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Reconceptualisation in the Argentine university: Experiences of reforms in the schools of

Reconceptualización en la universidad argentina. Experiencias de reformas en las escuelas de Servicio Social (1969-1976)

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Received: 18/10/2024

Accepted: 4/03/2025

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How to cite

Tiberi, R (2025). Reconceptualisation in the Argentine university: Experiences of reforms in Social Service schools (1969-1976) *Critical Proposals in Social Work* *Critical Proposals in Social Work*, 5 (9), 108-131. DOI: 10.5354/2735-6620.2025. 76409.

Abstract

This paper deals with a particular aspect of the Reconceptualisation movement in Argentina. Focusing on different areas of professional training in Social Work, it analyses the changes and transformations that took place at institutional and curricular level between the end of the 1960s and the mid 1970s, paying special attention to the curriculum reform processes. The aim is to build a broad and federal view on this phenomenon, recovering the experiences of the Schools of Social Service of Buenos Aires, Rosario, Misiones and Mendoza. This analysis is built on the knowledge accumulated so far, based on previous studies and existing academic productions. From this body of work, new contributions are proposed to enrich and broaden the understanding of the subject. As a starting point, the political and social climate of that period, in which the Reconceptualisation movement was developed, is placed. Subsequently, the

Keywords:
reconceptualisation; vocational training; university; social work; social work

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influence of this movement on the processes of change that took place in the careers during those years and its link with the political events that determined the debates are investigated. Then, the main transformations that contribute to the understanding of this phenomenon are pointed out. Finally, we seek to warn about some aspects related to the interruption of Reconceptualisation, linked to the advance of conservative and anti-communist sectors within the ruling Peronism, and the arrival of the Military Dictatorship. The comparative view of these experiences is postulated as a contribution to analyse the general implications of the period on the development of different careers, to identify common points and to provide clarity on the impact of Reconceptualisation in professional training.

Resumen

El presente escrito aborda un aspecto particular del movimiento de Reconceptualización en Argentina. Poniendo la lupa en distintos espacios de formación profesional de Trabajo Social, se analizan los cambios y transformaciones que acontecieron a nivel institucional y curricular entre finales de la década 60 y mediados de los años 70, prestando puntual atención a los procesos de reformas de planes de estudios. Se busca construir una mirada amplia y federal sobre este fenómeno, recuperando las experiencias de las escuelas de Servicio Social de Buenos Aires, Rosario, Misiones y Mendoza. Esto fue posible gracias a la recuperación y análisis de trabajos elaborados por colegas sobre la temática (Melano, 2016; 2019; Rodríguez, 2016; Siede, 2015; Barrera y Fuentealba, 2012; Moljo, 2004; Pagani, 2007; Muñoa, 2020). Como punto de partida, se sitúa el clima político y social que acontece en ese periodo, en el cual se desarrolla el movimiento de Reconceptualización. Posteriormente, se indaga la influencia de dicho movimiento en los procesos de cambios que ocurrieron en las carreras durante esos años y su vinculación con los sucesos políticos que determinan los debates. Luego, se puntualizan las principales transformaciones que aportan a la comprensión de este fenómeno. Finalmente, se busca advertir sobre algunos aspectos relativos a la interrupción de la Reconceptualización, vinculado al avance de sectores conservadores y anticomunistas dentro del peronismo gobernante, y la llegada de la Dictadura Militar. La mirada comparativa de estas experiencias se postula como un aporte para analizar las implicancias generales del periodo sobre el desarrollo de las distintas carreras, identificar puntos en común y aportar claridad sobre las implicancias de la Reconceptualización en los ámbitos de formación profesional.

Palabras Clave:
reconceptualización; formación profesional; universidad; trabajo social



Introduction

Studying social work invites us to investigate and analyse the social and historical aspects that influenced its origin and development. It is about looking at the events, actors, institutions, discourses and practices that in a given context gave foundation to its processes.

To this end, this study is based on a history of the present perspective (Castel, 1997). Following Zampani et al., (2017), this approach seeks to understand the present and the future of Social Work, allowing to understand how certain practices emerged and transformed to become what they are today, identifying continuities, ruptures and key moments. Thus, it is not a matter of accumulating data, but of revealing the logic that sustains the profession's practices, its conditions, and the changes that have marked its evolution. As Castel (1997) states, it is a matter of "asking the historical material the questions that historians have not necessarily formulated, and reordering them on the basis of other categories (...) that is to say, using the data that one owes to historians, to create other narratives" (p.15).

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In the history of Argentine and Latin American Social Work we find a particular moment known as Reconceptualisation or the Reconceptualisation movement, which developed between the 1960s and 1970s. Estela Grassi (1994) describes it as a new line of rupture in the professional field that differs from the contents of traditional and technical social assistance, reconceptualising the bases of the profession towards more radicalised positions of a Latin American and anti-imperialist tinge. Following Nora Aquín (2005), we can understand this event as the expression of a disagreement, of a political criticism with the installed knowledge and with the forms of professional practice, giving rise to a questioning and – in some cases – to the removal of the theoretical and ideological perspectives that guided the intervention. For his part, Norberto Alayón (2016) highlights it as the most crucial step in the history of Latin American Social Work, defending its validity to read current debates. It is also important to mention the contributions of María Virginia Siede (2015) who warns that it was a period in which new – and diverse – professional projects were sought to be articulated in line with the competing societal projects, but without any of them being imposed as hegemonic

Considering the above, approaching Reconceptualisation is a challenge, since it is a movement that developed with significant heterogeneity and diversity. In this case, the



analysis focuses on *what happened in professional training spaces, more specifically in the schools of Social Work universities in Argentina.*² Regarding these experiences, authors such as Carina Moljo (2004), María Virginia Siede (2015) and Ana Arias (2012), among others, recover some particularities of this phenomenon at a general level, which allow us to have a broad view of the process. These authors recognise the importance of activism and student and teacher organisation in universities, highlighting that these were significant changes in academic spaces for Social Work. They also note the connection between these spaces and the Reconceptualisation movement in our country, especially with the spaces linked to the Peronist political movement (Siede, 2005).

In this order, this paper addresses an aspect that has not been fully explored so far: the reform processes of the curricula of Social Work careers that took place within the framework of the institutional transformations of their respective schools, between the late 1960s and mid-1970s, coinciding with the radicalisation and expansion of the Reconceptualisation discussions in Argentina. In addition, it aims to offer a broad view of these processes, based on the systematisation of different experiences at the national level.

For this purpose, the experiences of careers that were – or were incorporated in those years – under the orbit of national universities are recovered. Among them, we looked into those that underwent curricular and/or institutional reforms during the period and about which there was literature produced in this regard. In addition, a broad and federal view – from different regions of the country – was taken. Thus, four relevant experiences were taken: those of schools in Buenos Aires, Rosario, Misiones and Mendoza. This was possible thanks to the recovery and analysis of works elaborated by colleagues on the subject (Melano, 2016; 2019; Rodríguez, 2016; Siede, 2015; Barrera and Fuentealba, 2012; Moljo, 2004; Pagani, 2007; Muñoa, 2020). All these works offer a particular look at each career, without establishing hierarchical connections with other processes that occurred in parallel.

The analysis of the different experiences will allow us to build a general view of these curricular reform processes, noticing similarities and connections, and reflecting how the discussions promoted by Reconceptualisation are incorporated and have an impact on the professional training proposals. All this, crossed by the

² During those years, the names of Social Assistance and Social Service remained in the training proposals of our profession. For practical purposes, in the development of this article we will use the term “Social Work” to refer to the career in a general way and the corresponding names will be taken up again in each particular case.

political effervescence generated by the national and Latin American situation as a driving force for the organisation and protagonism of university youth

In this way, the analysis will make it possible to express the close link between the ideals of Reconceptualisation and the objectives of the national and popular project for liberation, which is installed with the return of Peronism to power under the government of Héctor Cámpora. This connection is what allows, drives and orients the curricular reforms in the experiences surveyed. This close link will also be demonstrated with the sudden interruptions of these reform processes – before the coup d'état of 1976 – produced from the advance of the Peronist right wing (Besoky, 2017), represented by authoritarian, conservative and anti-communist sectors within the government.

The Argentine Reconceptualisation movement

The origin and development of the Argentine Reconceptualisation movement is framed in what Grassi (1994) refers to as the breakdown of harmony in the professional field towards the end of the 1950s. In those years, the first lines of rupture in the Social Work debate were identified, with the entry of the modernising debates and the developmentalist perspective into the profession, materialised with the creation of the Institute of Social Service in 1959, a professional bastion of the developmentalist era (Alayón, 2005). The creation of the Institute, inscribed in the need to overcome the traditional structures of Latin American society, in order to insert it on the road to development, expresses the first rupture in the professional field (Grassi, 1994). Paradoxically, this event also represents the origin of the second, since from its ranks of students and graduates will emerge the group that will drive the Reconceptualisation process in the profession.

Following the author, it can be affirmed that this new proposal of Latin American repercussion had its origin in Argentina with the formation of the ECRO Group and the publication of the first issue of the magazine *Hoy en el Servicio Social* in 1965, edited by this group. Its members were former students of the Institute and represented a critical voice within the institution (Grassi, 1994). Although they began with a developmentalist orientation, they later moved towards more radical positions. Among the members of this group were Norberto Alayón, Ethel Cassineri, Alberto Diéguez and Juan Barreix, among others. During its development, the ECRO Group will radicalise its discussions and will establish itself as the primary spokesperson of the movement in our country. This is understandable in the heat of the political and social events that shook the world: the French May '68, the Vietnam War, the Cuban Revolution, the



national liberation movements and the African decolonisation process, among others (Servio, 2009). These events brought to the plane the possible need for transformation and boosted the liberation process of the so-called Third World countries (Arias, 2012). Hand in hand with this, the movement is nourished by the contributions of Marxism, the theory of domination and dependence, Paulo Freire's proposal of conscientisation and the postulates of the emerging Liberation Theology, among others (Alayón, 2005).

During those years, the national scenario witnessed a repressive period that began in 1966, with the coup d'état that brought General Juan Carlos Onganía to power. According to Grassi (1994), it was an authoritarian, technocratic government with a strong repressive content, guided by anti-communist, Catholic and nationalist sentiments. During his mandate, strong social control was applied, and the aim was to intervene and weaken the spaces of political and partisan organisations, such as unions and universities³. Moljo et al. (2023) note that this closure of the political scene had as a counterpart the development and strengthening of different actors in the public arena, such as trade unions, the student movement and the grassroots sectors of the Catholic Church. This is reflected in a strong process of mobilisation and popular resistance to the repression deployed by the government: "the more the spaces of popular expression were prohibited, the more radical the actions of the youth, the neighborhood militancy, the unions, the world of culture, etc., became" (2023, p.15). The social conflict will determine a turning point, weakening the dictatorship in power and generating the conditions for the subsequent democratic opening in 1973, with the return of elections. In this process, the student movement took a leading role, while the universities and training centres entered a moment of unprecedented political agitation.

Schools of Social Work in Argentina

The upheaval of this period determined a change of course in the professional debates with pronouncements on the need to reconceptualise Social Work, although from very diverse and even irreconcilable positions (Siede, 2005). In this regard, the author recovers the role of the International Catholic Union of Social Service (UCISS), which entered the debate in search of hegemonising the professional discussion and openly confronted those sectors that promoted an updating of Social Work. Thus, the discussion ranged from the most conservative positions – as represented by the UCISS – to the most progressive and radicalised positions (Siede, 2005).

Along the same lines, the ECRO group strengthens its position of rupture with the

³ This event, known as 'La Noche de los Bastones Largos' (The Night of the Long Batons), led to the arrest of many teachers and students and expressed a precise determination to weaken the spaces for student political organisation (Melano, 2019).



traditional proposal of Social Work by incorporating a perspective oriented by a political and ideological content in tune with the transformation processes taking place in the country and in the world, and reaffirming its opposition to the reformist tradition (Siede, 2015).

In this way, the debates began to spread to the areas of professional training, reaching the universities and feeding a student movement that was a protagonist in the process of resistance to the dictatorship. The first experience to be recognised is that of the Misiones School of Social Service in the city of Posadas, which, as of 1968, had come under the orbit of the National University of the Northeast after depending on the General Council of Education of the province. This career was one of the first to receive the influence of Reconceptualisation, with great prominence of the members of the ECRO Group and being the venue of the VI Jornadas Argentinas de Servicio Social held in 1972 (Siede, 2005). The author highlights this event, since it marks a change of direction in the professional debate, promoting a more explicit political linkage of the professional profile with the Latin American socio-political situation and with the process of liberation of the people, as stated in the final document of these Conferences:

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We understand that the Social Service needs to be implemented from an ideological change that leads man to rationally and critically analyze his situation, allowing him to freely decide his own destiny, from a process of participation in the popular mobilization, as an organized, solidary and self-generated expression of the people themselves that leads us towards the goal of integral development (Siede, 2005, p.15).

In 1970 Juan Barreix – member of the ECRO group – intervened in the school and promoted, as director, a reform of the curriculum. During his term of office, Barreix promoted the extension of training to four years, with the granting of a Bachelor's degree, encouraged the creation of new departments of Theoretical Research, Practical Work and Teaching Theoretical, and renewed the teaching staff by incorporating members of the group such as Norberto Alayón, Luis Fernández, Ethel Cassineri and Luis María Früm (Rodríguez, 2016).

At the same time, the School of Social Service of Rosario also underwent an institutional

change: in 1971, after having developed under the Ministry of Social Welfare of the Province of Santa Fe, the career became dependent on the National University of Rosario. At that time, the career was undergoing a reform process initiated in 1968, which aimed at introducing changes in the developmentalist matrix and extending its duration to four years. The school was then one of the academic units that had most faithfully adopted the modernising perspective in its training, aiming at a “technical” profile with knowledge and tools of the social sciences (Pagani, 2007). It is possible to observe the presence of subjects such as Community Development, Social Welfare Administration, Sociology, Social Research, Social Psychology and Social Economics, among others. In turn, the training objectives are oriented towards “planning social welfare programs”, developing potentialities to “use them for the benefit of the community” and “contributing to the formulation of social policy and national development planning” (Pagani, 2007). In this line, Muñoa (2020) also highlights in the Academic Works presented between 1968 and 1973 the presence of the Community Organisation and Development method as a recurrent tool in the intervention proposals, as well as recurrent conceptualisations around the notion of development, community and integration, as primary theoretical scaffolds.

However, political events and the arrival of the first discussions of the reconceptualising movement began to open questions on some aspects of training. Within the framework of professional practices, there was an encounter with the subjects and experiences of the city’s popular neighbourhoods: students mobilised by the climate of the time began to learn about the reality of these sectors and became involved in the processes of community organisation. This insertion allowed the link with political militancy, as well as strong criticisms to the curricular proposals of the internships and the supervision methods (Pagani, 2007). This event reflects what Ana Arias (2012) refers to as the process of radicalisation of the middle sectors, led precisely by the approach to popular realities within the framework of the commitment to community development and the experiences of grassroots militancy that were developed in those spaces. The political radicalisation of these sectors will be an inevitable consequence.

In turn, at the National University of Buenos Aires we can find other particular aspects of the period. Here, the School of Social Service was already under the university orbit, under the Faculty of Law and Social Sciences. However, it occupied a relegated place, under the hegemony of the legal paradigm. María Cristina Melano, who was part of this process, warns that the career functioned under a schooled logic and at the margin of political debates, without registering curricular or institutional reform processes until 1973 (Melano, 2019). In this context, the role of a group of students and



graduates organised in the *Nuevo Servicio Social (New Social Service)* group stands out, from where new debates with a strong political content were promoted, which, up to then, were absent in the training. The author emphasises that “they advocated social work committed to the historical moment and to the most dispossessed sectors, to the construction of the new man and a new society, while at the same time they fought for the professionalization and technification of the field” (Melano, 2019, p.229). This group promoted the need to hierarchise academic training and to dispute against the strong para-legal character. Likewise, they sought the incorporation of theoretical perspectives linked to liberation processes, allowing the entry of reconceptualising debates, especially the discussions promoted by the ECRO Group.

Finally, the experience at the Mendoza School of Social Service once again puts the student body at the centre of the scene. Following the contributions of Barrera and Fuentealba (2012), it is interesting to highlight the Seminar called *Restructuring of the Social Service Career*, in September 1972, which had Juan Barreix as guest speaker. According to the authors, this event was promoted by the students of the career and expressed the need to discuss this issue in view of the possible democratic opening. They also reconstruct that the renowned member of the ECRO Group presented in his speech a new proposal for the organisation and operation of the school, which laid the foundations for the curricular reform project that would be carried out the following year, under his leadership: democratisation and student protagonism were its main axes (Barrera and Fuentealba, 2012).

Observing these experiences, as we approach the brief democratic experience of 1973, movements appear within the different careers, with a strong student protagonism, motivated by the social and political events of the region and influenced by Reconceptualisation. These debates promote changes and transformations in the curricula and open the questioning of the matrices considered traditional in the profession. In some cases, they will be accompanied by institutional movements, as in the schools of Rosario and Misiones.⁴ In this line, the events of March ‘73 will have a strong impact on the development of these processes.

⁴By 1973 several of the schools that trained professionals had been incorporated into public universities, abandoning the tertiary character of training. Between 1971 and 1973, 12 national universities were created in Argentina (Rio Cuarto, Salta, Catamarca, Lomas de Zamora, Luján, Junín, Misiones, Patagonia (Comodoro Rivadavia), San Juan, San Luis, Santiago del Estero and Entre Ríos), two provincial universities were transformed into national universities (that of Neuquén, which was transformed into the National University of Comahue, and that of La Pampa) and two provincial universities were created (of La Rioja and Jujuy), thus achieving considerable expansion and growth (Moljo, 2004).

Democratic openness

On March 13, 1973, the elections were resumed after seven years of democratic closure in our country, with a high turnout that resulted in the victory of Cámpora-Solano of Peronism (FREJULI).⁵ This event put an end to the stage of the Argentine Revolution, which witnessed the Peronist resistance, the expectation for the construction of a national socialism and a strong protagonism of various sectors of the Argentine youth (Siede, 2005). It is also a turning point in the development of our profession, which will take a new impulse.

Following Moljo (2004), we can observe expressions of this impulse in the profession's journals. In the editorial note of issue number 27 of the magazine *Hoy en Trabajo Social*, in 1973, this new stage is analysed, stating that for the discipline it could be the immediate possibility of its insertion at the grassroots level, together with a people beginning the path of liberation and national construction. In the same vein, in issue number 19 of *Selecciones del Trabajo Social*, of the first four-month period of 1973, it is stated that the electoral result.

It seems to demonstrate the generalised will of a people towards the recognition of human values and the dignity of all men without irritating and unjust exclusions [and that] a convergent parallelism could well be established between these objectives and those explicitly proclaimed by the growing movement of the new Social Service. (quoted in Moljo, 2004, p.256).

The opening also meant the beginning of a new cycle for the university. Just days after taking office, Héctor Cámpora appointed Jorge Taiana as Minister of Education, who intervened in the university. In the decree of intervention, it is expressed that the project of national liberation demands to definitively put the national universities at the service of the people, being therefore necessary for the reformulation of the objectives, contents and teaching methods with the participation of all the sectors linked to university life. With the advance and support of the youth and student sectors, the proposal was to change the public university, incorporating a vision of service towards society, seeking the use of science and technology in the service of production and promoting the

⁵ These elections symbolized the return of Peronism to power after almost 18 years of proscription. During the previous months, the agitated social and political situation forced the de facto government (at that time under the command of General Lanusse) to promote a Great National Agreement (GAN) and to call for national elections without proscriptions for 1973. In this context, Juan Domingo Perón, the main political figure of the country and of Peronism, decided not to run and to delegate his candidacy to Héctor Cámpora, a man of extreme confidence of the former president. Within this framework, Peronism ran again in elections in a front called FREJULI (Frente Justicialista para la Liberación). The formula formed by Héctor Cámpora and Vicente Solano Lima obtained more than 6 million votes (49%), leaving the radicalism formula in second place with 21% of the votes.



liberation process (Melano, 2019). These changes gave rise to intense student activism, concretising the curricular reforms brewing in previous years.

Schools of Social Work and reform processes

University intervention reached many of the schools of Social Work. In the aforementioned issue No. 20 of *Selecciones del Servicio Social*, recovered by Siede (2015), it is recognised that the assumption of the new government meant a profound change and that all the Social Service schools dependent on universities or ministries had intervened or were in the process of renovation⁶. These interventions enabled initiating – and sometimes deepening – curriculum reform processes.

The National University of Buenos Aires was one of the first to feel the repercussions of the change of course in national university policy. Rodolfo Puiggros, coming from the Marxist tradition and a referent of a new left wing of Peronism, was appointed rector⁷. His project aimed to build a national and popular university, promoting student and teacher participation in constructing an academic and pedagogical project for liberation (Melano, 2019). His arrival made it possible to promote an unprecedented reform in the Social Service career of that university. The kick-off was the arrival of Marta Cantorna as intervener delegate after a strong demand from teachers and students. For the first time, a social worker took over the direction of the school, starting a new stage by aligning herself with the national project promoted by Cámpora's government. This is what she said in her first speech:

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A rectifying course had begun to be generated since March 11, when the people said enough to a dependent, inhuman, mercantilist and incapable of satisfying man's material and transcendental needs. This is why we propose, through the University, to participate in the popular government to create a new country that enables a society of solidarity, social justice, economic freedom, and political sovereignty. (Melano, 2019, p.232).

Cantorna belonged to a group of teachers and graduates who approached the intervention through a project committed to the guidelines of the national government and linked to the ideals of the Reconceptualisation movement, as stated in an excerpt from issue No. 21 of *Selecciones del Servicio Social*:



In the specific field of our career, we intend to eliminate the welfare social service to build social work at the service of the country and its people. Of the country, to contribute through research and action to the liberation process. Of the people, enabling their conscious, free, but organised participation in government decisions as a means of access to power. Therefore, all subjects and careers must be analysed, questioned, and rethought. This task will involve teachers, non-teaching staff, students and graduates who wish to collaborate. We intend to boost our careers to prepare the new social workers that the country will require in quantity to carry out its revolution. (Melano, 2019, p.232).

The first step was to renew the teaching staff, which included many professors from the legal field and with a conservative tradition. At the same time, the Third Chairs were created and established: parallel chairs that students were free to take and in which professors aligned with the objectives of the popular government participated. In these spaces, students entered into dialogue with the theories of Marxism, the theory of dependency and the contributions of Paulo Freire, among others. Along the same line, proposed training courses for teachers, such as *Liberation or Dependence*, are the alternative of this hour (Melano, 2019).

Secondly, progress was made in the draft of the new curriculum, approved in 1974. On its pages, it announces the search for a professional profile committed and militant of the popular struggles and the causes of the people who intervene with those groups that have the possibility of leading the transformation process in the processes of awareness, education, training, organisation and popular mobilisation, to “integrally develop the solidarity personality to eliminate dependence and oppression, strengthening the formation, organisation and action of the same” (Melano, 2019, p.235). New philosophical and epistemological paradigms are incorporated, and the historical character of social processes is deepened through subjects of world, Latin American and Argentine history, to broaden its approach to social sciences and the theories that interpret social phenomena in their structural, historical and conjunctural aspects. The draft project sought to put a brake on the subordination of the career to the hegemony of law: from five annual subjects on law, there will be only two semesters, and thus, subjects such as Philosophy, Epistemology and Political and Economic Doctrines will be introduced, which allow the understanding of power structures and the relationship between the



central and peripheral countries. Along the same lines, subjects such as Sociology of Liberation and Social Psychology appear. The aim is to contribute to the search for a new Social Work that can be validated and legitimised within the social sciences.

In line with what happened in Buenos Aires, the Mendoza School of Social Service quickly felt the impact of the change of government. Following the research of Barrera and Fuentealba (2012), after Alberto Martínez Baca took office as the new governor of the province, the students decided to take over the school to request its immediate intervention and to implement the restructuring project that had been proposed in the 1972 seminar. From then on, Juan Barreix was appointed director and focused on addressing the student demand, promoting curriculum reform and restructuring the teaching staff (Barrera and Fuentealba, 2012). The authors recover a speech by the Undersecretary of Education, Carricondo, in which he explains the fundamental guidelines that led to the restructuring of the school:

We consider that the Superior School of Social Service had functioned perfectly and harmoniously with the complementation of objectives within the educational apparatus's key postulations, an instrument of domination of the exploiting classes. In this particular case, dedicated to the training of welfare technicians, with professional objectives of mere adjustments of man to the unjust system; professionals who, acting from a supposedly neutral perspective, but deep down deeply oppressive, served to conceal contradictions and superficially and temporarily soften the particular effects of a globally unjust system. (Barrera and Fuentealba, 2012, p.99)

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The authors go on to explain the objectives of such structuring, highlighting the need:

To converge two projects, the first – of a fundamentally pedagogical nature – oriented in the direction of a “liberating education” and the second of a political order according to the horizon of “national liberation (...) the aim was to combine an education “liberated” from the constraints of the domination of the school apparatus, with a highly politicised professional education committed to the project of “national liberation” postulated by those partisan groups. (Barrera and Fuentealba, 2012, p.99)



These objectives are clearly expressed in two aspects of the new curriculum. On the one hand, the incorporation of new subjects, such as Regional Geography, Contemporary Political Doctrines, Introduction to Philosophy, Argentine and American History and Sociology of Change. On the other hand, and fundamentally, in incorporating a new modality of work, known as Didactic Community, a type of unschooling and democratising operation inspired by Freirean education. This novel proposal aimed at overcoming the paternalistic relationship between teachers and students, competitive relationships through cooperative and supportive group action for the achievement of a common goal and the implementation of joint and reciprocal forms of evaluation; it also encouraged the participation and active involvement of students (Barrera and Fuentealba, 2012). This was the name adopted by the school's working group, whose objectives are expressed in a document they produced called *Memoria Crítica* and published in *Hoy en el Trabajo Social*:

Suppose our objective is to achieve liberating Social Work. In that case, the educational reality of the School must create the appropriate conditions to experience the values that allow the Social Workers to insert themselves in the liberation process that America demands (...). It is about the professional knowing how to live, communicate, and dialogue with groups and communities and, with an attitude of existential commitment, knowing himself, to place himself in a genuinely conscientizing role (...) to serve his people. (Barrera and Fuentealba, 2012, p.105)

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The traditional forms of teaching and practice of Social Service must be definitively ended because they disassociate the students from the realities where they will have to work. The new education must be a praxis of liberation, not preparing for liberation, but already a liberating action. (Barrera and Fuentealba, 2012, p.103)

The Didactic Community had another relevant aspect: the Total Workshop experience, a weekly meeting and debate space for students, teachers and administrators, where they discussed the projects previously addressed in an academic council. These were considered instances of collective learning and complete expression of the horizon of a liberating educational practice. The idea of “totality” is aimed at having the different



faculties work in an integrated, open, and collective manner on all the issues of interest to the institution. Finally, the authors emphasise that, in the new curricular proposal, there is a commitment to field practices to conceive them as an opportunity for the university to provide a service to the people in response to the needs of the communities (Barrera and Fuentealba, 2012).

In Rosario, the return of Peronism to power also found a convulsed university: mobilised and organised students took over the school and achieved the resignation of its director, who Néstor Ciarnello, a man of Peronist militancy and affinity with the youth movement, replaced. This new administration would propose an Emergency Academic Plan that would function as a transition plan until the arrival of the new Curriculum, approved in April 1974, the result of the work of teachers and directors with the support and participation of students.

Following Pagani (2007), we notice, in the first place, the criticism of the previous curricular proposal. On the one hand, in the ministerial resolution approving the Emergency Plan⁶, it is stated that it covers a need that the previous plan did not cover: the understanding of the socio-political and economic reality of the country since, without it, students could not approach the field of work in the community. On the other hand, in the text of the '74 Plan, the criticism is deepened by arguing that:

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As a result of the training given so far at the School of Social Service of Rosario, the professional practice of the social worker has been limited to palliative and welfare action in general, not by the real needs of the country and the popular sectors (...) These methods, individual social cases, groups, and communities imported from other countries, were applied to your reality and had little to do with theirs. (Pagani, 2007, p.118)

Based on this diagnosis, the new plan advances in the construction of new objectives linked to the national liberation process and the objectives of the new government:

To teach students the fundamental principles of the disciplines and give them the necessary tools to deepen the development of a critical and committed practice that has as its final objective the liberation of man in society (...) The systematisation of a new methodology of social work, not

⁶ Moljo (2004) indicates that at that time the Escuela Superior de Servicio Social of Mendoza and the schools of Social Service of Río Negro, Posadas, La Plata, Olavarría, La Rioja, Neuquén, Comahue, San Juan, Santa Fe, Rosario, Córdoba and Bahía Blanca were intervened.



adopted from compartmentalised social sciences, but fundamentally based on the continuous analysis of reality made in the field of work itself and then transferred to the classroom, elaborated with the contribution of the social sciences, should tend to the systematisation of a new methodology of social work, not adopted from compartmentalised social sciences, but fundamentally from the continuous analysis of the reality made in the same field of work and then transferred to the classroom, elaborated with the contribution of the social sciences. The school's academic structure must guarantee a permanent confrontation between methodological learning and learning of the theoretical framework (Pagani, 2007, p.119).

Following the analysis, the search for a new way of teaching the profession, situated in the local reality and linked to the horizon of liberation, is noticed. The new curriculum contained workshops where students carried out their practices, seeking to get closer to the concrete, objective reality and contributing to understanding those structures that condition man and, therefore, needed to be transformed (Pagani, 2007). New subjects such as Social Structure, Critical Analysis of Social Service, Argentine Socio-Political Reality, Analysis of the Third World, History of the Workers' Movement, Ethics and Philosophy were incorporated. In line with the other experiences, these were theoretical tools for understanding reality and sought to enhance the scientific nature of the profession.

Finally, the Misiones School of Social Service will also experience a decisive turn. In 1973, students and teachers who supported the new government demanded the resignation of the then-director. They succeeded in having him replaced by Alberto Diéguez, who was elected to the assembly as the school's "popular intervener" (Rodríguez, 2016). At this point, a new proposal of Social Work begins to take the shape of a critical nature, framed in a stage of reconstruction and national liberation, based on a new social work model:

Deep commitment and knowledge of national problems from a central objective: to eradicate our dependent structure and build a society free from any form of exploitation (and) to assume as one of the objectives the insertion of the social worker in the specific problems of the region and in those areas where his intervention will be more beneficial for the popular sectors. (Okada, 1973, cited in Rodríguez, 2016, p.298)

In addition, the creation of the so-called non-curricular Chairs is highlighted, which allowed the incorporation of students from outside the academic environment: neighbourhood leaders, workers, and political and union activists occupied the classrooms, forming a new and disruptive space that allowed the exchange of experiences and knowledge on issues of social and political reality. It was an experience because of the horizon of the construction of a university of the people (Rodríguez, 2016).

Finally, it is also worth mentioning that the new study plan was implemented in 1974. This proposal included a five-year course with novel subjects, such as Economic and Social History, Social and Economic Planning, Social and Cultural Anthropology, World and Latin American Issues, Guarani I and II, among others, in addition to the presence of Philosophy, Economics, Sociology and Political Science. Rodríguez (2016) recovers a note from the newspaper *El Territorio* entitled “Carreras que se dictarán en el ‘75 en la Facultad de Ciencias Sociales”, dated November 18, 1974. From there, he retrieves a definition of Social Work:

‘A social technology that applies the knowledge of social sciences to social reality, to transform its being its primary objectives, according to the same reference source: ‘to investigate and formulate the general principles that make the conformation of social problems; to elaborate social technology aimed at intervening in the solution of social problems; to carry out processes aimed at social education tasks tending to raise the level of awareness of the population, for social transformation’. (Rodríguez, 2016, p.304)

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Turning point. The advance of the right and the coup d’état

These unprecedented reform processes were interrupted in the short term. These were years of great political upheaval not only in Argentina but also in the region. The implementation of the Condor Plan, under the economic interests and military deployment of the USA, contributed to the advance of the armed forces in the power spaces of Latin American nations. Examples of this are the coups d’état in Bolivia (1971), Chile (1973), Uruguay (1973) and Argentina (1976). National processes linked to Latin American liberation horizons were interrupted in this context.

In Argentina, the optimism generated by the new government was dampened by internal conflicts and the political crisis. Only a few months after Cámpora’s inauguration, the advance of conservative and right-wing sectors⁷ within the ranks of the national

⁷ Under his administration, it will be renamed the National and Popular University of Buenos Aires.



government took place in a transparent and open dispute against the spaces that raised the banners of the youth and the national and popular horizon of liberation.

Within this framework, the university received one of the first impacts. The consolidation of the most conservative sectors paved the way for the development of repressive actions to achieve the so-called anti-communist “purge” and the displacement of the left-wing sectors of Peronism. This purge deepened in the universities after Jorge Taiana was forced to resign and was replaced by Oscar Ivanissevic, a character who came to express the need to close the subverted universities to clean them up, order them and normalise them, explaining that what it is about is to “sanitise an organism that is recognised as suffering from serious anomalies” (Besoky, 2017, p.146). This opened a dark period in the Argentine university, with intense persecution and repression of students and teachers. These changes occurred quickly, interrupting experiences that had begun not more than a year before.

At the University of Buenos Aires, a few days after taking office, Ivanissevic appointed Alberto Ottalagano as rector, a figure representing the most conservative and reactionary sector of Peronism⁸. His arrival will put an abrupt halt to the reform process that was being promoted in the university. In October 1974, Rodolfo Carlos Barra was appointed as intervener director of the school, proceeding to change the curriculum once again and forcing the resignation of the then director Marta Cantorna and her team, who left behind the reform project, which could not be fully implemented.

Mendoza will also suffer the advance of the Peronist right-wing sectors in his government, which will consequently impact his social service career aligned with his administration. The pedagogical and organisational model of the Didactic Community continued to operate in uncertainty until the end of 1974, when the closure of this experience occurred, implying the end of the reform process initiated and the consequent return to a traditional schooling system within the framework of a profound political-ideological reorientation (Barrera and Fuentealba, 2012).

For its part, the Misiones School of Social Service will not be the exception in this setback. According to Rodríguez (2016), in the same year the new curriculum materialised, the school was transformed into the Faculty of Social Sciences and is incorporated into the scope of the National University of Misiones. This moment coincides with the appointment of Raúl Lozano as interim rector and the subsequent appointment of Horacio Belastegui as dean-normaliser, accompanied by Enrique Aderrechea as

⁸ Resolution 556/73 (Expte. No 19.109) of 5 October 1973, which Pagani (2007) retrieved in his work. This document leaves without effect the last modification of the 1972 curriculum and recognises the Emergency Academic Plan until the curriculum for the academic year 1974 is presented.

academic secretary, which represented, according to the author, a clear advance of the most conservative and orthodox sectors of Peronism (Rodríguez, 2016).

Finally, on March 24, 1976, the national coup d'état was consummated by the Armed Forces, initiating what became known as the National Reorganisation Process. This dictatorship would be the bloodiest in the history of our country. One of the most atrocious aspects of the process was the construction of a legality around the extermination of people, that is, the normalisation of the annihilation of the different, problematic and fundamentally politically dissident other (Trachitte et al., 2005), from which the actions of violence, repression, torture and annihilation of thousands of people are justified, silencing and immobilising society through terror. The policies designed for the university focused on ideological control and political persecution of large university sectors: students, professors and researchers were persecuted and tortured, and many of them were killed and/or disappeared. Hand in hand, the prohibition of authors, publishers and contents of different texts and publications was implemented.

Social Work was directly affected by these events. On July 18, 1976, Luis María Früm, a member of the ECRO Group and an outstanding teacher at the school of that city, was murdered in Villa Mercedes (San Luis). In addition to this event, Barreix and Ander Egg were exiled, and Alayon, a magazine member, was imprisoned. The magazine would publish two more issues the following year until the de facto government finally banned it. Many of the books published by this group were also forbidden. For its part, the journal *Selecciones del Trabajo Social* stopped publishing in 1978.

Schools also suffered from this development. Out of a total of forty-five schools of Social Work that existed in our country up to that time, fourteen were closed or suspended, among them those of Rosario and Mendoza (Moljo and Moljo, 2006). In the first case, the career was closed on October 20, 1976. In Mendoza, also that same year, the closure and the interruption of the reform process that the Comunidad Didáctica had carried out was consummated. Peculiarly, training was restarted the following year, leaving behind all the aforementioned advances and with a new curriculum, which granted the degree of Social Worker for three years. "In the training, the epistemological and theoretical foundation of the professional work was placed, purely and exclusively, in Christian morals and ethics, of course, of the most orthodox kind. This explains the existence of subjects such as General Ethics, Ethics and Social Doctrine of the Church and Professional Ethics" (Barrera and Fuentealba, 2012, p.111).



Conclusions

This article deals with the reforms of the curricula of Social Work careers at the university level, which took place within the framework of the institutional transformations of their respective schools between the late 1960s and mid-1970s in Argentina.

This analysis helps to understand how the climate of the time impacted the Social Work profession and the development of training proposals in those years. Student protagonism gained momentum with the regional political events to initiate a process of questioning and reforms that reached the Social Work careers hand in hand with the Reconceptualisation debates. Within this framework, the democratic opening allowed the radicalisation of these experiences.

The research carried out so far has concentrated on the recovery of the histories of each career or school in particular. In this paper, the systematisation of the experiences of the different works made it possible to go beyond individual analysis and offer a broad and federal view of this process. In this way, it was possible to detect common characteristics and axes that marked these curricular reforms:

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- The importance assigned to organisational processes, with a strong democratising and collective content, based on student and teacher protagonism and the active participation of all stakeholders.

- Adopting new teaching and work methodologies, mainly inspired by Freirean pedagogy, aimed at overcoming the hierarchical relationship between teachers and students.

- The incorporation of new debates and theoretical and political perspectives, which are reflected in the latest subjects.

- The reconfiguration of professional practices, which begin to express a social and political commitment with the popular sectors in constructing the road to liberation.

In this sense, the paper reflects how these curricular reform processes allowed the ideals of the reconceptualisation movement to be closely linked to the objectives of the national and popular project of the Peronist government. In addition, it provides a broader and national conception of this process. These were not isolated experiences or the impulses of specific sectors or local governments. Instead, it was a bet on a project that sought to reconceptualise the profession under the ideals of national liberation and install a change of direction for Social Work throughout the territory.



It is important to note that this strong linkage was also reflected in the impact that the political crisis and the right wing's advance had on the dissolution of the reform processes in a very short time. A direct relationship between the two movements can be observed. In this way, we can see that the interruption of the Reconceptualisation movement in Argentina began sometime before the 1976 coup d'état. This can only be explained by the linkage above.

It can be affirmed, then, that the experience of the Reconceptualisation of Social Work in university training environments was determined, both in its gestation and in its dissolution, by the fate of the Peronist project of national liberation that came to power in 1973. In this way, the work allows a deeper understanding of this phenomenon, permitting a dialogue between the national socio-political processes and the particular experiences of curricular reforms. In addition, it opens the possibility of expanding this line of research, incorporating the experiences of other schools and careers in the country that went through similar experiences.

Finally, it is worth mentioning that with this interruption, the lines of work and reflection promoted in the curricular reform processes were practically aborted, eliminated from the professional debate, giving way to a method of consolidation of traditional perspectives and a repositioning of conservative sectors in the hegemony of the professional field.

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We would have to wait for the next democratic opening, in 1983, to see how the debates opened by the Reconceptualisation would be taken up again under the impulse of the new airs.

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Acknowledgments

This work was conducted as part of a research process within the Socio-Historical Foundations of Social Work I course of the Social Work career at the National University of Rosario.

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