Program innovation in higher education: An exploratory study of the creation of new degree programs in Chilean universities

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Many researchers have studied differentiation in higher education systems, considering the multiplicity of new programs as one of its relevant features. In Chile, as well as in Latin America, there is ample literature on emerging higher education institutions and their growing differentiation, but very little or almost none devoted to emerging programs and the program dimension of differentiation.

Using the concept of *degree program innovation* (DPI), as one particular type of innovation carried out by universities in its national context, this study describes and provides documentation about the new programs created by Chilean universities over a period of 28 years (1980-2008).

This dissertation builds on previous research and intends to assess the most relevant assumptions about the factors that seem to be promoting and/or limiting DPI. Therefore, together with describing DPI in Chilean universities, this research explores the main factors related to the emergence of new programs, thus contributing new evidence from Latin America to the international debate on program differentiation.

I report the magnitude of DPI in Chile, as well as its evolution over time. I also describe its distribution among different types of universities. I show how DPI occur in a higher rate in some universities compared to other, and discuss how a number of context and institutional factors figure simultaneously as considerations that need to taken into account for a better understanding. I suggest that changes in these factors are intertwined, vary in time, and relate to different universities in varied ways, promoting and/or limiting DPI differently across the whole period of study.