIVERSIDAD INTERCULTURAL MEXICANA**

**RESUMEN**

La educación superior intercultural en México apuesta por la creación de nuevos perfiles profesionales, cultural y lingüísticamente pertinentes, que empoderen a las y los jóvenes indígenas y a sus comunidades. Desde hace aproximadamente una década van surgiendo las así denominadas Universidades Interculturales (UI), ubicadas en contextos rurales e indígenas, que ofrecen programas de formación con enfoque intercultural en lenguas originarias, en comunicación, en sustentabilidad, en salud y en derecho. En este trabajo reflexionamos acerca de la metodología empleada en una etnografía colaborativa que hemos llevado a cabo con una de estas nuevas UI mexicanas, la Universidad Veracruzana Intercultural (UVI), y particularmente con sus egresadas y egresados. Presentamos aprendizajes obtenidos a lo largo de diez años de trabajo colaborativo-etnográfico con la UVI, cuyas bases metodológicas procuran combinar los principios de la «antropología activista» con una «etnografía doblemente reflexiva». El presente artículo analiza cómo en el proceso de interculturalización educativa surgen nuevas opciones metodológicas y cómo estas pueden retroalimentar, rejuvenecer y descolonizar la clásica etnografía antropológica, de orientación aún demasiado monológica y extractivista.

**PALABRAS CLAVE**

Etnografía colaborativa, reflexividad, educación intercultural, universidad intercultural, pueblos originarios.

## 1. Introduction

An anthropology committed to contemporary problems is involved with the social actors who seek to solve these problems by transforming their concrete realities and the asymmetric relationships that link them to the broader contexts. Investigating necessarily conflicting realities in asymmetric situations of power and, at the same time, trying to contribute to transforming them, constitutes a challenge for all social science, which increases in the case of anthropology: its colonial and exogenous origin has marked not only its theoretical baggage and its predilection for certain subjects “object” of study, but also its methodological canon. Even after its last postmodern and postcolonial twists, ethnographic fieldwork continues being considered more suitable, convincing and successful the more empirical density and *emic* vision — from within, from the perspective of the actors — it achieves in its analysis of the otherness experienced, experienced and drawn to the exterior, academic field.

Given this legacy of ethnographic extractivism, what methodological procedure would be appropriate to an anthropological research that engages with the actors and is involved in their social transformation processes, but that simultaneously aims to take advantage of the potential of the ethnographic, discoverer and translator look of otherness, in contexts of cultural, ethnic and linguistic diversity that are in emerging effervescence? Collaborative ethnography (Lassiter, 2005) emerges as an explicitly committed aspect with the actors with whom we work ethnographically, betting on the systematic introduction of *co-labor* dimensions in the ethnographic process as a whole, including phases of *co-interpretation* and *co-theorizing* with the participating actors. In our experience, this requires a permanent dialogue, throughout the whole research and collaboration process, between two different reflexivities: the explicit and conscious processes of subjectivation of the people who investigate (self-referential reflexivity) and the processes of subjectivation of the subjects participating in the research; the result is a committed and collaborative ethnography that we have therefore called “doubly reflexive” (Dietz, 2011; Dietz and Álvarez Veinguer, 2014 and 2015).

Ten years ago at the Universidad Veracruzana (UV), a team from rich and varied experiences of participation in popular education projects, participatory action research and activist anthropology, who agreed on their interest in the anthropology of education and intercultural education was formed for this. From an intercultural higher education pilot program created within the UV, but with close relations and networks of actors from indigenous movements and non-governmental organizations active

in the Mexican state of Veracruz, the opportunity to direct an ethnographic accompaniment of “long-term” to the various actors who converge in the aforementioned pilot program, later called the Universidad Veracruzana Intercultural (UVI) arose. The collaboration has emerged at the invitation of the UVI itself, its teachers and directors, but has been gradually evolving over the years, as we will detail throughout this work, increasingly focusing on collaborations with student actors and later with young professionals graduated from the UVI.

In this article, we assess the first ten years of this process of ethnographic-collaborative accompaniment, paying particular attention to the methodological procedures that we have been designing and experiencing based on the ethnographic canon mentioned above and the transformations obtained from the political-academic involvement with the participating actors. To do this, we outline and problematize in the following national and regional context in which the UVI arises as part of a rearticulation and redefinition of the relations established between the Mexican nation-state and the indigenous peoples. We subsequently present and analyze in detail the methodology that we have been developing, piloting and evaluating throughout the research process, the different phases of greater and lesser collaboration, of changing coalitions of actors whom we have accompanied and the challenges that we have been facing throughout the process. Once the methodological procedure has been analyzed, the article summarizes the results obtained for the UVI as an alternative higher education initiative. We conclude with some methodological and conceptual contributions of our project for the contemporary debate on the diversity of diversities and their educational “attention<sup>1</sup>.”

## 2. Intercultural higher education and the genesis of new social actors

At the beginning of the 21st century, in different Latin American countries, what is being called *intercultural higher education* begins to be articulated (Mato, 2009), a subsystem of strong indigenous reminiscences that arises at the interface between the nation-state, indigenous organizations, academic institutions and governmental actors, as well as non-governmental, which in each context characterize the respective national educational system. The emerging intercultural higher education reflects tensions

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1. We will focus on the methodological process followed throughout our collaborative project; for their conceptual results and their contributions to an anthropology of interculturality in more general terms, see Mateos Cortés (2011) and Dietz (2012a and 2017b).

and contradictions that transcend the educational sphere and that have an impact on the “identity politics” of the actors involved<sup>2</sup>.

## 2.1. Mexican intercultural universities

In Mexico, the so-called Intercultural Universities (IU) constitute one of the main and most novel types of institutional response that the Mexican nation-state has been deploying since the beginning of the millennium in response to the coverage and relevance claims that from the 80s and 90s formulate the indigenous peoples of the country and their organizations in the field of higher education<sup>3</sup>. The Mexican federal government and its educational authorities define an *intercultural university* as an institution of higher education that directs its educational programs toward young people from one or more of the indigenous peoples, settling in or near the regions of origin of these young people. The IUs have been created since 2013 in different predominantly indigenous regions of Mexico as a public policy initiative. Despite the fact that non-governmental actors have participated from the beginning, the vast majority of these universities co-sponsored by the state and federal governments are subject to the guidelines of the Ministry of Public Education (MPE) and specifically of its General Coordination of Intercultural and Bilingual Education (GCIBE; Casillas and Santini, 2006).

Its policy of promoting the ethnic-cultural diversification of the profiles and curricular content of the IU does not occur in isolation, but coincides with a broader trend of making higher education institutions more “efficient,” locally “adapted” and oriented toward specific “impacts” in general. They are universities that are born with a strong regional and rural vocation and, therefore, in most cases, place their campuses in regions historically neglected by Western higher education, always focused on the urban, in the city and with a strong bias toward the middle and upper classes of state or national capitals (Dietz, 2017a). For indigenous students, having access to higher education was practically impossible, so

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2. The typology elaborated by Mato (2009, 2011 and 2018) encompasses a very complete continental panorama of the intercultural higher education institutions that have emerged in the last two decades in Latin America; in this work we cannot include a comparison between Mexican intercultural universities and other efforts to diversify and/or decolonize higher education systems within and outside the continent; for this, see Santos (2005), Wright and Shore (2017) and Cupples and Grosfoguel (2018).

3. The contextual information that we summarize in this brief section comes from Schmelkes (2008), Dietz (2012b and 2017a), Mateos Cortés and Dietz (2013), Rojas Cortés and González Apodaca (2016), Bermúdez Urbina (2017) and González González, Rosado-May and Dietz (2017).

to date their percentage in general enrollment is well below their demographic presence (estimates vary between 1 and 2% of all Mexican university students; see Schmelkes, 2011).

Unlike conventional educational institutions, IUs arise with the intention of expanding higher educational coverage in rural and indigenous regions and achieving the cultural and linguistic relevance of higher education offered in these regions. Coverage and relevance are objectives that reveal the historical moment in which these new universities emerged: in a moment of transition from the classic indigenism of the nation-state toward a neoliberal multiculturalism (Hale, 2006) strongly conditioned by what Shore and Wright (2015) have identified for higher education policies in general as *governing by numbers*, a technocratic expression of ‘rule by numbers’ and quantifiable evidence.

## **2.2. The emergence of the Universidad Veracruzana Intercultural (UVI)**

Apart from these government institutions of higher education and some independent initiatives promoted by NGOs or religious orders (Dietz, 2012b), with the establishment in 2005 of the UVI, an alternative model emerges: in this case, the UV, a pre-existing public university, starts its own intercultural pilot program, which operates in four regional headquarters in the Veracruz regions of Huasteca, Totonacapan, Sierra de Zongolica and Las Selvas, and which today constitutes an intercultural university housed inside a conventional university. The hybrid nature of the UVI, its intermediate position between initiatives “from above” — the IUs of the CGEIB — and initiatives “from below” — such as institutions promoted by non-governmental actors — makes it particularly relevant for a collaborative ethnography that emphasizes the diversity and complexity of its participating actors.

The UVI was originally promoted by a group of academics from the UV Research Institute of Education, coordinated by Sergio Téllez Galván, who had created a Seminar of Multicultural Education in Veracruz (SEMV) to channel research, teaching and continuing training on multiculturalism, interculturality and diversity in the Veracruz region. This group of academics, strongly guided by a constructivist and anti-essentialist concept of interculturality, coined and developed in European universities, enters into dialogue between 2000 and 2004 with two types of extracurricular actors: on the one hand, with bilingual indigenous teachers trained in Normal Schools and interested in expanding bilingual education for indigenous youth beyond basic education and in overcoming

the indigenous legacy of education for indigenous peoples through locally and regionally rooted academic programs; and, on the other hand, with activists who from non-governmental organizations promote alternative projects of sustainable development in rural and indigenous areas of Veracruz (Ávila Pardo and Mateos Cortés, 2008; Mateos Cortés, 2011). As a result of this confluence of highly heterogeneous actors and discourses, the pilot program was inaugurated in 2005 and then institutionalized as the Universidad Veracruzana Intercultural (<http://www.uv.mx/uvi>). With great speed and many pressures from political actors from the State of Veracruz, two bachelor's degrees are being opened at the same time on an experimental basis that begin to be given simultaneously in August 2005 in the four indigenous regions mentioned above, which are the areas with the greatest educational backwardness and socioeconomic marginalization, as well as infrastructural of the state (UVI, 2005): the Bachelor of Intercultural Management and Animation, and the Bachelor of Sustainable Regional Development. Quickly, the four headquarters, whose teaching staff is made up of precarious contracts between the bilingual teachers, professionals from the region with work experiences in NGOs, academics from the UV who move to one of the host regions, are overwhelmed by demands from students, their families, other members of the communities served or local and regional institutions to expand the educational offer to other topics that are relevant to the indigenous communities of Veracruz, but that are not covered in the two initial degrees: linguistic and identity aspects of cultural revitalization, legal aspects of defense of indigenous territories and human rights, health-disease aspects in contexts of institutional diversity and discrimination, aspects of gender equality and sexual diversity.

All this wide range of regional problems, which also arose in the research projects that students themselves start from when they enter one of the two degrees, forced the UVI in 2007 to restructure its educational opportunity; it chose to merge the two degrees into one, called the Bachelor of Intercultural Management for Development (<https://www.uv.mx/uvi/general/licenciatura-en-gestion-intercultural-para-el-desarrollo/>), but that from a common trunk it diversifies early on into five interdisciplinary fields of professionalization, called "Orientations." These Orientations of Languages, Communication, Health, Rights and Sustainability were designed as part of a flexible curriculum adaptable to the proposals for research projects with which students enter the UVI.

In this context of curricular redesign, but also of renegotiation of the role of the intercultural university in relation to community actors and

the conventional university, our close collaboration with the UVI and our collaborative ethnography project with its main actors also arises in 2007.

### 3. The *InterSaberes* project and collaborative ethnography

From the beginning, our collaborative ethnography had a dual objective, both theoretical and practical, with both descriptive and prescriptive orientation: we set out to analyze how the relationship between the UVI and its host communities and regions builds, links, exchanges and mutually fertilizes diverse knowledge and wisdom; simultaneously, we intended to experiment with more horizontal and dialogical forms of knowledge exchange that “entangled” in ethnographic-collaborative praxis with diverse and even scarcely linked actors: teachers, researchers, students, graduates and residents of the communities in which the UVI is inserted.

The project resulting from this initial dual objective, called “Dialogue of knowledge, actions and powers between educational and community actors: a reflective ethnography of intercultural higher education in Veracruz” (*InterSaberes*)<sup>4</sup>, we have been conducting it since 2007 with a team of UVI teachers, students and graduates, as well as with community actors from the four indigenous regions of Veracruz. To this end, our analysis has focused on analyzing and contrasting three closely interrelated dimensions: the “intercultural” dimension (the dialogue between different cultures and worldviews), the “interlingual” dimension (the interrelationship between the respective language systems that have coexisted for centuries in each of the regions) and the “inter-actor” dimension (the emergence of and communication between academic actors, communities and social organizations)<sup>5</sup>.

The research team has been made up of researchers from the Institute of Research in Education of the UV, by teachers of the UVI, as well as by students and graduates of the Bachelor of Intercultural Management for Development at the UVI and from four different postgraduate degrees

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4. The project had a first initial piloting phase (2007-2009), which was sponsored by the UV’s General Directorate of Investigations and by SEP, and later (2010-2014) benefited from the National Council for Science and Technology. (Conacyt, Basic Science call 2009) and by the Spanish Agency for International Development Cooperation (AECID, call for aid for inter-university cooperation programs and scientific research); in its continuation, currently (2015-2018) is part of a broader project called, “Emerging processes and common agencies: praxis of collaborative social research and new forms of political subjectivation” (Call 2014, R&D projects, the Spanish state program for promoting excellent scientific and technical research; reference: CSO2014-56960-P).

5. See Dietz (2012a), Mateos Cortés (2015), Mateos Cortés and Dietz (2015) and Mateos Cortés, Dietz and Mendoza Zuany (2016).



— the Master’s and Doctorate in Educational Research at the UV, as well as the Doctorates in Anthropology and Social Welfare and in Multicultural Societies and Intercultural Studies, both from the University of Granada. As a whole, colleagues trained in social anthropology, in linguistics and translation, in pedagogy and in philosophy have participated.

During the first phase of piloting and exploration, a wide range of community as well as academic knowledge and expertise has been gathered in the four regions to feed back into the academic program of the Degree in Intercultural Management for Development (see more below). Thus, between 2007 and 2010 we have accompanied teaching practices within the UVI itself. Subsequently, from 2011 we have carried out a collaborative ethnography to study how the transferring, linking and mutually “hybridizing” academic, organizational and community knowledge, especially accompanying UVI graduates in both their professional activities and in their community roles. While our ethnographic accompaniment during the first phase focuses on UVI students and teachers, in its second phase the project focuses on UVI graduates, as well as their local and regional counterparts. This creates dense and complex networks of ethnographic collaboration, which we will analyze below.

### 3.1. Research-collaboration methods

Based on methodological experiences previously obtained in research-collaboration processes with indigenous organizations and movements in Michoacán, as well as with migrant communities and NGO promoters in Andalusia, since its inception in 2007, the *InterSaberes* project combined two methodological traditions: ethnography and participatory action research. Starting from the meeting of both traditions (Mendoza Zuany, Dietz and Alatorre Frenk, 2017), in which several members of the research team had already actively participated, we selected three basic methods of data construction, which we prepared along with the actors participating in the project, which we will characterize below:

- Participant observation — classical method of ethnography, successfully applied to multiple educational, organizational and institutional contexts (Velasco and Díaz de Rada, 1997; Velasco, Díaz de Rada, Cruces Villalobos, Fernández Suárez, Jiménez de Madariaga and Sánchez Molina, 2006; Díaz de Rada, 2011) — has carried out about the interactions that took place between the different types of actors in their respective situations of generation,

transmission and exchange of knowledge, first in the classroom contexts of the four regional headquarters of the UVI, then in the “field” practices carried out by the students during their university career and lastly in work and citizen activities that the UVI graduates carried out within their community, in some non-governmental organization, in a municipal presidency, in a local or regional company, as well as in one of the governmental institutions present in the region. The observations focused both on classroom and campus interactions and on those in the communities on the topics covered (in class/field), the forms of knowledge transmission (oral/written, concrete/abstract, etc.), the relationships that are established between the actors inside and outside the classroom, the thematicization of the identity, culture and language of one’s own vs. that of others, the worldviews included or excluded, thematic or silenced, the languages and communicative guidelines used in the interactions, as well as the elements that promote dialogues and those that generate conflicts between actors. The observation of these diverse patterns of inter-actor interaction — among students, teachers, neighbors of the communities, parents, community officials and external governmental and non-governmental actors — generated data of great ethnographic density, with evident predominance of an *etic* perspective, thus nurturing what we call the *pragmatic dimension* of a reflective and collaborative ethnography (Dietz, 2011).

- The ethnographic interview, with a strong biographical-narrative orientation and great potential for reflexivity (Díaz de Rada, 2011; Kvale, 1996; Velasco and Díaz de Rada, 1997), was initially conducted with those who created the UVI, with their counterparts in the communities, as well as with the first generations of teachers and students who joined the UVI between 2005 and 2009, when the first generation of students graduated, and subsequently developed with the graduates, their families, their institutional and organizational counterparts both inside and outside their home communities. The more than eighty interviews — both those with students and teachers as well as those we carried out with community actors and parents — focused on the biographical trajectory of the actor in question, their previous experiences of schooling, their current experiences in relation to the UVI, the way in which one perceives the different diversities both within of the UVI as well as outside, in the community and in the region, as well as relationships (intercultural, interlingual and inter-actor) that are establis-

hed inside and outside the educational institution to promote or prevent a dialogue of knowledge. These interviews were designed and carried out in a “*dialogical*” and self-interpretive way to capture the senses and meanings at the *emic* level of the actors’ own discourse, of their identities, which constitutes the *semantic dimension* of a reflective ethnography (Dietz, 2011).

- Lastly, the “*intersaberes* forums” that we periodically carry out after phases of observations and interviews as spaces for inter-learning (Bertely, Gasché and Podestá, 2008) with their own participating actors, served to exchange knowledge from different origins and together to analyze, compare and discuss interpretations that we made of the contrast between the *etic* and *emic* perspectives obtained through observations and interviews with these same actors: at the beginning UVI founders, teachers and students, later graduates, employers and other intermediaries who interact in the workplace or in the community with the graduates of the UVI. This contrast of visions and often contradictory interpretations, achieved throughout the *intersaberes* forums, carried out first semi-annually and then with the graduates annually in each of the four regions, constitute what we call in reflective ethnography the *syntactic dimension* (Dietz, 2011). The resulting complementarity and cyclical concatenation of more classically ethnographic methods (observations and interviews) with methods from participatory action research and popular education (forums, workshops) has allowed us to promote and integrate two types of reflexivity that conventional research barely manages to put into dialogue: the reflexivity processes promoted by those of us who investigate from the academy, the contemporary problems faced by our research subject-objects, on the one hand, and the reflexivity processes that the social actors themselves are involved in, on the other hand. Talking together and horizontally in *InterSaberes* forums gave us the opportunity to link and mutually fertilize both sources of reflexivity, thus establishing throughout the project “double reflexivity” processes, which for us constitute the indispensable nucleus of any collaborative ethnography (Dietz, 2011).

### 3.2. Phases of the research-collaboration process

Therefore, our ethnographic research phases have been constituted both in the initial project (2007-2010) and in the current project (2011-2018) through cyclical processes of research and collaboration, in which more

“extractive” and conventionally academic periods alternate with more “dialogic” and collaborative periods. Each of the two subprojects has therefore been structured as follows:

- the first stage of negotiation and joint co-definition of the objectives to be pursued, the goals and activities to be implemented and the methods to be used; throughout the inter-actor meetings of reflection on the UVI in particular, and its educational offer and on intercultural higher education and its relationship with indigenous communities in general, these frameworks of the collaboration to be carried out between academic actors of the UV and the UVI, on the one hand, and community actors and/or social organizations interested in intercultural education, on the other hand, were determined;
- a second stage focused on the pragmatic dimension, in which the *InterSaberes* research team carried out previously agreed ethnographic accompaniments, generating participant observations of classroom and extracurricular processes in which academic and community knowledge was sought to be exchanged; to do this, we identified more school-based and decontextualized teaching-learning processes (which we would later call “knowledge-knowledge”) as opposed to more contextualized processes of knowledge transmission-transfer in specific community situations (which we would later classify as “knowledge-doings”);
- a third stage focused on the semantic dimension, to capture and contrast the discourses that different academic and community actors emit around the diverse knowledge that was interacting inside and outside the intercultural university and its curriculum; the respective ethnographic and biographical interviews reflect these discourses, which we then analyze and typologize in order to relate them to each other, as well as to the practices and interactions previously observed;
- a fourth stage of transfer and discussion of our interpretations to the actors previously observed and interviewed, through the aforementioned *InterSaberes* forums, which as workshops of debate, exchange and renegotiation, not only visualized the structural syntactic dimension that emerged from the contradictions between discourses and practices, between doxa and praxis (Bourdieu, 1991), but at the same time they constituted a collaborative starting point for the next ethnographic phase, since from these forums-workshops new “commissions” of research-collaboration emerged for another cyclical process of accompaniment through

observations, interviews and subsequent *InterSaberes* forums with the actors themselves.

### 3.3. Collaboration subjects and turns

Throughout this cyclical spiral procedure between observations, interviews and forums, not only have the types of actors involved expanded and diversified — first academic actors predominated, on the one hand, and community actors on the other, but later new actors have emerged, such as the young students themselves, who are products of the UVI itself and who later become active professional graduates in their respective regions — but in several cases subjects who participated in the research became research subjects who integrated themselves into the project itself, either as teachers who became researchers of their own teaching practice, or as students and graduates who became researchers of their professional reality and their emerging community roles.

Between 2007 and 2010 the emphasis of the collaboration, its channels, priorities, and temporalities have been clearly marked by the teaching community of the UVI itself. Starting from the aforementioned first moment of negotiation and codefinition of interests and research topics, we carried out in each of the regional headquarters of the UVI a kind of “school ethnography,” in which we observed teaching and learning practices inside and outside the classroom, which we then contrast with narrative and biographical interviews to practically the entire teacher plant at each site, as well as the first (2005-2009), second (2006-2010) and partly third generation (2007-2011) of students at each site.

As a result of the qualitative analysis of observational-visual and narrative-verbal data, for which we based ourselves on the methodological principles of *grounded theory* (Strauss, 1987) or fundamental theory (Trinidad, Carretero and Soriano, 2006), we took advantage of the “stereo vision” that the contrast of the *etic* and *emic* perspectives provided us (Werner and Schoepfle, 1987) and that generated contradictions and dilemmas between the sayings and doings of an intercultural higher education, between the *doxa* and the *praxis* of the alleged “dialogue of knowledge” between academia and community, dilemmas that we presented and discussed in *InterSaberes* forums. These forums-workshops were carried out first separately — only with students, then with teachers and finally with managers — and then jointly, promoting and co-organizing forums for joint and multi-stakeholder reflection on the UVI and its work. New research collaborations emerged from these forums to the subsequent phase; likewise, new spaces for inter-learning germinated, particularly claimed and

promoted by UVI teachers. Thus, as a result of our collaborative ethnography, a “Methodological Training Laboratory for Research” was established and operated for several years within the UVI, which we coordinated from the *InterSaber*es project and in which all the full-time professors of the UVI participated, training with us and with a group of academics and activists from inside and outside the UV in participatory and collaborative methodologies and methods, but also in certain “extractive” methods and techniques that the teachers and their students required to carry out their research, intervention and/or community organization processes.

These methodological training spaces were decisive for the reorientation of training processes for both teachers and students. The teachers, due to their very diverse regional, professional and disciplinary backgrounds when entering the UVI teaching staff, needed to move from individual, fragmented research projects, and often closely identified with their disciplines of origin, to collective, collaborative projects that were relevant to local and regional actors and that could integrate students into their own research activities. For its part, the curriculum of the Bachelor’s Degree in Intercultural Management for Development began — among other impulses, based on what was diagnosed in our ethnographies of student field work — a transit of a curriculum that reproduced vices of discipline — the Orientations in Languages, Communication, Health, Rights and Sustainability ran the risk of becoming new (inter)disciplines, isolated from one another — toward another curriculum focused on the methodological research-management itinerary that the students began in the first semester with exercises in problematizing reality, in community and regional diagnosis, and then moved on to interventions, systematizations and evaluations of their intercultural management projects, which finally led to the drafting — individual or collective — of a reception document equivalent to a bachelor’s thesis.

Once our results and findings were fed back through the *InterSaber*es forums to the student actors, teachers and directors of the UVI, in the second phase of our project, as a “quasi-natural” evolution of our students who have already become graduates/and professionals of intercultural management, we turn the emphasis of the collaboration of the UVI actor to the graduate actor and to their web of community and professional networks.

### 3.4. Levels of Research-collaboration

In the first meetings of graduates of the UVI, we began to identify interests in collaboration and co-research, the same ones that were particularly

focused on the different types of knowledge that, as intercultural managers, they articulated in their professional and community work, in their work roles, but also in their role as “literate community members” and active citizens in their communities.

To do this, we again initiated a cycle-spiral of observations, interviews and inter-learning forums, in which we now focus above all on the graduates, their employers and/or — in the case of self-employed intercultural managers — their interlocutors inside and outside the indigenous regions of Veracruz: La Huasteca, El Totonacapan, Las Grandes Montañas and Las Selvas. For this second collaborative ethnography, as the patterns of collaboration became more complex and diversified outside the UVI, we found ourselves needing to distinguish three different levels of research-collaboration activities:

- On a first macro level, which included the entire state of Veracruz, our research team, which consisted not only of researchers and students, but also of graduates in postgraduate training processes, carried out the same cycle of observations, interviews, analysis and forums with a sample of managers who had graduated from the four campuses and from the different UVI Orientations (Table 1). This level of analysis gave us the opportunity to identify from the individual guidelines of each graduate/or accompanied/or new professional fields and emerging community roles of the graduates, their networks of intermediaries, located in their communities of origin as well as in NGOs, government agencies at the municipal, state and federal levels, as well as academic entities with which they collaborated. We often find dramatic situations of job insecurity, of necessary flexibility and a tendency toward self-employment, but, at the same time, we find clear networks of regional actors that graduates have been weaving and cultivating. Thanks to these networks and their specific know-how as managers, in many cases graduates of the UVI are successfully replacing external managers, outsiders in the region, and are beginning to compete in municipal administrations, NGOs and regional indigenous movements with “old” intermediaries such as (nominally) bilingual teachers, from the era of classical indigenism. We have also met in several cases with graduates who have become “qualified migrants,” who find work spaces in the city, while several graduates have consciously returned to their community to continue dedicating themselves to the field and holding positions in their community, but now as peasants or literate community members, aware of their rights and

capable of putting indigenous and non-indigenous, community and academic knowledge into dialogue on a daily basis. As a result of this individual accompaniment of graduates, we were able to identify specific “intercultural knowledges and activities” of UVI graduates; some of these knowledges and activities were being promoted by their own degree at the UVI, but in other cases the managers themselves indicated that there were knowledges and activities that were not contemplated in the current curriculum (Mateos Cortés, Dietz and Mendoza Zuany, 2016).

Generation	2005-2009		2006-2010		2007-2011		2008-2012		Totals
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	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
UVI Huasteca Headquarters	2	6	3	4	0	1	1	0	17
UVI Totonacapan Headquarters	3	3	3	0	3	1	2	0	15
UVI Gr. Montañas Headquarters	8	2	4	2	2	1	0	0	19
UVI Las Selvas Headquarters	4	7	5	4	5	2	0	3	30
Totals	17	18	15	10	10	5	3	3	81

**Table 1:** Graduates from the UVI accompanied in the *InterSaberes* project.

**Source:** Mateos Cortés, Dietz and Mendoza Zuany (2016).

- On a second “meso” level, we complement this panoramic vision that started from the individual professionalization guidelines of each intercultural manager, now generating in each of the four regions a specific ethnographic accompaniment project, no longer to individual managers, but to groups of graduates who, from their research-management process carried out in the bachelor’s degree now worked together as managers in a specific area of professionalization. Each of the four regional projects was coordinated by a UVI teacher and carried out by UVI student interns from our post-graduate courses, and by the graduates themselves who self-analyzed their professional practices. For each headquarters, a particularly relevant area for the region was identified: legal pluralism in



the Huasteca, based on the links that a group of intercultural managers achieves between the traditional justices of the peace of the *Nahua* community of Puyecaco, the *Tepehua* community of San Pedro Tziltzacuapan and the *Ñuhú* community of Zapote Bravo, on the one hand, and the “official” justice system for human and indigenous rights; the solidarity and alternative economy in Totonacapan, based on the creation and circulation — by students and teachers of the regional headquarters of the UVI — of the “túmin” as an alternative community currency in the *Totonaca* community of Espinal and its diffusion within and outside the region; bilingual and intercultural education in Grandes Montañas and particularly the establishment of links and “bridges” between basic bilingual education offered in schools in the municipality of Tehuipango and the regional headquarters of the UVI as the last link in a future intercultural and bilingual itinerary for the entire educational system of this Nahuatl-speaking region; and, lastly, the environmental management of wild fauna in Las Selvas, promoting the exchange of agroecological and environmental knowledge-practices between the *Nahua* communities of Huazuntlán, Pajapan and Tatahuicapan, the *Popoluca* communities of the Sotepan municipality and producer organizations, as well as municipal councils for sustainable regional development. The findings on the specific knowledge-doings of the ethnographed graduates in these four regional subprojects, but also on their shortcomings and gaps in professionalization, were systematized and presented in *InterSaberes* forums to the UVI community itself, which is currently taking them up for the design of a new educational offer (see below).

- Lastly, a third micro level of research and collaboration was established from our research fellows, who, as students, whether of the undergraduate degree of the UVI or one of the aforementioned postgraduate programs, carried out within the framework of the *InterSaberes* project their own research projects that led to a rich range of undergraduate, master’s and doctoral theses on different actors, issues and regions of the UVI<sup>6</sup>. These individual investigations have been carried out since 2007, and since then they have been accompanied, fed back, analyzed and evaluated in the framework of an *InterSaberes* research seminar, whose first biweekly and

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6. A report published online (CAEI and UVI, 2017) offers a complete list of all the undergraduate and graduate theses generated in our project, along with other theses that have the UVI as the object of study.

then weekly sessions became what now constitutes the research seminar in Intercultural Education/Intercultural Studies of the post-graduate courses of the Institute of Research in Education of the Universidad Veracruzana.

#### 4. Reflexivities in dialogue: results of collaborative ethnography

Throughout these ten years, the *InterSaber*es project provided the opportunity to systematically and diachronically ethnograph the educational institution and its protagonists; the workshops-forums held at the conclusion of each of the spiral-phases detailed above allowed us to co-interpret and critically and self-critically review the substantive functions of teaching, research and community outreach that the UVI was providing in the four indigenous regions of Veracruz. As early as 2011, but intensely as of 2013, when members of our team are invited to temporarily take over managerial functions in the UVI itself, the empirical results of *InterSaber*es begin to be applied in a deep process of organizational and academic restructuring, which we summarize below. Responding to frequent criticisms of the centralized nature of decision-making and management of the UVI from its administrative headquarters in Xalapa, the capital of the State of Veracruz, a process of decentralization and regionalization is initiated, not only administrative, but also academic. The academic staff at the headquarters is drastically reduced, while recruitment of academics and professionals — preferably speakers of one of the respective native languages of the region — is increasing in the four regional headquarters. In addition, they obtain their autonomy through their respective Academic Commission, which determines, supervises and self-evaluates the university activities of the headquarters, including the election of its Regional Coordination and the other managerial functions; thus, the four de facto headquarters are becoming faculties that operate under the same conditions as other academic entities of the UV. A problematic aspect highlighted by students, as well as by graduates and parents in our forums-workshops, was a generalized crisis that they suffered when entering the university; coming from families that had never had access or even knowledge of higher education, required a closer and continuous accompaniment, especially in the first semesters, in order to alleviate both academic and personal challenges. To this end, since 2013 a new professional figure, called an “educational mediator,” a teacher specialized in psycho-pedagogical accompaniment of students, especially of recent admission, was

created in each campus, while technical, administrative and schooling problems are dealt with by another new figure, the “pedagogical administrator.”

In the follow-up of the graduates’ professional careers, we detected that their speaking and writing skills in two languages constitute, on the one hand, a great work advantage compared to monolingual professionals in Spanish and, on the other hand, an important source of identity and self-esteem as self-identified bilingual professionals such as *Nahuas*, *Totonacos*, *Popoluca*, *Tepehua*, etc. In order to strengthen the educational and communicative role of native languages, processes of “linguistic normalization” were initiated at the regional headquarters, which are not limited to the preferential hiring of academic and administrative personnel that is bilingual, but also includes bilingual or multilingual signage of the headquarters and the preferential use of the native language in daily communication between students, teachers and administrators. In two of the four headquarters, the staff, who is still monolingual, is currently learning Nahuatl (Grandes Montañas Headquarters) and Totonac (Totonacapan Headquarters) so that the original language is no longer just a subject and object of learning but can fully function as a channel of communication and learning. Since 2013, an entire area of the UVI has been dedicated to promoting these processes, which involve not only specific and differentiated language courses, but also efforts in interdialectal communication (between variants of each language), writing standardization and lexical updating, which are prerequisites so that in the future, languages such as Nahuatl or Totonac can be used not only as community languages, limited to the rural and peasant world, but also as expanding languages that also include academic variants in each case, as they were before European colonization.

Fourthly, all the actors with whom we have been collaborating over the last ten years have continually pointed out the need to diversify the UVI’s educational offer. Therefore, from 2013 onwards, systematic consultation processes have been carried out to the communities of the four regions, and as a result the offer is being expanded in two directions: on the one hand, maintaining the degree level as the core offering, but opening up educational offers at other levels, both postgraduate and continuing education, to meet the continuing education needs expressed by education professionals. The semester-long diploma holders are those that arouse the most interest among professionals in education, health, the administration of justice and regional peasant agriculture. On the other hand, the Bachelor’s Degree in Intercultural Management for Development, important as a pioneer in the comprehensive professionalization of indig-

enous and non-indigenous youth who intend to remain or re-root in their region, does not manage to cover all the training needs that are locally relevant and that are demanded by neighbors and community authorities. Therefore, with the participation of local authorities, jurists from the Faculty of Law, the community of UVI teachers and members of the *InterSaberes* team, a new Law Degree has been designed with a Legal Pluralism approach, which since 2017 has been offered simultaneously to Intercultural Management at the Totonacapan Headquarters and soon also at other locations. Likewise, new bachelor's, master's or diploma courses are being designed in agroecology, intercultural health/nursing/midwifery, languages, interpretation and translation, as well as regional arts. At the same time, the critical diagnosis of training deficiencies in the current degree, observed in our forums-workshops by the graduates, has triggered a process of redesigning the degree in Intercultural Management, which now covers decisive training areas in a more systematic and comprehensive way for professional know-hows, such as project management, applied statistics and financial runs, gender equality, ethics, leadership and conflict mediation, as well as on the didactics of native languages and linguistic mediation and interpretation.

Another finding of our collaborative research problematized the scarce articulation between teaching, research and bonding activities that UVI professors particularly express. Instead of adding functions in a mechanical way, through the laboratory and other educational training and self-training activities, generally concentrated in the inter-semester periods, spaces are being created in which the three functions of teaching, research and linkage are combined. In this sense, in each regional headquarters, teachers activate three types of "academies," which together generate communities of practice dedicated to educational innovation: 1) the basic training academy, which develops, strengthens and mainstreams activities of learning aimed at the achievement of students' communicative and linguistic competences both in Spanish, as well as in native languages and English; 2) the academy by semester, in which the teachers of a section of students jointly accompany the integral process of learning and evaluation that the students develop during each period; and 3) the academy of the "Axis of Methods and Practices of Related Research," which accompanies the process through which future intercultural managers develop, systematize and analyze, during the course of their studies, related research experiences, putting community knowledge in interaction with the analysis and intervention of the problems addressed by each student. Lastly, on each campus, teachers are integrating "academic bodies," teams of teacher-researchers who share common lines of research and linkage and who,

at the same time, promote and “sponsor” the new range of bachelor’s, master’s and diploma courses.

The research deficiencies reported to us by the teachers have led to our own area of research and internal training for the teaching staff. To this end, the regional teams of the UVI dedicate themselves in each inter-semester period to intensively self-train and update themselves in their substantive teaching, research and linkage activities, starting from the development of intercultural competencies for management, passing through the articulation of the aforementioned substantive functions in their own research projects as well as those of their students and landing on the systematization of the planning, accompaniment and evaluation processes of the research-linked management projects carried out by the intercultural managers to obtain their degrees.

Acknowledging the efforts made since 2005 by the teachers at the four Regional Headquarters of the UVI, until now hired as “temporary personnel,” and therefore exposed to occupational, professional, and experiential fluctuations. Since 2013 a specific program has been negotiated with the authorities of the UV to convene for fixed full-time teaching positions for UVI staff, which for the last four years has been generating permanent teacher-researcher nuclei at the four campuses, which not only increases their work and academic stability, but also impacts on the permanence of the linking ties that teachers have been establishing with the main cultural, social, economic and political actors in each of the regions where the UVI is based.

Finally, precisely, one of the most relevant empirical results of *InterSaberes* referred to the great challenges that we observed to generate stable and permanent channels of dialogue between the intercultural university and these regional actors. Interesting and pioneering dialogues of knowledge were being achieved, but these were taking place outside the UVI, in initiatives, organizations and individual and collective efforts of a teacher and/or a graduate, but they were not used within the university, in its school curriculum or in its regional activities. For this reason, since 2013 we have managed to get the UVI to recover the important figure of the Advisory Councils, key instances for the link between the intercultural university and its region of impact. Composed at each site by regionally recognized “moral,” wise and scholarly authorities as well as representatives of government institutions at the three levels, as well as local and regional civil society organizations, these Regional Advisory Councils meet in person once a semester to advise the academic authorities and teachers in their substantive activities and in making decisions on the UVI’s new educational offering. These regional councils lead to the inter-

cultural university's General Consultative Council, which serves to deepen the links between the UVI and governmental and non-governmental actors, with indigenous movements, as well as with current and future employers of intercultural managers who have graduated from the UVI. With this, we managed to get the UVI — one of the few educational institutions in the country — to introduce into its own daily operations the right to free, prior and informed consultation enjoyed by the original peoples of Mexico, as established in international treaties such as Convention 169 of the International Labour Organization and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, ratified by Mexico, and in the national legal framework, such as the Political Constitution of the United Mexican States, the General Law of Education and the General Law of Linguistic Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

## 5. Conclusions

A collaborative ethnography that encourages double reflexivity between academic and community actors not only contributes to the transformation of the concrete reality of the actors with whom it collaborates, as outlined above for the case of the UVI and its local and regional relations. Likewise, the methodology used here makes it possible to generate and contribute new knowledge to the academic field and to the anthropological and pedagogical work, in our case. As we have detailed in other publications (Dietz, 2012a; Mateos Cortés, 2011 and 2015; Mateos Cortés and Dietz, 2015), the ethnographic accompaniment and the constant and circular contrast between *emic* (acting), *etic* (observational) and *emicletic* (structural) perspectives, among what we have called *the semantic, pragmatic and syntactic dimensions* of the ethnography of intercultural education, has also made it possible to identify underlying models of interculturality, communality and diversity that the different actors, sometimes explicitly, but often implicitly, generate and apply in their daily work as community members, as academics, as young people and/or as professionals with a vocation and regional identification. Throughout these inter-actoral processes, some of the models and types of interculturality appropriate and resignify the classic anthropological — and abstract, generalizing — notions of culture, identity and ethnicity, while others transcend them in search of less abstract and more contextual, more culturally and linguistically rooted, as in the case of the vindication and re-interpretation made by several graduates of the notions of the *masewal* (the peasant, the communal) and the *tapalewilis* (of reciprocity, of the “returned hand”).

Methodologically, the process of research-collaboration described here has allowed us to diversify, relativize and contextualize at every moment the very notion of “collaborative ethnography.” There is no single way to collaborate by ethnography, or to ethnograph by collaborating because of how it is — more than in any other methodological option — a direct product of the circumstances and of the negotiations with the actors with whom one collaborates. In our case, both institutional and organizational actors, both academic and community, have been changing: instituting subjects become institutional subjects, emerging actors become factual powers, and our role and degree of involvement, commitment and collaboration are also changing.

Therefore, in a first attempt to typologize collaborative ethnographies, Arribas Lozano (2017) invites us to include in our methodological self-reflexivity a conscious tracing of what he calls the “genealogies of collaboration.” Throughout these transformations, both our own and those of others, in our experience we have lived phases of greater collaboration, identification and commitment with the actors as opposed to other phases of greater research, extraction and distancing from the actors. In retrospect, we found that we needed both moments to obtain our main findings and learnings. This forces us to recognize that the double reflexivity promoted and cultivated in collaborative ethnographies like ours does not generate an often longed-for Gadamerian “fusion of horizons,” a simplifying equation between academia and activism, but rather triggers a whole range of research functions, extraction, training, negotiation, translation, mediation and communication that maintain very diverse networks and exchanges between “divergent temporalities,” between different “forms of relevance” and between “scales of responsibilities” (Arribas Lozano, 2017) that are not homogeneous or homogenizable. Keeping the respective processes of dialogue and reflexivity in dialogue linked is the main challenge, but at the same time, is the most important criterion of legitimacy and “quality,” of collaborative ethnographies.

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