

Intergenerational Educational Mobility and Identity: a French-Argentine Comparative Study

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Abstract

This study forms part of the author's longstanding research regarding social, educational and professional mobility observed in Argentina across three generations, associated with the factor of Education and with the greater flow of immigrants in the last century. This research encompasses various smaller studies. Here we mention one, a French-Argentine comparative study in which we worked with PhDs from different institutions and different social science PhD programs. Our objective was: a) to analyze what factors (quantitative) and what reasons (qualitative) positively and negatively impacted professional pathways (career mobility); b) to observe the level of educational mobility present in families with PhDs, taking the issue from different paradigms (reproductionist/interactionist): University of elites? University of the masses? The methodology was both quantitative and qualitative, using semi-structured surveys (which included open-ended statements so respondents could expand); the hierarchical evocation technique and interviews. Results: a) we observed the intergenerational educational mobility of PhDs (quantitative-descriptive level); b) we understood some of the "reasons" and "sense" that underlie said mobility and that have either acted as driving forces or have not acted as driving forces of social and cultural-educational promotion (qualitative level). c) We found similar levels of intergenerational educational mobility for PhDs in France and Argentina (graduates of various PhD programs). This result is interesting in the face of well-held myths of educational "hypo mobility", intergenerational drops in mobility, stagnation, a lack of educational/cultural promotion under "plafond" effects, or a saturation of degree holders, above all in developed countries. From the point of view of identity, this high level of intergenerational educational mobility impacted national, institutional and micro individual identity; three planes in sustained interaction using the author's theory: The Three Dimensional Spiral of Sense ((2015 a and b).

Keywords: Intergenerational educational mobility – University – Masses – Identity

Introduction

1. Theoretical Framework

1.1. Intergenerational Educational Mobility and Career Mobility

Our research on mobility reaches back decades to 1980. Within this framework, the study carried out with PhDs belongs to the last phase. Previously, numerous studies have been carried out on educational and professional pathways for different populations, namely university populations (graduates from different universities, individuals who either abandoned their studies or who prolonged their studies beyond that stipulated by their Study Programs, students, university professors, high school teachers, researchers and PhDs). We have also completed studies with university subjects in public and private workplaces (businesses, NGOs, etc.) so as to compare, among other aspects, profiles of achievement as they relate to conditioning factors.

One of these observed effects – besides Objective achievement, Subjective achievement, Socioeconomic level and Professional status – is Workplace insertion reached and promotions observed (Career mobility) (Aparicio, 2005, 2007 a and b).

However, previously, we worked on Intergenerational Mobility, both from the Educational/Cultural and Professional points of view. This topic is very important in Argentina, a country which received one of the most important "waves" of European immigrants in history as a consequence of war and a favorable economy – causing the country to be known as the "breadbasket of the world" or "the country to make America." In fact, around 1930, the country changed its economic, social

and cultural structure, becoming the fifth world power, in large part due to the arrival of immigrants and their accompanying work ethic (Germani, 1955; 1963; 1966; 1972; Aparicio, 1981; 1984^a, 1984 b, 1984 c, 1985, 1987, 1988, 1990^a, 1990 b, 1992, 1992/93; 1993).

In effect, the role of immigrants and their cultural ethos had a notable influence on this growth (Panettieri, 1966), as has been recognized in the national and international literature. Some arrived with an important work ethic but without economic means, many times fleeing from war. Nevertheless, moved by the *n-ach* (achievement needs) and a sense of struggle and effort, in just a short time they reached an important professional and, particularly, economic status (McClelland, 1961). In the second generation – the children of immigrants – many had already reached university level and with this, the immigrant dream came to fruition. “My son, the doctor” is a phrase that became immortalized by Argentine literature to describe parents’ most relevant aspiration: that their descendants would reach the highest level of academic instruction. This was made possible by the fact that Argentina was, and continues to be, a country open to different cultures, where neither discrimination nor racism exist. For this reason it is considered an example of positive acculturation. In addition to this, we add the fact that university has been free and open to everyone since its origins (it is important to note that the University of Cordoba was the first university in the Viceroyalty of La Plata after the conquest of America).

Nevertheless, and though this goes beyond our objective here, it is necessary to point out that said immigration and the corresponding abrupt growth did have effects on individuals, who were made to adapt to cultural change, with all that this implies, and to gradually overcome anomie (Aparicio, 1984d, 1985c, 1996a, 1996b, 1997, 2014) and the so-called “status inconsistency” (Ellis, 1952; Ellis & Kirbb, 1954; Jackson, 1962; Benoit-Smullyan, 1969; Heintz, 1965, 1970; Jackson & Curtis, 1972; Jackson, 1962; Jackson & Burke, 1965; Segal, 1967; Germani, 1955, 1963, 1965, 1972; Aparicio, 2001).

The author dedicated many years to studying Implicit Intergenerational Mobility and its impact on national growth and in 2000 began to study personal/professional mobility. In this line, she translates R. Boudon’s work, *L’inégalité des chances. La mobilité sociale dans les sociétés industrielles* (1973) into Spanish, published by Laia (Barcelona, 1983). At the same time, she completes a review of literature from the USA from the 1960s in which cultural mobility is considered a factor of social achievement, but also of national achievement, and is frequently linked to the psychosocial factor “Aspirations” and “*n-Ach*” (Keller & Zavalloni, 1964; Krauss, 1964; Chinoy, 1952; Duncan, 1965; Elder, 1965; Levy-Leboyer, 1971; Jencks & Brown, 1975; Benetton, 1975).

The recent shift in focus relates to the growing importance of Workplace insertion in the presence of new workplace demands. Added to this, still today, is an education which is inadequate for current market requirements, insufficient professionalization (especially in the social and human sciences), an increase in structural underemployment due to the influence of technology and economic factors, and the delocalization of businesses within a context of growing globalization, among other factors (Aparicio, 2000; 2003, 2001^a, 2001 b, 2001c, 2002, 2004^a, 2004b). This widespread scene impacts both biographical/professional and national identity, forcing actors to adopt new strategies to “survive” in the labor system. It also impacts opportunities for professional development and, among factors which indicate such development, occupational mobility. Dubar highlights these two aspects in different works: on the one hand, the need to once again address the issue of Professional promotion, overshadowed by the global situation and market difficulties, and on the other, the impact that these changes have at the level of biographical and relational identity (Dubar, 1991, 1992, 2000; Goffman, 1963).

Through the years, with the end of the phase of great Argentine growth, under the protection of hyperfunctionalist theories/criticism, the idea that the University was an institution open to elites, despite being free and – in most cases and in most political terms – with unlimited funds, extended (Rajneri, 1990). This would make access to university more difficult especially, as one could suppose, for those from families not culturally favored, that is to say those families in which parents and grandparents did not reach university level. In other words, we may think that well-known process of mobility had become stagnant (particularly at the university level).

In synthesis, the study of Intergenerational Mobility (Educational and Occupational) was addressed in the first phase of the author’s research, inspired by the impulse of this topic in the USA under the Human Capital theory (Becker, 1964). Within this theory, Education is seen as an investment that brings about a better quality of life and other benefits. In a second phase (from the 1990s to the present), she dedicates her research to the issue of Career Promotion or Mobility, within the context of profound market changes, carrying out research with different populations.

Nevertheless, she always incorporated the variable of Intergenerational Mobility (educational and occupational) into her work, with the objective of observing tendencies throughout the years and contrasting the mobility of different populations as it relates to various conditioning factors and effects.

The question we now ask then is: What happened with Intergenerational Educational Mobility for PhD populations? This line of research – in light of combined quantitative and qualitative methodologies and with three real generations (grandparents, parents, PhDs) – was introduced by the author in Argentina and in France (in this context there were already diagnoses with “figures” or statistics regarding PhDs, though with other theoretical-methodological focus) (Aparicio, 2009, 2012, 2015d).

The fact that we analyze PhDs, that is those who have reached the highest educational level in Argentina (in France the 3rd cycle) has special significance.

1.2. Intergenerational Mobility for University Students

We address the problem in two instances: first, we refer to results provided by Cereq (in France) regarding the Diploma/Mobility relationship; secondly, we point out what questions oriented our analysis.

1.2.1 Higher Education and Diplomas: Data

The value of the diploma: access to higher education is becoming more and more commonplace. Since 1980, the number of individuals completing this level in France has quadrupled. Already in 1998, around 1 out of every 2 individuals had completed higher education.

Within this framework, obtaining a diploma continues to be a key factor, despite the devaluation of diplomas, and presents itself differently depending on the career program (Beltramo & Paul, 1994; Beltramo, Calmand & Montjourides, 2008; Beret, 2002; Cereq, 1990; Cereq-Bref, 1998; Duhatois & Maublancm 2006; Martinelli & Perret. 1998)). The same phenomenon has been observed in Argentina: university graduates are higher up on the occupational scale than non-graduates and continue to value their diplomas.

In fact, in France, university graduates from Business and Engineering Schools are those least affected by structural unemployment, frequently occupying management positions and enjoying more stable positions. In Argentina, a strange tendency is observed with Engineering programs: engineers are in demand but currently enrollment in this discipline is decreasing in all universities.

Globally, those with a university degree rarely find themselves unemployed. Approximately half of these young people find employment immediately after finishing their studies and temporary employment is very rare (above all for Engineers).

We may infer from these findings that university diplomas protect against unemployment, though they are currently far from being a guarantee against relatively low salaries.

Salaries and gender: After three years of active life, net monthly salaries of young university graduates follow the same hierarchy of diplomas in France. Thus, one additional year of university studies is almost always valued in terms of salary, though differences between men and women do still exist, no matter the diploma obtained.

Entrance to professional life and unemployment: Those who graduate from *Engineering and/or Business schools* enter active life more favorably. Unemployment rates for these populations is almost zero, with 90% in non-temporary employment and, after three years of active life, almost 80% in France reach management status. In Argentina, the data follows the same path. For many years, no unemployment was observed for university graduates, though this peaked with the employment crisis of 2001-2002 (20% of university graduates were unemployed).

As regards PhDs, important differences are observed according to specialty. For all else, having reached the PhD does not have much influence on insertion into workplaces with better working conditions.

Nevertheless, it is necessary to point out that there are great differences according to specialty: unemployment rates are practically non-existent in Health fields in France, while on the contrary, they are very high for the Social and Human Sciences. Salaries in these disciplines are lower than for engineers and graduates from Schools of Administration or Business (around 8-10% less); in Argentina this data is not available).

There also exist differences between those who complete their university studies and those who abandon their programs without obtaining the diploma (absence of thesis).

At the *Masters* level, the same general situation is observed: the higher the diploma, the higher the salary, the lower the unemployment rate and the lower the percentage of temporary employment, though differences do always exist depending on the discipline.

As regards *university, generally considered*, obtaining a university diploma presents advantages according to the discipline: again, graduates in social and human sciences generally have more difficulties entering the market (particularly French graduates in art, psychology, history, and geography who –after three years on the market- have high unemployment rates, 15%, 12% and 11%, respectively). Those who abandon their studies, as in the previous case, are sanctioned in the context of the labor market. In Argentina, those working in the field of education have difficulties with the aforementioned aspects and, particularly, with salaries.

This information demonstrates that, even under non-optimal market conditions, added to the effects of globalization: a) a university degree represents a « plus », though it no longer ensures important comparative benefits; b) this “plus” is much lower for the social and human science disciplines.

1.2.2. Questions Guiding our Analysis

Firstly, the idea has spread that University is for the elites in both countries, under the influence of hyperfunctionalist/reproductionist approaches which emerge with force in France in the 1970s (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1984). Education and the academic institution –previously considered from points of view of interactionism, theories of Human Capital and the so-called “Investment” theories (as opposed to the “Consumption” theories Mingat & Eicher, 1982) as motivators of human development were seen as devices of reproduction of the dominant classes (Bisseret, 1968; Giroux, 1983).

In addition, taking into account the democratization of teaching, a phenomenon more and more widespread since the 1960s, many individuals not previously incorporated into the educational system (minorities, black people, women, working classes, ...) gradually find their way into University. Thus, enrollments take off and the idea of the University of the masses begins to take hold, with its positive and negative aspects, especially in the labor market (Jarousse & Mingat, 1988;; Eicher, 1973; Levy-Garboua, 1976).

The issue, within this context, is if in the highest level of instruction there is greater access to University as compared to previous generations. Recent data from Argentina show that Intergenerational Mobility remains at the university level. The *Observatorio de Villa María* (Córdoba) demonstrates that a very high percentage reaches university studies for the first time. For its part, the University of Buenos Aires –with 400,000 students- demonstrates with its most recent statistics that (July 2017) that more than half of its students are first generation university students (their predecessors did not reach the university level). Its Rector, Dr. Barbieri, stated on Radio Mitre that “According to data from the University of Buenos Aires, half of its students are the first in their families to go to university” (...) “The role of the university is to reach out to all sectors. Each year, there are more and more individuals attempting to reach the university level of education.”

Secondly, we asked ourselves if this phenomenon took on the same dimensions in Argentina as in France, keeping in mind that in France thousands of PhDs graduate each year (many of them in social and human sciences), while in Argentina graduation rates in these fields has only recently begun to grow in the last decades (PhD programs in these areas were shut down in the 1970s under the military dictatorship). For this reason, we expected to find a greater increase in individuals in Argentina reaching the doctorate as compared to their parents and grandparents.

Continuing with the Argentine case, where the “cultural ethos” has always given education a unique position as a tool of progress, we asked ourselves if this ethos currently continued to push individuals to the highest academic level, despite the structural limitations non-existent in the last century. In other words: faced with a market of conflict and marked structural unemployment, do individuals still wish to attain this level, knowing full well it will be difficult to find a position in the labor market fitting of their education? In France, for its part, the market is also facing serious issues (the delocalization of businesses for one, with the subsequent increase in unemployment), which means that not all PhDs can get the positions they desire (Aparicio & Cros, 2015).

Faced with this panorama:

What moves or motivates people to carry out PhD studies and, particularly, PhD studies in the social and human sciences, where demand is limited to the State (in general, the majority will be university professors and researchers) where the structural limits are marked, as there are not enough positions to absorb supply (Aparicio, 2014). On the other hand, European statistics show that Engineering and Business Schools especially are those which offer a more promising future in terms of occupational development (income, position, quality of life) (Aparicio, 2009).

What leads someone to desire to reach an educational level greater than that of his or her family, without linking this specifically to economic benefit? What image or representation is held regarding PhD programs? Is it still considered a type of passport to the future, despite contextual circumstances which are not always favorable? (Moscovici, 1961) Is this imaginary found in accordance with the real situation?

Hypothesis

-PhD saturation in the French context, more marked than in the Argentine context, leads to the observation of lower degrees of relative intergenerational educational mobility.

-In both Argentina and France, higher or fourth level education is still accessible today, within a socio-economic context which is quite unfavorable, for individuals whose families did not reach this highest level of educational instruction.

2. Methodology

2.1. Population:

We worked with PhD students and PhDs in the social sciences and humanities in Argentina (UNCuyo, PhDs in Education and Social Sciences) and France (one university located in Paris and one located in the province). We took as our sample students who had entered starting in 2005 and later. In this paper, we refer to results found in our Argentine context, with only mentions made to similarities found respect to studies carried out in France.

2.2. Techniques

Among the quantitative techniques used was a semi-structured interview of PhD students and PhDs (2005-2014). Among the qualitative techniques utilized were a semi-direct interview, word association (Doise, Clemente & Lorenzi-Cioldi, 1992; Wagner & Hayes, 2005; Wagner, Valencia y Elejabarrieta, 1996) and hierarchical evocation (Abric, 2001). In this paper, we will focus on the descriptive-quantitative segment.

3. Results

Mobility, diploma and PhD education: These three aspects are important for the synthesis of individual and contextual aspects. We have addressed the question of statistics in the theoretical framework, with the official statistics from France contributed by Cereq (Center for the Study and Research of Data). We observe results for the different institutions studied.

In the words of the PhDs, one of every two graduates estimates that the degree obtained at the undergraduate level has been an engine for occupational mobility (this is observed particularly for those who have experienced internal mobility within the same workplace organization). Nevertheless, this has not always been associated with greater workplace Satisfaction (Aparicio, 2016 a, c). Nor is there a correlation between those experiencing objective occupational mobility (changing positions to one higher up) and a feeling of having been promoted, as they frequently relate this promotion to different aspects of the position itself (workplace environment, demands, recognition, respect, etc.) (Aparicio, 2016b).

More specifically, they were asked if they consider that the doctorate will have an influence on their general objective situation over the next ten years and in their disciplinary field. Secondly, they were asked if they consider that having finished the doctorate can be considered a vector of Socio-professional mobility, having already experienced positive changes in their career. The majority of respondents – between 60% and 70%, both for Argentine programs and French programs – consider that there has been some change in their career since the start of said studies, whether in income or position, though with differences between men and women (Cf. Aparicio, 2015d, chapter 3, *Trajectoires et identités*. Also, Dupray & Moullet, 2005). Nevertheless, some report not having experienced any promotion.

Individuals will continue to value doctoral programs, despite contextual limitations, and this probably leads them to choose to carry out studies at this level, exceeding the level reached by their families. In other words, this could result in Intergenerational Educational Mobility, with subsequent impacts on identity.

Our findings in percentage terms (%)

1. We were able to access our object of analysis in the various institutions, finding strong similarities between them (the percentages of mobility of grandparents to PhDs and of parents to PhDs in the Education PhD program in Argentina are very similar to those found in the French provincial University).

2. The following results were obtained for Argentina (National University of Cuyo); we will briefly highlight those results obtained at the French provincial University.

In Cuyo, for PhDs in Education, there are graduates whose parents have no formal education (4.7%), while 32.6% have parents who finished primary education, 18.6% secondary education and 44% university education. That is to say, almost 50% of graduates do not have parents who reached the university level. The figures found at the PhD level –the highest educational level in Argentina– are very similar to those found at the University of Buenos Aires (UBA) among undergraduate students, in line with the Rector's recent comments.

Also in Cuyo, but for PhDs in Social Sciences, there are no graduates with parents with no formal education and there is a lower percentage of students who have parents with only a primary level of education, as compared with the Education PhDs. Here, the majority of parents (42.9%) completed secondary education, while 28.6% reached the university level.

At the French provincial University, whose identity we protect, we recorded the following percentages by level:

There are no parents with no formal education, while 37.5% completed primary education and another 37.5% completed secondary education. 75% of the graduates' parents can be found within this range. Only 25% of parents had reached the university level.

3. The PhD, even in social and human sciences – less promising fields in the Market according to studies and statistics – continues to be attractive to the university public, overcoming the economic angle and resting upon obtaining a degree.

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Highest educational level reached by parents

(The following tables are not essential for publication as their data has been incorporated into the text.)

Table 1: Degree Program versus Highest Educational Level Reached by Parents (UNCuyo, Argentina) (q11)

			Degree Program	
			UNCuyo - Education	UNCuyo – Social Sciences
Highest educational level reached by parents	None	Effective	2	0
		% in the program	4.7%	0.0%
	Primary	Effective	14	2
		% in the program	32.6%	28.6%
Secondary	Effective	8	3	
	% in the program	18.6%	42.9%	
University	Effective	19	2	
	% in the program	44.2%	28.6%	
Total	Effective	43	7	
	% in the program	100.0%	100.0%	

Table 2: Degree Program versus Highest Educational Level Reached by Parents (French University) (q11)

			Degree Program	
			Education Sciences	
Highest educational level reached by parents	None	Effective	0	
		% in the program	0.0%	
	Primary	Effective	9	
		% in the program	37.5%	
Secondary	Effective	9		
	% in the program	37.5%		
University	Effective	6		
	% in the program	25.0%		
Total	Effective	24		
	% in the program	100.0%		