Inherited and Acquired Assets in the Chilean Higher Education Admission Process

Pablo Antonio Lillo Cea

Master’s thesis in Sociology of Education
No 7
Abstract
The present study examines from a Bourdieusian perspective the relationship between the university admission process and the social structure in Chile by analysing the extent to which inherited and acquired assets relates to the educational performance and pathways of talented students. Geometric Data Analysis in the form of Specific Multiple Correspondence Analysis is used to map out the social space of the First-application Enrolees in higher education via the University Selection Test between 2005 and 2017. Special attention is given to the sub-space of the students who achieve a perfect score in the test known as 'Puntajes Nacionales'. Thus, 16 interviews were conducted with such students so as to deepen the interpretation of the sub-space they constitute.

Evidence show an extremely high importance of inherited assets in the test performance of the First-application Enrolees, resulting in an overrepresentation of male, upper-middle class students which is not only mirrored but also sharpened within the sub-space of the Puntajes Nacionales. Such findings at once confirm and expand what previous research on the determinant conditions for the performance on the University Selection Test have argued, that is, that the function that the selection process in Chile fulfils is closer to fostering the misrecognition of the tight relationship existing between the institutionalized educational system and the social structure than to the actual measurement of competence on the national curriculum for secondary education achieved by the students. Finally, the emergence of an economy of symbolic exchange surrounding the figure of the Puntajes Nacionales in which agents other than the students benefits the most is discussed.

Supervisor: Emil Bertilsson
Examiner: Mikael Börjesson
Content

Foreword .................................................................................................................. 5

Introduction ................................................................................................................ 7

1. Background ........................................................................................................... 9
   1.1. The Chilean Educational System ...................................................................... 9
       1.1.1. Distant Origins .......................................................................................... 9
       1.1.2. Twentieth Century Reforms .................................................................... 11
       1.1.3. The Economic Turn: Immediate Origins ................................................. 12
       1.1.4. Ownership and Funding .......................................................................... 13
   1.2. University Admission in Chile ......................................................................... 14
       1.2.1. Selection Methods .................................................................................. 14
           Baccalaureate ............................................................................................... 15
           Scholastic Aptitude Test .............................................................................. 15
           University Selection Test ............................................................................. 15
       1.2.2. Higher Education Admission Rates ........................................................ 16

2. Research Questions ............................................................................................... 21

3. Previous Research .................................................................................................. 23
   3.1. Education and Social (In)Equality in Chile .................................................... 23
   3.2. Along Came the University Selection Test ..................................................... 23

4. Sociological Approach .......................................................................................... 27
   4.1. The Space of Positions .................................................................................. 27
   4.2. The Space of Dispositions ............................................................................. 28
   4.3. The Social Embeddedness of Educational Systems ...................................... 29

5. Methods ................................................................................................................ 31

6. Results .................................................................................................................. 33
   6.2 Interpreting the Space of the First-application Enrollees ................................ 34
       6.2.1. Eigenvalues and Contributing Variables .................................................. 35
           Axis 1: Inherited Capital Volume .................................................................. 36
           Axis 2: Acquired Capital Type ..................................................................... 36
           Axis 3: Acquired Capital Volume .................................................................. 36
       6.2.2. The Space over Time ............................................................................... 38
       6.2.3. Sex, High School Type and University Selection Test Performance ........ 39
           Sex and High School Type .......................................................................... 40
           University Selection Test Performance ....................................................... 42
       6.2.4. Regional Location of the Schools ............................................................ 44
       6.2.5. Higher Education Recruitment Patterns ............................................... 46
           By University ................................................................................................ 46
           Enrolment in Elite Programmes .................................................................... 47
   6.3. The Sub-Space of the Puntajes Nacionales ...................................................... 49
       6.3.1. Position in the Space ............................................................................... 49
       6.3.2. Puntajes Nacionales over Time ............................................................... 51
       6.3.3. Puntajes Nacionales according to Sex and High School Type ............... 53
6.3.4. *Puntajes Nacionales* according to University Selection Test Performance. 56
6.3.5. *Puntajes Nacionales* according to Regional Origin ___________ 58
6.3.6. Higher Education Recruitment Patterns of *Puntajes Nacionales* ______ 60
  According to University ___________________________________________ 60
  *Puntajes Nacionales* in Elite Programmes ____________________________ 62
6.3.7. Summary ___________________________________________ 64
6.4. Dispositions within the Sub-Space of the *Puntajes Nacionales* ___________ 65
  6.4.1. To become a *Puntaje Nacional* ________________________________ 66
    Facilitating and Hindering Factors ________________________________ 66
    Hard Work vs Talent ____________________________________________ 68
    The Role of Luck and Chance ____________________________________ 71
  6.4.2. To be a *Puntaje Nacional* ________________________________ 72
    Micro-meanings ________________________________________________ 72
    Macro-meanings ________________________________________________ 73
  6.4.3. The Path of the *Puntajes Nacionales* ____________________________ 75
    Educational Strategies of *Puntajes Nacionales* ___________________________ 75
    Extension and Duration ____________________________________________ 77
  6.4.4. Criticism ___________________________________________ 78
7. Discussion ___________________________________________ 81
  7.1. Structural Conditions of University Admissions in Chile ___________ 81
  7.2. University Admissions: An Economy of Symbolic Exchange ___________ 83
References ___________________________ 85
Appendix 1 ___________________________________________ 88
Appendix 2 ___________________________________________ 89
Appendix 3: Interview Guide ___________________________ 91
Foreword

I would like to thank the Department of Evaluation, Measurement and Educational Registry (DEMRE) of the Universidad de Chile for providing the databases of the Admission Process to Higher Education via the University Selection Test for the development of this research project, and all the informants who kindly accepted to participate in the interviews analysed in this work.

This thesis has been produced during my scholarship period at Uppsala University, thanks to a Swedish Institute Scholarship.
Introduction

Any fair portrayal of Chile cannot ignore its sharp contrasts. Whether one is describing its landscapes, its climate or even its history, a myriad of contradictory elements appears as simultaneously contained within the same narrow and long piece of land located in south-western Latin-America. Social life is no exception to this rule, especially if we look at its socio-economic indicators. According to recent OECD reports, Chile, with a GINI coefficient\(^1\) of 0.503\(^2\), has consistently appeared as the most unequal member country regarding income distribution over the past few years\(^3\), with the top 10% of the population earning in average 26.5 times the average income of the bottom 10% - that is 17.5 times more than the average OECD proportion.\(^4\) Taking Sweden as a reference point, a country highly ranked with regard to income equality, the average income of the top 10% of income earners was 6.3 times higher than that of the bottom 10%, and the GINI coefficient of the country roughly reaches 0.28.\(^5\)

Chile’s disproportionate wealth distribution has been often regarded as a problem that needs to be addressed given its economic and cultural repercussions.\(^6\) In this sense, there seems to be a tacit agreement that education is the only key capable of opening the door to a more egalitarian society. Indeed, when asked about the function that educational institutions serve, many, especially those from working and middle-classes, have answered highlighting ideas such as ‘social mobility’ and ‘equality of opportunities’.\(^7\) In other words, Chileans tend to assume that studying and obtaining a professional degree play a decisive part in overcoming poverty.

Nevertheless, sociological research on these matters has provided evidence that supports a very different point of view. According to the studies conducted by the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu and his collaborators, educational systems appear to be a gravitating factor in the permanent redistribution of power and privilege. Moreover, they seem to make a critical contribution to the state’s monopoly on symbolic violence through its power to grant legitimacy to subjects’ occupation of certain positions within the social order.\(^8\) Thus, it has been reasonably posed that the most specific function of the institutionalized educational systems is that of masking its relationship to the structure of social-class relations, which is usually carried out through measurement and selection procedures.\(^9\) This way, all students appear to be equally submitted to a neutral

---

\(^1\) The Gini coefficient measures the extent to which the distribution of income deviates from a perfectly equal distribution. It ranges from 0 (when all people have identical incomes) to 1 (when the richest person has all the income).

\(^2\) Gini coefficient after taxes and transfers. For more information, visit http://stats.oecd.org/Index.aspx?DataSetCode=IDD


authority that sorts out the distribution of positions that embody success purely through assessing merits.

One form often taken by these above-mentioned measurement and selection procedures is that of standardized tests applied at different educational levels. In Chile, there is only one selection procedure for tertiary education, the University Selection Test (PSU, per the Spanish acronym), which is composed of four specific exams: mathematics, Spanish language, history and sciences. The first two are mandatory, and students may choose to take both or just one of the other two depending on the programme they are to apply to. This test is commonly assumed to objectively assess the students’ degree of competence on a portion of the national curriculum for secondary education; but it is not as often recognized how the classification of the students produced by its results is connected not only to purely educational issues.

In fact, it has been shown how a study on the scheme of relations among the students who perform particularly well in such selection processes can provide a clear account of the connection between the social structure and the educational system within a given society.\textsuperscript{10} In the case of Chile, the students who achieve a perfect score in at least one of the tests comprised by the PSU are known nationwide as \textit{Puntajes Nacionales}.\textsuperscript{11} They are seen by most people as those who because of their exceptional talent are meant for the ‘brightest of futures’, which entails that their actions and characteristics will have an important effect in the shaping of both the notion of ‘talent’ and of ‘bright future’ itself.\textsuperscript{12}

Along these lines, the present study sets out to examine the relationship between the university admission process and the social structure in Chile by analysing the extent to which the inherited and acquired assets of those regarded as talented students impact their educational performance and pathways. In chapter 1, a brief background to the Chilean educational system from its distant origins to the current date is carried out. Next, research questions are presented in chapter 2, followed by a review of previous research in chapter 3. The characterization of the sociological approach and the methodology used in this project are to be found in chapters 4 and 5 respectively. Results are presented in chapter 6 and later, in the concluding chapter of this work, they are discussed.

---

\textsuperscript{11} Literally translated, ‘national scores’.
\textsuperscript{12} Bourdieu, \textit{The State Nobility}, p. 113.
1. Background

1.1. The Chilean Educational System

When studying the genesis of specific educational systems, many scholars often have turned to the formation of national-states in the Western world during the nineteenth century as a point of departure. In this context, it has been highlighted how certain strategies were fostered by the elites of these emerging states, i.e., by the groups that had a significant degree of power at the time, for the sake and prosperity of their nascent sovereign projects. Policies as increasing elementary school enrolments and introducing topics in line with the construction of a national identity to the curriculum can be mentioned as examples of such strategies. Furthermore, it has also been stated how these actions were carried out in a scenery of conflict, one in which different social groups holding (more or less) different interests competed with one another among other issues, over the influence on the shaping of what were to become the educational systems of each nation-state. Such differences ultimately led to uneven outcomes depending on the agents’ relational performance within the socio-political scenery. As I will show next, Chile is not an exception to this characterization and, in fact, it rises as a paradigmatic example of how political struggle moulds the cultural arbitrary that underlies every educational system.

1.1.1. Distant Origins

The early Republican Chile inherited the rudimentary educational system typical of Spanish colonies: very few schools offering a simple and inflexible curriculum to a small male proportion of the population and two small universities in the capital city restrained to the few academic fields recognized in the Spanish-speaking world at the time. This approach to education fostered by the Spanish crown led to the conditions that nurtured an increasing discontent among a fraction of the Chilean dominant groups, which peaked at the start of the nineteenth century. Influenced by recent events of political turmoil in France and the United States, a group of young elite intellectuals seduced by the modern European ideals saw in the principles of Enlightenment an agenda setting forth the path to the society they envisioned, and, in popular education, the most adequate tool to ensure its construction. Thus, when the Spanish king Fernando VII was imprisoned by Napoleon, this cultural fraction of the elites took the opportunity to set up the First National Government

---

Meeting in September 1810, which eight years later would be regarded as the cornerstone of Chile’s independency.

One remarkable measure taken during this process that dates back as early as 1813 is the enactment of the ‘Regulation for Literacy Teachers’. This legal document dealt with the profile that such teachers should embody in the explicit understanding that it had a strategic character in the consolidation of the new order. This reveals that the national elites were rather aware that they needed not only to organize the new institutions that would embody the emerging social order, but also to think in a way to legitimize and keep their positions whilst rearranging the social and economic structures inherited from the previous regime. Hence, popular education was deemed to be indispensable for the wellbeing of the Republic inasmuch as it was seen as the ideal way of civilizing people, teaching them values and guiding their intelligence.

From 1817 to 1829, after several failed liberal experiments, another fraction of the elites decided to confront the new regime and seize political power. Those at the economic pole, composed by the conservative landowners from Santiago (the capital city) tightly related to the Catholic Church, were more interested in reproducing the colonial regime based on property privileges. Their lack of confidence in what they saw as a dysfunctional government, the actual incapacity from the cultural elite in power to assure political stability, and the news of civil war in Argentina, led to a short civil war which terminated the liberal regime in April 1830.

The conservative triumph founded the basis of the constituent power that allowed the victors who overthrow the former government to grant legal grounds to their domination through the Constitution of 1833, an enactment which opened a new period in Chilean history known as the ‘Conservative Republic’ spanning from 1830 to 1860. The efforts to expand schooling that for almost two decades were unsuccessful, slowly started to bear fruits in 1832 – gradually increasing the enrolments in elementary school, strengthening secondary education, promoting female education and outlining a centralized and unitary administrative structure over the decades to come. However, the educational policy comprehended to a lesser extent the primary education for the whole population, and to a greater one the secondary and higher education orientated to the elite and the embryonic middle-class groups. The highly segmented and stratified Chilean educational system designed in the 1840s, which underpinned the consolidation of the nation-state as such, would only be modified in the 1920s.
1.1.2. Twentieth Century Reforms

After a long period of debate about the social inequalities that reflected on- and persisted through the Chilean educational system, an agenda for its unification was set up by an Educational Reform Commission introduced in 1924. Out of the work of this commission in 1927, the Ministry of Education was instituted with the explicit task of organizing education as one functional unity; a task that would quickly find fierce opposition among the most privileged classes, especially as that unification entailed to impart secondary education to youngsters from different social groups in the same institutions.

When these attempts to unify the educational system carried out by the government did not progress, different actors started to organize on their own to push forward the agenda of a unitarian, correlated and continued school. Thus, teacher unionists formed the Federation of Chilean Educators (FEDECH, per the Spanish acronym) aiming at influencing the government, which they did, especially from 1944 onwards.

Nevertheless, it was not until the Christian Democratic regime of Eduardo Frei came into power in 1964 that it was possible to implement a major national reform programme. In this period the capacity of the system was increased; the structures of elementary and secondary education were modified, introducing local adaptations in the curriculum, as well as substantial improvements in teacher training with remarkably successful results.

With Frei’s reforms the educational system rapidly grew to levels never seen before, and quickly a scenery for which the existing structures were not prepared arose. Consequently, the next government, headed by the socialist Salvador Allende, presented a reform project whose main task was to deal with the huge gap created between the rising enrolment rates and insufficient educational structures by introducing radical transformations. Such a project was to be known as “The National Unified School Reform” (ENU, per the Spanish acronym). Thus, education workers and community members, from the whole social spectrum, directly or indirectly interested in the Chilean educational process, were invited to participate in the definition of national educational policy through a National Congress of Education that was set up in 1971. This Congress had high rates of participation, providing the social and technical basis for the massive reform programme.

After a long period of revision and discussion in which UNESCO and the Ministry of Education were involved, the characteristics of the new educational system were established. The National Unified School Reform was expected to be implemented as soon as possible, but seemingly, the rush of the government in doing so fed the resistance and suspicion that its opponents, the economic conservative elites and the Catholic Church, had from the very beginning. Accusing it of being part of a foreign ideological plot to indoctrinate...
people into Marxism and socialism, the detractors of the ENU held that the project was illegal insofar as it infringed fundamental rights protected by the Constitution such as the freedom of education and pluralism. These claims led to a delay in its implementation and to a negotiation between all the actors involved – including those groups opposing the government. Four months later, a coup d’état lead by the same opposing groups would be perpetrated, thus annulling every chance for this reform to ever be enacted.

1.1.3. The Economic Turn: Immediate Origins

In early 1973, whilst Allende’s government was fine-tuning the ENU project with popular participation, a group of economists, most of them having graduated from the School of Economics of the Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile and additionally trained at the University of Chicago, gathered with the mission of reviewing and republishing a series of analyses made by them a few years back. The final document, known as El Ladrillo (literally translated, “The Brick”), was to be used as the basis for the economic policies imposed by the civic-military dictatorship that started in September 11th that same year. Apart from a wide-ranging diagnosis of what they regarded as a complete failure of “the Marxist recipe incarnated in Salvador Allende’s government”, the text addressed issues such as pricing-, tax-, monetary- and fiscal policy among many others, all of them from the perspective of hardcore neoliberalism.

In the text, under the headline of “Socio-Economic Aspects of Educational Policies”, education is argued to be a primal factor in achieving socio-economic equality. Therefore, it ponders providing for free the minimum levels of instruction. Higher education, however, is approached as a direct and notorious benefit for the individuals who obtain it, which would justify the need for them to pay tuition fees. This passage finishes by acknowledging that the introduction of such fees in education may be extremely shocking for the prevailing mentality in the nation at the time, considering that people were used to tuition-free higher education. Therefore, it was suggested to complement this policy with scholarships for the most talented students who lacked the required economic means, and student loans for the rest of them.

The educational reform imposed during Pinochet’s dictatorship is still the deepest and most comprehensive one to these days and the principles that underlined it remain largely unchallenged.

As regards its structure, the institutionalized educational system in Chile nowadays comprises two compulsory and two non-compulsory levels. The compulsory ones are basic, which comprises primary and lower secondary (grades 1 to 8), and upper secondary (grades 9 to 12) with three different major programmes: humanistic-scientific, technical-professional (vocational) and artistic (enrolment wise, very small). The two non-compulsory are pre-school,
which is divided into three progressive stages, and higher education, which is imparted by universities, professional institutes and technical training centres.

1.1.4. Ownership and Funding

Chilean higher education has been both government and private owned since the second half of the 19th century. The first state university emerged shortly before the mid-1800s as one of the outcomes of the Chilean independent national state formation process, when the former Royal Universidad de San Felipe, run by the Spanish crown, was finally transformed into the Universidad de Chile after a period of transition. One century later, the Universidad Técnica del Estado was created out of the fusion of mining-, engineering- and teacher-training schools. Additional state run higher education institutions were opened from the 1950s onwards across the country under the model of Regional University Schools seeking to increase the reach and influence of the mentioned institutions.

The first privately owned university was founded by the Catholic Church in 1888 as to counteract the rising predominance of secular and liberal ideas. In the 20th century, other private universities were created by the regional elites in major cities like Concepción (Universidad de Concepción, 1919), Valparaíso (Universidad Técnica Federico Santa María, 1931), Valdivia (Universidad Austral, 1954) and Antofagasta (Universidad Católica del Norte, 1956). Thus, by the 1960s, Chilean higher education comprised two government owned universities with national reach and six privately owned ones focused on regional development. Three of the private universities were run by the Catholic Church. All of the universities existing at that time received funding from the State.

After the coup d’état and during the civic-military dictatorship that implemented political, economic and social transformations underpinned by a strong neoliberal approach, state funding for higher education was significantly reduced and slowly replaced by a self-financing model. These pro-market and deregulatory policies allowed and encouraged the creation of more private higher education institutions. Thus, between 1988 and 1993, 34 private universities were founded, 11 within a period shorter than three months. Many more have been founded since, making the present institutional landscape of higher education a very complex one. Whilst some higher education institutions are either exclusively government or privately owned, others can be said to be hybrids: although they are privately owned, their history and public service mission align them to some extent with those owned by the government. These institutions are grouped within the Council of Rectors of the Chilean Universities (CRUCH, per the Spanish acronym) along with those run by the State. To distinguish them from the public ones, the hybrid institutions included within the Council are known as G9.

If we consider elite higher education, i.e. higher education that leads to positions among higher levels of the government administration, within the free professions or in business corporations, it is found at the top traditional universities, namely the Universidad de Chile and the Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile, and more recently in some private universities such as the Universidad Adolfo Ibáñez, Universidad del Desarrollo and Universidad de Los Andes. The strong relationship between upper secondary pupils’ social origin and the type of high school they attend has an effect also for the recruitment to
higher education, where most of the students in elite higher education come from private schools.

Chilean higher education has four funding sources: (1) tuition fees charged directly to the students, (2) state funding, (3) the income the institutions receive for the services they sell and (4) others such as donations. State funding is composed of “basal funds”, “competitive funds” and the different scholarships granted to a portion of the student body attending the students’ merits and needs directly from the State. The “basal fund” which provides the most financial resources corresponds to the Direct Fiscal Contribution, which is granted to the CRUCH Universities, followed by the Indirect Fiscal Contribution, which is granted to the institutions where the 27,500 top students per their educational merits enrol at, including private institutions.

The cleavage between government- and private education appears also in the school system that prepares people for higher education. Since the 19th century, public and private systems coexisted, with special emphasis in the latter after the neoliberal reforms imposed in the last quarter of the 20th century. Nowadays we find public-, private-subsidized- and private high schools that differ both as regards how they are funded and with respect to the social origin of the pupils they recruit. The public ones are decentralized in the sense that government funding, based on vouchers for pupils, is channelled through each municipality that administrates the schools. These schools recruit mostly working-class students. The second type, the private-subsidized schools, run by private corporations, obtain their funding in some cases through fees paid by pupils’ families, but mostly through government school vouchers. Finally, the private schools are exclusively run and funded by private means. They recruit almost exclusively students from the upper-middle and higher classes.

1.2. University Admission in Chile

1.2.1. Selection Methods

University selection in Chile can be studied in three different periods according to the main three methods used throughout the history of Chilean higher education for such purpose. In all of them, the Universidad de Chile has played the leading role in elaborating and implementing such methods. From the mid-1800s up to 1967, the ‘bacalaureate’ was used to admit students to the universities. Afterwards, the ‘Scholastic Aptitude Test’ (PAA, per the Spanish acronym) came along, and was replaced at the turn of the 21st century by the ‘University Selection Test’ (PSU, per the Spanish acronym). Next, I will elaborate on each of these methods.

---

44 Galleguillos et al., pp. 19–23.
Baccalaureate
When the Universidad de Chile was founded, there was a rudimentary oral exam which granted those who passed it a bachelor’s degree. This exam was to be taken after going through a number of different courses in Spanish language, a foreign language, in history and geography of Chile, along with a specific test for the programme to which the students were to apply. Between 1927 and 1931, the administration of the Universidad de Chile was changed four times due to an educational crisis produced by the reforms and experiments that the government of the time tried to apply. This turmoil led to define graduation from high school as the only requisite to access higher education. Shortly after, the baccalaureate was re-established and used uninterruptedly until 1967.

Scholastic Aptitude Test
As the number of university enrollees grew, the baccalaureate system started to be criticized for not being strict enough. In 1963, a group of researchers from the Universidad de Chile decided to try out a new test, based on studies made in the 1950s and onwards. This initiative gave birth to the Scholastic Aptitude Test which in 1966 became the new official university selection method, replacing the baccalaureate.

The Scholastic Aptitude Test was composed of two mandatory sections (namely verbal and mathematics) and a series of Specific Knowledge Tests (namely advanced mathematics, biology, chemistry, physics, social sciences and history) which varied depending on each university and programme. The test was first implemented as such in January 11th, 1967. It would be the official university selection method for 35 more years, during which it was submitted to constant revisions and adaptations according to the needs it was supposed to satisfy -which meant the addendum of additional special tests for specific programmes.

University Selection Test
In January of 2000, the Ministry of Education, with the agreement of the Council of Rectors, created a research team with the purpose of analysing the Scholastic Aptitude Test and its coherence with the national curriculum for secondary education, so as to strengthen the articulation within the educational system between such secondary level and the tertiary level embodied by higher education. The team, integrated by scholars from the Universidad de Chile and the Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile, developed a project under the name of Higher Education Access System. However, after a series of debates, the project was rejected.

In 2002, it was decided for the Scholastic Aptitude Test to finally be replaced with the University Selection Test, a new test focused on the national curriculum for secondary education elaborated by the Department of Evaluation, Measurement and Educational Registry (DEMRE) of the Universidad de Chile. This test comprises four independent instruments: two mandatory tests (namely language and mathematics) and two optative tests (namely history and sciences, the latter of which has three specific forms: biology, chemistry and physics) which vary depending on the programme the students are to apply.

This test was advertised as a good indicator for how successful students’ educational trajectories have been and would be in the future, given that it also considers high school grades. It does so by transforming the high school grade
average into a score according to a standardized scale, which later contributes to the weighted score used when applying to a specific programme.

The students who achieve the highest score in one or more of the forms of the tests having taken the University Selection Test immediately after graduating from high school are known as Puntajes Nacionales (“National Scores”) and are regarded as the very best students of an age cohort. Traditionally invited to a formal breakfast with the President of the Republic, they are often offered scholarships to continue their studies in higher education as a reward for their merits.

The goal of these successive reforms on the university selection procedure have aimed at formalizing the university entry requirements so as the students are submitted to the same standard when applying for higher education study programmes. Along these lines, the University Selection Test would represent the most advanced instrument, which, inasmuch as it is built on the national curriculum for secondary education, is supposed to grant every secondary school leaver the same degree of success opportunity as long as they have attended secondary education.

1.2.2. Higher Education Admission Rates

Admission rates for higher education in Chile, considering only the institutions that partake in the University Selection Test, have grown almost uninterruptedly over the past decade as well as the number of applicants. Whilst in 2005, out of the 167,372 students who took the University Selection Test, 45,643 (27.3%) were admitted to a university programme; in 2017 these numbers increased to a total of 269,032 applicants out of which 82,943 (30.8%) were admitted (see Table 1).

This 3% expansion has been unevenly distributed amongst different social groups. As discussed in the previous chapter, insofar as the students are extremely segregated by social origin in different types of schools (depending on the income of their families from lower to higher ranges, each group - students form lower-, middle-, and high- income families - can be found almost exclusively at public, private-subsidized or private institutions), one can characterize this unevenness by controlling admission rates according to school funding.

Taking into account all the applicants between 2005 and 2017, those from private schools have had around twice as many possibilities of being admitted to higher education (49%) than those from voucher (26%) and public schools (20%). Furthermore, notwithstanding the fact that they contribute to a lesser extent to the total population of applicants (12%), students from private schools equate to 20% of the total enrolees, whereas students from voucher and public schools amount to 50% and 38% of the total number of applicants and make up 49% and 30% of the total enrolees respectively.

There is also a notorious variation of 8% between the years 2011 and 2012 in the enrolment rates of students from private and public high schools. For the former, it was an increase, and for the latter, it was a decrease. This was one of

---

46 There are private higher education institutions in Chile which admission process does not consider the University Selection Test. As long as the applicants are able to afford the tuition fees and there are enough places for them in a certain programme, they will be admitted.

47 See section 1.1.4.

48 “Voucher schools” is another way to refer to “private-subsidized” schools within this text.
the consequences of the implementation of a ‘Qualification Ranking’, an index created to indicate the relative position of the students’ educational trajectory independently of both the type of school(s) they attended and their socioeconomic background. This new policy aimed at increasing the weight of the students’ educational trajectory versus their University Selection Test performance. The measure was largely criticised for its effects at this time, which lead to its modification.  

Overall, if we compare the first and the last year of the studied lapse, the percentage of public school students admitted for higher education decreases as that for voucher and private school students rises. However, when inspecting recent years, the trend seems to be that the admission rate for public schools is growing whilst the same rate for voucher and private schools is slowly dropping (see Diagrams 1 and 2).

49 This ‘Qualification Ranking’ will be further discussed in section 3.2. of chapter 3.
Table 1. Applicants and Admitted to Chilean Universities via University Selection Test per School Funding between 2005 and 2017.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Applicants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Academic Year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Admitted</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Academic Year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This table and the graphs that follow, were created for descriptive purposes using the databases described in chapter 5.

2. Research Questions

This study sets out to analyse the contribution of inherited and acquired assets to the higher education selection process with a focus on the best performing students, generally defined as those who are accepted to higher education institutions at their first application, as a way to explore the connection between the educational system and the social structure in Chile. Three main questions and a set of sub-questions guide this research:

1. **How is the space of the Chilean First-application Enrolees via University Selection Test structured?** What is the importance of inherited as opposed to acquired assets for the positioning within this space? What contrasts can be found regarding the sex, school type (per funding and status) and geographical origin of the students? How does the composition of students' assets reflect on their University Selection Test performance and on their choice of higher education? To what extent has this space changed over time, if at all?

2. **What positions do the Puntajes Nacionales occupy within this space?** What kind of assets characterize the PNs? How does the distribution of their inherited and acquired assets resemble or differ from the distribution in the overall space?

3. **What dispositions can be found amongst the Puntajes Nacionales and how do they relate to their position in the space?** Do the Puntajes Nacionales use different narratives as to explain what it takes and what it means to achieve a perfect score in one of the forms of the University Selection Test? How do these students explain their performance and career choice? Is their status associated to specific educational strategies? If so, what other agents are involved in the deployment of such strategies and in what ways according to the experience of the Puntajes Nacionales themselves?
3. Previous Research

3.1. Education and Social (In)Equality in Chile

At the dawn of the twentieth Century, the nascent Chilean educational system had developed its secondary and tertiary levels unrelatedly to the primary level and vocational sections. As noted by the historian of education Amanda Labarca, each of these tracks concerned different social groups: the former, the elites, and the latter, the working classes. This reflection of the social structure into these educational paths, which persisted throughout the last century, continue to some extent to these days.

According to studies on the performance of students in international tests, socio-economic background is the most influential factor. Very few of them outperform the expectations based on the average performance for their socio-economic group. Furthermore, domestic tests show the exact same tendency, indicating that school performance depends more on social factors rather than on the character of the education received by the students.

Regarding elite degree programmes in higher education, that is, programmes related to access to power positions, it has been described how it most serves those who already come from an elite background, i.e. from elite schools and very wealthy families. Studies on the role of elite colleges in providing a pathway for talented students from non-elite backgrounds into positions of top leadership at major companies and income distribution, have concluded that even when the admission system is based on tests scores and school grades, it is the social networks that the students carry from their high school years that play the most important role in embodying such positions rather than their academic performance.

Considering this evidence, Chileans’ perception of education as divided in public and private as a reflection of their quality, even if mediated by the belief that it grants the chance for individual social mobility, appears as empirically grounded.

3.2. Along Came the University Selection Test

The Chilean University Selection Test was first implemented in December 2003 under the context of a heated debate. On the one hand, its supporters claimed that this new test would bring great improvements to the system given its focus on the curriculum for upper-secondary education. According to them, preparing for the test would come down to just paying attention in the classroom, which would improve learning outcomes for all the students regardless of their social origin and thus bolster equity through an enhanced social mobility. On the other hand, there were those who stated that, in a country where the socio-economic

---

51 OECD, *Education in Chile*, p. 61.
52 Ibid., p. 63.
54 Ibid., pp. 32–3.
55 Mayol, Azócar and Azócar, *El Chile Profundo*, p. 177.
56 Ibid., p. 187.
conditions hindered equal access to quality primary- and secondary education, it would be difficult to ensure that no one would be left behind.\(^{57}\) Studies aiming at settling this argument by establishing the truth of the effects of the PSU\(^{58}\) started to be published as soon as there was enough data to conduct proper research.

One of the PSU’s principal aims has been to organize the secondary school leavers according to their performance as an indicator of future academic success in higher education. Thus, analysing its determining factors and results has been regarded as a way to assess the relation between the educational system and the social order within which it is embedded. Considering this perspective, evidence suggesting a tight connection between economic capital and educational inequalities was published in 2008. Particularly, it was established that lower amounts of economic capital in the household of a student would predict a lower score on the test.\(^{59}\)

A couple of years later, these findings were confirmed and expanded by another article, showing also how the test results were countering the optimistic auguries of those who fostered its implementation. Instead of improving the learning outcomes in secondary education, the PSU started to guide how the curriculum was imparted in several schools, turning the upper secondary courses into actual training programmes for answering the test – which in turn increased the participation of private pre-university institutions with a similar approach.\(^{60}\) Furthermore, this same study showed how, as the PSU developed, the gap between the scores of the students with weaker and stronger assets increased in all the sub-tests. Finally, the researchers stated that the available data demonstrated the test was not a good predictor of future academic performance. In other words, it was failing to accomplish one of the core tasks for which this test was conceived.\(^{61}\)

This scenery triggered a notable modification. In the admission process of 2012, the PSU overall score introduced a new factor: the ‘Qualification Ranking’ (hereinafter, Ranking), an index that shows the relative position of the students’ educational trajectory independently of both the type of school(s) they attended and their socioeconomic background. In short, this new reform sought to increase the weight of the students’ educational trajectory (hitherto represented only by their graduation grade) versus their test performance. Based on a series of simulations, DEMRE\(^{62}\) determined that the addition of the Ranking would have a positive impact, i.e. an enhanced selection, for those students who performed well at school, for those with weaker socioeconomic assets, and for female students particularly.\(^{63}\)

Recent studies have described a general, though not homogeneous, tendency among higher education institutions towards a greater valuation of the


\(^{58}\) Spanish acronym for “University Selection Test”.


\(^{60}\) Koljatic and Silva, ‘Algunas Reflexiones a Siete Años de La Implementación de La PSU’, p. 4.

\(^{61}\) Ibid., pp. 130–5

\(^{62}\) Spanish acronym for “Department of Evaluation, Measurement and Educational Registry”, see page 18.

educational trajectory of the students versus their PSU overall score.\textsuperscript{64} Also, some aspects of the simulations carried out by DEMRE have been confirmed, such as how the use of the Ranking boosts equity within the selection system by favouring students with unprivileged backgrounds when compared to previous rates.\textsuperscript{65}


4. Sociological Approach

The present work stands on the principles of structuralist constructivism, i.e. the Bourdieusian understanding of the traditional division between structuralist and constructivist approaches as a complementary opposition rather than an antagonistic one. Under this paradigm, the study of the social world is performed by organizing its examination in two different moments: an objective one followed by a subjective one.66 The former, involves the construction of the studied object as a social space characterized by the distribution of the properties capable of conferring strength, power and profit to those who hold them, which results in the mapping out of a space of positions; whilst the latter, takes up the task of analysing the lived experience of the agents as well as their subjective representation of the world as it appears to them, which leads to the introduction of these dispositions into the space of positions.67

In this chapter, I elaborate on the conceptualization of the social reality as a social space of both positions and dispositions to thereafter expand on the pertinence of this approach for the study of educational systems and their connection to the social structure.

4.1. The Space of Positions

Following the conceptualization made by Bourdieu and the team of which he was part of, the social world, conceived as the scheme of positions and oppositions proper of a given studied social space, would be structured according to the possession of certain assets. As a result of classifying individuals in this way, the positions they occupy within the constructed social space is such that the more similar they are to each other as regards the volume, type and trajectory of the properties used to define them as an object of study, the closer they are located, and, conversely, the more dissimilar they are, the further apart they are placed.

In the Bourdieusian tradition, these assets are known as capital, and classified into four fundamental species: economic, cultural (informational), social (connections and group membership) and symbolic (the form taken by other types of capital when they are recognized as legitimate).68 On top of this typology, another relevant distinction based on the mode of capital acquisition can be made.69 In this regard, capital can either be acquired if it is appropriated throughout the course of an agents’ life (e.g. the type of skills and knowledge that students are expected to develop at school) without the intervention of the agents’ predecessors (e.g. their parents), or inherited, should this third party play a critical role in the process of appropriation.70

---

At this point, it is very important to note that this differentiation between distinct types of capitals according to their source of origin is not absolute, i.e. an asset that constitutes a specific form of capital is not definitively restrained to one form in particular, for it may be converted into one or more types depending on the rules of the space within which a given asset is recognized as a capital.\textsuperscript{71} So it is that the holder of a specific cultural asset that constitutes a part of his or her cultural capital, say a certain credential, may be able to access a job from which this holder will receive a salary, incrementing his or her economic capital in a way that those who do not hold the same cultural asset cannot.

In any case, possession and accumulation of capital has been argued to be arbitrary. Even when it is acquired, individuals embody certain predispositions proper of the position they already occupy within the space which may ease or hinder capital acquisition; not to mention the (dis)advantages that the presence or absence of hereditary capital may entail. And, insofar as the positions constituted by the character of the properties possessed by agents also correspond to relationships of power\textsuperscript{72}, such possession demands to be justified so as to at least ensure that the arbitrary nature of its foundation will be misrecognized,\textsuperscript{73} thus granting legitimacy to the social order. This legitimation is not the product of an intentional action of symbolic imposition; it stems from the fact that agents use structures of perception and appreciation to give meaning to the objective structures of the social space which have been shaped by these latter structures with the result of picturing the world as evident or granted.\textsuperscript{74}

4.2. The Space of Dispositions

As it follows from what has been argued so far, within the social space, positions endow its occupants with certain dispositions, whose distribution follows that of the positioning itself. That is to say, “objective distances tend to reproduce themselves in the subjective experience of distance”.\textsuperscript{75} These dispositions may be defined as the representations that agents have of the social world, which outlines the contribution they make to the (re)construction of that world.\textsuperscript{76}

The systems of schemes of perception, appreciation and action, produced within the structural constraints to which agents are subject because of their positioning, are inscribed in their body. This bodily inscription, known by the name of \textit{habitus}, predisposes agents to react in a defined way to certain stimuli, generating countless \textit{strategies}, that is, various actions which aim is to push forward their interests, although without any rational calculation.\textsuperscript{77}

Because of the dispersion of objective differences within the space, the different positions generate different types of habitus and, consequently, a wide range of interests which may oppose to each other. As Bourdieu himself puts it, “the truth of the social world is the stake of a struggle”. Hence, multiple symbolic strategies will take place so as to legitimize clear-cut divisions and

\textsuperscript{73} Bourdieu, \textit{The State Nobility}, p. 265.
\textsuperscript{74} Bourdieu and Wacquant, \textit{An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology}, p. 168.
\textsuperscript{76} Ibid., p. 10.
\textsuperscript{77} Bourdieu, \textit{Pascalian Meditations}, p. 138.
specially to provide possibilities of understanding for the grey zones - as manipulations of group membership.\textsuperscript{78}

In these struggles, the ultimate goal is the monopoly over the imposition of the legitimate vision of the social world and of its division; in one word, over \textit{legitimate symbolic violence}, which nowadays is held by the state.\textsuperscript{79} To put it another way, insofar as the space of objective positions, constituted by an unequally and arbitrary distribution of assets, grounds relationships of power which replicate themselves in the space of subjective dispositions originating the possibility for struggle, some strategies will succeed in establishing a specific set of categories of perception (\textit{cultural arbitrary}) as the legitimate truth of the social world. Thus, the production and reproduction of the conditions that determine a given configuration of the social order will rely on its imposition upon social agents with their complicity, that is, with their irreflexive and spontaneous engagement in assumptions and beliefs which are accepted and taken for granted without the need of any direct influence.\textsuperscript{80}

\section*{4.3. The Social Embeddedness of Educational Systems}

Because of the role that institutionalized educational systems play in the reproduction of the distribution of cultural capital, which in turn makes a critical contribution - by itself and by its conversion possibilities - to the objective differentiation of social agents, such educational systems act as a structuring force of the social space. Furthermore, these systems fulfil at once the function of inculcating a cultural arbitrary that they do not produce\textsuperscript{81} and of masking the objective truth of its own relationship to the structure of class relations\textsuperscript{82}, thus favouring its reproduction.

Therefore, hidden behind what is often regarded as a simple and neutral relation of communication, lies a whole space structured by positions and dispositions capable of explaining inequalities in learning outcomes and educational pathways not in terms of individual talent variation, but in terms of the distance that the students must cover between the habitus they developed outside the school (e.g. mastery of the mother tongue) and that which the school tends to inculcate (e.g. mastery of the scholarly language).\textsuperscript{83}

Consequently, considering that educational institutions are one of the major means through which symbolic violence is most effectively exerted in the form of rational communication\textsuperscript{84}, the study of the dynamics they enclose, particularly of the objective positioning and symbolic strategies used by the agents associated to the space they constitute, becomes a way of unveiling the truth of the relationships of power and domination that take place in the social world.\textsuperscript{85}

Among the conscious and unconscious education strategies used by agents to reproduce their objective positions within the space, Bourdieu and de Saint-Martin highlight the school-mediated mode of reproduction wielded by certain

\textsuperscript{79} Ibid., pp. 13–4.
\textsuperscript{80} Bourdieu and Wacquant, \textit{An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology}, pp. 167–8.
\textsuperscript{82} Ibid., p. 208.
\textsuperscript{83} Ibid., pp. 71–2.
\textsuperscript{85} Bourdieu, \textit{The State Nobility}, p. 117.
families, which consists in the enrolment of their children in certain prestigious schools and university programmes in order to legitimize the transference of privileges through the acquisition of a diploma and social capital that seem to be spontaneously originated.\textsuperscript{86} A very good empirical example of these type of strategies is to be found in Zimmerman’s work on the role of elite universities and elite peers in the reproduction of the top one percent of the wealthiest and most powerful Chilean classes\textsuperscript{87} briefly discussed in section 3.1.

In light of this conceptualization, the approach to education fostered by \textit{El Ladrillo}, i.e. ideologies that regard students and other social agents as rationally-driven individuals who consciously set up social mobility as a goal achievable through education, unfold themselves as myths\textsuperscript{88} or at least fictitious explanations.\textsuperscript{89}

Within this study, out of a number of properties - further explained in chapters 5 and 6 - a profile for each individual will be created so as to determine the objective position of the studied population of students based on the volume, kind and trajectory of the capitals they hold. A distinction between inherited and acquired assets will be made to later distinguish the volume, kinds and trajectories existing within each category. Per their inherited assets, their family background as regards their parents’ education and level of income will be considered, whereas per their acquired assets, their educational trajectory as regards their performance at high school will be taken into account. Later, some aspects of their habitus and the strategies they use to navigate within the educational system will be considered as to account for their dispositions and their distribution within the constructed space.

\textsuperscript{86} Bourdieu, \textit{The State Nobility}, p. 285.
\textsuperscript{87} Zimmerman, “Making the One Percent: The Role of Elite Universities and Elite Peers.”
\textsuperscript{88} Bourdieu, \textit{The State Nobility}, p. 373.
\textsuperscript{89} Bourdieu and Passeron, \textit{Reproduction in Education}, Society and Culture, p. 87.
5. Methods

As a reflection of the structuralist-constructivist perspective adopted and described in the last chapter, this study combines both quantitative and qualitative tools in order to examine the relationship between the university admission process and the social structure in Chile.

In a first step, Specific Multiple Correspondence Analysis (Specific MCA), a multivariate statistical method developed from Geometric Data Analysis (GDA), is used to map out the existing positions within the social space of the First-application Enrolees via University Selection Test between 2005 and 2017. GDA is a method of geometric modelling which, based on a two-way table of individuals defined by a number of variables, allows one to create a geometric space consisting of two clouds in which each entry is represented by a point. MCA is a particular form of GDA which involves categorical variables. This method very much matches the multidimensional perspective developed by Pierre Bourdieu inasmuch as it consists in a practical way of combining quantitative data and the notion of space discussed in the previous chapter.

The databases used to perform such charting, provided by DEMRE at request, encompass the whole population of secondary school graduates who have taken the University Selection Test between December 2003 until December 2016, that is, those who applied for university programmes via PSU between the academic years of 2004 to 2017. These databases were not designed to provide data perfectly adapted for quantitative sociological research. In this sense, they fit the profile of what from a Bourdieuian perspective might be called “data banks” devoid of theoretic capital. Thus, although on the one hand, insofar as the whole population of students is covered by them there is no need to worry about sample representativeness; on the other hand, there is no further information on how the variables were constructed and coded.

This study sets its focus only on the First-application Enrolees via University Selection Test, that is, as explained in chapter two, the students who are accepted to higher education at their first application, because of two reasons. First, this group has often been regarded as the one composed by the most ‘scholastically-talented’ students, given their success in following the educational path set forth by the institutionalized system. Furthermore, it is within this relational space that the Puntajes Nacionales will emerge. Second, the inspection of the scheme of statistical relations characteristic of those who have most successfully performed at this selection process eases the assessment regarding the pertinence of ‘talent’ as an explanatory factor for their performance. As the first implementation of the test in 2003 (for the admission process of 2004) had a different score scale, it will not be considered.

---

In a second step, to make up for the problems that may derive from the way and the context in which the afore-mentioned databases were constructed and to enrich the understanding of the PN's dispositions, sixteen interviews with such students were conducted in Chile, particularly within the areas of Concepción and Santiago. Different social and educational profiles were considered so as to cover as much of the class (PN) as possible. The interviews carried out in Spanish\textsuperscript{95}, were recorded and lasted between 25 and 50 minutes each, given the semi-structured approach adopted. All interviews were personally arranged after contacting the students through friends and acquaintances. To uphold the participants' anonymity, their names are changed.

\textsuperscript{95} The quotes used within this paper have been translated to English by the author of this thesis.
6. Results


The construction of the social space presented below was made through a Specific MCA based on a set of 7 variables with 3 categories each, selected from the DEMRE databases. These variables were organized under two main headings: inherited and acquired assets (see Table 2). The first heading refers to the properties more or less actively transmitted to the students by their parents, that is, in this particular case, to the economic and cultural resources available in the students’ household whilst the second heading refers to the properties actively developed by the students at school.

Although the information on the income per family group is available, is available in the databases, its coding is inconsistent over the academic years which made it practically impossible to recode it and avoid the overlapping of different categories. However, given the available evidence pointing out a meaningful correlation between the type of health insurance and the volume of economic assets of a family in the Chilean context, it seems reasonable to select in this particular case this variable (health insurance) as an indicator of volume of economic assets over the income.

Thus, in attention to the quality of the available data, three indicators are grouped under the first heading: (1) health insurance and (2) studies’ expected funding source, both as indicators of inherited economic assets, and (3) parents’ level of education as an indicator of inherited cultural assets. Modalities for Health insurance in the databases are coded as ISAPRE (private), FONASA (public), DIPRECA (public), CAPREDENA (public) and Other. They were recoded into Private (ISAPRE), Public (FONASA) and Military/Police (DIPRECA and CAPREDENA). The category Other was treated as missing data for lack of information. The modalities for Studies’ expected funding source are coded in the original databases as Parents, Partner, Other family members, Loan, Scholarship, Work and Other. They were re-grouped in Parents/Family (Parents, Partner, Other family members), Scholarship and Loan/Work. Once more, because of the lack of information, the variable Other was treated as missing data. Finally, Parent’s Education is treated separately for the mother and the father in the original databases and is coded in 14 modalities: No data, No studies, Primary incomplete, Primary complete, Secondary incomplete, Secondary complete, Vocational incomplete, Vocational complete, Professional institute incomplete, Professional institute complete, Higher education incomplete, Higher education complete. Considering frequencies, they were regrouped in Low (No studies, Primary incomplete, Primary complete, Secondary incomplete, Secondary complete), Vocational (Vocational incomplete, Vocational complete, Professional institute incomplete, Professional institute complete) and High (Higher education incomplete, Higher education complete). The modalities No data and Other studies were

---

considered as missing. The highest level of education of each student parent was the one considered as indicator for inherited cultural assets. The use of the same number of categories in each variable ensures that no bias is created in relation to the contributions.\textsuperscript{97} For a more detailed analysis on the plausibility of the use of Health insurance as an indicator of inherited economic assets and the aggregation carried out for Parent’s Education, please see appendix 2.

Under the second heading, four indicators were taken into account: (1) the grade point average, recoded and regrouped into categorical modalities whose meaning is relative to each other and to the frequencies in the databases; (2) preference of enrolment - that is, if the student got accepted at his/her first, second, third or lower preference of higher education institution and programme - as to indicate volume of acquired assets, in the understanding that if a student achieved enrolment at his or her first preference of higher education institution and programme, it was because they had the required volume of assets; and (3) the optative form of the test they chose along with (4) the relation between their performance in the language and math tests as to characterize the type of acquired assets.

Given the large number of cases available and the scope of this project as discussed in chapter 5, the studied population was narrowed down to the Chilean First-application Enrolees via PSU between 2005 and 2017 (FAE), which amounts to n=499,178 individuals.

### Table 2. Active Variables and Categories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Inherited Assets</th>
<th>Acquired Assets</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Variables/Categories</td>
<td>Nº</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Health Insurance (HealthIn)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public</td>
<td>265,508</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private</td>
<td>189,819</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Military/Police</td>
<td>14,706</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Parents’ Education (FamEdu)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher Education (High)</td>
<td>192,265</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocational</td>
<td>71,476</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary/Primary (Low)</td>
<td>196,091</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Funding Source (FundingSource)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents/Family</td>
<td>316,394</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scholarship</td>
<td>125,156</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loan/Work</td>
<td>21,428</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First</td>
<td>202,182</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second</td>
<td>106,168</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third or Lower</td>
<td>100,828</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

6.2 Interpreting the Space of the First-application Enrolees

In this section, the technical details of the construction of the space of First-application Enrolees will be presented and thereafter proceed with its inspection and interpretation.

\textsuperscript{97} Le Roux and Rouanet, \textit{Geometric Data Analysis: From Correspondence Analysis to Structured Data Analysis}, p. 214.
6.2.1. Eigenvalues and Contributing Variables

Table 3 shows the eigenvalues and modified rates for the constructed multi-dimensional social space. The first three axes equate to 87.4% of the variance of the cloud, which from axis 4 onwards, continually decreases. These results indicate that axes 1 to 3 should be inspected to perform the analysis of the space.

Table 3. Eigenvalues and modified rates.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Axis</th>
<th>Variance of the axis (eigenvalue)</th>
<th>% of explained variance</th>
<th>Benzécri’s modified rates (%)</th>
<th>Cumulated % of modified rates</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.248</td>
<td>12.2</td>
<td>59.4</td>
<td>59.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.189</td>
<td>9.3</td>
<td>17.5</td>
<td>76.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.174</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>10.5</td>
<td>87.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>0.149</td>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>90.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>0.145</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>92.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>0.142</td>
<td>7.0</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>94.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>0.141</td>
<td>6.9</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>97.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>0.140</td>
<td>6.9</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>97.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>0.138</td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>99.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>0.133</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>99.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>0.127</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>0.112</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>0.090</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>0.073</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>0.019</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>0.008</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>0.002</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>2.030</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4 presents the active variables and categories which contribute over the mean (4.76%) to the variance of each axis. To handle the problem of missing data, a specific category was created for the missing data for each variable and later excluded from the Specific MCA. Notwithstanding the limited number of variables used, the inspection of this table clearly shows three distinct and interpretable dimensions. The volume of inherited assets is heavily expressed on axis 1, whereas the type and amount of acquired assets stands out for axes 2 and 3 respectively.

Table 4. Contributing Variables and Modalities by Active Categories.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Axis 1</th>
<th>Ctr</th>
<th>Left side in diagram</th>
<th>Ctr</th>
<th>Right side in diagram</th>
<th>Ctr</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Health</td>
<td>36.6</td>
<td>Public Health</td>
<td>14.6</td>
<td>Private Health</td>
<td>22.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FundingSource</td>
<td>17.2</td>
<td>Scholarship</td>
<td>12.2</td>
<td>Parents/Family</td>
<td>5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FamEdu</td>
<td>35.8</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>17.3</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>18.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>89.6</td>
<td></td>
<td>44.1</td>
<td></td>
<td>45.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Axis 2</th>
<th>Ctr</th>
<th>Bottom side in diagram</th>
<th>Ctr</th>
<th>Top side in diagram</th>
<th>Ctr</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>HsSc</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>Sciences</td>
<td>17.4</td>
<td>History</td>
<td>28.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lg&gt;Mt</td>
<td>42.9</td>
<td>Lg&gt;Mt</td>
<td>25.1</td>
<td>Lg=Mt</td>
<td>17.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>88.9</td>
<td></td>
<td>42.5</td>
<td></td>
<td>46.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Axis 3</th>
<th>Ctr</th>
<th>Bottom side in diagram</th>
<th>Ctr</th>
<th>Top side in diagram</th>
<th>Ctr</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Preference</td>
<td>15.4</td>
<td>Third or lower</td>
<td>9.7</td>
<td>First</td>
<td>5.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FundingSource</td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>Scholarship</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GPAv</td>
<td>50.3</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>22.6</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>27.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lg&gt;Mt</td>
<td>8.9</td>
<td>Lg&gt;Mt</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>81.4</td>
<td></td>
<td>41.2</td>
<td></td>
<td>40.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Axis 1: Inherited Capital Volume**

The interpretation is based on 6 categories (see Table 4) accounting for 89.6% of the variance of this axis. Positions are determined by the volume of inherited economic and cultural assets. At the higher volume pole (see Diagram 3), Parents/Family as expected funding source, Private Health users and highly educated parents (High) can be found. At the lower volume pole, we find Scholarship as expected funding source, Public Health users and less educated parents (Low).

**Axis 2: Acquired Capital Type**

In this case, 4 categories (see Table 4) accounting for 88.9% of the axis’ variance are used for the interpretation. The cases are distributed depending on the type of acquired capital. Those who opted for the Sciences and performed better on the math test than in the language test ($Lg<Mt$) are grouped in a scientific-mathematical pole, whereas those who opted for History and performed better on the language test than on the math test ($Lg>Mt$), constitute a humanistic pole (see Diagram 3).

**Axis 3: Acquired Capital Volume**

Finally, the interpretation of axis 3, in which the indicators for the volume of acquired assets are concentrated, relies on 6 categories (see Table 4) accounting for 81.4% of the variance of the axis. On one side, those who enrolled in their First preference, had a High GPA and indicated a Scholarship as their expected studies funding source are placed together. On the other side, those who enrolled in their Third or Lower preference, had a Low GPA and do not show a specific differentiation on their acquired assets at school are found (see Diagram 4). For the interpretation of this axis, the category Scholarship is read not only as an indicator of economic capital volume, but also as an indicator of a high volume of acquired assets inasmuch as school merits in the form of good grades are a fundamental requirement to access this type of funding.

6.2.2. The Space over Time

As it was stated before, the data used to construct this space spans over twelve years, comprising the cohorts from 2005 to 2017. Each academic year was individually projected into the Space of FAE in order to explore this space for fluctuations over time.

Diagram 5. The Space of First-application Enrolees according to Academic Year. Plane 1-2.
Results show all years randomly grouped closely around the centre of the space in all planes (1-2 and 1-3), which indicates no meaningful variation within the academic years. In other words, similar characteristics have structured the space of First-application Enrolees for over a decade in regard to its dispersion of inherited and acquired capital.

A closer inspection reveals that the most recent academic year (2017) appears as drawn up and to the left in plane 1-3 (Diagram 6) indicating that this academic year stands out amongst the others for having a slightly greater number of enrollees with a higher volume of acquired and lower volume of inherited assets. This might be because for the first time, 51% of the students who graduated from public education achieved a score over 450, which is the minimum score required to apply to a higher education programme. Thus, more of them applied in comparison to past years and were accepted to different programmes. No relevant variation is observable on axis 2.

With attention to the absence of a clear pattern in the distribution, the data allows one to conclude that this space has been stable over the studied lapse.

6.2.3. Sex, High School Type and University Selection Test Performance
In this section, sex, high school type according to funding, status (elite) of secondary schools and PSU performance will be put as supplementary elements. Funding is divided according to the three different possibilities that exist within the Chilean educational system, that is, private, private-subsidized and public. The elite status is defined considering the top ten high schools that most frequently appear in the educational trajectory of both political leaders and
high-ranking managers. To this top ten one high school have been added as to represent the elite-public education for female students following the same criterion.

**Sex and High School Type**

In Chile, private education is often perceived in general terms by as that of the best quality, whilst public education is deemed as not as good. However, when examining the data, a different perspective emerges. School funding appears as strictly related to the volume of inherited assets of the students rather than to the volume of their acquired assets. Only when crossed with the sex of the students is a small distance in axes 2 and 3 observable, indicating that women lean more to the humanistic side and perform somewhat better than men, who lean more to the scientific pole, in every type of school (see Diagrams 7 and 8).

**Diagram 7. Sex and School Funding. Plane 1-2.**

---


99 That is, considering that such high school appears in the educational trajectory of various political leaders, former President Michelle Bachelet included, among others.
When it comes to considering elite high schools, again there is a greater distance on axis 1 than on any other axis, separating elite public schools (closer to the centre) from elite private schools (drawn to the pole of higher volume of inherited assets) with no meaningful difference between men and women. On axis 2, students from private elite schools lean to the humanistic pole, especially women, whilst students form public elite schools appear very close to the centre in the graph. Finally, in axis 3, that of the volume of acquired capital, students from elite private schools are located higher than students from elite public schools (see Diagrams 9 and 10).
Yet again, results show a clear influence of the volume of inherited assets over the students’ performance. Scores, grouped as low, below average, average, above average and high, are progressively organized on axis 1 from left (lower
volume of inherited assets) to right (higher volume of inherited assets) in all tests (language \([lg]\), mathematics \([mt]\), history \([hs]\) and sciences \([sc]\)). On axis 2, the opposition between scientific-mathematical and humanistic profiles is apparent, with the higher scores in math and sciences at the bottom of the space, and the higher scores in language and history at its top (see Diagram 11).

The difference between above average and high scores on the math test reaches a plateau on axis 2, suggesting that the amount of inherited assets has more weight than the type of acquired assets in achieving better results on this particular form of the test. In a similar way, it is also remarkable the lack of more noticeable distances on axis 2 between the different performances in the sciences test, especially when considering that high scores in this test are closer to the centre of the axis than average and above average which lean more towards the pole of scientific/mathematical acquired assets.

As regards the third axis, all tests are once again progressively organized from the pole indicating a lower volume of acquired assets to the pole indicating a higher volume of acquired assets. The first dimension, though, does not lose its importance, and scores appear organized throughout axis 1 as well - which, on top of this, continues to show the greatest dispersion and distances between the different degrees of performance. From the perspective of plane 1-3, it is the history test that is the one that stands out for its homogenous distribution (see Diagram 12).

**Diagram 11. University Selection Test Performance. Plane 1-2.**
6.2.4. Regional Location of the Schools

With the exception of Santiago (Metropolitan) and Antofagasta, all regions are grouped on the left side of axis 1, with Bio-Bío, Maule, Araucanía and Arica & Parinacota at the very extreme of the pole. Along the second axis, there seem to be no clear-cut oppositions. On the contrary, axis 3 shows a greater dispersion, with Maule at the top position on the side representing a higher volume of acquired capital and Antofagasta at the bottom (See Diagrams 13 and 14).

6.2.5. Higher Education Recruitment Patterns

By University

By inspecting recruitment patterns by higher education institution in plane 1-2 (see Diagram 15), it is apparent how UAH among the private institutions, and UMCE among the public ones, stand out on the recruitment of students with a more humanistic profile, and how UTFSM seems to attract students with a more scientific-mathematical profile, which, especially in the latter case, may be explained by the programmes offered by these institutions.


In plane 1-3 (See Diagram 16), one can argue for the existence of at least three clusters. First, one composed by mostly G9 and public institutions, which are placed relatively closer together on axis 1 and more spread out on axis 3. This distribution suggests that in terms of inherited assets of its enrollees, these institutions exhibit a similar profile, and in terms of acquired ones, G9 institutions appear to have the upper hand. Second, there is a cluster composed of private institutions which are dispersed the most along axis 1. This cluster comprises both the most extreme positions with regards to inherited assets, and the lowest positions with regards to acquired assets. All these institutions are placed in the bottom part of the figure on axis 3, indicating that the recruitment pattern of private higher education institutions stands out for the lower volume of acquired capital of the students they receive. And third, there is a cluster composed by the two world-class Chilean universities: by the UCH and the

---

100 For the full name of the institutions, see appendix 1.
101 According to the QS World University Ranking for 2018, PUC is ranked 1st and UCH 6th within the region.
Pablo Antonio Lillo Cea: Inherited and Acquired Assets in the Chilean Higher Education Admission Process

Both are drawn to the right on axis 1, very close to the private institutions which, as noted, hold the most extreme position on this axis (especially PUC), and, at the same time, are at the highest position on axis 3, indicating that their enrollees can be characterized as having a high volume of inherited assets and the highest volume of acquired assets within this space. The positioning of the top 10 institutions (highlighted with a star in Diagrams 15 and 16)\(^2\) seem to confirm the suggested clusters. Most public and G9 universities are grouped together in the centre of the graph with no meaningful contrasts; private institutions are placed very low on axis 3; and UCH and PUC appear in the top right corner, as already described.

**Diagram 16. Recruitment Patterns by University. Plane 1-3.**

Enrolment in Elite Programmes

Turning now to enrolment in elite programmes, that is, programmes that lead to positions among higher levels of the government administration, the free professions or in business corporations, we can see how most of them, with the only exception of civil engineering and business at public institutions, are placed at the right side of axis 1, highlighting once more the importance of inherited capital in the structuring of this space. Medicine, on this axis, stands out in the most extreme position at the right side of the graph in both public and private institutions.

On axis 2, regardless of the type of institution where these programmes are taught at, they are organized according to the students’ type of acquired capital. At the very top, towards the humanistic pole, law programmes group together, followed by business closer to the centre and medicine immediately down below, leaning towards the scientific-mathematical pole. Finally, civil engineering programmes are to be found at the very extreme of this side (Diagram 17). Along the third axis, it is possible to observe an almost clear-cut division per type of institution. Elite programmes from private universities are

\(^2\) [http://www.webometrics.info/es/Latin_America_es/Chile](http://www.webometrics.info/es/Latin_America_es/Chile)
positioned towards the pole representing a lower volume of acquired assets; those from public universities appear in the centre; and those from G9 universities are placed the highest. Only Medicine at public and private institutions go against this distribution, the former positioned the highest on this axis and the latter, similarly to that of the programmes at G9 universities (Diagram 18). This positioning may indicate that elite programmes at private institutions constitute a refuge to students with a higher volume of inherited assets who have not achieved a good school performance and thus would be refused the access to more prestigious.\textsuperscript{103}

\textbf{Diagram 17. Recruitment Patterns in Elite Programmes. Plane 1-2.}

\textsuperscript{103} Bourdieu, \textit{The State Nobility}, p. 190.
6.3. The Sub-Space of the *Puntajes Nacionales*

This part of the study considers those cases who obtain a perfect score in at least one form of the PSU, which amount to N=3,181 cases (0.63% of the total population). Next, the objective positioning of *Puntajes Nacionales* within the space of the First-application Enrolees will be described thereafter, by using similar supplementary variables as those used in the previous section.

6.3.1. Position in the Space

Along the first axis, the PNs are positioned on the side of the higher volume of inherited capital. On axis 2, they are slightly drawn up to the side of the humanist profiles, and on axis 3, they appear grouped towards the pole representing a higher volume of acquired capital. Plane 1-2 (see Diagram 19) shows a relatively more homogeneous distribution compared to that of plane 1-3 (see Diagram 20), in which PNs appear heavily concentrated at the top right corner of the figure - which is not very surprising considering that the volume of acquired assets is at once an active variable structuring the space and one of the characteristics that define this group.

6.3.2. *Puntajes Nacionales* over Time

Table 5 presents the number of PNs per Academic Year, which has fluctuated during the studied lapse between a minimum of 61 (2016) and a maximum of 488 (2011) with a mean of 245. Also, it details the distribution per sex, which shows a huge gap between male and female students that amounts to an overall difference of 64.8 percentage points in favour of men.

Table 5. *Puntajes Nacionales* per Academic Year

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Male N</th>
<th>Male % in Academic Year</th>
<th>Female N</th>
<th>Female % in Academic Year</th>
<th>Total PN</th>
<th>Total % in PNs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>221</td>
<td>78.6%</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>21.4%</td>
<td>281</td>
<td>8.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>209</td>
<td>86.4%</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>13.6%</td>
<td>242</td>
<td>7.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>181</td>
<td>83.4%</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>16.6%</td>
<td>217</td>
<td>6.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>81.0%</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>19.0%</td>
<td>247</td>
<td>7.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>178</td>
<td>81.3%</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>18.7%</td>
<td>219</td>
<td>6.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>272</td>
<td>81.9%</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>18.1%</td>
<td>332</td>
<td>10.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>418</td>
<td>85.7%</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>14.3%</td>
<td>488</td>
<td>15.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>244</td>
<td>82.4%</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>18.6%</td>
<td>296</td>
<td>9.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>178</td>
<td>86.4%</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>13.6%</td>
<td>206</td>
<td>6.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>170</td>
<td>82.1%</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>17.9%</td>
<td>207</td>
<td>6.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>78.7%</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>21.3%</td>
<td>235</td>
<td>7.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>88.5%</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>11.5%</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>1.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>73.3%</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>26.7%</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>4.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>2620</td>
<td>82.4%</td>
<td>561</td>
<td>17.6%</td>
<td>3181</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Results show no major variation on axis 1 throughout this period; that is, the sub-space of the PNs has been stable as regards the properties related to the inherited capital of the students for the past decade. Nevertheless, axes 2 and 3 show an opposition between the years 2012 and 2017 that did not appear when inspecting the overall space. The academic year 2012 is placed the furthest towards the humanistic pole on the second axis and towards the lower-volume of acquired assets pole on the third one, whilst the academic year 2017 is placed the closest to the centre on axis 2 and the highest on axis 3, which indicates a lower differentiation in the type of acquired assets and a higher volume of acquired assets of the PNs for that specific year. The other academic years appear as closely and randomly spread, providing evidence to suggest that, other than what has already been noted, no meaningful changes have occurred within the subspace of PNs between 2005 and 2017, especially as regards their distribution per inherited assets (Diagrams 21 and 22).
Diagram 21. *Puntajes Nacionales* according to Academic Year.
Plane 1-2.

Diagram 22. *Puntajes Nacionales* according to Academic Year.
Plane 1-3.
6.3.3. *Puntajes Nacionales* according to Sex and High School Type

Table 6 presents the number of PNs per school funding, school status and sex. If one compares it to Table 1, that is, if we take into account that private high schools contribute the 21% of the total enrollees between 2005 and 2017 and the 67% of the total of PNs, private-subsidized contribute the 48% and the 18% of the total of PNs, and public high schools contribute the 29% and the 15% (of which 9% are from Elite public high schools), it is clear how students from private high schools and students from elite high schools are heavily overrepresented. In addition, if we pay attention to the sex of the students, a gap in favour of male students is apparent, already described when discussing Table 5.

### Table 6. *Puntajes Nacionales* according to Sex and School Type

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Private</th>
<th>Private-subsidized</th>
<th>Public</th>
<th>Elite Private</th>
<th>Elite Public</th>
<th>Total PNs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>1371</td>
<td>367</td>
<td>493</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>146</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>79%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>86%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>74%</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total N</td>
<td>1,738</td>
<td>575</td>
<td>198</td>
<td>387</td>
<td>283</td>
<td>3,181</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total %</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Although for the case of the PNs, school funding still appears as strongly related to the volume of inherited assets of the students as it does for the overall space - with the public schools at the left, the private-subsidized schools in the middle and the private schools at the right of the distribution - it is apparent how female students are consistently positioned further to the right -to the pole of the higher volume of inherited assets - than the male students. Also, the distances between the individuals are greater for the sub-space of the PNs than for the general space on axis 3, in which female students from voucher high schools stand out at the highest position and oppose male students from public high schools who occupy the lowest one (see Diagrams 23 and 24).

Once again, the observed distances are rather small and tend to replicate what has been described for the whole space: women lean more towards the humanistic pole and perform somewhat better than men, who lean more to the centre of the second axis in every type of high school.

As regards elite high schools, the positioning of female students further to the right on the first axis in comparison to their male peers appears once more and widens for the case of female and male students at elite public schools. On axis 2, the positioning for male and female students from private elite institutions is the same as described before in this section and even more pronounced; that is, women group on the side of the axis indicating higher humanistic acquired assets whereas men group closer to the centre. But, it is reversed for elite public schools, with women closer to the centre of the graph and men drawn slightly higher - although both of them positioned below individuals from private institutions on this dimension. Moving on to axis 3, similarly to the positioning in the overall space, students from private elite high schools are the ones located higher up when it comes to the volume of acquired assets. Female individuals occupy both extreme positions (see Diagrams 25 and 26).

**Diagram 25. Puntajes Nacionales per Sex and Elite High School. Plane 1-2.**
6.3.4. **Puntajes Nacionales** according to University Selection Test Performance. When inspecting PNs’ distribution per test, no clear distinction is observable on axis 1; they all are to be found on the side of the higher volume of inherited assets. Along axis 2, their positioning only reflects what has already been discussed when interpreting this axis: those with a perfect score in the language or history tests are drawn to the top of the figure, whereas those with a perfect score in the maths or the sciences one, are closer to the centre. Finally, on axis 3, PNs in the sciences test are the ones with the greater volume of acquired capital, closely followed by those in the math and language tests. Students with a perfect score on the history test occupy the lower position on this axis, although, if we compare it to the overall space, they are still drawn to the pole indicating a high volume of acquired assets (Diagrams 27 and 28).
Diagram 27. Puntajes Nacionales according to subject. Plane 1-2.

6.3.5. Puntajes Nacionales according to Regional Origin

In Table 7, one can see how on the one hand the Metropolitan region is clearly overrepresented, contributing with 64.7% of the total population of PNs and with only 34.04% of the total population; and how on the other, the extreme regions in the north and in the south appear as the ones most underrepresented.

Table 7. PNs according to Regional Origin

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of the Region</th>
<th>PN</th>
<th>Total per Region</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>% in region</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arica &amp; Parinacota</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tarapaca</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>0.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Antofagasta</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>0.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Atacama</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>0.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coquimbo</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>0.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valparaiso</td>
<td>199</td>
<td>0.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metropolitan (Santiago)</td>
<td>2059</td>
<td>1.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O’Higgins</td>
<td>146</td>
<td>0.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maule</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>0.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bio Bio</td>
<td>221</td>
<td>0.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Araucania</td>
<td>132</td>
<td>0.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Los Rios</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>0.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Los Lagos</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>0.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aysen</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Magallanes</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>0.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Compared to the distribution of the overall space of FAE, the PNs per regional origin are very differently positioned. First, all regions are placed on the right-hand side of the first axis, indicating the importance of inherited capital in becoming a PN. Aysen and Antofagasta occupy the most extreme positions, with the former closer to the centre and the latter very far to the right. On axis 2, Valparaiso and Magallanes stand out at the humanistic side whilst Tarapaca is the only region placed at the bottom side of this dimension (see Diagram 29). On the third axis, Aysen and Araucania, two regions that appear drawn to the pole of lower inherited capital volume on axis 1, are located the highest on axis 3, conversely to Antofagasta and Santiago (Metropolitan), which are to be found at the pole of higher volume of inherited capital on the first axis, but at the lower volume of acquired capital for axis 3 (see Diagram 30).
Diagram 29. *Puntajes Nacionales* according to Regional Origin. 
Plane 1-2.

Diagram 30. *Puntajes Nacionales* according to Regional Origin. 
Plane 1-3.
6.3.6. Higher Education Recruitment Patterns of Puntajes Nacionales

According to University

The distribution of PNs per university is presented in Table 8. G9 universities attract the most PNs, reaching roughly 64% of the total. This catchment is mostly attributable to PUC, which catches alone more PNs than the sum of those recruited by private and public institutions altogether. UCH is the responsible for almost the total of the catchment of public institutions, and the private ones stand out for their extremely low enrolments of PNs. Such overrepresentations do not appear in the overall space of the First-application Enrolees in which PUC and UCH, although they are still the institutions with the highest enrolment rates, attracts only the 8% and the 8.2% of the students, respectively.

Table 8. Higher Education Recruitment Patterns of Puntajes Nacionales

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>University Type</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>PN</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>N in type of University</th>
<th>% in type of University</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>G9</td>
<td>PUC</td>
<td>1596</td>
<td>50.2%</td>
<td>2031</td>
<td>63.85%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>UdeC</td>
<td>148</td>
<td>4.7%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>PUCV</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>1.2%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>UFT5M</td>
<td>213</td>
<td>6.7%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>UACH</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>0.7%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>UCN</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0.3%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>UCM</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.1%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>UCSC</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.1%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>UCT</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.03%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private</td>
<td>UDP</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0.3%</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>1.48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>UAH</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.03%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>UAB</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.1%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>UAI</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0.3%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>UAndes</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>0.5%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>UDD</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>0.3%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public</td>
<td>UCH</td>
<td>1001</td>
<td>31.5%</td>
<td>1103</td>
<td>34.67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>USACH</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>0.9%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>UV</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>0.9%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>UT</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.03%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>UFRO</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>UTAL</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0.3%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The first difference that stands out in relation to the distribution of these same properties within the overall space, is that out of the total of 38 higher education institutions within the PSU system, only 21 have received PNs between 2005 and 2017 (6 private, 6 public and all of the G9 universities). Along the first axis, private institutions are once again those which occupy both of the most extreme positions on either side of the axis, with UAH leaning to the left, and UAndes very far to the right. Except from the former and UT (which is placed in the middle of the axis) all universities appear towards the pole representing a higher volume of inherited capital, which can be read as a reflection of the greater amount of these assets that the PNs attending these schools have, as already described.

On the second axis, most institutions group on the humanist side, with UT, UAH and PUCV at the top side of the graph. UAndes, UCSC and UCM stands out on the opposite side, in the leading positions amongst the universities with a more scientific-mathematical recruitment (see Diagram 31).

Moving on to axis 3, except for UCT, there seems to be a clear-cut division between G9 and public universities, located at the pole with a greater volume of
acquired assets (UT, UFRO and UTAL at the very top), and the private universities, located at the pole representing a lower volume of acquired assets (UAH and UAB at the very bottom, indicating a low volume of this type of asset even when compared to the overall space; see Diagram 32). Although UCH and PUC are still positioned high in plane 1-3, they are not the indisputable leaders for this sub-space as they are for the overall space.


**Puntajes Nacionales in Elite Programmes**
Overall, about 43% of the PNs enrol at one of the four elite programmes, of which medicine, especially at G9 (10.1%) and public (8.2%) institutions, stands out. This is followed by Civil Engineering (8.7%) and then by business (5.2%) both at G9 universities. Finally, law appears at G9 (3.9%) and public (3.2%) institutions as the smallest majority as regards PNs’ preference for elite programmes (see Table 9).

Table 9. *Puntajes Nacionales* according to Elite Programmes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Medicine</th>
<th>Law</th>
<th>Business</th>
<th>Civil Engineering</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>G9</strong></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private</td>
<td>320</td>
<td>10.1%</td>
<td>123</td>
<td>3.9%</td>
<td>165</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public</td>
<td>281</td>
<td>8.2%</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>3.2%</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>600</td>
<td>18.3%</td>
<td>224</td>
<td>7.4%</td>
<td>227</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When examining PNs distribution in the space per elite programme, all of them, with no exception, are placed at the right side of axis 1, which means that for this subspace the importance of the first dimension in accounting for the agents’ distribution is even greater than for the overall space of FAE. Business and Law programmes at every type of institution and ‘Other’ non-elite programmes at private institutions occupy the highest positions on axis 2 and oppose Civil Engineering and Medicine at private- and Civil Engineering at public
institutions which are located at the other extreme, although relatively closer to the centre (see Diagram 33).

Medicine and Civil Engineering at G9 and public institutions as well as ‘Other’ non-elite programmes at the same type of university are to be found towards the side of the highest volume of acquired capital on axis 3. On the contrary, Business at private institutions is positioned closest to the centre, and leaning slightly to the bottom of the figure, at the most extreme positions of this side, Law and ‘Other’ non-elite programmes at this type of institution are placed (see Diagram 34).

**Diagram 33. Puntajes Nacionales according to Elite Programme. Plane 1-2.**
Diagram 34. *Puntajes Nacionales* according to Elite Programme. Plane 1-3.

6.3.7. Summary

Having carried out the construction and interpretation of the space of FAE and the sub-space of PNs, it can be concluded that this is a space extremely dominated by the volume of inherited capital, in which male students and those who have graduated from private high schools are heavily overrepresented. The presented results have shown how inherited assets seem to determine the degree to which students are able to acquire the assets they are supposed to develop at high school, in the form of knowledge and skills defined by the national curriculum and later measured by the PSU. Students from elite private high schools might be regarded as the paradigmatic example for they stand out within the space with a greater concentration of inherited and acquired capitals.

This evidence confirms what previous research has noted, that is, that rather than the type of school or one’s regional origin, it is the economic and cultural resources held by a given family group which ultimately conditions the performance of the students on the PSU. The First-application Enrolees with a lower amount of acquired assets and a greater concentration of inherited ones can be found mostly in private universities. Those with a slightly higher amount of acquired assets and a lower volume of inherited ones are to be found in G9 and public universities. Those who are characterized by a lower volume of both types of capital are recruited to one specific private university and the two private professional institutes that consider the PSU in their admission process. Finally, those with a greater volume of both types of capital are almost exclusively found at the two elite Chilean universities, namely, Universidad de Chile (public) and Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile (G9).
Furthermore, this positioning is not only mirrored but sharpened within the sub-space of PNs. Based on the comparison of the distribution of regional origins within the overall space and the sub-space, it is possible to argue how the overrepresentation of students with a higher volume of inherited capital within the latter is even larger. Out of those who obtained a perfect score, the ones who did in the history test stand out for their relatively lower volume of acquired assets, which suggests that on this type of test, it is rather the volume and type of inherited capital that matters the most.

The kind and volume of acquired capital within the sub-space of PNs seem to be clearly connected to the elite programmes the PNs chose. Thus, law and business appear characterized as the ones that recruit the most PNs with a relatively lower volume of acquired assets and a more humanistic profile, whereas medicine and civil engineering recruit PNs with a more scientific/mathematic profile and a greater volume of acquired assets (especially the former).

Another interesting finding is that the dominance of the elite Chilean universities that is apparent in the space of FAE, although still present in terms of frequencies, is diluted in the sub-space of PNs, giving way to other public and G9 regional institutions, not to mention the climbing in position of several private universities, especially the Universidad de los Andes.

One final remark that is worth making is that both the overall space and the sub-space show no major fluctuations over the studied lapse, nor clear patterns in the small fluctuations that can be observed, which grounds the conclusion that no relevant changes have occurred as regards the relationship between the social structure and the university admission process in Chile other than what has already been noted.

6.4. Dispositions within the Sub-Space of the Puntajes Nacionales

In the previous section, the space of the FAE has been described as one in which inherited capital is heavily dominant and seems to determine to a relevant extent the students’ performance on the selection test. In simple words, it appears to be as if the greater the volume of inherited capital of a given student, the greater his or her capability of acquiring the school assets that later on are measured by the PSU. This relation between both type of assets mirrors in the sub-space of the PNs.

In this section, based on 16 interviews104, takes on the task of exploring some of the dispositions existing within such sub-space, considering the objective positioning of the cases as well as their subjective experience of being at the very top of the Chilean educational system according to their PSU scores. Table 10 details the profile of the informants as regards their sex, graduation year, type of high school and parents’ occupation.

104 The interview guide used to conduct the interviews comprised within this study is to be found in appendix 3.
### Table 10. Interviewees.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Graduation Year</th>
<th>Type of School</th>
<th>Parents' Occupation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fabián</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>2013</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>No Elite</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jorge</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>2016</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>No Elite</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elisa</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>2015</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>No Elite</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constanza</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>2008</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>No Elite</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matias</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>2007</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>No Elite</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>René</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>No Elite</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daniel</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>2013</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>Elite</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nicolás</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>2016</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>No Elite</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paulo</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>2005</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>No Elite</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sebastián</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>2007</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>No Elite</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ignacio</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>2013</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>No Elite</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diego</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>No Elite</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tomás</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>2012</td>
<td>Voucher</td>
<td>No Elite</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rocio</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>2014</td>
<td>Voucher</td>
<td>No Elite</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rubén</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>2013</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>Elite</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Débora</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>2011</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>No Elite</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of School</th>
<th>Per Funding</th>
<th>Per Status</th>
<th>Father</th>
<th>Mother</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>No Elite</td>
<td>Dentist</td>
<td>Dentist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>No Elite</td>
<td>Civil Servant</td>
<td>Housekeeper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>No Elite</td>
<td>Civil Engineer</td>
<td>Informatic Engineer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>No Elite</td>
<td>University Professor</td>
<td>Informatic Engineer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>No Elite</td>
<td>Janitor</td>
<td>Housekeeper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>No Elite</td>
<td>Surveyor</td>
<td>Saleswoman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>Elite</td>
<td>Civil Engineering</td>
<td>Entrepreneur (Cook)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>No Elite</td>
<td>Businessman (Construction)</td>
<td>Civil Contractor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>No Elite</td>
<td>Civil Engineer</td>
<td>Civil Engineer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>No Elite</td>
<td>Agricultural Technician</td>
<td>Podiatrist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>No Elite</td>
<td>Bus Driver</td>
<td>Housekeeper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Voucher</td>
<td>No Elite</td>
<td>School Teacher</td>
<td>School Teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Voucher</td>
<td>No Elite</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>School Teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>Elite</td>
<td>Lawyer</td>
<td>Entrepreneur (Driving School)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>No Elite</td>
<td>University Professor</td>
<td>University Professor</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

6.4.1. To become a Puntaje Nacional

**Facilitating and Hindering Factors**

The interviewees, independently of their social background, hold a very similar perception on what it takes to become a PN.

First, they make a clear distinction between those who have more opportunities and those who have fewer, depending on the presence of certain facilitating or hindering factors within the living context of the students. Jorge, who graduated from a private high school and claims to have had more opportunities for becoming a PN than others, explains his perspective on this issue.

Jorge (PN in Sciences): Not all students have the same opportunity. I believe that all people are born with a similar cognitive capacity. Nevertheless, the economic context of your family shapes you until it's time for you to take the test which makes it easier or harder for you to fully develop your skills. I had the chance to study at a fine high school, and I didn't have any problem at home. I can think of other people who didn't have such opportunity; people with lower income backgrounds who studied at public schools where they don't get the chance to study in the same conditions or access a prep school as I did; people who must deal with worries at home -apart from those related to school- which limits their chances of performing very well at the test.

According to Jorge, a major hindering factor is the lack of economic means. He argues how, apart from forcing them to enrol at a public school, this absence of financial assets implies that the students would have to deal with issues that might take their focus away from their studies, which later impacts negatively on their performance. Thus, a facilitator would be a stronger economic background within the family group, for it would enable them to afford a private high school as well as a prep school. This latter type of institution, which are mostly private, appears in the educational trajectory of all interviewees, except from two who studied at public schools and did not manage to pay for one. In any case, both of them recognize that they had to prepare for the test by themselves apart from the school.
Rubén (PN in History): Personally, I don’t know any student who became a PN having graduated from a public school. It is a bit sad. But I think that if they managed to do it, it most certainly was because they were persistent with their studies and had someone supporting them. In my case, I supported myself; I created my own study plan and sat down to prepare for the test. I stopped attending school and stayed studying at home instead. I didn’t go to any prep school - they are way too expensive - but I know my case is exceptional.

Matías, who considers himself as having had fewer opportunities to achieve a perfect score, seems to hold a compatible view on these matters, introducing the notions of “quality” and “social reproduction” in education, as well as “cultural” assets - which he understands as related to the education level of a student’s parents - as yet another facilitating factor when they are available at a given household.

Matías (PN in History): The University Selection Test reproduces social inequality. The one who graduates at the German School\textsuperscript{105} has greater chances [of becoming a PN] than the one who graduates at any public school because of the quality of the education they receive. At private schools, students receive other stimuli, more resources, they come from families in which there is a stronger cultural background; those are professional families who invest their money in their children’s education. At public high schools, students are abandoned to their fate.

Another interesting topic that came up was sexism. According to the interviewees, the support received at school - even at a private one - and the ease with which a student faces the test, may be mediated by the sex of the student.

Elisa (PN in math): I always really wanted to become a PN because I love math, and I always had the highest grades in that subject. I didn’t even have to put effort that much - especially if I compare to my sister. Overall, I was the third best of my class. The first and the second ones were expected to become PNs, and the [math] teacher didn’t have faith in me. It drove me crazy, because I think it was because I was a girl and they were boys that he thought less of me. And I ended up being the only one of the cohort that got a perfect score on the test.

Elisa, who studied at a private school, narrates how the fact of being a female student was perceived by her teacher as a feature that might have diminished her odds for becoming a PN, especially in comparison to her male classmates. This same issue was brought up by another interviewee, but from the perspective of the content, the construction of the test itself and how it naturalizes inequalities between sexes.\textsuperscript{106}

Fabián (PN in math): There is a very subtle sexism within the test. The average difference between men and women - when I took it - was of about 18 points. When you answer the questions, say in physics, you will face the example of the car and not of the doll. The heteronormative conducts that are imposed during our education are not proportionally expressed in the content of the tests, and thus we end up with an instrument that, because of the social conditioning we are subjected to, privileges men in despise of women.

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{105} A well-known private school from Concepción.} 
\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{106} Bourdieu and Passeron, \textit{Reproduction in Education}, Society and Culture, p. 77.}
In sum, these last two comments ground the conclusion that being a male student acts as a facilitating factor and being a female student acts as a hindering one for becoming a PN. Similar findings have been described by Bourdieu and De Saint-Martin in the context of French institutionalized education.107

**Hard Work vs Talent**

The distinction made on the basis of the degree of opportunity that the students have for becoming a PN, which applies to all of them regardless of their score on the test, is connected to another classification when applied to those who did become a PN. Participants acknowledge that becoming a PN is owed in every case to a mixture of different components, mainly of hard work and talent, whose degree of importance varies depending on the background of the student, which is again connected to Bourdieu’s findings.108 Thus, although the informants accept that there certainly are exceptions, they attribute the perfect score of those with greater opportunities mostly to talent and personal interest whilst that of those with fewer, to merit and personal effort. René, who studied at a private high school, explicitly labels what was more subtly suggested by other informants.

René (PN in math): I believe that there are two groups of PNs. First, those who study a lot, who are more dedicated and studious, whose score is all product of the effort they made. And then you have those who were born with a skill... although I don’t really think it’s something you are born with, rather one acquires certain abilities throughout one’s life. Maybe you got interested in math at a very early age and you learnt it so well that afterwards it started coming to you as a second nature. That happened to me. I was very good at math because I liked it, and I achieved a perfect score without even studying that much.

This participant not only clarifies this typology, but also touches upon the role of personal interest in the development of the skills that later on are perceived as inborn talent. This is something that other interviewees also reported, especially for the math test. In some cases, they used this element as an explanatory factor for the performance of those with a similar profile who did not become PNs.

Paulo (PN in math): Achieving a perfect score is a mixture between effort and personal interest. My brother, although he would have liked to become a PN, couldn’t do it because he was a bit lazier than I was. And my sister, although she was more organized and studious, she didn’t liked math as much as I do.

Paulo compares his siblings’ performance to his own and determines that not only effort, but also personal interest in the subject of the test is required to become a PN. That personal interest seems to configure a personal motivation that acts to some extent as another facilitating factor. Furthermore, when exploring this topic, other informants referred to the PSU, as a sort of game.

Daniel (PN in sciences): The PSU is like a game: if you prepare yourself to tackle a certain type of question, then you will become a PN. And I want to insist on such metaphor [of the game]. For example, there is a website named

---

“puntajenacional.cl” which hosts a huge database with questions that one can solve again and again. I did it several times and in the end, it worked.

Sebastián (PN in math): I have always liked puzzle games, such as sudoku. They are challenging and very entertaining. [...] When I was preparing for the PSU I had a teacher that taught us using that perspective, not of math as being something difficult, but rather as a game.

Both Sebastián and Daniel studied at private high schools, the former at a regional one and the latter at a metropolitan-elite institution. They claimed that, because of their personal interest and talent, they were able to approach the test in terms of a mere puzzle game, which Sebastián even compares to sudoku. Such ease presents itself as the representation of freedom from the constraints that other students experience. Furthermore, there are informants who talk about an obsessing competition, in which victory may have come at the cost of a relatively lower score in the other forms of the tests.

Paulo: I think I could have had better results in sciences and language if I hadn’t used that much of my time in preparing for the math test, for which success was already guaranteed in my case. There is something like an obsession with becoming a PN because it feels like winning a contest.

Ignacio (PN in maths): I projected myself as a PN already at high school. I wanted to become one because of my ego; it satisfied my desire of being acknowledged as the best at something.

The reality for students with a lower distribution of assets is not the same. They are not able to look at the test as a game, even when they have a special liking for the subject, because it is perceived by them as a definitory event in their lives that might open or close the doors to a better future.

Rocío (PN in sciences): I always remember this one time that I was going for some groceries with my mom, and I told her that I would like to become a PN, so I could study for free and not be forced to take a loan. I was under a lot of pressure because I wanted to study here [at the Universidad de Concepción] and it meant a lot of stress because I had to perform well.

Matías: At high school, they always tell you that the PSU is an instrument designed for social mobility; accessing higher education is the only way to improve your life standards, and I had that idea in mind when I was preparing for it. My family doesn’t have many resources, so the only way in which I could access higher education was with a high score, so I could get a scholarship.

By the perspectives of Rocío and Matías, it is possible to see how for them the PSU was not experienced so much as a game as it was as a possible game-changer. Their families did not have the economic assets to afford tuitions fees, so the only chance they had to access higher education, was either through a study loan or, as Matías says, through a high score that, in addition to their socioeconomic background, would make them eligible for a scholarship.

---

It is important to note at this point, as it was indicated before, that the participants do not consider talent and hard work as completely separated. It’s only its importance which varies depending on the social background of the students who become PNs. Constanza highlights the role of effort and personal motivation for achieving a perfect score for those with greater opportunities, suggesting that inborn talent is not always enough.

Constanza (PN in sciences): I’ve seen it clearly in one of my cousins who studies at the French High School. His parents can afford everything, but he doesn’t even bother. Maybe he will learn by osmosis, but he lacks personal interest. At the university, I have had classmates from [public schools] that have been able to create their own opportunities out of hard work.

She explains how students with a number of facilitating factors available to them, although they may not need to study that much to perform well on the test, if they lack a goal or motivation, they won’t end up achieving a perfect score. Moreover, she speaks of “osmosis” as to explain the way in which some of these students learn. Such metaphor may be explained in terms of having developed a specific relation to language which is favoured by the school.

Also, this same participant, as well as others, specifies that the form of the test also impacts the dichotomy talent/hard work, separating on the one side the math test as the most common for obtaining a perfect score, and on the other the rest of them.

Constanza: The PN in sciences is rather rare. There were about 200 PNs in math when I graduated; it was the most common one. But the science test presents an extra difficulty because you must be good at biology, physics and chemistry, altogether.

Elisa: To become a PN in history demands a special effort. You need to study a lot to know all that stuff. The same goes for sciences.

Diego (PN in history): I became a PN in history after reading eight hours daily and memorizing almost everything that was on the books. For other tests, like the math one, you cannot do the same.

Tomás (PN in language): The most important thing for becoming a PN in language is not so much the knowledge on the content of the test but the habits associated with the skills it measures. It depends on to what extent you are used to reading different types of texts rather than on the strategies they teach you at prep schools or even at high school, and at home I always had that. Both of my parents are teachers, and my grandfather is a writer.

Based on these reports, it is possible to observe in what forms of the test, inherited assets seem to have the most influence. Although the science test is perceived as more difficult than the math one, Constanza claimed to have learnt what she knew throughout her educational trajectory, whereas Diego and Tomás explicitly explain how they attribute their PNs to the fact that they were

---

110 Another renown private high school.
exposed to certain types of text and books outside school even though the economic background of their families was rather weak.

*The Role of Luck and Chance*

Beyond the already discussed factors, some participants also spoke about the role of luck and chance, stating that, even when a student fit the profile hitherto described for becoming a PN, there are other random elements that may play in their favour or against them.

Sebastián: I used to think—and I still do, that a result above 750 points on the PSU\textsuperscript{112} is mostly luck... it's very easy to make silly mistakes. For instance, the same day the results were announced, I discussed my answers with a classmate that also became a PN, and for one question [on the math test] we had different answers. It turned out later that, in the end, that question was deleted from the test because both answers were correct. Had it not been for that, only one of us would have become a PN.

Rubén: I always say, up to 750 points it can be a product of your knowledge. Beyond that point it is just luck. I think it's just three or four questions that may lower your score that much. [...] My classmates didn't achieve what I did because of bad luck. Although some of them were true geniuses, whom even helped me prepare for the test, they just got one or two questions wrong and just because of bad luck they didn't become PNs.

It is intriguing to note how both of these participants, although they don't know each other and certainly have not exchanged their opinions about the test, set the barrier of luck at the very same score. However, there are dissident voices. Other informants have claimed that they doubt that the result of becoming a PN could be attributed to mere chance, and that other factors are far more relevant.

Débora (PN in math): I think that most of those who become a PN must have made a great effort... I seriously don't think it is a product of chance, or that luck plays any role in it. Of course, some, because of their context, must make a greater effort, but in the end, it depends on yourself and where you are standing.

Débora, who studied at a private high school, makes it clear that in her view, becoming a PN is up to the capability of each student for setting it up as a goal and then putting in the required amount of effort so as to achieve it. She also considers the context as a conditioning but insists that the perfect score depends ultimately on the student.

Jorge had a different take on this same issue too. For him, it is not luck itself what may reduce the chances of a student for becoming a PN nor is it the setting up of a goal. Rather, for him it is something way more practical that comes down to the extent to which a student is able to stay in control under stressful circumstances.

Jorge: The mind of a person in the moment of the test may play against them. It happened to a handful of my classmates who were more skilled than I was, but they didn’t become PNs. You need to be focussed, because that test may define your future, may or may not open doors for you, so you must know how to control your

\textsuperscript{112} The score of a PN is 850.
mind in that stressful situation. It is about how you deal with frustration, and that’s related to other things in life, apart from academic success.

Based on his words, when this participant talks about the mind, he also includes the context that shapes it -as it follows from his first quote presented above. In his view, there are certain backgrounds that would provide the tools required to acquire such frustration tolerance and some others that not only hinder its development, but actually makes it worst.

6.4.2. To be a Puntaje Nacional
The meaning of having become a PN can be approached from two different perspectives. On the one hand, there is a micro dimension of significance that varies to some extent depending on the profile of the students. On the other, there is a macro and more social dimension that, as it will be discussed, is quite alike for all PNs and includes other agents from the space of education in Chile.

Micro-meanings
All informants reported to have felt joy, pride and relief. However, the meaning of these feelings, especially that of relief, differs from student to student. Thus, it is possible to talk about at least two different types of relief.

Rocío: [When I became a PN] there was a lot of joy and pride at my home. It increased my self-confidence. Not only did it mean for me to be able to access the programme I wanted at the university I wanted, but it was also a big economic relief. It meant a car. We were able to purchase a car with the savings we had to eventually pay for my study loans, and it has eased things for my mom and my grandmother, with whom I live.

Fabián: [Becoming a PN] brought joy and specially relief for my mom. She was worried sick because of the pressure that my high school put onto me to become a PN.

It is clear how Rocío’s relief entailed an economic dimension, whereas for Fabián, it entailed a more emotional one. For her, it was about getting rid of a weight related to money, for him it was about getting rid of a weight related to external expectancies. More participants indicated that they were in a similar position to that of Fabián, especially those from both elite private and public schools. Rubén and Daniel narrate how becoming a PN was a goal that their elite high school context set up for them.

Rubén: My high school is well known for graduating a lot of students who become PNs every year. We saw becoming one as something fun, as a challenge, and if we were to take the test in any case, why not become one? A lot of my classmates, who were common people, became PNs, so I always thought that if common people could achieve it, why wouldn’t I.

Daniel: At my high school, PNs are somewhat venerated and idolatrized, so to speak. As I was a relatively good student I felt the pressure for becoming one. It was not something explicit, nobody would tell me that I failed if I didn’t become one, but still I felt that external pressure.

In other cases, becoming a PN meant more for the students’ family than for themselves, especially when becoming one was not a part of their own goals.
Nicolás (PN in math): My parents burst into tears. They believed more in me than I did. [...] It didn’t mean that much for me... I studied a lot but becoming a PN was not my goal, but for them it was a whole different story.

Matías: It meant a great joy. Especially for my parents, because they could see a retribution for the economic sacrifices they made to get me into a prep school. Personally, I think what it meant for my parents mattered more to me than becoming a PN in itself; I never set it as a goal, I just would have been equally happy as long as I had a good score.

Nicolás, who studied at a regional private school, seems to have experienced his achievement as an outsider. For him, although he recognized that his success enabled him to pursue the future that he wanted, becoming a PN was not as meaningful as it was for his parents. Likewise, Matías did not really care about becoming a PN for himself; as he puts it, it was more about what it meant for his family which brought him satisfaction.

But there are not only positive consequences for the family members of the students. A number of participants have reported that their achievement put a heavy weight on their siblings’ shoulders, which even when they succeeded in becoming PNs as well, it was at the cost of a long period of deep stress. Because of this, becoming a PN can also bring guilt, especially when it puts pressure to other family members.

Elisa: When I became a PN my younger sister felt obliged to become one as well. It was awful. Her classmates were worried because studying was the only thing she would do. I felt extremely guilty.

Finally, it is possible to mention all those cases in which it meant the achievement of a personal goal. In addition to the cases of Daniel, Sebastián, Ignacio and Paulo, discussed when treating the metaphor of the game and the competition, there is the case of René, Débora and Rubén, who also envisioned the perfect score as a personal goal.

Débora: For me it meant achieving a goal. For my parents, pride. And also, the certainty about the fact that if you aim at something, you can achieve it.

**Macro-meanings**

In addition to the various personal meanings attached to having become a PN, participants highlight how it changes their relationship with other people, with their high schools and especially with higher education institutions.

Sebastián: When people know that you were a PN, they immediately ask if you had breakfast with the President of the Republic. [...] Those of us who became PNs at our high school were invited to a dinner. They asked our opinion on educational issues. It is as if your status as a student improves in the eyes of the world. Also, universities started calling us and offering scholarships.

The experience that Sebastián had, is very close to that of the other informants, regardless of their social background. All of them said to have received many calls from different institutions and even to have been interviewed by newspapers. One case that stands out is that of Matías who, because of his social origin, was interviewed not only by local, but also by national newspapers.
Matías: There were no other PNs graduating from my high school before or after I did. And the funny thing is that I got the good news [of having become a PN] when a truck from El Mercurio\(^{113}\) parked outside my house.

Others went one step further, using their fifteen minutes of fame to perform a social protest. This was the case with Rubén, who, during the ceremony hosted at the government palace, and later broadcast on television, appeared wearing a shirt with a message related to the student movement for free education that had taken place in Chile for several years.

Rubén: At the award ceremony, I wore a t-shirt that said “education is not a commodity, but a social right”\(^{114}\) ... I always dreamt of doing something like that, like performing a political protest through the fact of having become a PN so I could show people who thought of us protesters as lazy students that they were utterly wrong.

On top of what has been mentioned, that is, of the scholarships they are offered and the momentary public notoriety they gain, some PNs used their status as an advantage to actively bargain their access to certain institutions.

Tomás: I was interested in enrolling at the Universidad de Concepción, so I had a meeting with the dean of the faculty of law. They offered me a full scholarship, which I needed in order to be able to study in that institution. However, there was a problem with the administration, who claimed that the only scholarship they could offer me was a partial one. [...] So, I had a meeting with them, and after a long bargaining -in which I was backed up by the faculty of law- I got the full scholarship.

Rubén: There is a macabre funding system set up for the universities that I don’t fully understand, but I know that they all want to attract as many PNs as possible because in that way they are able to get more funding from the State. In that sense, the PNs are very desired at an institutional level. That’s why universities offer them so many benefits. I had classmates that enrolled at PUC with all fees covered plus a small stipend. They went there and actually negotiated the conditions for their enrolment.

Tomás studied at a voucher school with a scholarship. To pursue further studies in higher education, he depended on achieving a high score so as to be eligible for a new scholarship. So, when he became a PN, something that he was not planning on consciously, he saw himself in a position in which he could not only apply for a scholarship, but also intervene in the terms of such benefit. In a similar way, others proceeded to bargain with PUC with notoriously good results. Rubén elaborates on the reasons he thinks might be the ground for this leverage that enable some students to improve the conditions of the scholarships they received. He stresses the funding system for higher education and how the fact that universities receive more funding from the State when students with high scores, and especially PNs, enrol at them seems to be one

\(^{113}\) The biggest newspaper there is in Chile.

\(^{114}\) This message can be read as a direct reply to the sayings of Sebastián Piñera, President of the Republic at that time who have literally said that education was a commodity back in 2011. See http://www.cooperativa.cl/noticias/pais/educacion/proyectos/presidente-pinera-la-educacion-es-un-bien-de-consumo/2011-07-19/134829.html
underlying reason as to why they receive so many phone calls offering them special discounts on the tuition fees -not to mention the prestige it entails to receive a PN for a given programme.

Along these lines, the meaning of having become a PN does not only pertain to the students and their families, but also to the educational institutions they are related to, including not only higher education institutions, but also high schools and prep schools. Rubén also mentioned how one of his friends that had become a PN before him was hired by a private prep school for advertisement.

Rubén: There was a friend of mine with whom I used to hang out all the time when he was about to take the test, and even so, he became a PN and got great scores on the other tests. He also became the face of Pedro de Valdivia prep school for that year; he was hired for advertisement.

Private prep schools in Chile often advertise their services using billboards with real students who were able to become PNs. In fact, some of these institutions make students sign at their enrolment that in the case of becoming a PN, the prep school will explicitly take credit for it, as Sebastián indicated.

Sebastián: When you enrol at a prep school, you sign that if you become a PN, they will take credit for it. So, I am “their” PN. It’s part of their marketing strategies, I guess.

Participants reported a similar pattern in high schools, especially the elite and private ones. Even though they won’t receive more funding from the state due to the students they graduate who thereafter succeed in becoming a PN, the quality of the education they impart will be perceived as better.

Ignacio: I studied with a scholarship at a regional private school. I didn’t have a good GPA, and in fact it was not even enough to maintain the scholarship, but they did not terminate it because they expected me to become a PN. And they told that explicitly to my parents. In that sense you can see what interests are behind.

Constanza: I know that in many private high schools, students are specially trained to become PNs as a goal for the school.

These narratives, such as that above-quoted by Rubén when explaining that his high school (an elite public one) is well known for graduating many students who become PNs, must be added. All three of these participants provide evidence to show how a perfect score does not only hold meaning for individuals, but also for other agents within the space of FAE, and even more so, within the institutionalized educational system in Chile.

6.4.3. The Path of the Puntajes Nacionales

This section can be divided into two main topics, namely, one related to the educational strategies used by the PNs and a second one related to the duration of the symbolic value of the perfect scores.

Educational Strategies of Puntajes Nacionales

The interviewees reported different experiences as regards their election of higher education programme and institution. Whilst for some it was very clear from the beginning, particularly for those with a higher volume of inherited
assets, for others, having become a PN was a critical factor to various extents, especially for those with a lower volume of inherited assets.

Daniel: Both my dad and grandfather graduated from engineering at the Universidad de Chile, and they influenced me quite a lot. At school I was already interested in physics and mathematics. It was then when I set it up as the path that I would follow. As regards the university, I never thought of any other from UCH, because of its social role and inclusive profile. The PN played no role whatsoever in my decision.

Rubén: At high school I was told that there were only two options for me. It was either UCH or PUC, and I believed it. Programme-wise, I was thinking of business or law. And in the end, I decided to choose based on my score: if I had a better score on the history test, I would go for law; if I had better score on the math test, I would go for business. And here I am, in the law school at UCH.

Matías: I knew I had a humanist profile. I always thought of studying to become a history teacher or a lawyer, but I wasn’t sure. When I got the PN, people used to tell me not to waste my score. There was somewhat like a social pressure for me to not become a teacher. So, in the end, also considering economic factors and how I would be able to help my family in a better way, I made up my mind for law as it was more profitable, also in a social way.

In the case of Daniel who, as said, studied at an elite-private school, it was clear from the beginning, and becoming a PN had no impact on his decision. It was rather his background, specifically that of his father and grandfather which determined his decision. Moving on to the second case, although the fact of Rubén’s father graduating from law school whilst Rubén was still at high school was what brought the idea of studying the same subject to his mind, in the end his decision was made on the basis of the scores he got. Finally, for Matías, the one with the lowest volume of inherited assets of these three participants, becoming a PN put him in a position in which social beliefs along with the economic situation of his family made him make a more practical decision, setting aside his wish of becoming a history teacher. All in all, it is as if disciplines and institutions choose their students as much as students choose such disciplines and institutions.115

Jorge expanded a little bit on this pressure that Matías felt when choosing a programme. He explicitly identifies the educational tracks that society expect for PNs to follow, because they are perceived as the natural pathway to success.

Jorge: I didn’t really know what I wanted to study. Because of social pressure, I knew that as a PN I would have to enrol at one of the ‘big’ programmes and be the very best. By ‘big’ programmes I mean those that will make you earn loads of money as a professional, such as medicine, civil engineering, law at the Universidad de Chile...

The embracement or rejection of this expectation ended up in failure or conflict in some cases. There are cases like that of Constanza, who ended up as one of the PNs who did not enrol at one of the ‘big’ programmes mentioned by Jorge, 115 Bourdieu, The State Nobility, p. 19.
and cases like that of Elisa and Sebastián, who although enrolling in one of these programmes, ended up dropping out.

Constanza: Becoming a PN gave me the authority to choose freely. I had problems with my grandfather who kept insisting that I should enrol in medicine, but I couldn’t see myself working at a hospital.

Elisa: I chose medicine under pressure from my family, and from freshman year I knew it was not my thing. I stayed there for two years because I was afraid of what my family would think of me if I dropped out, which got me into a deep depression. Finally, with the help of my teachers at the med school, I was able to change to the Civil Engineering Informatics training programme, which is the same that my parents studied.

Sebastián: Both of my parents are engineers, so there was always a pressure in that direction, and when I became a PN I could not escape it. It was as if you were thinking about going to a concert and suddenly someone gifts you the tickets. I grew up with the idea that engineers were able to do anything, but when I got into the programme I realized I was completely wrong. So, I ended up changing to sociology.

It is interesting how what others experienced as a pressure, for Constanza entailed the strength to stand her ground. This might be due to her background, which includes having a mother who is a university professor and having lived in Germany for a couple of years where she developed her interest in chemistry. Elisa, on the other hand, went through a very complicated situation, in which her parents wanted her not to follow in their footsteps, which she finally ended up doing anyways. Conversely, Sebastián’s parents wanted him to follow the same educational pathway they did, but, according to himself, the other interests he had developed for music and the social sciences made him choose differently.

Extension and Duration

For the participants, having become a PN is something related to high school and the university admission process, but nothing further than that. All of them agree that once they enrolled in a programme, being a PN started to quickly become a matter of the past.

Rocío: Once you are in, being a PN is worthless. Teachers won’t look at you differently for being one; your classmates won’t treat you in any special way either. How you study at the university and the skills you need to develop do not relate to the PSU.

Sebastián: When I got accepted in engineering at PUC I realized that half of my classmates were PNs too. So, maybe there is something like a myth around it. Now for me it is barely an anecdote, because once you access higher education, it vanishes.

Matías: When I was applying for a job, I put it in my CV, but they didn’t even care. Now, after 10 years, it’s only a fun story.

These three cases from different backgrounds coincide in that having become a PN has not had an impact for them after the selection process. The case of
Matías shows how it is not relevant either in the labour market. Therefore, the symbolic dimension of being a PN seems to be something strictly attached to the space of education.

Furthermore, the participants assure that, as the symbolic value of being a PN vanishes after enrolling at a higher education institution and as they maybe have exchanged it for a scholarship in the process, it does not hold any special social meaning. Thus, they claim that there is not a cohesive group amongst former PNs. The only contact they have with other students who achieved a perfect score during the present is because of friendship or membership to certain types of networks in which, although there may be some former PNs, being one has no special meaning at all.

Nicolás: Some of my classmates are PNs as well. Also, in the award ceremony I met a few of them. We share the same joy and that might push you into getting to know them a little better, but it is up to you.

René: Many of my classmates are PNs, but there are so many that I forgot whom of them are. It’s not like we are grouped into a network or anything like that.

Débora: I meet with PNs all the time. We met at high school in math, physics or chemistry Olympiads, in chess championships, scientific camps, at the same programmes, universities... but I would say that we are more united because of our interests rather than because of the fact of having had a perfect score on the test.

In some cases, as in that of Matías, insofar as he has been the only one ever in becoming a PN at his high school, he has not been able to meet any other student with such a score nor has he been contacted by any group or association on the basis of his achievement - other than the newspapers that interviewed him when he got the perfect score on the history test.

Along the same lines, the interviewees think that, beyond the skills they might have had to develop to become a PN, this status that they once had will make no impact on their professional careers.

Paulo: I don’t think that having become a PN would have any direct impact on my future; the study techniques I learnt or the capacity to set up a goal are far more important. I wouldn’t use the PN on my CV, for example.

Even though Paulo and Matías think alike as regards the impact of the status they achieved in their professional lives, the former does not even think of using it when applying for a job. That shows how the importance of becoming a PN fades away for the individuals who became one, which contrasts very much with the use that educational institutions at all levels give to the fact of having been able to recruit these students when they were in their moment of glory.

6.4.4. Criticism

Most participants were extremely critical towards the PSU for different reasons. Some of them explicitly state that the test is socially unfair, regardless of their social background.

Fabián: This is a classist, sexist test, and it doesn’t even predict how well people will perform in higher education. There is something like a religion that is imposed on good-performing high school students to make them believe that if you perform
well at school, you are going to do well in life, and also to force them to accept becoming a PN as a goal of their own.

Fabián goes as far as comparing the beliefs surrounding the test to a religion to emphasise how a certain meaning that is attached to having achieved a very high score on the PSU is presented as naturally given. Others insist that the test fails to consider human and social features that, in a country as unequal as Chile, have a high impact on the performance of the students.

Jorge: The test is presented as neutral whilst knowing that Chile is an extremely unequal country. To some extent, that’s very cruel, because with the classification it creates, it also stigmatizes certain students from certain schools.

This criticism also reaches the educational system as a whole. From the perspective of Débora, prep schools are playing a role in fostering the neglect of social inequalities that would have been carried out through the PSU.

Débora: What prep schools really do is to hide the deficiencies of the educational system and the lack of resources that students have.

The interviewees also regard the test as outdated and poorly designed, inasmuch as, in their perception, it is impossible to measure what they are supposed to learn throughout 12 years of education in just a few hours spread out over one or two days (which is how the PSU is implemented). Some argue for the need of interviews as is done in other countries.

Daniel: The PSU is poorly made and completely out of place for context nowadays. Mostly because, as it is just a couple of days, you cannot be sure that you will be in a good physical condition exactly those days. Plus, I don’t feel it measures any knowledge, but it measures how much you were able to get into the logic behind the test.

Elisa: I don’t like the PSU. I prefer how it is done in the US, because their applicants are interviewed by the universities, taking more into account your performance throughout your whole educational trajectory. You are not just assessed on the basis of one test that lasts a couple of hours of one day in which, just by chance, you may feel sick or sad and then end up failing at it because of that and not because you lack the knowledge.

As regards the scores as such, Sebastián highlights how the spontaneous perception of the PSU results might be contributing in confusing the students rather than helping them to understand the actual educational meaning of their performance.

Sebastián: On the one hand, if you perform too well, then certain programmes will be presented to you as an unavoidable path to follow. And on the other, if you perform just good enough -as in, you achieve the score that you need to access the programme you want but that it is not an elite programme- your score will be perceived as low either way.

Out of Sebastián’s words and that of other participants who discussed this topic in a similar way, socially the scores are reified; that is, their value is mostly perceived as absolute and organized on a single scale. In other words, if the
score of a student was sufficient to get accepted at the university and the programme she or he applied to, but that programme and that university did not require an exceptionally high score to accept the student’s application, it is still not regarded as a very good result.

Overall, it is striking how most of the participants are so critical against the system that they themselves benefit so much from and how they explicitly refer to objective factors like economic and social capital to explain their success. One possible reason for these two findings is that most of the interviewees were sympathetic or even involved to different extents in the above-mentioned movement for free education that has taken place in Chile for over a decade. The rampant inequality in wealth distribution within the country, which is perceived by the interviewees as differences in educational opportunities, contrasts very much with the meritocratic arguments used to justify the need of the PSU and even the awards granted to the perfect scores.

Fabián: The perfect score is overrated. I don’t get why we receive so many benefits. The weighed score should be more appreciated. If you think, a PN might have got 850 points in one form of the test, but in the others, he or she may have performed awfully low. And some of my classmates who got over 800 points on every form of the test, just because they didn’t get a perfect score, couldn’t opt for the same benefits as I did.

After experiencing life in higher education institutions, not only Fabián, but also others consider their own achievement as overhyped, which they connect to the more general criticism they have against the Chilean educational system and the social inequalities it mirrors.

Rubén: All in all, within my context, accessing higher education is not seen as something good because you are going to learn and think, but because it is a path that will make you earn money.

In the words and experience of Rubén, one can see how he is able to grasp the interests related to accessing higher education beyond the innocuous claims that most people derive from the discourses of social mobility and the liberating school. For him, it is clear that - for most people surrounding him - accessing higher education comes down to an issue of earning money, that is, of accumulating economic capital, for which purpose cultural capital in the form of credentials only may serve as an entry key and does not seem to constitute a goal on its own.
7. Discussion

In this study, a two-step approach was taken to analyse the connection between the university admission procedure and the social structure in Chile, paying special attention to the best-performing students on the University Selection Test (PSU). As it was presented in the last chapter, the space of the Chilean First-application Enrolees via University Selection Test seems to be a very stable space, socially structured in its first dimension as regards the volume of inherited capital held by the studied population, opposing on the one side the students with a lower volume of inherited assets and on the other the students with a greater volume of inherited assets. The importance of acquired assets is subordinate to inherited assets, meaning that the best predictor for the performance of students on the test is their volume of inherited assets.

Female students within this space are characterized by a lower volume of inherited assets and a greater volume of acquired ones in comparison to male students in all types of schools, except for female students from private high schools who have the greatest volume of inherited capital within the space and for those females from elite public high schools who have a lower volume of acquired assets than their male peers. Furthermore, no significant differences were found as regards acquired capital between the different types of high schools, which contrast majorly per the inherited capital of the students they recruit. Similarly, the regional origin of the students appears as more related to the first dimension than to any of the other two.

Results have shown that the greater the volume of inherited assets of a student, the better their performance on the test, which, in connection to what has been discussed so far, may constitute the basis to question fictitious explanations when accounting for the performance of the students in the University Selection Test.

When it comes to the sub-space of the Puntajes Nacionales, the distribution described for the overall space of FAE is not only mirrored, but it is sharpened. This sharpening is more apparent when comparing the positioning of PNs per their geographical origin to that of the rest of the students in the space of FAE. PNs appear located at the pole representing a greater volume of inherited assets regardless of the region where they studied, whereas, as presented, in the overall space there are only two regions located in quadrant.

Also, it was commented how the students who get a perfect score on the history tests stand out per their relatively lower volume of acquired assets; positioning that may be better explained in light of the narratives of the interviewees who achieve this result, highlighting the presence of a number of books at home which they used to prepare for this specific exam.

Next, I will present a discussion on the meaning and scope of the results previously presented. Two main topics will be tackled, namely, the structural conditions of university admissions and how the university admission process becomes the context in which a particular economy of symbolic exchange takes place.

7.1. Structural Conditions of University Admissions in Chile

Findings have shown that the volume of inherited capital held by students, defined as being composed of certain economic and cultural assets available
within their family context, has been the most important structuring factor of the constructed space over the past twelve years, which is mirrored and sharpened within the sub-space of PNs. Further studies on the test results are needed to track possible changes in the space, for there was an interesting variation as regards the increase in the enrolment of students with a lower volume of inherited assets and a greater one of acquired assets in 2017. For the moment, this evidence at once confirms and expands what previous research on the determinant conditions for the performance on the University Selection Test has argued, that is, that the function that the PSU fulfils is closer to fostering the misrecognition of the tight relationship existing between the institutionalized educational system and the social structure than to the actual measurement of competence on the national curriculum for secondary education achieved by the students.

To put it more simply, results allow us to state that the university admission process in Chile, materialized through the PSU, contributes to turning social privilege into educational merit, hiding the arbitrariness that underlines the extremely uneven distribution of the different kinds of wealth existing in the country by crafting a context which gives credibility to the discourse of meritocracy and social mobility. Let us take as an empirical example the overrepresentation of students who graduated from private and elite high schools in both the space of FAE and the sub-space of PNs. As it was presented, the differentiation per high school type as regards funding and status is strictly linked to the first dimension of the space (volume of inherited assets) and not significantly related to the third one (volume of acquired assets), which provides objective arguments to at least doubt the pertinence of explanations that rely merely on the talent of the students to account for their performance on the test.

Furthermore, it’s worth noting that, according to the data, such social privilege is constituted by something other than economic and cultural assets: the sex of the students. Not only is there an objective overrepresentation of male students in both the space of FAE and the sub-space of PNs, but also there was an explicit reference to this issue made by the interviewees, who made it clear how female students are expected to perform worse than their male peers on the admission test, and how the test itself appears as more familiar to men if one analyses the content of some questions.

Hence it is possible to argue that the different types of schools, the different sex of the students and even their different geographical origins may constitute different locations for habitus formation, and that a very specific one is being favoured by the PSU over others. Of course, this does not mean that it is impossible for students who do not fit the privileged profile to perform very well on the test, but it must be recognized -as all informants did, regardless of their social background- that those in this less privileged condition must make a bigger effort comparatively in order to achieve a good result.

At this point, it is useful to bring up the view of the PSU as a game, as opposed to that of it as a game-changer. It is the privileged students, who are perceived and perceive themselves as having more opportunities to become a PN, those who can afford to face the test as a puzzle and set the achievement of a perfect score as a goal. Conversely, the unprivileged ones cannot afford to do the same, because their performance determines if they are going to be able to pursue further studies in higher education. Those who are perceived and who perceive themselves as having had less opportunities in becoming a PN, also
coincide in that, although they might have set as a goal the achievement of a high score, they never meant to achieve a perfect one.

The second interpreted dimension was that of the kind of acquired capital of the students, distinguishing those with a more humanistic profile on the one side from those with a more scientific/mathematical on the other. It was also discussed how this differentiation, in combination with that of the first dimension, seem to have an impact on the choice of elite higher education made by the studied individuals. This review can be complemented by the interpretation of the last axis which contributes in differentiating the higher education institutions and elite programmes chosen by the students. Thus, in the overall space of FAE, private higher education institutions stand out for being massively preferred by students with lower acquired assets, while the two world-class institutions, UCH and PUC, are the ones preferred by those who have the highest volume of acquired capital within the space. However, this distribution is slightly altered within the sub-space of PNs, in which the dominance of UCH and PUC persist quantitatively speaking - they have recruited 81.7% of the total PNs - but is diluted from a qualitative perspective, giving way to other higher education institutions in the highest positions on axis 3.

7.2. University Admissions: An Economy of Symbolic Exchange

To become eligible for most fiscally funded scholarships in Chile, a student must achieve a high score on the PSU as well as have insufficient economic means to pay for tuition fees. However, becoming a PN enables students to access certain exclusive benefits which are not directly funded by the state, but by the higher education institutions that offer them. If we follow the principles stated in *El Ladrillo*¹¹⁶, the logic behind this system is that of meritocracy: only those who need it and deserve it should receive external funding for their studies, and if they perform particularly well, all the more reason to grant them special benefits.

Nevertheless, there are powerful arguments to sustain that this logic is not enough to account for the strategies deployed by the students and by other agents within the space of Chilean higher education in relation to university admissions. In other words, it is not only out of scholar-merits recognition that higher education institutions are interested in attracting as many students with high scores on the PSU as possible. When discussing the higher education funding system in Chile, it was indicated that the Indirect Fiscal Contribution is granted to the institutions where the 27,500 top students per their PSU score enrol at, regardless of their ownership. Thus, attracting good students implies for public, private and G9 universities the entitlement to receive extra economic assets, which can be regarded as much-welcomed leverage in the competition for extra-funding within the self-financing model that is currently in place.

But good students are not only a double source of funding for the universities¹¹⁷. They represent a quarry from where high schools and higher education institutions can extract the symbolic capital that enable them to gain

---

¹¹⁶ See chapter 1, title 1.1.3.

¹¹⁷ Double source because of the resources received by the Indirect Fiscal Contribution and also by the direct or indirect (through a scholarship) payment of tuition fees.
or reproduce the prestige they already hold within the broader space of education. The interviewees made it clear that having become a PN is something that quickly fades away for them after having exchanged its symbolic value for improving the conditions in which they access higher education; however, for educational institutions and programmes, this symbolic asset lasts much longer. Hence, certain high schools, UCH and PUC as well as Medicine, Law, Business and Civil Engineering tend to be perceived as the obvious and natural pathways that not only PNs, but anyone who aspires to success must follow. Therefore, although those who end up in power positions within the social order in Chile might have not gotten a perfect score - or even a particularly high score - on the test, they are legitimized in their position and capital possession because of the educational path they followed.

There is yet another type of agent that benefits from these symbolic dynamics. Private prep schools were mentioned and regarded by all informants as an important factor in the achievement of high and even perfect scores - which contradicts very much one of the primal arguments used by the supporters of the PSU, namely, that paying attention in high school was enough to perform well on the test. These institutions partly owe their existence to the reification of the scores and the lust for success embodied in the specific pathways that were just described and justify the need for their services by using students who have become PNs as their own face.

In any case, more research is needed not only to account for the social impact of the participation of prep-schools within the space of Chilean education, but also to provide a more thorough account of the economy of symbolic exchange that takes place within such space. Moreover, the mapping out of the space of education in Chile at its different levels may lead to a deeper understanding of the connection between the institutionalized educational system and the social structure existing in the country.

---

References


### Table 11. Glossary of Higher Education Institutions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Name</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>G9</td>
<td>PUC</td>
<td>Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>UdCe</td>
<td>Universidad de Concepción</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>PUCV</td>
<td>Pontificia Universidad Católica de Valparaíso</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>UTFSM</td>
<td>Universidad Técnica Federico Santa María</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>UACH</td>
<td>Universidad Austral de Chile</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>UCN</td>
<td>Universidad Católica del Norte</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>UCM</td>
<td>Universidad Católica del Maule</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>UCSC</td>
<td>Universidad Católica de la Santísima Concepción</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>UCT</td>
<td>Universidad Católica de Temuco</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>UDP</td>
<td>Universidad René Portales</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>UMayor</td>
<td>Universidad Mayor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>UFT</td>
<td>Universidad Finis Terrae</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>UAB</td>
<td>Universidad Andrés Bello</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>UAI</td>
<td>Universidad Adolfo Ibañez</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>UAndes</td>
<td>Universidad de los Andes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>UDD</td>
<td>Universidad del Desarrollo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>UAH</td>
<td>Universidad Alberto Hurtado</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>UCSH</td>
<td>Universidad Católica Silva Henríquez</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>IP DUOC UC</td>
<td>Instituto Profesional Duoc UC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>CFT CEDUC - UCN</td>
<td>Centro de Educación y Capacitación de la Universidad Católica del Norte</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>UCH</td>
<td>Universidad de Chile</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>USACH</td>
<td>Universidad de Santiago de Chile</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>UV</td>
<td>Universidad de Valparaíso</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>UMCE</td>
<td>Universidad Metropolitana de Ciencias de la Educación</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>UTM</td>
<td>Universidad Técnica Metropolitana</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>UT</td>
<td>Universidad de Tarapacá</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>UAP</td>
<td>Universidad Arturo Prat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>UAntofagasta</td>
<td>Universidad de Antofagasta</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ULS</td>
<td>Universidad de La Serena</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>UPA</td>
<td>Universidad de Playa Ancha</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>UAtacama</td>
<td>Universidad de Atacama</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>UBB</td>
<td>Universidad del Bio Bio</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>UFRO</td>
<td>Universidad de la Frontera</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ULL</td>
<td>Universidad de Los Lagos</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>UM</td>
<td>Universidad de Magallanes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>UTAL</td>
<td>Universidad de Talca</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>UOH</td>
<td>Universidad de O’Higgins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>UAysen</td>
<td>Universidad de Aysen</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 2

Diagram 35 shows how, regardless of the three different coding for Income existing in the original databases (Income0407 for the coding corresponding to the years 2004–2007, Income08 for the coding corresponding to the year 2008, and Income0917 for the coding corresponding to the years 2009–2017) is organized along axis 1 from lower (at the left) to higher (at the right) confirming its connection to the type of Health insurance a family has.

Diagram 35. Income

Diagrams 36 and 37 show how the cases are distributed in the space according to father’s and mother’s educational attainment respectively. In both cases it is apparent how the lower, middle and higher levels of educational attainment aggregated as indicated in chapter 6 are grouped.
Diagram 36. Father’s Education

Diagram 37. Mother’s Education
## Appendix 3: Interview Guide

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Questions</th>
<th>Analytical purposes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Identification</strong></td>
<td><strong>Describe your educational trajectory so far (i.e. what school did you attended, what scores did you get in the PSU, what programme and university did you chose, etc.)</strong></td>
<td><strong>How do these appreciations relate to their positions within the constructed space?</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| **Definitions and experiences** | **Could you describe your experience in relation to the PSU and the status you achieved?**  
Beyond the formal definition of ‘Puntaje Nacional’, how would you define it?  
What have your performance at the PSU meant for you and your closest ones?  
If you have siblings, have they taken an educational path similar to yours?  
Do you think all students have the same chance of being a Puntaje Nacional? Why?  
In your opinion, is there any particularity that characterizes the profile of all the Puntajes Nacionales?  
Are you in touch with your fellow Puntajes Nacionales? If so, how? If not, why? | **What perspectives do these students have on what does it mean to be a Puntaje Nacional?**                                  |
| **Performance**        | **How would you describe your performance at school and at the PSU?**  
How would you explain your performance at the test? Do you think your answer could be used to explain other Puntajes Nacionales’ performance as well? Why?  
Why would you say that your high school classmates and other students with profiles (school type, family background, etc.) similar to yours didn’t achieve what you did?  
How would you explain the achievement of those with a profile different to yours who performed as high as you in the test? | **What narratives do these students use to explain their performance?**                                                |
| **Choice and Projections** | **Could you describe your process of choosing the programme and university where you enrolled at?**  
Do you think that being a Puntaje Nacional affected your decision? If so, how? If not, why?  
Do you think that being a Puntaje Nacional will impact on the development of your professional career? If so, how? If not, why? | **What narratives do these students use to explain their career choice?**                                              |
Master’s thesis in Sociology of Education