

Book Review: Private Universities in Latin America: Research and Innovation in the Knowledge Economy

Edited by Gustavo Gregorutti and Jorge Enrique Delgado.
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Established on the basis of a Napoleonic, professional training mission, universities in Latin America have not centered their activities in conducting research. This statement applies to traditional public universities, though Latin America's leading universities boast some research tradition. Contemporary worldwide trends such as the increased economic value of knowledge, the demand of private firms to develop research and innovation, the multiplication of accountability stages, and the rise of new modes of academic activity have led public and private universities in Latin America to increase their research footprint. In most cases, public universities have driven this push. Private universities, rather than developing comprehensive research portfolios, tend to cover niches of research that are usually funded by international agencies or other non-governmental organizations. Thus, *Private Universities in Latin America: Research and Innovation in the Knowledge Economy* is mainly about outliers, what we might call the research underdogs of higher education (HE), and how they have grown due to or despite public policy.

At least two main features of the volume make it a relevant contribution to the literature. First, the division into two core parts, public policy toward private higher education (PHE) and cases of private universities dealing with research. Although public policy is not usually a driving force in the emergence of the private sector, it plays a critical role in supervising it and, to a greater or lesser extent, indirectly funding institutions and their research. The first part of the book clearly addresses main policy approaches and how those regulatory frameworks may have contributed to or inhibited research in private universities. The second part focuses on leading cases of private universities developing research portfolios.

Second, another contribution of the edited book lies in its geographical scope. The volume includes chapters on seven countries in the region (incorporating most major Latin American HE systems) and dedicates a chapter to an often neglected, but highly dynamic area: Central America. The reality of educational

systems and research in Latin America depicts a complex, heterogeneous panorama that includes great disparities across the region and within each country. The book addresses that complexity without any intention of generalizing, but rather of indicating patterns of research in private universities in the region. The brief introductory chapter by the editors, Jorge Enrique Delgado and Gustavo Gregorutti, sets the tone of the whole edition. Most chapters highlight the role of PHE institutions that have adapted and generated applied research in a context not usually favorable toward PHE. The book provides support for the idea that the private sector still challenges public dominance in Latin America and that the challenge includes the incursion into research by an increasing number of private institutions.

Chapters 2 and 3, by Claudio Rama and Gustavo Gregorutti and by Jorge Enrique Delgado, respectively, introduce the role of research in private universities in the region. Chapter 2 addresses the main challenges that research, as a relatively new development, poses to private universities in the region. It does so by exploring the role of the private university sector toward the promotion of research activities. A second part of the chapter is more policy-oriented than the first, centering on ways that PHE institutions could enhance their research mission. Chapter 3 presents an overview of the Latin American science and technology (S&T) system and how it relates to research productivity in the university sector with a clear focus on private institutions. The chapter gives essential background information, backed up with key indicators (investment in research and development, human resources, publications, patents, etc.). One of the critical points relates to main differences within Latin America (e.g., overwhelming concentration of research and development investment in a few countries). Chapter 2 traces historical developments in the last 30 years while Chapter 3 relies on comparisons of universities through international and regional rankings. Although in most rankings PHE institutions are underrepresented, some cases such as the Catholic University of Chile challenge conventional wisdom, since it surpasses

traditional and highly regarded public institutions in the region. These chapters overwhelmingly highlight the role of research in private universities, setting it up as an ideal type that most PHE institutions should have on their horizon. Although this emphasis is understandable since it is the focus of the book, private and public HE systems tend to be highly diverse with a large proportion of teaching-centered universities, and these types of institutions also fulfill important functions.

The ensuing two chapters highlight the role of governmental policies in the development (or lack of it) of research-oriented private universities in three countries (Argentina, Chile, and Colombia). In Chapter 4, Argentine scholars Ana García de Fanelli and Ángela Corengia, link public policy toward (private) universities in Argentina with two cases. Their contribution moves beyond description by utilizing sociological theories (neo-institutionalist and internalist approaches) to address their guiding research question: how Argentine private universities have reacted and adjusted to policy changes in their environment, namely quality assurance and research funding. Besides its analytical approach, the chapter contributes to the existing literature in two main ways. First, the authors address two much overlooked research areas (organizational responses and private universities). The role of the private sector and how public policy may have shaped it has been largely left outside of mainstream academic inquiry in Argentina (and elsewhere). Second, in Argentina, unlike other South American countries such as Brazil, Chile, and Peru, governmental subsidies toward PHE institutions are rather limited (scholarships to doctoral students, research positions for faculty, and competitive research grants). One is left wondering to what extent these trends may signal a new path with lesser governmental restrictions on PHE institutions in the future.

In another analytic chapter, Pedro Pineda utilizes comparative policy analysis to study policy changes in Chile and Colombia. The author examines the institutionalization of research in private universities in those countries. The chapter uses the most similar cases approach (in terms of external pressures) but with different results (varied research performance at private universities). Although the two systems have presented similar contextual forces to promote research productivity within their HE systems, the main differences, the author claims, are based on the governmental approach. He concludes that scientific productivity from PHE in both countries can be explained better by the relationship between government and universities (public policy toward PHE) than by inherent missions or organizational, internal approaches (e.g., the entrepreneurial nature of certain universities).

The next part of the book (Chapters 6 through 12) dedicates itself to successful research ventures in Latin American

universities. It predominantly showcases organizational, internal factors that may have played a critical role in the development of research within relatively new PHE institutions. In some chapters, usually the most descriptive ones, the stress on internal factors has led to a reductionist view that does not give much importance to external factors. In the opening chapter of this part, Francisco J. Cantú-Ortiz analyzes the case of the Monterrey Institute of Technology (ITESM). A traditional Mexican teaching-oriented institution, ITESM has developed policies to promote a research portfolio. The author advocates for the use of a managerial model (Research Innovation Ecosystems) to increase research visibility in private universities. Unlike previous chapters, this one is highly prescriptive. It gives predominant space to key elements required by a university to be able to develop a research portfolio (e.g., full-time faculty, doctoral programs, institutional resources, infrastructure, postdoctoral positions, etc.), overlooking external facilitators and constraints.

Stephen P. Wanger and Edgar ApanecatI-Ibarra detail a case similar to the one analyzed in the previous chapter. The entry addresses how Puebla State Popular Autonomous University, a private university in Mexico, has modified its mission to incorporate research as a core part of the institutional identity. Key findings relate to how the university adapted to external forces through the development of strategic planning, the establishment of an interdisciplinary center of graduate programs, and overarching changes in the vision of the institution. The authors may overemphasize the role of the university and the university actors in the changes that took place at the institution, not giving enough credit to alternative explanations.

As Chapters 2 and 3 emphasize, Latin America is a highly heterogeneous region, with large differences in levels of development. One of the usually overlooked sub-regions is Central America. Nanette Svenson, in Chapter 8, addresses what she calls “Central American outliers.” The chapter starts with a brief but comprehensive overview of HE in the region. It indicates a steady increase in the number of HEIs, both public and private. On the latter, there is a specific mention of the growth of teaching-centered for-profit institutions. However, the focus is on exceptional cases, what Daniel Levy studied as “private research centers.” Backed by international organizations such as the Inter-American Institute of Cooperation on Agriculture, the US Agency for International Development, and the Kellogg Foundation, just to mention a few, the list of institutions include the well-known FLACSO (also present in other Latin American countries such as Ecuador, Argentina, and Chile). These institutions grant degrees (undergraduate and graduate) and specialize in a single academic discipline related to environmental and agricultural sciences or social sciences. The author mentions that these institutions have

developed over time, but one wonders how sustainable are these types of international endeavors.

Elizabeth Balbachevsky and Antonio José Botelho tackle the huge Brazilian case. With one of the largest shares of PHE in the region (73.3% of undergraduate enrollments), the private sector encompasses small to large institutions, nonprofit to for-profit ones. Despite public policies lenient toward PHE, the government does not provide public research funding to researchers in the private sector. The chapter analyzes two units within prestigious private institutions: the School of Economics at the Getulio Vargas Foundation and the Department of Computer Science at the Pontifical Catholic University of Rio de Janeiro. It inquires into what institutional arrangements have led to those cases flourishing in a position of disadvantage compared to the public sector. In both cases, these institutions are covering niches in the market that bring private investment as the main source of sustainability for the development of those programs. This is a key strategy in the private sector when facing public funding limitations: focus on relatively low investment fields that can provide relatively high rates of return to investment.

In one of the most descriptive chapters in the collection, José Anicama and José Livia (Chapter 10) explore the development of a research agenda within Peru's private Cayetano Heredia University. It is the case of a private university focused on mostly one field of study: health sciences. The authors provide an overview of Peruvian HE and the structure of scientific research in that country. At the policy level, the authors highlight the variability of approaches toward PHE. On the organizational level, the chapter identifies structural, organizational, and management changes that led the university to increase its research portfolio. As highlighted in other chapters, private universities like this one rely on external, nongovernmental funding to promote their research through a series of activities, projects, awards, and publications. Unfortunately, the chapter ends without fulfilling one of its promises: telling the readers how the experience of this university could be useful for other universities and other countries.

In an analytical chapter, Marcelo Rabossi applies new institutional economic theory to the study of two relatively new private universities in Argentina. The main goal of the study is to understand how those PHE institutions have developed recruiting and incentive strategies to promote higher levels of research productivity. The analysis is carried out by accounting for external restrictions (low levels of governmental funding channeled to PHE institutions) and internal challenges (reduced number of researchers in the private sector compared to the public one). The chapter contributes to a more in-depth understanding of internal conditions that may lead to higher research productivity

in some universities. Without neglecting the role of external factors, the author shows how recruitment, salary, and promotion policies coupled with working environment conditions make a difference when it comes to the enhancement of the universities' research missions.

The last chapter of Part 2 by Enrique Martínez Larrechea and Adriana Chiancone explores the case of ORT University's biotechnology graduate program. In a similar vein as the previous chapter by Marcelo Rabossi, this entry analyzes organizational features that have guided the university toward more research productivity. Among the main economic incentives offered to faculty, the authors cite institutional funds available to conduct research, research productivity (publications) bonuses, and the promotion of researchers to full-time status. The chapter addresses in a critical way the role of organizational incentives in a context of recent governmental support to research in Uruguay.

The editors, Gustavo Gregorutti and Jorge Enrique Delgado, close the volume with a brief concluding chapter. The authors provide the reader an overview of the main ideas developed throughout the book, tying the pieces together to address the main goal as stated in the introduction. The concluding paragraphs bring to the forefront that while some private universities in Latin America may tend to increase their research activities, there are many PHE institutions that may not need to modify their missions since they are already satisfying other societal and market demands. Although the book is about Latin America, a good addition to the conclusion might have been a statement on how the trends in that region may be mirroring those already taking place elsewhere or how other regions have followed similar trends.

To sum up, this edited book covers its multi-country subject matter with each chapter taking its author's chosen approach. Alongside the many chapters that are mostly descriptive, analytical chapters incorporate some theoretical tools of leading studies of PHE, though the book would have benefitted from more such integration. The book highlights a variegated landscape of PHE institutions that are increasing their research productivity. The diversity leaves aside a mix of religious HE institutions (usually the oldest and often the highest ranked in a country's private sector) that still play an important research role. In contrast, the volume targets and brings us fresh information on universities deriving from more recent waves of PHE. This book, whatever limitations one might find, is a welcome contribution to the overall discussion on PHE in Latin America among scholars, policy-makers, and practitioners.

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