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Working Paper

The unfolding of neoliberalism in economics curricula and scholarships: Colombia as a case study

ZÖSS Discussion Paper, No. 104

Provided in Cooperation with:

University of Hamburg, Centre for Economic and Sociological Studies (CESS/ZÖSS)

Suggested Citation: Ariza Ruiz, Efrén Danilo; Garza, Nestor (2024) : The unfolding of neoliberalism in economics curricula and scholarships: Colombia as a case study, ZÖSS Discussion Paper, No. 104, Universität Hamburg, Zentrum für Ökonomische und Soziologische Studien (ZÖSS), Hamburg

This Version is available at:

<https://hdl.handle.net/10419/300688>

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Efren Ariza und Néstor Garza

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Colombia as a case study**

ZÖSS
ZENTRUM FÜR ÖKONOMISCHE
UND SOZIOLOGISCHE STUDIEN

ZÖSS-Discussion Papers
ISSN 1868-4947/104
Discussion Papers
Hamburg 2024

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Discussion Paper

ISSN 1868-4947/104

Zentrum für Ökonomische und Soziologische Studien

Universität Hamburg

Mai 2024

Impressum:

Die Discussion Papers werden vom Zentrum für Ökonomische und Soziologische Studien veröffentlicht. Sie umfassen Beiträge von am Fachbereich Sozialökonomie Lehrenden, NachwuchswissenschaftlerInnen sowie Gast-ReferentInnen zu transdisziplinären Fragestellungen.

Herausgeber/Redaktion:

Zentrum für Ökonomische und Soziologische Studien (ZÖSS)

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Abstract

We document and analyze the emergence and consolidation of neoliberalism in higher education in economics in Colombia. The research focuses on four interrelated categories through which the neoliberal ideology changed the scientific field of economics by replacing endogenously developed analytical traditions during the 1980s -1990s: 1) homogenization of curricula; 2) neoclassical mathematization; 3) use of textbooks; and 4) quantitative assessment (scientometrics) of academic quality. The results show how a generation of economists combined their networks of social capital and legitimacy from international academic connections, to simultaneously impose their worldview in academia, the public administration, and private sector. Our analyses highlight the transfer of the neoliberal values to the education field through the concepts of quality assessment and scientometrics, which institutionalized the exercise of power to discipline intellectual inquiries and scholarship.

Keywords: Higher Education, Economists, Research Policy, Cultural Capital, Sociological Studies, Neoclassical Economics

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1. Introduction

The consolidation of neoliberalism as the underlying ideology of technocratic policymaking in developing countries has been underpinned by the transformation of economics as a social science and a professional discipline. In the case of Latin America, the emergence of neoliberalism in economics curricula and academic production is a result of the transformations experienced during the first half of the 1990s (Chang, 2015; Grabel 2018).

Economics as a social science has a variety of doctrines, which, contrary to popular opinion about the field, do not differ in terms of their worldviews (ideologies), but in terms of what is considered a valid approach to scientific knowledge (Gallardo, 2004). Among the economic doctrines, neoclassical and Austrian seem to better align with the neoliberal ideological agenda, although analyses in the logic of classical or even Marxist theories can also produce research conclusions and policy advice aligned with the neoliberal ideology¹.

The neoliberal agenda in neoclassical economics is based on its epistemic aspiration to comprise a purely technical approach to understanding and conducting social affairs. Neoclassical methodological individualism is a perfect basis for the endorsement of public policies aimed at debt accumulation, labor flexibility, and entrepreneurship. These are tools to transform and discipline the world's population into *homo economicus*. That is, populations oriented to individualized self-improvement in areas such as information, health, and beauty, and especially important in this paper: the use of academic research and knowledge to develop oneself as human capital (Laval & Dardot, 2013; Foucault, 2009; Quijano, 2022).

In this article, we use the consolidation of neoliberalism in Colombian higher education in economics as a case study of its unfolding in Latin American countries, both in the study programs and the scholarship agendas. We show that the development of neoliberalism in the economics curricula and research programs in different Colombian universities, normalized hierarchical power relations and the unification of their analytical paradigms (González, 1999). These transformations are discussed in the context of transformations of the scientific discipline of economics in Latin American higher education institutions, which used to have a relatively long tradition in alternative approaches to economic knowledge (Missio et al., 2015; Bresser-Pereira, 2019).

¹ For example: international trade guided by comparative advantage and intertemporal equivalence in taxes/expenditures (Ricardo, 2001), or the export of capital in Marxism as a solution to the decline in the rate of profit of the central economies (Luxembourg, 2003).

2. Case Study Description

Colombia is a middle-income country (US\$ 15,630) of intermediate size (52 million inhabitants), with a relatively long democratic tradition compared to other Latin American countries (presidential elections and continuous mandates since 1958). The country has had slow but steady economic growth since the 1930s (only one recession, 1999-2001), with relatively low inflation and balanced fiscal exercises. Therefore, and in contrast to most Latin American countries, Colombia did not suffer economic crises during the 1980s and did not have to enact neoliberal reforms at the beginning of the 1990s due to external pressure, as was the case with other countries in the region. Therefore, Colombia offers a case study where the enactment of neoliberal reforms can be more clearly related to changes in economics education and scholarship.

Colombia's first economics departments were created during the 1950s at *Universidad de los Andes* (private institution) and at the *Universidad Nacional* and *Universidad de Antioquia* (public institutions). These schools were created in the context of post-Keynesian and developmentalist traditions and were dedicated to discussing the different economic theories that explained national underdevelopment and its process of structural change, through industrialization, urbanization, and the consolidation of its national economy and finances. These institutes also taught quantitative tools to be used by their graduates in existing industrialization and modernization efforts: linear programming, statistics, financial accounting.

The professional discipline of economics, which emerged in Colombia by prioritizing developmentalist, Keynesian, and structural development traditions, was drastically transformed during the 1980s and 1990s. A new generation of neoliberal economists replaced the developmentalist tradition both in the established channels of dissemination of knowledge in the field, such as journals and conferences, and in the positions of power in national policymaking (Aparicio & Fernandez, 2022; Mercado, 2021; Valencia, 2020; Rozo, 2006; Estrada, 2005).

Three cohorts can be identified in the neoliberal generation in Colombia. The first cohort during the presidential terms of Belisario Betancur (1982-1986) and Virgilio Barco (1986-1990), led by Roberto Junguito, an economist from Universidad de los Andes with postgraduate studies at Princeton and the London School of Economics, who has held senior positions in government and private sector institutions since 1973. Throughout that period, he was also a lecturer in economics at Universidad de los Andes. By the 1980s, his students held strategic positions in: Fedesarrollo (a think tank inspired by the Brookings Institution, and created in 1970), DNP (National Development Agency, which functions as a supra-ministry of development projects), the Ministry of Finance, Banco de la República (Central Bank), and CEDE (Universidad de los Andes Center for Research in Economic Development).

The second neoliberal cohort corresponds to the presidency of César Gaviria (1990-1994), during which drastic structural adjustment reforms were implemented. During this period, most of the high government positions were held by economists from Universidad de los Andes, trained during the first generation, among them: Rudolf Hommes, Armando and Santiago Montenegro, María Mercedes Cuéllar and Martha Lucía Ramírez. These economists implemented most of the neoliberal reforms in the economy and, as academics, taught the third cohort of neoliberal economists.

The third cohort was made up of a large group of economists from Universidad de los Andes, who obtained graduate degrees in the United States. Some of them, such as Alberto Carrasquilla, Juan Carlos Echeverry, and Mauricio Cárdenas Santamaría, rotated between important positions in government, academia, and the private sector (revolving door). They implemented a second wave of neoliberal reforms during the period 1998-2022, while facing serious ethical and legal challenges, with multiple cases of prison sentences and administrative monetary fines.

The neoliberalism of the 1980s and 1990s replaced endogenously developed traditions in economic thought in Colombian universities through four interrelated categories that we discuss and analyze below: 1) homogenization of curricula; 2) neoclassical mathematization; 3) use of textbooks; and 4) quantitative assessment (scientometrics) of academic quality.

3. Categories that drove neoliberal hegemony in the Colombian economy

3.1. Homogenization of curricula

Economic neoliberalism is based on a neoclassical trait, its *Homo economicus*, detached from its social context to make neoclassical economics “the” general theory of social systems, rather than “a part of” that effort. Three features of neoclassical economics enable this process. The first is the general equilibrium approach, which allows the development of sequentially derived theoretical models focused on a wide variety of topics with different, and in many cases contradictory, conclusions, depending on variations of their ad-hoc mathematical assumptions (Salazar & Cendales, 2007; Gallardo, 2004; Hann & Hollis, 1996).

The second feature is based on the first, where the general equilibrium approach unifies economic thought, and any other approach is considered a special case of the neoclassical approach. In this logic, economics has changed from a multi-paradigmatic social science into a kind of “hard science” unified by its deductive approach to knowledge accumulation. In contrast to other social sciences that tend to develop different schools of thought, neoclassical economics seems to do away with the plurality of scientific views on social issues (Cataño, 2001).

The third process is the use of the neoclassical analytical toolbox in other social sciences (political science, sociology, urban planning, law), favoring the search for explicit closed-form solutions to be empirically tested. That is, a microeconomic approach with its corresponding interpretations/tests in terms of regression analyses, without engaging in a true two-way dialogue with the other social sciences (Garza & Garza, 2023; Ariza, 2016; Fourcade, 2015).

3.2. Neoclassical mathematization

The imposition of the neoliberal agenda has coincided with a consensus among economic scholars around the mathematical formalization of economic theory, or more accurately, the neoclassical mathematical formalization². In the neoclassical epistemic approach, Latin American developmentalist and structural change approaches are not even considered scientific knowledge in economics (Lee, 2004; Goodwin, 1998).

The imposition of the neoclassical approach and its methodological commitment to optimization obscures non-linear and collective (non-individual) social processes. In contrast, Latin American developmentalism and structural change emphasized such features, for example: the role of inequality in macroeconomic performance, or the importance of industrialization in economic development (Hira, 2007; Kohli, 2012)

The cohorts of Latin American economists that pursued graduate studies in the United States during the 1980s and 1990s were educated in the so-called freshwater analytical tradition (fully deductive rational expectation models). These individuals, in turn, controlled the academic milieu. That is, these economists constituted a self-referential academic community, encompassing networks of government officials and high-level consultants, committed to modifying policy according to the ideology implicit in their theoretical approach (Biglaiser, 2002).

Neoclassical mathematization encompasses the methodological approach, the research topics and, most importantly, the inclusion and exclusion of the problems to be analyzed. This process of prioritizing the methodology, which in turn includes the corresponding research problems, is at the root of the normative (ideological) bias in neoclassical economics (Benetti, 1997; Keppler, 1998)

² Many alternative doctrines are also fundamentally quantitative. However, they are based on completely different epistemic foundations. Examples, among others, are predator-prey biological models in Marxist economics (Goodwin, 1951; Goldstein, 1999) and nonlinear systems in post-Keynesian economics (Skott, 1989; Skott & Gómez-Ramírez, 2018).

3.3. Textbook hegemony

The neoliberal hegemony has built upon academic credentialism, and the economics departments of elite higher education institutions have been instrumental in this process. It is in academia that the “right ideas” are transmitted, and textbooks are effective tools for configuring a regime of “truth” that favors neoliberalism through the unification of thought. In this regard, Wainer (2015), González (1999) and Bejarano (1999) have shown how in Colombia many economics programs have become excessively dependent on textbooks as a survival tool in the process of unifying (copying) their curricula and graduation criteria from elite institutions.

The widespread use of economics textbooks in Latin America is largely the result of a long-term strategy between U.S. publishers and their diplomatic representations. Mayor & Zambrano (2017) offer evidence of this process by including 1950s correspondence between McGrawHill Editorial, the U.S. embassy in Colombia, and the School of Economics at *Universidad de Antioquia*. Those messages promoted Samuelson’s book “Fundamentals of Economic Analysis” stating that it was already being used by more than 100 schools in 30 countries, and that free copies would be sent to educators upon request. These messages were exchanged between publishers, universities, and the U.S. embassy as tokens of goodwill in the context of the Alliance for Progress, the Latin American foreign policy promoted by the U.S. government in that period.

3.4. The neoliberal concept of quality in higher education

The current concept of quality in higher education is a neoliberal practice led by the government in the form of an institutionalized assessment system. These assessments essentially certify the degree to which higher education institutions are adapting to the requirements of the global economy (Castro & Rafo, 2016; Batanelo, 2015; Martínez, 2010).

In Foucauldian terms, the neoliberal approach to the quality of higher education comprises a system of power exercise, in which higher education institutions accommodate themselves to what government-appointed agencies consider best practices. This idea is detrimental to local or national teaching and scholarship initiatives in developing countries, as their performance is measured in terms of practices and metrics that might not be relevant in their own social contexts. The necessary process of adaptation and local development of measurement practices is almost never carried out. An example in this regard is the indiscriminate use of globalized scientometrics in the evaluation of higher education in Colombia.

We should clarify that we consider scientometrics to be a relevant and valuable academic field, with its corresponding intellectual discussions and research processes. What we found problematic is the

way in which bureaucrats and other institutionalized agents use it indiscriminately, as a mechanism of power to discipline higher education systems without making any effort in adaptation to the needs of the education and research systems of a Latin American country. Such uses of scientometrics create skewed international rankings that favor the top universities of the Global North, while promoting an emphasis on indicators that are artificial at best, and detrimental at worst, to Latin American higher education institutions (Valles, 2021; Gomez, 2018).

Who are the actors promoting these markets to assess the quality of higher education? They are a handful of private multinational institutions such as the Institute for Scientific Information – Thomson Reuters Scientific (ISI), the Web of Science (WoS) with its Citation Index products, Google Scholar, and the Scopus index from the publisher Elsevier. These companies comprise a deregulated oligopolistic market, vertically integrated with their consumers and suppliers: universities, government agencies in charge of science and technology, and global evaluation institutions (Berneix et al., 2015).

In Colombia, Minciencias is the minister in charge of science and technology. It conducts the National Survey for the Measurement of the Quality of Higher Education Institutions (Scienti). This survey, a system for capturing and producing scientometric data, is based on the neoliberal logic. It requires that academic knowledge responds first to the needs of markets and firms, and only secondarily to the needs of society:

One of the purposes of Law 1951 of 2019, which creates the Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation (Minciencias), is that the knowledge generated by research and technological development has a greater impact on the productive system, thus contributing to solving the problems of Colombian society (Minciencias, 2020, pág. 14).

By adapting to the Scienti platform, researchers morph into *homo economicus*, as discussed above. Local universities and scientific journals need to adopt strategic behavior to meet Scienti requirements, the first of which is, for example, international co-authorship. We must clarify here that we are not against international co-authorship as such, a very valuable tool for international development and intellectual progress. However, when used as an indiscriminate requirement, it incentivizes strategic implementation by local institutions. This strategic implementation includes practices such as “renting” the Scopus profiles of internationally recognized researchers by some institutions in Saudi Arabia³. Another example of how evaluation systems can be fooled is by creating numerous fake articles (using computer bots in many cases) to artificially increase Google citations (López-Cosar et al., 2013). Finally, as evidenced by Rusell et al. (2007), the citation record of Latin American international collaborations with the United States and Europe is higher than that of intraregional international

³ <https://elpais.com/ciencia/2023-04-18/arabia-saudi-paga-a-cientificos-espanoles-para-hacer-trampas-en-el-ranking-de-las-mejores-universidades-del-mundo.html>

collaborations. Therefore, the Scienti platform gives more weight (incentivizes) to North-South collaboration than to South-South collaboration.

Such processes give rise to a structural isomorphism, in which the most successful participants in the national science and technology system are those who adapt to the required globalized standards, resembling private sector practices of marketability, and the accumulation of symbolic, social, and economic capital. These agents, in turn, become decision-makers in the system, reproducing the same practices⁴. It is not clear whether all the practices mentioned contribute to solving specific Colombian problems or at least contribute to the development of a national intellectual-scientific community, or if they are mere tools to categorize, and eventually finance and promote researchers and their institutions.

4. Analysis and Results

We conduct our analysis by finding evidence regarding each of the four categories discussed above in the case of Colombian education in economics. We used data from the 8 highest ranked programs in the country, 5 are private institutions: *Universidad de los Andes*, *Universidad del Rosario*, *Universidad Javeriana*, *Universidad EAFIT*, and *Universidad ICESI*, and 3 are public: *Universidad Nacional*, *Universidad de Antioquia*, and *Universidad del Valle*. We use data on their undergraduate curricula in economics to analyze their homogenization under neoliberal criteria. And the same database is used to explore the neoclassical mathematization of the field. To verify the hegemony of textbooks, we use data on the syllabi of all subjects taught in these eight universities. Research productivity and national journals in economics will allow us to evaluate the impact of indiscriminate scientometrics.

4.1. Homogenization of curricula

Most university degrees in Colombia required 10 semesters before the neoliberal reforms in education (Laws 30 of 1992; and 1188 of 2008). Since then, most institutions have opted to offer shorter programs, adapted to the international standard of bachelor's degrees in 8 semesters. The data selected for the 8 best-ranked programs in economics is reported in Table 1, where we can see that the top two, *Universidad de los Andes* and *Universidad del Rosario*, have 8 semesters. The average for the eight institutions is 9.1 semesters. The number of mandatory courses in these programs ranges

⁴ Tito Crissien, Colombian Minister of Science and Technology 2021-2022 was accused of academic fraud by being included in numerous works in which he did not make any contribution while he was president of *Universidad de la Costa*. The minister argued that his name had been added without his “consent”, and that the editorials had removed his name from the publications. However, this did not change his high rank on the Scienti platform, and he remained as minister for more than a year. <https://www.eltiempo.com/colombia/barranquilla/la-defensa-del-nuevo-ministro-de-ciencia-sobre-la-acusacion-de-plagio-594363>

from 26 at Universidad del Rosario to 48 at Universidad ICESI, with an average of 37.8. Academic credits range from 128 at Universidad de los Andes to 171 at Universidad ICESI, with an average of 147.5. These short programs of study tend to focus on the neoclassical paradigm, arguing that there is not enough space to offer alternative approaches or courses in history and other social sciences. The lack of diversity in these academic programs is guided by the supposed efficiency of a neoliberal approach to higher education, which focuses on neoclassical mathematization as we will see below, while discarding alternative doctrines and history.

Table 1: Curricular characteristics of the top 8 undergraduate programs in economics

| Rank | Institution | Type | Semesters | Credits | Courses | Credits in: | | | |
|------|-------------|---------|-----------|---------|---------|--------------------------|--------|--------|----------------------------|
| | | | | | | Quantitative Foundations | Micro | Macro | History & Economic Thought |
| 1 | Andes | Private | 8 | 128 | 37 | 10.94% | 7.03% | 7.03% | 4.69% |
| 2 | Rosario | Private | 8 | 130 | 26 | 15.38% | 9.23% | 9.23% | 4.62% |
| 3 | Nacional | Public | 10 | 151 | 35 | 9.93% | 10.60% | 10.60% | 7.28% |
| 4 | Javeriana | Private | 9 | 160 | 36 | 15.00% | 7.50% | 7.50% | 3.75% |
| 5 | Antioquia | Public | 10 | 150 | 44 | 10.00% | 8.00% | 8.67% | 10.00% |
| 6 | EAFIT | Private | 9 | 141 | 30 | 10.64% | 6.38% | 6.38% | 6.38% |
| 7 | Valle | Public | 9 | 149 | 48 | 13.42% | 6.04% | 8.05% | 8.05% |
| 8 | ICESI | Private | 10 | 171 | 47 | 8.77% | 5.85% | 5.85% | 5.26% |

Table 2: Graduation options of the top 8 undergraduate programs in economics

| University | Graduation Options |
|-------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Universidad de los Andes (Bogotá) | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Elective Cycle (courses in various economics subjects) 2. Take courses in the Master of Economics (PEG) or Master of Applied Economics (MECA). |
| Universidad del Rosario (Bogotá) | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Coterminal: take 16 academic credits from a master's program at the School of Economics 2. Bachelor's Thesis 3. Internship |
| Universidad Nacional (Bogotá) | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Research paper (monograph) 2. Extension Internships (Internship & Entrepreneurship) 3. Qualifying Exams 4. Take courses in the Master's Degree in Economic Sciences |
| Universidad Javeriana (Bogotá) | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Final Degree Project (monograph) 2. Research Assistant 3. Internship 4. Qualifying Exams |
| Universidad de Antioquia (Medellín) | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. 1. Bachelor's Thesis |

| | |
|---------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Universidad EAFIT (Medellín) | 1. Bachelor's thesis (extended essay) 2. 2. Take two subjects of the Master's Degree in Economics |
| Universidad del Valle (Cali) | 1. Degree Project 2. Take a Research Seminar |
| Universidad ICESI (Cali) | 3. 1. Final Degree Project (monograph) |

Source: Authors' own elaboration based on the current curricula of the programs

The neoliberal approach to education is also evident in the changes to the graduation options offered by these programs. Prior to the 1990s, most economics programs in Colombia required a graduation paper or thesis from their students, including semester- or year-long research processes under the guidance of a faculty advisor. This requirement has been relaxed or eliminated, to increase graduation rates, job marketing, and post-graduate enrollment, as shown in Table 2.

4.2. Neoclassical mathematization

As discussed above, the neoclassical economic theory tends to align more clearly with the neoliberal ideology. This theory comprises the mainstream of economic research and education around the world, a ahistorical, acontextual approach that does not even discuss the scientificity of alternative doctrines. As Fourcade et al. (2015) explain:

For much of the post-World War II period, flexing one's mathematical and statistical muscles and stripping down one's argument to a formal and parsimonious set of equations was indeed the main path to establishing scientific purity in economics. With the empirical revolution in the 1990s and 2000s, this function has shifted toward a hard-nosed approach to causality focused on research design and inference and often extolling the virtues of randomized controlled trials (p.92).

Moreover, being defined by the method (optimization) rather than by the topic (the economy), neoclassical economics deals with a wide variety of topics and issues, directly offering seemingly scientific (neutral) advice on all sorts of real-world problems (Chang, 2015). This dominant approach requires a relatively solid foundation in quantitative analysis and, consequently, education programs in Colombia emphasize quantitative courses (mathematics, statistics, econometrics) and their corresponding core courses of economic theory: micro and macroeconomics, as shown in Table 3.

It also should be noted that in private institutions the proportion of History and Economic Thought courses is lower than in public institutions. This is the result of a greater degree of adaptation to

neoliberal standards, following the model set by Universidad de los Andes. In this approach, courses that lead to "practical" skills are prioritized, and the professional core of neoclassical economics—Micro + Macro + Econometrics—seemingly fulfills that role⁵. Courses in History, Philosophy/Epistemology, and Economic Thought are assumed as an exercise in erudition and almost as elements of general culture, interesting but not fundamental (Ariza, 2016).

4.3. Textbook hegemony

In this section, we analyze the bibliographies used in the study programs in Table 3. We can see that textbooks predominate in the basic disciplinary cycle. Gregory Mankiw's Introduction to Economics, for example, is used in all the programs analyzed. Gregory Mankiw is a Harvard professor and economic adviser to the Bush administration⁶. His textbooks on micro, macroeconomics, and intermediate macroeconomics are also used in most of the programs analyzed, and his Intermediate Macroeconomics is used in five programs.

The Intermediate Microeconomics of Hal Varian, Google's chief economist, is also used in all the programs, while the most popular macroeconomics textbook is that of Jean Blanchard (president of the International Monetary Fund during 2008-2015). In Econometrics, the book by Wooldridge, a professor at Michigan State University, is used in six programs.

All the textbooks are written by authors from American universities, with a track record as high-level political advisors and administrators. Textbooks on introductory economics or in intermediate microeconomics written by Colombian authors like the ones by: Cuevas (1993) and Monsalve (2018) are not used in any of the programs analyzed. In addition, we do not find alternative international approaches such as the textbook *The Economy* (CORE Econ, 2017), despite being used in some prestigious programs in Europe and the United States⁷. Finally, we were unable to identify in the core courses the use of original authors and discussions, including the instructors' own research, rather than textbooks. That is, we find a unified and disciplined US-based approach to basic knowledge in the field.

⁵ Stickers (2018) shows that in fact contemporary dominant economics is disconnected from concerns about the real economy, as perceived by its agents. In a similar fashion, Kassner (2019) identifies that the dominant empirical approach does not align with a genuinely pragmatist (positive) approach to empirical research.

⁶ Using the same genealogical approach, we should mention that Mankiw was mentored by Stanley Fischer, who also wrote a paradigmatic textbook (still used on our list), and Mankiw, in turn, has mentored Xavier Sala-i-Martin, Ricardo Reis, David N. Weil, and Francesco Caselli (excerpted from Greg. Mankiw's blog: *J.D. vs. PhD: My Story*, June 6, 2006, and: *A Profile of Stanley Fischer*, February 17, 2013)

⁷ Curriculum Open-access Resources in Economics (CORE) is a multinational, student-led organization that wants to transform economics education by opening the curricula to alternative doctrines and inductive scholarship. Their flagship book is *The Economy*, which is currently used at dozens of institutions around the world, including Columbia, Princeton, and Oxford

Table 3: Textbooks used in the core courses of the curriculum (some are Spanish translations of U.S. textbooks, while others are used in their original version in English)

| Textbook | Author(s) | Editorial | Absolute Frequency | Relative Frequency % |
|-------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------|----------------------|
| Principios de Economía | Gregory Mankiw | Paraninfo | 8 | 100.00 |
| Microeconomía Intermedia un enfoque actual | Hal R. Varian | Alfaomega Antoni Bosch | 8 | 100.00 |
| Macroeconomics, 7th edition | Olivier Blanchard, David R Jhanson | Pearson | 6 | 75.00 |
| Econometrics: A Modern Approach, 5th edition | Jeffrey M. Wooldridge | Cengage Learning | 6 | 75.00 |
| Microeconomía | Pindyck y Rubinfeld | Pearson | 5 | 62.50 |
| Macroeconomía Intermedia | Gregory Mankiw | Alfaomega Antoni Bosch | 5 | 62.50 |
| Microeconomía: Una Nueva Visión | Jeffrey Perloff | Pearson | 2 | 25.00 |
| Macroeconomía | Rudiger Dornbusch, Stanley Fischer, Richard Startz | McGraw-Hill Publishing Co | 2 | 25.00 |
| Econometría | Gujarati, D. y Porter, D | McGraw-Hill Publishing Co | 2 | 25.00 |
| Principios de Microeconomia | Gregory Mankiw | Paraninfo | 1 | 12.50 |
| Microeconomic theory: Basic principles and extensions | Nicholson, W., & Snyder, C. | Cengage Learning | 1 | 12.50 |
| Macroeconomía: teoría y política | Frederic S. Mishkin | Pearson | 1 | 12.50 |
| Modern macroeconomics | Chugh, S | The MIT Press | 1 | 12.50 |
| Introducción a la Econometría | Stock y Watson | Pearson | 1 | 12.50 |

4.4. Scientometrics

Minciencias, the government agency in charge of science and technology, has encouraged higher education institutions to adapt to globalized requirements, oriented to productivity and economic success, as mentioned above. In this logic, the neoliberal approach to academic assessment is based on globalized scientometric criteria. Minciencias maintains that Colombia has increased scientific

production and visibility by increasing the number of articles produced by its researchers in the WoS Index: from 672 in 2004 to 3,175 in 2018 (Gomez, 2018, p276).

However, the general increase in intellectual productivity is only one of the possible ways in which Colombian academia can participate in global academic exchange networks. That goal can also be achieved when Colombian institutions internationalize their own academic journals. However, Gómez (2018) found that despite all the effort (financial and human investment) by the institutions in charge of economics journals in Colombia, only nine journals are indexed in Scopus (out of 1,216 in the field), where all but one of these journals is at the bottom 25%, and only two journals have an H-index greater than 10 (at least 10 articles with 10 citations).

Table 4: Colombian Economics Journals Indexed in Scopus

| Journal | Institution | Scopus Quartil | H Index | # Cites last 3 years | References/ Cites 2021 |
|---------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|----------------|---------|----------------------|------------------------|
| Cuadernos de Economía | Universidad Nacional de Colombia | Q3 | 9 | 85 | 39.7 |
| Estudios Gerenciales | Universidad ICESI | Q4 | 15 | 82 | 57.4 |
| Cuadernos de Desarrollo Rural | Pontificia Universidad Javeriana | Q4 | 11 | 14 | 69.4 |
| Revista de Economía Institucional | Universidad Externado de Colombia | Q4 | 9 | 23 | 35.2 |
| Ensayos Sobre Política Económica | Banco de la República | Q4 | 8 | 9 | 132.3 |
| Lecturas de Economía | Universidad de Antioquia | Q4 | 7 | 14 | 40.7 |
| Desarrollo y Sociedad | Universidad de los Andes | Q4 | 7 | 18 | 33.9 |
| Revista de Economía del Rosario | Universidad del Rosario | Q4 | 7 | 6 | 41.0 |
| Revista Finanzas y Política Económica | Universidad Católica de Colombia | Q4 | 4 | 10 | 45.2 |

Source: Authors' own elaboration using Scimago Journal & Country Rank 2022

In the logic of scientometrics, the measured impact of the scientific production per school is an approach to the quality of economists' training. However, the abusive use of quantitative measures such as the journal's impact factor or the H-index has generated a culture of accelerated publication. This culture prioritizes research with a reduced focus, avoiding "big picture" problems and meta-narratives. Furthermore, the adaptation to what is considered scientific truth in neoclassical economics requires the researchers to focus on applied topics that are attractive to publications with a higher impact factor. In many cases these topics are irrelevant in terms of local realities and research

needs. Scientometrics and its associated education quality assessments are used as tools for controlling and disciplining the academic body, affecting academic freedom and critical thinking.

5. Discussion

The emergence and consolidation of Neoliberalism in the study programs and scholarship in economics has been part of a global strategy, which also includes politics, law, journalism, and other areas that determine the social acceptance of the new paradigm. This strategy has built upon the features of the neoclassical mainstream of economics that more clearly align with the neoliberal ideology.

We must add that the neoliberal dominance in Colombia has not necessarily had superior academic argumentation or indisputable scientific results. And quite the opposite, the neoliberal economists who operate as free-market advocates have systematically operated outside of the market competition for ideas, jobs, and political influence (Rozo, 2006).

In Colombia, the neoliberal generation, initially based at Universidad de los Andes, used its system of international networks to gain legitimacy while operating on its domestic networks of social capital to gain access to government and academic positions. (Ahumada, 2006; Markoff and Montecinos, 1999). This strategy, both local and international, and both in the academic and professional spheres, was documented by Rozo (2006) using a comprehensive series of interviews. Here, we reproduce some fragments:

When Colombians return from their graduate education (master's or doctorate) abroad, it is much easier for them to enter institutions such as Fedesarrollo, than for a person who has not been able to study abroad. At the same time, the link between having studied at Universidad de los Andes and going abroad is what I think marks the possibility of being at research centers and, subsequently, influencing politics. Now, that creates its own vicious, or virtuous, circle, depending on your point of view. To the extent that universities abroad begin to receive Uniandinos and they do well there, professors at those universities seek to attract Uniandinos in the future. When a person applies from a different university (from Colombia), which they don't know, they don't know what to expect. In many cases, prospective students already know the professor abroad through their own faculty who knows those people and recommends them, which strengthens the link between Universidad de los Andes and prestigious universities abroad (a member of the board of directors of Banco de la República (Central Bank) – Interview conducted in March 2004).

That is something that has a lot to do with the signals of the labor market that are not exclusive to us [at Universidad de los Andes]. A recommendation is very important. You have two people in the same market, but if one comes recommended or you know the

person, that's what happened to me. Why did I join Banco de la República (Central Bank)? Because a friend of mine, who had been my academic tutor and worked at Banco de la República, recommended me. And many times, the classrooms at Universidad de los Andes are the place where it happens. Ortega [Juan Ricardo] was here [at Universidad de los Andes], I took him to the DNP, he was there for a year, then I sent him to the presidency (of the republic), he was there for another year and then [Roberto] Junguito took him and now he is vice minister of Foreign Trade. I haven't thought about it too much, I know it works. Today, young people are already consciously making the decision to follow that process when they enter Universidad de los Andes (a high-ranking central government official at the time, currently dedicated to academia – Interview conducted in March 2004).

Neoliberalism entered the highest levels of public administration in Colombia during the 1980s and 1990s, building upon its dominance in universities and research centers. Such dominance, enhanced by credentialism, social capital networks, and capture of the research outlets by its practitioners, imposed the unification and neoclassical mathematization of the curricula and the extended use of US-author textbooks. It also used scientometrics to impose the research questions and methods in the scientific community of economists in the country. However, there were no intellectual superiority or scientific results underpinning such a process. If a different cohort of economists or social scientists with a different ideological commitment had access to corresponding positions of power and international academic connections to legitimize their claim to scientific truth, they would also be able to move between academia, government, and private sector, imposing their corresponding worldview. An interesting counterfactual built upon the same reasoning process.

6. Conclusions

During the 1980s and 1990s a generation of Colombian neoliberal economists, mostly professors and students at Universidad de los Andes, gained disproportionate participation as high-level government officers and advisors. These economists used academic credentials as post-graduates from international universities to legitimize the imposition of their worldview in academia and government.

The neoliberal consolidation required a transformation of the economics profession in the country, via four interrelated categories: 1) homogenization of curricula among the different universities, adapting them to globalized standards of assumed efficiency and marketability; 2) neoclassical

mathematization, an epistemic approach where the method pre-determines the topics, in advance of any intellectual inquiry to be developed in curricula and research. This process excludes important questions and topics from academic exchange in economics; 3) excessive reliance on textbooks, in particular, textbooks written for American universities and produced by global editorials, eliminating references to the specificities of the national or local cases; and 4) quantitative assessment of academic quality, where an indiscriminate (non-adapted) use of globalized indicators of scientific productivity guide institutional assessment and force the unification of scholarship practices. These categories have consolidated the neoliberal hegemony in the scientific field of economics in Colombia, and its practitioners, in turn, occupy most of the high-ranking positions in the public administration, private sector and academia.

It is an ethical imperative to consolidate alternatives to the neoliberal hegemony in economics education. Such transformation would require changes to the discipline and daily practices in the classroom, allowing students to understand the complexity of economic phenomena, and promote alternatives that contribute to the construction of social justice, environmental sustainability, and human well-being.

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