

Neoliberalism and Equity: Chilean Society Analyzed from the Student's Perspective¹

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Abstract

The present qualitative study explores how students from the University of Chile define the concepts of "neoliberalism" and "equity" and discusses the effects of neoliberalism on the higher education offer. The sample includes 70 students and a natural semantic networks technique was used to access the individual's conceptual constructions and process definition. In conclusion, the students consider neoliberalism as an economic system based on capitalism and characterized by inequality, competition, injustice and individualism, whose effects manifest with poverty. Whereas, they define equity as a right based on distribution, focused on society and characterized by equality, opportunities and justice, and becomes evident with social development.

Keywords: neoliberalism, equity, higher education, equality, opportunities

Introduction

Since the establishment of conceptions on development by the Economic Commission for Latin America (ECLA), the pursuit of social equality -characterized by poverty reduction- became the core principle and main goal to achieve. The application of economic models focused on industrialization and the development of domestic markets characterized the dynamics and economic policies of most countries in the area. Social welfare policies focused particularly on fighting social lag and included State intervention, centering the attention towards universalization. The Washington Consensus³ marks a breakthrough between the developmental model and the neoliberal model. Supported by Friedman's doctrine, the consensus resumed the forties neoclassical thesis to promote competitive advantages of international trade among Latin American countries. In this regard, the intention of building a unified global market, questioned the State's intervention in economic and social management of both developed and peripherals countries. Developing countries were practically forced to create policies to liberalize the market and to systematically dismantle the welfare state. The dismantling of the welfare state turned the neoliberal model to market, individualistic competition and capital accumulation. Moreover, it has generated a social polarization dynamic, extreme poverty and emerging conflicts that demand the State intervention to provide the basic welfare satisfiers, such as housing, employment, health care, food and education. Frequently, discussions on the concept of neoliberalism come from the critical voices.

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³ It is constituted by a set of "recommendations" given to countries with external debt when renegotiating new borrowing. The meetings which these recommendations originated were mainly promoted by the World Bank (WB) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). The Latin American countries are particularly influenced by these recommendations (Calvento, 2006; Gutiérrez, 2007).

The social consequences it generates incite critics on the application of this economic model, when in fact the concept itself belongs to the capitalist market structure; neoliberalism is mainly accused of generating inequities and injustices that capitalism⁴ "per se" reproduces. This study explores which are, from the perspective of the University of Chile students, the key aspects for understanding the relationship between the economic system and the global society, considering the analysis of the neoliberal economic model and its relation with equity. The research focuses on the analysis of two qualitative variables that, on one hand, constitute the ideological apparatus of the economic system and, on the other, the ideological construction of society: neoliberalism and equity. This manuscript is a qualitative study that allowed access to the individual's conceptual constructions and definition processes by using a natural semantic networks technique. Moreover, it explores the definitions that the University of Chile students have regarding the concepts of neoliberalism and equity. Thus, the objectives are:

1. Develop semantic networks around the concept 'neoliberalism'.
2. Develop semantic networks around the concept 'equity'.
3. Identify specific definitions and conceptualizations in the relationship: neoliberalism/equity among the University of Chile students.

Indeed, within subjective assessments, the definitions provided by students on neoliberalism and equity—drawn from its context-specific features—will help understand the problems in the perception of the economic model and its direct and intrinsic outcomes, as they are often defined as antagonistic to equity; this will broaden the range of social interpretations provided by these students.

1. The Relation: Neoliberalism and Equity

The starting point is the basic definition of the neoliberalism and equity concepts, and the concepts considered to be associated with them. Thereafter, a discussion, reflection and analysis will be made on the existing relationship between the concepts neoliberalism/equity and their background/social consequences.

1.1. About Neoliberalism

Before addressing the concept of neoliberalism, it is necessary to define its root and immediate conceptual background: liberalism. Considering it as a political and economic doctrine, the basic definition of liberalism is: Set of political ideas and practices that emerged in Europe in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, particularly during the French Revolution that considers an individual's freedom of thought and action as original and fundamental human values, argues for the need to foster development by defending individual rights, freedom of work and expression, free enterprise, reason and progress against the traditional authority arbitrariness and its intervention in the economy (Lara, 2011b:1030).

The social science dictionary defines liberalism as:

An ideology that defends private property, individual rights, legal equality, freedom of choice and a democratic government. Liberalism suggests that the essence of freedom is to be free of restrictions. Liberalism is an ideology that supports capitalism and upholds the principle of the free market, without limited government intervention. While liberalism defends the free market, it also gives a high value place for equal opportunities and is strongly opposed to ascriptive processes in society, as they restrict individual choice and deny equal access to satisfaction. (Drislane and Parkinson, 2010). Through time and universal dissemination, the social and political transformations and its application in different societies around the world during the twentieth century, this set of ideas and practices: (...), Without losing its essential characteristics, stressed over its defense of free competition and private initiative against the power of the State, but also supports the need for the last one, to intervene to prevent the creation of monopolies and regulate the economic activity (Lara 1030). During the postwar period, the Keynesian state economic model prevailed in the capitalist world, which appealed strongly for State intervention in order to constitute it as a protectionist welfare state; this position is widely known as the welfare state defender. Neoliberalism started as a resistance to Keynesianism. One of the names closely linked to the origin of neoliberalism is Von Hayek, an Austrian economist, whose perspective on freedom and justice was completely antagonistic to the Keynesian perspective. The concept neo-conservatism [neoliberalism] is defined as: A resurgence of political and economic beliefs associated with classical liberalism of the early nineteenth century.

⁴ Max's construction appeals to resource possession and capital accumulation and the ways to manage a particular social class, not with the intention to establish bonds of solidarity, but seeking antagonistic relations between the working class and the bourgeois class.

Properly, it should be called neoliberalism [emphasis added]. This philosophy includes: acceptance of an unregulated market economy, a minimal role for the government, distrust of the welfare state, a vision of citizens as motivated only by personal interest, a commitment to the core value of individualism (Drislane and Parkinson, 2010). According to Hayek's view, the role of the State in a capitalist system should remain limited⁵. Human efforts will be ease if the State's power and force is as far as possible from intervening in competition. From this perspective, the State must monitor the free competition and private property. Contrary to the welfare state, free competition would facilitate individual initiative to generate their own welfare and to successfully achieve self-motivation and their individual freedom. In summary, if considered as a concept that comes from the political philosophy and economy, and that its application suggests and implies intervention in a country's economic model; intervention on the design of social welfare policies; that its main focus is on the market and freedom is defined in terms of market (characterized by free competition) and derived from the above definitions, we can say that the concept presents to least six substantive components:

1. Individualism as a supreme value,
2. Unrestricted freedom,
3. Protection of free competition,
4. Defense of private property,
5. Resistance to State intervention in the economy,
6. Poverty is considered as a necessary evil.

The development model theoretical background can be used to analyze neoliberalism, it was built by the Economic Commission for Latin America (ECLA) with the main purpose of helping Latin American countries become industrialized and fight poverty. This theoretical position regarded State intervention as necessary in the execution of public policies, particularly social welfare policies which are essential for an integrated development. Hence, the constituent elements of development such as building roads, hospitals, housing, must be financed privately and publicly (leaving the management to the public sector), in order to promote the worker's income and domestic consumption. From this perspective and economic dynamic, social policy was a core vertex for the growth of countries oriented to the development model (Calvento, 2006:51). The Washington consensus ended the implementation of development policies and provided the scope to establish trade policies, also known as austerity policies and economic adjustment policies (Gutiérrez, 2007:52). With the end of the development model and the consolidation of the neoliberal model, social policies underwent substantial changes and their implementation and results transformed the Latin American reality. According Vilas (1997:936-941, quoted by Calvento, 2006:55), the model's social policies are distinguished by three characteristics:

1. Decentralization. It involves the transfer of social policy decisions to municipalities, provincial governments and NGOs.
2. Privatization. To alleviate the states' fiscal crisis and improve the quality of services.
3. Focus. Opposed to the universalism of the development model. Confrontation of the spread of social problems with cut funds.

Analyzing social policy, particularly the education policy, Chile's case is completely apart from other Latin American countries. Since the nineties, a democratic⁶ government is established and with it, new strategies in public administration were implemented, since the previous regime was a military dictatorship. Currently, the economic policy and education policy live in tension and conflict. The educational policy of the military regime transformed the school's system financing and managing model.

⁵In the twentieth century, a more active role of the state in creating more equal opportunities in society became important within liberalism (this liberalism trend was also a reaction to the development of unions and populist and socialists movements). There was a massive expansion of the state –as provider of education, social programs, etcetera- from the late nineteenth century to the sixties and seventies (Drislane and Parkinson, 2010).

⁶ Some of the harshest critics of Chilean democracy consider that this is not a full democracy (or citizen's democracy) but a tutelary democracy. Considering that Chile's democratic transition was overseen from the White House, who was interested in proceeding to the country's "modernization" by establishing a democratic regime. GrezToso (2012: 6) calls "neoliberal democracy, protected nature and low intensity".

Through a structural reform the school administration was decentralized, financial instruments based on demand subsidies was introduced, teaching status was standardized, and legal and market instruments were used to stimulate the creation and growth of state-funded private schools, reducing the public budget on education. Accordingly, the education policy focused on reform was mainly fiscal and administrative, linked to a decentralization project, which according to Cox (2011) is clearly a neoliberal strategy. The education policy reforms proposed by the democratic regime established since 1990⁷ focused on improving the education quality through the direct contribution of the State resources to schools, attaining equity in every context and achieving learning outcomes within international standards (Donoso, 2005), particularly those recognized by the OECD. In the Chilean State's official discourse, education is recognized as a national priority (at least until the basic level, excluding higher levels). However, a State policy that goes beyond diagnostic (in terms of quality assessment) and budget discussion is not apparent. The current perspective on improving the quality requires not only meeting international standards established by the OECD, but also achieving equity in terms of equal opportunities and benefits for the demand.

1.2. About Equity

Etymologically, the word derives from the Latin equity: *aequitas*, *-ātis*, a word that designates equality or mind attitude. According to the Royal Academy Spanish language dictionary, equity is defined as:

- (a) Equality of mind. (b) Usual generous temperance. Prone to be guided or fall for the sense of duty or conscience rather than for the strict requirements of justice or law. (c) Natural justice, as opposed to the positive law letter. (d) Moderation in the price of things or contract conditions. (e) Mind attitude that moves to give everyone what they deserve (Real Academia Espanola, 2012).

The dictionary of Mexican Spanish defines equity as "quality of equal. Ability to apply the law according to justice principles and common sense: equity criterion" (Lara, 2011:724). For other researchers, the concept of equity is commonly associated and synonymy of the concept of social justice. However, as noted by Bracho: Talking about equity is still unclear and accurate. The main cause of this lack of clarity is that the concept of equity is based and interacts with three hugely important concepts: on one hand, equality; on the other, law and justice enforcement; and finally, inclusion (2009:2). Understood as a concept provided by the legal and juridical field, its application implies value and moral judgments when executed, and considering the previous definitions, we may consider the concept includes at least six substantive components:

1. Value judgment from who applies it (or acts with equity),
2. Considerations regarding the rules and/or laws that leads to its application,
3. Equality and mind attitude from who applies it,
4. A trend to justice,
5. A trend to equality,
6. A trend to inclusion.

Applied to the education field, some approaches to the concept of equity present a set of articulated elements inclined towards development. The achievement of educational equity is regarded as a result of political action particularly that aimed at social policy. Indeed, the educated population with high social participation, who have the ability to organize themselves to request (sometimes claim) quality, free and universal educational services, counteract social arrears. In this context, development is part of a vision and a global objective linking institution-society that considers education as an effective tool to accomplish it (ECLAC-UNESCO, 1992). Moreover, since the sixties, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development regarded education as a social mobility and prosperity instrument for society (OECD, 1991:22). In the eighties, several international agencies found a space to consolidate this paradigm in the main educational issues. Accordingly, it is easy to find major similarities between the approaches of UNESCO and ECLAC. The agencies converged in the recurring idea of viewing education as the engine for an economic and social development with equity (ECLAC-UNESCO, 1992). Within this developmental vision, one of the international organizations fundamental concerns is the main goal of counteracting inequalities and fighting poverty; it is considered that this may be achieved effectively by providing schooling to the population. The paper "Social Panorama of Latin America" presented by ECLAC (2010) highlighted the ways in which the reproduction of poverty is manifesting in the region's population.

⁷ The period 1990-1995 corresponds to what Marchesi (1998:140-141, quoted by Donoso, 2005) called *design or installation* phase, followed by the *implementation* phase and then *institutionalized*.

Children and young people who aspire a better future (using education for this), fail to meet their goals because the first filter within the social structure is the family and within it, poverty is only perpetuating across generations. The same report estimates that the family depends on the labor market (ECLAC, 2010), which as a result of a neoliberal economy gives priority to productivity and competitiveness, rejecting in its ranks the youth who do not fulfill the required skill levels and paradoxically the low quality educational systems fail to provide them this qualifications. In the tension between labor market, social policy and education policy, it is necessary to remark that the labor market is not geared towards inclusion and equality. Therefore, it is inequitable by definition as social policies are not aimed to protect employment, redistribute income and universalize social protection. State policies have not been able to close the gaps between labor market, education investment, tuition, skills and educational achievements of the individual. These consequences are marked in the youth population aged between 12 years to 29 years. The existing levels of child poverty in Latin America (poor children 0-15 years of age) confirm this situation. A comparative analysis conducted by ECLAC (2010), contrasting the differences between 1990 and 2009, found that Chile had reduced child monetary poverty by 74%, Argentina by 48%, Uruguay by 45%, Panama by 37 %, and Mexico by 16%. This situation is alarming considering that during childhood the social and family basis are established to later build a school and social life that can offer a place within the structure and dynamics of social mobility. The neoliberal market, society and State affect directly the family with their actions; an inclusive market creates jobs and protects the welfare state. The young and the child, as family members, face the dilemma of having opportunities and being able to live in a fair and equal society or in social exclusion. It is up to the higher education -represented by universities-to assume its responsibility as an institution that strengthens inclusion and promotes the values of equality, justice and equity.

2. Methodology

The study is a qualitative research; it is a descriptive/interpretive research.

2.1. Design of the Research

Descriptive research allows obtaining information and descriptive data derived from the subjects of research spoken words (written); it is conducted in the context where the subjects construct their daily life. The descriptions make the social dimensions interact with the individual ones, the micro-social with the macro-social dimensions, moving them at the level of the practices that occur within the meso-system (Deslauriers, 1991). Furthermore, it is interpretive because it suggests an approach to social practices and to the perceptions of the subjects from a theoretical and conceptual framework. This type of research allowed access to the conceptual universe of the subjects and to the interpretations in the network of meanings that the University of Chile students have on two concepts: "neoliberalism" and "equity". The natural semantic networks technique was used. A concept's semantic networks refer to the set of items selected by the memory through a reconstructive process. This network is given by associative links and the memory processes nature, which chooses the elements that comprise it. This selection is based not on the association's strength, but on the elements within the network kind of properties (Figueroa, et al., 1981). The research sample was an intentional non-probabilistic type, also known as purposive sample (Hernández et al., 1991: 231) and included a total of 70 students ($n = 70$), who were assigned to the Faculty of Philosophy and Humanities and the Faculty of Social Sciences of the University of Chile. The sample distribution was: 16 graduate students in Educational Psychology, 9 doctoral students in Psychology, 21 undergraduate students in Psychology, and 24 undergraduate students in History, including 27 male individuals (38.5%) and 43 females (61.5%).

2.2. Procedures

The fieldwork was conducted in April of 2012 at the University of Chile. All students were invited to participate voluntarily and to ensure the respondent's anonymity the field instrument did not require a name. The natural semantic networks technique was applied to the subjects (Figueroa et al., 1981; Valdez Medina et al., 1998). First, they were asked to address the stimulus words "equity" and "neoliberalism" and to express a definition for each concept with a minimum of five and a maximum of ten words. They were informed they could use verbs, adverbs, nouns, adjectives and pronouns, but asked to avoid using any grammatical particle (articles or prepositions).

Secondly, they were asked to prioritize each word used as definition by assigning the number 1 for the one considered most important, related, close or that best defined the stimulus word, the number 2 to the next most important, the number 3 to the next and so on, until they had included all the words used as definitions; the number ten was assigned to the word that was furthest from the concept.

2.3. Data Analysis

To analyze the natural semantic networks findings⁸ it was pertinent to consider the following indicators used by Figueroa (1981) Moreno (1999); Valdez Medina, et al. (2004); Cabalín, et al. (2010):

1. J value. Indicates network size. The total of defining words used for the stimulus word. Displays the network's semantic richness.
2. M value. Indicates semantic weight. The value obtained through multiplying the frequency of occurrence and the hierarchy obtained by this concept ($M = \text{frequency} \times \text{hierarchy}$).
3. SAM set. The group of words that get the highest values M.
4. FMG value. Indicates semantic distance. The defining words in the set SAM, in terms of percentages and semantic distance between words taking the word with more semantic weight as a 100% reference.
5. G value. Indicates semantic density. The difference between the highest and the lowest M values in the SAM set, which is divided by ten. Indicates the proximity among the ten M values that composes the SAM set, where the low G values reflect a high semantic density and the high G values reflect a low density; it is understood that there is distance between the concepts that constitute the network.

3. Findings

3.1. Liberalism Definitions

From the seventy [70] students that participated in the study, a total of 197 words were obtained as definition of the concept "neoliberalism", that is the value $J=197$ (Table 1). The result for the SAM set for the twelve words with higher semantic weight (M value) are shown in Table 1. Associated with this table, the graphic 1 displays how the network is built and towards where the semantic weight leans; it is evident that between the concept "injustice" ($M=118$), representing 48.7% and the concept "companies" ($M=69$) representing 28.5%, there is a moderate percentage variance (20.2%). This means that from the fifth definition (injustice), lower G values and FMG values will be present, which can be understood as proximity and density. Graphic 2 displays the semantic cores (drawn from the FMG values, Table 1). In this context the first core words identified are related to "definitions on the social effect". The word inequality (100%) has to do with the effect caused by neoliberalism. That is, neoliberalism is defined as an economic model that produces inequality; percentages greater than fifty percent (>50%) are associated to this concept. Concepts related to the "economic model" are associated to the second semantic core, namely how it is constituted and its dynamic in the economy. It is noticeable that the definitions refer to free market or market (84%), economy or economic system (83%). Only these three words grouped over 50% of the students' opinions, that is, their main areas of interest (Table 1). Additionally, the word capitalism has a value of FMG 49.5%, a data that reflects proximity in terms of percentages, with this dimension. The third core words are related to the dyad injustice/poverty and associated with the neoliberal model "economic effects/social effects"; considering that the model's most negative effect affecting the Chilean population is: poverty. It is important to note that between the concept capitalism (FMG = 49.5%) and the concept injustice (FMG = 48.7%) there is a small distance (0.8%), and between the capitalism and the poverty concepts the same phenomenon occurs, with a semantic distance of 5.7%. Taking into account this semantic core we can build the following interpretation: the neoliberal model is a model within the capitalist economy that is unfair and generates poverty. Also, from the term "capitalism" there is nine concepts that are below 50% of the definitions. Continuing with the description of graphic 2, there is a group of fourth concepts with lower FMG value that can be considered "definitions around the model structure".

⁸ Some authors choose to analyze the network's weight from a set of 15 SAM defining words (Valdez Medina, et al., 2004); other authors conduct this analysis from 12 defining words (Cabalin, et al. 2010). For this research, both the concept of "neoliberalism" and the concept of "equity" were analyzed according to the semantic weight with 12 values, because there was a marked proximity between the concept number 10 -companies- and the concept 12 -competition- (table 1) and between the concepts -solidarity and distribution (Table 2). The importance of the analysis is not to alter the G values (G value total/individual G values), since the equation to obtain these values must adhere strictly to the analysis of the first ten M values. Therefore, the last two G values (Table 1: inequality, competition and Table 2: society, solidarity) are not reported.

Concepts such as globalization (35.5%), individualism (33%), money (32.2%) and companies/entrepreneurs (28.5%) are part of the definitions expressed by the Chilean students. They view neoliberalism as a structure that is made up of companies and individuals (individualist) whose motivation is making money and that this is part of globalization. Finally, two defining concepts associated with neoliberalism were identified: inequality (28.5%) and competition (26.8%). These concepts are grouped into what has been called "definitions on the social effect", which once more, describe the negative effects resulting from neoliberalism. It's an inequitable model as it does not distribute income to citizens according to a welfare state policy, but following an economic model that determines who should receive the income based on relations market/employment. Thus, the rivalry to occupy a place in the labor market and the benefits that could be obtained from this, for example if employees can access social security, becomes a daily fierce competition. Moreover, G value was $G=17.3$ (see Table 1), which means there is a moderate (not high) semantic density in all definitions associated with the concept "neoliberalism" and between the concept "inequality" and the concept "companies". In the specific analysis of each of the G values, graphic 3 shows clearly that between the concept "injustice" (value $G = 0.2$) and the concept "companies" (value $G = 0.9$) there are concepts associated with high semantic density (low G value). It is evident how these values are densely concentrated with a value fluctuation between 0.2 and 2.0. In contrast to the first three definitions (inequality, market and economy) its density is low, although they have the highest M values and grouped over 50% of the definitions; the concepts are distant from each other. The single G value showing density between these three concepts is that between market and economy (0.2), reflecting a strong link between these concepts.

3.2. Definitions about Equity

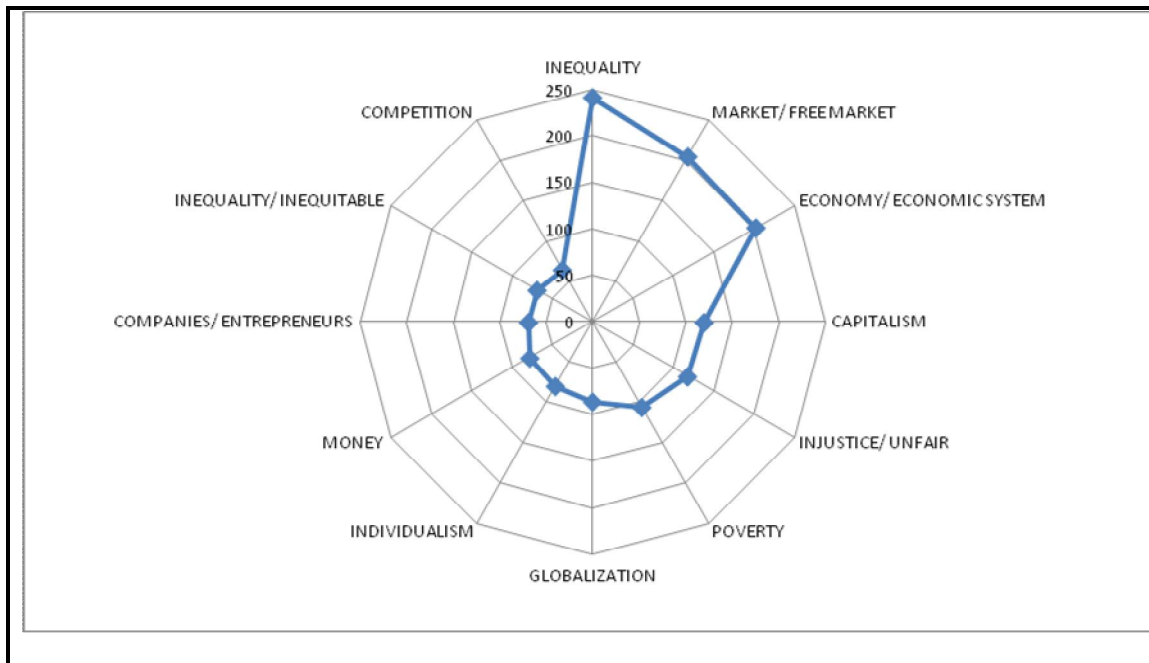
From the seventy [70] students who participated in the study, a total of 186 words were obtained to define the concept of "equity", this is the value $J=186$ (Table 2). The result for the SAM set for the twelve words with the higher semantic weight (M value) are shown in Table 2. Associated with this table, graphic 4 presents how the network is built and towards where the semantic weight leans. Between the concept "rights" ($M=104$), representing 27.5% and the concept "solidarity" ($M=50$) representing 13.2%, there is a minimum percentage difference (14.3%), meaning that from the fourth definition, low G values and FMG values will be noticed, which is understood as proximity and density. The graphic 5 shows semantic cores representations (drawn from the FMG values, Table 2). The first core words identified are related to "definitions around the politic /philosophical dimension". The word equality (100%) is related to the outcome of equity: equity is a political act (whether social policy, public policy, or State policy) and consequently there is equality (gender, access, etc.). Percentages greater than fifty percent ($> 50\%$) are associated with this concept and are linked to effects from equity, i.e. as opportunities (56.2%), and from what society should "get" from political action, i.e. justice (51.9%). Only these three words encompass over 50% of the students' views and represent their main areas of interest (Table 2). The second core of words is related to the dyad rights/education and associated with the subject's "education", defined as a right to which one must have access. It is important to note that between the word justice (FMG = 51.9%) and the word rights (FMG = 27.5%) there is a considerable distance (24.4%). In this regard, between the concept of "rights" and "education" there is only a distance of 5.5 percentage points. Then, from the concept of "rights", there are nine concepts under 50% of the definitions. Continuing with the graphic 5 description, there is a third group of words with a lower FMG value that can be considered "definitions around the dimension of social justice". For students, equity is defined as an instrument of social justice. The definitions are associated with the "expectations" that generate equity. That is, the possibilities and opportunities for a more just society: development (17.5%), democracy (17.2%), need (14.5%), distribution (14.3%), society (13.2%) and solidarity (13.2%). It is important to note that the antonym concept inequality (16.1%) appeared in the definitions. The G value obtained is a high value, $G=32.3$ (Table 2), which means there is a low semantic density in all definitions associated with the equity concept. Also between the concept "equality" and the concept "distribution" there is a low density. In the specific analysis of each of the G values, the graphic 6 shows clearly that between concept "education" (value $G = 2.1$) and the concept "distribution" (value $G = 0.1$) there are concepts associated with a high semantic density (low G value). These values are densely concentrated with a value fluctuation between 0.1 and 2.1, contrasting with the first four definitions (equality, opportunity, justice, rights) which have a low-density, but high M values; these concepts are distant from each other. The single G value showing density between these four concepts is that between opportunity and justice (1.6), which reflects a strong link between these concepts.

Table 1: SAM Set. Stimulus Word: Neoliberalism

	M value	FMG (%) value	G value
1. INEQUALITY	242	100	0
2. MARKET/ FREE MARKET	205	84	3.7
3. ECONOMY/ ECONOMIC SYSTEM	203	83	0.2
4. CAPITALISM	120	49.5	8.3
5. INJUSTICE/ UNFAIR	118	48.7	0.2
6. POVERTY	106	43.8	1.2
7. GLOBALIZATION	86	35.5	2
8. INDIVIDUALISM	80	33	0.6
9. MONEY	78	32.2	0.2
10. COMPANIES/ENTREPRENEURS	69	28.5	0.9
11. INEQUALITY/INEQUITABLE	69	28.5	-
12. COMPETITION	65	26.8	-
Value J= 197			
Value G= 17.3			

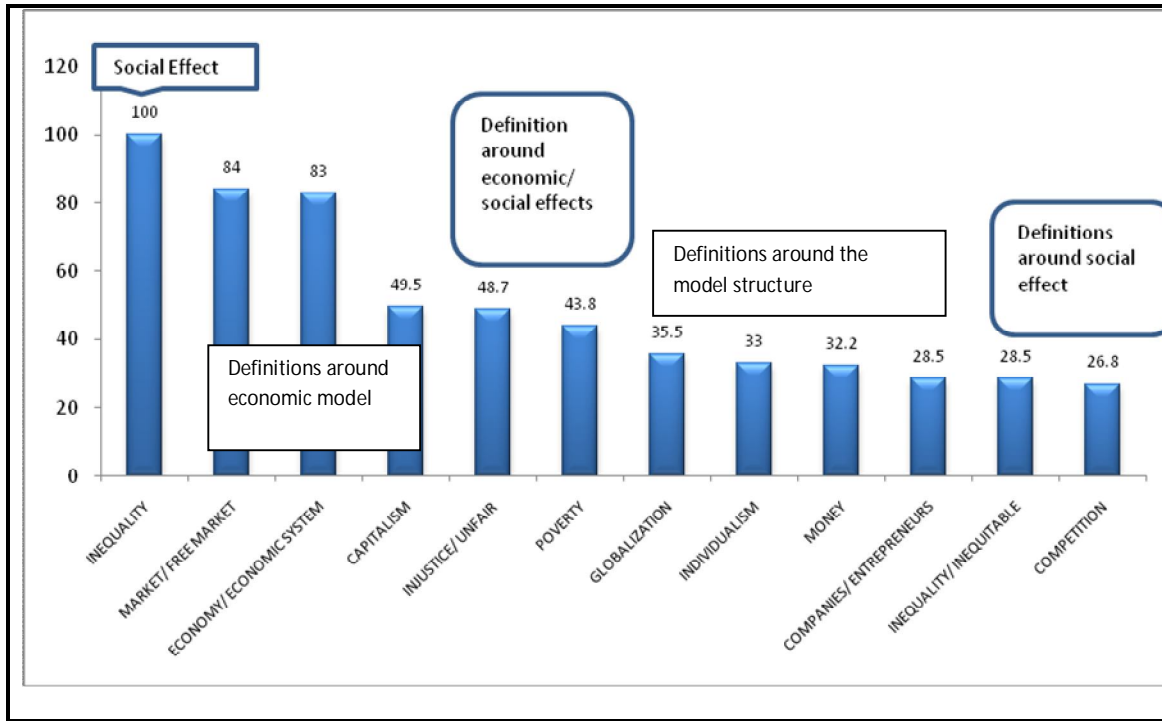
Source: Self Elaboration.

Graphic 1: M Value (Semantic Weight). Stimulus Word: Neoliberalism



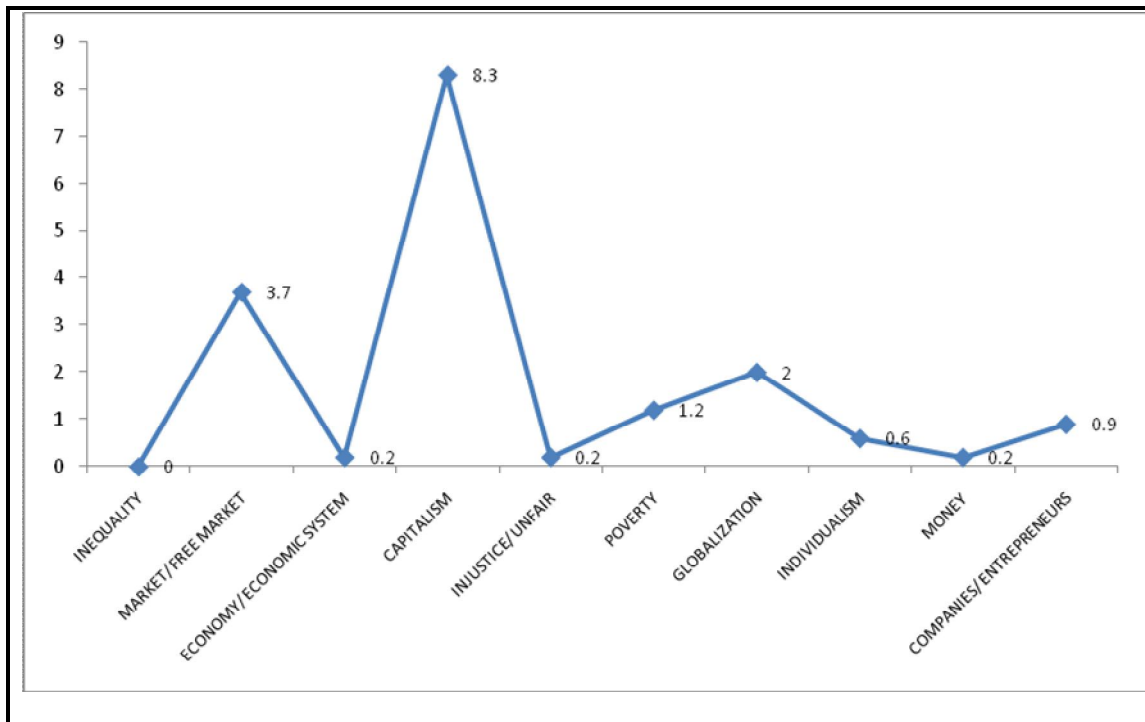
Source: Self Elaboration

Graphic 2: FMG Value (Semantic Distance). Stimulus Word: Neoliberalism



Source: Self Elaboration

Graphic 3: Gvalue (Semantic Density). Stimulus Word: Neoliberalism



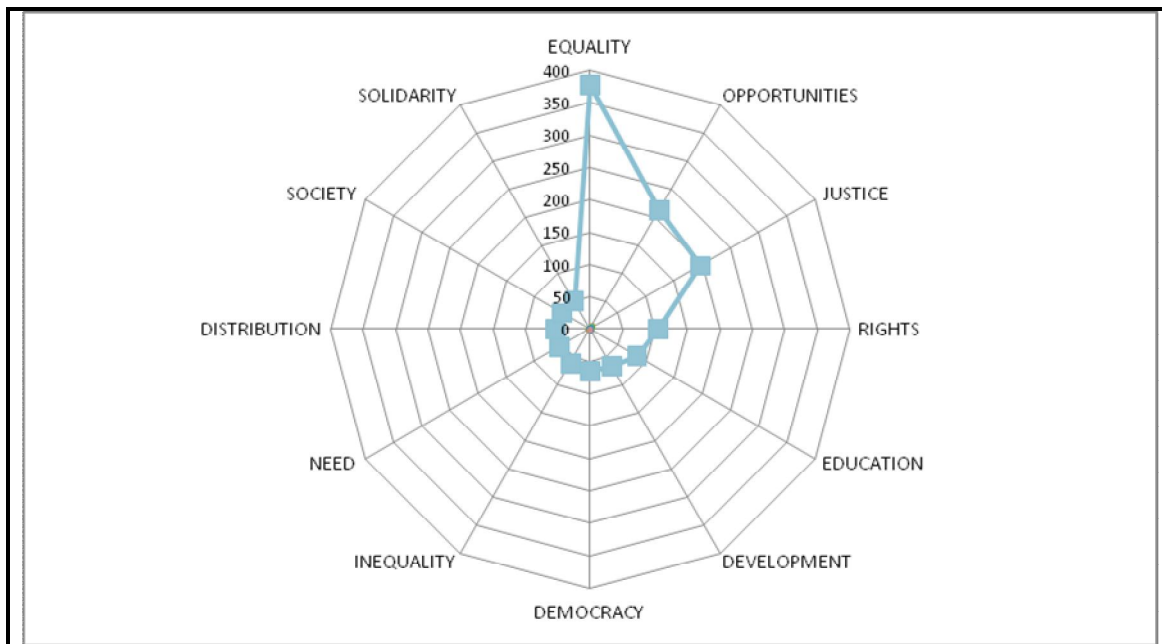
Source: Self Elaboration.

Table 2: SAM Set. Stimulus Word: Equity

		M value	FMG (%) value	G value
1.	EQUALITY	377	100	0
2.	OPPORTUNITIES	212	56.2	16.5
3.	JUSTICE	196	51.9	1.6
4.	RIGHTS	104	27.5	9.2
5.	EDUCATION	83	22	2.1
6.	DEVELOPMENT	66	17.5	1.7
7.	DEMOCRACY	65	17.2	0.1
8.	INEQUALITY	61	16.1	0.4
9.	NEED	55	14.5	0.6
10.	DISTRIBUTION	54	14.3	0.1
11.	SOCIETY	50	13.2	-
12.	SOLIDARITY	50	13.2	-
	Value J= 186			
	Value G= 32.3			

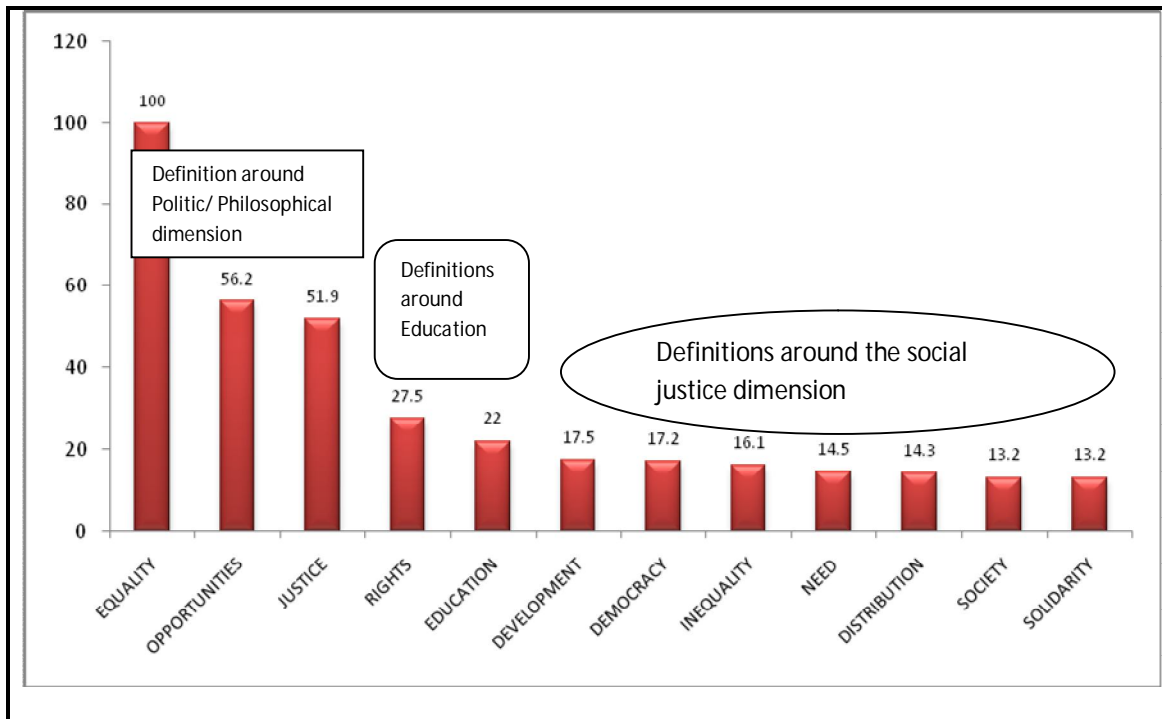
Source: Self Elaboration.

Graphic 4: M Value (Semantic Weight). Stimulus Word: Equity



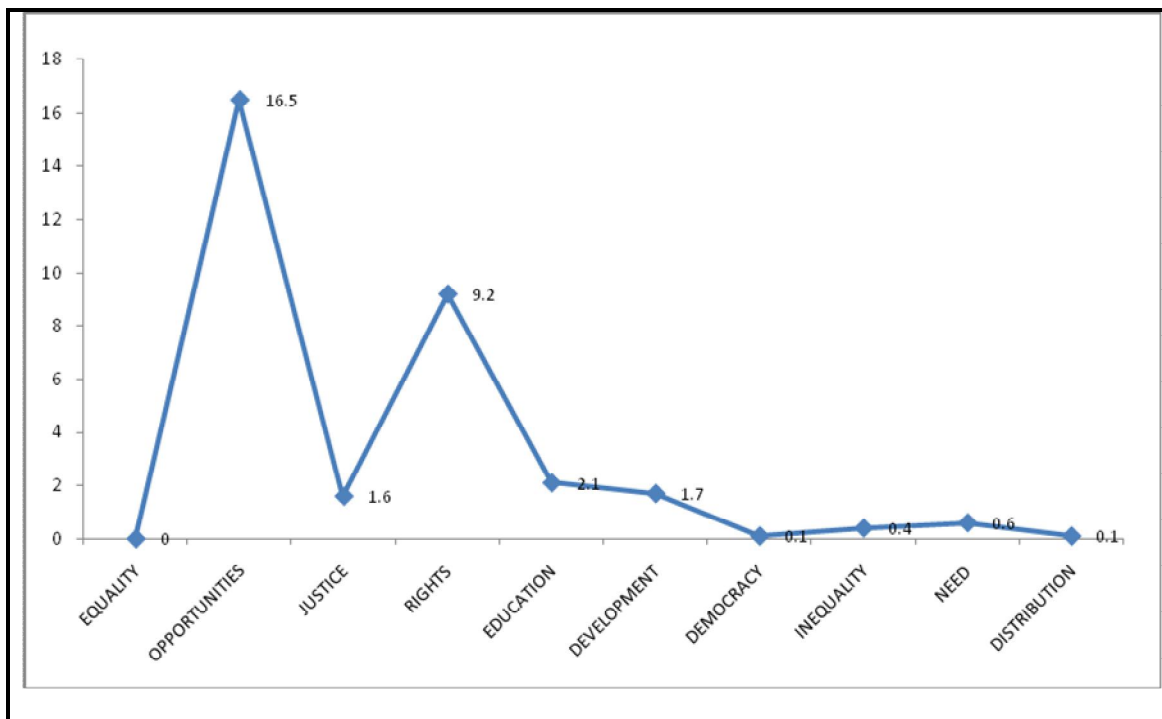
Source: Self Elaboration

Graphic5. FMG Value (Semantic Distance). Stimulus Word: Equity



Source: Self Elaboration

Graphic 6: G Value (Semantic Density). Stimulus Word: Equity



Source: Self Elaboration.

4. Discussion

The research results support the conclusion that for the University of Chile students, neoliberalism and equity are by nature two antagonistic concepts. In conclusion, they consider neoliberalism is an economic system based on capitalism and it is characterized by inequality, competition, injustice and individualism, and its effects are evident with poverty. While equity is a right based on distribution and characterized by equality (access), opportunities and justice, as well as focused on society and becomes evident with development. The results demonstrated that the first concept to which the University of Chile students referred to and that forms their schemes of definition for the concept "neoliberalism" is inequality. In parallel, the research findings allowed to identify an antonym conceptual definition relationship (neoliberalism) associated with the concept "equity": equality (see Tables 1 and 2). It is interesting to find these two concepts facing a mirror of antagonism in the relationship neoliberalism/equity; while there is no cause/effect direct relationship established, they are indeed defined as constitutive of the reproductive circle in continuum (inequality/economic system/injustice/companies/poverty), that reproduces capital accumulation models and economic structures, and in the social sphere, reproduces stratification and segmentation schemes. When matching definitions [rights and system], we evidently face a first conceptual confrontation (Table 3). While for the University of Chile students equity is a right that must be characterized by equality, justice and opportunities and that should allow benefiting from a service to meet a need while ensuring the equitable distribution of that service (mainly education), the neoliberal model core structure is based on the capitalist system, which by nature is inclined towards accumulation of capital and competition.

Table 3: Concepts: Neoliberalism and Equity. Conceptual Confrontations

Neoliberalism	System	It's a based in characterized by	Right	Equity
	Capitalism		Distribution	
	Inequality		Equality	
	Injustice	=	Justice	
	Competition	=	Opportunities	
	Individualisms	=	Society	
Poverty	It's evident with	Development		

Source: Self Elaboration from table 1 and table 2.

Currently, in the Chilean society there is an explicit resistance and protest towards the prevailing model. However, and compared to other societies, Tiramonti (1997, quoted by Lopez and Flores, 2006:5), affirms that since the nineties the social imaginary representations in Argentinean society regarding the way neoliberalism penetrated the educational systems was modified: The social imaginary of the Argentinean people began a process of transmutation and went from considering the funding of education as a human right and a duty of the State [emphasis added], to take it as a right to be acquired by competition for financial resources under the scheme performance evaluation. Parents and teachers that in 1991 were public school advocates and resisted the privatization trend, by 1995 had in replacement, developed a strong institutional competitiveness by obtaining extraordinary resource associated with the financing of special educational projects (Tiramonti, 1997; quoted by Lopez and Flores, 2006:5). In other words, funding for education is neither a citizen right, nor a State obligation. It is not a fair distribution and income redistribution act, but a privilege that reflects the merit achieved by the academic institution and school officials in terms of efficiency. That is, make proper use of the material resources assigned and avoid wasting it as this will allow to keep receiving the stimulus and in the best case, in a larger quantity. Indeed, the school will also be considered a quality⁹ educational institution, as Camila Vallejo expressed: In fact the current president said it last year [referring to 2011], "education is a commodity," which accurately reflects where it is built, well, they were the ideologues of this model years, decades ago, but how was the whole educational model in Chile structured? Understanding education as a commodity, as a tradable good in the market, as a commodity to be consumed, what we are trying to make is that it is a social right, a universal right and it is a public good, a good of all (Vallejo, 2012).

⁹ Around the concept *quality* and its relationship with *efficiency* as its indicator (applied particularly to basic education), there is full acceptance for this relationship both in the academic areas and among the educational systems evaluation officials (Toranzos, 1996; Schmelkes, 1997; Muñoz Izquierdo, 1998; INEE, 2003; Rodriguez, 2003; Robles, 2009).

Another conceptual confrontation is visible in the Chilean youth population aspirations [opportunity and competition]. Indeed, it is clear that equality and access to opportunities are listed in that cluster of aspirations. The public protests led by students that also involved some professors, are a reflection of the demand and the pursuit of such opportunities, considering that 60% of college-age young people are not attending school (OECD, 2007). The public university offers a limited supply of places for the student. The educational offer is dominated by private universities (73% of the educational offer); their excessive tuition cost becomes a barrier to access this level of education. Therefore, competition for a place in a public university also becomes an unequal competition from the aspiration to enter the system, because those few opportunities to earn a place in public universities are mediated by the University Test Selection (PSU: Prueba de Selección Universitaria). The test was initially established in December 2003 and became an instrument of exclusion because while there is access to technologies for test preparation, only 60% of applicants have access to such information and training platforms (websites, podcasts, applications in mobile phones, etc.). Thus, those who for economic or geographical (the educational system in Chile is concentrated in the central area) reasons do not have easy access to these resources are excluded (UNESCO, 2012). Furthermore, although is not this manuscript's main purpose to cover equity comprehensively from a gender perspective, it must be addressed in the discussion since the female population that enters, transits and graduates from the educational system at all levels -educational path- is negatively affected by the social structure and its mechanisms of inequity, inequality, segregation and discrimination.

This phenomenon has been widely analyzed, its pioneer and main contributor is the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (2009 [1964]). In "The heirs. Students and culture", Bourdieu described how those aspiring to enter the university were directly conditioned by the social class they belonged¹⁰ to (children of workers, peasants, or professional) and sex. Regarding the female population educational path (entry, permanence and graduation), Bourdieu made it clear that the group was influenced by the restriction of choice, where career choices were determined largely by the applicant's sex, the programs on Arts and Humanities were particularly abounded with women and students from middle and upper classes. In Bourdieu's words: In principle and irrespective of social origin, it is still more likely that women are inclined for letters and boys for scientific studies. This trend recognizes the influence of the traditional models of division of labor (and of the "gifts") between the sexes. More generally, women tend to be condemned to the faculties of Arts and Sciences, to prepare for a teaching profession (Bourdieu, 2009:19). Returning to the Chilean case and analyzing the same phenomenon in the current context, the first changes have become evident in the perception and evaluation that Chilean society itself has given to the relation sex/profession. In this sense, according to Meller (2010b: 195) in the early twentieth century, Chile said that "college was not for women," and if they were admitted, they had to pursue "programs for women." Once the cultural stigma "men to work and women to the home" were overcome and with the open and direct integration of women into the academic and professional fields, Meller affirmed that: "we can no longer talk only about a couple of university professions that are highly feminized" (2010b: 200). The problem of admission to higher education is not currently determined by gender or the program to pursue¹¹. Meller (2010b) considers the inequities in the professional practice once the higher level education is complemented as the crucial problem. He presents an analysis of gender discrimination in the labor market. The study analyzes the segregation conditions experienced by women, which, according to the Chilean researcher, are determined by two variables:

1. Access to certain types of employment and
2. Differential pay.

Meller considered two university graduates cohorts, one for the year 1998 (n=4,389) and other for the year 2000 (n=6,517) to apply a regression analysis in which the dependent variable was the income and distinguished between men and women and their income on the second year after graduation, he found that "there is on average a

¹⁰ According to the class belonged, it was demonstrated that children of professional individuals had more possibilities (80%) of entering college than the children of workers, rural workers, farmers or service personnel (less than 1%). Data that inevitably reflects inequities in a system that by nature was to serve the bourgeois class.

¹¹ In Chile, programs in Medicine and Law are two of the highest social status programs; professional women constitute more than 45% of the total new professionals graduating annually (Meller, 2010b: 200).

wage gap by gender among graduated in the range of 22% and 23%. That is, professional women earn on average 22% to 23% less than men" (Meller, 2010b: 209).

The causes are correlated with the following independent variables:

1. Differences in skills (as measured by scores on the college application);
2. Differences in socioeconomic background;
3. Participation and wages in different geographic areas (Chilean labor supply is practically concentrated in the central region), and
4. Inhomogeneous distribution among the various professions (level of feminization of the programs).

In his conclusions¹², the author believes that there are three major hypotheses that may explain the pay gap between men and women:

1. Discrimination. Arbitrary preferences by employers, customers or employees;
2. Human Capital. The rating level can depreciate when large absenteeism;
3. Role of the family. The traditional division of family roles, involves relatively short working hours and discontinuous.

Associating these conclusions to the University of Chile students (and from a certain level of gender perspective, considering 61.5% of the sample were women), the claim for equity -understood and defined as equality-, justice and distribution was noticeable. According to their definition on the relationship neoliberalism/equity, the neoliberal model is not distributing income fairly when acting with arbitrary preferences by companies owners that assign higher salaries to men. Being inflexible in working conditions for women, who demand (or need) to cover personal issues such as family dynamics, requires flexibility in working conditions and the capitalist system (which seeks to accumulate capital/money) does not allow it. Finally, the developmental theory proposed by ECLAC [development/poverty] were committed to the development of Latin American society and the fight against poverty, where basic education (from elementary to high school) was considered the tool to achieve it. However, now that Latin American governments have overcome the educational coverage problem, the issue is not providing basic educational services to all people¹³, but equity; this is, the way in which the benefits of education are distributed and achieve a positive impact in terms of equality and justice, and attain the individual's and society's welfare as a whole (Muñoz Izquierdo, 1998; Mendez-Ramirez, 2012). Equity is committed to social participation, social capital enrichment, establishment of cooperation and mutual aid networks, as well as solidarity. Capitalism is committed to economic capital and the dissolution of mutual aid, replacing it with a selfish accumulation of values through exploitation, individualism, exploitation and arbitrary and inequitable distribution of resources. The dismantling of the welfare state created a lack of social security and employment protection and a lack of access to the basic minimum welfare (education, health, housing, food, employment). The young Chilean in age of attending university is unprotected and lacks of a free and quality education benefit. Access to education is a privilege (not a right) that only 40% of young people enjoy. Individuals whom complete their studies face the challenge of meeting a labor market permeated by the powers and business elite preferences who seek recruiting graduates from private universities, which are considered a more selective group. Graduates of these universities have more job opportunities and better pay (Meller, 2010a: 110). Women receive lower wages, as already shown. Higher education is indebted with Chilean society, particularly the public higher education. There is a need to rethink the scope of the offer, in contrast to the scope of private education. One wonders if it is necessary turn to see, even sideways, the thousands of students who call and claim a free, equitable and quality education.

¹² According to Meller to elucidate the validity of the above hypotheses, more research is needed at the micro level (interviews and surveys).

¹³ Mexico in particular, where higher education is free (or low cost), they created the University of Mexico City in 2001 to cover the growing demand for admission to higher education. Since its origin, it was established as free. However, despite that flexible measures of income (no entrance exam, no minimum GPA required and places are allocated by "lottery") somewhat guaranteed equity, the university has failed to cover the severe deficiencies in performance level required by the students. In 2010, there were only 47 students graduated and in 2011 only 135 had completed their studies. These data show that not only by covering the demand for education, the young people will have a chance to finish their education (from basic to higher). There is a need to raise the quality of education in terms of efficiency [cost-benefit] (Muñoz Izquierdo, 1998) for both parts: the offering State and the demanding society.

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