

Educational Reform Policies in Argentina in the 1970s: The Beginning of a Differentiation Process among National Universities?

Mariana Mendonça

email: mmendonca85@gmail.com

Universidad de Buenos Aires/CONICET. Argentina

Abstract: The purpose of this article is to analyze the mid-term consequences of the institutional expansion that took place in the nineteen seventies in Argentina, in light of the results yielded by studies carried out in the region by international organizations. This process aimed to reform and restructure the existing state universities into an American research model. We argue that this process did not accomplish its initial objectives, but led instead to an exacerbation of existing structural problems and gave rise to a differentiation process among public universities in the country. In order to do that, we will use first and second-hand sources.

Keywords: University expansion; Argentina; international organizations; educational reforms; higher education policies.

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1. Introduction

Due to the explosive global growth of university enrollment around the mid-twentieth century, higher education systems around the world changed their structures notably. Enrollment expansion was channeled through multiple institutions, which emerged from different political contexts; this made the system more complex and increased the number of postsecondary education options.

This process initially took place in member countries of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), which implemented a series of reforms. Some of them introduced a binary system that combined two postsecondary education subsystems. In this regard, the cases of the United States, France, Germany, the United Kingdom, Spain, and Sweden stand out. In the United States, for example, institutional differentiation began early on, with the creation of

community colleges. As Brint and Karabel point out, junior colleges played a critical role in the expansion of education in the United States during the first half of the twentieth century. The result of popular demand and elite response was “the creation of a huge but highly differentiated educational system” (Brint & Karabel, 1989, p. 9).

The situation in Latin America turned out to be somewhat different. In many countries of this region, the expansion of the student income took different forms: in Brazil, Chile, and Colombia, private institutions accounted for most of the increased enrollment, whereas in Mexico, Uruguay, and Venezuela, the number of public universities increased, leading in turn to a diversification of institutions. Many of them were created at a regional level to satisfy some of the demand (Holm-Nielsen, Thorn, Brunner, J., & Balán, 2005).

In Argentina, despite strong student opposition, green light was given for the creation of private institutions in the mid-1950s. Simultaneously, two national universities were also built, each bearing a strong regional character and featuring an academic offer that sought to differentiate them from more traditional institutions. However, the restructuring of the Argentinian higher education system ended up taking a different path.

In the early 1970s, the expansion process took a strong leap forward, redefining the shape of the whole educational system. Initially, this policy aimed to solve issues that had been identified a decade earlier by national and international organizations, such as the Inter-American Development Bank and the OECD: low number of graduates, high dropout rates, student concentration in few universities, and a general tendency to opt for “traditional” majors (such as Medicine or Law, for example), among other aspects. Although, this process policy took place during the last years of the military government, the so-called Argentine Revolution (1966–1973), whose first university policy consisted in suppressing political activity within educational institutions, by 1975 sixteen new public universities had been created.¹

In this paper, we intend to analyze this process, which turned out to be the first wave of expansion of public national universities across the country. Discussions regarding what university model should be implemented in Argentina were part of the government’s agenda at the time and had an impact on the transformation of the educational system. Nevertheless, despite an attempt to emulate foreign models (in particular, the United States’ research universities),² this transformation allowed a first step forward toward a differentiation process within public universities under the form of quantitative expansion. Our results reveal the importance of analyzing the university public system in the country today, by means of taking into account the general performance of the 54 existing state universities. The expansion process

¹ Some of the new universities were created from scratch, while others came to be through nationalization, as well as divisions or mergers of existing institutions. Out of the 16 brand-new universities, some were created without any previous planning, whereas others resulted from the nationalization of preexisting provincial universities or were developed based on schools belonging to older universities, which had been geographically decentralized. For a more detailed analysis, see Mendonça (2018).

² Krotch (2009) states that the transformation the system underwent during these decades shows a strong exogenous influence in comparison to the ones that took place during the first decades of the nineteenth century.

that began in the seventies did not always prioritize quality, and that tendency has been replicated over the years.

In the international arena, the question regarding who has access to higher education has been a key issue. In Argentina, seventy years after the passing of the law that guaranteed free access to university education, the achievements and limitations of this policy—a staple in the Argentine university system—are still being debated. Although researchers have been mostly interested in the enrollment rates and who can access postsecondary education, we believe that it is also important to pay attention to what kind of education these students receive once they have been admitted. For our purpose, we will focus on the differences between the public universities in the country. Although these institutions have the same missions, and all of them were able to develop academic programs that are virtually identical from one another, we will argue that the university expansion during the seventies enabled a horizontal differentiation between them. To do so, we will analyze the transformation that the system underwent and its midterm consequences (1982-1996). Our analysis does not go beyond that time frame, due to the fact that in the late eighties and nineties, the university public system went through another wave of expansion. Thus, it is our main interest to look at the outcomes of the institutional expansion that took place in the seventies, since we will argue that the differentiation process within national universities was triggered in that first expansion wave.

Therefore, in the first section, we will focus on the university policies implemented during the rule of the so-called *Argentine Revolution* and the strategic changes enforced to confront what was known as the *university problem*. Afterward, we will analyse the development of the public university system during this same period. We will argue that, despite being strongly restructured through an expansion process, the higher education system did not manage to revert the main qualitative deficiencies that had been identified years before, which were the starting point for the reform projects; moreover, the performance of the different universities began to show significant variations. Finally, we will assert that this restructuring was directly linked to a significant differentiation within public universities.

2. Argentina's Universities under the military Regime: From Repression to Expansion

Around mid-1966, a coup d'état put an end to the democratic government of President Illia and established the most authoritarian regime the country had experienced until that time. In their initial communiqué, the military junta claimed the country had become a “theater for anarchy as a result of a collision of sectors with opposing interests” and alluded to the “non-existence of an elemental social order” (Brennan & Gordillo, 1994). In this scenario, the de facto government immediately set its sights on the country's national universities.

The changes brought about on the country's higher education institutions from the mid-1950s onward had radically transformed their functioning, not only due to the expansion of the enrollment rate but also due to the politicization of the student body. In tandem with the global fight against Communism, spearheaded by the

United States, the universities began to be seen as places prone to violence and disarray, as well as the incubation of “subversive” germs. It is unsurprising, then, that the military government had so insidiously repressed the university space; all the more so, considering that the coup gave way to a series of student mobilizations and protests.

Nevertheless, the repressive policies were unable to break the universities’ political activism. Moreover, massive resignations of professors and researchers took place as a result of state repression.

At the same time, a series of reports concerning the university situation in the country, were published.³ These reports highlighted the increase of enrollment rate, but did not link it to the student body politization. All of them concurred that the government should redefine an educational policy regarding the significant rise in enrollment, tandem with extremely high dropout rates, low graduation rates, and the concentration of enrollment among a cluster of degrees. The reports also underscored the structural deficiencies of the universities, which acted as a barrier to economic development. Let us analyze now the main issues that affected national universities (Mendonça, 2015).

Diagnosis and Prescriptions

The reports on the country’s universities highlighted an issue that had already been identified by the dictatorship: the high rate of enrollment. By the end of the 1960s, Argentina had one of the highest rates of university students in relation to the total population. With more than 230,000 students registered, the enrollment amounted to 9% of the population, a number which widely surpassed that of France (6.1%), Italy (5.3%), Chile (3.4%), Mexico (2.4%), and Brazil (1.5%) and which was only outstripped by the Soviet Union (12.1%) and the United States (24%). Yet, 25% to 30% of Argentinean students enrolled dropped out even before sitting for their initial examinations. In the end, only 25% of them managed to graduate, albeit two or three years later than the estimated curriculum time (CRUN, 1968).

The main explanations found in these reports relate to a lack of articulation between middle and higher education; the universities’ structural rigidity, which hindered the combination or transfer of students among different courses; the excessive duration of some basic courses and, consequently, the lack of opportunities for shorter courses, in particular those in technical specialties; the pedagogical deficiencies that resulted in massive dropouts, such as admission exams, lack of tutors, advisers, and adequate infrastructure; the need to educate primary and secondary schoolteachers through specialization courses; the large number of students who had to work throughout their degree courses; the lack of scholarships; and the need to restructure the organization and functioning of the universities and faculties through a departmental framework.

³ The most important diagnoses of that time were published by CONADE and the National Universities’ National Council of Rectors (CRUN—Consejo de Rectores de Universidades Nacionales). Other reports related to academic life were also published (Devoto, 1968; Taquini, 1972).

In short, these diagnoses corroborate the poor functioning of the Argentine education system in general and of higher education in particular. The dropout rates, they stated, were too high, and there were no structures or mechanisms capable of reverting the situation. As a result, investment in education turned into an unprofitable waste of resources. This is why the new university projects in the late 1970s suggested a restructuring of higher education institutions. These projects were intended to resolve those issues that the university system had been dragging along for decades and, by means of a developmentalist ideology, to turn such a system into a pillar of economic development. Although there was a wide range of proposals put forward by these organizations, none of them considered the possibility of establishing new national universities across the country.⁴ Moreover, some of these proposals argued that this path could be counterproductive, given that these new universities may not attain a critical mass of students, which would turn them into “anti-economic units.”

These reports and proposals ended up changing the main goal of the Argentine Revolution, and the so-called university problem stopped being directly associated with student politicization; it was linked instead to the university’s structural issues.⁵ Nevertheless, the policy adopted, centered around the creation of new universities, was precisely the one not recommended by the different reports analyzed herein.

3. New National Universities in the 1970s: Shape and Outcomes of the Expansion

The process that transformed Argentina’s higher education system was drawn up in the National Development and Security Plan of 1971–1975. This plan, conceived in accordance with the main tenets of the developmentalism theory, sought to promote the different productive regions in the country and the exploitation of their economic resources, as well as a better regional integration and an increase in international trade volume, particularly with neighboring countries. Hence, the university system reform entailed the creation of new majors (both in brand-new and already existing universities), which would train professionals capable of fostering local development. The aim was to “achieve a profound qualitative renewal” of the higher education system “with the intention of adjusting it to current needs and to the requirements of regional development” (CONADE, 1971). With this policy, the government was seeking to create new institutions based on the United States’ research university paradigm, building university *campuses*, hiring full-time professors and researchers, and strengthening academic life within this new structure (Mendonça, 2015b).

⁴ The only exception to this, aimed at decentralizing the Universidad de Buenos Aires’ enrollment (by far, the largest university in the country), consisted in developing a new university on the outskirts of the city in the medium or long term.

⁵ The university expansion policy has been analyzed as one of the government’s main goals to depoliticize the student body (among others, see De Luca, 2006). But as Bianculli & Taroncher state, without ruling out these ideas, we must analyze it as part of a larger debate (Bianculli & Taroncher, 2018). Moreover, in her doctoral thesis, Bianculli has analyzed the university policies implemented during Onganía’s term in office as part of a larger project that intertwined educational and scientific reforms (Bianculli, 2016).

The first public university expansion wave was based on these foundations, offering new programs and fields of study, mainly oriented to the development of regional production. As a result, the universities located within the agricultural belt, for instance, were earmarked for the education of agricultural engineers, whereas those founded near the Andes Mountains would be focused on the need to train experts on mining and hydrocarbons. Also, in the northeastern forest region, the plan was to educate specialists in forest engineering. It should be stated, however, that the creation of new majors was not based solely on regional needs and that not all universities were built from scratch: in some places, they were built upon preexisting institutions, without improving their original infrastructures (Mendonça, 2018).

Yet, the drive for regional development was not the only reason behind this intended reform process. It was, in fact, an aspect that had been incorporated in a rather mixed fashion by different universities. The most important goal of this reform process was to eradicate the problems identified by national organizations, particularly the National Universities' National Council of Rectors (CRUN—Consejo de Rectores de Universidades Nacionales) and CONADE, which would become a common characteristic of all universities involved in this process.

These reports, as we have mentioned above, underscored the problems the higher education system in Argentina had been experiencing for years and offered an outline of possible solutions. Specifically, it was suggested that the upsurge in the number of students and the massification of traditional universities could be addressed through the creation of new university models. This meant decentralizing students and attempting to reorganize the university system, setting an “optimal” number of 20,000 students per institution. Short-term training programs, in addition to forming specialists in different fields, were conceived as a way of diminishing the number of chronic students and attritions, and, in turn, increasing completion rates. Also, the need to redirect students into non-traditional degrees was already highlighted as a desirable policy in those reports, as well as a means to take economic development to a new level.⁶ This process would end up taking a vastly different form, moving away from the concrete recommendations submitted in those proposals and the official plan in which it was put forth. It is clear that the number of universities that began operating between 1971 and 1975 was far greater than what the initial project called for (Pérez Lindo, 1985; Cano, 1985; Buchbinder, 2005; Rovelli, 2008; Mendonça, 2015).

Given the scale the expansion process eventually took; one cannot help but assume that it effectively resulted in a profound transformation of the system. As we will later see, though, this did not turn out to be the case.

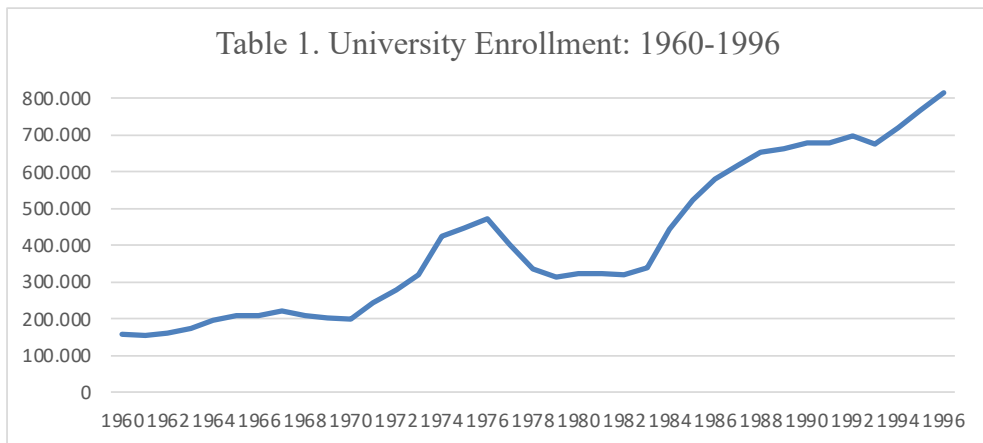
The evaluation of the results obtained vis-à-vis the stated goals is a highly complicated task (in part due to the poor quality of the available education statistics).

⁶ In Argentina, traditional universities were created following the French Napoleonic model. Academic orientation provided a framework for professionals, whereas academic organization was based on a system of independent schools and departments. Accordingly, this model was known for offering traditional careers that could be pursued as a lone professional, such as lawyers. Against this backdrop of developmentalist ideas and thought during the 1970s, the intention was to try and redirect students toward scientific and technical careers in order to strengthen the country's economic development.

In the following pages, we will attempt to make some progress in this regard. In order to achieve this, we will disaggregate the available data pertaining to decentralization, student enrollment, reorientation, and graduation rates, which represent the main focus of our analysis. Given the limited and fragmented nature of the existing data, the indicators we will introduce represent an initial approach to the problem. Moreover, they are intended to show the extent to which this quantitative expansion was accompanied by the much-touted “qualitative adaptation” of the higher education system to regional needs.

University Enrollment

Before we examine the outcomes of this policy, let us first gloss over how enrollment evolved during this time frame. As we can see in the graph below, there is a trend toward sustained growth, with only two contraction points, both of them under military dictatorships (the first took place in the 1968–1970 period, during a military government, and the second became noticeable by 1977, when the following military coup was at its repressive peak). With the return of democracy in Argentina in 1983, university enrollment went through an expansion period that seemed unstoppable, nearly doubling within five years, stalling, and then expanding again.



Source: Author’s graph based on statistical data of the Ministry of Education.

One of the primary objectives of the National Development and Security Plan of 1971–1975 was the decentralization of the most populated universities—namely, Buenos Aires, Córdoba, and La Plata—through the opening of new ones in the surrounding areas. Nevertheless, despite the strategic location chosen to build the first universities (on the outskirts of Buenos Aires and in southern Córdoba province), enrollment rates at the former universities remained the same.

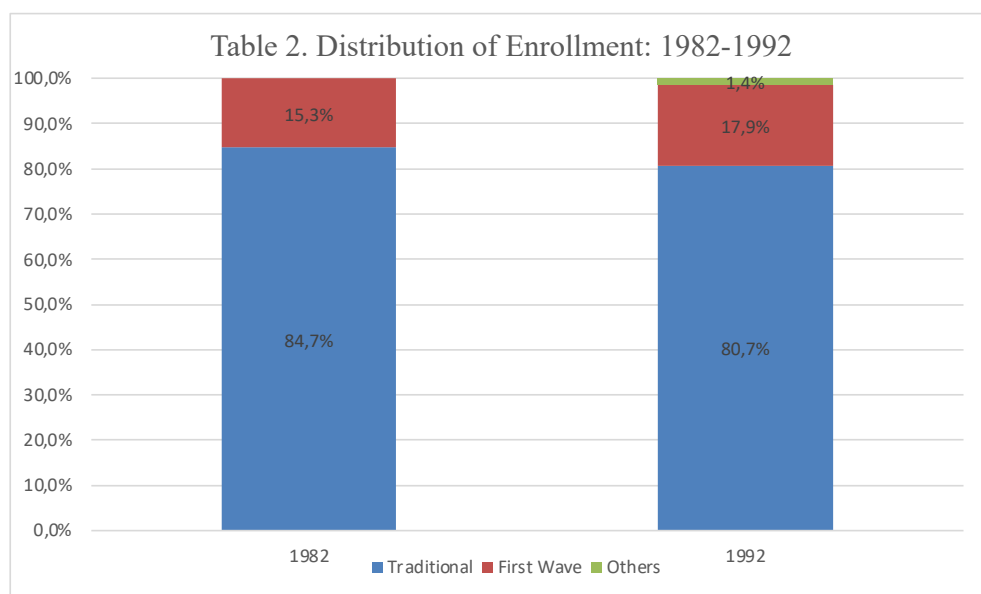
The case of the University of Buenos Aires (UBA) is the most noteworthy. In 1977, there was a considerable decrease in enrollment in all universities as a consequence of, among other policies, a student quota and admission exams. The opposite happened at the UBA, where the number of applicants (24,887) nearly doubled the

available quotas (13,845).⁷ It should also be noted that universities in the rest of the country could not even cover the number of established vacancies (Rodríguez, 2015).

By 1982, Buenos Aires, Córdoba, and La Plata (three of the oldest universities in the country) still housed the greatest number of students, with a total of 102,941, 34,060, and 33,187, respectively. Even if we include the number of students of all 16 universities created between 1971–1975, their total number did not make up for even half of the students that the UBA had.

The period from 1975 to 1982 is relatively brief, thus it is difficult to fully assess its impact. During this time, the military government once again intervened in a heavy-handed way in university life, albeit more violently than before. Consequently, we will also analyze the developments that took place in the following decade.

To begin with, student distribution does not show a significant transformation compared to 1992.



Source: Author's graph based on statistical data of the Ministry of Education.

What stands out from this first analysis is that, far from aiding in the decentralization process, the universities created during this period barely managed to absorb a minimum number of the incoming students, which kept on growing at a fast rate. On the other hand, the performance of the new universities shows significant differences. While some of them experienced a strong enrollment increase, others were unable to keep up with the pace of general expansion. The distribution of students in these new universities in 1992 portrays these differences.

Therefore, the warnings issued by CONADE and CRUN in 1968 proved to be true: nearly a decade after their creation, most of the new universities were still far from what was considered an "optimal" number of students. Instead, they became

⁷ For a more detailed analysis, see Seia & Califa (2017).

part of the group of small-sized universities, with a maximum quota of students that did not reach 8,000. In some cases, the situation was even more disheartening, with no more than 2,000 students enrolled.⁸

Let us now analyze the results of the efforts made to redirect students into nontraditional degrees.

Student Orientation

The analysis of student orientation presents several difficulties, since it is not possible to work with disaggregated statistics for each program and university, which would have allowed us to thoroughly study the distribution of students in light of the academic offer. The existing data, however, barely allows us to analyze the disaggregated distribution per study branch. We will do this by focusing on the performance of Basic Sciences, where the majority (although not all) of the prioritized degrees were gathered. Thus, by observing enrollment on a national level, we will be able to account for the impact produced by the creation of new universities.

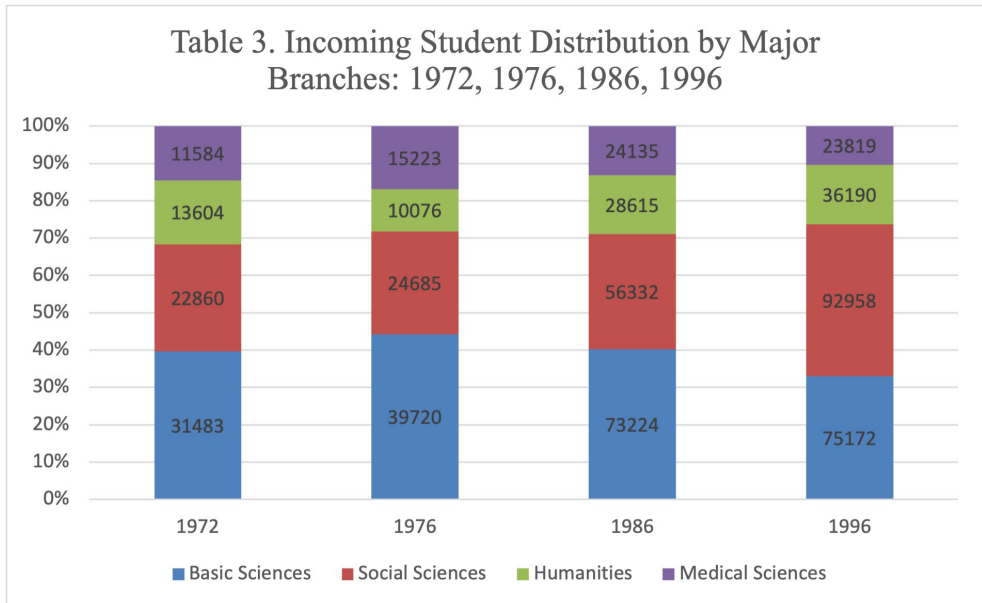
First, let us look at the absolute and relative distribution of incoming students along the so-called major branches—that is, Basic Sciences, Social Sciences, Humanities, and Medical Sciences⁹— in different moments between the years 1972–1996.

As we can observe, between 1972 and 1976, the Basic Sciences branch increased its number of incoming students at the expense of the Humanities. A decade later, however, this figure returned to its 1972 levels and kept on falling until 1996 by about 10 percentage points. Medical Sciences followed the same path, albeit with less fluctuation, whereas the Humanities, despite a significant increase in dropout levels in 1976, would later return to their earlier student rates. The Social Sciences branch, on the other hand, was able to keep its student quota, with few variations, all the way up to 1986. It would later experience a 10-percentage-point growth, 7 of them coming at the expense of Basic Sciences.¹⁰

⁸ Based on the Ministry of Education's statistical criteria, we consider small universities to be those that have no more than 8,000 students; middle-sized, those who hover between 8,000 and 20,000 students; and large universities, the ones that have more than 20,000 students. These benchmarks, however, were set in the late 1960s. Since the total number of students grew threefold between 1970 and 1992, a "middle-sized" university should currently gather at least around 24,000 students.

⁹ Agricultural Sciences, Architecture, Engineering, Land Survey, Technology, Biochemistry, Pharmacy, and Chemistry, all fell under the umbrella of Basic Sciences. Administration, Economics and Organization, Law, and Political and Diplomatic Sciences came under Social Sciences. In the realm of Medical Sciences, we find Medicine, Dental Science, Medical Auxiliaries, and Paramedical Science degrees. Finally, the Humanities gather Philosophy and Literature, Educational Sciences, Human Sciences, Fine Arts, and Music.

¹⁰ Social Sciences had already started to grow in the 1960s. Since the majority of its students were concentrated in Economics and Business Administration, it was suggested that the "outsourcing" that the Argentine economy had begun to experience in that decade was, together with American management and administration techniques and the arrival of transnational firms, the leading factor for giving these academic careers an identity of their own. They would eventually come to occupy a prominent place in universities. Furthermore, the "modernization" of public offices and administration (which the military government of the Argentine Revolution was set on promoting) played a key role in the development of management degrees. These would be the predominant choice for most of



Source: Author's graph based on statistical data of the Ministry of Education.

It is not possible to determine how the student body was distributed within the different study fields. Of all Basic Sciences enrollments, some chose majors that had been encouraged by university reform, while others stuck to traditional options (this is what happened to a large number of Engineering, Exact Sciences, and Architecture students, for instance).

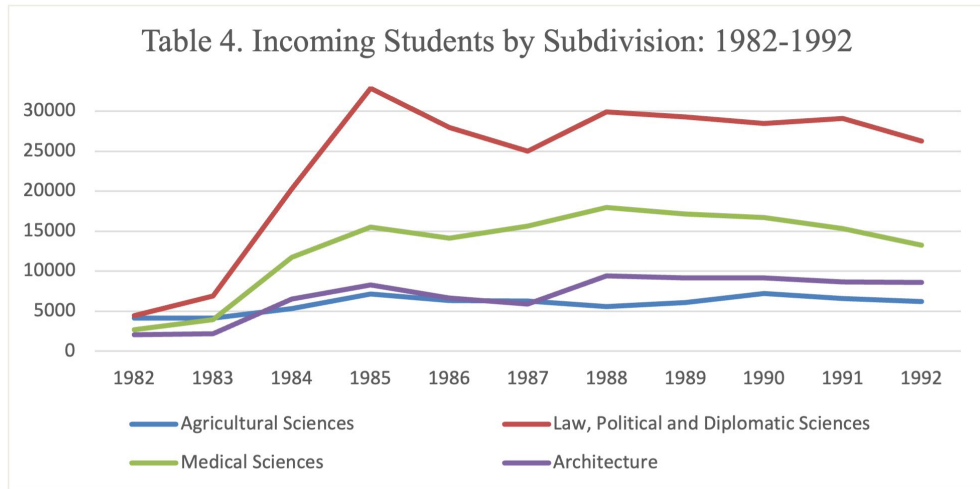
Nevertheless, statistics do allow us to take a specific case into account: the subdivision of Agricultural Sciences, which contained a number of degrees that had been given priority status in the reshaping of the university system. Among them, we can name several majors, as well as engineering degrees in Agriculture, Forestry, and Veterinary Science. These were critical for the reform project, since they were deemed necessary for the country's regional development. The number of incoming students in these degrees can be compared to those in other subdivisions such as Architecture, Medical Sciences, Law, and Political and Diplomatic Sciences (in this last case, the majority of students went into Law School).

We will now turn to the number of incoming students these subdivisions received during the 1982–1992 period, nearly two decades after the conclusion of this reform project within the expansion process.

Here we can observe that enrollment in the Agricultural Sciences subdivision barely expanded, showing a huge contrast to what happened in the branches of Law, Political and Diplomatic Sciences, and Medicine, which, in average, quadrupled and doubled, respectively, the number of incoming students in the period, and remained only on a par with Architecture (though a little behind). On the other hand, two

that decade, rivaled only by Law and Political and Diplomatic Sciences (Pérez Lindo, 1985).

decades after their creation, the new universities had a smaller average of students enrolled than traditional ones. Not only was the number of students declining but also, rather than counteracting this trend, these new institutions boosted it.



Source: Author's graph based on statistical data of the Ministry of Education.

In other words, nearly twenty years after the reform project concluded, traditional degrees were still a common choice among students when compared to those degrees introduced and encouraged by the reform.

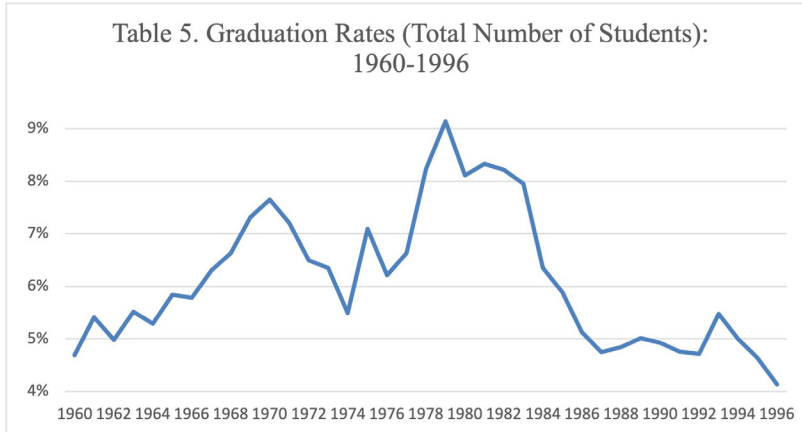
We will now turn our attention to the graduation rates after the university system overhaul took place.

Graduation Rates

One of the objectives of the National Development and Security Plan was to raise graduation rates for the entire system by 5% between the years 1971 and 1975. We will further expand that period up to 1991 in order to observe the most immediate results of this task in a longer time frame. In the following chart, we depict the graduation rates, calculated as total enrollment divided by the total number of graduates. While this is not the most accurate calculation, the existing data allows us to trace its evolution from 1960 up to 1996.

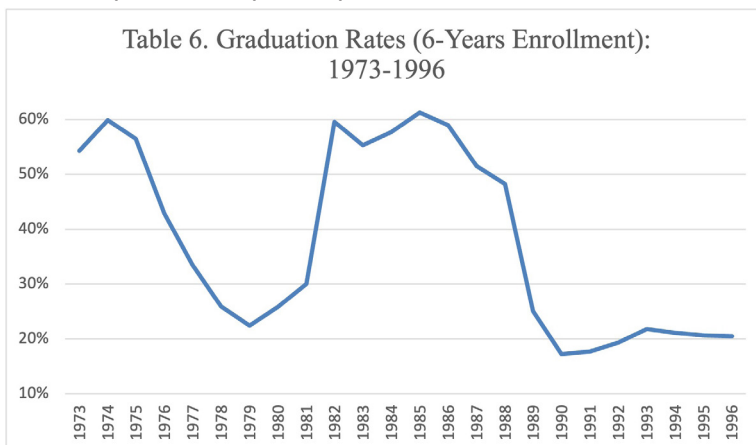
Averaging 5.8% for the 1960s, the university degree completion rates increased in 1970, plummeted in 1974, and then rose again sharply, reaching a higher peak in 1979. In the short term, the plan's proposed targets were seemingly met. Nevertheless, this was achieved in a rather oblique manner, since it did not involve an increase in the number of graduates but rather a sudden drop in the number of total students. This contraction had its onset precisely during the years in which State-sponsored terrorism began taking shape under the constitutional government of María Estela Martínez de Perón, and it continued under the ensuing military dictatorship of 1976–1983 (a similar explanation can be given regarding the 1967–

1970 period, where political repression also led the student quota to drop). After 1979, graduation rates fall again, reaching a new average bottom in the 1990s. While this may be explained in part by the sudden increase in incoming students that followed the return of democracy in 1983, it is also true that, in the first years of the 1990s, university enrollment slowed down significantly. Yet, the average graduation rates from 1990 onward are even lower than those of the 1960s.



Source: Author's graph based on statistical data of the Ministry of Education.

A more sophisticated calculation can be achieved by dividing the number of graduates by the number of incoming students six years earlier, which could help to represent the expected completion period (although short-term degrees entail a distortion of this process). However, available sources are limited and only allow us to calculate this expected completion period from 1973 onward.



Source: Author's graph based on statistical data of the Ministry of Education.

In this graph, we can appreciate the ups and downs of the graduation rates, with peaks in both 1974 and 1983–85. After 1991, the rates stabilize at an average 20%, the lowest historical figures. Therefore, regardless of the indicator used, graduation rates did not improve; in fact, they deteriorated.

If we disaggregate the information by university, the situation becomes more complex. Some of the largest universities, especially Buenos Aires and Córdoba, push the average upwards, maintaining completion rates that are above 15% and 23% in average (with the exception of the National Technological University, which only holds majors in the field of Basic Sciences and whose completion rates are usually lower than the rest). The newer universities, on the other hand, average a 13% graduation rate. There are significant differences among them, many of which show higher rates than some of the traditional universities (Ministry of Education).

4. Toward a Deepening of Institutional Differentiation?

In the previous section, we have analyzed the university expansion process that took place in Argentina. As we stated before, this process was part of a tendency displayed throughout many Latin American countries during the mid-twentieth century, when international organizations exerted a huge influence on the education system. The efforts to shape the university system after the American model can be traced to the Atcon Report in the 1960s. As Torres and Schugurensky (2002) state, the blurring of the distinction between public and private universities, the implementation of tuition fees in public universities, the public funding of private institutions, and the new initiatives to create community colleges underscored the pressures to implement an American model in the region.

Nevertheless, enrollment grew significantly in Latin America, especially in the realm of higher education, where it accounted for the highest rates in the world. While between 1960 and 1970, primary and secondary education rose 167.5% and 247.9%, respectively, the rates of educational growth in higher education increased by 258.3%. Along with educational expansion, a proliferation of universities stepped up the differentiation, regionalization, and privatization of educational institutions (Torres & Schugurensky, 2002). Most countries in the region experienced a rapid growth in the private sector. As the authors point out, this helped governments to ease pressure for higher education access without incurring in budgetary increases (Torres & Schugurensky, 2002)

In Argentina, the creation of private institutions was given a green light in 1958. However, as we have shown, the institutional expansion was mainly sustained through a wave of creation of public universities. These new institutions were meant to deal with the massive growth of higher education enrollment, taking the American system as a model.

Nevertheless, the attempt to restructure the university system seems to have failed. According to Krotch (2009), the institutional maturity that the Argentine university system reached (in contrast to other countries in the region) precluded the country to embrace the foreign model, because the historical and traditional structures did not allow extreme changes, therefore limiting the reforms goals. The author points out that the private universities in Argentina filled this gap, since

these institutions ended up offering short-term degrees, i.e., technology educational programs, similar to the European model, or alternative offers similar to the United States community colleges.

Krotch's assessment highlights one of the particular characteristics that the Argentine university system had. In fact, the project to create new universities was based in this idea as well, since the new national universities created in the seventies sought to embrace a new institutional model. In such a way, at a first glance it seems like they inherited the higher education institutional maturity, since they were also unable to adopt the new version. However, we believe this analysis must be broadened. Despite allowing an enrollment expansion (a process that would only begin in 1984), the issues identified toward the end of the 1960s could not be resolved by the creation of new institutions; rather, they were exacerbated. Moreover, if we take into account the graduation rates, the performance of a great number of these new public universities stands well below that of traditional institutions. Therefore, the Argentinean process of university expansion does not differ in this regard to the general Latin American trend pointed out by Rama (1978), who claims that "the emphasis was placed on enrollment issues, while the quality of knowledge was not prioritized" (Rama, 1978).

We may argue that this process falls within the framework of labor power differentiation.¹¹ On the one hand, enrollment has maintained a steady upward trend in Argentina. On the other, by the early 1990s, for instance, a larger proportion of incoming students were still unable to graduate, partially completing the different degree courses. This number has increased and has been distributed unevenly among the state universities. As a result, the Argentine public university system increasingly and differentially educates a fairly high number of students who are unable to bring a degree course of studies to completion. In some cases, these students' education could be likened to the type found in the higher education systems of some European countries or the United States, such as colleges or short tertiary degree courses.

However, the Argentinean case stands out in the region. In many Latin American countries, this process took the form of an increase in the number of non-university tertiary institutions, which usually offer programs of a shorter duration than those delivered in universities, such as technical schools, teacher colleges, and vocational training schools. Although this type of education may allow for specialization in any discipline, its main outcome is a broad expansion in the labour-power productive capacities. On the other hand, private universities were also created: "except in Cuba, private institutions of higher education—for profit and nonprofit—are now found throughout the region, and in most countries the private sector has increased its coverage, complexity, and visibility" (Holm-Nielsen, Thorn, Brunner, J., & Balán, 2005, p. 41). Some Latin American governments deregulated the market for higher education, all the while dismantling what had until then been a public sector

¹¹ It is true that, at the beginning of the twentieth century, the public university system gained complexity with the creation of three national institutions that were inspired in the German Humboldt research university model (Buchbinder, 2005; Krotsch, 2009). However, we argue that this did not result in the differentiation of labor power.

monopoly. It is worth mentioning, however, that this distinction was not limited to the public and private sectors, since universities also showed differences within each of these subsystems. In Chile, for instance, there was a division of existent institutions, and new regional universities were created. In Venezuela, new public universities were established in the 1970s to control the level of absolute autonomy of traditional universities, contributing to the specialization and regionalization of higher education institutions (Rama, 2006). As we have seen, this is not the case of Argentina. Not only the importance of its non-university higher education institutions is rather small when compared to universities, but, among the latter, the public ones tend to have more leverage.

In sum, Argentina has also experienced a process of differentiation of its higher education system. However, it took shape, at least along the period analyzed here, within the public university structure.

5. Quantitative Expansion and Institutional Differentiation: Some Conclusions

During the sixties and seventies, discussions about the purpose of higher education were central among politicians of Western countries. The unexpected increase in enrollment, budgetary expenditure, the number of institutions, teachers and other axes relative to university life became a key worry. The transition of higher education from elite to mass system occurred in North America, in western European countries, and in Latin America. Since then, the causes of this transformation have become the subject of inquiry by politicians and academics. As our analysis shows, enrollment growth and institutional expansion in this region during the period in question were massive and brought the attention of both national and international organizations. Among with the mass enrollments, new higher education institutions were created. As we have showed, that proliferation resulted in a greater institutional differentiation between public and private institutions. In Argentina, in particular, the differentiation did not only address to the public and private sector, nor to universities and non-universities institutions, but within the public university system.

We argued that Argentina sought to reform the higher education system under the umbrella of developmentalism with the aim of boosting economic development. Yet, despite this overhaul in the education system, the issues underscored in the late 1960s were not resolved in the long run, and its transformation seems to have limited itself to a mere expansion of the number of universities in the country.

However, under this appearance lies the strengthening of a differentiation process, which took on a distinctive form. While enrollment in traditional universities kept on growing, regardless of the numerous universities established during the studied period, university expansion in itself was unable to raise completion rates or lower attritions. The idea of creating new institutions inspired by the research university paradigm, with all its particularities, did not come to fruition, just as neither did the idea of completely restructuring the old universities. In this regard, although these new institutions intended to offer new majors linked to regional economy development, the majority of them ended up offering traditional degrees. In the 1990s, this situation continued without significant alterations. The relative goals of

achieving decentralization, reorientation in the selection of majors, and an increase in graduation rates were (and still continue to be) unmet. At the same time, “modern” structures set in motion to solve other issues pertaining to deficiencies in universities were rolled back shortly after being implemented. If we look at the performance of the university system in its totality, we will notice that, in average, the core issues persist. However, the performance of the different institutions shows big differences among them. The leading questions that must be answered in future investigations, then, must be ones related to the programs each of these universities offer. Thus, we may conclude that the apparent large-scale expansion of the higher education system and the subsequent transformations it endured seem to have only exacerbated the differences in the formation of labor power within the public university framework.

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