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Consequences of the 1873 economic crisis for the Argentinian State educational design

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ABSTRACT

10 This article aims to explain the ultimate organisation of the Argentinian educational system during the 1870s as a result of the 1873 world economic crisis, which led, among other measures, to budget cuts. These had serious consequences in both curriculum design and the general structure of the different educational levels. Such a system fostered a cheaper and lower-skilled labour force, according to the needs of the modern Argentinian State as a primary goods exporter.

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The 1873 crisis in Argentina

15 By 1873, the world economy had entered an accelerated process of integration, division of labour and exportation of capital. The economic crisis set off that year had economic repercussions in places such as Vienna, Paris and, mainly, London. It also had a central impact in semi-colonial economies like that of Argentina. According to Lenin:

20 South America, and overall Argentina – says Schulze-Gaevernitz in his work about British imperialism – financially depend on London in such a way that it must be qualified as a British commercial colony.¹

From the end of the nineteenth century, the Argentine economy depended almost entirely on British trade: the first sent commodities and the second sent capital in the form of debt. The scenario opened up by imperialism was a consequence of the emergence of the capitalist economy, which wanted to rebuild its rate of profit through the extraction of surplus value outside the metropolitan economies. This is how capitalist social relations were imposed in every corner of the globe.

25 In this context, the reconfiguration of national states led to open conflicts with and beyond their frontiers. This brought about the final emergence of the South American states. The Paraguay War in South America and the 1866 crisis in England led to a political impasse. The presidency of Domingo F. Sarmiento (1868–1874) is a product of that impasse. It was a period characterised by a number of initiatives in culture and education. A new economic crisis in 1873 would put a final stop to the possibility of autonomous national development. The political conflicts caused by this crisis led to the rise of a single social class with sufficient

[AQ2](#)
[AQ3](#)

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¹Vladimir Lenin, *El imperialismo, fase superior del capitalismo* [Imperialism, the highest stage of capitalism] (Buenos Aires: Ed. Libertador, 2008), 121.

[AQ1](#)

strength to guarantee the requirements of the new world order from the administration of the state. The previous political and economic developments took Nicolás Avellaneda to the presidency (1874–1880) through an alliance with the Buenos Aires' autonomy group party.² Landowners in the countryside and a political faction of opportunists would agree to be bound by the *Partido Autonomista Nacional*.³

During the 1862–1872 decade, foreign investments, almost exclusively British, were directed to the construction of railroads, investments in corporations and in national and provincial loans:

In Argentina, the loan of £2,500,000 taken by Mitre to finance the war is followed by a cascade: between 1870 and 1876, they add up to £16,000,000; ... in 1875, five years after the war against Paraguay finished, the British are creditors of nine loans and have investments in the railroads *Central Argentino, Gran Sud, Ensenada* among others: they own about 1000 establishments for breeding sheep and they are beginning to control public services (trams, gas, telegraphs); they are the owners of Liebig and Bobicúa cold stores and of mines in San Juan, and let's stop counting although the count has not finished.⁴

AQ4

Argentina entered the world market accepting its place in the international labour division. In 1873 its economy was so integrated that it would suffer the impact of the European stock market shocks.

The production costs due to the shortage of labour were added to the decline in capital inflows and the retraction of bank credits.⁵ The price crisis had an immediate impact on the trade balance, reducing exports but, above all, on imports between 1874 and 1876. The income fall reverberated immediately in the public policy of the state, reducing the budget for the areas that – at the time – required a large amount of financial resources for the development of strong state institutions.⁶

AQ5

In this emergency the national government applied a deflationary policy: the recruitment of new loans from abroad was suspended, the state budget was reduced paralysing public works, reducing the administrative staff and lowering the employees salaries.⁷

The 1873 crisis expanded the agricultural world frontier and represented the first great wave of capital exportation from the metropolis to peripheral countries. Both elements would be crucial for the configuration of the Argentinean State, its entailment to the market, and the definition of its educational design.

The political transition that determined the future of Argentinean history cannot be fully explained if the decision-making on the political level is isolated from the economic events that supported those decisions. Among the most outstanding political consequences of the 1873 crisis are not only the strategy of a notorious cut to the public budget, but also the rise of a ruling class that would redefine the social orientation of public policies, particularly in education.

²Before this process, Buenos Aires' autonomy group proposed the separation of Buenos Aires from the rest of the country.

³Fernando Barba, *Los autonomistas del 70, auge y frustración de un movimiento provinciano con vocación nacional. Buenos Aires entre 1868 y 1878* (Buenos Aires: Ed. Pleamar, 1976).

⁴León Pomer, *La Guerra del Paraguay* (Buenos Aires: Leviatán, 2008), 88-90.

⁵It is one of the elements that fosters the initiative for a migratory policy. The entry of immigrants to the territory addressing a lack (and therefore the rise) of labour is another element that links economic crisis, migratory policy and educational policy. It is necessary to understand this so as to go deep into the economic characteristics that the national educational programme would develop.

⁶We understand that these facts reduced the public expenditure destined for education, de-funding the developments fostered under Domingo Sarmiento's presidency.

⁷Ezequiel Gallo, Roberto Cortés Conde, *La República conservadora* (Buenos Aires: Hispanoamérica, 1986), 21.

Effects of the crisis on educational policy

The crisis, British pressure for payment of capital raised in the form of debt, and local resentment due to the decline in Brazilian gold income after the end of the Paraguayan War, forced landowners and elites to reorganise. The presidential succession of 1874 became a central point of such reorganisation, and this fell on Avellaneda, who had been Minister of Justice, Education and Religious Affairs during most of Sarmiento's administration.

The international events fostered an opportunity to redirect local economic policies, opening a debate between the protectionist members of the landowning oligarchy and those who had a liberal position and wanted to strengthen the bonds with the British market. These were represented by the new government. However, the economic crisis was showing its first signs: the prices of primary products dropped and thus reduced the income of the state. In this context, President Avellaneda's willingness to pay the creditors manifested itself through all sorts of cuts in the public sphere:

Several public jobs of importance were suspended. There were several items of the national budget that were eliminated. Almost all the subsidies to the provinces were suspended, accentuating the recession in the regional economies. Salaries, retirement pensions and pensions in general were reduced by 15 per cent, which contributed even more to depress the interior market.⁸

Members of the protectionist sectors asked the Government to suspend the debt payment to foreign creditors and use those funds to reactivate the local market. They expected to overcome the crisis this way. However, the faction in control of the state wanted to avoid commercial penalties by the British market, so they turned down this proposal:

It was then that President Avellaneda pronounced the famous words of his message of 1876: "The Republic may be deeply divided into internal factions, but it has only one honour and one credit, as it has one name and one flag. There are two million Argentinians that would economise over their hunger and their thirst, to respond to the liabilities of our public faith to foreign markets."⁹

The landlord oligarchy that had attained the political direction of the country intended to develop a plan that would defend their interests. The increase of the crisis in 1875 deepened the cuts in public spending, including education, receding from the progressive measures that they had promoted since 1870.

Cuts in the education budget

Spanish traveller Adolfo Posada, in *La República Argentina. Impresiones y comentarios*, a book published in Madrid in 1912, states, regarding the situation of education in the country, that "the enthusiasm in the period between 1870 and 1875 had, apparently, cooled, in part, under the unfavourable influence of a great economic crisis."¹⁰ A series of facts confirm this analysis. Since 1875 the opening of elementary schools had been curbed. Professors of Córdoba University reacted and demanded a return to the previous Jesuit scheme. On 26 September 1875 the Law of Common Education was enacted in the province of Buenos

⁸Antonio Brailovsky, 1880–1982: *Historia de las crisis argentinas, un sacrificio inútil* (Buenos Aires: Belgrano, 1985), 30.

⁹Ibid., 31.

¹⁰Adolfo Posada, *La República Argentina, impresiones y comentarios* [The Argentine Republic, impressions and comments] (Madrid: Victorino Suarez, 1912), 198.

Aires, as a result of the triumph of conservative groups that attempted to install a “civilisation image” through schools.

Another journalistic piece that illustrates this situation was published in *El monitor de la educación común*, the official magazine of the National Council of Education. In its 13th edition, published in August 1882, it refers to Common Education in the province of San Luis:

From 1873 to 1876 Common Education developed itself in such way that the province of San Luis obtained in 1873, 1874 and 1876 the award given by the National Law of 7 October 1869 ...¹¹ Since 1877 a slight decrease in the number of schools and of students that were enrolled can be perceived, if we examine this movement with attention ... it shows that it does not reveal a real decline in education but a modification tending to give schools a more harmonic, regular and permanent, even more truthful organisation according to the resources and elements of the Province.¹²

Between 1870 and 1873, during Sarmiento’s administration, the state had designated an important amount of financial resources for public education. In this context, technical and scientific development thrived. At the end of this period there were more than 1600 fully functioning schools. The impulse of those years was curtailed from 1876 onwards. The subsequent slowdown is justified by the national authorities, who stated that educational growth in the province ought to be more in line with its “resources and elements”. Budget cuts had a direct impact in the technical education field. For instance, in 1876, the mining schools of Catamarca, and the agriculture ones of Salta, Tucumán and Santa Catalina in Buenos Aires were closed. In that same year, the 1870 419 Law of Popular Libraries was repealed. Popular libraries were considered by Sarmiento as an important part of the public education system, emulating the Massachusetts model. Several reasons were given to explain the dropping of this project, such as the lack of preparation of the population or the absence of cooperation between local societies and the state.¹³ However, other reasons of a larger magnitude can explain this decision. The abolition of this law and the reduction of the amount of books sent to the libraries – among other measures – was a consequence of the cut in funds of the education budget as a product of the retraction in the economy since 1873. The public budget assigned to the area decreased in comparison with the growth of the school-age population.

The purposes of public education were linked to economic and political aspects. The regression in the technical scientific proposals for public education was connected to the impact of economic aspects because, on the one side, the cut in the area was a direct product of the economic crisis; and on the other side, there was a need for a new type of labour, destined to deliver simple tasks that did not require specific knowledge.

Adriana Puiggrós endorsed this view and also stated that: “We add that secondary education was given the task of forming a ruling class with a mentality of administrators of the ‘estate-country’, of exportation and the use of the State for private purposes.”¹⁴ The political function in the composition of a state bureaucracy is clearly seen, although the author states – without saying so openly – that that bureaucracy was formed with an economic objective.

¹¹The National Council of Education awarded annually a distinction to those provinces that developed their educational system the most.

¹²*El monitor de la educación común*, Buenos Aires, no. 13 (August, 1882), 388.

¹³Manrique Zago, *Bibliotecas Populares argentinas* (Buenos Aires: Manrique Zago, 1995).

¹⁴Adriana Puiggrós, *Sujetos, disciplina y currículo en los orígenes del sistema educativo argentino (1885–1916)* (Buenos Aires: Galerna, 2006), 98.

Becoming the administrator of the “estate-country” or guarantor of “private interests” had the purpose of providing a specific social direction after having led the national market towards a particular form of production.

5 This analysis considers the division between politics and economy to be false because, as R. Williams states, “all the ruling class consecrates a significant part of the material production to the provision of a political order.”¹⁵ The social and political order needs material productions such as state-controlled schools, but these activities are not part of the super-structure. They have a key role in the development of the production mode.

10 Briefly analysing the objective of education of the new state, Díaz Alejandro linked it specifically to the building of a local labour market. Economic motivation was one of the key points to explain the development of education guided by the state. In the last years of the nineteenth century, the educated population rose from 20% to 31%, thereby lowering the cost per capita: [AQ6](#)

15 The public policy previous to 1930 tried not only to increase the offer of labour, but also to improve its quality. Among the population whose age ranged between six and thirteen, only 20% attended school. That percentage rose to 31% in 1895 and 48% in 1914.¹⁶

20 Thus, the strategy followed to “improve the quality” of available labour was invariably carried out by school. Education, as a state policy, was conceived as functional to the labour world and its development. Now, schools had to include an increasing population of professionals ready to administer that “estate-country”.

Public education suffers the impact of the crisis

Onésimo Leguizamón served as Minister of Education under Avellaneda’s administration from October 1874 to June 1877. He was responsible for the reports presented annually by the Ministry to the Congress from 1873 to 1876. In his report of 1875, Leguizamón
25 highlights the good administration of the previous government, which had had Sarmiento as President, and two ministers from the area, Avellaneda – president of the nation at that moment – and Albarracín. They had amazingly been able to open and sustain about 1600 schools all over the territory, 14 *Colegios Nacionales*, three agronomy schools, one science
30 academy, 140 popular libraries, two normal schools, two mining schools and one astronomical observatory.¹⁷

The report of 1873 stated there were 1327 public schools with 85,672 students and 1828 teachers, and 489 private schools, with 24,269 students – to whom must be added 2282 from graduate schools – and 1040 teachers. Regarding funds, the nation invested \$fts¹⁸ 257,262 in education, while the provinces invested \$fts 1,257,886,¹⁹ \$fts 914,746

¹⁵Raymond Williams, *Marxismo y literatura* [Marxism and literature] (Barcelona: Península, 1980), 112.

¹⁶Carlos Díaz Alejandro, *Ensayo sobre historia económica argentina* (Buenos Aires: Amorrortu, 1975), 40.

¹⁷*Memoria presentada al Congreso Nacional de 1875 por el Ministro de Justicia, Culto e Instrucción Pública Dr. D. Onésimo Leguizamón* (Buenos Aires: imprenta Americana, 1875). At the time, public education in Argentina was on three levels: elementary schools, secondary schools and universities. The secondary level had different branches with different goals: the *Colegios Nacionales* were aimed at elite students, who would afterwards enter the universities. Normal elemental schools trained teachers for the elementary level. There were also two normal superior schools (at Buenos Aires and Paraná cities), which trained professors for the normal elemental schools, and as headmasters and inspectors. Last, during Sarmiento’s administration, there were several technical schools, which provided a qualified labour force.

¹⁸This symbol (\$ fts.) refers to the denomination *Pesos fuertes* (strong Pesos), the currency used in Argentina before 1881. In the 1870s 16 *Pesos fuertes* were the same as an ounce of Spanish gold.

¹⁹The figures show the sum of funds provided by all provinces together.

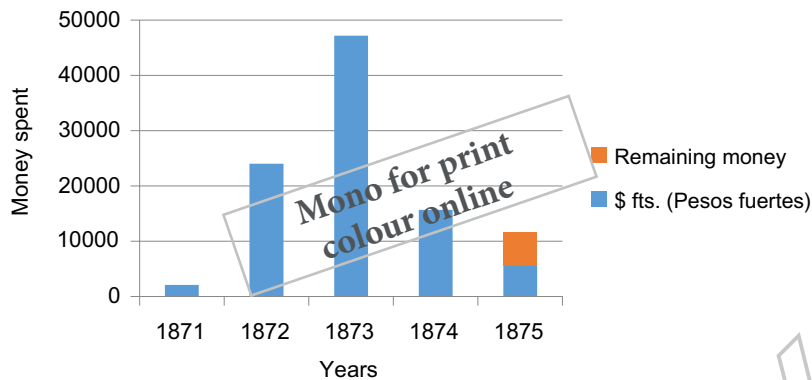


Figure 1. Budget allocated to libraries, 1871–1875.

AQ17

of which were invested by Buenos Aires only, which leaves a total of \$fts 343,140 by the 13 remaining provinces. At that time, there were 156 popular libraries, with a total amount of 130,000 volumes. From 1871 to March 1875, \$fts 100,623.39 were invested in popular libraries (see Figure 1). In 1871, \$fts 2095.12 had been invested; by 1872 the sum had been multiplied by 12, reaching \$fts 24,017.2; in 1873 the protective committee received a new rise and doubled the sum of the previous year, reaching \$fts 47,200.08. However, in 1874 the assignation was three times lower and fell to \$fts 15,664.63; falling again in 1875 to \$fts 5692.41, to which must be added a reserve fund held at different banks of \$fts 5953.95, the lowest budget since 1871.²⁰

However, the report submitted to the National Congress in 1876 – where the balance of 1875–1876 is shown – does not speak of “previous administrations”. More than a year and a half had passed since the arrival of the new minister, almost the same period that led to the crisis. In the section of the *Memoria de 1876* called “Public Instruction” numerous adversities for educational development are admitted: “the new people such as the Argentine people have to fight against enormous difficulties to spread education, and that will make its programme slower for almost half a century”.²¹ In spite of having asked for certain measures a year before, education still lacked censuses to specify its deficiencies, as well as a uniform teaching system. There was almost a complete lack of books and school supplies: in some schools there were not proper benches, books, maps or blackboards; in other cases there were not even adequate programmes or suitable teachers.

The number of schools remained constant, with 1825 of them still working. The peculiarity is that, despite the 1327 public schools stated in the previous report, that of 1876 presents 1314. The slight decrease was compensated by opening 22 new private schools, which by then numbered 511. This demonstrates that the cut in public activity was compensated for by the private activity. A total of 116,773 children were educated in these schools, 92,234 of them in public schools, and 24,539 students in private schools. The teachers’ department numbered 3100 members, 2015 in private schools and 1085 tutors. The invested income

²⁰*Memoria* (1875).

²¹*Memoria presentada al Congreso Nacional de 1876 por el Ministro de justicia, culto é instruccion pública doctor Don Onésimo Leguizamón* (Buenos Aires: Imprenta El Tribuno, 1876), XXXIX.

of that year was \$fts. 1,926,657.61½²² distributed as follows: \$fts. 303,243.4 by the nation (referred to as subsidies under the 1871 law of grants); \$fts. 1,476,363.60½ by the provinces; \$fts. 93,100.75 by the town councils; and \$fts. 73,949.72 by the students.

The increase of more than 30,000 students in the educational system did not correspond with the opening of new schools (13 public schools were closed and only 22 private schools were opened) and the budget allocation was lower by almost \$ fts. 850,000. Such numbers enlarge the diagnosis of a reduction in budgetary terms by 1875.

The budget's cut to popular libraries

The “economy” of the public expenditures applied since 1876 would affect in particular popular libraries, a key area in Sarmiento's proposal for public education. “This allows to economize the public expenditures, and the saving will be higher next year, without suffering these useless institutions.”²³ The Protective Commission would disappear due to Law 800 of 23 September 1876 (only six years after its foundation), and its tasks would be taken over by the National Commission of Schools.

In 1875 there were 170 popular libraries, with 35,797 volumes each and 50,000 readers a year. By 1876 there were 182 libraries. Between 1866 and 1870, the year in which Law 419 was enacted founding the Protective Commission of Popular Libraries, there were only 12 libraries in the country. In a two-year period, 108 new libraries were founded, making a total of 120 throughout the country. By 1874 there were 156 libraries, which means that only 36 were founded in the next two years. In 1876, the year of the closure of the commission, there were 182 libraries in the country.

The paradox underlying this process is that this law, signed by Leguizamón as minister and by Avellaneda as president of the Nation, revoked the previous law that Avellaneda himself had authored, when he had been the minister a few years before. Despite its short duration, the Commission had obtained positive results, and the shift in the educational policies that resulted in the cutbacks were not in direct relation to the interest – or lack of interest – that the libraries provoked as an educational tool.

The bill issued by Deputies said: “Abolish the protective commission of Popular Libraries created by law on 23rd September of 1870; its tasks will be performed by the National Commission of Schools, without increase in staff.”²⁴ The senators proposed an amendment to that article stating that not increasing staff was equivalent to not raising salaries; the foundation argued that “this profitable expense, does not have, however, the matter of urgency and these are not times to make such expenditures. When the circumstances improve we will be able to increase the number of libraries.”²⁵ The final goal would be to suppress the budget assigned to the area.

A desolate wasteland: the ending of Onésimo Leguizamón's administration

In June 1877 Onésimo Leguizamón resigned as minister to take a place in the Supreme Court of Justice. In the editorial to his last report, he presented a bleak picture regarding the previous administrations:

²²Budgets were so detailed that they incorporated amounts of half a cent.

²³*Memoria* (1876), LII.

²⁴Sessions Journal of the National Chamber of Deputies, 8 July 1876.

²⁵*Ibid.*, 22 July 1876.

AQ7

AQ9

AQ8

I confess today as before, that it is very difficult to surpass, without much competence and resources, the creative labour of the previous Administration. Less happy than my predecessors, I did not create, nor have been able to create. Apart from lacking the means, the country has lived with restlessness so I cannot demand great enthusiasm for the calm reflections that the educational movement requires. Everything was disturbed by the economic crisis and the political anarchy, it has cost a great deal to make the silence and calm in which patient science investigations and hard work could germinate. My work has been, in consequence, more one of organisation and incentive than one of new approaches. The National University, the Schools, the Industrial Schools and Normal Schools live poorly; but their discipline is unsurpassable, their administration is regular and their labour thorough. The professors themselves are surrounded by needs; but their popularity encourages them, and places them in school teaching, independence and respect. Last year, they were subject to the painful situation of reductions in their salaries, already low, and their dignified resignation facing this situation testifies to their personal disinterest and love for science.²⁶

According to the educational census of 1876, of a 2,121,775 population, the country had 503,068 children between the ages of six and 14 years old, of whom, 266,680 were boys and 236,388 girls. Even though there were 116,000 children registered in the educational process, more than 386,000 of them did not attend school. Around 52,180 boys and 37,388 girls attended public schools, giving a total of 89,568 children in the public educational system. Some 15,403 boys and 11,273 girls, a total of 26,676 kids, attended private schools, with a total of 116,244 kids incorporated into the educational system.²⁷

There were 669 public schools for boys, 307 for girls, 392 mixed schools and 195 private schools for boys, 88 for girls and 295 mixed, giving a total of 1946 establishments. Public institutions totalled 2215 teachers and private ones had 3678. The provinces with the largest number of unschooled children were Buenos Aires, with 92,000 children, and Córdoba, with about 55,000 children outside formal schooling. Between them nearly 38% of the school age population did not attend school.

The data from the different reports are diverse and confusing. However, they set a trend for the growth of the population of scholars that is much lower than the child population. While in the period 1875–1877 the scholar population grew by 3.8%, the child population grew by 8.8%. In 1875 the 24.4% of children between six and 16 were included in the educational system, while in 1877 only the 23.1% of those children from six to 14 were included, showing a decrease of 1.3%. In addition to this, in 1875 the range of census age to characterise the children of school age was greater (at least statistically). This shows the educational “cooling off” and what – in the future – would allow for a programmatic reorientation. It is striking that lower numbers for school and educational policy in general have not been registered since the presidency of Mitre.

Table 1 shows the situation by 1877. With an average of 138 schools per province, only four went beyond that media. Of the 1936 schools registered, 809 were located in the province of Buenos Aires.

Buenos Aires was the province with the largest number of schools per km², one per 264 km², while the province of Catamarca only had one school for every 5016 km². The data are negative even for Buenos Aires, which shows the catastrophic state of education in the rest of the provinces. The province of Santiago had only one school for every 2848

²⁶Onésimo Leguizamón, “Informe,” in *Memoria presentada al congreso nacional de 1877 por el ministro de justicia, culto é instrucción pública Doctor Don Onésimo Leguizamón* (Buenos Aires: Imprenta “courrier del plata”, 1877), 432.

²⁷By a slight margin, the data do not match those in the census which refers to 116,577 children in the system. We have decided to maintain them in order to respect the original report. *Memoria* (1877).

Table 1. Relation between the schools existing in 1876, showing territory, absolute population and school population.

Province	Schools in that province	Km ² per school	Inhabitants per school	Children of school age per school
Buenos Aires	809	264	772	179
Catamarca	48	5016	2035	482
Córdoba	145	1491	1773	420
Corrientes	166	745	949	225
Entre Ríos	154	725	1049	252
Jujuy	37	2518	1333	316
Mendoza	69	2251	1158	274
Rioja	37	2940	1609	381
Salta	76	2043	1429	339
San Juan	67	1527	1100	260
San Luis	89	1413	731	173
Santa Fe	113	1003	765	228
Santiago	57	1907	2848	675
Tucumán	69	900	1929	457
On average ¹	138	991	1090	258

Note: ¹This figure corresponds to the average of schools in all the territories.

Source: Table obtained from the *Memoria del departamento de Justicia, Culto é Instrucción pública correspondiente al año de 1878 presentada al honorable Congreso de la Nación en sus sesiones del año 1879* (Buenos Aires: Imprenta El Nacional, 1879), XLV.

Table 2. Number of students, students per teacher and students per school in each province.

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Province	Students	Per teacher	Per school
Buenos Aires	51,336	27	64
Catamarca	3299	46	69
Córdoba	6361	32	44
Corrientes	6826	32	41
Entre Ríos	7539	34	48
Jujuy	1597	26	43
Mendoza	6356	39	92
Rioja	2988	60	81
Salta	3981	34	52
San Juan	6211	35	93
San Luis	4636	38	46
Santa Fe	5825	29	52
Santiago	3130	45	55
Tucumán	6159	57	89
Chaco	59	29	29
Misiones	274	34	34
On average	8303	32	60

Source: *Memoria presentada al congreso nacional de 1876 por el ministro de justicia, culto é instrucción pública* (Buenos Aires: Imprenta "courrier del plata", 1876).

inhabitants and every 675 children of school age. Despite these facts, Buenos Aires, due to its extended population, continued to be the province with the largest number of children outside school: more than 92,000 children did not attend. In 1873, the last complete year of the presidency of Sarmiento and the year in which the economic crisis exploded, there were 87,620 children outside the formal education system.

5

Focusing only on Buenos Aires after its education law was issued in 1875, Pablo Pineau refers to the historian Alberto Reyna Almandos (1927) to explain the disadvantages that education faced in the province, one of them being the economic problem. Almandos identifies "two great disadvantages" that came with the application of the law in 1875. First,

Table 3. Detailed funding of elementary education by province.

Province	Per nation	Per province	Total
Buenos Aires	134,146	274,291	408,437
Catamarca	5235	5235	10,470
Córdoba	2069	4137	6206
Corrientes	15,542	15,542	31,084
Entre Ríos	20,024	40,048	60,072
Jujuy	4641	1547	6188
Mendoza	17,646	17,646	35,292
Rioja	5345	1782	7127
Salta	17,210	17,210	34,420
San Juan	18,572	18,572	37,144
San Luis	21,224	7,075	28,299
Santa Fe	6486	12,971	19,457
Santiago	17,182	17,182	34,364
Tucumán	13,090	13,090	26,180
Extraordinary expenses	78,532	–	78,532
On average	376,944	446,328	823,272

Source: *Memoria presentada al congreso nacional de 1876 por el ministro de justicia, culto é instrucción pública* (Buenos Aires: Imprenta "courrier del plata", 1876).

the powers conferred on the School Council, and second, the economic legislation, which left few resources for the promotion of elementary school.²⁸

The difference between the data corresponding to the province of Buenos Aires and the rest of the country is clear. Buenos Aires accounted for 44% of the total number of students, even though the corresponding percentage of the funding, leaving aside extraordinary expenses, reached almost 59% of the assigned items. Tables 2 and 3 show the differences between Buenos Aires and the rest of the country.

An accelerated transition towards new objectives

After the resignation of Onésimo Leguizamón and the brief interregnum of José María Gutiérrez, Miguel Goyena – a conservative Catholic – occupied the position during the transitional stage between the presidencies of Nicolás Avellaneda and Julio Argentino Roca.²⁹ During their terms of office, the negative results of successive years of cuts and low budgets were evident. They would be the point from which Argentine education would change the orientation of its policies.

In the report presented in 1879 regarding the previous year, the minister stated in the “Public Instruction” section that:

In this sector of the Administration of which I am in charge, the action of the Ministry has been one of constant activity. The progressive movement has not been stopped and, however, I must again call attention to this fact: from 1,600,000 *Pesos fuertes* to which the Public Instruction budget was raised in 1875, it has fallen to 848,000 voted for the current year.³⁰

²⁸Pablo Pineau, *La escolarización de la provincia de Buenos Aires (1875–1930): una versión posible* (Buenos Aires: OPCBC, 1997).

²⁹Nicolás Avellaneda and Julio Argentino Roca were two of the main representatives of the landowning elite that achieved state control after the crisis of 1873. Supporters of an extreme commercial trade liberalisation, they promoted links between Argentina and the British Empire in which the first one sold commodities becoming practically a semi-colony. Avellaneda and Roca formed the *Partido Autonomista Nacional* (PAN) – an alliance between the Buenos Aires autonomy group and the liberals in the rest of the Argentinean provinces – that allowed this party to gain control of the state until the first decade of the twentieth century.

³⁰*Memoria del departamento de Justicia, Culto é Instrucción pública correspondiente al año de 1878 presentada al honorable Congreso de la Nación en sus sesiones del año 1879* (Buenos Aires: Imprenta El Nacional, 1879), VIII.

The policy of creating *Colegios Nacionales* stopped abruptly and only the ones in La Rioja city (1871) and Rosario city (1874) were open during the period 1870 to 1886. The opening of normal schools was also modest.³¹ She explains the differences between the *Colegio Nacional* and normal school regarding the concept of citizenship. The *Colegio Nacional* was a secondary school destined for a reduced group of the population that would become part of the cultural elite that was going to control the state. The normal schools, which were also secondary schools, sought to form a great mass of teachers that would transmit, through elementary education, the concept of citizenship that would shape the future child generations. In 1878 only three normal schools were created (two in the province of Mendoza and one in the province of Catamarca), and two schools training women teachers in 1879 (one in Rosario and one in San Juan).³² The total expense of the budget destined for these schools was \$fts. 321,697.27 in 1876; in 1877 it dropped to \$fts. 281,319.97, and in 1878 it descended again to \$fts. 254,468.15. These numbers relate to the 14 normal schools, one in each province, plus the elementary schools that depended on the *Colegios Nacionales*, and the budget was destined to fund buildings, furniture, schools supplies and professors. These figures show a constant decline in the budget directed to the training of new teachers.

As a reference point, the Normal School of Buenos Aires, the Normal School of Uruguay³³ – both among the most important in the country – and the Normal School of Jujuy³⁴ received the lowest budget destined for normal schools between 1876 and 1878. In the first case, contrary to the national trend, the budget increased constantly. The Normal School of Buenos Aires went from receiving \$fts. 27,333.98 in 1876 to \$fts. 33,548.10 in 1878. The item that grew most was the one destined for “Teachers’ Salaries”, which corresponded to 95.73% of the budget in 1876; 97.68% in 1877 and 92.67% in 1878.

In the case of the Normal School of Uruguay, the budget declined sharply from \$fts. 29,211.53 in 1876 to \$fts. 17,657.32 in 1877, recovering slightly in 1878 with a budget of \$fts. 18,657.24. The percentage destined for “Teachers’ Salaries” was equivalent to 98.73% in 1876; 94.15% in 1877 and 98.14% in 1878, leaving a limited margin for any other type of expenses.

In the case of the Normal School of Jujuy, it received almost \$fts. 34,206.19 in the three years (a little more than the Normal School of Buenos Aires received in 1878). The budget of nearly \$fts. 7422.29 in 1876 was raised in 1877 reaching \$fts. 17,524.50 and descending again to \$fts. 9259.40 in 1878. Despite the rise, the percentage destined for building and school supplies was not maintained. It was reduced to make way for other expenses that were considered a priority such as salaries. Thus, the percentage decreased from 2.27% in 1876, to 1.92% and almost 0.43% in 1878.³⁵

In the same way, the report announces the emergence of new elementary schools for both sexes. The decline in the budget, meanwhile, did not accompany the need to promote

³¹Mariadel Carmen Fernández, “Colegio Nacional y Escuela Normal: la constitución de una identidad ciudadana diferenciada,” in *Anuario de la SAHE N°3* (Buenos Aires: CaRol-Go, 2000/2001).

³²The data provided by the state’s report, *Memoria*, show that the Normal School of Teachers of elementary institutions in the province of Tucumán, created in 1875, began activity on 3 March 1876. The one in Mendoza was founded using the same scheme as that in Tucumán and began its activity on 20 March 1879

³³The Normal School of Uruguay was opened in 1873 in Concepción del Uruguay, province of Entre Ríos, Argentina. The province of Entre Ríos was, at the time, one of the richest provinces in the country. However, Buenos Aires was, by far, the richest.

³⁴The province of Jujuy is located in the north of Argentina. It is one of the poorest provinces in the country.

³⁵*Memoria* (1879). We performed the extraction of the necessary data to illustrate this presentation.

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an educational policy after five years of regression. In the report, the minister called the attention of the Honourable Congress to this point without posing any solutions; he limited his comments to pointing out the problem and stating the need to “think of its total re-establishment for the next year”.³⁶ As regards professors, the *Memoria* indicated:

5 They earn just what is necessary for the necessities of life ... It must be added that the little
regularity in the method of payment makes their lives really desperate ... I have done everything
to solve this, repeatedly negotiating with the Treasury the regular payment of monthly salaries
in all the Provinces. I have partly reached it, and I think that in the future a modest number
of employees will be able to have the certainty of receiving the salary accorded by law at the
10 beginning of each month ...³⁷

The economic crisis had a deep impact on national educational policy, which not only led
to a cut in the budget and a slowdown of the former policies during the first half of the
1870s, but also to a productive reorientation intended for education, which imposed new
programmes. The new recovery cycle that started the next decade stabilised this process
and laid the foundations for the educational system that would prevail until at least the end
15 of the twentieth century.

Conclusion

The complex political and economic process in national development that has been briefly
described in this article is related to the link between the Argentinean market and the
20 international market, the impact of the economic crisis of 1873 in Argentina, and its effects
on national policy, but particularly on educational policy.

Once linked to the international market, Argentina was interwoven with a double game.
On one side, the enrichment of the social class that possessed the resources the world market
demanded. On the other, the economic prejudices produced by the changes that were
25 introduced as a result of the various crises the system suffered. The Argentinean landowning
oligarchy sought the benefits of entering the international market, but was not willing to
afford its costs (mainly represented by the international debt). The 1873 crisis impacted on
the country as a product of the already ongoing British imperialism. The control of the state
reached by such a social group allowed them to maintain links with British capital stock,
30 acquiring debts for the productive development of this sector, and using the power of the
police for political centralisation and control of the labour market.

With Nicolás Avellaneda in the presidency, the elites of the provinces, in an alliance
with some sectors of the Buenos Aires autonomist group, strengthened their position for
control of the state. It is no coincidence that both Avellaneda and the bureaucratic staff of his
35 administration were the guarantors of the loan payments with the condition of maintaining
their diplomatic and commercial links with Great Britain.

The statistics tables, data and reports highlighted here show that the collateral effects of
the crisis implied a diminution of the budget in the educational area, and a “cooling” and
even a regression in educational policy. The contradiction in the process is reflected in the
40 fact that Avellaneda himself had prompted these policies while minister during Domingo F.
Sarmiento’s government. The number of mining and technical schools and popular libraries

³⁶*Memoria* (1879), IX.

³⁷*Ibid.*, IX.

was reduced. The number of schools built and the incorporation of students slowed down in comparison with previous years. The reports of the ministries demonstrated that the new era was not as prosperous as the last years of the previous presidency.

5 The most immediate consequence, after the budget cuts in education because of payment of the external debt, could be seen in the closure of technical schools and agronomic schools. These measures left the door open for a future and definitive reform of educational programmes, leading to a civic humanistic reorientation of education.³⁸ Proposed in the early years of the 1970s, this thesis challenged those coming from the Philosophy of Education field, and it was reproduced subsequently by many historians and education scientists without further analysis.
10 We intend to enlarge this point of view by demonstrating that such educational design indeed had a “productive interest” alongside its political one, and also that its development was a straight outcome of the national and international economic context.

The data show the restraint suffered in education and highlight other causes of such phenomena. According to the 1869 Census,³⁹ there were 469,000 children of school age (from 15 six to 15 years). Of these, only 82,689 or 17.63% were in the school system. In 1876, the child 15 population grew to almost 577,000 children in that age group, of whom only 107,649 or 18.65% were educated, according to the national registers. In seven years, national education incorporated almost the equivalent of 1% of the child population into the school system.

20 The agronomic schools of Salta, Tucumán and Mendoza languished until they disappeared. The one in Santiago del Estero never materialised. That is how the “6 June 1876 Congress law, with the previous consent of the Executive Power, suppressed the Schools of Salta and Tucumán”.⁴⁰ The same report explained this decision because of the ignorance of the popular masses, the aristocratic traditions, the protection of professions such as law and 25 medicine as the most prestigious, the lack of agronomic directors, or the fact that agronomic schools were not founded in the most suitable areas to fulfil the task.

This decline would allow future changes in the curricula, more linked with the founda-
tion of “citizenship”, an equalising element for locals, immigrants, the poor, the illiterate, etc. However, we understand that the concept of “citizenship construction” hides a double
30 logic. First, the new proposal gave way with Sarmiento’s idea, which imitated the North American development, a model that did not correspond with the local scenario. The new generations should be formed in other productive techniques, not so technically specialised, which cheapened the cost of labour. On the other side, civic-humanistic education shaped a “docile” labour market and hid, behind the concept of “citizenship” or later “Argentinity”, the differences of class.

³⁸The crisis had a deep impact on national education, and its first consequence was followed by one on a larger scale: the reorientation of the whole education system towards a civic humanistic approach. This aspect has been analysed by various authors, starting with Juan Carlos Tedesco (2009), but none of them could fully explain this drastic change. From our perspective, this phenomenon can only be explained if the economic and productive vicissitudes of the national state are taken into account. Thus, this general reorientation can be explained in light of the numerous cutbacks in scientific and technical development. It is not our intention to deny the political nature of this decision, or its continuity with the Argentinian aristocratic tradition in education. However, we find that in order to understand this process in all its complexity, it is absolutely necessary to read it against the deep economic changes that were taking place in the country. Tedesco posits in *Educación y Sociedad en la Argentina (1880–1954)* that “leading groups ascribed a political function to education and not an economic one; since the economic changes occurred during that period didn’t carry the need to resort to training human resources locally, the structure of the educative system was changed only in those aspects likely to have political interest, and due to that same political interest”. Juan Carlos Tedesco, *Educación y sociedad en la Argentina (1880–1945)* (Buenos Aires: Siglo XXI, 2009), 36.

³⁹Data obtained from the National Census of 1869. National Index of Statistics and Census, Archivo General de la Nación, Buenos Aires.

⁴⁰*Memoria* (1879), 199.

Two novelties emerge from the present analysis. On one side, one aspect has been frequently left aside by most authors of educational history: the impact of the international economic crisis of 1873. The dialectic of the process is presented in the fact that the optimal way out of the crisis accelerated the elements that had generated it. The world economic crisis forced the landowning class that directed the state to pay the external debt, deepening its links with imperialism. On the other side, as we have seen, the budget cutbacks to the educational area prevented the development of scientific technical education and slowed down the inclusion of children in the educational system. As a result, there was a change to an educational policy linked to humanism.

It is clear, from our perspective, that education played a strong economic role, evidenced not only by the facts that determined its path, but also by its orientation regarding the labour market. The deficiency in the training of technicians, scientists and skilled labour education became one of the unfinished tasks of the Argentine bourgeoisie.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

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Oscar Daniel Duarte was born in Concepción del Uruguay, Entre Ríos, Argentina on 6 May 1979. He has a PhD in history from the Universidad de Buenos Aires where he is a professor, as well as at the Universidad Pedagógica (UNIPE). He also works as an investigator with a grant from the Consejo Nacional de Investigaciones Científicas y Técnicas (CONICET). He has published numerous articles in national and international journals specialised in educational history, and he has also published various books as co-author on diverse topics of general history and educational history.