



**University of  
Nottingham**

UK | CHINA | MALAYSIA

# **David against Goliath? Media representations of a policy of tuition fee removal in a highly marketised society**

Dr Patricio Sanchez-Campos  
Department of Marketing  
Nottingham University Business School  
04<sup>th</sup> April 2024

**CENTRE  
FOR  
GLOBAL  
HIGHER  
EDUCATION**



## The policy agenda of markets in HE

Reduction of public spending

Removed regulation and obstacles fostering market growth

Massification of the sector – 263 million by 2025  
(UNESCO, 2023)

Increased privatization and commodification of the sector

Tuition fees to cover the cost of a massive sector



# Discourse of the Goliath

- Access to university: one of its most significant achievements.
- Tuition fees as a price mechanism have improved competition and efficiency in the sector
- Students and families can select from competing HEIs to invest in their children's future job security.
- Student fees are considered an investment in an individual's future earning capacity.
- HEIs are considered customer-oriented enterprises responding to student consumers' needs for an educational service paid at a price.
- HE is, thus, a private good





# The controversies

Lack of perfect information as a basic premise in unregulated markets.

discourses of excellence and high quality, attracting the best-qualified applicants.

HE as a private commodity and the consumption model

Students and families forced to get loans and massive debt

Instead of nurturing publicly oriented citizens...commercially oriented individuals



# Discourse of the David

- A vibrant democratic culture recognizes HE as a public good and HEIs as a place where students can gain a public voice.
- Tuition fees as a price result in a highly segmented HE system.
- Tuition fees jeopardise a citizen's right to be educated, regardless of their financial means promoting educational inequities, fostering social and academic segregation, and increasing social inequality.
- Funding HE privately appears to impose not only an individual financial burden but also has repercussions that extend beyond the individual level, affecting society as a whole.





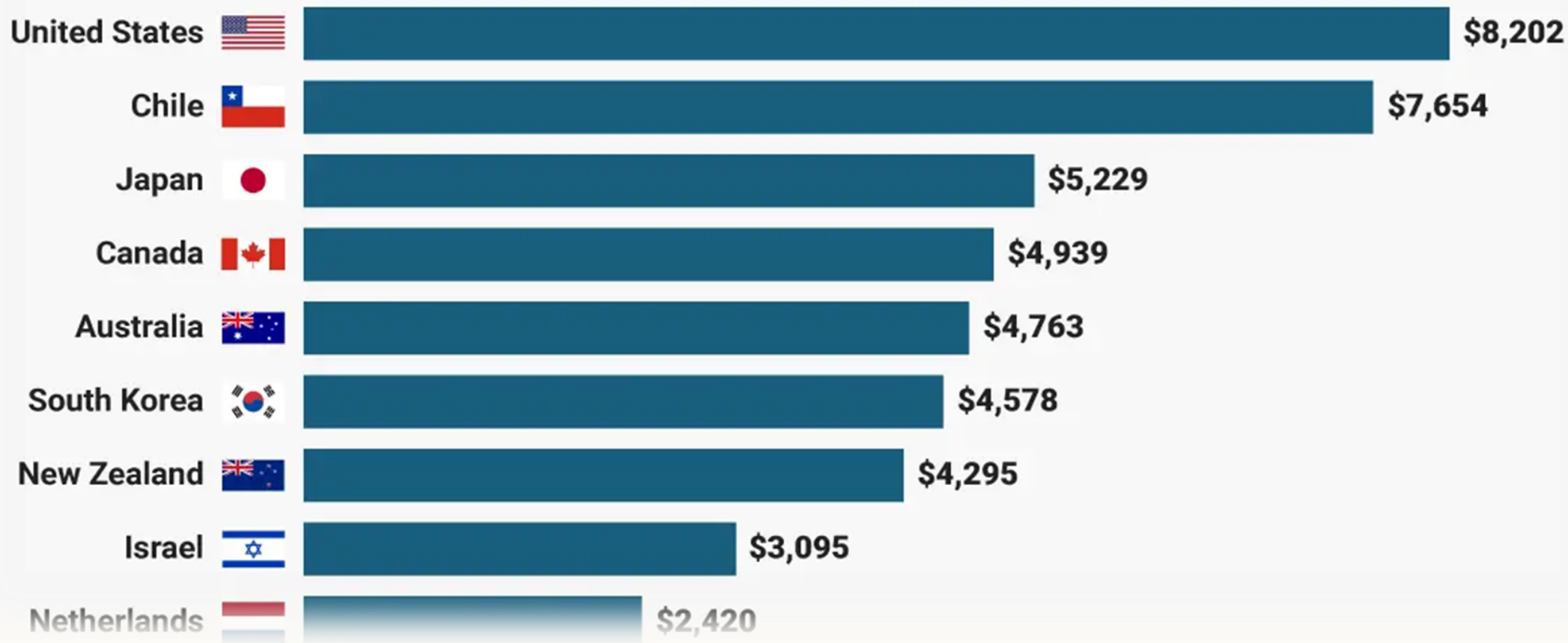
# The miracle of Chile?





# AVERAGE ANNUAL PUBLIC TUITION FEES

Fees at the bachelor level for public institutions, 2015/16





## A failure of marketisation





---

## An effort to dismantle marketisation?

**Gratuidad:** Policy of Tuition Fees Removal in HE

‘...to reposition HE in society’ (Bachelet, 2016: 2)  
and a step closer towards the major political long-  
term goal of reinstating HE as a fundamental right’  
(Bachelet, 2016: 6-7) .”

(Bachelet, Michelle. 2016. ‘Presidential Message No. 110-364 Addressed to the H. Chilean Parliament on reference to the HE Reform Bill’



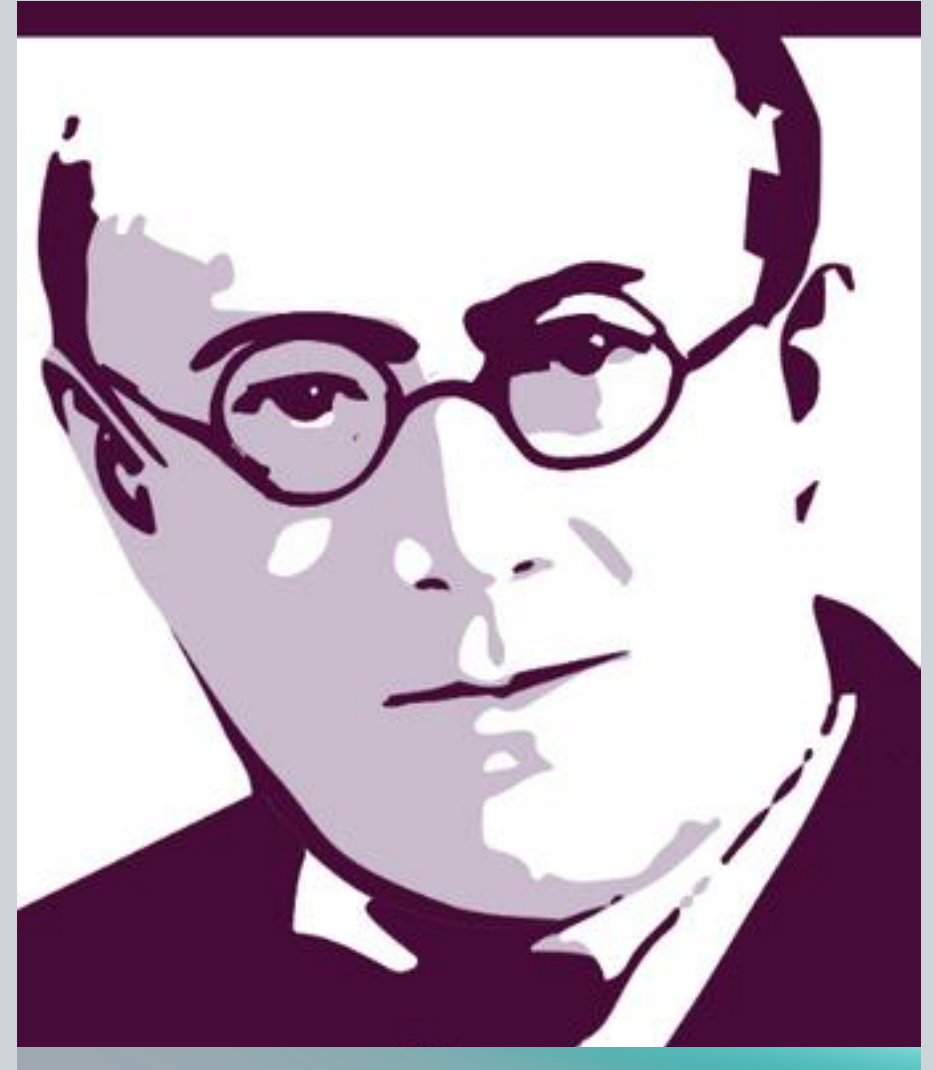


# A David against a Goliath?



# David against Goliath: Polanyi's double movement?

- Social inequalities can be attributed to the extensive marketization of a market that is being **disembedded** from its social institution (Polanyi, 1944, 2001)
- **Disembedded markets** erode the sense of solidarity among individuals inciting to significant social crises and prompting a variety of demands for social regulations (Polanyi 2001, pp. 136-138).
- **Double movement:** When market-driven policies, as seen in highly marketised HE systems, have been stretched to their limits, societies will endeavor to reconfigure these market-oriented policies (Polanyi, 1944; 2001).





# The research

How is the public policy of Gratuidad (free education) discursively represented in media articles?

Qualitative

Fairclough's approach CDA: TODA (Fairclough, 1992)

28 articles from El Mercurio & El Mostrador – 22,179 words  
11th March 2014 - 16th May 2019

“Estudiantes” (students), “Educacion Superior” (higher education), “Gratuidad” (free education), “Igualdad” (equality), and “Equidad” (equity).

# Findings

3 topoi constructed from CDA:

- ✓ Gratuidad as a **flawed, ill-thought-out and mistrusted policy**
- ✓ Gratuidad **an obstacle in promoting equality**
- ✓ Gratuidad **as a social revolution for the future**



# Gratuidad as a flawed, ill-thought-out and mistrusted policy

‘... the effects and impacts of the reform **are so far limited**. To say that **there will be** better quality opportunities, greater equality, less segregation...a more organised HE system, **is not serious at all**. This belongs to the **world of Bacon's idols**: failure to reason clearly and confuse reality with wishes...**the promised** “free education” has created **more chaos than benefits...**’

(El Mercurio, 24/04/2016)





# Gratuidad as a flawed, ill-thought-out and mistrusted policy

‘There is still no good reason ...it is **costly, doubtful** from an access point of view, and **highly regressive**. The argument that **access to education is a social right** and that requires ‘de-commodification’ is **theoretically and empirically weak**’

(El Mercurio 23/02/2015)

‘In 2011, the year in which **the fallacy of free education was installed** in Chile... a large part of Chileans prefer to act freely rather than be **suppressed by the machinery of social equality**... a long time ago we said that the reform [Gratuidad] would cause **serious damage** to our young people... If approved, it will undoubtedly turn them into dependents of socialism, into **slaves of the State**’

(El Mercurio 11/11/2015)





# Gratuidad as an obstacle in promoting equality

‘...**a profound** reform of tertiary education **to all** students, **from all** spheres, ending profits in HE, **inclusive access to all, universal free tuition for all**...A society without privileges and without discrimination should be reflected in decisions regarding **every student in HE**’.

(El Mostrador 12/06/2015)

‘...**Why** poorer students who want to study here [private HEI] **are not able to receive support?** but Council of Rector universities [public HEIs] that are of lower quality and hold lower levels of accreditation get that support? ...**We are one of the very few** [HEIs] that have students **from all neighbourhoods, from all counties, well balanced**. We **are a radically inclusive university**; more than 80% of our students receive some kind of financial support. **60% of vulnerable students do not attend public HEIs** ... If their criteria are social justice, I would like them [government] to be consistent”.

(El Mercurio 24/05/2015)







# Gratuidad as a social revolution and a force for radical social change

‘**This transformation** represents moving from an education conceived as a consumer good to an education recognised as **a guaranteed social right**. Above all, the approved reform is **historic**, and will offer a new educational paradigm and the promise of **greater equality and inclusion**.’

(El Mercurio 24/04/2016)

‘**A milestone was met** this afternoon when the MPs dispatched the reform...By advancing on free HE, **we want to build** a more equitable country with **equal opportunities for all**.’

(El Mercurio 25/01/2018)





---

## Gratuidad as a social revolution and a force for radical social change

‘...**an instance of** reunion, of equality, inclusion, social cohesion and progress for the country. **Chile is better today than yesterday.**’

(El Mercurio 25/01/2018)



# Discussion (1)

## 01

Discourses keep legitimising the neoliberal policies in HE and media discourses reinforce the social power of certain groups of intellectuals and influential people.

## 02

Both media sources' discourses perpetuate a narrative of successful market-oriented policies, freedom of choice and HE as a commodity.

## 03

Confusion and inconsistency is validated with several lexical choices used in the text.



## Discussion (2)

# 04

Uncertainty and vulnerability of private HE students reproduce a negative impact of Gratuidad on private HE students

# 05

The media discourses reproduce notions of a better future when HE is free

# 06

Potential power and wide-ranging influence of Gratuidad, not only in the HE sector, but also in the rest of Chilean society



# Conclusion

- **Goliath:**

- The hegemonic market language is strongly replicated and defended in media, hindering any attempts to alter the social order, and undermining the sense of solidarity and collectivism produced by a disembedded HE sector.
- Free choice and individualism as a part of the market ideology are resisted against any notion of social justice and equality.
- The **disembeddedness** of the market in HE is supported by discourses that reproduced

- **David:**

- Gratuidad emerges as an image and step (small) toward a more equitable society.
- The policy change, reproduced as a significant turning point in the HE system, can be portrayed as the **social demand for regulation**.
- Gratuidad's attempts to reshape market-oriented policies in HE could be interpreted as a Polanyian's **Double Movement** toward a more equitable society
- Gratuidad rising force to re-embedd the HE sector to society.



**“it will have to get worse before it gets better”**



University of  
Nottingham

UK | CHINA | MALAYSIA

# Thank you



# References

- Bellei, C., Cabalin, C., & Orellana, V. (2014). The 2011 Chilean student movement against neoliberal educational policies. *Studies in Higher Education*, 39(3), 426–440. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2014.896179>
- Brown, R. (2008). Higher education and the market. *Perspectives: Policy and Practice in Higher Education*, 12(3), 78–83. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13603100802181125>
- Cabalin, C. (2012). Neoliberal Education and Student Movements in Chile: Inequalities and Malaise. *Policy Futures in Education*, 10(2), 219–228. <https://doi.org/10.2304/pfie.2012.10.2.219>
- Cabalin, C. (2015). Mediatizing higher education policies: discourses about quality education in the media. *Critical Studies in Education*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17508487.2014.947300>
- Cardoso, S., Carvalho, T., & Santiago, R. (2018). From Students to Consumers: reflections on the marketisation of Portuguese higher education. *European Journal of Education*, Vol. 46, No. 2
- Carpentier, S. (2021). Evolución de matrícula en Chile. <https://www.mifuturo.cl/bases-de-datos-de-matriculados/>
- Connell, R. (2013). The neoliberal cascade and education: an essay on the market agenda and its consequences. *Critical Studies in Education*, 54(2), 99–112. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17508487.2013.776990>
- Cuthbert, R. (2010). Students as customers? *Higher Education Review*, 42(3).
- Dill, D. D. (2003). Allowing the Market to Rule: The Case of the United States. *Higher Education Quarterly*, 57(2), 136–157. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-2273.00239>
- Espinoza, O. (2008). Creating (in) equalities in access to higher education in the context of structural adjustment and post-adjustment policies: The case of Chile. *Higher Education*, 55(3), 269–284. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-007-9054-8>
- Fairclough, N. (1993b). Critical Discourse Analysis and the Marketization of Public Discourse: The Universities. *Discourse & Society*, 4(2), 133–168. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0957926593004002002>
- Fairclough, N. (2003). *Analysing Discourse: Textual Analysis for Social Research*. Taylor & Francis Ltd.
- Fleet, N., & Guzmán-Concha, C. (2013). Mass Higher Education and the 2011 Student Movement in Chile: Material and Ideological Implications. *Bulletin of Latin American Research*, 36(2), 160–176. <https://doi.org/10.1111/blar.12471>
- Giroux, H. A. (2020). *Neoliberalism's war on higher education* (Vol. 1).
- Government of Chile. (2015). Modifying public sector budget Act No. 20,882 of 2016. Bill No. 20.890 Financing free access to higher education institutions 2016, Art. 6 (b) & (c). Ministry of Finance.
- Guzmán-Valenzuela, C., & Barnett, R. (2013). Marketing time: Evolving timescapes in academia. *Studies in Higher Education*, 38(8), 1120–1134. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2013.833032>
- Harvey, D. (2005). *Neoliberalism: A brief history*. Oxford University Press.
- Hemsley-Brown, J. (2011). Market heal thyself: the challenges of a free market in higher education. *Journal of Marketing for Higher Education*, 21(2), 115–132. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08841241.2011.623832>
- Kremerman, M., & Páez, A. (2015). Endeudar para gobernar y mercantilizar: el caso del CAE. 1–33.





# References

- Lynch, K. (2006a). Neo-Liberalism and Marketisation: The Implications for Higher Education. *European Educational Research Journal*, 5(1), 1–17. <https://doi.org/10.2304/eeerj.2006.5.1.1>
- Marginson, S. (2007a). The public/private divide in higher education: A global revision. *Higher Education*, 53(3), 307–333. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-005-8230-y>
- Marginson, S. (2018). Public/private in higher education: a synthesis of economic and political approaches. *Studies in Higher Education*, 43(2), 322–337. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2016.1168797>
- Martin, J., & Warwick, M. (2014). *Education not for Sale*.
- Meyer, H., John, E., Chankseliani, M., & Uribe, L. (2013). The crisis of higher education access—A crisis of justice. in *The crisis of higher education access—a crisis of justice*. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-6209-230-3\\_1](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-6209-230-3_1)
- Molesworth, M., Scullion, R., & Nixon, E. (2011). *The Marketisation of Higher Education and the Student as Consumer* (Taylor & F).
- Naidoo, R., & Jamieson, I. (2005). Empowering participants or corroding learning? Towards a research agenda on the impact of student consumerism in higher education. *Journal of Education Policy*, 20(3), 267–281. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02680930500108585>
- OECD. (2016). *Education at a Glance 2016: OECD Indicators*, OECD Publishing, Paris,. <https://doi.org/10.1787/eag-2016-en>.
- Polanyi, K. (2001). *The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of Our Time* (3rd edition). Beacon Press.
- Saunders, D. (2010). Neoliberal Ideology and Public Higher Education in the United States. *Journal for Critical Education Policy Studies*, 8(1), 41–77.
- Shumar, Wesley. (1997). *College for sale: a critique of the commodification of higher education*. Falmer Press.
- Simbürger, E., & Guzmán-Valenzuela, C. (2019). Framing educational policy discourse in neoliberal contexts: debates around the public university in a Chilean newspaper. *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management*, 9508. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1360080X.2019.1687267>
- Somma, N. (2012). The Chilean student movement of 2011-2012: Challenging the marketization of education. *Interface: A Journal for and about Social*, 4(2), 296–309.
- Tight, M. (2019). The neoliberal turn in Higher Education. *Higher Education Quarterly*, 73(3), 273–284. <https://doi.org/10.1111/hequ.12197>
- Ugarte, J. J. (2014). Chile's Universities: Reasons for Success. *International Higher Education*, 77. <https://doi.org/10.6017/ihe.2014.77.5684>
- Wedlin, L. (2008). *University marketization: the process and its limits*. Portland Press Ltd.