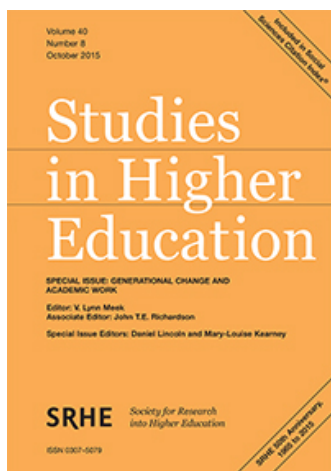


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Generational change in the Argentine academic profession through the analysis of ‘life courses’

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The aim of this article is to analyze the effects of the socio-political processes on the academic profession in Argentina from the life course perspective. The analysis of differences in the individuals’ life course was made by dividing them into three groups, representing different generations of academics: the novel, the intermediate, and the consolidated. It is possible to link the way in which those groups have delineated their careers to key historical periods of the country. The assumption of the authors is that each generational group has delineated its academic life course under the performativity of university policies during different socio-political moments, building networks of relationships and life paths through elections, in the context of opportunities and obligations imposed by history and social circumstances. This article draws on research data from two projects: The Changing Academic Profession Project (henceforth CAP), based on a structured questionnaire answered by a probabilistic sampling of Argentine university professors in activity, and a qualitative study based on 80 in-depth interviews to academics on key topics that emerged from CAP study.

Keywords: age groups; CAP study; life course perspective; networks of relationships

Introduction

The study of the current conditions shaping academics’ professional careers in Argentina can be made from several approaches. From a structural point of view of the organization of the academic work (Clark 2008a), the academic ranking structure is based on a hierarchical scale. Teaching positions in the university system are classified according to this scale; therefore, candidates must satisfy requirements in order to gain access to the university teaching staff. However, access requirements and mobility in the academic career are also determined by a set of social conditions (family and academic cultural capital) (Bourdieu 2008), institutional regulations (formal and informal mechanisms of access and development) as well as those concerning regulations of each disciplinary field.

In addition, the analysis of academic trajectories (Dowd and Kaplan 2005; Light et al. 1990; Padilla González 2007) leads us to consider those aspects that influence on the definition of the academic career and accounts for the articulation between individual conditions and possible paths that define and shape institutions (Clark 2008b).

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In addition, the academic profession, in this framework, is a dynamic phenomenon subjected to its own transformations; as a result, conditions, expectations, ideal trajectories, and demands undergo changes over the course of time.

This article assumes that multiple factors, such as the socio-historical context as well as the agency of individuals, among others, are significant in order to understand those transformations. Therefore, we analyze how different generational groups of academics in Argentina have designed their academic trajectories under the performative university policies, building networks of relationships, and life paths through choices in contexts of opportunities and obligations imposed by recent history and social circumstances. Specifically, we want to know why different generational groups of academics respond in distinct ways to the current regulations stated in the last two decades in Argentina.

The academic profession in Argentina: key points of recent history

The Argentine higher education system manifests a highly complex historical evolution characterized by the absence of long-term agreed policies, as a consequence of periods of interventions and depletions of the University by the political power and others of splendor and growth. In this framework, higher education had a relatively sustained development during the twentieth century, with the University Reform of 1918 having an important effect, a time in which the concept of autonomy was set as the distinguishing seal.

In this context, the Argentine academic profession belatedly began to take shape toward the middle of the twentieth century. Intra- and inter-institutional heterogeneity, successive institutional disruptions and political interventions in university life plus the unplanned expansion of the teaching body as a product of the expansion of the enrollment appeared as the principal features of our academic profession¹ (Marquina and Fernandez Lamarra 2008).

The period 1955–1960 constituted a stage of highly significant qualitative growth that had a profound impact on what could be considered, at that time, a clearly identifiable academic profession. It was a time notable for scientific and academic advances, whereby the academic profession clearly advanced toward a strong identity in terms of its disciplinary relevance more than the merely institutional.

The growth of the teaching body in Argentine universities accompanied the explosion in enrollment, and moreover remained constant even in times during the military dictatorship (1976–1993) when the number of students was reduced. The decade 1983–1992 showed a doubling of the total, although part-time faculty continued in the majority (Marquina and Fernandez Lamarra 2008).

The government which took office in 1989 designed and implemented a political agenda for the sector which was clearly set within the international trends of the era, placing emphasis on the efficiency of the institutional administration and improvement in educational quality. Accountability, evaluation, privatization, and institutional differentiation were the main topics of the government agenda. These policies have modified the faculty work, their socialization mechanisms and their practices. Thus, a ‘type’ of academic begins to take form (Fernández Lamarra and Marquina 2012), characterized for having a high level of graduate education and the requirement of developing teaching and research duties. Within this framework, academic activity begins to be evaluated according to global standards of productivity in research with different incentives and regulations being introduced which begin to form themselves into an academic work model that until that time was limited to certain specific disciplines.

Theoretical approaches: the academic profession from the life course perspective

Influence of global reforms of higher education on the academic profession brought about a number of studies focusing on the way this reformation process has affected the way academic careers are constructed, and has imposed new parameters for the definition of academic career trajectories. Consequently, a large number of studies have considered academic life stages, professors' professional life cycles, socio-biographic factors, and strategies influencing academics' professional trajectories (Albero, Lameul, and Loisy 2013; Cummings 2009; Dowd and Kaplan 2005; Hake, Kamp, and Slagter 2002). The aforementioned studies are multidisciplinary because they are based on different theories. They became not only more complex but also more specific, depending on the nature of academic work (Clarke, Hyde, and Drennan 2013). Approaches that focus analysis on the academic career trajectory follow the theoretical presupposition that the academic profession is built on the basis of *progressive institutional stages*. As the academic advances through the professional ranks, their promotion is linked to the performance of certain roles that grow in complexity and contribute to the prestige of one's career (Finkelstein, Seal, and Schuster 2008). This approach is based on the theory of group socialization, which considers the professional role and the existence of a professional ethos in which competitiveness, merit, and recognition constitute the structuring values in the labor field (Caradec 1998). The passage from one hierarchy to another can only take place when certain conditions are fulfilled including required competencies for promotion. In general, studies based on this approach are devoted to the analysis of political and organizational factors regulating academic work (Light, Mariden, and Corl 1990), and the working position may not vary from context to context. Strategies applied by scholars, to make progress in their careers, are also mentioned in these investigations.

Another group of studies has worked under the light of the *academic trajectories* approach. This perspective emphasizes analysis of academics' strategic actions to design their professional trajectory. It concentrates on the use of different kinds of material and symbolic capital, in the framework of certain organizational and social conditions. This research line has shown that academics are active and involved in building their professional trajectory. Consideration is also given to the influence of certain extra-academic aspects, such as the gender and social position of the academic (García Salord 2001). Academic aspects are also worth considering, for example, academic qualifications, knowledge and expertise, and academic recognition in the discipline.

The Life Course approach, as a comprehensive perspective that takes aspects of the aforementioned perspectives and as a tool for analyzing the academic profession has gained ground during the last decade (Keep and Brown 2005; Shaw 2005; Slowey and Watson 2003). This perspective is the outcome of researchers' concern for biographic methods, narrative investigation, and the recovery of academics as political subjects capable of modifying global processes of change and their re-signification (Lalivie D'Épinay et al. 2005; Macmillan 2005). One of the main researchers of this perspective, G.H. Elder (1998, 961–969), states four essential principles backing up the life course perspective that can be applied to this study.

1. Historical events occurring in the course of times along with the experience gained make academics' life story. That is why historical times and social

- processes shape biographic and academic trajectories. Shaw (2008) holds that a professional trajectory deals with the career's general process pursued by academics within a society or a historical time throughout their professional lives. An academic career is not universal. Variations in its nature arise according to trajectories of typical careers connected to historical times and social forces influencing universities of different societies (Currie and Thiele 2001).
2. Academic trajectories take place over the course of a lifetime. It is in this time during which there is alternation between stability and change and between identity and transformation. All these aspects intersect with biographical and socio-professional factors that bring about different transitional types (García Salord 2001; Grenier 2012). The impact made on the development of a professional career, after a number of transitions or events, is different according to the time of its occurrence during the individual's life course (Glastra et al. 2001). A large number of studies provide evidence as to how events (access to postgraduate studies, motherhood, and women's family care) mark certain transitions in the first stages of the career. All these factors have a strong influence on the career, particularly on the way a professional career is managed (Viloria Hernández and Galaz Fontes 2008).
 3. Professional development and identity as an academic professional are the result of interaction and social interdependence that make up a network of shared relationships (Finkelstein 2010). They take place in the framework of institutional processes of the academic and scientific fields. They also undergo socio-historic influence that shapes ecological environments in which everyday and professional life is led.
 4. Academics build their own life trajectories through their choices and actions taken within the opportunities and obligations offered by history and social conditions. The agency of individuals supports academic trajectories (Carvalho and Santiago 2010). Their actions and choices articulate with the demands made from institutional transitions connected to general norms that have arisen from the social and scientific fields. These demands produce changes as far as status and academic roles.

Shaw (2005, 333) holds that the academic career, considered from the life course perspective, is a socio-genetic process. It is the outcome of the inter-play between the academic as an individual subject and the university as representative of the scientific field. It functions as a systemic force within a historical time and social space. Neale and White (2012) point out that the concept of life course is useful for understanding not only academic career trajectories but also how changes in higher education affect the nature and design of careers as well as professional trajectories.

Even if the perspective of life courses identifies unique ways in combining all the factors already mentioned, we consider that it is possible to identify groups of life courses with common characteristics, especially given by different historical periods. In this sense, the concept of generation can be a key organizer of those groups.

In Manheim's theory (1993), generation refers to a group of individuals characterized by a socio-historic conscience or a collective identity that bestows on them a significant character as a group and exerts influence on their attitudes and behaviors. This perspective shows the influence of a generation on ideological definitions concerning universities, their involvement, and academic fields. Therefore, university studies, from the perspective of the sociology of culture or the history of ideas, back up this

analysis in order to explain, for example, the influence of May 1968 in France and the 1918 University Reform in Córdoba (Argentina) on the ways academic work is defined.

Different authors, among them Landesman (1997), consider that generations are internally joined through their academic story, though they may differ as to their university positions and roles. This academics' generation approach leads to an understanding of social change that redefines nature, functions, and ways of building a professional academic career.²

The relational meaning of generation allows for the articulation of the four structuring principles of the life course approach. It is a suitable conceptual tool for understanding socio-historic transformations of the academic profession in a specific political–institutional context. Analysis among generations can also explain demands of identity transformation undergone by academics in the course of their professional life (Weinrib and Jones 2012). It also accounts for tensions arising between socialization processes and initiation in academic life, and those brought about by organizational changes produced by university policies and global reformation trends in higher education.

Methods

The aim of this work is to analyze from the life course perspective the effects of the socio-political processes on the academic profession in Argentina. In order to achieve our purpose, we apply the concept of generation as a tool to classify main groups of life courses. The said tool can account for chronological, historical, and social time periods; it can also function as the framework for defining the academic profession and its development under collective and individual ways.

Our analysis draws on research data derived from two fieldworks: The Changing Academic Profession Project (henceforth CAP),³ – based on a structured questionnaire answered by a probabilistic sampling of Argentine university professors⁴ in activity ($n = 826$), and a qualitative study based on 80 in-depth interviews with academics on key topics that emerged from CAP study.⁵

The analysis of possible differences in the individuals' life course was made by dividing them into three groups representing different generations of academics. These groups coincided with key historical periods of our country. The generational group called 'consolidated' started their academic career as well as their professional socialization during the period of splendor of Argentine universities, (i.e. in the 1960s); this period lasted until the 1976 *coup d'état*. The second generational group, called 'intermediate', started their professional career at the beginning of the military dictatorship and state terrorism that deeply affected university life until the end of the 1980s. This included the first government of democratic transition that meant a growth of student enrollment, and consequently, the increase of the teaching staff. Finally, the 'novel' generational group initiated the academic career during the period of strong neoliberal modernization of the Argentine university. This period also includes the 2001 deep economic crisis up to the present time.

The hypothesis for this analysis states that each generational group has delineated its life course under the light of performative university policies during different socio-political moments, building networks of relationships and life paths through elections in the context of opportunities and obligations imposed by history and social circumstances.

Characterization of academic life courses was carried out by taking into account the aforementioned four principles of life course approach: (1) Historical events and social

processes; (2) transitions or events of the academic career; (3) interaction and social interdependence; and (4) strategic actions and choices of the individuals within the opportunities and obligations offered by history and social conditions. In addition, subjective aspects of the interviewed individuals are identified, such as mood, satisfaction, and concerns, which in turn are effects of context and are the basis on which they shape their actions and build their respective paths.

Academic life courses according to generations

This section deals with findings of the fieldwork, which are organized according to the three generational groups mentioned. We characterize the different life courses based on the common elements that emerged from the responses, which were ordered according to the four principles described above. We recognize that within each group, it would be possible to identify specific life courses, given determinants of the discipline or the institution. While these aspects are studied, due to space, they are not the subject of this paper.⁶

The life courses of 'consolidated' academics

... I have in mind primarily the classes, which are the moments that I owe to students; hours of consultation, where we are always available, though students do not come ... and also the moments of the internal discussion in the 'chair', once a week, to analyse, to evaluate, to see how we are going on, to see what we are going to change; and then come the moment for research; ... what happens is that the time devoted to research is subject to hours of teaching. We try to balance teaching with research, but it is not always possible; often people spend more time with the activities of teaching and many take research home, which I find unbelievable.⁷

This group entered into the profession at the time of greatest splendor of the history of Argentine university. Just then, it was possible to recognize in Argentina an academic profession, based on research, teaching, and services. Until then, the university had been primarily a site of vocational training, with part-time teachers devoted to train professionals. This process took place in the context of a society based on economic development, where science and technology were considered the engine of modernization. While that purpose for universities of training professionals continued, it is in the 1960s when the number of full-time positions increased; research centers were formed and there was a growing national concern about scientific progress in the framework of a national development plan. In this context, the first generation of professors emerged. It was made up by those who could be called founding professors, inheritors of an old tradition of teaching practice by 'being under the guidance of a master teacher for a certain time, as assistants and apprentices'. Results of our study show that this generation comes from homes where parents have mainly primary education as maximum educational level attained, and they constitute the first generation with a university degree.

The said professors generally consider that working in the university gave them symbolic prestige. Most of them have devoted more than 30 years to teaching and researching. These professors began their academic careers before getting their undergraduate degree, and postponed the achievement of their doctor's degree; it was probably at a time and under labor conditions in which the doctoral degree was not required;

it was rather the ‘coronation’ of a career. The lack of this advanced degree is not a problem for this group. Nowadays, this group occupies the highest ranks in academic positions. They perceive to have had more freedom than other generations to choose their research topics, and they have advanced in the academic career without any financial aid such as scholarships. They claim to prefer teaching above all, showing this option as a vocation or responsibility; this is also clearly seen in the number of hours dedicated to this activity. Their production profiles are more learned, and more concerned with the search of knowledge for the sake of knowing. Regarding the impact of new policies at work, testimonies show a concern for the tense loyalty created between research and teaching, and pressures exerted by bureaucratic regulations concerning new conditions of performance.

This generation conceives the academic work in a more collegial manner, and gives much value to networks and collaborative work. The highest position of the ‘chair’ appears for them to be the most valued level for academic work. They also consider institutional governance involvement as a key part of their tasks. They know the functioning of institutions, and they also know how to manage them on the basis of real and formal power. They value collegial decision-making; moreover, they are aware of how to exert influence on colleagues. The life courses of this generational group show more satisfaction with academic work than the others, though they believe that in recent times, working conditions have deteriorated, particularly with regard to salary. They miss the academic life of the past, freer, and comprised by the attainment of new knowledge and training future generations of scholars, as the main purpose of academic work. However, they accept the new realities of their working conditions trying to uphold the principles that always guided their careers until they retire.

The life courses of ‘intermediate’ academics

I imagine having a PhD and I intend to establish myself in teaching. I figure working more comfortably, because the academic work that includes teaching and research demands a more comfortable infrastructure. And, of course, I can see myself at the top position within the chair. That is the main reason why I am joining a doctoral programme; it is the engine that makes me say, ‘I need to have a PhD to defend my position in the future, either this or another senior position’ ... When it comes to defending your position you have to have a graduate degree. That’s why I am motivated to finish, with all the sacrifice.⁸

The academic life courses of this generational group show an engagement in academic activity for nearly two decades since they entered the university, during the great enrollment expansion of the 1980s. The professional socialization of the intermediate generation took place under the recovery of the university as a democratic and critical space, after the damage produced by university policies of the dictatorship (expulsion of teachers, disruption of teacher selection processes, ideological control, etc.). Academically socialized in scientific disciplines and isolated research practices, teachers of this generation began their academic careers at a new stage of democratic opening that forced them to learn new rules of the academic game. During the 1990s, they had to face another professional re-socialization process to adjust their work to the demands of the neoliberal model. The changes have been dramatic and they have been the most affected by the application of the new regulations. Nevertheless, this group has redoubled their efforts to fulfill new funding research requirements, linked to the

accountability of academic performance. Our study reveals that this generation comes from homes whose parent educational levels are higher than those of the previous group, mostly with parents with secondary studies completed.

They learned their teaching practice in a nonsystematic way, under the guidance or advice of more experienced professors. These individuals started their career about a year before graduating, and the ones with graduate degrees received their doctorate's or master's almost a decade after they started working for their universities. They felt pressured to attain a postgraduate degree in order to fulfill the new regulations. They have had greater difficulties rising in the ranks to higher positions than the consolidated academics. While attaining promotion was always difficult, the difference of today is that they not only have to deal with the more established academics who hold senior positions but also with younger academics who are already trained under a more competitive academic model and obtained doctorates earlier.

Academics of the intermediate generation are concerned about changes in the rules of the academic work. They think that they should incorporate those new rules to stay updated and able to continue to pursue their academic career. The increasing managerialism that makes their work more bureaucratic represents an additional burden to them, especially because the new time devoted to management reduces the time for research. Evaluation processes of academic work appear as a recurring theme in the interviews. They feel that they are not enough prepared and specialized toward their promotion, especially by the lack of scholarships and resources that enable them to obtain higher degrees or academic backgrounds.

The preferences of intermediate academics are balanced between teaching and researching, though they show a tendency to prefer the latter activity. This is confirmed when considering the hours devoted to both activities. They share with their seniors an amount of time devoted to management and university governance, but they are not as concerned with service activities as the older generation. They show themselves active, thinking about professional growth; they value teamwork despite complaining of having to take over the coordination tasks that consolidated teachers are leaving for them. Supporting teaching function is expressed as a responsibility, but at the same time, the pressure for research places them at a crossroads. They have come to resolve this tension through teamwork. They regret themselves not having planned better their careers as studying abroad, or becoming more international, or having obtained the graduate degree earlier. They feel the importance of institutional involvement, although they warn that there are irresolvable conflicts and tensions working at that level. They are critical of the existence of privileges and arbitrariness in institutional decision-making, but also recognize that they have freedom to research. Unlike younger academics, intermediate academics are ready to attain positions from which they exercise power. They feel responsible for maintaining the full spirit of academic activity and, to some extent, of the university.

The life courses of 'novel' academics

The basic objective is to write articles because you have more advantages writing an article for a journal than a book, because articles are generally refereed... What you have to do is to read, going to conferences, presenting papers and publishing them. At first I knew that I wanted to work in this... I have learned from people who were more advanced in this activity and I was told that the first thing to do was to get an 'adscripción',⁹ (...) What defines my work is the goal. At first, the goal was to win

the doctoral scholarship; to win the scholarship I had to meet a certain standard. When I was a doctoral student, I wanted to win the post-doctoral fellowship and I had to publish and get the PhD. To obtain the PhD you have to fulfill a number of credits obtained by attending seminars and doing the thesis, so I focused on that. I do not mean that someone was hitting me with a stick if I did not read an article on a particular day, but my goal was to keep winning these scholarships, to keep 'eating' once the doctoral scholarship was over. When I won the post-doctoral fellowship, my goal was to enter the career of researcher and now my goal is to level up in the CONICET.¹⁰

I finish doing things, but sometimes all those things together generates me a very distressing situation. ... Be evaluated by productivity stresses me, and sometimes loneliness of academic work distresses me as well. Competition produces stress me when I see people of my generation with whom I grew up, trampling heads for obtaining a post for a course, for publishing or for more benefits. I think we are in a logic that we cannot even explain.¹¹

This generation represents the last promotion of teachers who have begun their careers at the beginning of the twenty-first century. The novel generation coincides with the institutionalization of global standardization processes. The reform of higher education, implemented since the mid-1990s with processes of auditing and accreditation of academic trajectories, introduced a disruptive logic of the existing reformist¹² tradition so far. They are mostly young people whose profiles are quite satisfactory for current policies; their conception of academia is a worthy and competitive alternative in the academic labor market. They started their careers under highly competitive conditions, once the new rules of the 1990s reform were established. Our study reveals that this group comes from homes whose parents, as well as their spouses, have a high educational level, above secondary school studies.

They are people who are well aware that one of the expectations for current higher education careers is the possession of a graduate degree, mainly a PhD, which they generally achieve in less than five years after their first degree. They begin their careers soon after graduating, they take their master's degree in around three years, and they obtain the doctorate's degree before seven years after graduation of their first degree. For young people, access to a graduate program immediately after completion of the undergraduate degree is essential for progress toward a positive future in the academic career.

In spite of their efforts, most of them compete for the lower positions in the rank scale. Formal entry into teaching positions at the university has proven to be difficult for younger academics. This group has reported better success in entering the university environment through a research pathway supported by national or provincial grant programs, for example, the National Council of Scientific and Technological Research (CONICET). Pursuing the research pathway into academia starts with obtaining scholarships for doctoral training and continues with postdoctoral fellowships, and later with the very competitive admission to the career of researcher. Additionally, as a complement, most of the young academics interviewed commented that they only received a teaching assistant part-time position at the university, or an *ad honorem* position, just for doing teaching, a very weak stimulus. Thus, they complete their income to an amount equivalent to a full time position. This is indeed a very unstable situation that consists of the doctoral scholarship and of a part-time post for teaching; the first one, funded by the national or provincial system of S & T, and the other supported by the university. Young interviewed academics emphasized the difficulty in access to full-time positions at the university; in most cases, those who got one was at the cost of poor working conditions. Young people recognize that during the doctoral

training, they received intensive guidance of their director; however, they remarked that they have not had the possibility to select their own research topic. They are the least satisfied with their jobs, since they are very much concerned with the accountability of their academic production by means of reports.

Their contribution to institutional involvement, management, and services is not important. The responses of the interviewed show a feeling of little influence on decisions at different levels of the institution. This feeling may be related to the fact that they spend little time in the institution or because they feel high instability in their positions. In addition, young academics are the ones who work to a lesser extent in collaboration with peers in their research projects. They are the ones less connected with colleagues in other institutions, locally or abroad. Indeed, from their statements emerge a sense of loneliness and perceptions of a very competitive career, without cooperation and with lack of opportunities to discuss. However, as the advantages of the activity, the young people interviewed recognized the autonomy and non-routine work.

These scholars show a remarkable preference to research, a clear difference with their senior colleagues. The content of the statements of the interviewees referred mainly to their research activity. In this regard, they remark the importance of producing, complying with administrative guidelines and adapting to these rules. The teaching activity appears as a supplement to a research career. Young scholars highlight the importance of having the academic guidance of a director and the ability to choose strategically who would be this mentor. The testimonies show rapid acquisition of the main formal and informal tools to advance in academic careers such as readings for updating teaching methodologies, to have expertise in literature searches, presenting papers at conferences, to have academic stays abroad, to access to funds or grants, among other things. In relation to the other two groups, they are the ones who feel less satisfied with their work and who believe that their work is a source of personal stress. Pressures undergone by academics are generally due to the difficulties to comply with deadlines, the scholarship applications, administrative requirements, the lack of resources, difficulties to get a better position and lack of stability.

Discussion and conclusion

The collected data provide evidence of the profound changes that the academic profession in Argentina has experienced in recent decades. The comparative analysis between different generations of scholars shows that key historical moments in the recent history of higher education have performed the identity, work, and principles that structure career trajectories of academics.

Indeed, the generation of consolidated teachers was socialized in a vision of a highly structured academic profession on the basis of teaching as a dominant activity. Career paths were mainly defined by the professorial career progression, hierarchically structured, in which promotion was achieved by changing roles in the academic task. The institutionalization of a national scientific system enhanced the scientific activity in universities. However, research complemented the teaching function contributing to the professional development. The 'chair' as organizational structure of the academic work condensed teaching and research, based on the same hierarchical structure. The down-regulation of scientific work contributed to the maintenance of the organizational structure and was the guarantee of a certain degree of academic freedom.

The professional socialization of the intermediate generation took place under the recovery of democracy, and the 1990s reforms in education, when they had to adjust their work to the demands of the neoliberal model. Currently, the intermediate generation is beginning to occupy positions of power in the universities, but this professional transition keeps on having to appropriate the symbols and resources that ensure academic legitimacy in their career. Of the three generations compared, this is the one that more clearly shows how the historical forces imposed demands of professionalism and required the reconfiguration of the professional identity and the re-learning of the rules of academic work.

Finally, the expected trajectories of novel generation of academics gave greater importance to the research activity over teaching. The academic culture of this group is imbued with values such as productivity, competitiveness, internationalization, and incentive to the development of individual career paths. Early appropriation of resources and academic prestige symbols represented by obtaining the PhD and scholarships are not enough to ensure progress in the career. Thus, at the beginning of their academic trajectories, the novel generation has, nowadays, higher levels of formal qualifications than those obtained by their preceding generations. They also show a greater mastery of the rules established in the scientific field; nevertheless, they occupy a subordinate and precarious position in the organization of the academic work at the university. The competitive logic permeates the strategic actions of young academics in managing their careers, unlike the trajectories of older colleagues where the institutional dynamics and the internal logic of the 'chair' as the structure of the academic work had subordinated individual actions. For earlier generations, the relationship between novice and their mentors based on discipleship, in a relationship of empathy with the leader and consecration of the heirs by the latter. For this new generation, instead, the election of a director or tutor is a strategic process, which poses as a counterpart a relationship of subordination and adherence to the dictates of his/her boss. This type of relationship is perceived as a restriction on the margins of professional freedom of the younger scholars.

Our results show that the transformations coming from the university policies of the last two decades explain the reconfiguration of the academic work. The changes are generating strong intergenerational differences, which may be expressed as personal conflicts, which deserve to be studied further. One of the issues raised is the capacity possessed by the consolidated and intermediate generations to influence the academic socialization of the novel generation, especially regarding their contribution to improving the instability of the academic work of the younger group. Also, for ensuring in the future an integrated university model, where their different functions – mainly teaching and research – are complementary and not competitive. The distance of academic generations that highlight the data obtained shows that the academic profession in Argentina is destabilized by tensions between the university traditions, the organizational cultures of the institutions and the demands of current university policies. In the context of these tensions, each generation is forced to redefine their identity, adapting to the changing rules and using their different symbolic and material capitals in their chosen strategies. Therefore, the context opportunities and the biographical constraints define the unique paths through which academics shape their academic life courses.

The perspective of professional life courses that we used in this paper shows their potential for understanding the dynamics that define and organize the academic profession. This approach articulates different levels of analysis in a relational logic for analyzing the academic profession as a result of the confluence and concurrence of structural factors, specific historical processes, institutional logics, and human

agency. The identification of these factors in the characterization of each generational groups allowed us to identify ‘epochal answers’ to the university policies. The comparison between generations exposed the dynamic changes affecting academics in transit through different cycles of their careers. Finally, analysis of the practices of academics in each generation allowed us to document the changes in value systems and social ideals that reinforce the regulation of the academic field.

Disclosure statement

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Notes

1. The chair is the type of organization of academic work that predominates in Argentine universities, above all in the most traditional ones. Under this scheme, the faculty career is composed of a series of five positions organized hierarchically. Access to positions is decided by a mechanism termed ‘contest of work record and opposition’, in which the institution makes an open call for the occupation of a position and selection is made by a board of peer evaluators with positions of greater hierarchy. The duration of the position extends to six or seven years, at which time an open contest is called to fill the same post. The teaching contest gives to the teacher ‘regular’ status, or stability, for the duration of the position. This status implies that the teacher cannot be removed – except in extreme circumstances – and that s/he has acquired ‘university citizenship’, which allows her or him to choose and to be chosen in the different bodies or positions of university governance.
2. Landesmann (2001) considers that the generation concept constitutes an important space for the development of academic trajectories and identities. Professors belonging to the same generation are more likely to share academic itineraries and processes in the course of their careers. Thus, the main aspects include professional and scientific formation, initiation to the academic career, and processes of professional socialization according to their position (research, teaching or management); a further aspect is connected with ways of producing knowledge specific to the discipline at a certain historical time.
3. The CAP was an international project where more than twenty countries from different continents participated conducting a common survey during 2006–2010. After that work, the Argentine team initiated a qualitative research on the basis of the main findings of CAP, with the purpose of understanding reasons and rationales of the responses obtained from the survey. The qualitative study developed between 2011 and 2013, and based on in-depth, not structured interviews, which lasted nearly 2 hours each.
4. A total number of 100,000 teachers in 2008, when the survey was conducted.
5. On the basis of these two fieldworks, we have been studying the academic profession in Argentina from different perspectives, for example, by comparing ‘trajectories’ (Yuni and Marquina 2010). We have also focused on changes in different aspects of the profession such as the level of satisfaction (Marquina and Rebello 2012), the relation of teaching and research (Leal and Marquina 2013), and the transformations of the Argentine academic profession as an emerging country (Marquina and Ferreiro 2014). Evidence obtained from the qualitative fieldwork became more complex and rich data to our research, emerging more dimensions and levels of analysis that made us consider new and more comprehensive approaches, such as those proposed in this article.
6. Because of limitations of space, for each life course group, we have only selected one testimony that in our opinion is representative of each group.
7. Statement made by a female professor from the Humanities of a big traditional university.
8. Statement made by a female professor of the Applied Sciences’ field, of a big traditional university.
9. An *ad honorem* position for assisting the teaching activity.
10. Statement made by a male teacher assistant from the Humanities, working in a big, traditional university.

11. Statement made by a male teacher assistant from Social Sciences, working in a small-sized new university.
12. In the sense of the 1918 University Reform, based on university autonomy and co-governance of teachers, alumni and students.

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