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# LABS4CHANGE PROJECT

## METHODOLOGICAL PROPOSAL

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# Index

1. General description .....	3
2. Methodological development of the Audit .....	4
2.1. Document revision .....	4
2.2. Participant observation .....	5
2.3. Key informant interviews .....	5
2.4. Student survey .....	6
2.5. Focus groups .....	6
2.6. Results registration by indicator and report elaboration.....	6

## 1. General description

This methodological proposal is framed within the *Labs4change* project, whose main goal is to promote transformation towards gender equality and foster social innovation in High Education Institutions (HEIs). To this end, gender perspective is integrated in the specific context of each institution, using a key tool: **the participative gender audit**.

The audit will allow for an accurate diagnosis of the gender equality situation in each university, and the design of strategies adapted to the real needs of both university staff and students. It is a stage of one of the main activities of the project —“Participative audits: Identifying discriminatory bias in HEIs and their communities through a network of auditors” — and is implemented alongside with other actions such as gender and diversity training, the creation of a network of universities engaged in promoting inclusion, and the development of *Living Labs* to co-create solutions to the identified challenges.

The methodological design builds on the experience of the Swedish 3R methodology (*Representation, Resources and Reality*), an analytical framework that examines:

- **Representation:** presence and participation of women and men in decision making organs and relevant places.
- **Resources:** distribution of opportunities, services, spaces, time and budget.
- **Reality:** lived experiences, perceptions and institutional culture.

Originally developed in Sweden in the nineties, this methodology has been used in different fields (education, public administration, culture, healthcare) and has been proved to be efficient to identify structural inequality and produce improvement proposals.

Its main strength is that **it combines quantitative and qualitative analysis with a participatory approach**. Inspired in methods such as the ILO's *Participatory Gender Audit*, not only is used to measure indicators, but it also involves the different actors of the university community in the building of a diagnosis. This enhances critical learning, fosters collective reflection and makes it easier for the proposals that emerge to have legitimacy and viability in the institutional context itself.

In the university environment, this methodology is especially valuable because it connects the policy framework (documents, structures, data) with the living dimension (perceptions, attitudes, daily practices). Thus, it offers a comprehensive overview that can be used as a basis to promote real changes.

## 2. Methodological development of the Audit

The proposed methodology is **participative, interdisciplinary and educational**. It is designed to be implemented by students with a previous training in gender perspective, accompanied by an Expert Network that will support them both adjusting the tool and validating indicators and results.

Field work will combine **diverse information collection techniques** that complement themselves:

- **Document revision** to analyse the formal and regulatory dimensions of equality.
- **Participant observation** to identify how equality is reflected in spaces and everyday practices.
- **Key interviews** to obtain qualitative information from people with deep knowledge of the institution.
- **Surveys** to collect the general perception of students.
- **Focus groups** to deepen in the experiences and proposals from a collective perspective.

This combination allows to contrast data, identify contradictions and validate findings, reinforcing the toughness of the diagnosis. The added value lies in the fact that the audit not only describes the current situation, but also interprets it from the experience of students and university staff, generating critical knowledge that will serve as a basis for the transformative actions promoted by the project.

### 2.1. Document revision

Document revision is one of the fundamental foundations of the audit. Its purpose is to allow an institutional approximation to the university context, by observing the documents that regulate and define its functioning: from equality plans to statutes, including calls for proposals, teaching plans, communication materials and participation statistics.

This technique allows to observe both the formal presence of gender perspective and the way in which equality is symbolically represented, taking into account the degree of regulatory commitment, institutional voids or the presence of inclusive language and gender perspective in public documents. In this sense, it allows to analyse the **representation**, when showing the composition of bodies and positions, and **resources**, when showing how specific resources are destined (or not) to equality initiatives. Despite being an exploratory technique, it is key to contextualize posterior findings from observation and contrast. This revision will allow a first approximation to:

- Subjects and teaching material.
- Collegiate bodies and responsibility charges.
- Equality and harassment prevention protocols.
- Research projects and final degree and master's projects.
- Existing equality initiatives and inclusion protocols.

In this stage, the auditor student body will have a form adapted to each of the indicators to be covered using this technique. They are expected to use it to gather the information found by indicator for later analysis. For each indicator, a scale from 0 to 3 has been established, which will facilitate the measurement of all of them together for the development of final conclusions.

## 2.2. Participant observation

Observation of the university environment is a key tool to capture the cultural dimension of the university. Through planned routes around different departments, services or common spaces, the auditor student body can register systematically the existence of inclusive sign posts, specific resources such as lactation rooms, signage visible campaigns or identity symbols.

This exercise allows to observe not only what is present, but also what is missing, hidden or reproduced in a stereotypical manner. As opposed to document revision, it is centred in what happens daily, the **reality**, beyond the existing regulations. Its use enables to evaluate the real impact of institutional politics and the atmosphere of university spaces from a gender perspective. Its visual and located character is especially powerful in detecting the gaps between the normative and the everyday.

To make the collection and systematization of the information easier, the auditor student body will also have a form adapted to each of the indicators to be covered using this technique. It will allow them to record their observations for each space analysed, along with visual evidence to support their assessment, also on a 0–3 scale

## 2.3. Key informant interviews

Key informant interviews (professors, administrative and support staff, heads of departments and students) represent a key technique for exploring the internal dynamics of institutional functioning. They offer a contextualized view, help identify non visible barriers in documents, and allow to look into how internal protocols and resources disposition actually work.

Engaging with equality officers, faculty, administrative staff and student representatives will help the auditing students discover how protocols are implemented, what are their obstacles, what is the perception on women's participation or whether the formally established resources are effectively activated. Interviews provide depth and allow for capturing nuances that are not evident in documents.

In this way, they will gain a more direct insight into how **resources** are accessed, how **representation** dynamics unfold on a daily basis, and the lived **reality** from positions of responsibility.

The auditor student body is expected to identify two key informants to interview and gather the information needed on the proposed indicators, establish contact with them and schedule the interviews. For this purpose, a script that aligns with the objective of the project and the indicators that should be covered will be provided.

#### **2.4. Student survey**

The student survey offers a quantitative overview on the general perceptions of the institutional climate, organizational culture and the knowledge on available resources for equality. In a digital format, it is possible to reach a wide and diverse sample, collecting data on knowledge of the protocols, discriminatory experiences, perception on equal treatment, and participation level in gender equality initiatives. Thus, **reality** is accurately analysed, allowing to observe how students live and understand their experience at university.

The model for the student survey can be found in the Toolkit. This is a brief, anonymous survey to facilitate a broad sample of responses, focusing primarily on measuring organizational culture and coexistence and preventing harassment.

#### **2.5. Focus groups**

Focus groups represent one of the richest techniques from a participative logic, since they are spaces where horizontal dialogue between students is encouraged, allowing to explore shared experiences, generate critical thinking, and contrast perceptions. They are specifically useful to take on sensible topics such as harassment, discrimination or everyday sexism.

Shared listening, consensus construction and the possibility to express emotions and experiences provide a layer of analysis impossible to obtain with surveys or documents. They dig deep in **reality** and allow to identify inequalities that navigate bodies, bonds and trajectories.

The auditor student body is expected to organise one focus group in each university, composed by students from various levels and branches of education. They will have a script designed to evaluate students' perceptions of inclusion, equality, and discrimination that occurs in the university environment.

#### **2.6. Results registration by indicator and report elaboration**

Once the information has been collected, each group will systematize it by indicator, applying the defined rating scale (from 0 to 3). This phase allows for inequalities, progress, and resistance to be visualized in a structured manner.

Then, a session will be held in which the auditor student body will be able to share results and issues arising from them with the Expert Network. The latter will be responsible for preparing the audit reports later.