Recognizing inequalities, transforming structures: design and implementation of a care policy at the University of the Republic, Uruguay

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ABSTRACT
This paper discusses the process of designing and implementing a specific policy at the University of the Republic, Uruguay, which seeks to include the dimension of care from a gender and feminist perspective. Firstly, some conceptual supports are introduced, as well as some studies which allow us to review and cross reference through all the organization, which perceives itself as a gender neutral space, while it continues to sustain multiple inequalities. Secondly, the process of building and consolidating a care policy within the University of the Republic is analyzed. It is relevant to highlight the different strategies executed, the spaces and actors involved. Finally, some reflections of this process still under construction are considered.

KEYWORDS
Care policy; University of the Republic; gender inequalities

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1. Introduction

The objective of this article is to analyze the process of designing and implementing a specific policy that seeks to include the dimension of care, from a gender and feminist perspective, within the University of the Republic (UdelaR), Uruguay. This process, iterative and under constant reviewing, has allowed the emergence of a debate involving the entire population which inhabits the University – students, teachers, and workers – and that aims to place the UdelaR as a co-responsible actor of care activities. Thus, an institutional-normative, organizational, and cultural review has been initiated, which aims to include, by mainstreaming, the group of activities involved in care.

The theoretical, conceptual, and empirical contributions made by studies in Science, Technology, and Gender (CTG) in the region highlight the prevalence of multiple gender inequalities in the academic world. The dimension of care has been invisible in the discourse and policies designed at University levels in Latin America. All those activities, which do not have direct competence, including care activities have historically not been taken into account in the design of policies and activities, despite evidence of the direct correlation between care activities and gender inequalities in our region (MIMCIT 2020; Buquet et al. 2013; Arce Riffó et al. 2018; Blázquez 2014; among others).

Following Durán (1978), one of the most commonly used arguments to “detract value” and ignore the economic condition of care work is to “deny its working character” (Durán 1978), maintaining such consideration for the type of work which is developed in the public sphere and for which an economic reward is obtained. However, this type of unpaid care work is essential for the market to exist, by creating the necessary conditions for the subsequent acquisition of human capital. From the feminist economy viewpoint, and particularly the care economy, the concept of care is at the heart of “life sustainability” in all areas where people participate (Carrasco 2016).
Care economy involves all those activities and practices needed for dependent people’s daily survival, due to their age, their conditions or capabilities (children, the elderly, the infirm or relatives with physical disabilities). These activities include self-care, direct care of other people (interpersonal care activity), the provision of pre-conditions under which care takes place (house cleaning, food purchasing, and cooking), and care management (timetable organization, transport to and from schools and other institutions, supervision of the work of paid caregivers, among others).

In the last five years, due to the collective action of feminist academics – within the framework of a broader movement – and spaces built to mainstream gender perspective inside the UdelaR, the value of unpaid care has acquired renewed validity and recognition in the internal debate of the UdelaR, challenging the Institution as a whole. This article is organized in three sections. Firstly, the theoretical contributions that have been made mainly by the CTG studies in Latin America are presented, and also a review of how other regions have connected the academic field with the dimension of care. Secondly, the process of designing and implementing the care policy and the attempt to establish the foundation of a policy still under construction are analyzed. Finally, some general reflections are raised in an attempt to advance and deepen this process.

2. When care enters the academic field: making the invisible visible

Despite progress in women’s participation in Science, gender gaps still persist in advancing and consolidating their academic careers. International literature on this topic points to the relevance of studying how gender roles, especially those derived from unpaid care responsibilities, affect women in their career advancement (European Commission 2019; UNESCO 2018; López-Bassols et al. 2018; Albornoz et al. 2018).

In Latin America, and in our country, there are several studies that show the discontinuous and slower paths that women go through, as a result of the multiple gender inequalities still in place in the Universities. In this way, gender biases are visualized – horizontally and vertically. They are manifested specifically in the greater participation of women in some areas of knowledge, their lower presence in higher-level positions, lower salary levels, and lower productivity recorded through scientific publications, among other issues (Maffia 2008; Estébanez 2011; Blázquez 2014; Tomassini 2014; Goñi Mazzitelli, Tomassini, and Schenck 2014; Bernheim 2015; Buquet et al. 2013; Yáñez 2016; Bukstein and Gandelman 2017; Arce Riffó et al. 2018; Albornoz et al. 2018).

Other effects are less visible, remaining hidden under the apparent gender neutrality within the academic field (Keller 1991). The meritocratic system that guides and regulates these institutions is established as an “equalizing” element of any difference, not just those of gender. According to Ballarían Domingo (2015), the social gender codes in this academic space, despite being transformed and acquiring new meaning, still maintain the structure of male privileges in which the University is immersed since its origin. An example of this lies in the way academic careers are thought, structured, and shaped (Yáñez 2016).

Thus, the demand for Full Tenured Dedication, full availability for Science, and the uninterrupted sequencing of the different building stages are often associated as “the ideal path” through which males’ and females’ trajectories must follow likewise. In the construction of this narrative, and of Science as an institution, gender and its regulations
are imperceptible organizers of the mental and discursive structures of those who inte-
grate academia. Therefore, care activities, which are those belonging to the field of
private and individual subjectivity are “interrupted” when entering the academic field,
guided by reasoning and objectivity.

Certainly motherhood, as the most visible activity within the repertoire of unpaid care,
have been the subject of more frequent studies and analysis as a contributing activity,
while being disregarded in sustaining gender inequalities within the academic field.
Within the framework of all empirical evidence produced, some concepts can be recog-
nized – “rush hour” or the “maternal Wall” (Williams 2005) – that serve to analyze how
these activities occur and which inequalities generate the idea of an in-compatibility
between reproductive and academic life. Thus, there is a “slowing down” and/or lower
productivity on the part of women (Lutter and Schröder 2019).

Others argue that only the existence of young children decreases the production of
publications (Cole and Zuckerman 1984; Mason, Wolfinger, and Goulden 2013; Lutter
and Schröder 2019; Fox 2005; Kyvik and Teigen 1996; Long 1992). Still, others consider
that women with young children are less likely to get Tenured positions than their child-
less peers (Kulp 2016; Mason, Wolfinger, and Goulden 2013; Mason and Goulden 2004;
Morrison, Rudd, and Nerad 2011). This leads to motherhood being perceived as a “risk”
in advancing and consolidating women’s careers in the academic field. Hence, it is
delayed as far as possible or simply discarded (Mason and Goulden 2002, 2004). Most
of these studies reflect, mainly, the reality of the American academic system, as well as
focusing on the segment of the population which integrates universities: researchers
and, to a lesser extent, graduate students.

In the path of generating evidence in Latin America, a cross-dialogue can be recog-
nized between different conceptual frameworks of the effects the dimension of care
has on gender inequalities within the University, which aim to make these inequalities
visible and deepen the analysis in this regard. Thus, the feminist and care economy
and CTG studies have found meeting points to spread the debate on this issue. Therefore,
pointing to the inclusion of this dimension as activities that must be integrated and con-
sidered in the set of practices that outline the journeys of men and women within the aca-
demic fields.

The academic proposal of the feminist economy allows to expand, introduce, and poli-
ticize the dimension of care, recognizing a wide repertoire of activities, beyond mother-
hood, adding value to all these and, recognizing them as essential for the development of
the rest of the activities. The inclusion of this perspective within CTG studies not only
recognizes but also provides a perspective that makes it more complex to read and
analyze how the social organization of care leads to a reproduction of gender inequalities,
including in the academic world.

In this context, a debate is left open on the necessary transformation of the organi-
zational structures of universities – what activities enter, are recognized, and included and
which are not within the formation of male and female tours in academia- seeking to
unfold the idea of the apparent in-compatibility of activities and spaces (Rodigou et al.
2010; Flores Garrido 2017; Alcazar and Balarin et al 2018, Arce Riffo et al. 2018; Andreozzi
et al. 2019, among others).

At least two challenges arise in this scenario. On the one hand, the expansion of aca-
demia’s recognition of all the activities involved in care from an integrated perspective,
where motherhood and fatherhood are not the only subject of the analysis. Thus, the aim is to identify the interaction between – academic and non-academic – activities, proposing their periods, rhythms, and processes (Palomar Verea 2009).

On the other hand, this involves upsetting and transforming the current academic structure, since it is not only a question of women being able to have access to it, but also their inhabiting it. The orientation of gender and care policies should aim towards a breakdown of what is established as “natural,” therefore making explicit the political character involved in the inclusion of the dimension of care within the Universities’ framework.

3. Methodology

This article is based on the systematic review of a series of documents produced by different actors within the UdelaR. It presents information that analyzes how gender inequalities occur particularly when the dimension of care is not taken into account. These documents can be identified in two categories: (i) documents that seek to influence the visibility of care, the discussion on the effects of not having it in mind, and therefore the aim to nurture the construction of actions and policies; (ii) documents grounded on gender-based organizational diagnoses that have been promoted within the UdelaR, in different spaces, and which take into account the dimension of care.

In turn, seeking to nurture the analysis, different regulations and the actions thus pushed to incorporate the dimension of care, mainly activities related to motherhood and paternity, were promoted.1

The systematization and analysis of these documents and regulations seek to identify the characteristics of this route and the designed strategies that serve as the basis for the construction of a care policy within the UdelaR. In this context, the analysis seeks to identify the different actors within the University community and the spaces involved in the promotion of the different concrete actions for the inclusion of this dimension.

Under this analysis, the identification of the conflicts that arise in terms of how the inclusion of the care dimension is addressed and how a specific policy is designed is also sought. The proposed analysis sets to (i) identify how the inclusion of the gender perspective in the UdelaR is designed and implemented as well as the recognition of the care dimension; (ii) what is the structure, in terms of actors and spaces, which are formed for

1The systematized and revised documents were identified under categories: (i) “A brief report on the need to incorporate the gender perspective into university policies” (CAEG, 2012); “University conciliation policies with co-responsibility. Contributions for discussion at the UdelaR” (Gender Thematic Network, 2014); “Accountability Document” (CAEG, 2018, 2019); “UdelaR Gender Equality Policy” (CAEG, 2018); “Base document to incorporate the dimension of care into the UdelaR” (University Teachers’ Association 2019); Annual Report (CAEG, 2019); “Recommendations of the Central Care Commission” (2019, 2020); (ii) “Quantitative diagnostic report for the implementation of the “Quality Model with Gender Equity” in the UdelaR” (CAEG, 2014); Reports of activities of the Open Commission on Gender Equity (2017, 2018, 2019); “Organizational diagnostics applied in different Schools” (2017, 2018, 2019). (iii) Regulations: for the installation and adequacy of nursing rooms (CAEG, 2018); Modification of the presentation to research projects balancing reproductive activities with academic trajectories (CSIC, 2018); Scholarships to facilitate the care of children (University Welfare, 2019). Document that systematizes the creation of recreational spaces in different Schools (2017, 2018, 2019); Criteria for the non-discriminatory inclusion of responsible pregnant students, responsible motherhood and fatherhood in the School of Veterinary Medicine (CAEG and Gender Committee Faculty of Veterinary Medicine, 2018); “RDT Regulation: Maternity and Paternity Leave” (CSIC, 2012); Graduate Study Scholarships Regulations (CAP, 2017). All these documents are freely accessible and were created by each of the actors who make up the respective commissions and/or spaces from which they emerge.
the design of this specific policy and finally how care policy is formalized within the UdelaR.

4. Design of a care policy at the University of the Republic: different actors and spaces in interaction

Recently, the dimension of care has taken an interesting momentum within the UdelaR, highlighting the “no place” that this issue occupied within the institution as the subject of policies. While in our country the analysis of gender inequalities is well documented (Bielli and Buti 2008; Tomassini, 2014; Goñi Mazzitelli, Tomassini, and Schenck 2014; among others) the intersection of this analysis with the care dimension is more recent. In 2020, the results of a survey were presented in our country that seek to relieve barriers that women go through in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) careers in the national academic system. The results showed that care activities have greater effects on women’s trajectories, affecting their performance at different periods and causing difficulties in their consolidation. Thus, the completion times of the doctoral degrees are longer, and the main reason is the care of children: 46% of women have interrupted their study and/or work for 6 or more months, while for males, this percentage reaches just 38%. On the other hand, women take on the unpaid responsibilities of the household to a greater extent, approximately 40% to 50% report being primarily responsible for different household tasks. The biggest difference is seen in childcare: 41% of women claim to be in charge of children, while in males this only reaches 7% (MIMCIT 2020).

These data, coupled with the context outside the UdelaR that led to these discussions, allowed the issue to be put back on the agenda of University policies. On the one hand, the massive mobilization of the feminist movement in our country, and the region, had direct effects on all structures and institutions, including universities and educational institutions in general. Feminist power at the University boosted the debate on some topics, such as care, which have faced resistance in their approach and real depth. Women at the University begin to recognize and become aware, in first person, of different situations that lead to gender inequality and discrimination. This realization and full awareness of the issue led to political action to address the dimension of care within the UdelaR.

On the other hand, in 2015 in Uruguay, Law 19.353 created by the National Integrated Care System came into force. This new regulation recognizes the social value of people who perform care tasks and aims to promote a change in the current sexual division of labor. In short, the rule establishes the subjects of the policy, their rights, and obligations. This is how the National Integrated Care System (SNIC) was born; with the aim of generating a co-responsible model of care, between families, state, community, and market. (SNIC, revised in 2019). It should be emphasized that this policy, its previous debate,

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2This work was carried out by the Women in Science, Innovation, and Technology Inter-Agency Bureau (MIMCIT), as part of its participation in the United Nations Organization for Education, Science and Culture (UNESCO) SAGA (STEM and Gender Advancement) project, with the support of the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB). This survey was applied to researchers who integrated, or have integrated, the National System of Researchers (SNI) into these areas of knowledge – STEM – in the period 2009–2018.
and design, was clearly influenced by the contributions that had been processed in the region and our country due to the feminist and care economy.

In this context of normative transformations and massive mobilizations for women’s rights, the UdelaR is challenged. Responding to the specific demands of its population, adapting and harmoniously incorporating national regulations to the University, designing new regulations that take into account the characteristics of the institution and its population become of utmost concern.

Next, the route initiated in the UdelaR will be presented until the formalization of a care policy, still under construction and consolidation. This journey begins with a cross-section of the institutional gender perspective where, in particular, the emptiness of policies and actions that take into account care activities is evident. In tandem with this, there are actions that seek to “fill” this gap. A set of concrete demands and activities are pushed mainly by women-teachers, students, and workers, who seek to reduce gender inequalities caused by a lack of recognition of the tension between academic and care activities. Finally, the formal features for the creation of a space that aims to design care policy in the UdelaR are presented.

4.1. Institutionalization of the gender perspective: Open Commission on Gender Equity

Gender policies are recent within the UdelaR, as is the case at other Universities in the region (UNESCO 2019; Rojo and Jardon 2018; Torlucci, Vazquez Laba, and Pérez Tort 2019). Taking this into account, the two spaces that will be described and analyzed signal some important milestones from the beginning and some characteristics on the way to cross the gender perspective within the UdelaR. Currently, these spaces work in an articulate way seeking to consolidate the dimension of care, particularly, and considering all aspects of the gender perspective inside the UdelaR. So, the aim is not only reviewing the normative structure but also the construction of a collective reflection to upturn the current academic culture, where various gender inequalities are still reproduced.

The Open Gender Equity Commission (CAEG), established in 2012, is the space where the gender perspective formally begins to be institutionalized within the UdelaR. CAEG plays the role of advising university authorities on how to implement gender transformations in all its fields: teaching, research, and extension; as well as promoting the design, and re-design of institutional policies that take this perspective into account. One of the main actions taken to implement gender mainstreaming was the implementation of the Gender Equity Quality Model (MCEG). This Model began its implementation in 2013, forming a team of advisors with training in gender to carry out this task. In turn, its implementation involved taking into account an intersectional perspective on how inequalities occur. The model is characterized by being: (i) voluntary in its support; (ii) open and flexible, in the sense that each organization will adapt it to its reality based on the realization of a diagnosis; (iii) temporary, its completion depends on the degrees of progress and the overcoming of the inequalities detected, (iv) participatory,

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3 The Model is led by the National Institute of Women – Ministry of Social Development. Through it, guidelines, measures, and methodological guidance are provided for the process of institutional transformation.
4 There are currently 8 gender advisers accompanying the MCEG implementation process.
aiming for the participation and involvement of all actors, and (v) of a certifiable nature through annual audits.

In order to adhere to the Model, each School must form a Gender Committee that will be the responsible space to coordinate the implementation of this tool, and to account for progress at each level. These committees have been a key place as catalysts for multiple demands, including care. Currently, the MCEG has been implemented in 14 Schools and Units of the UdelaR.6

With regard to the dimension of care, this is seen as a critical axis in the context of the organizational diagnosis developed as an initial step in the implementation of the MCEG (Dávalos 2014).7 While this is a present dimension in the implementation of the Model, the almost complete absence of information on this was denied as well as the limited or almost non-existence of specific policies and actions. In this regard this axis aims to identify the actions of the organization to promote work–family reconciliation. For this purpose, the indicators envisaged are (i) the existence of a policy of co-responsibility that guarantees the reconciliation between working and family life; (ii) the existence of staff needs detection relays relating to the use of time; (iii) existence of database with uses of staff time; (iv) the existence of databases about staff according to age that are in charge of children (v) the existence of a database with the number of personnel with dependent relatives; (vi) mechanisms to support the staff with child care; (vii) the existence of adequate nursing rooms and use of sex-based co-responsibility benefits and regulations.

In the context of this limited information, and specific policies and actions, CAEG was a key player in driving specific actions within the different departments, led by gender committees, helping to recognize the problem and fueling the construction of a central care policy.

4.2. Spaces that demand care and drive policies

In this section, I will present the different initiatives that were possible due to women-teachers, students and civilians – who demanded concrete actions and began to hack different university spaces to include the dimension of care. In this scenario, the schools can be seen as the “spaces in action,” where gender inequalities are highlighted within the framework of everyday relationships and where concrete initiatives are promoted seeking its relief.

5There are 4 levels that guide the implementation of MCEG: Level 1 – “Commitment”; Level 2 – “Implementation”; Level 3 – “Improvement” and Level 4 – “Sustainability.” Each level has certain requirements that must be met. For a description of what each of these levels entail: https://www.gub.uy/ministerio-desarrollo-social/node/724.

6Since its momentum in 2013, there are different Schools that have adhered to the Model. It should be mentioned that the application of the Model is not mandatory, but its accession is freed from the explicit will of each School and/or unit that wants to apply it. These spaces are: School of Social Sciences, Humanities and Educational Sciences School, Psychology School, School of Administration and Economic Sciences, Law School, School of Veterinary Medicine, Agronomy School, Information and Communication School, Engineering School, School of Design and Architecture, National School of Fine Arts, East Regional University Center, Chemistry School, Experimental Station “Dr Mario Cassinoni.”

7Diagnostics are based on a common methodology focused on the construction of an eight-axis baseline: 1. Socio-demographic distribution; 2. Level of entry to the organization; 3. Positions, functions and competencies; 4. Remuneration system; 5. Use of time, working day and conciliation and co-responsibility strategies; 6. Training and development opportunities; 7. Prevention and treatment of gender inequities, sexual harassment and gender-based violence; 8. Incorporation of the gender perspective into organizational culture. Each thematic axis is analyzed through a series of about 25 qualitative indicators and 40 quantitative indicators.
In this space, the Gender Thematic Network (RTG), created in 2001 and composed of teachers from different faculties, is a substantive impetus to a line of work aimed at defining and implementing policies to eliminate all gender-based prejudices from higher education, consolidating women’s participation at all levels, and strengthening their active intervention in decision-making. Thus, the Network allows for the creation of the conditions for interdisciplinary dialogue in substantive issues and strategies for teaching, research and relations with the environment, and helps to accelerate the process by driving changes from within the university institution.

In this context, and with regard to the dimension of care, the Network contributed to the discussion and inclusion of this dimension in the UdelaR agenda, from a gender and feminist perspective, creating the synergies necessary to move towards gender equality. A first action, driven by women-teachers from different schools taking as a reference policies that were already replicated in other universities, was the modification of the evaluation regime of the Total Dedication Regime Program (RDT). This program supports teachers in the development of their activities. In 2012, an amendment to its regulation was introduced enabling the extension for one year of the assessment on maternity or paternity grounds.8 This type of mechanism is known in the literature as stop the clock policies. Its application seeks not to lose potential talent and to stimulate the development of teaching careers in terms of equity between men and women. To comply with this objective, it was necessary to implement mechanisms that allow to balance academic activities and those related to care, in this case particularly with motherhood and fatherhood.

Continuing this momentum, in 2014, the Network produced a technical document on the dimension of care, taking into account the lack of data recorded by the implementation of the MCEG, and therefore promoting awareness of the invisibility that the subject has within the institution. This document served as the basis for initiating a process of dialogue and reflection.

In addition to raising a conceptual discussion on gender inequalities, focusing on the care dimension, a number of recommendations were made that sought to influence the construction of specific policies. Last but not least, it provided testimonies of women researchers in different schools that showed from their perspectives the difficulties of reconciling all productive and care activities.

As a result of this increased visibility, the actions promoted by RTG and CAEG, the committees, the gender committees, and the recognition that women within the UdelaR began to make about this dimension and the effects that their institutional “non-presence” have on their journey and development, there were a number of initiatives driven by the concrete demand of different groups of women, mainly teachers, towards the design of a care policy in the UdelaR.

With regard to the evaluation of teachers, and following the line proposed in the DRT, in 2017, as a product of the demand of a group of female teachers, the program to support postgraduate training, promoted by the Academic Graduate Commission (CAP)9, incorporated the possibility of its application during the period of the scholarship for maternity leave, extending payments and academic deadlines during its

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8For further information: http://dedicaciontotal.udelar.edu.uy/wpcontent/uploads/2016/04/dist_103_11_c_criterios_ evaluacion_ver_8set.pdf.
9For additional information on this issue: https://www.posgrados.udelar.edu.uy/portada.php.
implementation. Also in 2018, in the orbit of research policies, the Sectorial Commission for Scientific Research (CSIC) added to the funded research projects the possibility of covering the costs associated with maternal leave of those responsible of the projects as well as members.

Furthermore, the evaluation of teachers who are promoted in the schools also included recognition of care. On the one hand, aspects related to motherhood and paternity were taken into account in the evaluation process, also adding other “special circumstances” that could include care for older adults and/or persons with disabilities. On the other hand, in the event that a teacher is using or has used maternity leave during the evaluation period, a one year extension of the leave is possible. In the case of paternity leave, this extension shall be for six months.

These modifications can be considered a recognition of the inequalities that care activities have on women’s academic trajectories. But the truth is that focusing on activities associated with motherhood, and paternity to a lesser extent, can contribute to the reproduction of traditional care roles and also to limit the inclusion of other activities. While this is an important step forward – demands of teachers who achieved transformations in current regulations- it is still recognized that it is only “a step” in recognition and projection towards the construction of gender-transformational policies (García Prince 2012) within the UdelaR.

Continuing on the stage of the schools, other relevant actors are the Gender Committees. The Committees are composed of representatives of the different populations that make up each school: students, teachers, workers, graduate students, and authorities. These have served as catalysts for the different demands emerging from the context, seeking to provide answers through concrete actions in conjunction with the central commissions.

With regard to the inclusion of the dimension of care, they have played a role in the momentum as advisors of many of the initiatives that begin to be thought and implemented. The first experience was recorded in 2016. At that time, teachers from the Experimental Station “Dr Mario A. Cassinoni” (EEMAC) in the interior of the country (Paysandú), promoted the creation of a space to develop an Early Childhood Educational Center.10 This initiative seeks to respond to a need for care of the entire population that integrates this space (teachers, officials and students). This is the first kindergarten initiative in UdelaR.

As a product of this experience, an alternative to care began to be outlined in other schools. In 2017, the School of Psychology created a co-governed commission that, in conjunction with the gender committee, designed a project for the creation of a Recreational Space.11 This space is installed within the school and begins to be implemented during school holidays (February, July, September, and December), intended for children between 3 and 12 years old. Initially, it was sustained by outsourcing the service to a social organization but is currently supported through a curriculum proposal that is integrated into the school.

10The Experimental Station “Dr Mario A. Cassinoni” of the Udelar is an experimental university center under the Agronomy School authority.
11https://psico.edu.uy/noticias/perspectiva-de-genero-y-corresponsabilidad-de-cuidados-entre-familia-e-institucion-espacio.
The good results achieved by this experience served to have other schools seek to replicate it. Thus, from 2018 and throughout 2019, there were 11 Schools that promoted recreational spaces, also innovating in the forms of management and the type of organization they adopted according to the specific demands that arose from each one. While most of these spaces operate during the school holiday period, the School of Social Sciences planned to open this space every semester and in tandem with classes during the night shift.

This causes the modification of other regulations. This is the case of the School of Veterinary Medicine, where the amendment to the students’ regulations was proposed. In 2018, the Criteria for the non-discriminatory inclusion of pregnant students, maternity and responsible paternity were approved, with the aim of preventing activities associated with maternity and/or paternity from being a barrier and impediment to the realization of the career and its advancement.12

Aimed at the specific population of students, in 2018, University Welfare boosted a scholarship to support child care between 0 and 3 years of age, seeking not to interrupt studies and any other academic activity within the UdelaR.

Finally, it should be noted that nursing rooms have also been installed in the various schools. In 2017, Law No. 19530 was adopted at the national level which states that “in the buildings or premises of public and private sector bodies, bodies and institutions in which twenty or more women work or study, or fifty or more employees work, a nursing room should be available.” In this context, a review process was started in its built structure.

All these initiatives have not only led to concrete changes in different university regulations but have also involved the physical space of the UdelaR in the location of different care activities (kindergarten, recreational spaces, and nursing rooms). These initiatives have been the fundamental basis for bringing about the decision to formalize the design of a care policy within the UdelaR.

4.3. Formalizing care policy

In 2019, the Central Commission on Care was set up. The objective of this Commission is to advise and promote recommendations aimed at adapting and harmoniously incorporating the dimension of care into university legislation and institutions from a wholesome perspective, which is to take into account all activities that are centered around this dimension. The formation of this commission implies the consideration by the UdelaR of a co-responsible role in the context of care activities. This requires moving from the vision in which care is conceived as a private responsibility, towards the idea of collective responsibility in management and care tasks as a strategic guideline.

In the design of this policy, the challenge of transcending women as the subject of these regulations, and motherhood–fatherhood as an almost exclusive care activity is

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12These criteria included a protocol of action that sought to guide the measures to be taken into account. This protocol included: (i) proposing the appointment of a tutor to perform accompaniment and follow-up, (ii) flexibilities in conducting courses (virtual classes, alternative work for evaluation), (iii) flexibility in exams (changing exam dates, providing care space), (iv) taking into account health care, (v) promoting responsible parenthood (10 days after birth students are exempt from course attendances, exams or work presentations). http://www.fvet.edu.uy/index.php/novedades/noticias/22-destacados-noticias/2173-criterios-para-la-inclusion-no-discriminatoria-de-estudiantes-embarazadas-maternidad-y-paternidad-responsable-en-fvet.
essential. The orientation which sets the course of policy design aims to promote a regulation and cultural transformation within the institution, recognizing the role this same institution must assume to ease the interconnection between care and productive activities. It must as well recognize care activities as part of the development of academic trajectories.

The Commission is formed by the Chancellor, CAEG, Pro-Chancellor of Management, teachers representing different areas of knowledge, by the Teaching order, workers, students and graduates, and by the Central Service of University Welfare.

Under this framework, work has been under way. At first, on three axes: (i) the design of a child care system from 0 to 2 years of age, (ii) the creation of legislation to protect the current recreational spaces promoted in the UdelaR and, (iii) review, adjustment, and design of university regulations so as to keep the dimension of care for students, teachers and workers. This framework must be accompanied by campaigns and awareness-raising spaces to modify gender stereotypes, which associate women as the only or best caregivers in relation to men.

This Commission’s start of a journey points to the construction of a care system in the UdelaR, creating the conditions that allow its members to face the many roles of their professional, family, and personal life.

5. Reflections of a policy under construction

The process, which produced the formal creation of a space for the design of a care policy in the UdelaR, faces some new challenges and interesting strategies to be highlighted, and which need to be analyzed more in depth.

Firstly, it is interesting to highlight how the challenge of formally addressing the dimension of care was a process, which directly began with the demand and direct action of the university population, especially women. Undoubtedly, the recognition, in the first person, of gender inequalities resulting from the lack of adequateness between all academic and care activities on behalf of women, led to setting proposals then transformed into policies. Universities have widely resisted the dimension of care, so their recognition does not necessarily imply full recognition. This poses the challenge of not only designing specific policies, changing university regulations from a gender perspective, and while taking this dimension into account, also working the cultural component prevalent in the institution. There is still a lack of understanding in reference to why these activities should be considered within universities. In this context, the cross-contributions between CTG studies and the feminist and care economy allow to deepen the global reflection on the implications that care activities have, in this particular case, in the design and construction of a university that aims to banish gender inequalities.

Secondly, while many of the proposed initiatives and policy changes point almost exclusively towards addressing motherhood- and fatherhood-related care activities, there is a general premise from the Central Care Commission, and other spaces, that seek to promote the inclusion of this dimension as a whole. Perhaps, as in CTG literature and studies, the activities associated with motherhood and fatherhood are the most visible among care activities and therefore the first to emerge. But the truth is they should not be considered the “roof” of the implemented and regulatory changes.
Thirdly, the production of quantitative and qualitative knowledge is essential in order to design and promote a set of policy and regulatory changes. This is a must of the UdelaR; it is currently being worked on.

Summarizing, the formal design of a care policy still under construction within the UdelaR addresses multiple transformations. On the one hand, the way policies are built and nurtured, ensuing from the recognition and daily practices of gender inequality lived by women in the institution. This construction portrays an unusual power within the UdelaR, where politics are not imposed but instead there is a collaborative construction in relation to specific demands. On the other hand, regulatory changes are not enough. The real insertion of the gender category and the dimension of care involves transformations of how the University is built. Reviewing practices, modifying the gender order still present today, recognizing care activities within the institution, are part of the simultaneous challenges posed by such a policy. In this context, it is essential to feed debates and collective reflections that point towards the gradual but sure transformation of the androcentric culture that currently prevails in the UdelaR by expanding the collective imaginary towards new and diverse routes built by males and females. An effective University policy that aims at gender equality implies a renewal that should not be limited to increasing the number of women within it, but involves working to eliminate the inequalities that still occur today by addressing the symbolic dimension that underpins them, revealing the multiple exclusions that the institution has naturalized so far. The journey has started.

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**Disclosure statement**

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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