

POSTGRADUATE STUDIES IN PANDEMIC:

Virtuality and internationalization from a biographic-narrative approach

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Abstract

The article analyzes, from the narratives of management academics at the National University of Mar del Plata, Argentina, the various potentialities and tensions that the COVID 19 pandemic and the virtualization of the courses produced in the internationalization of postgraduate courses at the Argentine university. From a biographical-narrative methodological approach, the study shows that virtuality made possible facilities of hiring international teachers for the delivery of seminars, the extension of the enrollment of the new cohorts remotely, the optimization of the study and thesis writing times. In the same way, the pandemic increased the difficulties of thesis students to carry out their field work, the absence of face-to-face instances of encounter and exchange, the impossibility of traveling to carry out training stays abroad and the health risks that this entails. Thus, the article recovers the main effects of the pandemic on Argentine postgraduate training and its internationalization, assuming said context as a propitious time for the production of situated knowledge.

Keywords: Education; teacher education; graduate; higher education; pandemic

ESTUDOS DE PÓS-GRADUAÇÃO EM PANDEMIA:

Virtualidade e internacionalização a partir da abordagem biográfico-narrativa

Resumo

O artigo analisa, a partir das narrativas de acadêmicos de administração da Universidade Nacional de Mar del Plata, Argentina, as diversas potencialidades e tensões que a pandemia COVID 19 e a virtualização dos cursos produziram na internacionalização dos cursos de pós-graduação da universidade argentina. A partir de uma abordagem metodológica biográfico-narrativa, o estudo mostra que a virtualidade possibilitou facilidades de contratação de professores internacionais para realização de seminários, extensão de inscrições de novas coortes remotamente, otimização de tempos de estudo e redação de teses. Da mesma forma, a pandemia aumentou as dificuldades dos alunos de tese em realizar o seu trabalho de campo, a ausência de momentos presenciais de encontro e intercâmbio, a impossibilidade de viajar para realizar estádias de formação no estrangeiro e os riscos para a saúde que este implica. Assim, o artigo recupera os principais efeitos da pandemia sobre a formação da pós-graduação argentina e sua internacionalização, assumindo esse contexto como um momento propício para a produção de conhecimento situado.

Palavras-chave: Educação; formação de professores; graduado; ensino superior; pandemia

ESTUDIOS DE POSGRADO EN PANDEMIA:

Virtualidad e internacionalización desde el enfoque biográfico-narrativo

Resumen

El artículo analiza, desde las narrativas de académicos en gestión de la Universidad Nacional de Mar del Plata, Argentina, las diversas potencialidades y tensiones que la pandemia COVID 19 y la virtualización de las cursadas produjo en la internacionalización de los posgrados de la universidad

argentina. Desde un enfoque metodológico biográfico-narrativo, el estudio arroja que la virtualidad posibilitó facilidades económicas de contratación de docentes internacionales para el dictado de seminarios, la ampliación de la matrícula de las nuevas cohortes de forma remota, la optimización de los tiempos de cursada y de escritura de tesis. De igual modo, la pandemia potenció las dificultades de tesistas para la concreción de sus trabajos de campo, la ausencia de instancias presenciales, la imposibilidad de viajar a realizar estancias de formación en el exterior y los riesgos sanitarios que eso conlleva. Así, el artículo recupera los principales efectos de la pandemia sobre la formación de posgrado argentino y su internacionalización asumiendo dicho contexto como un tiempo propicio para la producción de conocimiento situado

Palabras clave: Educación, formación, posgrado, enseñanza superior, pandemia

INTRODUCTION

Postgraduates in the Latin American region have experienced a strong expansion in recent decades (FARE & ROVELLI, 2019). In this framework, and in line with global tendencies, Latin American countries and universities have increased processes of internationalization of Higher Education to privilege, among other actions, the mobility of academics and graduate students and the strengthening of interinstitutional links between university careers from different countries (RAMÍREZ, 2015, LAMFRI & SALto, 2016; ARAUJO & WALKER, 2020). These aspects, at the epochal juncture of the COVID 19 and product of the isolation measures regulated in each country, have witnessed certain changes that were translated, according to the context in which they are analyzed, in potential and / or voltages around internationalization, academic mobility and extreme virtualization lived.

The Argentine university system in its integrality and, specifically, the level of graduate in particular, have carried out various normative, institutional and pedagogical strategies with the aim of sustaining the development of the various postgraduate careers and guarantees their students and teachers minimum conditions that are necessary for the concretion of their studies, the deployment of their profession and the achievement of their research work (MARQUINA, 2020, AGUIRRE, 2021). In this framework, and product of the acquiring of the activity, the academics that are currently in charge of the management of the graduate level of the national universities experienced, biographically and professionally, the effects that the contingent virtuality has had in the daily life of the education of Argentine Specialists, Magisters and Doctorates.

Hence, problematizing from their own voices and narratives, these effects become indispensable to know, mean and analyze the way in which subjects have been assuming the changes that were imposed by the viral juncture.

In this manuscript, we are recovering testimonies of teachers and researchers from the National University of Mar del Plata, Argentina; of those who have under their responsibility the coordination of postgraduate careers that the House of Studies provides. Although the investigation does not aspire to assume conditions that can be generalized to the whole national or Latin American university system, it is relevant to the extent that the findings and results obtained can serve as inputs for future research in the subject from other latitudes. Not only because of the results in themselves, but also by the methodology used to achieve them.

In conceptual terms, internationalization of the academic profession¹, Higher Education, Posgraduate Education, virtuality and pandemic make up a framework significant in the becoming of this shared article. It is not intended to exhaust, in these lines, the review of antecedents or the state of the question of each object of study mentioned; since it would represent a difficult undertaking to specify that in this article. But if, at least, we can place the reader in the main discussions that cover the epidermis of the proposed framework and mark the epistemic and theoretical position from which the narratives of the academics interviewed will be analyzed.

We assume internationalization, at first, as a polysemic concept. In this sense, for some authors internationalization is part of the challenges of Higher Education in the context of economic globalization, the opening of labor markets and the knowledge society (RAMIREZ, 2015), while for others expresses an opportunity for the improvement of the quality of Higher Education in a broader sense (LAMFRI & SALTO, 2016). These different interpretations are at the basis of confusion between the concepts of internationalization, globalization, trans-nationalization and regionalization.

During the 1990s, specifically in Argentina and in the region, the internationalization processes of Higher Education began to have greater prominence due, in part, to policies aimed at sector, the fate of greatest budget in scholarships and international postgraduates programs; and the consolidation of various university academic exchange networks (KROTSCH, 1997, LAMFI & SALTO, 2016). Despite this, AIELLO (2012) and PÉREZ CENTENO (2017), have analyzed the object of study for the Argentine case, both conclude that there is a low level of internationalization of the profession and that two internationalized academic profiles coexist.

One of the profiles represents a traditional version of internationalization: senior academics with exclusive dedication and senior positions who teach courses abroad or prevails an international orientation in their teaching or research's. And another profile of younger academics, with postgraduate degrees abroad and in collaboration with foreign colleagues, which represents an alternative form of internationalization (Pérez Centeno, 2017, p.245).

Despite this, in the early years of the new millennium and until the beginning of the COVID 19 pandemic, the promotion of networks of researchers and international institutions has been increased and incorporated, which constitute a powerful strategy for the consolidation of research groups in articulation with Postgraduate Education (LAMFI & SALTO, 2016, ARAUJO & WALKER, 2020).

However, Postgraduate Education, as an object of study, can also be addressed from multiple investigative constellations. One of them is aimed at analyzing graduate formation from its links with the academic profession, since "the requirement of possession of that degree becomes inescapable to access certain professional fields, mainly for admission to the various forms of the academic and research career " (UNZUE & ROVELLI, 2020: 38).

¹ The academic profession is defined as that made up of subjects who, within the framework of the universities and through the functions of research, teaching, extension and management, build and transmit knowledge. The academic profession as a field of study has had a renewed and growing development, consolidating itself as a subject especially since the 1980s, when Higher Education became a specifically defined field of study (MARQUINA, 2020).

From a micro-sociological point of view (MELENDES & YUNI, 2017), the framework that is configured between postgraduate education and profession, allows considering the extent to which academics have accessed the level of postgraduate studies, the associated working conditions, aspects related to management, research and teaching, as well as other new emerging aspects and transversal such as internationalization, the evaluation of the activity, the response to social and professional demands, and even the links and conditioning of the credentialing devices registered in the particular academic field in which each graduate student works (BOURDIEU, 2012) .

Theoretically assuming more placed perspectives, the graduate formation can be inquired, in the same way, from prisms that place the experiences of the subjects that the training instance that the training instance place in the center of the analysis. Somehow it implies a turn towards the stories, experiences and trajectories that are forging and building from and with subjects who transit the postgraduate level. Here the "expansion of the biographical, from its epistemic, methodological, ethical and political motion" (PORTA, 2021:19) and studies with and from everyday life, as a possibility of narratively investigating the educational experience, they become powerful channels to recover, from the voices narrated by the subjects, the subjective experiences that are deployed in the graduate education.

Finally, in these almost two years, both the internationalization of Higher Education and the graduate education, have been reversed by the effects that the pandemic and the consequent virtuality has produced in them.

In Argentina, towards March 2020, the preventive and compulsory social isolation (PCSI) was decreed and produced the closure of educational institutions at all levels, but not the suspension of educational activities. In this framework, authorities, teachers and students, were thrown into the world of virtuality with few technological and pedagogical knowledge to develop tasks and with even less practices linked to the design of remote teaching and learning proposals (WIÑOS DE BRITOS, et al 2021).

In contexts of Covid 19, the universities experienced a paradigmatic change in the way of carrying out the multiple academic functions that are deployed in the daily life of Higher Education (CANNENELLOTTO, 2020). The members of the university community assumed "the concern for pedagogical continuity - still with its fragility-and the right to education was rapidly incorporated into academic discussions and university policy discussions" (2020, p.213). Just the management of the graduate level, its internationalization and its deployment in virtuality have not been the exception and the resident of pedagogical and institutional practices by the actors account for it. (MAGGIO, 2021).

Therefore, we consider that producing knowledge together with and from the narratives of the academics who have been interviewed, also have objectives to produce movements and dislocations to the classic investigative approaches of a structural and systemic nature, which allow to situate and revitalize the voices and experiences of social subjects. What these investigations ultimately propose is a greater "democratization of the hermeneutical position" (BOURDIEU, 1999: 542) on the production of knowledge in the educational territory.

It is necessary and urgent to deepen the systematization and visibility of tiny narrative and biographical methodologies (YEDAIDE & PORTA, 2020; PORTA, 2021), which, as we will see below, assume the challenge of investigating the daily years of educational education from the testimonial textures woven together and signified by the actors themselves (BOURDIEU, 1999).

The narratives that we will share do not rule out how critical, stressful and painful the time of the pandemic has become. But they also propose us to think of that time as “a time of possibilities” (DI FRANCO, 2020:1). Favorable and opportune times in the production of new knowledge (YEDAIDE & GONZÁLEZ, 2021), which in short, allow us to “re-signify and recover the politics of daily life and help us to think about ourselves by sharing this new reading of the world and of the word” (DI FRANCO, 2020: 3).

METHODOLOGY

Methodologically, the research we develop is of a qualitative and microsocial nature, deploying the biographical approach (AGUIRRE, 2017; BOLIVAR, 2002, OGEDA GUEDA & RIBEIRO, 2019, PORTA, 2021, SUAREZ, 2021). The type of focus has generated a deep turn in ways of thinking, making, knowing, saying and writing in education. The contributions of this narrative and biographical turn to educational research, particularly to investigate the teaching practice and the daily life of the school and the university (BOLÍVAR, 2002, SUAREZ, 2021) and professional education and development, are already relatively known and accepted (PORTA, 2021, SUAREZ, 2021). More and more researchers of professional education use methodological and technical resources of this research tradition in their studies, giving rise to a vast and heterogeneous variety of more or less participatory inquiry strategies that put in question the methodological orthodoxy of the subject-object cleavage in Social Sciences (YEDAIDE & PORTA, 2020).

The theoretical and methodological predilection of the narrative studies that depart from the expert everyday of the subjects, has to do with the centrality that this type of story gives it to the notion of experience (MURILLO, 2021) and “the possibilities it offers to involve at the same time the subjectivity of the actor, the social territory of the action, the contexts and global, regional and local historical movements that constitute them” (Suárez, 202: 366).

Starting from these methodological coordinates, it is possible to investigate objects of study such as postgraduate training, its deployment and internationalization in pandemic contexts from approaches that distance themselves from the classic statistical, macrosystemic and comparative approaches of Higher Education (AGUIRRE & PORTA, 2020). What is proposed here does not seek to obstruct this methodological typology of inquiry, rather, it invites as its complement.

Regarding the validity criteria of these approaches, they have always been a concern in qualitative research, because they are what give it its credibility². These criteria in a qualitative research focus mainly on intersubjectivity and communication (DENZIN & LINCOLN, 2015), taking into account the multiplicity of voices. Thus, researchers promote

² For each of the interviews, the interviewees were asked to review the transcript of the same and send their signed consent in order to give methodological and ethical validity to the qualitative research instrument.

listening to the narratives of the participants to avoid the construction of personal and biased realities (BOURDIEU, 1999; 2012).

Instrumentally, the research article presented is the result of the partial findings of a postdoctoral inquiry developed within the framework of the Postdoc Studies Program of the National University of Tres de Febrero, Argentina³. It is proposed as a main objective: to understand the frames presented by the graduate education in the academic profession from the biographical narratives of the teachers of the National University of Mar del Plata (UNMDP) (AGUIRRE, Et.al. 2018). This investigation, is also clear from the set of productions carried out within the Research Group in Higher Education and Academic Profession (GIESPA) and the Investigation Group in Education and Cultural Studies (GIEEC) of UNMDP.

The greater research work that gives rise to the article, in its early methodological stages, was worth analyzing statistical structural data of the Argentine university system (Statistical Yearbook SPU, 2017 and 2018), the regulatory documentation of UNMDP itself: teaching plant, Ordinances of Superior Council, ordinances of academic and regulatory councils granted by the graduate secretariat of the university itself analyzed.

In a second stage of qualitative cut, whose results will be shared in the next sections, the secretaries and coordinators of the UNMDP graduate levels of all academic units that comprise it⁴, to the Secretary of Research already The Undersecretary of Graduate of the University. The foundation of this survey is to recover the testimonies of those academics that manage and coordinate the postgraduate level and know the particularities that it assumes in the evolution of its daily development. In these interviews and through a semi-structured script (DENZIN & LINCOLN, 2015) we toured various thematic axes that recovered dimensions linked to biographical aspects, training tours, graduate level data at the university level and at the level of faculties, normative and institutional characteristics of Postgraduates dictated by each academic unit, graduate links with racing evaluation and accreditation agencies, internationalization and academic mobility, virtualization of the course, the particularities of enrollment, and finally, we travel the challenges presented by the level of the pandemic of the Covid 19.

Between March and May of the year 2021, 12 interviews were conducted from which we will recover those narrative scraps of the secretaries and coordinators who arranged in depth the subject of internationalization, virtuality and challenges that the pandemic involved in the functioning of the level of Postgraduate at the Argentine University. The academics interviewed configure the population of the study that is presented here⁵.

³ Postgraduate training and academic profession in Argentina. Interpretive study based on the biographies of university professors³. (2020-2022) Postdoctoral Training Program- National University of Tres de Febrero

⁴ The National University of Mar del Plata has 10 (ten) academic units. »Architecture, Urbanism and Design» Cs. Agrarias »Cs. of Health and Social Work »Cs. Economic and Social »Cs. Exactas y Naturales »Law» Humanities »Engineering» Psychology »University School of Medicine.

⁵ The selection of the interviewees has two central foundations. The first, its place of management within the university that allows us to understand the impact that the pandemic and virtualization have had on the internationalization of the postgraduate offer. The second is that his testimony allows the enrichment of the script of interviews that will be carried out in future inquiries to various academics of the UNMdP in order to deepen the analysis. The voices of the actors interviewed will serve as the basis for the next instance of investigation

Finally, being one of the pillars of narrative and biographical research, the authorship of the stories, and affirming that those who produce knowledge, together with the researchers, are the narrators of the experienced experience, we decided to codify each narrated fragment below with the name of the authors and the date of realization of the interviews.

RESEARCH CONTEXT

The National University of Mar del Plata is located on the southeast of the province of Buenos Aires, Argentina, in the Gral. Pueyrredón Party. According to the latest statistical data provided by the Secretariat of University Policies under the Ministry of Education of the Argentine Nation; the university has 3757 university teachers distributed in a total of 5680 teaching positions (Yearbook, 2018).

The statistical analysis of the teaching plant emerges that by 2018, of the total of academics that deploy the fusion of teaching and research in the Higher Education, only 17.4% are doctors, 6.8% Magisters and 6.3 % Specialists (Yearbook, 2018, AGUIRRE 2021)⁶.

Likewise, in order to contextualize the narratives of the academics interviewed, it is also necessary to mention that UNMDP has a broad and varied graduate offer which is provided by each of the 10 academic units that compose it. In 2021, the University of MDP provided 47 graduate careers: 16 specializations, 16 masters and 15 doctorates, all accredited by the National Evaluation and Accreditation Commission University (CONEU) (UNMDP Report, 2021). Of the total careers offered, 54% were academics postgraduates and 46% professionalists (UNMDP report, 2021).

Finally, the area of international relations of UNMDP, which is under the coordination of the Vice-Rectorate and focuses its interest in the circulation of information regarding scholarships, awards, subsidies, calls, associations or scientific meetings that incides positively in the scientific and academic community of the institution

RESULTS

Effects of the pandemic in graduate formation and its internationalization: between the contingency and the recurrent

One of the main consequences that the Covid 19 pandemic has produced, added to the health and socioeconomic horror that the countries of the region have experienced, has been the massive acceleration of the virtualization of our social practices (Cannellotto, 2020). Even, such virtualization, in the educational field, has revealed and has even visibilized the structural inequalities that condition to various social sectors to access to connectivity and optimal digital devices to continue the educational process (MAGGIO, 2021).

Virtuality also brought with it a propitious time to develop alternative and powerful pedagogical practices from which teachers of different educational levels and different

⁶ Prof. Titular, Associate, Deputy, Heads of Practical Work and Graduate Assistants- These positions, together with the dedications in hours that each position entails, define the main structure of the Argentine academic profession (Marquina, 2020)

contexts were able to accompany their students in the challenge of continuing the multiple teaching and learning processes that, for a period of time, they presented themselves clogged.

In this sense, the educational presence was suspended, but, in Argentina, as in other countries of the world, the classes continued to develop remotely. There emerged "redesigned teaching practices" (MAGGIO, 2021:12) that involved, first a didactic re-learning by the teachers themselves and secondly reflected the challenge of non-transpolar in virtuality, which occurs in face-to-face classes. This meant a redesign of ways to be linked, of forms of planning and the implementation of other didactic resources (MAGGIO, 2021). With regard to university Higher Education, this virtual redesign of the educational process, allowed marked increases in student enrollment both in graduate and graduate careers (FANELLI, MARQUINA & RABOSI, 2020).

Teaching practices redesigned in virtuality, new linkages between teachers and students and the increase in university student enrollment also occurred at the graduate level of the National University of Mar del Plata. In this sense, the narratives of Alejandro, Silvia, Liliana and Juan realize this and even set the eyes, not only in the didactic practices or the opportunities provided by virtuality, but on the power that this time has had for those students who take postgraduates at our university from abroad,

"As for teaching practice in graduate, virtuality implies greater wear. (...) We gave class 5 hours on Friday and 5 hours on Saturday by Zoom. With small classrooms, putting them to work, but that also involved wear. What happened was that we gave them activities. We ended up getting together during the week, the students got together to do the work we sent them... there they had a question, they sent us a WhatsApp, they passed us the Zoom link and we went in, we joined. It cost us nothing, we joined their meeting for a while to help them with practical work, as if it were in the classroom, in the faculty. I think that kind of practice is going to stay". (Alejandro, April 26, 2021)

"Another very positive thing is that we were able to go virtual all the postgraduate courses, except for one, which due to the type of postgraduate program it is, has very great teachers and they didn't want to. Today it is working virtual too. Those teachers had to action without option. (...) I have a teacher with whom we gave a course that is over 70 years old and the truth is that the videos he made were from a professional, a teacher, a great person. The videos were edited, they look like Netflix movies. She has a son who works with audio and image; he put everything together, and she sent us the videos. (Alejandro, April 26, 2021)

"In the evolution of pandemic and extreme virtualization, teachers understood that virtuality is not easier. The institutions understood that the virtuality is not easier, it is not cheaper. They realized that if you want to do well, you have to produce content. You have to pay a content person... It is not cheaper. In the Faculty of Economic they look it as: "Well, I make it virtual, but I can have one hundred students." No, that's if you make videoconference. Virtuality has pedagogical power if working with smaller groups (...) I think we understood a lot of things that we will be able to capitalize in the future (Alejandro, April 26, 2021).

"The first challenge we posed last year, facing up this world change; the change of paradigm, was continuity. (...) With all the negativity that this pandemic can have, I believe that particularly in this area [Law], has had positive results. Faced with the crisis, we were able to resurface in many things. First, we saw that much more people were added to our postgraduate courses. Think that the courses were all clearly face-to-face and today, this modality we have, allows people, especially in the surrounding area, and Latin American countries where our public comes from; they continue to learn from home. They avoid the transfer expenses of those who study a Graduate program and also the external teachers in charge of seminars. Our goal was to continue, mainly, with the Doctorate Program of foreigners under this modality. You should remember that it is people from Brazil, Ecuador, Peru, Colombia. People who can continue their graduate program, even in this setting. What is noticeable is the difference in terms of costs." (Silvia, June 10, 2021)

"For us [Faculty of Economic and Social Sciences- FCEyS] in this pandemic context, one thing that happened to us is that our graduation rate improved. We have managed to recover people with these owed, due to the times, to be more at home, to start writing. Also with a lot of work that was done: generating accompaniment workshops to bring people back. I think it allowed us to accelerate some of the processes that we had to start virtualizing (...) We bought our zoom to have it without limit, we improved the virtual classroom that we already had. Today we have the virtual classroom, the virtual field in Moodle but hosted on our own servers"(Alejandro, April 26, 2021).

"It seems to me that the challenge is to consider distance graduate careers. The courses that were given online, more than doubled, sevenfold the number of participants. So, not only because you have a very important critical mass but because you have people from all over the country, people from other countries: from Uruguay, Colombia, Ecuador, who have been part of these seminars" (Liliana, April 8, 2021).

"(...) This year I am going to give a virtual postgraduate course in June. We had to cut a week to open the call for the number of people from all over the world ... from Ecuador, Mexico, Spain... because now it is in that way. We are going to have the challenge of how to handle the volumes of students that we are attracting with the virtuality and internationalization that is coming, at least there are people in Spain, people in Latin America "(Juan, April 12, 2021).

The narratives of the interviewed academics provide us with interpretive coordinates on the redesign of the pedagogical proposal that was carried out in the university postgraduate course and the expansion of enrollment in various dictated careers. In Alejandro's story, the figure of older teachers is recovered as who have had to update their practice in order to be able to offer their seminars digitally and remotely.

Another finding that is visible here is the power that virtuality has granted to postgraduate careers for greater internationalization. Punctually, the possibility of dictating courses and seminars via Web enables not only to increase the volume of students from other latitudes, but to hire foreign teachers for deployment. This is possible thanks to what

Silvia narrates with respect to the low economic costs involved in dictation of online seminars and to the availability of teachers and foreign students to participate. In some way, the modalities assumed by the Postgraduate Coordination's of UNMDP under the contingency of the Covid 19 enabled the support of internationalization practices that as mentioned Lamfri & Salto (2016) and Ramirez (2015) allow us to consolidate the institutional links between national universities and foreigners.

Next, the testimonies of Beatriz, Ana, Liliana and Silvia deepen the effects that the pandemic has had in terms of virtuality and postgraduate internationalization and highlight the importance of sustaining the international view of the various careers offered by the UNMdP,

“The amount of training talks we gave was immense, it allowed us this: to have the presence of teachers who were in Spain and gave classes, which we could not have in a face-to-face framework. It also allowed many people from Latin America to join our talks and join our activities. We were forced to advertise each activity with time from Spain, Peru, Brazil, Mexico. That too, within this very negative pandemic framework, I rescue it as positive” (Silvia, June 10, 2021).

"When I attended at another time I had to travel ... this possibility of accessing a graduate space that really interests you even if you are far away. We have, for example, in the Graduate of Heritage Program [Faculty of Architecture Urbanism and Design], many foreign students who perhaps in other circumstances could not have participated. It seems to me that this is a strength of virtuality. Beyond ... What do you earn? Fundamentally participation, and manage time and resources. When you attend a postgraduate program to which you have to travel, there are times, there are expenses, all that takes ... you feel it” (Beatriz, May 5, 2021).

“That is very important because that center, in turn, connects, now for example by Zoom through that academic space, activities were carried out: symposia, talks with foreign doctoral students who came to study, or others who linked us with other activities. They did many collaborative activities with various universities. In a pandemic, these links are maintained and strengthened by virtuality” (Ana, June 10, 2021).

“It seems to me that any international instance, whether in person or virtual, is favorable for postgraduate training. Even undergraduate students who have had internationalization experiences, now, and who have taken subjects in Mexico, Chile, Colombia... they do it with great wealth and they tell you about the differences in approach, and that is very rich at the time of education. It could not be done, or you should have many resources to do it in person. Virtuality allows that and it must be strengthened with more exchange policies and a larger scholarship budget” (Beatriz, May 5, 2021).

“One issue that came to stop the pandemic was undoubtedly the international academic mobility of students and teachers. It is true that it brought with it a greater virtual exchange of experiences, meetings, and symposia. But it obtained the possibility of deepening the internationalization of our postgraduate courses in person. The virtuality,

rugged and urgent, allowed us to sustain the links and the proposals. I suspect this is here to stay. It will be up to us, the management academics, to regulate this new internationalization.” (Liliana, April 8, 2021)

The effects that the pandemic has produced, specifically for the postgraduate level of the UNMDP, have not meant only potentialities. The virtuality that executives, teachers, researchers, students and thesis have encountered implied that there are also tensions regarding the completion or completion of doctoral and master's theses, the impossibility of carrying out data collection work in the field, experimental practices in laboratories, measurements in the territory and administrative procedures of each postgraduate degree. In this sense, the narratives of Cristina, Cecilia, Federico and Juan respectively also navigate,

“I think that in the doctoral students and in the master students, virtuality has brought good things but others not so much (...). There comes a time when you have to go back to the field, do the interviews again, go back to the laboratory, go back to the community, go to the field. When I say field, I mean the territory. So it is a very big challenge to see how this year we are going to continue, I believe that already a year of pandemic and children without being able to carry out the essentials in their thesis, it was good, but more than a year is going to be harmful ”(Cecilia, April 22, 2021).

"In some disciplines it is a problem because if you have to make your graduate work in a laboratory, or overseeing a crop in the Inta (National Institute of Agricultural Technology), the truth is that has been harmful, but thesis has been delayed" (Cristina, May 5, 2021).

“I think that virtuality facilitates both the delivery of courses and the defense of thesis. Lowers costs, allows internationalization or nationalization. If we manage to oil the administrative circuits, it is great, because outsiders can study our subjects, our own doctoral students can study in other countries. There is enormous potential. The only thing that I see as difficult, especially for the social sciences, for history as well, are some limitations for field work. In the case of historians, the archival theme. In the case of social scientists, field work.”(Federico, April 6, 2021)

“The level of research is a complication in a graduate degree in Exact Sciences, because students need a laboratory. If they cannot access the laboratory, the field, it becomes quite complicated. There were many delays for many in their theses, so we suspended established deadlines for reports and that, because it was logical not to demand them when they did not have access.”(Juan, April 12, 2021)

The recovered narrative snippets account for some of the potentialities and tensions on virtuality and internationalization that have been most significant for the graduate level at the National University of Mar del Plata. The redesign of teaching practices, the increase in student enrollment, the deepening of exchanges and links with teachers and students from foreign countries to the impossibility of carrying out field work, experimental practices in laboratories, the flexibility of courses and the thesis concession and postgraduate scholarship schedules by researchers in training are some of the effects that the pandemic has left behind at the higher level. The narratives poured out here give an account of this from the biographical and professional experiences of its protagonists.

By way of balance and projection, the testimonies of Mauro, Alejandro and Daniel allow us to place ourselves in a powerful finding in order to produce debates and future productions on the management and teaching practices that should be established in times of post-pandemic. The narratives that we share below focus on debating these practices from the dilemma between the contingent and the established. They start from the challenge of assuming that the virtuality and the deepening of the international perspective of the graduate program must come out of the contingency and must become recurrent and established practices. This will endow Higher Education and the graduate level with a wealth that until now has not been fully exploited. This is how the actors involved in the process tell it,

“The challenge I think is to go from the contingent version to the established version. When all this started it was a contingency. I think that more and more we are realizing that this is being installed then contingency plans are migrating to more stabilized plans of how to think about virtuality in postgraduate training. I would also tell you that some collateral benefits: access to large teachers is sometimes easier from virtuality than from face-to-face. It seems to me that this year will be, no longer a year of contingency, but a year of being more established. Look at what we think remains of virtuality to perfect it and continue to have a level that has never been lost, but is not lost, and optimize possibilities and resources that virtuality can give” (Mauro, April 3, 2021).

“You also have to learn to distinguish between teleworking and the virtual contingency of a pandemic. When you do virtuality you have virtual students, we have face-to-face students, who are waiting for the teacher in front of the Zoom talking. From my international experience of doing virtual postgraduate programs: in international virtuality it is the opposite, they cannot offer you a postgraduate program with synchronous activities, it would not be possible. Because you are studying with one from the US, a Brazilian ... What time? It cannot. The activities are basically asynchronous. A production of infernal content, activities, dynamics, evaluations. It is not what we are doing. So we must go towards a mixture of modality that overcomes the contingency and is committed to the production of new ways of offering seminars, classes and content at the university. (...) For us, in postgraduate studies, this challenge will basically allow us to limit physical presence a bit and generate a little more technology-mediated presence (...)” (Alejandro, April 26, 2021).

“What the pandemic did was change the paradigm of those of us who were not working with this modality. (...) I think that the pandemic brought, in the midst of so many negative things, a positive point, which was to allow the structure of the university to change rapidly so that all undergraduate and graduate and undergraduate careers had a virtual campus. Before 2020 we had very few subjects that had a virtual campus, not that were virtual in their development. That was a big change. I believe that the postgraduate challenge is, for me, to find a mixed system, a balance. Everything that we went through last year and we go through this, is a matter of necessity that should allow us to reflect on hybrid modes of work, where the face-to-face, the human is not lost in a lot of dimensions such as the encounter. But we must also give way to technological tools, which facilitate and shorten many issues. The issue is to find pedagogically prepared systems to carry out the proposals, and that these last over time.

(...) In many cases, the first error is to say that the virtual is the same as the face-to-face through the computer and with the camera on, and we know that experience told us that this is not the case” (Daniel, April 28, 2021).

Maggio (2021) recovers the need to redefine educational practices and policies that project a post-pandemic with a hopeful outlook where we all fit. In this projection, get out of the contingency and think about pedagogical, curricular, political and social proposals that are maintained over time and that seek the expansion of digital inclusion, the enrichment of the teaching practices of teachers, the recognition of regionalisms, of the flexibility of courses, of the open and constant exchange with national and international educational experiences and that, in some way, focus their gaze on caring for the other, will allow the construction of a more enriched and more humane education in the post-pandemic. A collective, biographical, affective and affecting alterity that makes care and the encounter with the other a flag and a point from which to start to reconfigure ourselves as a society in these propitious times.

CONCLUSIONS

The main objective of this article was to analyze, based on and with the narratives of academics in management of the graduate level of the National University of Mar del Plata, the various potentialities and tensions that the COVID 19 pandemic and the virtualization of the courses produced in the postgraduate courses given by said Argentine university and its internationalization.

The results that have been obtained are linked to the enrichment of the redesign of the pedagogical-didactic proposals by the professors in charge of the postgraduate seminars, the economic facilities of hiring international professors for their dictation, the expansion of the enrollment of the new cohorts remotely, the optimization of the study and thesis writing times, the deepening of international exchange based on virtuality and previously established agreements and the challenge of transferring everything done in the conjunctural contingency towards practices that become recurrent with a view to the future of the graduate level in post-pandemic contexts.

Likewise, as a result of the investigation, tensions are identified related to the difficulties of thesis students for the realization of instances of data collection in field work, the absence of face-to-face instances of encounter and exchange in the course of the courses, the impossibility of traveling to carry out training stays abroad and the health risks that this entails.

In methodological terms, the research is qualitative and micro-social, deploying the biographical-narrative approach in its development. This perspective allowed recovering dimensions of postgraduate training, virtuality, its internationalization and the links with the university academic profession from the narratives and experiences of the actors themselves. Going back to the subject and his biographical and professional experiences to, from there, analyze what happens in the daily lives of Latin American higher education means expanding tiny methodologies (OGEDA GUEDES & RIBEIRO, 2019) that complement the classic approaches in the social field and enrich the interpretive look towards future inquiries and debates. Even considering the limits of the approach itself, that is, the impossibility of establishing generalities and the investigation of the object from the subjective experiences

of those who narrate it, we consider that these typologies of social research are powerful insofar as, while complementing the studies Macro-systemic provide contextual and situated interpretations that enrich the construction of knowledge in the field of contemporary educational production.

Although the article does not seek to exhaust here all the findings of the more general postdoctoral research, which covers greater dimensions about the object of study investigated, it allows us to contemplate some of the following questions. In thematic terms, how to construct curricular and pedagogical policies in postgraduate studies that migrate from contingency to recurring, contemplating the learning that the pandemic provided at this time? What are the new characteristics that the internationalization of higher education assumes in times of COVID 19 and post-pandemic? How much can the academics who manage, teach and study in the Argentine postgraduate study contribute for its improvement, updating and development? In methodological terms, how to achieve greater complement and dialogue between the biographical and narrative, micro-sociological and macrosystemic approaches that have university higher education as their object of study? Is it possible to disrupt the classical sense of production of scientific knowledge in the social field and think of methodologies that enable more situated approaches where the subject's experience becomes a central element of the analysis? The questions do not seek to conclude and close the article, rather they try to reflect on what is shared, produce new debates and think together about higher education and its research in future post-pandemic contexts

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