

## ARTICLE

# CURRENT CHILEAN SOCIOLOGY: TRAINING, GRADUATION AND PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE<sup>1</sup>

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**ABSTRACT:** The article analyzes the effects of enrollment expansion in the careers of sociology in Chile, in the last two decades. The main argument is that the enrollment expansion is related to the increase in the number of schools and the overcrowding of the university system, as a whole, since the 1990s. The analysis of the problem of sociology students' retention, the differences by type of school, and the issue of jobs is based on the data provided by the Ministry of Education for the period 2009-2019. This information is contrasted with historical data about the way sociology has emerged and institutionalized in Chile, starting in the late 1950s, and its later stages of professional and scientific development. After the analysis, it is possible to account for the current conditions in which are carried out the training, graduation, and labor insertion processes of those who have opted for sociology careers in different universities.

**Keywords:** Sociology; Chile; Higher education; Training; Labor integration.

## SOCIOLOGIA CHILENA HOJE: TREINAMENTO, FORMATURA E PRÁTICA PROFISSIONAL

**RESUMO:** Este artigo analisa os efeitos da expansão das matrículas em cursos de sociologia no Chile nas últimas duas décadas. Argumenta que esta expansão está relacionada ao processo de expansão e massificação do campus que o sistema universitário como um todo vem experimentando desde os anos 90 até os anos mais recentes. Com base nos dados fornecidos pelo Ministério da Educação do Chile para o período 2009-2019, são analisados o problema da retenção e graduação dos estudantes de sociologia, as diferenças por tipo de campus e a questão da inserção no mercado de trabalho. Estas informações contrastam com a apresentação de informações históricas sobre o surgimento e institucionalização da sociologia no Chile, a partir do final dos anos 50, e suas etapas subsequentes de desenvolvimento profissional e científico. Desta forma, são dadas contas das condições atuais em que são realizados os processos de formação, graduação e emprego daqueles que optaram por cursos de sociologia nas diferentes universidades em que foram ensinados.

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<sup>1</sup> The translation of this article into English was funded by Conselho Nacional de Desenvolvimento Científico e Tecnológico - CNPq/Brasil.

**Palavras-chave:** Sociología; Chile; Ensino superior; Formação; Inserção no mercado de trabalho.

## LA SOCIOLOGÍA CHILENA ACTUAL: FORMACIÓN, EGRESO Y EJERCICIO PROFESIONAL

**RESUMEN:** El artículo analiza los efectos que ha traído la expansión de las matrículas en las carreras de sociología en Chile, en los últimos dos decenios. Se sostiene que dicha expansión se relaciona al proceso de aumento de los planteles y masificación que el sistema universitario, en su conjunto, ha venido experimentando desde la década de los noventa hasta años más recientes. En base a los datos proporcionados por el Ministerio de Educación para el periodo 2009-2019, se analiza el problema de la retención y titulación de los estudiantes de sociología, las diferencias por tipo de plantel y el tema de la inserción laboral. Esta información es contrastada con la presentación de antecedentes históricos de la fase de surgimiento e institucionalización de la sociología en Chile, a partir de fines de los años cincuenta, y sus etapas posteriores de desarrollo profesional y científico. De ese modo, se logra dar cuenta de las actuales condiciones en las cuales se llevan a cabo los procesos formativos, de egreso e inserción laboral de quienes han optado por las carreras de sociología en las diferentes universidades en las cuales estas han sido impartidas.

**Palabras claves:** Sociología; Chile; Educación superior; Formación; Inserción laboral

## INTRODUCTION

In Chile, the university higher education system has operated since the mid-1980s like a market system. On one side, some universities compete to capture enrollment; on the other hand, students are found, who join the list of consumers of the provision of educational services. It is possible to distinguish between the phases and the historical development of the process leading to this situation. The first covers the period between the beginning of the 1980s and 2000s, being the result of a series of reforms imposed in 1981 by the military regime (1973-1990) by that time in power. Along with carrying out a redesign of the institutionality of the tertiary system, the implementation of this period is to deposit the provision of tertiary training in the private sector, and the regulation of quality standards that will have to be revised to the market dynamics. There was practically a complete lack of a public institution aimed at ensuring quality in higher education, as well as information systems that would support informed decision-making by new students. Among other consequences, this lack of regulation generated a drastic increase in the number of higher education institutions (Universities, Technical Training Centers “CFT-*Centros de Formación Técnica*”, and Professional Institutes “IP-*Institutos Profesionales*”) as well as the volume of students who entered the system. This is how total enrollment at the tertiary level quadrupled between 1990 and 2015.

The second phase begins in the mid-2000s with the creation of the National System for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (SINACES-*Sistema Nacional de Aseguramiento de la Calidad en la Educación Superior*), through which a public institution is created in charge of supervising the creation and operation of Universities, CFT and IP, establishing mechanisms for licensing, accreditation, access to public resources and, eventually, also, the establishment of institutions. The proliferation of higher education institutions of dubious quality linked to the existence of significant student dropout rates (and debt) justified the advent of an institutional approach exclusively to ensure quality within the scope of tertiary training, one of whose central labors consists of making available information to new students that enables decision-making when choosing a career and higher education institution to pursue tertiary studies.

The representation of tertiary-level students as a subject who must make an election – ideally informed – about the offer of existing careers in the country, persists throughout the two phases of the selected period. They also last, up to date, despite the improvements introduced in the second phase of this process, gaps in information that continue to result in the election, in good measure, of a “blind decision”. While the incorporation of information systems on careers and institutions has been useful in favoring informed decision-making by new students, the current information continues to be partial and incomplete, which is why: 1) the duration of university careers in the country is mostly concentrated around to 5 years; However, official information on retention in regular programs only reports until the third year; 2) the percentage of students who managed to complete their training process is not known; 3) the labor insertion figures reported refer to the percentage of labor insertion among those who achieve completion of studies, not to the expectation of labor insertion associated with pursuing a career exactly like that.

This situation affects both the careers of greater social renown – in the country the careers of Law (law), Psychology, and “Commercial Engineering” (economic sciences)—, as well as university programs with less public visibility, as in the case of the discipline that concentrates the attention of this work: the Sociology career.

Incarcerated and seen with fear during the military dictatorship (1973-1990), sociological formation was reborn at the dawn of the restitution of the democratic regime in the country. From a total of 130 students enrolled in universities in 1985, there were more than 3,500 in 2010, distributed across 17 different institutions. By the mid-2000s, career employment was at over 90% (Meller, Lara, and Valdés, 2009, p. 14), significantly higher even than careers with greater social renown. Also, the return on professional performance was above the average for social science careers. The previous one appears to have contributed to the growth of the training offered in the discipline, as well as the number of students who enroll in it each year.

When carrying out an examination of the literature on Higher Education in Chile, it is common to find sociologists among its authors. Research on sociology, as part of university training and professional performance, however, turns out to be scarce. Among the exceptions, studies by Iturrieta (2019) and Gómez and Sandoval (2004) can be mentioned. Both works coincide in currently characterizing sociology as a scope of professional exercise with diffuse, and therefore permeable, border boundaries. This last condition, together with the drastic increase in enrollment that occurred throughout this period, could be one of the causes that explain the abrupt changes in the labor market that are currently being faced by career graduates. The study by Meller et al. (2009), cited in the previous paragraph, found at the end of the previous decade a drastic decline in employment among career holders. More recently, figures contained in the “Statistics search engine by career” contained in the Mifuturo.cl portal of the Higher Education Information System (*SIES-Sistema de Información de Educación Superior*) show a sustained decrease in the economic return associated with professional exercise during the last decade<sup>2</sup>.

In summary, being part of the offer of university training in Chile, and due to information gaps in official statistics on higher education in the country, there is a lack of information on the results of training in the discipline, as far as figures of permanence, title, and job insertion expectations associated with studying the Sociology career. In addition, although it is a career not included in the set of programs of greater social renown, there is also a lack of a historical overview of the development of the same career up to its current situation of diffuse frontier milestones in the scope of professional performance compared to other disciplines

<sup>2</sup> See: <https://www.mifuturo.cl/busador-de-estadisticas-por-carrera/>

of social sciences. The absence of this type of information has several implications, which have repercussions both on the possibilities of carrying out an informed election by new candidates, and also on the work of the same sociology schools at the national universities in charge, among other tasks, of curriculum design, definition of vacancies or projection of enrollment at short notice.

With this study, we seek to problematize the situation of the sociology career in Chile within the framework of the transformations experienced today by the national higher education system. Using a review of historical antecedents, we establish, in the first place, that Sociology in Chile has been, since its origins, marked by a thematic diversity in terms of the focus of research themes, so that the description of the future of the discipline in the political sociology/diversification axis (Araujo, 2015) turns out to be inaccurate. Secondly, using the information available on the open data portal of the Ministry of Education of Chile (MINEDUC), we provide a description of the characteristics of career enrollment for the period between 2009 and 2019; we report the percentage of titles of the cohorts included in the series, and finally, we offer an estimate of the general probability -- this is, not conditioned on the title -- of job insertion among students who choose the career.

The motivation of the study is eminently descriptive: we seek to present trends in which previous antecedents are currently lacking, without intending now to elaborate causal hypotheses for what has been found here. The article is organized as indicated below: the following section includes a description of the historical development of the discipline in Chile, from the mid-20th century to the present. Then, there is a brief review of the conceptual background of quality assurance in higher education, relevant to the intended analysis. Then, we describe the methodology used for data analysis and show the results obtained. Finally, in the fifth section, we develop the conclusions obtained with this study.

## **HISTORICAL EVOLUTION OF THE DISCIPLINE AND ITS TRAINING IN CHILE**

The development of professional and scientific sociology has been underway in Chile for the last fifty years. Three are the most important schools that are created at the core of United Nations organizations and within the universities of Chile and Catholic. In 1957, the *Facultad Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales* (FLACSO) was established in Chile, following an initiative promoted by UNESCO and organized within the University of Chile for its operation in the first few years (Brunner, 1988; Franco, 2007). Simultaneously with the creation of FLACSO, in 1958 the plan for training in sociology at the University of Chile began, which was imparted by the Institute of Sociological Research. This unit, which later became known as the *Instituto de Sociología*, was installed inside the *Facultad de Filosofía y Educación* to carry out studies and investigations based on the theoretical and methodological contributions of the discipline (Brunner, 1988, p 221). The training of graduate students in sociology oversees a series of teachers and researchers who come from disciplines such as law, economics, education, philosophy, and history. Since the beginning of the 1950s, a group of academics, including Eduardo Hamuy, the first Director of the Institute of Sociological Research, in addition to Guillermo Briones, Raúl Samuel, and Hernán Godoy, were sent to pursue postgraduate studies in sociology at universities in the United States and Europe. Subsequently, Raúl Urzúa and José Sulbrandt were sent with the same purpose to join the academic plant of the *Instituto de Sociología de la Universidad Católica*, also created in 1958. The difference between the *Instituto de Sociología de la Universidad de Chile* which belonged to a *Facultad de Filosofía y Educación*, the new *Escuela de Sociología de la Universidad Católica* were part of the *Facultad de Ciencias*

*Económicas y Sociales*, which at that time had an agreement with the Department of Economics at the University of Chicago (Valdés, 1989, p. 166-174; Hachette, 2007, p. 32-33)<sup>3</sup>.

Before the creation of the FLACSO and sociology careers at the *Universidad de Chile* and the *Universidad Católica*, the discipline had been taught only at the level of courses for humanist, legal, and healthcare careers. It was a “chair sociology”, in charge of teachers who had no training in the discipline and who lacked any experience in basic and applied research. Brunner maintains that the creation of the *Instituto de Investigaciones Sociológicas*, at the University of Chile, was tenaciously resisted by “chair sociologists”, even generating a true generational conflict with those with postgraduate degrees abroad (Brunner, 1988: 217-220). Apart from university chairs, the “general sociology” appointments were part of the contents that received primary education teachers in their training in the so-called Normal Schools<sup>4</sup>.

At the beginning of the 1960s, the areas of research that developed in the two universities mentioned included the sociology of education, rural, politics, public health, stratification, and industrial relations. In the case of the University of Chile, Eduardo Hamuy promoted the first public opinion studies, which addressed aspects related to the performance of institutions, preferences for presidential candidacies, and, above all, the perception regarding the implementation of certain government policies. These studies, considered pioneers in the use of opinion surveys, will be applied regularly from the beginning of 1973 (Navia and Osorio, 2015). The areas of research mentioned, as well as the training received by the generations that have followed since the end of the 1950s, have at least the beginning of the so-called “university reform” initiated in 1967, tending to have a strong influence on North American sociology, in a special focus on structural functionalism and modernization theories. This was due, in part, to the training received by those who were sent to carry out postgraduate studies abroad to begin professional and scientific sociology in our country (Godoy, 1960; Medina Echavarría, 1963; Brunner, 1988). Also, it was due to the type of themes in question in the first half of the sixties, related to development, integration, and social change, as well as the financing and cooperation of international organizations to implement plans and intervention programs in this direction (Franco, 2007, p. 33-37).

In his balance on Chilean sociology, Araujo has noted that “Chilean sociology since the beginning of its institutionalization in 1950/1960 has been characterized, and in part continues to be characterized, by the clear introduction of political issues” (Araujo, 2015, p. 30). The root of it refers to a “hegemony of political sociology” that dates to more recent years. Reports and works given to knowledge, in the “starts of its institutionalization” show, on the contrary, a diversity of themes in which political sociology is an area with more attention among others (Godoy, 1960; Sociedad Chilena of Sociology, 1961). In reviewing the themes of the theses of degree that are present in the sociology careers of the *Universidad de Chile* in the period 1966-

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<sup>3</sup> The direction of the School of Sociology at the Catholic University oversees the Belgian priest Roger Vekemans, one of the main scholars of the phenomenon of marginality in Latin America and linked to the *Compañía de Jesús* (Brunner, 1988; Ramos, 2019). Unlike the other study house that had to send professionals to carry out postgraduate studies in the discipline, to carry out research and be able to teach a degree in sociology, the School of Sociology of the Catholic University took advantage of the training received by Raúl Urzúa, José Sulbrant and others like Hernán Godoy, choosing to direct a good part of the resources and agreements with foreign universities to perfect the graduates of the first cohorts of the degree. A report released in 1959 indicated that the School of Sociology of the Catholic University had on that date 14 hired professors and a budget of twenty thousand dollars per year (Donoso and Zorbas, 1959, p. 35-36).

<sup>4</sup> According to the report on the teaching of social sciences in non-specialized university schools and in Normal Schools (for teachers), released at the end of the 1950s, there were 50 sociology chairs, with a total of 80 hours of dedication, ranking third after the number of professorships in law (141) and international relations (56). Further down was the number of chairs in economics (22), anthropology (6), social psychology (4), demography (2) and political science (1) (Donoso and Zorbas, 1959, p. 51).



1971 and the *Universidad Católica* between 1963-1968, Brunner demonstrates a greater propensity for themes such as agrarian, urban, university and economic-national system (Brunner, 1988, p. 329-330)<sup>5</sup>. In short, in that period, sociology of an empirical nature began to predominate, oriented towards applied research, intervention, and the implementation of social programs. The most critical approaches, such as dependency theory, come from the contribution of foreign sociologists, especially Brazilians—such as Fernando Henrique Cardoso, Theotonio dos Santos, Vania Bambirra, and Ruy Mauro Marini—, who reached Chile behind the military coup of this country in 1964. Contrary to stereotypical views, about an assumed compromised sociology predominating in this period, very different from the future of the presentation of later projects (Mires, 1993), it became evident in those who assumed a function “militant” and linked to the political process of the time. However, this same “militant” function, which ended up being exceptional, or assumed within an academic elite, has also been detected in more recent years as part of individual experiences rather than a condition of the discipline (Ramos, 2019, p. 728-748)<sup>6</sup>.

After the democratic crisis of 1973, sociology experienced a great deal of replication and frenzy in its process of institutionalization. Sociology careers that since the middle of the sixties have been created at the *Universidad de Concepción*, at the *Universidad del Norte*, and in some special programs imparted at the *Pontificia Universidad Católica de Valparaíso* have been opened. FLACSO will continue to provide, for a few years, a postgraduate program and will become a refuge for academics dismissed from the main universities. Although the universities of Chile and Catholic will continue to provide their graduate programs in sociology, the latter will decide that after the graduate of the last promotion who had entered in 1973, the Institute will continue to operate with a reduced number of academics oriented to impart a Magister in the discipline. In the 1980s, the University of Chile would be the only institution dedicated to imparting a graduate program in sociology, in an environment marked by authoritarianism, censorship, and the deterioration of academic quality (Güell, 2002, p. 86). In these years, the development of the profession has been carried out in international organizations, municipalities, and above all in government organizations, due to the increase in international cooperation, and independent academic centers. In the latter, basic research is concentrated, which is separate from a teaching activity. According to a study carried out by Barrios and Brunner, based on a survey applied by FLACSO to male and female sociologists in 1984, in these years the greatest job possibilities were discovered in independent academic centers and through external research funds, such as those offered by the *Fundación Ford* or the *Agencia Sueca de Cooperación* (Barrios and Brunner, 1988, p. 282)<sup>7</sup>.

Some of these institutions, such as the *Academia de Humanismo Cristiano*, began at the end of the decade at the University, starting a sociology program in 1989. In 1990, the pre-graduate program was reopened at

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<sup>5</sup> Of the 62 sociology theses presented at both universities, in the indicated periods, only 5 were dedicated to topics related to the political system, 13 to agrarian topics, 9 to urban topics, 9 to the University, 5 to the Chilean economy, while the remaining 21 were distributed in a variety of areas such as health, deviant behavior, organizations, women, youth, religion, international relations, stratification, ideology, among others. In Brunner's work, it is recognized that in these theses the greatest references were to North American sociologists, such as Parsons, Merton, Lazarsfeld, Lerner, Mills, and neo-Weberian authors.

<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, among the “organic intellectuals” who currently intervene in public debate, there are people from other disciplines (although from the field of social sciences).

<sup>7</sup> The most important independent academic centers were FLACSO, SUR Profesionales, the Grupo de Investigación Agraria (GIA) dependent on the Academia de Humanismo Cristiano - an institution that together with the Centro de Estudios de la Realidad Contemporánea (CERC) were created at the initiative of the former Cardinal Raúl Silva Henríquez—, the Instituto Latinoamericano de Doctrina Social (ILADES) belonging to the Compañía de Jesús, the Instituto Latinoamericano de Estudios Transnacionales (ILET), SENECA, the Center for Development St Centro de Estudios para el Desarrollo udies (CED) and the Corporación de Estudios para América Latina (CIEPLAN).

the *Universidad Católica*, and the Sociology career was also created at the *Universidad de Artes y Ciencias Sociales*, ARCIS. In the mid-nineties, sociology programs were created at the *Universidad de la Frontera de Temuco*, the *Universidad de Concepción*, *Arturo Prat de Iquique*, in addition to the *Universidad de la República*, a private squad linked to the masonry. Thus, it became a just undergraduate program, delivered at the University of Chile, four years ago in 1990 and eight years ago in 1995 (Courard and Frohmann, 1999, p. 33). In 1998, ILADES became part of the creation of the *Alberto Hurtado University*, among whose initial career was one in sociology. In the following decades, the number of programs increases, especially in private universities and in others belonging to the Council of Rectors. Between 2000 and 2001 sociology careers were created at the universities *Diego Portales*, *Cardenal Silva Henríquez*, *Central*, and at the end of that decade, at the *Universidad Andrés Bello*. From the second half of the same decade, the Arcis universities, later *Central* and *Andrés Bello*, promoted undergraduate programs in sociology in other regions of the country. The increase in sociology careers and the number of enrollees went hand in hand with the massification process that the Higher Education system experimented with, facilitated with access to new credits that were established by being endorsed by the State (Salazar y Rifo, 2020).

On the other hand, there was also an expansion of the contents of the topics investigated and the subjects taught in the undergraduate and graduate programs in the discipline. Topics related to agrarian transformations (in vogue until the end of the eighties) and industrial relations were surpassed by the rise of gender studies, concern for the subjective dimension, cultural changes, and identity problems, while also preserving the vocation by classic themes such as stratification, poverty, and local development. It also highlights the fact of trying to incorporate more critical paradigms that would allow us to overcome the excessive empiricism and positivism of the initial phase (Ramos, Canales, and Palestini, 2008, p. 179). Regarding the professional development of the discipline, a clear propensity towards the State, municipalities, private consulting firms, and, to a lesser extent, international organizations was evident in the nineties. In more recent times, a greater contraction of the public sector has been observed, as it shows limitations in absorbing the bulk of the contingents that graduate annually from each of the university campuses in which the degree is taught, without producing greater openness towards the private sphere. Likewise, testimonies from graduates show that the difficulty in defining the object of study of sociology and the identity of the discipline compared to related careers continues to weigh (Iturrieta, 2019).

In summary, the process of institutionalization that the discipline began at the end of the fifties managed to be completed, albeit in a relative way, in two decades that succeeded the finalization of the authoritarian regime. Partly because the exponential increase in careers, graduate enrollments, and the proliferation of postgraduate programs in the discipline – at the level of Magister and Doctorate – cannot be compared with the opportunities that the labor market offers in recent years. Nor is there a greater capacity to be able to equal the condition and prestige of other traditional careers, continuing an evident dependence, at least on the economy. Likewise, in some areas of social and community intervention it is not possible to distinguish their competencies regarding anthropology and social psychology; or at the state level, with subjects such as political science.

## **HIGHER EDUCATION AND QUALITY ASSURANCE**

Palma (2013) summarizes the international discussion on the evolution of higher education systems, distinguishing three development phases. The first stage receives the elite access name: destined in the

substance for the preparation of the dominant classes. The second corresponds to mass access: it originates in the demand for social inclusion mainly by the middle classes, and its main function is to train individuals to fulfill professional or technical roles that respond to the needs of the productive sector. The third stage is called “universalization”: typically, when coverage exceeds 80%. In this last stage, the step towards higher education, from being exclusive to elites, begins to be conceived by individuals as an imperative for integration and adaptation in a context marked by constant social and technological change. Despite being deposited from the previous phase, in this third stage, the tertiary certification is no longer a sufficiently distinctive award, which gives rise to the need for its complementation with additional specialization studies.

However, in the elite phase the concept of quality in higher education is understood – but implicitly – as excellence, in the sense of selectivity and prestige, with the advent of massification in access at the tertiary level this notion, without disappearing, its relevance is lost. From this moment on, the international discussion on quality opens to new conceptualizations that emphasize, this time explicitly, the need to institutionalize processes for the security of quality that provide certain minimum guarantees to students, as well as to finance these institutions (Harvey and Green, 1993; Lemaitre and Mena, 2012). Van Damme (2004) distinguishes four approaches to quality that have succeeded each other chronologically: together with the criterion of excellence, they appear: “aptitude for the process”, which materializes in the agreement between institutional purposes and practices within higher education institutions (in addition, HEIs); of “basic standards”, aimed at the empirical verification of minimum conditions that guarantee compliance with the results of the training processes – and not only the future of the institutional purposes; and finally, “consumer satisfaction”, which associates quality with the satisfaction of the needs of the world of work.

The development of the international discussion on the concept of quality in higher education denotes a basic tension between the emphasis given. On the one hand, to the installation of processes within the HEIs, and on the other, to results of training processes that obtained them and students in their step at tertiary level. Regarding this last theme -- quality as results -- one of the criteria shared in the international conference for the evaluation of the quality of higher education is the culmination of studies (Heusser, Drake, and Owens, 2015; OECD, 2019). If, for the quality-as-excellence approach, degree effectiveness turns out to be a second-order indicator or even an inversely proportional interpretation - the lower the degree, the greater selectivity, and consequently the higher quality (Scheele, 2009) -, in a context of massification in access to the tertiary level, this indicator comes to occupy a central place, since, among other aspects, it is related to the effectiveness of public and private investment destined for this area.

According to Brunner (2015), because of the mass access that has occurred in Chile since the beginning of the 1990s, the national higher education system is on its way to reaching the stage of universalization. Despite the magnitude of this trend, the system operated until the middle of the last decade in a practically unregulated manner (Geoffrey, 2014), with few oversight powers for public organizations and the absence of information frameworks that guided the choice of careers by new applicants. As in the reality of other countries, this process of massification has been accompanied by a diversification of the profile of students who access higher education: in this new context the figure of the “non-traditional student” emerges, a term to refer to students whose motivation to pursue higher education is not limited exclusively to academic/vocational motivation, but also to the search for economic return and/or social status (Carrasco, Zúñiga and Espinoza, 2014; Orellana, Valenzuela, Bellei, Gareca and Torres, 2017).

In recognition of the challenges posed by the previous one, the National System for Quality Assurance



in Higher Education (SINACES) was established in the country in 2006, one of whose central purposes has consisted of systematizing and disseminating information that serves as support, both informed decision-making by new candidates for the system, as well as the evaluation of public policies inscribed in this area. Along with this last component, SINACES also has licensing and accreditation responsibilities, the latter being carried out by the National Accreditation Commission (*Comisión Nacional de Acreditación-CNA-Chile*). The original SINACES report corresponds to the focus on quality as “aptitude for the process”<sup>8</sup>. This could be one of the reasons that explain the lack of information regarding title effectiveness or net employment among the set of indicators that are reported by public bodies in charge of this matter. Another possible cause behind this omission may come from the belief that a greater degree of efficiency is not necessarily indicative of greater quality/pertinence of training processes, but even on occasions, it could indicate precisely the opposite (Centro de Políticas Públicas UC, 2011). If there is underlying motivation, the information available by SINACES to favor the selection of careers until here is partial and incomplete (Sandoval, 2020), which raises questions regarding the level of agreement between their expectations and students, and the reality of the careers they choose, particularly in the case of programs that are not part of the group of careers with greater social visibility.

## **ANALYSIS OF THE RESULTS OF UNIVERSITY SOCIOLOGICAL TRAINING IN CHILE: PERIOD 2009-2019**

### **Materials and method**

For the analysis, the data used corresponds to registration and title records in Higher Education available on the open data portal of the Ministry of Education of Chile (MINEDUC). Both information sources are hosted for free access at the following web addresses:

Registration: <https://datosabiertos.mineduc.cl/matricula-en-educacion-superior/>

Titled: <https://datosabiertos.mineduc.cl/titled-en-educacion-superior/>

The information present on the portal is of a census nature and contains more than 15 million individual annual enrollment records, as well as more than 2 million title records, at all levels of the national tertiary higher education system: university - -undergraduate and postgraduate-- and professional technician. In both cases, the case identifier features a “masked” version of the individual identifier employed in the country (RUT), labeled as “mrun”.

Once these data were obtained, we proceeded using the same type of strategy described in the study by Sandoval (2020, p. 54-55) for the treatment and analysis of information, even extending the monitoring to the period 2009-2019 and for this case specific to the Sociology career.

In line with the methodology used by Santelices, Catalán, Horn, and Kruger (2016), the results obtained correspond to the weighted average of the behavior of cohorts that, both due to the availability of the data series at the time of download and the temporality of their entry into the career, they had sufficient

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<sup>8</sup> For example, CNA defined accreditation until the middle of the last decade as a process evaluation mechanism, focused on encouraging a capacity for self-regulation and a culture of continuous improvement within HEIs (CNA-Chile, 2016).

seniority to arrive at their calculation. The table presented below shows these indicators, associated with the cohorts in which it was feasible to calculate them.

**Table 1**  
**Calculated indicators**

Indicator	Cohorts considered
<b>Permanence</b>	
First-year	2009-2019
2nd	2009-2018
3rd	2009-2017
4th	2009-2016
5th	2009-2015
<b>Title</b>	
Fourth year	2009-2016
5th	2009-2015
6th	2009-2014
7th.	2009-2013
8th	2009-2012

Source: Own elaboration with data from Mineduc Chile

In this way, each of these indicators reflects the joint behavior of at least 4 cohorts of students in the program. To obtain an estimate of the net job insertion rate, we multiply the graduation rate at the eighth year of seniority from entry obtained here, with the employability figures currently reported by SIES for the first and second year after graduation. This is an approximate figure, but it allows us to account for an aspect of the sociological professional performance for which prior antecedents are lacking up to this point.

It was decided to restrict the period of permanence and title monitoring until 2019 to the effect of representing the reality of the previous career in the scenario given by the COVID-19 pandemic, understanding that the latter constitutes a theme. Also, little is known about the reality of the career in the country in the period before this health crisis. When dealing with census-type information, it is not considered necessary to resort to multivariate analysis for inferential purposes, as the analysis carried out is fundamentally of a descriptive type.

## Results

### Description of registration for the first year 2009-2019

From 2009 to 2019, a total of 9,258 students enrolled in the Sociology degree in the country<sup>9</sup>. Nineteen different universities, out of a total of 63 existing in the country throughout the period, taught the discipline among their undergraduate offers. One of these universities is currently closed, while two others stopped offering the program. Since 2009, first-year enrollment has remained stable in the range of 800-850 registrations, *except for* 2015, which is when the highest number of new students was observed.

**Table 2**  
**Distribution according to cohort**

Cohort	N	%
2009	858	9.35
2010	859	9.36
2011	820	8.94
2012	800	8.72
2013	807	8.80
2014	833	9.08
2015	873	9.51
2016	858	9.35
2017	833	9.08
2018	800	8.72
2019	834	9.09

Source: Own elaboration with data from Mineduc Chile

Concerning the characteristics of the students who entered the career during this period:

- 54% are male students and 46% are female.
- 61% were 19 years old at the time of registration; 32% were between 20 and 24 years old; and another 4% were between 25 and 29 years of age.
- 97% followed or followed studies during the day.
- 60% started studies at a headquarters located in the Metropolitan Region<sup>10</sup>.
- The table that is included below details the regional distribution.

**Table 3**  
**Distribution according to region of origin**

Region	N	%
Metropolitan	5,493	59.87

<sup>9</sup> Nearly 1 million 800 thousand students enrolled in a university degree in a regular modality for the same period.

<sup>10</sup> In Chile, the regions constitute the main breakdown in political-administrative and geographical terms. The Metropolitan Region is the most populated in the national territory, and the one where the capital of the country is located: Santiago.

Valparaíso	1,543	16.82
Ñuble/Biobío	777	8.47
La Araucanía	616	6.71
Maule	298	3.25
Coquimbo	246	2.68
Arica y Parinacota/Tarapacá	189	2.06
Antofagasta	13	0.14

Source: Own elaboration with data from Mineduc Chile

We found that 41% studied -- which continues today -- at private universities and belong to the Consejo de Rectores de las Universidades de Chile (CRUCH<sup>11</sup>). A drop in enrollment at private universities not affiliated with CRUCH was observed over the period. This coincides with an increase in enrollment mainly at private CRUCH, and to a lesser extent, at state universities. On the other hand, in most cases, the duration of the career at the time of entry was 10 semesters<sup>12</sup>.

**Table 4**  
**Distribution according to type of university (2020)**

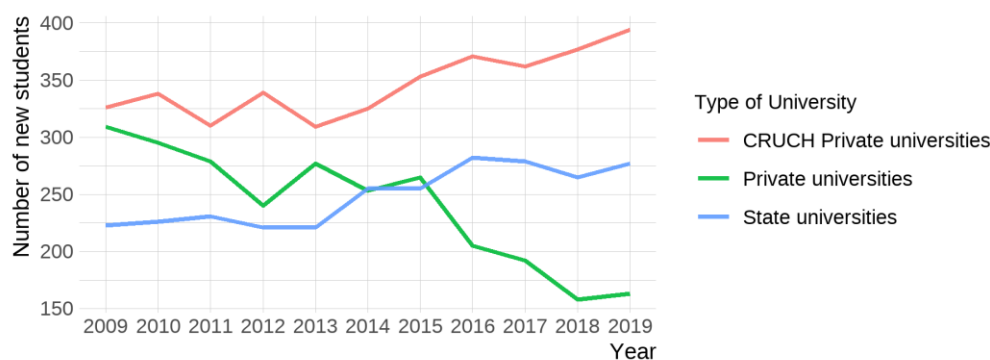
Type	N	%
Private in CRUCH	3,804	41.46
Private No CRUCH	2,636	28.73
State Universities	2,735	29.81

Source: Own elaboration with data from Mineduc Chile

**Graph 1**  
**Evolution of enrollment for 1st-year sociology degree (2009-2019)**

<sup>11</sup> The Universities of the Council of Rectors correspond to those existing before the reform of the system in the 1980s. These are the most prestigious Universities and include public Universities, as well as private Universities linked to the Catholic Church, as well as other private Universities created in the first half of the 20th century. Universities not belonging to CRUCH, created in the late 1980s, are known in the country as “Private Universities”.

<sup>12</sup> It is worth remembering that curricular changes sometimes imply redefining the duration of a career.



Source: Own elaboration with data from Mineduc Chile

**Table 5**

**Distribution according to the formal duration of the career**

No. of semesters	N	%
8	661	7.20
9	1.052	11.47
10	7.462	81.33

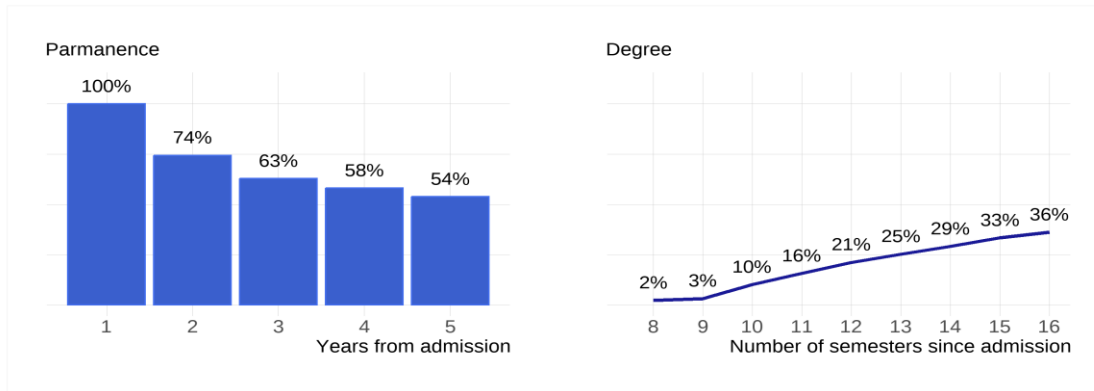
Source: Own elaboration with data from Mineduc Chile

**Degree effectiveness**

Three out of every four students who entered the program between 2009 and 2019 remained in the second year, and three out of every 5 in the third. Thus, the results coincide with the first and second-year retention figures reported by official organizations. What is not reported up to now by these sources is the permanence of the fourth and fifth years. In this regard, our results indicate that one out of every two students who enter the program persist in their training process after 5 years from the beginning of their studies. After 16 semesters (8 years), 36% managed to graduate<sup>13</sup>. Thus, one of every three students who enter the Sociology program in the country manages to complete their training process within the period that adds three years to its formal duration. The rest drop out - whether for vocational reasons or academic performance - or graduate and do not obtain a degree. When breaking down these results according to cohorts, a deterioration in the study completion figures in recent years can be seen: while 41.7% of the generation admitted in 2009 managed to complete their training process throughout the period that includes up to 8 years from the beginning of the program, these figures rise in the case of the 2011 and 2012 cohorts to 31.6% and 33.5%, respectively.

<sup>13</sup> In comparison, studies carried out in recent years indicate that the graduation rate of the national university system would be around 45% (Basso, 2016; González, 2005; Sandoval, 2020).



**Graph 2 - Permanence and career degree in sociology**

Source: Own elaboration with data from Mineduc Chile

**Table 6****Degree according to number of semesters since admission and cohort (%)<sup>14</sup>**

Cohort	N° semestres desde ingreso				
	8	10	12	14	16
2009	4.1	13.8	26.0	35.2	41.7
2010	3.3	11.5	24.3	31.2	37.4
2011	2.6	10.1	20.4	27.0	31.6
2012	2.4	9.1	20.9	27.4	33.5
2013	1.9	8.2	17.3	24.5	-
2014	2.0	9.0	18.0	-	-
2015	2.1	9.6	-	-	-
2016	0.9	-	-	-	-

Source: Own elaboration with data from Mineduc Chile

The table shows the percentage of completion of studies for each cohort of students; therefore it is not a table that should add up to 100%.

According to sociodemographic variables, a greater degree of effectiveness is associated with female students and those who begin their training process in a headquarters located in the regions of Maule or La Araucanía. When comparing by age group, the lowest degree rates correspond, by a wide margin, to those who were 40 years old or older at the time of their enrollment. According to the characteristics of the study plans, contrary to what would have been expected, students enrolled in 8-semester plans semesters have the

<sup>14</sup> The table shows the percentage of completion of studies for each cohort of students; therefore, it is not a table that should add up to 100%.

lowest graduation figures, while those who continued – or continue – their studies during the day outnumber those in the evening by a large margin<sup>15</sup>.

**Table 7**

**Degree according to number of semesters since admission and segmentation criteria (%)**

		N° semestres desde ingreso			
		10	12	14	16
Gender	Female	12.3	26.4	35.5	43.8
	Male	8.5	16.9	23.8	29.5
Age at admission	15 to 19 years old	8.4	20.9	30.1	37.8
	20 to 24 years old	12.1	22.3	28.5	34.8
	25 to 29 years old	15.2	18.1	23.3	29.6
	30 to 34 years old	21.3	25.7	31.5	32.0
	35 to 39 years old	19.6	23.8	28.6	33.3
	40 or older	10.2	11.3	14.6	13.8
Region Initial headquarters	Antofagasta	0.0	23.1	30.8	38.5
	Arica y Parinacota/Tarapacá	6.0	8.5	14.6	16.1
	Coquimbo	2.4	18.9	30.9	38.6
	La Araucanía	25.0	36.4	42.5	44.4
	Maule	3.9	25.5	33.9	53.6
	Metropolitana	13.0	25.1	32.8	39.5
	Ñuble/Biobío	1.0	12.9	21.2	29.6
	Valparaíso	2.0	7.1	15.7	25.6
Study time	Day	10.6	21.9	30.0	37.0
	Evening	1.8	3.3	6.8	8.6
Theoretical duration (Number of semesters)	8	5.7	8.2	13.6	18.2
	9	20.8	38.4	43.5	45.4
	10	9.3	20.4	29.1	37.2

Source: Own elaboration with data from Mineduc Chile

In relation now to the characteristics of the higher education staff that impart the career, the private universities currently belonging to the CRUCH are those with the highest degree efficiency figures, followed by the private ones in the CRUCH and the state universities. Finally, comparing according to years of institutional accreditation, universities accredited for 4, 5, or 7 years (at the beginning of 2020) present similar

<sup>15</sup> Students who, in parallel with studying, work; Therefore, they study during the afternoon and/or at night.

results to each other, surpassing by a long margin the performance of non-accredited ones (which corresponds in this series, exclusively, to a currently closed university).

**Table 8**

**Degree according to number of semesters since admission and university characteristics (%)**

		N° semestres desde ingreso			
		10	12	14	16
Type of University	Private in CRUCH	16.2	30.6	37.5	43.3
	Private No CRUCH	7.0	18.9	27.7	32.9
	State Universities	5.6	10.7	18.8	29.7
Years of accreditation (2020)	Not accredited	5.7	6.8	10.5	13.0
	4	9.3	22.7	32.9	37.7
	5	10.2	22.3	29.8	36.6
	7	12.1	22.3	30.3	41.2

Source: Own elaboration with data from Mineduc Chile

### Net employability

As previously mentioned, the employability reported by SIES is calculated based on the universe of graduates each year. The latest update of this figure indicates that 60.2% started to work 1 year after graduating, a figure that rises to 70.9% after the second. To obtain an estimate of the net employability (EN) of the program - that is, on the total enrollment entering the program - we use the relationship represented in general terms by the following expression:

$$EN = \frac{N^{\circ} \text{ of degrees}}{\text{Total enrollment}} * \frac{N^{\circ} \text{ of degrees with a job}}{N^{\circ} \text{ of degrees}} = \frac{N^{\circ} \text{ of degrees with a job}}{\text{Total enrollment}}$$

We obtain an estimate of net employability by multiplying the graduation rate obtained here (36%), with the employability figures in the first and second year after graduation as reported by SIES<sup>16</sup>. This provides an estimate of the expectation of job placement at the time of entry into the career. This is an approximate result. Among other limitations, it is possible that a considerable percentage of students without a professional degree - graduates for example - are also practicing professionally in the field of career performance, which would not be reflected in the figures displayed, or the case of students who obtain the professional degree in a longer period than the one considered here. Even with this, the result presented below approximates the measurement of a phenomenon for which there is a complete lack of antecedents in the case of university

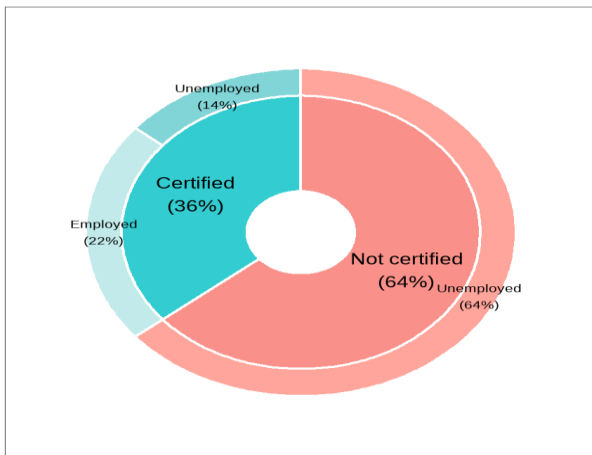
<sup>16</sup> Statistics on job placement currently report the percentage of job placement after 1 year, and 2 years after completing studies (degree).

courses in Chile, such as the Sociology course.

The estimate obtained is 22% in the first year after completing studies, and 26% in the second. Thus, the promise of job placement of the degree is fulfilled for 1 in every 4 students who enter to study the discipline in all the universities that have taught it throughout the period analyzed here.

### Graph 3

#### Estimation of the percentage of net employability in the 1st year



Source: Own elaboration with data from Mineduc Chile

### Graph 4

#### Estimation of the percentage of net employability in the 2nd year



Source: Own elaboration with data from Mineduc Chile

## FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The diversification of the tertiary education student profile associated with the processes of massification and universalization of access to undergraduate education in Chile means that the choice of a career is not guided exclusively by academic-vocational criteria, but also by an expectation of employability, return economic, and/or social status. No precedent allows us to think of sociology training as an exception to this trend. How much does a student who currently chooses to pursue higher education within the range of universities that teach it know about the reality of a career in Chile? The evidence provided by previous studies on higher education related to the discipline is scarce, while the information available by public organizations is partial and incomplete. Thus, there is a lack of knowledge about key aspects of the reality of the discipline in the country, shared even by the same professionals who practice it, which ranges from its historical development to the results of the training process among the students who choose it.

From the conflict between professorial sociologists and the founders of the first schools of sociology in the 1950s, through the confinement during the military dictatorship, to the resurgence of discipline in Chile during the transition, with its abrupt changes in the occupational market, the career has opened ground in the country, even though it has not finished - nor does it seem to be able to finish shortly - establishing its border frameworks with other related disciplines; if not in its entirety, at least as far as the scope of professional performance is concerned.

As has been observed, sociology, as a scientific and professional discipline, has dealt with different issues of local and national affairs. Over time, it has diversified its lines of specialization and has taken on those topics that emerge because of the accelerated transformations experienced by contemporary society. It has not been, in any of its stages of development, a single-thematic discipline, or one in which one thematic area predominates over the others. On the other hand, it is symptomatic of the fact that the initial institutionalization process, which made its consolidation as a scientific and professional discipline possible, is expressed differently from the 1990s onwards. In effect, from then on, its Institutionalization has been expressed in the increase in supply, because new universities offered the degree, as well as in the increase in enrollment. On the contrary, the identification, recognition, and positioning of graduates in a specific job niche is still pending. Furthermore, the increase in enrollment in sociology occurs between the phases of massification and universalization of admission to university Higher Education. This process is favored by the changes introduced in the financing system, firstly, the State Guaranteed Credit and a decade later the advances registered with free credit.

It is interesting to note that the number of enrolled students remains stable throughout the period studied here, despite the increase in the supply of universities that offer undergraduate programs in the discipline. The fact that the presence of people under 19 years old is predominant, in the initial phase of the courses, shows that the discipline represents a valid and attractive option for recent graduates of Secondary Education. On the other hand, sociology courses continue to be slightly masculine in their initial composition, although, at the end of the training cycle, the relationship is reversed as more female people manage to complete the degree process.

The most critical aspect is related to the low student retention and even lower, the number of graduates. The greatest difficulties for the continuity of programs and the retention of enrolled students have been registered in private universities not affiliated with CRUCH, some of which have not managed to meet



the basic requirements for accreditation. In other words, the increase in enrollment in the universities belonging to CRUCH was to the detriment of the other private universities that are part of the Higher Education system. Added to this is the low net employability that is recorded between the first and second year of graduation from the different programs taught in the country, the causes of which can be associated, for the most part, with problems of identity and differentiation of the discipline concerning others. purposeful professions within the field of social sciences.

The results presented here may constitute useful background information for the different schools of sociology taught in national universities, both for the projection of their vacancies and for defining content that points towards greater job insertion. The truth is that those who choose it year after year know little about the reality of the career, since the background turns out to be scarce, and the occupational field is diffuse. It is true that the concept of quality in higher education is not reduced to retention, qualification, or employability, but rather combines elements of perspectives of excellence, aptitude for the process, minimum standards, and agreement with the requirements of the productive sector, in such a way that the mission of sociology schools cannot be reduced to training professionals for the labor market, but is complemented by teaching, research and extension work. Even with the latter, make transparent the specificity of the curricular seals, as well as the results of the training processes obtained by the students of each study site, beyond what until now have been the traditional indicators in the reporting of the official organizations, can serve not only to promote the deployment of successful training trajectories among students - whether these materialize in professional performance or an academic career - but also to give sustainability to the same projects of each school, considering the advent of new criteria and standards for the evaluation of quality within university institutions in the country.

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**Submitted:** 05/23/2023

**Preprint:** 25/03/2022

**Approved:** 09/22/2023

## **CONTRIBUTION OF THE AUTHORS**

Author 1 - Data collection, data analysis, and writing of the text.

Author 2 - Analysis of the data and writing of the text.

## **DECLARATION OF CONFLICT OF INTEREST**

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest with this article.