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The Invisible Handbook: Three decades of higher education policy in Chile (1980-2010)

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The Invisible Handbook: Three decades of higher education policy in Chile (1980-2010)

Abstract: Chilean higher education has experienced vast, and in many ways groundbreaking, changes since 1980. Certain policy developments have been subject to various studies, but the overarching principles and underlying assumptions have remained less explored. The same applies to transitional changes in state approaches to sector-specific regulation that, once established, would remain relatively stable. Through content analysis of policy statements over three decades, this study critically reviews past accounts of the evolution of policy, proposing a new reading of the steps involved in organizing policy settings and the general criteria underpinning these. Beyond allowing a better understanding of the transformation of higher education in Chile, the article concludes with some suggestions around the growing difficulties faced in forming sectoral policy.

Keywords: Education policy; higher education; reform; policy change; Chile

El Manual Invisible: Tres décadas de políticas de educación superior en Chile (1980-2010)

Resumen: La educación superior en Chile ha experimentado cambios muy importantes desde 1980. Claves para entender la evolución del sector, las políticas sectoriales han sido objeto de distintos estudios. Sin embargo, la orientación general de esa evolución y sus supuestos han sido menos explorados. Lo mismo ocurre con los cambios de dirección que ha tenido la acción estatal en el contexto de una regulación sectorial que permanece relativamente estable. A partir de un análisis de

contenido de declaraciones de política educativa, este artículo revisa críticamente la tesis prevalente sobre la trayectoria de las políticas y propone una nueva lectura, en términos de las etapas que organizan la evolución del sistema de educación superior y los criterios generales que la han guiado. Además de permitir una mejor comprensión del proceso de transformación de la educación superior chilena, el artículo concluye dando algunas pistas sobre las crecientes dificultades que enfrenta la acción pública para orientar el sector en el futuro.

Palabras clave: Política educativa; Educación Superior; Reforma; Cambio de políticas; Chile

O Manual Invisível: Três décadas de política de ensino superior em Chile (1980-2010)

Resumo: Como é evidente para qualquer observador, o ensino superior em Chile sofreu mudanças revolucionárias desde 1980. Chaves para a compreensão da evolução do setor, as políticas sectoriais que tenham sido objecto de vários estudos. No entanto, a sua abordagem geral e suposições permanecem menos explorado. O mesmo se aplica às mudanças de direção que tem sido a ação do Estado no contexto da regulamentação específica do sector que permanece relativamente estável. A partir de uma análise de conteúdo das declarações de política disponíveis, este artigo analisa criticamente a tese prevalente na história das políticas e propõe uma nova leitura, em termos dos passos que organizam a sua evolução e os critérios gerais que nortearam. Além de permitir uma melhor compreensão da transformação da educação superior no Chile, o artigo conclui com algumas pistas sobre as crescentes dificuldades enfrentadas por ação pública para orientar o setor no futuro.

Palavras-chave: Política de Educação; Ensino Superior; Reforma; Mudança Política; Chile

Introduction¹

... with thy bloody and invisible hand
Cancel and tear to pieces that great bond
Which keeps me pale.
Shakespeare, Macbeth, Act III, Scene 2

We begin with the observation that public policy studies' contribution to the transformation of higher education in Chile remains little analyzed. A few studies (Brunner, 1986, Muga, 1990, Cox, 1996, Brunner, 1997) have been important in explaining the evolution that the Chilean university system has experienced, tracing the significant flow of human and financial resources (Bernasconi and Rojas, 2004, Brunner and Uribe, 2007), and have provided accounts of the dilemmas currently facing the university system. Only rarely, however, has the critical literature explored the evolution, characteristics and impact of the higher education system (Brunner and Briones, 1992).

In the absence of more systematic analysis, the idea has persisted that higher education policies are marked by two visitations of impetus: the *reform of 1980*², and the reorientation following the restoration of democratic government in 1990 (Brunner 2009). Since then, there have been more incremental adjustments during four successive center-left presidential administrations (1990-2010), and more recently a conservative government from 2010-13 (at the time of writing, the return of a center-left coalition appears imminent).

¹ The original Spanish version was written at the University of Melbourne; both authors now work at the University of Valparaiso. This American English version is augmented with a number of explanations for concepts which may be unfamiliar to those outside Chile or the Spanish-speaking world.

² This being more or less commonplace term in Chilean historiography, relating to a whole family of reforms accompanying the revised constitution promulgated in that year. Here it will refer more narrowly to the substantial component of higher education-related reorganization.

This thesis addresses a widespread perception of lack of direction facing higher education (Barros and Fontaine, 2011). This perception also suggests that the fundamental structures of the system have not been adjusted to guide its development smoothly. Urgent is the need to revise this interpretation.

This article explores the role played by public policy in guiding the transformation of Chilean higher education over the last three decades. To that end, we review the main policy documents available for the period 1980-2010 in order to establish key milestones in this evolution, as well as the continuities and discontinuities of the objectives, assumptions and strategies exhibited in Chilean higher education policy.

This examination allows the development of an alternative interpretation of the evolution of higher education policy in Chile. The reading suggests a new structure of three key sectoral policy phases for the study period, all structured on the basis of divergent assumptions and orientations and, consequently, of different ways of conceiving of and framing government action in higher education.

This new attempt at interpretation appreciates the increasing complexity of the processes of formation and implementation of new policy directions, as actors multiply and create denser networks of influence on the sectoral agenda.

Higher education in Chile

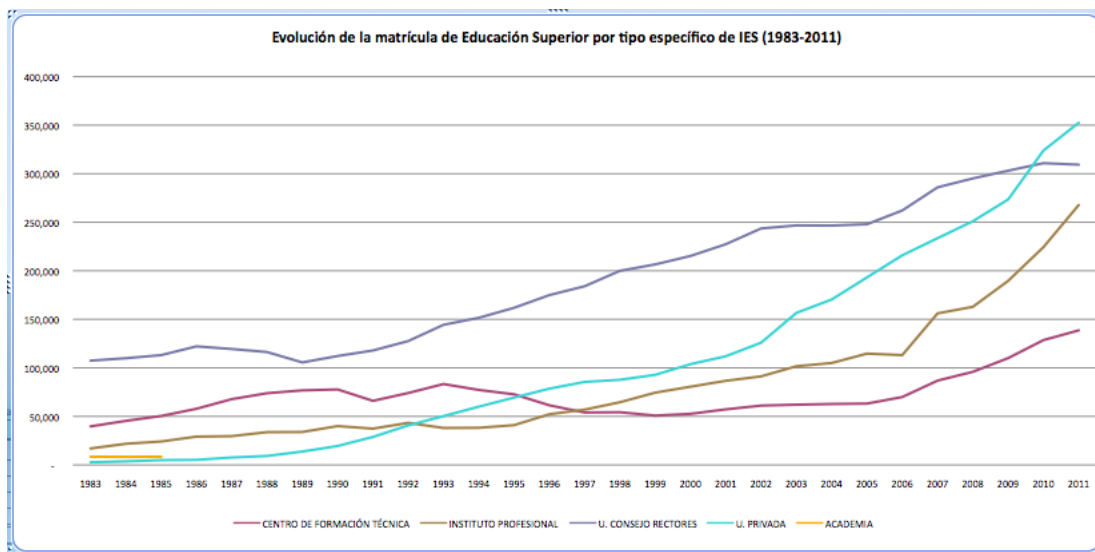
Chilean higher education has experienced huge transformations over the last thirty-odd years (indeed, in the twenty before that), in a number of dimensions. It is beyond the scope of this study to analyze all this in depth. Nonetheless, some basic information is necessary to contextualize subsequent sections.

Information can be gleaned from official statistics of the Ministry of Education³, with expansion evident in four key aspects: suppliers, students, graduates and public funding. The categories most often used to organize the information available have been the provider type, “traditional” universities (private universities pre-dating 1981, and public universities that proliferated in a reorganization from 1981), subsequently established ‘new’ private universities, professional institutes and technical training centers.

As shown in Figure 1, expansion of enrollment has been steady over the past 30 years. It has been particularly notable in universities, particularly among new private ones.

Figure 1: Evolution of total enrolment by type of institution (1983-2011)

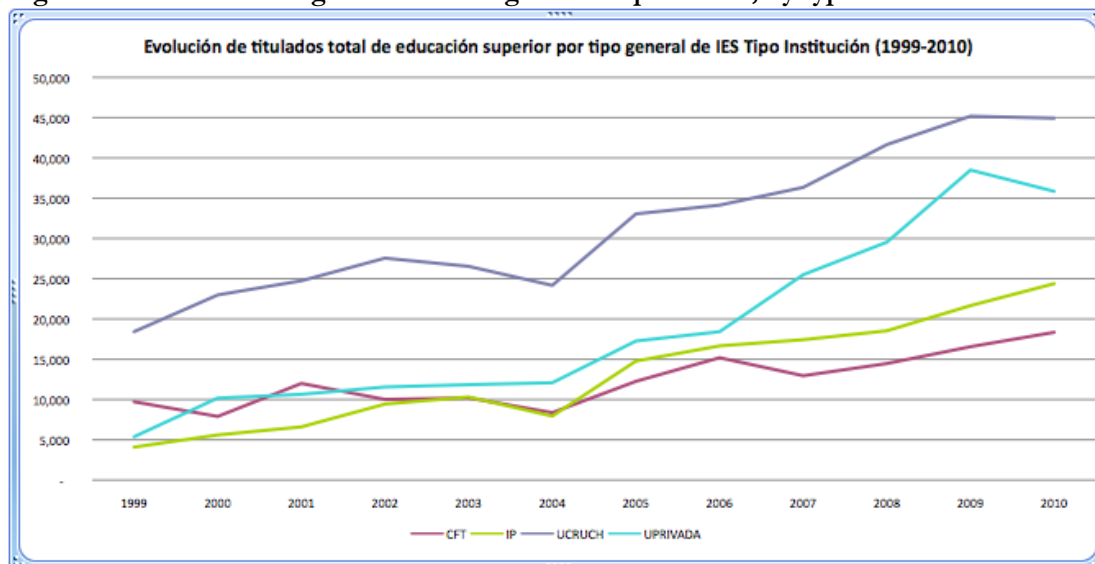
³ <http://www.mifuturo.cl/index.php/informacion-del-sies/compendio-historico>



Legend translated (but from topmost in 1983 down, in case color-coding not available): *traditional universities, centers of technical training, professional institutes, academies (a minor format discontinued in 1985), new private universities*

The number of graduates, in contrast, has experienced markedly lesser growth, as seen in Figure 2. Clearly, traditional universities have performed best, explained in part by greater selectivity, which feeds retention rates; this feature has declined over time, though. Professional institutes and training centers have also shown improvement in recent years, although this could be due to increased enrollment.

Figure 2: Evolution in higher education graduates produced, by type of institution

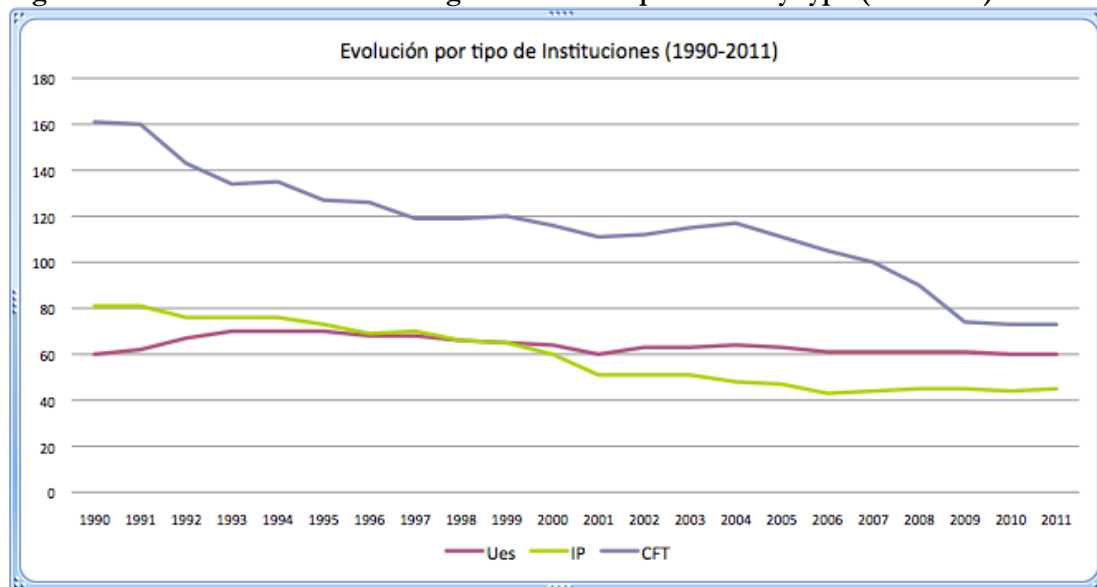


Legend translated (but from topmost in 1999 down): *traditional universities, centers of technical training, new private universities, professional institutes*

Such data contrast with the evolution in the number of officially recognized institutions. As shown in Figure 3, the number of these experienced a significant increase during the 1980s, and then would decrease to the current stable level. This decrease does not affect all types of institutions in

the same way; while the number of universities remains relatively constant, the headcounts of centers and institutes have fallen significantly.

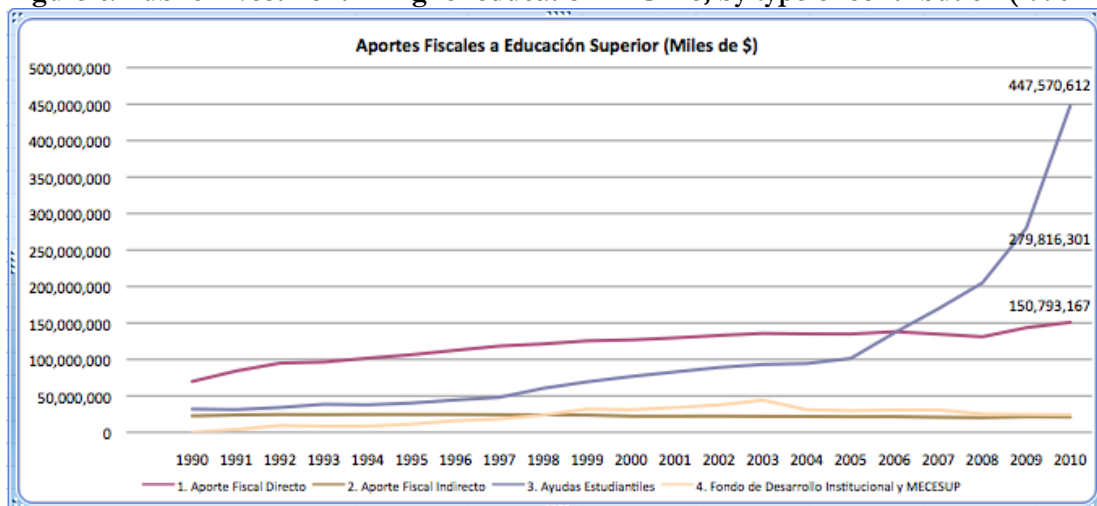
Figure 3: Evolution in number of higher education providers by type (1990-2011)



Legend translated (by number in 1990, from topmost down): *universities, professional institutes, centers of technical training*

Finally, Figure 4 shows public investment in higher education. After several years of moderate growth, student aid has experienced a significant increase in recent years. Such expansion outpaces that of other types of contribution that the state allocates directly to institutions of higher education, including direct and indirect grants and contestable funding for research and institutional development.

Figure 4: Public investment in higher education in Chile, by type of contribution (1990-2010)



Legend translated (but in order of 1990 level down): *1. direct grants, 3. student aid, 2. indirect grants, 4. Institutional Development Fund and MECESUP*

Higher education policies

This article exemplifies policy analysis in higher education from an examination of the historical documentation available. Following the approach proposed by Gordon et al. (1977), it avoids the prism of instrumental analysis for policy development to instead conduct a long-term interpretive study, which focuses on the history of educational policies.

Although policy can be understood as anything that the state chooses to do or not do, there is a broad consensus in the literature about the core features that policies have – see, for example, Fincher (1973) and Dunn (1994). Agreed is, for policies, the existence of a set of goals, courses of action chosen for their achievement and public action developed towards such ends, taking the form of an active response or stances that can absorb the actions (or inaction) of others (Anderson, 1994).

From another point of view, the emphasis on the axiological dimension of policy and its origination in state power have led Ball (1990:3) to define policy as the “authoritative allocation of values” that emerges from regulated processes. Additionally, it is necessary to take into account that policies emerge as responses to demands that different groups make in a public system (Premfors, 1980).

Essentially, the main purpose of policy is to provide a coherent framework in order to structure, coordinate and make sense of state action. Therefore, policy’s communicative character is intrinsic to it, structuring its content and circulation.

Within the same sector, policy statements serve primarily as formal expressions articulating different lines of governmental action (Anderson, 1994). Although they come from different sources, are manifested through various channels and reflect varying degrees of ambiguity, policy statements aim to achieve broad levels of socialized consensus (Fincher, 1973). Additionally, stability is a key condition that can guide and integrate the process of implementation of the various specific initiatives.

In a perspective that contrasts with the method of successive approximations (Lindblom, 1959, Scott, 2010), Evans (2009) has suggested that policies in the field of education tend to include a justification for considering the problem to be addressed through them, a set of goals to be achieved by the educational system and a number of hypotheses to explain how they will be achieved through a battery of measures. Policy statements fulfill a strategic role here, as they reflect the arrangement and prioritization of different values as a result of political negotiation processes (Rizvi and Lingard, 2010:72).

In the specific area of higher education, policy statements cover a set of key dimensions that define the sector, including: size of the national higher education system, types of tertiary education institutions and their territorial distribution, forms of government universities and funding, and organizational, research, curricular and admission systems and (Premfors, 1992). At the same time, higher education policies seek to accommodate, in different combinations and emphasizing the essential values that guide the sector, factors related to achieving adequate levels of excellence, quality, equity, autonomy, efficiency and accountability.

The thesis of the incremental path

Several studies have systematically addressed the evolution of public policy addressing higher education (Muga, 1990, Brunner and Briones, 1992, Cox, 1996, Brunner, 1997). Fewer have explored periods or cycles that extend over a decade or more (Brunner, 1986, Bernasconi and Rojas, 2004).

The most comprehensive work, by Jose Joaquin Brunner (2009), blends (at times, concatenates) the various emphases of previous studies, maintaining that the trajectory of higher education policy is an issue closely related to the change of governments and the ideological changes such transitions entail. Even in cases in which the ideology has remained ostensibly constant, the

transition from one administration to another potentially involves adjusted preferences and priorities as to alternative courses of action, depending on the hue of political and administrative authorities.

Brunner's thesis explores how the reforms stemming from 1980 radically altered the structural basis of the sector and established a new institutional framework for higher education. The military government headed by Augusto Pinochet had seized power in 1973, and from 1980 would seek to expand higher education inspired by market principles. The basic characteristics of this reform persist to this day, notwithstanding that the dynamics of the system have undergone major changes. Moreover, significant adjustments have occurred to match political changes.

Beyond the military regime's reform policies, democratic governments since 1990 have allowed markets and competition to assume a revised role in the coordination of the system (Brunner, 2009). While in the 1980s the guiding principle was a deregulated system (albeit with many forms of academic freedom unconscionable given military rule), in the two decades that would follow, governments would emphasize the role of regulation towards achieving more balanced coordination for the sector, combining autonomy and accountability.

With the milestone establishment of the Commission for the Study of Higher Education (CEES) in 1991, policies that followed were progressive in character, provide continuity (1990-1994) and then depth (1994-2000) within to basic guidelines, leading to reevaluation and incremental improvement (2000-2009) (Brunner, 2009).

This process has occurred in a context in which the fundamental structure of the reforms of 1980 remains, albeit corrected. A coordination model is evident in which institutions (in exercising their autonomy), the State (through regulation and evaluation) and the market (through the competitive allocation of resources) come together to lead the development of a sector marked by institutional differentiation, mixed provision and private financing (Brunner, 2009).

Although not stated directly, the incrementalism of higher education policy would be here an example of the "democracy of agreements" adopted by the political parties represented in Congress during the 90s. This sentiment sought progress towards the solution of social conflicts on a consensual basis, mindful of the effective veto power that opposition parties possessed at the time over substantive changes in legislation.

The incremental path thesis (both an explanation and a justification) tends to coincide with the observations of Streeck and Thelen (2005) as to sectoral reform processes. In such an assessment, under the influence of liberalism, institutional change processes (and policies, by extension) have followed a non-disruptive path. This has allowed a significant transformation in national economic structures without traumatic shocks.

An invisible handbook

If the incremental path thesis projects a straight line (or at least one with logical and even steps) – that higher education policies move from state control to the market with ease and confidence – the evidence actually gathered in the period at hand portrays a different situation. That is, one more akin to what Stephen Ball (1991) has described in relation to the UK, where the silences, omissions and gaps count as much as formal declarations and policy instruments.

So viewed, the evolution of higher education policy in Chile is very much like an invisible hand; a collation of successive orientations that are not fully consistent or entirely transparent in intent. The way public action has guided the invisible hand needs to be reconstructed through interpretation. It is interesting to note, too, that this invisibility is reinforced as a result of the combination of three circumstances.

On the one hand, it is true that all major changes occurring between 1980 and 2010 are closely linked to the development of new policies. The presentation of policy instruments, however, has been remiss in explaining their aims and in providing guidance for their subsequent

implementation. This despite the abundance of policy statements in Chilean higher education in this period.

The pieces of legislation that underpinned the reform of 1980 were explained by the military government through three public statements, chiefly concentrating on how the new rules were to be introduced.⁴ In contrast, the law that reshaped the regulatory framework for higher education in 1990 did not include any preamble or accompanying statement.

Democracy restored, presidential programs did include references to higher education. Yet, with the exception of the pioneering democratic program of President Aylwin (1991-1994), all programs have tended to repeat general notions as to the action plans to be deployed in these years. Although since the late 90s the situation has changed, there is only a handful of documents that explain in any depth the policies implemented previously.

Additionally, this invisibility is reinforced by the burgeoning in Chile of the field of higher education studies and the practically oriented research now in our midst. To wit, the theory of an incremental path for policy in Chile has not been subject to much challenge or alternative interpretation. This hitherto lack of contestation reflects the low priority given to these issues in the public policy debate. In an article published in *La Revista Mensaje*, Andrés Bernasconi would note the relative invisibility of sectoral policies:

...it is argued, for instance, that the government has no higher education policy and cannot conceive how it is possible that the state does not do more to remove the system of disreputable establishments, and not a few leading public universities have asked the government to define for them the mission of their universities. (2003:30)

Finally, it is difficult to ignore that the most striking policy directions in that period related to an increasing centrality for competition and exchange in framing strategies for achieving public purposes, suggesting a growing conflation of market forces and political emphasis. This included the competitive allocation of a significant portion of public funding and the creation and consolidation of a “new private” subsector within higher education.⁵

Expressing the aims of the policies in market terms, the sectoral spotlight pans naturally to markets. Thus, the invisible nature of policy guidance is reinforced through the ordering action of the hand of the market – an invisible hand, as it were. This has important consequences.

Up until now, policy debate (and, so, the agendas of governments) has focused on the operating conditions of markets and market players, especially with regard to higher levels of transparency in a market’s functioning. At the same time, markets create a self-naturalizing logic within higher education, which does not acknowledge the political aetiology of such impetus and prevents the emergence of alternative elements of policy discourse.⁶

What is the role of policies in this context? Stephen Ball (1994) and Lesley Vidovich (2007) have demonstrated the importance of analyzing and interpreting the content of policy statements in describing their evolution over irregular political cycles. The Chilean case presents further peculiarities. Although policy statements are regularly used by governments to integrate messages and achieve goals, it is not easy to find documents of this nature in the case of Chile. In stark

⁴ These being approved between December 1980 and February 1981, including Decree 3.541 (which authorized the government to restructure existing universities), and decrees with the force of law listed as 1 (setting a new framework for universities and allowing the creation of new private universities), 4 (regulating university funding), and 5 (which allowed the creation of professional institutes).

⁵ These new privates tend to be contrasted with institutions of pre-1981 provenance, often called “traditional” and including both the entire public subsector and the older private subsector. The chief executives of the traditional universities form the Chilean Council of Rectors (CRUCH), which has special advisory status in higher education matters.

⁶ This point is important to the last section of the article.

contrast to the international experience, policy documents are not available, either by virtue of not existing, of never having entered the public domain, or through slapdash archiving.

Making document-based sense of the 1980 reform is a task of palaeographic proportions. Unlike the founding documents that guided the expansion of enrolment in the United States and the United Kingdom in the 1940s and 60s respectively,⁷ in Chile in April 1980 would appear a clutch of military directives laying out in decisive but broad strokes the scope and direction of reform. This was comprised of a statement from the Ministry for the Interior introducing the new legislation and the new higher education funding laws, and from the Ministry of Education descriptive fiats as to standards for professional institutes (Council of Rectors of Chilean Universities, 1981). These reveal only glimpses of the objectives, assumptions and orientations of the reforms.

The official information available about the setting in which were introduced the Organic Constitutional Teaching Law of 1990 and the subsequent policy framework for higher education, is even scarcer. Policy statements from the democratic governments have tended to be confined to specific policies, again with the exception of the transitional government program of President Aylwin. Policy prospectuses of the 1993, 1999 and 2005 presidential candidates are perhaps the main sources of public information available, all preserved on social media.

Obviously, this does not mean that none of the five presidents who ruled between 1980 and 2010 forwarded an explicit set of plans to direct higher education. Only recently, however, have such plans in the area of higher education begun to enjoy (or suffer) wider circulation within the public discourse.

The idea of introducing competition between universities and transferring the cost of undergraduate study to families were not the only principles that underpinned the reform of 1980. A long essay prepared by key figures in the Pinochet regime Jaime Guzman and Hernan Larrain (1981) for *Revista Realidad* (1981; edited by Guzman) provides valuable clues about the concep of higher education imbued throughout the 1980 reforms. A similar, although less impactful, vision can be found in the statement of principles issued on behalf of the Gremialist movement⁸ of which Guzman was mastermind regarding university reform, in May 1980.

The restructuring of public universities also sought to reduce the size and national intellectual influence of the University of Chile and State Technical University (UTE). In 1976, the American education expert Bruce Vogeli had advised academic leaders and the military government to devise a public system of higher education that emulate the decentralized yet coordinated spirit of American state systems, his advice recorded at length in a book published in 1979 by UTE.⁹

⁷ The reports *Science, the Endless Frontier* (Bush, 1945), which followed the Servicemen's Readjustment Act (or "GI Bill") of 1944, and of the Robbins Commission (1963), respectively.

⁸ It would be futile to translate *gremialismo* into English as anything other than a loan-word. Taking its name from a medieval usage for *guild* (L. *gremium*, lit. *lap* or *bosom*) – and, ironically enough, elsewhere among Spanish speakers for *trade union* – such "corporativism" was a key influence within right-wing politics throughout the Latin world in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, although Gremialism is distinct from its forerunners in its academic mien. Of course, corporativism is not a readily current term in English, either, and a concept that itself varies according to national circumstances; meanwhile, "fascism" is either too strong or too cartoonish a term in English. There have been affinities to Gremialism within the anti-communist machine politics dominant within Catholic minority communities in the Anglosphere. Gremialism arose at the Pontificia Universidad Catolica at the height of the Cold War; not unrelated, "commercial engineering", as Friedmanite economics is called in Chile, had been advanced within this university following the Second World War, with US encouragement.

⁹ Vogeli's study, rich in leads for the way the public system would be reconfigured, can only be mentioned here in passing, in order to focus the analysis on the essential elements of higher education policy. For more details, see Leihy and Salazar (2012).

The report “Policy for the Development of Higher Education in the Nineties”, prepared by CEES (1991) and the “Framework for Higher Education Policy”, prepared by the Ministry of Education (1997), are also crucial documents whose circulation has been largely confined to academia, and whose thorough analysis in light of subsequent implications remains in its infancy.

The set of ideas, principles and guidelines that emerge from the aforementioned policy documents and commentaries suggests a path marked by two key moments: the 1980 reform and, come 1997, an ascendant and conservative neo-liberal agenda. A mainbeam bridging these critical moments is the nature of the transitional political adjustments of 1990. After the implementation of an in many ways neo-liberal agenda in 1997, a cycle was commenced that continues to this day, notwithstanding attempts at revising this agenda from 2006 and prolonged student demonstrations from 2011 on. This brings us to the current scenario, characterized by flailing debate. The debate is often dramatic and parties polarized as to the appropriate policy direction for higher education, and no constructive strategy has yet emerged.

Yet, the 1980 reform and the intensified market orientation of the neo-liberal agenda prevailing from 1997 betray organization around a shared and now inveterate set of ideas, objectives and lines of action. They both have clear sources of inspiration in their contemporary international moods. This politically-steeped character is, however, barely acknowledged in incremental path narratives. The apparent failure of these agendas for the sector appears to owe something to undergirding norms and assumptions, leading to an inability of government to anticipate and learn from consequences they have set in train and to make the necessary corrections; their unspoken rationales not articulated, they mistake these for having been pure reason.

The conservative reform

Although the military government clamped down immediately on universities following the deposing of socialist President Salvador Allende in 1973, and appointed rectors generally from military ranks each with broad executive powers, it was not until 1980 that a comprehensive plan for higher education reform would emerge (Brunner, 2009).

The reforms of 1980, which were further crafted over the next four years, entailed a new restructuring of public universities and the possibility of creating new private universities. The mechanisms were almost purely administrative; there was no open public consultation in such decisions. In the process, higher education was made more systematic, organized on the basis of an hierarchical structure of titles and degrees, encompassing universities, professional institutes, recognized technical training centers and on-the-job training outfits. At the same time, a unitary system of financing was replaced by a diversified one featuring contested funding sources, which also included significant private sector participation and the payment of fees for undergraduate study. A system of monitoring academic quality for new private providers was created and a set of restrictions on partisan political activity in higher education institutions formulated, with student participation in governance remaining largely proscribed.¹⁰

What ideas underpinned this revolutionary design? In Manuel Garreton’s view (1985:108), the reform was foundational to the extent that it not only sought the restoration of the state of affairs from before the expansion that followed 1967 – when universities experienced important changes in governance and management following demonstrations organized by students¹¹ – but sought also to recreate the idea of the university in terms of a set of new demands that higher

¹⁰ For more details on the content of the reforms, see Brunner (1993).

¹¹ For contrasting views of the reform movement consummated in 1967, see Cox (1985) and Krebs, Muñoz and Valdivieso (1994).

education should address. To Garreton's mind, the reform flowed from an ideology that combines elements of a national security doctrine, traditionalist nationalist thought and a vision based on technocratic, neoliberal economic ideas (1985:106).

These guidelines are clearly compatible, as evidenced by the degree of consistency in the design of the reform. Such ideological synthesis is no homogeneous essence, however, as some of its components were more relevant than others in setting up a new system. Thus the doctrine of national security has had a high impact, and was very visible in the design of the new university model. Paramount was the avoidance of ideas linked to Marxism or prejudicial to national security (including the prevention of subversion) in higher education. Ideological indoctrination in the universities was banned, transgressions to be punished by the closure of any private entity deemed so doing.

Economic ideas associated with the Chicago School and indeed learnt at the University of Chicago (and at other US graduate schools) by a group of Chilean economists known as "the Chicago Boys", were advanced during the military rule, although the Boys' direct personal influence would wane from the early 1980s. These economic ideas would have a greater impact on the reforms of 1980 than the national security doctrine in whose name universities had been suppressed following the coup of 1973.

Garreton sees a "subordination of the research process and knowledge production to the laws of the market and profitability" (1985:115). The introduction of competitive mechanisms for the allocation of public and private resources to universities shows a clear intent, seeking to increase efficiency in the use that universities make of state subsidies.

It is important to note, however, that such competition has peculiar characteristics given the subordinate role that it fulfills in the service of education and research. Initially it was academic, focusing on the competitive advantage of delivering high quality training and professional education and the impact of the findings of scientific research produced by universities (CRUCH, 1981:46). Better quality and greater capacity for institutions allows them to attract top students and more resources to support their research teams.

Also implied is the possibility of competing for new students, recognizing the limits imposed by the selective nature of university education. This condition substantially limits the pool of applicants to universities, which further contains its ability to expand. This prompts recruitment strategies for students with academic potential, it being assumed that universities with lower levels of achievement will remain less attractive and further reduce their competitive position in the sector. Variables such as price or market share were not yet relevant in this context.

A component of this strategy was the creation of indirect tax contributions to higher education, which were designed to comprise a third of public resources allocated to the sector; fees were distributed to universities according to the proportion of the top 20,000 matriculating students they managed to attract, as measured by student performance in the national entrance examination (CRUCH, 1981:45). The imperative was to develop prestige, a circular process in which the performance of graduates and the reputation of academics would allow the attraction of the best students and scholars with the greatest potential (Guzman and Larraín, 1981).

Additionally, this conception of competition assumes that private and public universities must be treated equally by the state, since they are designed to generate identical results. The reforms imply that any university will achieve better or worse results depending on strategies and tactics to mobilize their resources effectively.

Although competition plays a leading role within the design of the reform – to the extent that the coordination of higher education relies on it – this does not mean that neoliberal ideas were expressed as central tenets to the transformation that would ensue.

As covered by Juan Gabriel Valdes (1995: 96-99), the Chicago School developed its own recipe for economic development, with Chile prized as a laboratory of sorts. The view from Chicago was that the expansion of higher education can be understood as a key investment in the progress of nations in order to expand the human capital base. Consequently, the Chicago-trained economists recommended from early on increased public spending on higher education to expand the number of productive agents and thereby to raise the value of economic activity. These ideas, central to the neoliberal vision, were absent from the policy statements that launched the reform.

The 1980 reform also pursued the expansion of university education. Dissonantly, the policy language noted the “gigantism” of the university evident in inorganic and disproportionate growth, with public universities having become unmanageable and prevented from maintaining academic excellence (CRUCH, 1981:37). Academic competition was to act, then, as an incentive to check the uncontrolled growth of universities, denying them unconditional public funding to leverage their schools, offices and powers.

Should non-university higher education be created from scratch? No. Important to the new institutional framework was the conceptual inclusion of education for work within higher education – through official recognition and oversight of professional institutes and technical training centers. These institutions would absorb and channel inevitable pressures stemming from the expansion of higher education, which had been a considerable feature of *de facto* expansion between 1967 and 1973, but which had not been overseen as higher education *per se* in the same way as university education (CRUCH, 1981:35).

The recognition of institutes and centers was far from an original idea, having been periodically proposed. It did nonetheless impressively elevate the status of these private organizations, and allow them credibly, differentially and affordably to channel the increased demand for post-secondary studies without compromising public funding. At the same time, that they were allowed to organize as legal persons for profit allowed this new subsector to integrate into higher education without great rupture.

González (1990:521) has documented that around 66,000 students were enrolled in job training in over 580 different institutions by 1980. That total enrollment in officially recognized centers and institutes went from zero to about 64,000 students by 1983 speaks eloquently of the successful transition. In addition to submitting to the formal process for recognition, these new higher education institutions were subject to processes of examination (for institutes) and supervision (for centers) in order to vouch for the training to be delivered (CRUCH, 1981:58).

In contrast, the often overlapping national security doctrine and guidelines of neoliberal economists are ideas of the Gremialist movement, whose hallmark is all over the 1980 reform and the institutions that arose from it.¹² Such ideas define the approach to higher education and its organization. Started in 1967 at the Pontificia Universidad Católica University de Chile, in response to the reforms then underway, the Gremialists developed a comprehensive ideology to frame university action.

According to the Gremialist line, we should recognize the university as an intermediate body within society that has a permanent and universal value and a non-political nature (Movimiento Gremial, 1980). The university guides the moral and intellectual culture of humanity in the various disciplines of knowledge (CRUCH, 1981:38). The nature of the functions performed requires it that teaching and research be not manipulated or subordinate to politics. Therefore, the university is afforded a high degree of autonomy. The Gremialists also aver that the university should be

¹² Jaime Guzman – Gremialist leader, mentor and ideologue – emphasized the importance of restoring the primacy of academic activity in universities, stating that “...quality should be the criterion for differentiating between and evaluating university work.” (Guzman 1981:10)

organized as an hierarchical institution, in which the participation of academics and students in university government is differential – the former are to have more power.

The state, from the Gremialist perspective, can set limits on autonomy to ensure the adequacy of studies leading to professional degrees that require a high degree of public trust. In turn, the state should contribute to the financing of universities, whether public or private, in accordance with the social utility of outputs.

How do Gremialist ideas permeate the 1980 reform? Substantively, the Gremialist program can be read as a reaction to the transformative process initiated in 1967, criticizing the political instrumentalization of the universities, the introduction of university governance systems that guaranteed the equal participation of students and the expansion of higher education as a democratic imperative. The military government, through its then-mouthpiece, the star chamber of government-appointed university rectors, explained:

...It would be wrong not to notice that the root of evil lies at the very heart of the university system that consolidated and bequeathed [the 1967] reforms. Only deep correction of such a state of affairs can offer the prospect of a fruitful university life, stable into the future. This holds for the overall content of new academic institutions. (CRUCH, 1981:37)

For Gremialists, these problems had their origin in the historical development of higher education. The university system could not provide an adequate response to the phenomenon of mass school education and neither could the state agency set to oversee private universities, especially in financial matters. Inorganic and excessive growth for universities – which brought into question the integrity of governance mechanisms – was made possible by reliable public funding (CRUCH, 1981:35). The significant reduction in competitive forces between universities largely explained, in the Gremialist interpretation, the decline that triggered the 1967 reform and which would continue subsequently (Guzman and Larrain, 1981:21).

The Gremialist university model – that is, the ideas the Gremialists incorporated into a unitary action plan – assumes that all universities have the same set of essential attributes. To avoid politicization, they would outlaw ideological indoctrination in academic settings and the use of university premises for political action (of course, this had been very much the reality since the coup of 1973). To ensure the hierarchical difference between academics and students, limits would be set as to the participation of students and what we would now call professional staff in governance, and these groups would be excluded from the election of higher authorities. In order to ensure the integrity of universities, they should be outside the world of business, and organized as nonprofit legal entities.

This school of thought assumes that the natural location of the university is in the private sector and the Gremialist leaders were committed to encouraging the formation of private institutions, insofar as this favors freedom of education (CRUCH, 1981:41). This was a way to undermine the supremacy of the public university, which had marked the pre-reform scenario.

To raise academic quality – an essential aspect of the reform movement in the eyes of Gremialists – the aspiration was to increase competition between universities, through four measures (Guzman and Larrain, 1981:25). While rationalization of public universities and colleges sought to create new mechanisms aimed at ensuring that university organizations comply with the requirements of the Gremialist model, changes in the funding system were aimed at creating incentives for interagency competition, and dealing with pressure for greater access to undergraduate education.

To strengthen the control that competition might exert on academic rigor within the new universities, these were to be subjected to a system of examination of their students under the auspices of the pre-existing, “traditional” universities (CRUCH, 1981:44). The military government

received the power to veto the formation of private universities during the first five years, in order to prevent banned political groups from covertly organizing universities.

Finally, in terms of the internal management of universities, Guzman outlined some basic principles for their organization. Inspired by his experience as a professor at the Faculty of Law at Católica¹³, he proposed that “[T]he university should focus on core academic groupings and not on other organs, administrative or otherwise” (Guzman, 1981:11).

The fundamental academic grouping, the disciplinary department, was to become the center of gravity for university action, bringing together teachers and students. On this would depend the development of research and the training of new scientists and professionals.

The Gremialist doyen is explicit in suggesting a kind of autonomy from the central administration, so as to ensure financial and administrative independence in order to develop academic work. In his view, the central administration should function primarily as a regulatory apparatus and comptroller, leaving the implementation of university policies to the faculties. Guzman suggests that “the administrative role, however important it may be, is to be of service to the academic work and support it” (1981:11).

The excessive power of central administration within universities was one of the causes of the decline of the Chilean higher education in Gremialist eyes. Therefore, Guzman proposed that “the university should be streamlined dramatically, debureaucratizing and decentralizing economic and administrative activity, defining territorial limits and supporting a healthy-sized administration” (1981:11).

The adjustment of the 1990s

Evidently, the reforms of 1980 had a major impact on Chilean higher education. They substantially reshaped the system, marking a dramatic change in the dynamics of cooperation and competition. They also increased system diversity, but lessened understanding within the sector as to the achievement of common goals. The reforms’ most significant effects, however, were very different from the stated objectives of the government in three key aspects: the proliferation of suppliers, the control of academic rigor and public funding.

The evolution of enrollment in the 1980s saw the number of students almost double, yet the number of university students increased only marginally (from 118,978 to 131,702, or 9.66%). The lion’s share occurred within technical training centers and professional institutes – together enrolling 117,780 students in 1990, as private providers without any state funding – reflecting the growing popularity of job training (Bernasconi and Rojas, 2004).

After the public sector was restructured in 1981, the number of new universities slowly expanded. The Ministry of the Interior assumed veto power over the formation and early operation of new private universities in 1983. The expiration of that power in 1987 facilitated the still more rapid proliferation of new universities during the following years. Between 1988 and 1989, 17 new universities and 34 new professional institutes were recognized (CES, 1998). In turn, the scheduled end of military government accelerated the process: between January and March 1990, some 18 universities and 23 professional institutes received official recognition, increasing dramatically the number of higher education institutions to 302.

¹³ Guzman has in mind the idea of the university that existed in the Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile before reorganization after 1985. Andres Bernasconi (2005) has documented in detail the organizational change process.

Many new universities, especially those most recently established, had implemented by the end of the 1980s management models aimed at commercial exploitation of university-level professional education. Although not an explicit model, this approach was replicated by professional institutes and training centers.¹⁴ In several cases, chains were organized by people with extensive experience in job training and who had successfully managed centers and institutes. Lucrative was the opportunity to connect strong demand for higher education with the promise of economic betterment.

These new universities would be entrepreneurial organizations, willing to develop in any identified niche, depending on potential growth. Most of the time they did not have a predefined academic project and were supported by the operation of vocational centers and institutes owned by their organizers, sometimes even under the same name (Salazar, 2005).

In addition to establishing a new way of understanding the university, this explosive proliferation of institutions brought into question the functioning of the examination system, dramatically expanding the demand for university examiners. Bernasconi and Rojas (2004) have documented, for example, five universities examined between 20 and 32 times each, distributed between 12 and 14 different examining institutions. This was facilitated by the narrow regulatory focus of examination – the academic performance of students – to the dereliction of monitoring the quality of the new universities in other strategic processes (Muga, 1990).

In practice, the absence of control and coordination mechanisms produced a relaxation of examination standards, affecting the credibility of the system. The competitive nature of examination – which gave the new universities the discretion to choose their examiners, and old universities the ability to set their own standards – meant weaker universities within the traditional system were in high demand as examiners (Cox, 1994). Some were unwilling to resist such commercial opportunities. From its inception, the examination system operated as a transfer mechanism providing new resources to traditional universities facing tight financial straits (especially towards some public regional universities) (Muga, 1990).

Moreover, an economic crisis in 1982 and its devastating effects on public finances (marked by fall from grace for the Chicago Boys as far as the military government was concerned) prevented the increasing of state subsidies to education. In constant-peso terms, public spending in the sector contracted by 47.3% between 1982 and 1990 (Desormeaux and Koljatic, 1990). Besides thwarting expectations of increased resources for universities, the crisis was a major obstacle for the implementation of the new financing scheme. The expansion of the indirect tax contribution did not reach the expected magnitude – one third of all funding – until 1990, substantially moderating the impact of the principal tool designed to encourage academic competition.¹⁵ The National Fund for Scientific and Technological Development (FONDECYT), created in 1981 to finance research projects on a competitive basis, also had a modest impact on the coordination of the system, given its magnitude and the way it favored the existing research capacity of traditional institutions (Desormeaux and Koljatic, 1990).

In this scenario, and after a failed attempt in 1988 to extend the mandate of General Pinochet by eight years beyond the 1990 handover to democracy, the military government decided to make a final adjustment to the model of higher education. The opportunity came about from the need to adopt a new regulatory framework. Academic institutions were now legally authorized to operate as commercial enterprises (albeit, in the case of universities, not to be for-profit). Indirect

¹⁴ In keeping with the spirit of the reform, these organizations were legally authorized to operate as commercial enterprises.

¹⁵ The indirect tax contribution amounted to 7.19% of the 1990 fiscal contribution (Desormeaux y Koljatic, 1990).

fiscal contributions amounted to 7.19 % of the 1990 fiscal contribution for all higher education, an obligation that the military government imposed on itself in the constitution adopted in 1980.

In this context, the system would be replaced by a more comprehensive and complex examination process. The new supervisory regime – which, born of American inspiration, took on the name *accreditation*¹⁶ – aspired to be a permanent monitoring of new universities and professional institutes, under the responsibility of a new public agency, independent of government: the Higher Council of Education (CES). Universities and colleges already under examination could remain in that system or opt for accreditation.

In turn, after the failure of the plan to reorganize the distribution of state subsidies to higher education, the government abandoned this line of action. In the years to follow, the distribution of resources to universities would be decided annually on the basis of historical criteria and on financial flows. Thus, the military government definitively renounced the possibility of leading an intensification of academic competition, although such an atmosphere would remain symbolically.

Finally, through the adoption of the Organic Constitutional Act of Instruction (LOCE), the outgoing military government blocked the possibility that the legal framework of higher education be changed without broad consensus among all political forces represented in the Congress¹⁷. The military government was especially careful to put into place these safeguards as a way to ensure that the freedom to establish new universities not be limited once democracy was restored. This ensured the survival of a university model based on the ideal of private higher education, with the provisos and inroads for for-profit outfits already mentioned.

The *Concertation* of parties¹⁸ that came to power in 1990 would developed an ambitious plan in setting policies for higher education, drawing on joint work carried out by the World Bank-backed Latin American Social Sciences Faculty (FLACSO) and by the University Development Corporation (CPU)¹⁹. In addition to increasing investment gradually to promote scientific research aimed at maintaining a diversified system of higher education, the tenor was that:

...making possible the necessary competition is mandatory for advancing intellectual activity and, in turn, should ensure the solidarity, coordination and programmatic oversight necessary to develop higher education that will enable Chile to occupy a leading position in the Latin American region. (Concertación de Partidos por la Democracia, 1989:23)

The introduction of an accreditation system for institutional and program evaluation was pursued, administered by a new agency, the State Higher Education Council (CEES), which would also formulate sectoral policies. In the interim, however, the Concertation proposed measures for

¹⁶ The name of the supervisory regime would later be changed to “licencing” once the quality assurance system was introduced in 2006. The development of institutional accreditation pilot experiences – between 1999 and 2006 – triggered some ambiguity in the use of this term, although accreditation was only available to autonomous institutions.

¹⁷ A constitutional change requires a majority of 4/7 in the two legislative chambers combined. That quorum is reinforced by a binomial electoral system (first *two* past the post, as it were), representation that favors the two major political forces.

¹⁸ If only to be evenhanded as to the Gremialists, again “Concertación” will not be translated beyond basic anglicization (notwithstanding that *coalition* is a going term for reasonably stable combination governments [or as the Americans say, *administrations*] in English, and broadly *centrist* the going sensibility of this Concertation). Further, any connotations of the expedience of critical mass accompanying “Concertation” are much deserved.

¹⁹ The *Higher Education Forum* was a collection of three books published by both organizations in 1990, with the collaboration of the Center for Public Studies and Ford Foundation funding, reflecting the state of the discussion and the ideas that gave rise to the program of government of the Concertation in higher education. See Cox (1990), Lehmann (1990) and Lemaitre (1990).

allowing universities to adjust. This was a platform for establishing an agreed consensus on the future development of the sector (Concertación de Partidos por la Democracia, 1989:24).

Once President Aylwin's office assumed in March 1990, the Minister of Education noted that the approval of the LOCE hindered progress in the introduction of an accreditation system and the creation of an appropriate institutional framework. Instead, attempts were devoted to curbing the power of leaders at public universities, with the Commission for the Study of Higher Education²⁰ (CEES, an acronym perilously similar to that of the Council for Higher Education, CES²¹) formed to bring together leading academics and practitioners to advance the development of higher education policy.

The recommendations of the CEES (also known as the Brunner Commission) were not, however, implemented as proposed. Its proposed legislation was never approved by Congress. Bernasconi and Rojas (2004) have suggested that, in the absence of a new legal framework, the government used various means for gradual implementation. Thus, progressively, public spending on higher education increased, progress was made in the standardization of governance in traditional universities and competitive funding for scientific research was expanded and diversified (Allard, 1999). Few legal adjustments were made in accordance with its recommendations. Influence would be exerted through the formulation of fundamental guidelines.

To what extent did the recommendations of the Brunner Commission depart from existing policy guidelines? Its report, "A policy for the development of higher education in the Nineties", proposed as watchwords for the development of higher education quality, equity and efficiency, the same mindset stated for the reform of 1980.

The proposal was organized according to six main objectives: to strengthen the institutional base of the system, to boost enrollment in higher-order education, to ensure quality and equity, to promote scientific research and artistic creation, to increase and diversify funding, and to improve the legislative framework (CEES, 1991). For each objective, recommendations would only sometimes include goals, instruments, and forms of action for their achievement. All this was in order to reflect the agreement reached for "balancing priorities and provisions for the professions, markets and politics" (Brunner, 1991:47).

Competitive dynamics would play a role in this scheme, in a way very similar to that in the Gremialist higher education model. Institutions of higher education were to compete with each other to secure the resources necessary for their operation, either through fees charged to students, grant-seeking for the development of research, consulting and technical assistance. For CEES, this competition was academic at root, as it has been for the ideologues of the 1980 reform:

It must be ensured that a significant proportion of fiscal allocations to higher education be channeled through mechanisms that encourage the recipient institutions to increase the quality, efficiency and relevance of the activities they undertake. Competition based on academic values, and exercised through intellectual projects, can be, in the context of the policies proposed here, a positive principle in the life of higher education institutions. (CEES, 1991:61)

Academic competition between universities was viewed by CEES as not only a natural practice, but also the best possible solution to address the deepening of the country's higher education capacity. 15 academics, chaired by Brunner, agreed on projections of population growth, estimating that enrollment could expand (optimistically) by between 18% and 25% in the school-completing age group over the 1990s:

²⁰ That is, presided over by the academic José Joaquín Brunner.

²¹ Hence, CSE is referred to as the *Higher Council of Education* in this text, while CEES is either referred to by its acronym, or as *the [Brunner] Commission*.

The information presented leads to the conclusion that higher education participation in Chile is foreseeable in growing moderately during this decade. There will be increased competition, however, among institutions to attract students, a phenomenon that should be mitigated in terms of its potential negative effects through better coordination between institutions. (CEES, 1991:19)

In the opinion of CEES, this situation justified as *qualitative* growth a boost in enrollment. From the perspective of the institutions that would grow as a result, it behoved careful planning in order to strengthen deficient areas (such as training in basic science and the development of doctoral programs) and to rein in other areas where a temporary saturation of supply may arise. This would work also to extend the diversity of the system. From the point of view of public funding, it imposed new priorities:

...it is expected that this new phase will define public authority financing policies in line with the objectives of qualitative growth in enrollment, strengthening deficient areas and increasing internal efficiency. (CEES, 1991:23)

Unlike, however, the system of incentives that the military government deployed to support of the development of academic competence, the Commission rejected a proposal to use indirect fiscal contributions for the same purpose. This, in the context of a proposal aimed at diversifying the origin and distribution of public resources among higher education institutions, sought to regulate the system according to the achievement of objectives as to quality, equity and efficiency, and to increase the accountability of universities (CEES, 1991).

In this context, the government focused primarily on charging the Higher Council of Education with controlling the emerging deregulation associated with the rapid proliferation of private institutions. In turn, progress was made in securing self-government, the multiplication of new student funding through loans and scholarships programs, and improving the financing of traditional universities – and of research²² – through tactical and incremental annual budget regulations that the military government had dismissed (Bernasconi and Rojas, 2004). Additionally, public universities were authorized to participate in private organizations for the achievement of their objectives, the tax credit was rescheduled and universities were allowed to manage their credit funds on a consolidated basis.

All of this created a situation in which the basic guidelines of the reforms of 1980 were reaffirmed for democratic conditions, with some adjustments. A last ditch attempt by the Aylwin government at changes in legislation, to do away with the examination regime that had been temporarily extended under LOCE as an alternative to accreditation, also failed.

The neoliberal agenda and its implementation

The “Policy for the Development of Higher Education in the Nineties” assumed that the growth and consolidation of the new private sector could be framed with regard to the dynamics of competition and cooperation that characterized the traditional higher education system. The reality would show that this assumption was wrong.

Although the work of Brunner’s CEES managed to moderate the expansion of new universities, its work was severely limited by the duration of probationary supervision accompanied by a weak regulatory framework (CEES, 1998:32-34).

The radical changes in agenda experienced by many new universities upon earning full institutional autonomy reflected priorities and designs camouflaged or dormant during the monitoring period and not compatible with public policy guidelines. The development by the managers of new institutions of future projects and capacities while undergoing licensing proved to

²² Some results of this action are observed in the implementation of the different lines of financing associated with Institutional Development Fund (FDI), established in 1991, and the creation of FONDECYT in 1992.

be an effective strategy to circumvent state control without compromising long-term objectives that they often hoped to reach.

Most of the new institutions clearly had their own interpretations of growth and competition. They were able to lead the expansion of enrollment using market models.²³ Advertising spending in the sector and the proliferation of branch campuses and other “delivery” sites and special programs since the late 1990s would attest to the vigor of such strategies (Brunner, 2009). Instead of guiding the development of the sector, state universities were to some extent compelled to join in this new market-oriented and unfolding scenario, despite a lack of suitable management skills and, in some cases, in so doing redefining institutional priorities in order to compete by maintaining levels of enrollment (conceived now as market share).

The philosophy that inspired the work of CEES – the model of “steering from a distance”²⁴ – had not historically confronted issues of this kind in other countries, which goes some way to explaining the impotence of government in addressing the situation. In stark relief, this model of sectoral coordination assumes that all universities have similar objectives (i.e. producing education and research of the best quality possible) within a framework of institutional diversity. This had been a more reliable assumption in higher education systems in the United Kingdom and the Netherlands, countries where the model was developed from the 1980s; the model did not envisage for-profit higher education, and assumed that the state is the main financier of the universities.

In the basic program of his administration, President Frei – elected in 1993 with the support of the same political coalition that had governed with Aylwin – emphasized the need to continue the agenda proposed by CEES, with regard to reforming the legal framework for better coordination and operation in higher education (*Concertación de Partidos por la Democracia*, 1993:111-112). Frei proposed creating a public information system, introducing direct funding mechanisms associated with results and extending accreditation which, in turn, would be linked to access to financing for students.

Yet the initial agenda was not translated into concrete lines of action for achieving significant adjustments to the institutional framework for higher education. The highest authority within the Ministry of Education during the second half of the 1990s described the feeling that existed in the country with regard to sectoral policy:

...in the mid-nineties, the public had the perception that this level of education had been relatively neglected. Probably the lack of a general debate and unmet expectations from the report of 1991 led to this sentiment. (Arellano, 2000:75)

Furthermore, in June 1997, the Ministry of Education sought to justify its inaction in relation to higher education:

In these years we have seen the lag of other educational levels as critical, it being evident to the government that the most high priority challenge of Chilean society was to strengthen schooling. The universities have strengths greater than the rest of the system, which needed more urgently our energy and our leadership. (Ministry of Education, 1997:10)

²³ According to statistics from the Ministry of Education, total enrollment system expanded from 249,482-452,325 students between 1990 and 2000. The registration of new private universities 19,509-103,805 went from students in the same period. In contrast, the total enrollment of the Board of Regents universities grew from 112,193-215,284.

²⁴ Brunner (1990:308-311) had recommended the adoption of this form of regulation which suggests that the State adopt an intermediate position between regulation and deregulation of higher education, contributing to the funding of universities and their performance evaluated. At the same time, this event Evaluative state requires colleges compete with each other by means in order to increase their efficiency. See Henkel (1991) Neave (1988, 1998).

The existence of other priorities was not, however, the only reason that the government had to postpone ambitions to reform higher education. Also influencing this decision was the effective veto that opposition political parties exerted over discussing the legislative proposals announced in the programs of the Concertation government.

The Council for Higher Education and the Ministry of Education worked to monitor the development of new suppliers, which seemed to be producing results. Their proliferation had decreased significantly, and new institutions appeared to be developing appropriate institutional learning structures while universities that were not willing and/or able to do so were disappearing.

Finally, any reform to higher education would involve new financial commitments for the state, there being no clarity as to the availability of funds to finance a substantial reform agenda in the sector, from the perspective of the Ministry of Finance.

Yet by 1997 the government had become convinced that it was time to check the orientation of public policy for higher education, to enable it better to attend to collective needs. For this purpose was formulated a new policy framework based on seven goals²⁵. In terms of funding, the new policy was advanced in a fashion altogether new: public expenditure on higher education would expand in the next three years to double the previous share of the gross domestic product, in order to meet the demands of industry and to finance program reforms (Ministry of Education, 1997:26).

Along with suggesting a new legal framework to modernize the role and management of state universities (through review of their foundational statutes), the new policy aimed to strengthen regulation to improve equity and quality in higher education.

In relation to the promotion of equity (understood as equality of opportunity), the new framework aimed to target student aid adeptly, to improve the high dropout and repetition rates observed in the system, and to increase the provision of public information to support the decisions that applicants to higher education and their families take in relation to their tertiary education alternatives.

In turn, the government assumed that its role was to promote and to encourage the quality and relevance of university education. It opted to prod higher education institutions toward defining quality criteria and standards for their courses and programs, and developing mechanisms for self-assessment and performance evaluation (Ministry of Education, 1997).

The list of priorities that would emerge within this policy framework focused primarily on regulation and funding (Ministry of Education, 1997). One would be the implementation of a system for setting minimum quality standards for undergraduate education and for the accreditation of doctorates. At the same time, the Ministry promoted the introduction of professional qualifying examinations and a national public information system. Moreover, the new higher education priorities within the political agenda for the government meant a special commitment to the funding of the sector.

The 1997 program produced significant changes from the previous situation, with effects perhaps equivalent to the structural reconfiguration introduced by the 1980 reforms. It was, in part, an agenda that aimed to reset the bearings followed by higher education in Chile and was part of a new modernization agenda.

²⁵ They are presented in the following order in the new policy framework: promoting quality, promoting equity, contributing to the development of culture, advancing national development, the promotion of research, regionalization, internationalization, and consolidating based diversified existing institutional (Ministry of Education, 1997).

It was further surmised that the education system had not been sufficiently well shaped by existing policy. For the Ministry of Education, the policy framework was not supporting the growing complexity of needs shown within Chilean society:

[The current set-up] is unable to make sense of institutional diversity and is marked by policies designed for a homogeneous system, as regard the type of institution to which they apply, the functions performed, and the populations they serve. (Ministry of Education, 1997:22)

Compounded by greater investment in secondary education, higher education enrollment quickly expanded far beyond what had been originally planned for the entire decade – reaching an increase of 50% in early 1997 (Ministry of Education, 1997:5). Such a growth spurt, the Gremialist model had tried to channel outside the universities, whereas CEES had not addressed expansion of that order as likely; now it was viewed as something for which to take credit. The new policy framework reflects this:

[The system] has opened up educational alternatives for young people, both in the number of courses and in the levels offered. It is serving a more diverse student population and has involved the private sector more actively in the provision of educational services. (Ministry of Education, 1997:11)

Only a few years later, this expansion would be viewed as a significant achievement that the government would link to its own policies, as shown in the commentary accompanying the bill for the creation of a new student funding system in 2003:

We have made a significant effort to expand access to higher education. Today, more than three thousand per hundred thousand people continue education after secondary school, which places Chile in an average range for all regions of the world, below only the highest income countries. In the last decade, higher education coverage has grown by 7% annually. At present 31.5% of Chilean youth between 18 and 24 years study at a postsecondary institution. We continue to expand higher education opportunities for all talented young people who want to continue their studies. (Library of Congress of Chile, 2005:6)

This new assessment of the expansion of higher education – and of the involvement within it of the private sector – would have important implications for the policy framework. It would mean a subtle but decisive shift in the role competition plays in guiding the development of the system.

In the Gremialist design, competition should focus on producing graduates and research of high quality, assuming limited demand due to high selectivity, as was the nature foreseen of university education. Similarly, the proposal from Brunner and colleagues promoted qualitative rather than quantitative growth in enrollment (ie, better quality rather than more), that is, “if we want to avoid competition that eventually could be bad for the country and especially for youth” (CEES, 1991:21).

The 1997 policy framework, however, sought to expand higher education by increasing enrollment, which required that students in the new private sector have access to some form of student aid, which until then had been mainly targeted at students from the traditional universities. This new approach took into account the sustained growth that the new private sector had experienced since 1990.

Achieving this goal involved expanding the role of competition policy in a way that henceforth would be qualitative and quantitative at the same time. Obviously, the most prestigious universities continue to be selective. Changing that would jeopardize their main competitive attribute. The plan would, though, allow other higher education institutions to compete on the basis of other factors.

If quality, understood as excellence, is restricted to a small group of suppliers, other competitors can participate according to specific market niches, availability and price. While a niche approach may aim to make undergraduate and graduate curricula accommodate the demands and preferences of students, availability emphasizes accessibility – in terms of location, time or

technological platforms – while price strategies focus on the direct and indirect costs that higher education represents for students and their families.

Together, these new forms of competition would enter the understanding of market competition, thereafter coexisting with academic competition – which would subsequently be described as “stratified competition” by Brunner and Uribe (2005), in which there are different groups of competitors. It would allow universities to expand their operations to generate economies of scale that would reduce costs, improve efficiency and optimize results. At the policy level, this allowed quality concerns regarding the pursuit of excellence to exist separately to formulations of minimum conditions for enabling the adequate development of vocational and technical education – an approach that the Council of Higher Education had adopted to define criteria for evaluating new universities in 1993 (Council for Higher Education, 1998:24).

Along with this, the 1997 program introduced new language to the policy framework. The wide range of public and private purposes that Chilean higher education has historically pursued now are summarized in two new and powerful ideas: primarily, that universities must produce human capital and create the conditions to integrate into a knowledge society that emerges with the phenomenon of globalization. The new policy framework explained that

... it is important to achieve high level outcomes in an educational system as it is transformed, partaking of the revolution of knowledge and information and of the growing process of globalization. Such trends mean for the country and for its universities new requirements in terms of knowledge creation capabilities, of the training of highly qualified human resources and of technology transfer. (Ministry of Education, 1997:7)

These ideas would be repeated with greater emphasis two years later, with the establishment of the Improving Equity and Quality in Higher Education (MECESUP) initiative. The synopsis that the government prepared for this undertaking stated:

The knowledge society brings new learning and higher education requirements, which are particularly crucial in a country that is committed to further development. These relate to the training of qualified human resources, the generation, processing and transfer of scientific, humanistic, technological, and cultural work, the development of the arts, and critical analysis, rigorous debate and technical application of and around major national challenges and problems. (Ministry of Education, 1999:5)

A partnership between the government and the World Bank to modernize higher education, MECESUP injected \$US241 million in the period 1999-2003 towards improving the policy framework and strengthening the Ministry of Education’s sectoral coordination capacities for the external quality assessment of universities, and funding – on a competitive basis – the development of projects to improve the functioning of higher education institutions (Ministry of Education, 1999). This program enabled the deployment of the new policy for higher education as part of an overall strategy for change. The implementation process of accreditation for institutions in various regions, under the auspices of ad hoc commissions²⁶, was oriented towards the design and testing of new external evaluation mechanisms, which then served in formulating a new proposed comprehensive system of quality assurance.

The new policy guidance for offering higher education was informed, in part, by an alignment of national policy guidelines that had been promoted internationally by multilateral agencies like the World Bank and the Organization Economic Development and Cooperation (World Bank 1999; OECD, 2004).

It is evident that such convergence was not happenstance. The growing influence of economic thinking in the design of educational policies facilitated the participation and leadership of local economists in developing an agenda for the sector. The appointment of Minister Arellano in

²⁶ The National Commission of Undergraduate Accreditation (CNAP) and the National Commission of Postgraduate Accreditation (CONAP), both created in 1999 by the Ministry of Education.

1996²⁷, and his leadership in the formulation of new higher education policy, reflect the resurgent influence that the economic discipline has had in driving public policy in Chile.

What is more, a small but influential group of Chilean higher education specialists had been actively participating in forums, networks and communities of international experts. These links led to the modernization agenda of higher education, which would later be adopted, systemized and promoted by international organizations participating in accordance with the so-called Washington Consensus (Torres and Schugurensky, 2002). This allowed policy ideas circulating in such discussion spaces to be quickly gleaned and then promoted in Chile. The rapid development at this juncture of the system of quality assurance in Chile is explained, in large part, in terms of this interaction.

That the World Bank and the Chilean government agreed to develop a program for higher education served to accelerate this course of action. In addition to enabling the delivery of additional resources towards structural changes in financing and quality control, these negotiations (which took place between 1997 and 1999) allowed the government to develop a reform agenda for the period 1999-2003, externally validated and in tune with ideas of modernization that prevailed in the international arena. All of this led to the low level of resistance to this agenda within the sector and the rapid implementation of key initiatives.

Once these new policy mechanisms were installed, the question of what to do next rose in importance. Long and complex legislative discussion of government initiatives was brought on by the diversification of articulated sectoral interests. An agenda for the higher education sector to pursue a path that departed significantly from the status quo appeared unlikely to be followed without a broad consensus among universities. Steps to minimize controversy and legal changes were taken, as evidenced in the 2010 bicentennial scholarship program to increase substantially funding for postgraduate studies abroad.

Elected in 1999 with the support of yet the same Concertation that participated in the government of Presidents Aylwin and Frei, Ricardo Lagos opted to focus his action plan for higher education in three areas (Concertación de Partidos por la Democracia, 1999). Lagos's government program included a review of the structure of higher education funding. While projecting a reduction of the indirect tax, increased were the resources committed for institutional development – based on performance contracts – for the promotion of research and technological advancement. Additionally, Lagos announced a new emphasis on external quality assessment for disciplinary training programs, both professional and technical, to improve quality gradually.

The most prominent commitment of President Lagos's program was aimed at ensuring equal opportunity. Not only was increased funding pledged for scholarships and loans, access was to be guaranteed to higher education for those who, deemed unable to pay for their education, met the academic requirements for admission.

In contrast, as it transpired, in practice the government's efforts concentrated on monitoring the MECESUP pilot's impact on accreditation and the competitive allocation of funds. With progress evident there, the Ministry of Education opted to work the same seam. A joint proposal from CNAP and CONAP sought the installation of a system of quality assurance for higher education, including a public information system. MECESUP's initial timespan concluded in 2004, with a second stage supported for the period 2006-2010, this time aimed at providing incentives for improving the quality of traditional universities according to key indicators, through the development of performance agreements.

²⁷ José Pablo Arellano, the aforementioned Harvard educated economist, had headed the Budget Directorate of the Ministry of Finance in the period 1990-1996. Previous to that, he was Executive Director of the Economic Research Corporation for Latin America, CIEPLAN.

While these initiatives preoccupied the higher education component of President Lagos's program, an additional line of reform interposed. With the development of a joint policy framework for grants and credit instruments in 2006, a system of financial intermediation was introduced to expand student aid to students at private universities with state-subsidized credit (Williamson and Sanchez, 2009; World Bank, 2011). This initiative was a key aspect underpinning the installation of quality assurance, with the necessity for accreditation oversight to be eligible for these resources coloring further expansion of the private sector (Zapata, Rojas and Tejada, 2011).

State-guaranteed credit and the permanent system of quality assurance were implemented in the second half of the Noughties. Though her (first term) government program would merely maintain, with some variation, the guidelines adopted by the previous administration, the first coming of President Michelle Bachelet (2006-2010) was characterized by the quest for a new policy framework in higher education. Two consecutive evaluation exercises were conducted. The Presidential Advisory Council on Higher Education (2008) developed a comprehensive proposal for the development of a new policy agenda with sector-wide participation. A team of experts assembled by the OECD and World Bank (OECD and International Bank for Reconstruction and Development [World Bank], 2009) conducted a policy review commissioned by the government. Two complementary reports, on innovation policy (OECD, 2007) and on regional development in the Bío -Bío region (OECD and World Bank, 2010) also included policy recommendations regarding higher education.

None of these initiatives would give birth to a new sectoral policy, although they did precipitate a significant set of changes in orientation impacting different areas, especially as related to public subsidies to higher education and their distribution. Although it aroused keen interest in the sector, the government assessment of the policy framework failed to generate consensus on new policy directions.

Sustained increase in public spending in the sector – particularly through state-guaranteed credit – is the most marked characteristic of the period (Rodríguez et al., 2010). The absence of a clear agenda for the sector led to the emergence of rather heterogeneous policy proposals, as evident in the overall strategic framework prepared by the Higher Education Division of the Ministry of Education (Higher Education Division, 2008). A second MECESUP program was launched. Unlike its predecessor, this new project of the Ministry of Education would aim to develop new forms of public funding, based on the attainment of results agreed in advance, through performance agreements.

Powered by the new public funding for students, enrollment would expand significantly, particularly from students from low-income families, although it was a small group of institutions that expanded most (Zapata, Rojas and Tejada, 2011). While the number of individuals enrolled rose, this did not much affect the number of full-time equivalents, which remained relatively stable during the second half of the last decade.

Moreover, the international agenda which the Chilean government embraced, decidedly from 1997, experienced significant changes over the next decade (Maassen and Stensaker, 2011; Marginson, 2010). There was growing influence from rankings and league tables measuring the performance and reputation of higher education institutions, both nationally and internationally. The idea of world-class universities emerged, primarily focusing on the development of advanced research. Soon there proliferated national strategies for boosting local institutions towards global competitiveness, through targeted increases in public funding for scientific research. A select group of universities in each country had access to fresh resources to deepen their scientific productivity, subject to achieving results. Moreover, the development of quality assurance systems allowed a move towards the development of quality standards for the various functions of higher education.

None of these initiatives was echoed in Chile, which accounts for the decoupling of the local policy agenda from emerging epistemic community-driven reforms²⁸, which have dominated the formulation of new policies at the international level.

The situation reached toward the end of the first government of President Bachelet would reveal the consequences of the lack of a new sectoral agenda. In the absence of a policy framework for higher education, other more targeted outreach initiatives began to capture the attention of universities. Regional development agendas, for example, have provided ample opportunity for universities to influence the formulation of local development agendas and to obtain additional financing (OECD and World Bank, 2011).

In turn, the work of the National Accreditation Commission (CNA) faced doubts regarding its independence and rigor in deciding on the quality of higher education institutions. Proposed was an international assessment of its functioning, although this did not in fact take place (Zapata, Rojas and Tejada, 2011).

The link between public funding and accreditation had increased pressure on the system of quality assurance, to the extent that the potential for expansion and sustainability for many institutions was dependent on state funding. Moreover, the operation of the new system of student funding cast considerable doubt over the model used, in relation to the way in which financing facilities were to operate for students (World Bank, 2011).

In parallel, sectoral interests would consolidate and expand their networks of influence across political, business and intellectual fields. This was favored by an institutional design relying on decentralized agencies to take charge of the implementation of different policy instruments and prevalent interest groups. Market competition has continued to expand. Institutional advertising spending on higher education has multiplied to the point of its being the third segment of the advertising industry in the country (Brunner, 2009). Wörner and Santander (2012) estimated that by 2010, this spending was more than 5% of the budget of 12 private institutions.

Further reforms involving changes would favor larger institutions and organizing reforms has become increasingly more complex for the political authorities. At the same time such reforms have neutralized, in large part, the capacity of the Ministry of Education to influence the coordination of the system.

Conclusions

Viewed the way described above, the development of higher education policy in Chile presents interesting analytical possibilities. For now, let us consider a path where inconsistent guidance for policy has been implemented in contexts in which the regulatory framework for the sector has remained relatively constant. How to reconcile, in this context, the functions and policies regulating markets introduced into and recognized within Chilean higher education? Was there a moment, during the last 30 years, at which they were aligned? What capacity has government to regulate higher education in contexts of high privatization and marketization? What prospects today are there for regulating higher education? What problems emerge from this scenario?

Market development and competition in Chilean higher education have been the result of a political decision taken at the time of setting the reform agenda of 1980. That the decision has had the influence that it has had in shaping the sector was unexpected, not because of its power but rather its direction. Instead of protecting higher education from the effects of mass production, the marketization of training served to sharpen pressure on the university. This design was the result of a diversified education system vertically and hierarchically organized by the weight and nature of credentials depending on the level of the institution.

²⁸ For a discussion of epistemic communities, see Hass (1992), Meijerink (2005) and Kisby (2007).

The explosive proliferation of private universities and institutes linked to centers of technical and vocational training, which occurred between 1988 and 1991, can be read as a response by such institutions to realize market potential. The promotion of academic competition – requiring universities to compete for funding – coupled with growing demand for paid higher education and a booming economy, also facilitated the formation of tertiary education markets. All of these factors set the stage for the vigorous expansion experienced by higher education between 1990 and 2010.

Although it was in full swing, this shift went unnoticed or at least unaddressed by adjustments to the policy framework in 1990. Certainly, improvements in monitoring and control mechanisms prevented the number of suppliers from continuing to expand – albeit at the cost of strengthening the competitive position of existing institutions – but this had a limited impact on the expansion that the system experienced late in the decade.

The 1997 policy agenda went for further system expansion, focusing on developing the incentives and signals necessary to attain proper guidance from market forces. At first, a scheme that integrated the new accreditation system, additional funding and the expansion of student aid seemed to be ideal for a diversified system in which the state gave equal treatment to all institutions participating in it. However, the obvious failures of the new accreditation system and the recent state-backed credit sources have made evident the impossibility of maintaining this coordination scheme indefinitely.

The National Accreditation Commission was beleaguered by different sectoral interests, preventing sufficiently independent external quality assessment. The role it fulfilled facilitated access to state-guaranteed credit, impacting on institutional reputations critical to the survival of universities.

In turn, the new system of state-guaranteed loans allowed the price of an education to grow significantly without the cost of this expansion being immediately borne by students and their families. The effects of the price increase would soon, however, become visible, both for the state and for families, to the point of casting into doubt system viability.²⁹

Such processes reflect an undergraduate market in the process of maturation, in which commercial and noncommercial providers compete. This difference is explained by vocational institutions following whatever opportunities they can; being able to provide undergraduate studies is an attractive opportunity (de la Fuente and Lopez, 2010). The lack here of a dominant provider group explains the intensification of competition over the previous decade. While enrollment continued to grow, in the Noughties it became concentrated within a small group of national institutions run by holding companies.

The situation is not identical in the case of research institutions. Research remains mostly conducted by the same handful of selective traditional universities. Public funds allow the hiring of researchers in these institutions and materially supports research work. The capacity to produce surpluses through research is for now out of sight for the commercial providers. Yet, research's potential to enhance the prestige of universities should not be forgotten – such value simultaneously synthesizes the influence and capacity of these institutions to mobilize resources. The emergence of niche applied research dimensions in some new private universities could be read as an experiment to exploit this area commercially, without committing the huge investments necessary for maintaining groups and research laboratories on a large scale.

The Chilean case indicates that, during these three decades, political processes have consistently failed to control competition and markets. As has happened in other dimensions of

²⁹ To the extent that graduates face the increasing complexity of the labor market, repayment capacity is significantly limited (Urzua, 2012). Official statistics from the Ministry of Education indicate that in 2010 state-guaranteed credit accounted for 54.41% of all public resources for student aid in real currency.

social life, entrenched interests managed to coopt market forces (in the case of the 1980 reforms) and then instrumentalization (as with the agenda of 1997). This influence on policy needs to be brought out into the open. It is therefore crucial to examine the battery of instruments available and how they can be organized into a consistent plan that avoids the risk of the fragmentation of policies.

A starting point for this reflection is to ponder the consistency of policy over thirty years, constituting an invisible handbook, as such. In general, there has been an ambiguity apparent in how governments have used the tools available to regulate higher education – this conspires against the visibility and vigor that policy frameworks might possess. This helps explain the coexistence of different political agendas in the context of a relatively stable legal framework.

Initially, the military government opted to reconfigure the system, from a normative prism – regulating what higher education is, what it does, and of what its institutions and product types consist, and then setting restrictions on its operation. At the same time, the military government implemented incentives to encourage competition among institutions. At this initial stage, the importance of incentives for competition was less as an organizing principle than a legal framework for shaping sectoral conditions – which was reinforced by the inability to increase the resources available for the progressive implementation of indirect fiscal contributions.

Over the years, the normative power of regulation within the system has abated. The vast majority of universities were already well established and autonomous (notwithstanding their government-appointed rectors), decreasing their reliance on regulation and oversight. The emphasis that licensing and accreditation introduced in requiring a stated purposes for each university – as a way to protect the diversity of higher education – bolstered this trend.

As the new higher education scenario became consolidated, the use of incentives became the main tool of governments to regulate the system (Bernasconi and Rojas, 2004). In turn, this has implied a shift in public policy's center of gravity for higher education from the Ministry of Education to the Ministry of Finance. Beginning in 1990, fixed allocations of resources committed to this level of education and standards for distribution and delivery were carefully negotiated.

The power of markets and money is reflected in part by the difficulties in changing the legal framework but also in the increasing powerlessness of the legal framework in coordinating the sector – except in the most descriptive sense, such as the minimum duration of vocational programs or designations of diplomas, control has been limited.

Although legislation delivers the Minister of Education the power to decide on the closure of private universities, governments have been reluctant to apply that aspect of the LOCE³⁰. The lack of political will for more direct control over the development of the sector owes something to its illegitimate origin – since it was confected by the military government – as well as the seeming futility of even trying to achieve tight regulation for a very dynamic sector.

Since the restoration of democracy, financial incentives have had an incrementally growing influence – especially as has related to student aid and the competitive financing of traditional universities. Funding policies promoted by the Ministry of Finance have played a part in this (Marcel and Tokman, 2005; Rodriguez et al., 2010). The targeting of all this, however, has changed substantially to the extent that such incentives are uninteresting to the traditional universities and of swelling importance within the new private sector.

The expansion or redefinition of the types of providers eligible for certain incentives has changed the market conditions in which many private providers operate. The introduction of state-guaranteed loans, for instance, would be followed by an expansion the types of institutions where

³⁰ This situation has remained after the adoption of the General Education Law in 2009.

state-backed student loans are available. This has allowed some private institutions to expand the scale of their operations, consolidating dominant positions in fields with low academic selectivity (World Bank, 2011:58-61).

The proliferation of incentives – in the context of a weak policy framework – means that some institutions can pursue strategies that do not necessarily align with the public purposes for which the institutions were putatively created. The complexities associated with the proliferation, organization and consistency of scholarship programs funded by the state demonstrate this situation (see Benavente et al., 2012).

The problems caused by the deliberate ambiguity of policies have stoked a broad social discontent about the growing deregulation of higher education and the negative effects this has on society (Donoso, 2011). This is evident especially when bringing critical eyes to the operation of the newer policy devices – accreditation and guaranteed credit – given their clear inability properly to resolve problems that motivated their original deployment.

The proliferation of demands for radical change in higher education settings has been catalyzed within student federations (Bernasconi, 2012). The ideal of public, free and universal higher education is gaining ascendancy in Chilean society. With some variations, the ideals of the 1967 reforms – which aimed to democratize and expand higher education – are reprised in Chile today. The demand for free, high quality education provided primarily through state universities deserves careful attention. This may have a significant impact on the future design of policies, which would evidence a major ideological realignment in the country's leadership.

In contrast, the government of President Piñera (2010-2014) has opted to keep the pillars of the agenda from 1997, increasing public funding and delivering more demanded resources to public universities (Ministry of Education, 2012). At the same time, reform is proposed for the accreditation system with the creation of a superintendent of higher education to increase control of the system. The details and legal initiatives associated with such proposals are still under development, though.

Whatever the outcome of this debate, the high levels of overcrowding of the present system require that any transformation must be pursued cautiously. For now, this means taking over a set problems and challenges that today beset Chilean higher education and have tended to remain ignored in the formulation of sectoral policies. They demand careful attention.

It is necessary to pay special attention to the dominance of private sector interests in coordinating the system and influence from there on the provision of the public goods that society expects of higher education, on the reduction of organizational and functional diversity in the system, given the prominent position of commercial institutions with a national presence, on the intensification of competition for prestige among universities – and between graduates – with increasingly credentialist orientations in undergraduate education, on the primacy of managers in running universities and the sidelining of academics in having input on important issues, on the splitting of any academic profession and scientific research into many disciplinary communities, and of the robustness of the degree structure and of the outdated and rigid curricular organization associated with this.

Addressing these issues demands the definition of a new regulatory framework supported by a broad social consensus and reflecting the realities of the complex and dynamic enterprise of higher education.

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