



# EDITORIAL

Editorial

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## Neoliberalism, Covid-19 and its impact on academia from a gender perspective 2

COVID-19 has widened preexisting gaps in many areas that, even though already known, have been revealed as key in daily life over the last few months. At a structural scale, neoliberalism, rooted in the system through a market logic that imprints every sphere of society, promotes a competitive development of the productive tasks that neglects the reproductive activities that sustain it. The pandemic and the confinement have shaken this system when domestic chores and care tasks have had to be incorporated into the daily productive work and, in many cases, have had to share the same physical space, leading to a blurring of the boundaries of two areas that had been differentiated. State universities meanwhile have not escaped this market logic which has permeated its methods of economic support and administering its human capital. Currently, Chilean public universities are subject to some basic means of financing based on quantitative indicators of academic productivity and enrolled students, instead of being focused on strategic regional and national goals. The pandemic has jeopardized a system supported by productivity which had to focus on implementing a transition towards a remote teaching modality, one that saw an increase in class numbers and the number of courses per teacher, as a response to the economic impact brought by Covid-19.

Complementarily, when the focus is put on women and on how they have had to face this situation, already adverse in normal times, we find that, in the reproductive dimension and on a structural scale, women tend to be in charge of most of the care and domestic tasks. The confinement during a pandemic, has burdened them again, in a greater degree, with these being unpaid tasks, making the so-called "conciliation" (CEPAL, 2020) complex and a first gender asymmetry has been made apparent as a consequence of Covid-19, one linked to the reproductive dimension of care and domestic chores. At a university scale, this reproductive gap affects all groups of working women for whom, also, another series of asymmetries associated to the productive dimension, which comes from their gender condition, are superimposed, which vary according to the functions that perform in the university and the contractual relationship each one of them has with the institution.

When the focus is turned even further towards female teachers and/or professors, it is possible to see three relevant gaps: female representation is remarkably lower than that of men; it is complicated to find women at the highest levels or in leadership positions; and female professors receive an average remuneration that is lower than their male peers at the same level. Also, women perform leadership positions with a "reproductive" nature in academia, turning away from more point-scoring tasks in the structure and slowing down, in this way, their professional promotion. In this sense, universities have been accomplices of a patriarchal system that has built inequalities and glass ceilings that are difficult to break. During the pandemic, the reproductive asymmetry falls onto this group, due to their gender condition, which harshly affects conciliation with the demanding productive tasks, in particular to those who find themselves alone

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2 This editorial combines some findings of the innovation project "Desafío UBB: COVID-19" called "Mujer y trabajo a distancia en tiempos de COVID-19: análisis y monitoreo en Universidad del Bío-Bío, sede Concepción" (R&D 20-49), developed together with Soledad Reyes Pérez, Carmen Burdiles Cisterna and Jessica Jerez Yáñez, and some analysis made by Urbano's Editorial Team.

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Figure 1, 2 Alexis Pérez Fargallo, Concepción, 2020.

in the care of their children or elderly family members. The flip towards care and domestic chores and the transition towards a more demanding teaching has meant that possibilities of presenting projects, developing works or presenting scientific articles has been drastically reduced. Thus, the reproductive asymmetry originates a productive asymmetry compared to peers with no people to look after, who have been able to carry on moving forwards in their professional careers and fulfilling the commitments taken on before the pandemic. In this context, it is not strange that several voices have red flagged the situation of academic women in this health emergency and have denounced the professional deceleration they are suffering because they are researching and publishing less than under normal circumstances. Female authorship in scientific journals during this year and next, therefore, is predicted to fall, which will deepen an already existing distance in the presence of women in the specialized and scientific media, a distance that it does not seem will be reversed in the short-term.

The Chilean specialized media in the areas of urbanism, urban studies and geography is not exempt from this dynamic, where women still have less participation and leadership. A global analysis of the last five issues published (2018, 2019 and 2020) in the four Chilean urbanism journals indexed in Scopus (Revista AUS, Revista Geográfica Norte Grande, Revista de Urbanismo and Urbano) indicates not only that the presence of male authors is greater than female authors (12.7 compared to 10 per issue), but that also they lead group authorship of articles (5.7 compared to 4.6 per issue). This general data, however, are not free from exceptions per issue and per journal.

Urbano, since the entry of new female Editorial Team in January 2017, has tried to incorporate, where possible, gender equality in all of its processes. In 2017, the parity of the International Committee was reached and, since then, it has been sought to also balance the panel of expert evaluators, with less success in this case. On the other hand, analysis of the last five issues of Urbano (2018, 2019 and 2020) shows that women have a greater presence not only as authors (9.4 compared to 8.4 per issue), but also as leaders in group authorship (4.4 compared to 3 per issue). The current issue 42, whose call was amidst the pandemic, breaks the balance on seeing an increase of male presence (17 compared to 11); however, women keep a greater index of lead authorship (6 compared to 4). From this perspective, Urbano positions itself as an urbanism journal that champions parity in its internal administration and where women appear with an important role of leadership in the area of urbanism, even during this complex time.

Finally, and to conclude, when facing the gaps and asymmetries derived from neoliberalism, the pandemic and gender inequality, female academics and women in general, must take advantage of the opportunity of structural change that, we hope, will take place during the coming months on different scales, to promote a transition into a more equalitarian system, that becomes co-responsible for reproductive life and that makes the same opportunities for all possible, regardless of gender, ethnicity or social group. In this sense, it is worth pointing out some final reflections or challenges:

- The new Chilean constitution and new university bylaws, as national and university carta magna, must guarantee the basic principles so that these changes can take place in all the spheres of the economic and university system.
- Complementarily, the policies of higher education, of financing universities and of research should redirect their goals and focus on quality and not on quantitative indicators, in the areas of education and research.
- From the scientific media, we must promote and guarantee the presence of women and their involvement of several editorial areas, both visible, like scientific and writing committees, and invisible, editorial teams and evaluation panels; as well as quantitatively and qualitatively monitor their presence in authorships in order to measure whether the barriers in academia to reach this final stage of research are maintained, increase or are overcome.

Now, despite the fact that all these changes are necessary, they are not enough to generate a real change in gender equality either at a structural or, specifically, at an academic level. These changes must take place alongside a profound transformation of society that takes these principles as their own, and allows and promotes a natural transition in the coming years.

