

ARTICLE

Knowledge production and the development of postgraduate degrees in Latin America 100 years after the creation of the first school of social work

Producción de conocimiento y el desarrollo de postgrados en América Latina a 100 años de la creación de la primera escuela de trabajo social

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Abstract

This article recovers the trajectory of postgraduate programs in Social Work in Latin America, with emphasis on doctoral programs, to problematise the production of knowledge and its conditions of possibility in the current context. It emphasises the relevance of the construction of academic projects, where the production of scientific knowledge is a contribution to the understanding and social transformation, enhancing its various uses, through collaborative research networks and the construction of agendas.

Keywords:
social work;
postgraduate
programmes;
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Resumen

Este artículo recupera la trayectoria de los programas de postgrado en Trabajo Social en América latina, con énfasis en los doctorados, para problematizar respecto de la producción de conocimiento y sus condiciones de posibilidad en el contexto actual. Se enfatiza la relevancia de la construcción de proyectos académicos, donde la producción de conocimientos científicos sean un aporte para la comprensión y transformación social, potenciando sus diversos usos a través redes de investigación colaborativas y la construcción de agendas.

Palabras Clave:

trabajo social;
postgraduación;
Latinoamérica;
formación;
producción de
conocimiento

Introduction

This article is the product of research that crosses over time in an intergenerational way, where the production of knowledge in the discipline of Social Work has been a permanent concern for the authors, as it has been throughout the profession's history. We recognise the different expressions this debate has had in developing a discipline celebrating its first century. For this reason, in identifying the singularity of these debates, we would like to specify their indissoluble relationship with the diverse socio-political contexts in which they emerge. Just to give a few examples, we refer specifically to the debates on the relationship between intervention and social research as constitutive elements of the profession (Aylwin et al., 2004; Cazzaniga, 2014; 2015; Rozas, 2001) and the production of scientific knowledge at the disciplinary level (Matus, 1999; 2018; Rozas, 1999; 2004) in coherence with the *ethos* of social transformation (Aguayo, 2007; Castro-Serrano and Flotts, 2018).

41

In recognition of the uniqueness of these debates in the profession's history, this article seeks to account for the coming together of different generations of researchers who share reflections on these recurring debates. The intergenerational character is also present in how the issues of interest "meet" at various "moments" in the history of the profession of which we have been a part. Thus, the reflections presented here intersect research projects, academic management positions, and experiences of social intervention in different institutional spaces, which have allowed us to build our trajectories.²

We could mention, at least, that in the case of the first author, research on the "Trajectory of the profession in Social Work", the experience in the direction of doctoral and

² The authors met a decade ago, when one of them entered the Doctorate in Social Work at the National University of La Plata. Since then, they have worked together in different academic activities that have allowed them to dialogue, learn and reflect on their concerns about the development of the profession in each of their countries and its expressions in Latin America. Today they work together on the postdoctoral programme at the same institution.



master's theses, as well as her work as a researcher, and her participation from the 1970s to the present in the debates of social work at the Latin American level, related to the production of knowledge and postgraduate training in Social Work, are put into play in the reflections that we share today. On the other hand, for the second author, the doctoral thesis on research training and teaching methodologies in undergraduate courses in Social Work and the postdoctoral project on professional memories in Latin America, regarding professional training and the development of research, in addition to academic management and teaching positions in undergraduate and doctoral courses, are expressions of concern for the production of knowledge in the disciplinary field.

With the above, we do not wish to summarise our trajectories, but rather to show how our research concerns intersect intergenerationally, with the same intention of recovering the thread of the debates on the subject of the production of knowledge in Social Work with a focus on postgraduate training, putting forward converging positions and perspectives in order to analyse in retrospect the advances and challenges that are proposed for the future, 100 years after the first school of Social Work was created.

Many will wonder why start an article with these details, but for us, it is essential to explain "from where" we situate ourselves and talk about the subject that brings us together; it is that sort of epistemic-methodological backroom that, in general, has no place in current productions. These are experiences that have left us with lessons-learned reflections and allow us to continue thinking about proposals for research in Social Work, specifically about how the production of knowledge at the PhD level is an appropriate space (but not exclusive or excluding in the logic of meritocracy) to strengthen the production of rigorous scientific knowledge committed to social transformation, as well as to expand links and collaborative networks. At the same time, we try to refer to the foundational writings related to the need for postgraduate training and then make some reflections focused on the experience of doctoral programmes that have had more significant development in Latin America.

From an integral and relational perspective, we highlight the construction of what we have called "institutional academic projects" (Rozas, 1999; 2004) based on the integration of research, intervention, undergraduate and postgraduate studies in Social Work over the last 40 years – combining and being a condition for the diversity and heterogeneity that characterises the development of the discipline. This perspective generated questions regarding the endogenic and reproductive vision of academic debates, centred on themselves and fragmenting their articulation and relationship with the social sciences.

It is necessary to inscribe the academic subjects of the profession in a broader scenario between State and Society. It is a path that we are building, which allows us to broaden our discursive universe and the plurality of visions and generate new questions in this quarter of the 21st century to resituate our present regarding the importance of the production of knowledge in terms of continuing to contribute to critical thinking and social transformation, enhancing its various uses. In this perspective, it is essential to highlight the production of knowledge and the relationship with postgraduate studies, particularly with doctorates, clarifying that the analysis is limited to the foundational ideas on the importance of postgraduate studies today, taking the experience of the doctorate and postdoctorate in Social Work at the National University of La Plata (UNLP).

Knowledge production and postgraduate programmes in social work: a brief overview

Making reference to the debate on the production of knowledge in Social Work could be a task of a magnitude that exceeds the expectations of this paper; however, we propose to indicate some elements that situate the discussion in postgraduate training in Social Work, specifically, the opportunities offered by anchoring this debate in Doctoral programmes. As shown, we consider it a favourable, but not exclusive, space for developing the discussion.

43

For this reason, in this section, we develop a brief synthesis of the postgraduate courses in Social Work; at the same time, we explain that the debate on the production of knowledge has crossed and continues to cross a large part of professional life in a heterogeneous way.

Research and knowledge production dates back to the creation of the first school of Social Work of the Junta de Beneficencia in Chile, Alejandro del Rio, in 1925, in which the need to apply knowledge produced by others was raised, a highly debated situation (Aylwin et al., 2004; González, 2010; 2016; Cortés, 2020; Rozas, 2000).

Discussions on research work in the social sciences, particularly in Social Work, must be placed within a broader framework of analysis regarding the stakes and influences each country has had on academic development and the institutionalisation of research programmes. For this reason, any exercise of synthesis could fall into reductionism regarding the conditions of possibility and emergence of the production of Social Work

knowledge in the respective countries. Nevertheless, we would like to refer to the case of the Latin American Centre for Social Work (CELATS), based in Lima, Peru, to give an account of the development of postgraduate programmes and their link with the production of knowledge.

CELATS was an academic body that depended directly on the Latin American Association of Schools of Social Service (ALAESS), between 1974 and 1992; its activities included the journal *Acción Crítica* (1976-1992) and the first Latin American Master's Degree in Social Work (MLATS), based in Tegucigalpa, Honduras (1979).³

It is worth noting that this organisation's programmatic objective was to generate discussion, reflection and training in social research, which was highly prolific and allowed for the possibility of initiating debates on the need for postgraduate training in the discipline. For example, issue 21 of the journal *Acción Crítica*, published in 1987, articulates the investigation of training and intervention processes. In an article written by Alejandro Maguiña, Diego Palma, Teresa Quiroz and Carlos Urrutia, as well as raising the importance of research in the profession, the debate on the difference between knowledge and experience is discussed, responding to the debates of that time on the premise that experience produces knowledge, expressed above all in the Teresópolis document (Brazil, 1970), as well as problematising the nature of Social Work and the methodological reformulation, incorporating research.

44

We can also highlight the article by Elsa Lily Caballero, director of the fifth promotion of the Latin American Master's in Social Work (MLTS), who highlights "learning to research by researching" as a pedagogical experience that articulates teaching and research from different thematic fields of professional work, by developing a virtuous relationship between the working spaces of the Master's students and the development of empirical research that offers other approaches to understanding the social phenomena they address. With this, an articulation is sought between epistemological approaches, theoretical positions and methodological strategies; in revaluing "experience as a material subject of research (...) the process of critical reconstruction of experience not only serves to enrich the experience itself but also constitutes a source of scientific knowledge of reality" (Caballero, 1987, p.42).

³ To learn more about CELATS we invite you to review the following documents: a) Leila Lima (1984) A part of the History of Social Work: Six years of CELATS. Nuevos cuadernos CELATS, N°2. b) Interview with María Cecilia Tobón, el Trabajo Social en Latinoamérica, published in the Revista Trabajo Social de la Pontificia Universidad Católica number 50, 1986.



Furthermore, we could indicate the debates of the time regarding the production of knowledge and the development of research as a manifest tension, as Lorena Molina (2012) points out, describing them as “the underestimation of the competence of Social Work in the field of research, research as a new method for Social Work, research as an auxiliary technique, research is developed in the application of methodology, they locate the study and diagnosis as stages of knowledge and research as the scientific moment of reflection, theorisation of Social Work” (p.55).

This was not only a disciplinary discussion, but also responded to a larger context of reflection in the field of social sciences, which included, among other debates, a broad discussion on the “place” of researchers in the production of knowledge, which leads us to identify the primacy of positivism and functionalism and the “emergence” of critical theories (Cortés, 2015; Sisto, 2008); or the debate regarding the types of research, posed as a versus, between what is known as theoretical and applied research, and which was something that had an impact on the profession. With this, a debate has developed about the place of social work for its application and not the production of knowledge (Rozas, 2001; Véliz, 2024).

45

Since the creation of the first Latin American Master’s Degree in Social Work (MLATS) in 1979, the importance of postgraduate programmes in professional training has been established at three levels: specialisation, Master’s and Doctorate. It should also be noted that the first postgraduate programme (Masters and Doctorate), a pioneer in Latin America, was developed by the Pontifical Catholic University of Sao Paulo, which recently celebrated its 50th anniversary. Its contributions to the development of training, both for Brazilian Social Work and for Latin America, are and have been of great importance.

In Latin America, 26 doctoral programmes in Social Work can be found at universities in Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Mexico, Puerto Rico and Uruguay. We bring up these data to put into perspective the progress made in research, training, professional intervention, and doctoral programmes.

We highlight the creation of the first doctorate in Argentina, at the Faculty of Social Work of the UNLP (2005), and in Chile, the first doctorate in Social Work at the Alberto Hurtado University (2020). In addition, the Faculty of Social Work of the National University of La Plata has an agreement with the School of Social Work of the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM) to form a PhD in Social Work. In 2024, the doctorate of the School of Social Work of UNAM will be approved.



The current debates on knowledge production and training at the doctoral level articulate disciplinary concerns about the development of the social sciences as a whole (Mancovsky, 2015; 2021; Piovani, 2014; Wairnerman and Sautu, 2011), to name but a few: the theoretical-methodological knots on research, the concern for generating theoretical questions from social intervention, how to teach research, the concern and debate on the coherence between theoretical definitions and methodological strategies to build knowledge, and that also has the challenge of contributing to the daily transformation of the actors with whom we work, how to add value to scientific knowledge, the critical capacity that challenges axiological neutrality. To paraphrase Bourdieu (2000), it is about producing knowledge and implies an ethical-political stance in the relationship between knowledge and social agents. This brief synthesis gives us an overview of the debates that have reappeared in thesis workshops, research project exchange meetings, research institutes and laboratories.

In this sense, the postgraduate courses in Social Work and the social sciences, in general, converge in an enriching space of exchange between the production of theses and publications. At this stage, it can be seen that the production of knowledge from doctoral degrees has a valuable academic level and transformative and transfer potential, both for thinking about the discipline and continuing to investigate the problems that the current reality demands of us. We highlight the relevance of doctorates as a space that facilitates the conditions of possibility for the production of knowledge, which also have to do with the processes of insertion of Social Work degrees and doctorates in university life, taking into consideration that these conditions are diverse and depend on the level of institutional progress with the scientific research bodies in each country.

46

Conditions of possibility generated for the production of knowledge in doctoral programmes

In the last 40 years, and especially in this quarter of a century in the Latin American region, Social Work has made two central issues a priority; first, the involvement, together with other disciplines, in the generation of conditions of possibility for the production of knowledge, through doctoral theses, master's degrees, postgraduate training scholarships, as well as in the networks of articulation by lines of research. Secondly, a vision of broad professional training that builds meaning through the virtuous relationship between undergraduate and postgraduate studies; thus, breaking with the reductionist view regarding the conception of training based only on the contents of a syllabus.

Based on the above, we can observe that there is a sustained trend in the production of knowledge in Social Work, recognising that this progress is not the same for all countries (even within the academic units of the same country), because there are different conditions that may or may not favour the development of research. It also depends on the accumulation processes that each academic unit undertakes to articulate research and intervention as “academic development projects”. It is also necessary to point out that research constitutes an essential tool for the development of professional life, articulating diverse actors that give meaning and effectiveness to professional life. This broadens and enriches the professional culture.

On the other hand, thanks to the technological development of communications, it facilitates the socialisation and exchange of knowledge, strengthening the commitment to training and professional intervention. This is a necessary task in order to further develop and legitimise the profession’s place in university life, in society, and particularly with regard to those problems that hinder the production of living conditions for citizens.

Based on the above, we highlight some elements of the Doctoral Programme in Social Work at the National University of La Plata (UNLP), under the Faculty of Social Work, which express the importance of postgraduate training as part of academic-institutional projects developed comprehensively and relationally. In its 12 years of operation, strategies have been designed to identify the conditions of possibility for the construction of disciplinary knowledge, betting on the generation and socialisation in collaborative research networks and the construction of agendas.

47

Within this framework, research networks, laboratories, observatories and research centres constitute a privileged space to continue strengthening academic exchange and, above all, learning to dialogue among peers and with other social science professionals, articulating lines of research, thematic areas, and diverse educational activities, all building meaning concerning their transformative and transfer potential. For example, in the Institute of Studies in Social Work and Society of the Faculty of Social Work (UNLP), there are fruitful exchanges based on the various lines of research that are developed in them, thanks to the existence of trained researchers, scholarship holders from the National Council for Scientific and Technical Research (CONICET) and Science and Technology of the university. With this, doctoral students and graduates participate in research projects, scientific dissemination activities and university extension projects promoted by the Institute and the secretariats of the Faculty.

It should be noted that another way of linking the production of knowledge and the different academic activities is also through the Faculty's Postdoctoral Programme, which seeks to "generate institutionalised instances of meetings and links between researchers from the Faculty of Social Work and researchers from other universities, research centres and institutes at national and international level".

By monitoring our graduates, we can observe the initiatives and academic activities that contribute to the professional debate in the countries from which they come. In the case of Argentina, the categorisation of researchers in training, trainees, and scholarship holders whose productions in various areas and topics are of interest for the development of social policies and the concern to contribute to improving the quality of life of the people with whom we work has been expanded. The relationship between teaching, research and extension becomes clearer in this context. The actors involved in developing territorial projects and/or institutions and/or other academic actors become central.

The PhD has made it possible to qualify academic and professional cadres, strengthening the trajectory of knowledge production and publications through theses, articles and books. It has also been beneficial in terms of contributing to undergraduate training. From the epistemological point of view, there is an intertwining with other disciplines belonging to the world of social sciences, overcoming the reductionist vision of the discipline in the search for its objects. Therefore, there is an increasingly fluid exchange with other disciplines for knowledge production and the daily transformation of reality.

In this direction, we must continue working to strengthen the interdisciplinary approach, and we are in the process of doing so. It is necessary to review the tendency towards excessive competition and individualism in the production of knowledge, a product of the competitive individualism of neoliberalism. We aspire to build in the production of knowledge what Bourdieu (2000) called the interdisciplinary and international collective intellectual; this is not to deny the interest and/or thematic interests to develop research.

Not only do we refer to the institutional conditions of possibility, but we also aim to highlight the epistemic and conceptual conditions that underpin these conditions of possibility.

The development of a relational view between research and social intervention has allowed us to distance ourselves from positions with an academicist view of research;

we refer to the separation between research and intervention. The relationship between knowledge and ethics brings us face-to-face with reality regarding enquiry, discovery and questioning. Undoubtedly, this implies asking ourselves from what assumptions we investigate; this exercise suggests an act of rupture with respect to the logic of thinking and constructing knowledge in the positivist sense. This act of rupture also means questioning the instrumentalist sense of the production of knowledge, which justifies the social order by making its contradictions invisible: social inequalities, subjection, and subjugation of our view of the world and life. Invisibilising the social order, in short, has led to the separation between science and technology, between theory and practice, between reason and instrumentalisation.

It is essential to break these dichotomies and begin to be uncomfortable with purely descriptive research that reproduces the existing identity between society and nature by verifying the regularities that supposedly exist in social life. The COVID-19 pandemic challenges us to review these ways of thinking and knowing and reconfigure our interventions. With regard to the themes of the doctoral theses, there is a concern to incorporate into the research agenda the issue of the pandemic, the environment, care, the importance of the presence of the state, the weakening of social ties, the consequences of which must be anticipated by the social sciences.

49

Radical neo-conservatism: a context of uncertainty for universities and the production of knowledge

The aforementioned thesis topics and the concern for public and human rights constitute an essential agenda for the development of research in the face of the advance of ultraconservative rights in the world and the region; particularly in Argentina, it is necessary to take into account how universities and the production of knowledge are devalued every time authoritarian governments are installed in power. We have seen this during the Latin American dictatorships of the 1970s and in the 1990s, when adjustment policies were introduced, especially in social policies. The social sciences were considered dangerous and unnecessary, and knowledge production was discredited because no objective results could be seen.

With the current advance of the ultra-conservative right, there is a danger of questioning the validity of social science knowledge and the importance of knowledge in the fields of health, education and acquired rights and, in short, diluting the public as a political commonplace. The gap between the state sphere and the preponderance of the

economy is becoming ever narrower. This, in the future, leaves the state without safety nets for citizens. As Eric Sadin (2022), a French philosopher, warns, the contemporary individual who has no faith (he believes in nothing) and without networks to sustain him (which calls into question social protection systems) generates a high level of exposure of his private life, where communication networks are shaping his reality. This, in the future, may transform subjectivities and affect social ties.

On the other hand, Austrian political scientist Natascha Strobl (2022), in an unmissable book on the “analysis of radicalised conservatism”, warns that “conservatism is not a defensive ideology or a counter-ideology, but has its own ideological inventory, in which the idea that inequality is constitutive of a society is central” (p.13). And, he argues, the

Clear hierarchies ensure social order; if this becomes unbalanced, crises arise. From its inception, the hierarchy has been part of this conservative ideology. In short, this radicalised conservatism is anti-egalitarian and anti-revolutionary, defending the absolute freedom of the market and the idea that the state should be limited above all in its social functions. It de-statises the social question that democratic liberalism has brought to the functioning of the modern state. (p.14)

50

In this direction, our universities and the education system also suffer the impact of this radicalised conservatism. It is therefore necessary to re-discuss the meanings and purposes assigned to the university, at least to contextualise the challenges of professional training, particularly the production of knowledge in doctoral programmes. Finally, we point out that there are several challenges that we have at the level of doctorates and postgraduate degrees in general: rethinking social policies from a rights perspective continues to be an important line of research for Social Work. On the other hand, the traumatic experience of the pandemic broadens the need to incorporate an innovative agenda for research: paying attention to the politics of care, the strengthening of public institutions, the debate on the public as the shared place of politics, thinking about our exploded institutions, the discussion on the territorial and the presence of the State, but also the attention on the subjectivities of the contemporary individual.

Therefore, the agenda of knowledge production cannot ignore the damage produced by current capitalism: the deep inequalities accumulated since colonisation that subjugated our countries. It confronts us with a reality traversed by economic, patriarchal, hierarchical, racial and gender domination that has shaped a way of thinking and

established relations of domination. On the other hand, the triumph of individualism and market freedom, as Harvey (2005) warned us about the individual as a function of the commodification system and the processes of precarisation of human life, as Isabell Lorey (2016) puts it. And the great reflection made by Judith Butler (2017) when she states

When it is argued that individuals can take care of themselves under conditions of generalised precariousness if not outright poverty, something astonishing is taken for granted, and that is the assumption that people can (and should) act autonomously in conditions where life has become unlivable. (p.23)

It is necessary, then, to make explicit the systems of domination that exclude the significant majorities and are installed in the sphere of power relations, especially in the crystallised bureaucracies that have mechanised the social function of the state. The big question for the social sciences is: how did we arrive at the naturalisation of the conditions imposed by authoritarian governments? Why are progressive perspectives incapable of constructing an alternative, more democratic society where citizens can have a dignified life? These are questions that articulate the meaning of knowledge production and political action. Both are intertwined.

51

It is important to insist that it is not only the construction of a research agenda, regarding the consequences of capitalism, around the visibility and problematisation of the effects on everyday life, but also its expression in what is known as academic capitalism (Brunner et al., 2021; Fardella et al., 2020), which installs ways of doing research, its communication and dissemination. Specifically, in the field of Social Work, this is a central issue, as it allows us to understand, in part, the permanent tension between research and social intervention, and those who develop it, which refers to the discomfort generated by the ways of doing and communicating research, and not scientific research itself, which generates distances or gaps in the professional collective. It is the discomfort produced by the regimes of truth regarding the production of scientific knowledge, its standards and its dissemination, as well as how this is transmitted through training (Véliz, 2021). In view of this, we wish to make explicit the political dimension of research work in Social Work that “all research is political, insofar as it makes visible and problematises what is happening in our society as a tool for public advocacy” (Calvo and Véliz, 2021, p. 80).

Dialogue between critical theories

The context also implies some movement with respect to theories, and to the very concept of theory in the broad sense. Alexander (1992) asked what theory is and answered that it is abstractions based on the real world and for the real world. Classical to contemporary authors tell us about our times and each time and/or historical moment has a way of thinking and naming the events that speak about reality. Therefore, it is important to know the historical traditions of thought about social reality, social order and conflict, and how these conflicts play out in society. In-depth knowledge of these conflicts, from a critical and historical perspective, may contribute to the dialogue between essential theories that provide us with categories and concepts to understand and explain the complexity of the particular reality of each country and the world.

Critical theories that are fundamentally born out of the conflicts generated by modern society allow us to understand the character of the contradictions of today's society, to transform situations of injustice into an incessant exercise that relates theory and reality. In this sense, there is a need for debate between critical theories, in the plural (Marxism, Marxisms, theories focused on the explanation of structures and dynamics, post-colonialism, feminisms), which have as a standard starting point the questioning of systems of domination, the defence of rights and a capacity for cultural and political transformation. It is also necessary to debate theories such as theoretical relativism, pragmatism, functionalism, and positivism, to name but a few. We may or may not agree with these approaches, but we know that they are interwoven into the fabric of the social sciences, and certainly in Social Work as part of them. The challenge is to dialogue between these theories and enrich our theoretical repertoire based on argued productions.

This debate has been extensively addressed in the journal *Acción Crítica*, for example, in its issue 27, 1990, in which the discussion on the different theoretical perspectives on vocational training, considered central to subsequent debates, is addressed. Or the work done on how it is possible to operationalise different critical perspectives in research projects (Netto et al., 1992).

This line of discussion is still present today and other aforementioned theoretical perspectives have been added. Regarding the PhD programme in Social Work at the FTS-UNLP, the central area works from different theoretical-epistemological perspectives (Rozas, 2020).



This line of debate deepens critical thinking and contributes to the theoretical and epistemic development of Social Work. It is the critical theories that frame the lines of thought in the general context in which the concepts are inserted, taking their true meaning in the relational dynamics that social subjects establish. At the same time, these concepts have a historicity that gives them a particular and contextual meaning.

The profession of Social Work has at the core of its field the *social question*, precisely generated by social and economic conflicts expressed in a set of social inequalities, which does not ignore the meaning, the fabric and the ways in which social life has been reconfigured with broader social changes. Therefore, the challenge for critical theories is to know that this conjunction is neither linear nor a simple reproduction of concepts; it is, above all, to decipher a reality whose configuration shows aspects that are not always present in the more general account of society.

There is another dimension that organises the critical discourse on the anchorage between Social Work and citizenship: the defence of the public as an expression of the commons whose basis underpins social cohesion; in fact, with the advance of the right, this basis is in question. These categories and the condition of citizenship are a powerful weapon of inclusion in a common space and of the struggle for social rights. Critical and relational theories, in addition to expanding the repertoire of Social Work, contribute to intervention as a process that unfolds in situated contexts and from a transformative perspective.

Critical theories have ideology as an essential dimension, a category rarely mentioned in times of authoritarian conservatism. We know that ideology shapes the vision of life and society, and it is possible that political/ideological processes are at play in this confluence. The challenge for the social sciences in this direction is to detect and identify the articulations that allow for dialogue with other approaches to complex social processes. The conversation between theories enriches the empirical bases of intervention, as well as the multiplicity of diverse demands that emerge from the daily life of the profession. This allows us to value plurality and diversity in order to enrich the production of knowledge.

The increase in productions regarding the debate between theories and their empirical references for Social Work overcomes the vision of a single thought capable of capturing the complexity of reality and false dichotomies. As we all know, science, theory and culture are 'constructors of and constructed by' social processes that have a

level of complexity and require a systematic understanding that allows us to rethink the relationships between subjectivity, singularity and generativity of social and theoretical methods. This process is eminently political because it seeks to explain the complexity of globalisation, the multiple modernities that generate challenging questions about everyday life, the dehumanisation of people's lives and the subjection to processes of precariousness as a way of life.

Therefore, by way of hypostasis, we point out that we are passing through multiple universes of discourse capable of capturing the processes of complexity, which are the scenarios through which the questions that point towards the construction of the research themes pass, and which have a potential for transformation and transfer.

This analysis recovers another aspect in relation to the production of knowledge and the importance acquired by being able to introduce the social question and social policies into our discursive language, as two theoretical coordinates that make it possible to advance in reflections on the relationship between state and society, as well as the revaluation of the public sphere as a space for political construction, especially at this time of the advance of neo-conservatism.

54

The social question made it possible to define the coordinates that aim to discover its manifestations in social life, in the creation and recreation of the social agenda of states. It must be taken up again because today the advance of the ultra-right denies the social function of the modern state and negates the recognition of the existence of the social question. The danger includes ignoring the usefulness of the production of knowledge in the social sciences, as we said earlier. This is what we are experiencing in Argentina with the defunding of science in scientific bodies such as the National Council for Scientific and Technical Research, CONICET, and less intensely in Chile, with the lack of basal resources for scientific research, which is sustained almost exclusively on the basis of competitive funds provided by the National Research Agency (ANID).

Another challenge is to question normativised institutional knowledge, which has blocked the possibility of critical thinking. There is a division between knowing and thinking. Modernity became instrumental rationality and led us to accumulate knowledge, standardise knowledge, institutionalise knowledge, and find a refuge from where we believe and dare to relate to other knowledge. Some of this is evident, for example, in the separation made in Chile by the National Accreditation Commission (CNA), which differentiates postgraduate degrees between professional and academic

master's degrees, leaving the latter to produce knowledge in the more classical standards and separating the dialogues between forms of production. To be aware of these and other processes implies deepening critical thinking.

By way of conclusions

The title of this article and its development allow us to recognise the advances in the production of knowledge and postgraduate training, specifically, in the contribution that can be made from Doctoral degrees in Social Work in the current context. And with this, to continue thinking about the following points:

Continue to strengthen postgraduate programmes, especially doctorates, in the training of professionals who can contribute to sustaining the social function of the state in the face of the advance of neo-conservatism. In this sense, the challenge is to advance in a broad and integrating conception of the relationship between the production of knowledge and its transformative and critical potential.

Regarding the debate between critical theories, the challenge is to broaden the discursive repertoire to understand, describe and explain social life as an expression of the complexity of the contemporary social question. Today, the processes we are experiencing are neither linear nor normative; on the contrary, the realisation that there are no good or bad theories allows us to recognise that there is a confluence of critical theories that contribute to the understanding of the complexity of reality.

The challenge for the social sciences and social work is to construct systematic, precise and critical information on the emerging conflicts in our society. The question of the purpose of research, not only for social work but also for the social sciences, is increasingly being asked, and this question leads to a concern for transfer and its various uses – to bring solutions to the reconfiguration of institutions that facilitate people's lives.

However, there is also the challenge not only to do research but also to be able to consume research and its various uses in teaching and academic activities in general. It is also essential to formulate research within the framework of the rules of the game of scientific bodies and the need to carry out formative research in the professorships.



The research we carry out must be oriented towards uncovering the inequalities, poverty and impoverishment of our societies. The ethical dimension implies not only understanding the mechanisms of dehumanisation that occur through the dismantling of the social function of the state, today endangered by neo-conservative theories that propose to show that the state is an enemy to the absolute freedom of the market. The dialogue between critical theories brings together the diversity of perspectives and traditions, linking reflections and dilemmas about our historical present.

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