

# University Curriculum Transformations in Context



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*Global-Local Dynamics  
of Policy Processes*

By

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Tom O'Donoghue,  
and Lesley Vidovich

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CNA: National Accreditation Commission, Chile.

CRUCH: Council of Rectors, Chile.

CSE: Higher Education Council, Chile.

DIVESUP: Department of Higher Education, the Ministry of Education Chile.

EHEA: European Higher Education Area.

EU: European Union.

HE: Higher education.

IMF: International Monetary Fund.

LOCE: Organic Constitutional Law on Teaching in Chile.

MECESUP: Improvement of Quality and Equity in Tertiary Education Program, Chile.

MERCOSUR: The Common Market of the South.

MINEDUC: Ministry of Education Chile.

OECD: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development.

PSU: University Selection Test in Chile.

UA: University A.

UB: University B.

UC: University C.

UNESCO: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation.

UK: United Kingdom.

US: United States.



# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

The aim of the study reported in this book was to analyze contemporary curriculum policy and practices in universities in Chile that are engaged in a radical policy of adopting a liberal model of curriculum at undergraduate level, with professional preparation being offered only at the postgraduate level. The specific focus of the study was on three universities within the country, considered against a background of global and national contextual influences in the contemporary competitive higher education landscape. Other national settings that historically have been influential in ‘policy borrowing’ on the part of Chile, especially the United States (US) and the United Kingdom, were also considered. Equally, the influences of such international bodies as the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) were considered because, while they are not official policy makers, they have had a growing influence on higher education policy processes both nationally and internationally in recent years (Sellar & Lingard, 2013).

Internationally, new developments in university curriculum policy are currently evident. These relate to such matters as the range of curriculum objectives; the nature of associated values and beliefs; the extent to which various objectives are prescribed for some or for all; the pattern of components into which the ‘whole’ curriculum is divided and how lecturers and students are grouped in relation to this; the content, pedagogical approaches and modes of assessment outlined; and the methods used to evaluate the success of the work (Stabback, 2016). Associated outcomes include the deconstruction of the traditional university curriculum subjects through modularization, the cross curricular key generic skills movement, and competency-based developments (Harpe & Thomas, 2009). These and other policy outcomes have been fostered by such developments as the Bologna Agreement which has emphasized the importance of establishing a strong relationship between employment and education. A related idea is that in the global knowledge society where, many hold, information and skills can become obsolete quickly, the provision of a general education may be the best way to promote such competencies as analytical and

problem-solving skills. This, in turn, has led to an interest in promoting ‘general education’ at the undergraduate level (Vidovich, 2012), with this being understood as constituting “a broad background in the disciplines, along with critical thinking skills” (Altbach, 2011, p. 131).

Developments along the line of those noted above have led to decisions being more ‘high stakes’ than previously in terms of universities meeting government and employer accountability requirements in order to attract the ‘best’ students from around the world and to respond to the growing recognition of the importance of higher education in a knowledge era (Grumet & Yates, 2011). Moreover, new forms of curriculum policy have weakened the control of university academics over their work and placed it in the hands of university administrators (Vidovich, 2012). Specifically regarding Chile, over the last three decades there has been a shift to a neoliberal agenda in higher education and to the adoption by some universities in the country of associated international models of curriculum, pedagogy and administration. This process commenced early in the 1980s when the country had a military government under the dictator, Pinochet. The changes brought about during that era were directed towards achieving three main goals. First, there was an attempt to seek to open-up the higher education system to market forces. Secondly, there was an attempt to clearly differentiate between various types of higher education institutions. Thirdly, changes were aimed at partially transferring the cost of running state-financed universities to students or their families, through cost recovery (Brunner, 1993).

The dictatorship in Chile, which lasted from 1973 to 1990, was brought to an end through a process of negotiation between the military government and a section of the political opposition entitled the Coalition of Parties for Democracy. The resulting ‘alliance’ held power for more than 20 years (Cox, 2006). Over this time a series of changes to the education sector was introduced in order to open up higher education much more than previously to market forces. While these changes had a neoliberal thrust, there was some resistance. In 1997, for example, a historic mobilization of the Confederation of Chilean Students managed to stop a package of laws being introduced simultaneously which had been aimed at deepening privatization in the sector. The name given to the legislative project upon which they were based was the ‘Framework Laws’ and these were later approved.

Amongst the acts emanating from the ‘Framework Law’ are the ‘Accreditation Law’ and the ‘Finance Law’ (Rebellion, 2012). Between 2004 and 2014, these resulted in a process of accreditation being introduced

in Chile regarding the quality of higher education (Cancino & Schmal, 2014) to replace what had previously operated under the National Commission for Accreditation of Undergraduate Programs scheme. In particular, 'Law No. 20129' of 2006 led to the establishment of a national system of quality assurance for the higher education sector. The institution that now continues to oversee the process is the National Accreditation Commission (CNA). Its main roles are institution accreditation and program accreditation (Ministry of Education Chile, 2006).

Viewed internationally, what is happening in Chile is not unusual, with globalization being an enormous associated influence. World trends in higher education in recent decades have also been framed by the necessities created by the economic situations in various nations and by the influence of neoliberal economic models (Adams & Demaiter, 2008). This situation, in turn, has had an impact on higher education curricula, and not just in Chile, but throughout Latin America.

Universities in Chile have especially been affected by neoliberal policies accompanying globalization. Furthermore, as in many other countries in relation to their higher education institutions, the Bologna Declaration of 1999 in Europe was also influential (Amaral & Neave, 2008). In particular, nations and their higher education systems are seeking to elevate their positions in international rankings of 'quality' universities. Associated with this is the trend in universities around the world to compete with each other for those students deemed to be the best and the brightest.

Developments in Chile have also reflected a broad trend in certain constituencies internationally where some universities are adopting a generalist model of curriculum at undergraduate level, with professional preparation taking place at the postgraduate level. This has European and North-American influences. One result is that because professional degrees are often now not delivered at the undergraduate level, students in certain countries often have to be enrolled at university longer than previously. This means also that they have to spend more money than previously on their education (Vidovich & O'Donoghue, 2011).

A particular new curriculum approach in many countries is where undergraduate studies are provided under a 'college' system while postgraduate studies are provided through graduate schools. This long-standing trend in the United States (US) is now to be found in certain universities and colleges in a variety of countries, including Scotland, England, Singapore, Australia, and China. Specifically regarding Chile,

three universities have been undertaking curriculum changes along such lines over the last decade. These universities are the central focus of the study reported later in this book.

## **Key Bodies of Informing Literature**

The study reported in this book is underpinned by three bodies of literature, each related to key conceptual terms associated with the particular area of research. These bodies of literature relate to the ‘history of university curriculum’, ‘curriculum policy in higher education’, and ‘globalization, internationalization and education policy borrowing and policy learning’. Each of these is examined in detail later in Chapter 3. A brief consideration of them, however, is appropriate at this point.

In relation to the ‘history of university curriculum’, pioneering work by Frank and Gabler (2006) on change in university curriculum internationally over the last one hundred years provides the broad setting. Specifically in relation to Chile, however, there is a lack of studies in the field. This deficit is addressed later in this work in relation to three universities in Chile, since current developments need to be seen in relation to historical trajectories in the country itself, as well as in relation to the history of university curriculum internationally (Friedman, 2000).

Regarding ‘curriculum policy in higher education’, the concept of curriculum is now used regularly not only in relation to the schooling sector, but also in relation to such key higher education issues as contestations over core knowledge in particular disciplines, the establishment of US-style graduate schools in a number of European countries (Powell & Green, 2007), the spread of the strongly-embedded US civic engagement practice to universities further afield (McIlrath & Mac Labhrainn, 2007; Watson, 2007), and initiatives on internationalizing the curriculum (Jones & Killeck, 2007; Knight, 2004; OECD, 2008). Also, higher education and policy are now seen to be closely linked concepts.

Throughout the book the meaning of the term policy is based largely on Ball’s (2006) definition and particularly his argument that policy is not only a text but also consists of actions. In other words, what is enacted is to be regarded every bit as much as policy as what is intended (Ball, 2006). This definition is relevant not only in relation to economically developed countries, but also in relation to such nations as Chile that are moving towards developed-world status. It is also recognized that a policy represents a particular configuration and allocation of values, involving a

combination of global, national and local procedures (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010). As a result, policy is considered to be not only what a document explicitly indicates, but as also including enactment. In other words, it can include active negotiation, resistance, and transformation into new practices (Vidovich, 2007). Further, policy needs to be seen as something that is continuously evolving (Vidovich, 2013).

A third body of literature that informed the study relates to ‘globalization, internationalization and education policy borrowing and policy learning’. These concepts are used regularly in literature on contemporary higher education policy development as it relates to dynamic interactions taking place simultaneously at, and between, the global level, the national level, and the local university level (Marginson, 2007; Marginson & Rhoades, 2002; Vidovich, 2004, 2009). Theories of globalization in particular form part of their conceptual framing. While these are elaborated in Chapter 3, at this point it is highlighted that the OECD has, for well over a decade, been taking an increasingly powerful role as a key policy actor in what is now a globalized higher education policy community (Henry, Lingard, Rizvi & Taylor, 2001; Rizvi & Lingard, 2010). Here also it is important to clarify that, unlike some who prefer to see globalization and internationalization as distinct processes (Knight, 2004), throughout this book they are conceptualized as being very much interconnected processes.

The OECD has defined the ‘internationalization of higher education’ as “the full spectrum of educational programs and activities that contribute to internationalized learning, ranging from the internationalization of programmers’ content and delivery to the mobility of students and scholars” (2008, p. 238). More specifically, this international organization has defined ‘internationalizing the curriculum’ in terms of “strengthened foreign languages teaching and enhanced international perspectives in the substantive content of tertiary curriculum” (OECD, 2008, p. 257). Further, attenuated global and international interconnections have been accompanied by enhanced education policy borrowing across different jurisdictions (Phillips & Schweisfurth, 2004). This phenomenon is referred to both as cross-national attraction (Ertl, 2006) and as the cross-cultural transfer of concepts and practices of education (Tanako, 2005). Much of the associated literature on this is concerned with the nature of education theories, models and methods transferred transnationally for academic or practical purposes, as well as with the processes by which this takes place (Hoyler & Jons, 2008).

Cognizance is also taken throughout the book of the importance of those works that emphasize that different national and sub-national jurisdictions often deal with policy challenges in different ways, because “global policy agendas come up against the existing priorities and practices” (Ozga & Jones, 2006, p. 2). Of particular importance in this regard is the literature on policy transfer between Europe, the US and the rest of the world. For example, while some have argued that the Bologna process simply represents direct policy borrowing from US universities, others hold that this Europe-wide perspective is now powerful, not only in shaping policy parameters in higher education throughout the continent, but also in other jurisdictions (Hartmann, 2008; Robertson & Keeling, 2008). Equally, it is important not to overlook the strong resonance of policy discourses across regions, in part associated with a desire to internationalize university curriculum for global citizenship and in part also associated with ideology.

Finally, the notion of hybridity in curriculum policy as a result of policy transfer also informed the study reported in later chapters. This was deemed to be justified on taking account of Hartmann’s argument that “a new form of global hegemony’ is taking shape as a hybrid of a US and European Empire” (2008, p. 217). In relation to this, the concept of ‘policy learning’ is preferred over ‘policy borrowing’ (Vidovich, 2009), as it emphasizes the active agency of policy actors in negotiating site-specific policies and practices.

Overall, then, as expressed above, the notions of globalization, internationalization and global knowledge society are key to understanding current trends in higher education. Regarding the former, globalization is characterized by an increased interconnection and interdependency between markets and societies which has resulted in blurred boundaries between nation states. On this, internationalization refers to the interconnection between different nations and their higher education systems (Vidovich, 2004). Additionally globalization has resulted in the imposition of a market ideology in a number of constituencies. Thus, competition has become a core value in higher education. Furthermore, it has resulted in the mobility of people, objects, images, information, ideas, and waste, amongst other phenomena, around the world (Vidovich, 2007). Finally, globalization, has different foci, including not only economic ones, but also those of a cultural, political, social, technological, managerial and environmental nature. Other outcomes of this situation are the polarization of rich and poor countries (Williamson, 1996) and the growth in the role of supranational organizations.

The current nature of the higher education system in Chile reflects the influences of globalization already noted. Equally, as with education policy around the world, what has taken place has been based more on beliefs than on research, or on evidence of impact (Raczynski & Muñoz, 2007). Furthermore, consideration of education in Chile reveals problems and inequalities in society (Levin, 2011). On this, Gutierrez (2012) suggests that neoliberal reforms in the education field in the country has been aimed at reproducing social segregation.

In 2014, a major debate took place across the education sector in Chile. Pressure from social movements over the previous decade caused the new administration of President Michelle Bachelet to propose an education reform in order to end the operation of the profit motive in the public education sector (Tome, 2015). This proposal was approved by the National Congress in January 2015. However, the transformation that took place did not apply to the higher education sector. This had to wait for ‘Law Number 20.882 for the provision of Gratuity’ to be passed. It has resulted in the State now playing a more important role than previously in supporting the enrolment of students from low socioeconomic classes in universities.

Finally, it is apposite to consider here the notion of a global knowledge society. This refers to transformations which are the product of economic globalization, the reorganization of work, and the compression of space, time and knowledge transmission through an information and communication revolution. Relatedly scholars point out that knowledge and information have become far more central to economic production and social relations than previously, and that the locus of the relationship between power and knowledge has moved away from the nation state. Thus, knowledge production and transmission have become ever more central in hegemonic projects (Carnoy & Castells, 2001).

## **Research Design**

In the study reported in this book, university curriculum changes in Chile were analyzed using a ‘policy trajectory approach’ (Ball, 1994; Rivzi & Lingard, 2010; Vidovich, 2007, 2013). This refers to the notion that policy development cannot be divided into clear stages of formulation and implementation (Bowe, Ball & Gold, 1992). Instead, it consists of four interrelated contexts: the context of policy influences, the context of policy text production, the context of policy practice and effects (enactment), and the context of longer-term policy outcomes.

An analysis of policy in relation to the first context, namely, the context of influence, involves examining influences on the origins of a policy. An analysis of policy in relation to the second context, namely, that of policy text production and of the text itself, can inform understanding about how a particular officially prescribed policy text emerged out of the background influences (Vidovich, 2013). An analysis of the context of ‘policy practice’ focuses on how a policy is interpreted and practiced in action, often within a climate of continuous change and competing demands. Finally, analyzing the context of longer-term policy outcomes, which is interrelated with political strategies, involves observing second-order influences in relation to social justice and equity (Rivzi & Lingard, 2010; Vidovich, 2013).

Using the ‘policy trajectory’ approach described above, national and institutional level policy processes in higher education in Chile were analyzed to examine the context of influences, the context of policy text production, the context of practices, and the context of longer-term outcomes. The international and ‘national’, or macro level, comprised the national government in Chile and other stakeholders in higher education in the country. The more local level of research involved studying three universities, with university administration participants being seen to be working at the meso (university administration) level, and academics within faculties and schools being seen to be working at the micro (academics’) level.

Specifically, the study presented sought to investigate the following research questions, each of which is based on the different contexts within the policy trajectory framework:

1. What are the key influences from global, national and local levels on curriculum policy transformations at the universities studied?
2. What are the key characteristics of the context of policy text production at the three universities studied and how are they produced?
3. What are the policy practices and effects (enactment) of curriculum policies at the universities studied in Chile?
4. What are the longer-term policy outcomes of the new curriculum policies and practices in the three universities, and for changing higher education policy-scapes, nationally in Chile, and globally?

## **Theoretical Framework**

As outlined above, a policy trajectory approach (Vidovich, 2013) underpinned the study. Two theoretical paradigms were employed at different points in the study. These are interpretivism and critical theory. Interpretivism allows the researcher to understand processes, relationships, group life, adaptations and motivations in small-scale, everyday life (Woods, 1992). Its concern is with understanding the subjective world of human experience, with ascertaining the intentions of actors, and with sharing in their experiences in order to understand their meanings and the actions they take in the light of them. The second position, critical theory, requires engagement in ideological critique and investigating which political and economic interests influence the cultural production of policy (Ingram, 2014). The use of two theoretical lenses allows one to engage in comprehensive policy analysis, spanning global to local levels.

## **Data Collection and Analysis**

Considering the nature of the research issue, a qualitative research approach, using semi-structured interviews and document analysis was deemed appropriate to study the universities chosen. The particular focus on the three universities as separate cases of curriculum policy transformations was deemed to be in accord with growing calls for detailed ‘situated case studies’ (Marginson, 2007) to better understand the dynamics of globalization in higher education. Such an approach entails the investigation of “a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between a phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (Yin, 2003, p.13).

Because the overall approach adopted throughout the study was one subscribing to the notion that it was essential to fully contextualize the universities studied, curriculum policy transformations were examined in relation to both time (temporally/historically) and place (spatially). The longstanding policy questions of who, what, why, when, where and how? (Simon, Olssen & Peters, 2009) informed the investigation, as did Creswell’s (2005) recommendation that multiple sources of evidence be gathered when conducting case studies.

Data collection took place between October 2015 and March 2016. It involved engagement in in-depth interviews with a total of 33 participants. Institutional documents at the university level were also gathered to complement the analysis.

## Significance of the Research

By investigating significant new radical curriculum policy transformations in Chile, and particularly in three research-intensive universities situated within a background of accelerating globalization and internationalization, the study makes an important contribution to knowledge in both theoretical and practical ways. The analysis is both temporal (highlighting key changes over time) and spatial (highlighting key developments in different jurisdictions which have been major sources of policy borrowing for higher education in Chile). Furthermore, the focus is both macro (studying ‘bigger picture’ curriculum policy transformations) and micro (in-depth institutional analysis). Such work is timely as universities not only in Chile, but internationally, are, as indicated already, accelerating their engagement with a competitive global knowledge society and seeking to transform their curriculum policies and practices.

The book is also significant and innovative since it builds a much-needed evidence base to inform university curriculum policy development in Chile for a global knowledge society at a time when curriculum is becoming a focal point of national and international competition. This should strengthen the position of those universities in the nation that are engaging with the competitive global marketplace, where ‘quality’ curricula are increasingly being defined in terms of their international and intercultural curriculum dimensions (de Wit, 2009). Additionally, university curriculum policy transformations in Chile are located within wider contexts of such international trends as policy borrowing and learning were investigated across different jurisdictions. Thus, the research necessitated examining the relationship between developments in Chile and those in other regional and national settings, especially in Latin America, Europe and the US, which have been influential sources of policy borrowing for higher education in the nation (Holm-Nielsen, Thorn, Brunner & Balán, 2005). Such international comparative analysis is also an important source of policy learning for Chile (Gaete & Morales, 2011).

Contemporary curriculum policy transformations in Chile are also located within historical patterns, both in terms of the universities studied and internationally. On this, the study was designed to facilitate an analysis of the nature and extent of influences and changes in curriculum policy over time (Lowe, 2009).

Furthermore, the research reported offers a more holistic approach to understanding the phenomenon of ‘internationalizing the curriculum’ than

hitherto has existed by incorporating an analysis of curriculum content, pedagogy and assessment. In the domain of internationalizing university curricula, the concept of ‘curriculum’ is most often understood in the narrow sense of relating primarily to content (de Wit, 2009; Knight, 2004; OECD, 2008). While there has also been a nascent interest in internationalization through such pedagogical innovations, as ‘inclusive pedagogy’, other components of teaching and learning in universities has barely registered on the research agenda (Moore, 2012).

The study employed an analytic framework that foregrounded potentially homogenizing global pressures as well as local agency, in the development of university curriculum policy. This framework could be applied in other areas of policy research. All too often, analyses of higher education policy developments in a background of globalization make the assumption that institutions passively respond to an omnipotent force of globalization ‘from above’. The approach adopted in the study conceived of globalization more in terms of complex two-way relationships extending between global and national (macro), university administrations (meso) and local (micro) level policy processes (Vidovich, 2013).

Finally, the research that underpinned the study involved conducting a detailed situated case study analysis of curriculum policy transformations to provide a basis for theory building. It was a response to the call for empirical policy research in ‘situated-study’ institutions to examine the way globalization pressures may manifest differently in individual universities (Marginson, 2007). Furthermore, since similarities and differences exist in the policies of the universities studied, the development of finely nuanced understandings regarding ‘local’ curriculum transformations within global and national trends was possible.

## **Structure of the Book**

The book contains nine chapters. The present chapter has provided an overview of what follows. It has indicated that the central aim of the study reported later was to analyze the curriculum transformations in higher education in three universities in Chile. Following this, Chapter Two establishes the background of the research by exploring both international developments and developments in Chile in relation to higher education curriculum policy.

Chapter Three examines the literature on key concepts used throughout the study. These include ‘university’, ‘curriculum’, ‘higher education

transformations’, ‘education policy’, ‘equity’, ‘globalization’, ‘neoliberalism’ and ‘global knowledge society’.

Chapter Four presents the results of the study in relation to the macro or national level, while chapters Five, Six, and Seven present the results in relation to the meso (university administration) and micro (academics’) levels for each university studied. Chapter Eight is a qualitative meta-analysis of results along the policy trajectory from global to local levels. Finally, Chapter Nine provides an overview of the study and makes recommendations for theory, for further research and for practice.

# CHAPTER TWO

## THE CONTEXT

### **Introduction**

This chapter is concerned with the background to the policy study reported later in this book. The first section provides a background to the history on higher education internationally and a broad overview on the international situation in relation to higher education currently. The second section provides an outline of higher education in Latin America currently, both historically and currently. The third section provides an outline of higher education and university settings in Chile, again opening with an outline of the historical background and going on to focus on current structures and what has been termed the ‘crisis in the education system’ in the country.

### **The International Situation of Higher Education**

The first universities in the world were established in the East, and particularly in what today is India and Pakistan around the 5th century (Lowe, 1998). From the 12th century, universities began to appear in the West. Since then, the institution has undergone various transformations. In the beginning, the Latin word ‘universitas’ was used to refer to any group or body of adults with common interests in education and having an independent legal status (Brunner, 1990). Thus, universities were initially conceived of somewhat as vocational institution for professional education. In particular, they were created to provide education activities in response to the professional, ecclesiastical and government needs of society (Perkin, 1991). Further, over centuries, new universities were established around the world.

In many countries, there were important changes in the university at all levels during the 20th century. For example, over the last three decades, there has been a decline in the study of such areas as philosophy, the classics and botany, while there has been an increase in the study of social sciences and engineering (Frank & Gabler, 2006). Concurrently, there has been an

increase in uptake of programs in economics, history and business. Also, the university's teaching and research agenda has changed in various ways.

According to some scholars, the very idea of a university is now changing (Chow & Leung, 2016). The old concept is being challenged by different groups, ranging from national governments to students. Some have suggested that there are three main trends that are having an effect on universities and reshaping them, namely, the knowledge economy, globalization, and the digital revolution (Chow & Leung, 2016). Accordingly, these are considered at various points throughout this work.

### ***Current international trends in higher education policy***

Internationally, recent decades have been characterized by rapid changes in higher education influenced especially by economic circumstances (Adams & Demaiter, 2008). The impact has been felt in the higher education curriculum in Latin America as much as anywhere else. Universities in Chile have been particularly affected by such circumstances.

Some scholars argue that the design of policy in higher education in various countries after the Second World War has been driven by three interrelated phenomena (Teichler, 1992). These are the quantitative expansion of institutions, the increase in belief in the need for, and the potential of, macrosocial planning and steering of higher education systems, and concerns about teaching and learning and 'reform' efforts in curriculum, teaching and learning.

Globalization has also been an enormous associated contributor. This phenomenon is defined as the flow of technology, economy, knowledge, people, values and ideas beyond borders (Knight, 2013). It has been experienced in many countries in different ways, due to differences in traditions, culture, and priorities (Knight & De Wit, 1997). In higher education, an example of a globalized policy is the European Bologna Agreement (Crosier & Parvera, 2013). This was arrived at in 1999 between ministers of education and university leaders in 29 countries, mostly in Europe. Its main aim was to create a European Higher Education Area (EHEA) by 2010. After its establishment, it promoted a major reform initiative that has been embraced by more than 46 countries.

In taking part in the Bologna process, each country is meant to make a voluntary decision that its higher education system will endorse the principles of the European Higher Education Area (European University

Association, 2015). In the case of European universities, some have pointed out that they have had certain unbreakable alliances since medieval times (Hotson, 2016). This indicates that some structures generated by the Bologna Agreement are not new in every regard.

The Bologna process has not aimed to harmonize national education systems. Rather, it has offered tools to connect them. The initial intention was to allow for the diversity of national systems and universities to be maintained, while the European Higher Education Area would help to provide transparency between higher education systems as well as facilitate recognition of degrees, academic qualifications and mobility, and encourage exchanges between institutions (European University Association, 2015). The agreement is based on ten objectives. An important feature also is that all participating countries have agreed to introduce a three-cycle degree system (of bachelor degrees, master degrees and doctor of philosophy degrees).

Of particular interest within current considerations is the literature on higher education policy transfer between Europe, the United States (US) and Chile. While some have argued that the Bologna process represents direct policy borrowing from US universities, others hold that a Europe-wide perspective is now powerful in higher education globally not only in shaping policy parameters throughout the continent, but also by way of having an increasing impact on other jurisdictions (Hartmann, 2008; Robertson & Keeling, 2008; McEldowney, Gaffikin & Perry, 2009). Equally, it is important not to overlook the strong resonance of policy discourses across sites, including a desire to internationalize university curricula for global citizenship.

Equally important in terms of international policy trends in higher education is The Lisbon Strategy (Garben, 2012). This is also known as the Lisbon Agenda or the Lisbon Process. It consists of a development plan, devised in 2000 by the European Council in Lisbon to assist the economy of the European Union. The strategy was aimed at making the European Union, the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion, by 2010 (European Parliament, 2000). However, while it was set out in March 2000, by 2010, most of its goals had not been achieved (Rodriguez, Warmerdam & Triomphe, 2010). Further, 2015, its Implementation Report pointed out that there were still four key priorities for the future: 1) enhancing the quality and relevance of learning and teaching; 2) fostering the employability of graduates throughout their

working lives; 3) making education systems more inclusive; 4) implementing agreed structural reforms (European Commission, 2015).

The policies considered so far reflect the commodification of higher education. On this, the use of the economic model of education in the international setting means that for more than three decades there has been a questioning of the university's purposes and responsibilities in society. Indeed, some have suggested that this had led to a crisis related to the very concept of the university (Chow & Leung, 2016).

A survey conducted in 2013 by the Boston Consulting Group identified five long-term trends in higher education (Wilson, Pagano, Henry & Puckett, 2014). Even though the inquiry related primarily to the US, it is instructive to detail these trends as it is likely that they are also having an influence on developments in other countries. The first trend relates to revenue from key sources that, like tuition and fee revenue, is continuing to fall because of a decline in enrolments and putting many institutions at severe financial risk. Secondly, demands are rising for a greater return than previously on investment in higher education because of the decline in earnings of some graduates. Thirdly, greater transparency than previously about student outcomes is becoming the norm. Fourthly, new business and delivery models are being used in universities, and new forms of curriculum provision are gaining ground. Finally, globalization of higher education is accelerating and has led to a growth in the internationalization of student bodies.

## **The Latin American Setting**

Higher education commenced in the Latin American sub-continent with the creation of universities. The first Latin American university was established in 1538, in Santo Domingo, which today is the Dominican Republic. At the time only a few universities existed in the world. In the 'new world', they were conceived in terms of their origins in Europe (Jiménez, 2007). Since then, the university system in most South American countries has been related closely to elites in society, being aimed at preparing students in a manner that involves the concentration of the cultural capital of society (Brunner, 2007).

During the struggles of the Latin American colonies for independence, universities promoted the ideals of freedom, justice and equality as being necessary for the construction of governments independent of the Spanish and Portuguese crowns. Nevertheless, only a minority of the population

throughout the sub-continent attended university for a long time (Esquivel, 2007). After World War Two the schooling rate grew from 2% to 18%. Further, the number of higher education institutions increased from around 75 in 1945, to 700 during the 1990s (Casanova, 1999). Additionally, the massification of universities became evident in the second half of the 20th century with a doubling of enrolments taking place from 1975 to 2005 (Holm-Nielelsen, Thorn, Brunner & Balán, 2005). As a result, Latin American higher education systems nowadays can, as with those in other parts of the world, be characterised by two trends, namely, expansion and diversification.

### *Structure of higher education in Latin America*

In terms of structure, higher education systems in most of the countries in Latin America consist of university higher education institutions and non-university institutions (Castro & Vazquez, 2006). The former have, as their primary objective, vocational training, engagement in research, dissemination of research, and deepening national and universal culture. Non-university education consists of centres that offer a lower level of education to prepare students for technical careers in response to the needs of the productive sector.

According to some scholars, the main features of the higher education system in Latin America over the last 25 years have been the advent of widespread growth, differentiation, regulations, accreditation, articulation between institutions, post graduate studies, commercialization of education, virtual education, and internationalization (Lopez, 2008). Also, as they see it, curriculum changes are the by-product of this new reality in higher education in the region. Each of the characteristics outlined above is now considered.

The widespread growth of enrolments in higher education throughout Latin America has been accompanied by a change in the elite character of the previous university curriculum. Additionally, a significant increase in the enrolment of females took place during the 20th century. Furthermore, there has been a regionalization of the curriculum. This implies that curricula have been adapted to make them relevant for different geographical, social and economic spheres. Moreover, the incorporation of gender perspectives, of minorities, and of other social groups, has also had an impact on Latin American university curricula. As a result, some institutions have experienced a transformation of curriculum content (Rama, 2012).

The last decades of the 20th century were also characterized by high levels of curriculum policy borrowing from other countries. Slowly, also, a trend towards institutional and curriculum specialization in higher education institutions emerged. This has particularly been the case in relation to those curriculum areas with the greatest potential to have an impact on the economy and where suitable professional equipment associated with the curriculum subjects in question, is available. Notable in this regard is the enormous expansion of private curricula offered, with many of them not certified following quality control inspections (Rama, 2012).

The last decades have also witnessed the beginning of a loss of autonomy amongst higher education institutions because of government initiatives related to the sector. This, in many cases, has meant the subordination of the development of curriculum offerings to the authorization of external bodies. Additionally, in many South American countries there has been an incentive for researchers to gain qualifications by going abroad (Rama, 2007). In some cases, this has resulted in graduates obtaining high wages, thus increasing the desire by individuals to study overseas. On return, they are then inclined to promote those curriculum emphases they experienced there.

Accreditation has also become an instrument to promote the transformation of the university curriculum worldwide. Regarding the situation in Latin America, the majority of countries have established legally based regulations that universities have to abide by in order to obtain accreditation. They have also created accreditation agencies, the composition, vision and mandate of which can determine the profile of future curricula (Espinoza & González, 2012).

Some scholars have also suggested that a dislocation exists between school systems and higher education institutions in Latin America (Rama, 2007; Lopez, 2008). The 'mercantilization' of education has driven this situation. Some have explained this by pointing to a rigidity in, and irrelevance of, university curricula in various situations. Moreover, such separation is used to highlight a stated need for the renewal of higher education systems and a search for improved quality within them.

The establishment of postgraduate studies is also a new feature of Latin American university systems. The 'market supply' of graduate courses consists of those leading to specialized undergraduate degrees, postgraduate diploma courses, masters degrees, doctorate degrees and post-doctorate degrees. In some cases, growth has accompanied an increase in disciplinary specialization and the emergence of transdisciplinary offerings (Rama,

2012). As a result, evaluating the quality of programs has become more important than previously. Additionally, international rankings such as those of the Times Higher Education World University Rankings and the Academic Ranking of World Universities, also known as the Shanghai Ranking, are examples of international evaluation approaches of influence in Latin America. At the same time, postgraduate offerings in Latin America diverge greatly from one country to another, making engagement in comparisons a difficult exercise (Ramirez, 2012).

Another characteristic of higher education currently, and not only in Latin America but around the world, is commercialization. This implies that because of competition for students, demand is strongly influencing the supply of university programs. In other words, commercial logic has generated a positioning of Latin American universities based on advertising rather than on academic merit (Rama, 2012).

Virtual education has also become popular in universities in Latin America (Rama, 2012). Indeed, there has been an enormous development of curriculum offerings under the modalities of virtual and distance education in the interest of promoting commercial flexibility. This has accompanied greater access than previously to information for students and teachers. Concurrently, the increase has also resulted in greater attention than previously paid to intellectual property issues in curriculum development. Moreover, in Latin America the expansion of virtual education has major limitations, including those associated with a lack of crucial organizational structures, especially in the public education sector. The private sector, on the other hand, has benefited much from this form of education (Rama, 2012).

Regarding funding, universities in the Latin American region draw largely from two main sources. First, there is public funding from national and local governments, with public resources provided in most countries for public universities. Secondly, there is private funding available to private higher education institutions. This comes largely from families and from student loans. Because of this situation, it is possible to distinguish between public and private universities. Additionally, such differentiation can reproduce inequalities because only families with high incomes can afford to attend the most expensive private universities (Livert & Gainza, 2017).

The funding of universities has become a particularly important topic of discussion in Latin American countries. This is related to a tendency in a number of them towards decreasing the amount of public finance being

made available for the higher education sector in relation to gross domestic product (GDP) (Marín-Gutiérrez, 2016). Recognition of this raises critical questions about evidence indicating that social development can be built on the intellectual capital of societies (Dudin & Lyasnikov, 2013; Amaya, Samaniego & Armada, 2017).

Internationalization is another important aspect of current higher education systems in the Latin American region. All sectors are involved in this strategic process. It started in the 1990s and led to expansion and diversification in international higher education enrolments, with Chile leading the way (Holm-Nielsen, Thorn, Brunner & Balan, 2005). Further, the international dimension of higher education is recognized as a two-way-phenomenon. On the one hand, it can act to try to bring about improvement in the quality and positive impact of higher education within societies. On the other hand, it can lead to emigration of the 'best and brightest' minds. Nevertheless, universities in many parts of the world are adapting to these conditions, mainly because of the influence of globalization. At the same time, only a few institutions are undergoing such transformations in Latin America, mainly in Chile and Peru (Colleges and Institutes Canada, 2014).

In terms of power distribution and policy, important differences can also be identified between Latin American countries and their higher education systems. During the second half of the 20th century, there were military dictatorships in several countries. All of them had an effect on the education field. In some cases, democratic restoration after periods of military rule resulted in the reinstatement of democratic government in universities, the removal of restrictive access for students, and the restoration of free education (Rodríguez, 2006). Chile is an exception in this regard. Here, the end of the dictatorship of Pinochet did not mean the restoration of democratic participation within universities or the end of a profit-seeking approach in higher education. On the contrary, there has been a deepening of privatization and authoritarianism.

### ***Current policies in Latin American higher education***

In the late 1990s, Casanova (1999) noted that Latin American policies in higher education were framed in a triangular manner. The triangle points are the state, the market and the professional system. It is arguable that the same pattern exists today. Likewise, policy, regarding governance of higher education in the Latin American region seems to conform to an international trend taking place that emphasizes bureaucratic and political authority to the detriment of academic authority (Torres & Schugurensky, 2002). Moreover,