

Learning in Struggle Argentina's New Worker Cooperatives as Transformative Learning Organizations

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Argentina's *empresas recuperadas por sus trabajadores* (worker-recuperated enterprises, or ERTs)



Aims of my presentation

To present an overview of my research work with Argentina's *empresas recuperadas*.

Soon to be published as a book for Brill/Haymarket's Historical Materialism series:

There's No Stopping the Workers: Crises, Autogestión, and Cooperation in Argentina's Worker-Recuperated Enterprises

Synthesis of my case study work:

Vieta, M. (2014). Learning in Struggle: Argentina's New Worker Cooperatives as Transformative Learning Organizations. *Relations Industrielles/Industrial Relations*, 69(1), 186-218.

Research objectives

Influential instances of workplace conversions to worker cooperatives and working-class self-activity.

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By learning informally and collaboratively “in struggle”...

Transform subjectivities, organizations, and communities.

The methodological framework of my research program

1. Critical theories of technology and organizations of production
2. Working-class political economy
3. Labour process theory and theories of self-management
4. Social movement and workplace learning

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Workplaces also learning spaces...

People constantly learn at work in informal and social ways.

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Transformative organizations for workers and communities.

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The most radical forms of organizational change and sites of expansive learning.

“Each [workplace] takeover is an intense learning process for the workforce as an organisation as well as for individuals—there is a change of social roles, new attitudes [and skills] are required.” (Robert Paton, 1989; also see McCain, 1999, Delahaye, 2005)

Learning-in-struggle

Expansive learning

“occurs when contradictions are aggravated over time...; [challenging and questioning] ...existing norms, and the object or motive of activity are reconceptualized into a broader horizon of possibilities.” (Yrjö Engeström, 2001)

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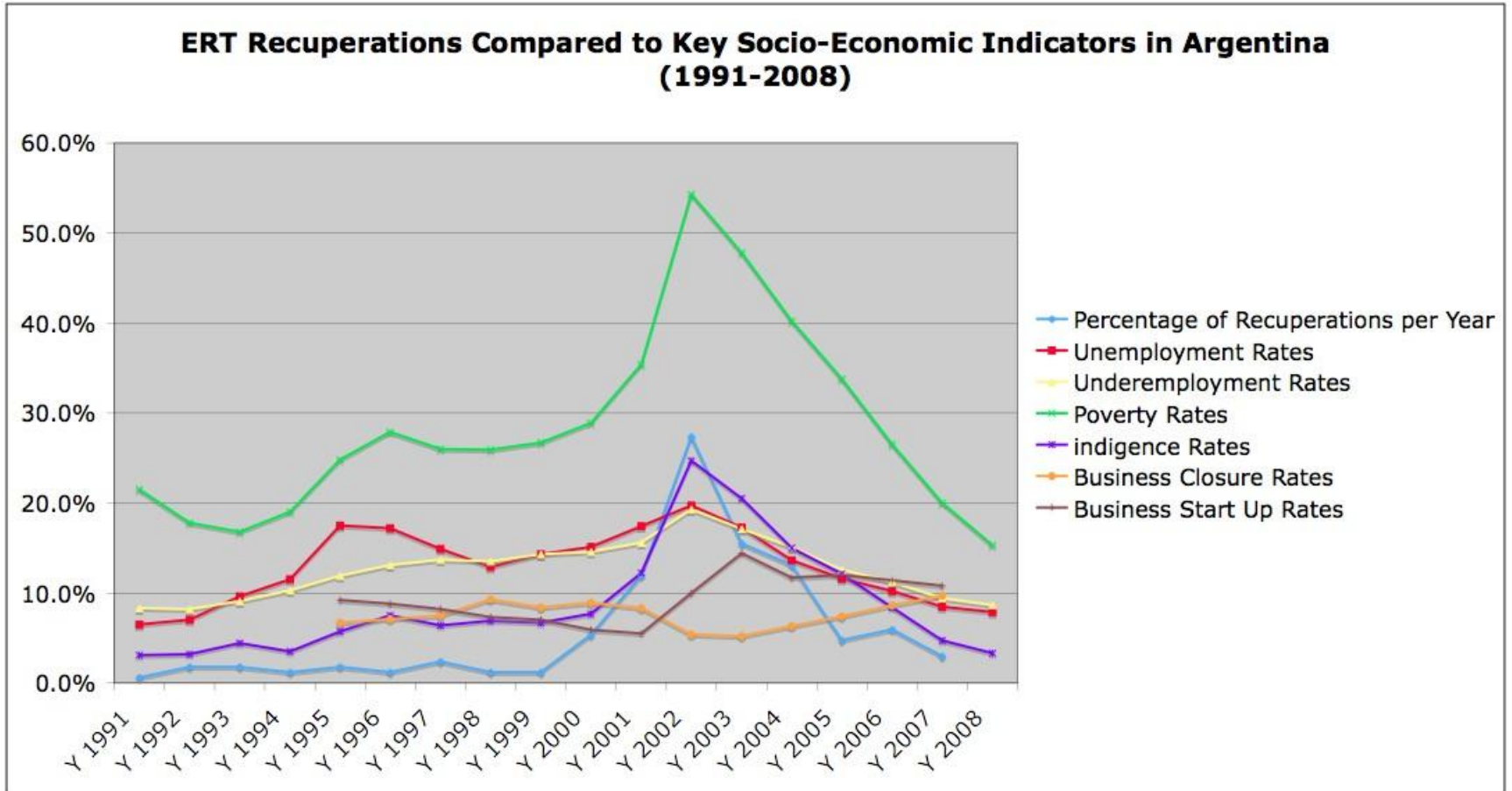
Paradigm-shifting learning

ERTs as “*transformative learning organizations,*” for workers, for workplaces, and for communities.

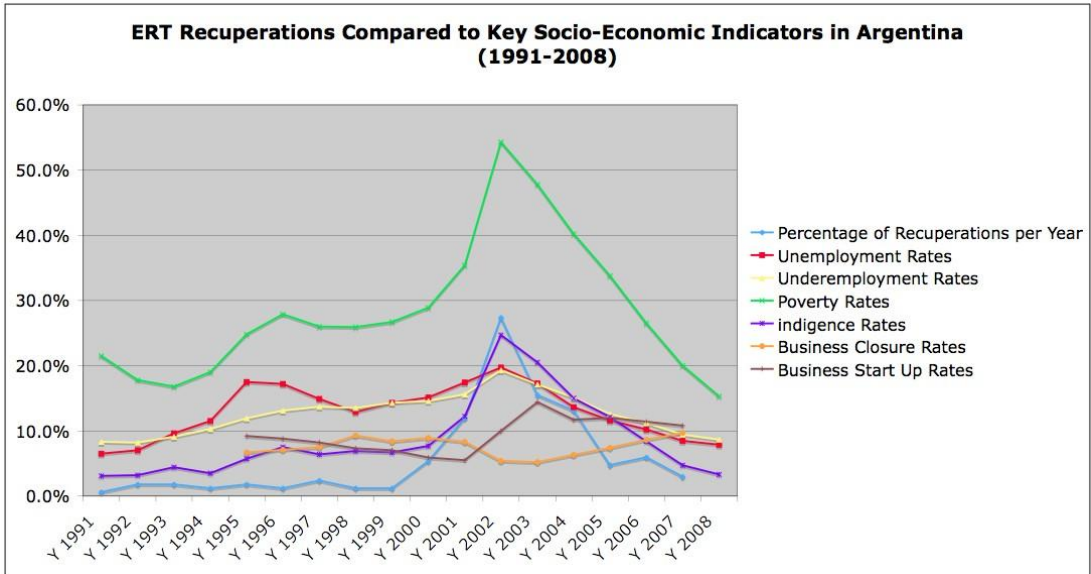
Research method

1. A macro-level political economy approach
2. A micro-level ethnographic and extended case studies dimension

The political economy of Argentina's ERTs



The political economy of Argentina's ERTs



The micro-level ethnographic and extended case studies dimension

Extended case study approach (Michael Burawoy, 1998)

The lived experiences of self-management

In-situ observations in four case study ERTs, and extended key informant interviews

Chilavert



Chilavert

Unión Solidaria de Trabajadores



Chilavert



Unión Solidaria de Trabajadores



Comercio y Justicia



Chilavert



Unión Solidaria de Trabajadores



Comercio y Justicia



Clínica Junín



Four main contributions, or findings

1. The lived experience of macro-economic crisis on shop floors.
2. ERTs' "radical social innovations."
3. The emergence of more socially-just workplaces.
4. ERTs' "recuperative moments."

First contribution: The role of crisis in creating ERTs and transforming workers

ERTs grow out of macro-economic and social *crises* radiating into workplaces.

Through lived experience of *crisis* on shop-floors, workers transform and radicalize: *from managed employees to self-managed workers.*

The transformation of workers “in struggle”



“[L]ooking back on our struggle three years on...I can see where the change in me started.... [I]t begins during your struggles. First, you fight for not being left out on the street with nothing. And then, suddenly, you see that you’ve formed a cooperative and you start getting involved in the struggle of other ERTs. You don’t realize it at the time but within your own self there’s a change that’s taking place.... You realize afterwards, after time has passed. You start to do things that you would never imagine yourself doing.” (Cándido Gonzalez, Chilavert)

Autogestión



“The possibility that we – all people – have to realize ourselves professionally, economically, and, in our capacities to labour. It emerges from within ourselves and together with the people with whom we want to share this realization, but without sacrificing personal freedom, without sacrificing personal dignity, and from our own developmental potential. It is, in other words, about the possibility of the full development of the person.”
(Javier Depasquale, Comercio y Justicia)

ERT protagonists overcoming challenges in self-management

Learning how to be cooperators

Restarting production

Financing and capitalization

Inappropriate bankruptcy laws

Struggles (via political lobbying and protests) to reform or change business, bankruptcy, expropriation, and cooperative laws

Second contribution: ERTs' "radical social innovations"

Transform formerly capitalist workplaces.

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Restructuring the organization's *governance, production processes, culture and goals* through *social values*.

First radical social innovation: *Social and solidarity economic practices*



Second radical social innovation: *More egalitarian and horizontal firms*



Third radical social innovation: *Bringing the community into a workplace*



Fourth radical social innovation: *Reinvesting surpluses back into the community*

ERTs' community development initiatives create social wellbeing and economies of "place"



***“La fábrica abierta”* – “The open factory”**



Third contribution: More socially just workplaces

From out of crises and collective struggles, more socially just economic organizations and workplaces emerge.

Compañerismo (camaraderie, or solidarity)

Esto es de todos (this belongs to all of us)

Fourth contribution: ERTs's "recuperative moments"

Prefigurative experiences

The recuperation of:

1. The labour process
2. The divisions of labour
3. Surpluses
4. Workers' abilities to cooperate
5. Workers' capacities to produce social wealth
6. Workers' own labour-power

Recuperating "dignity at work."

Two North American examples of ERTs

- New Era Windows Cooperative (Chicago)
<http://www.newerawindows.com/>



- Careforce Home Healthcare Cooperative (Kentville, Nova Scotia)
<http://www.careforce.ca/>

careforce
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NURSING FOOT CARE SUPPORTING COMMUNITY
For a FREE in-home consultation call 1-866-966-1486

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Beth is courteous and very knowledgeable... I like someone who is pleasant to have around. I couldn't do without her. - E.J.L.

Caregivers

"I feel so much better having your service available - a huge relief when I'm so far away." - E.M., United Kingdom

Choosing to receive assistance in your home can be a new and stressful experience; that's why the caregiver has to be someone you can trust.

We screen our staff carefully, making sure they are bonded and insured, and we encourage and provide professional development training.

But we go further than that—we choose only staff that are friendly, dependable, and who will understand your needs and preferences. Cooking meals, helping clean house, running errands and more—our staff will help you with everyday tasks that you may be finding difficult or challenging.

Our staff look forward to coming to your home. What's more important, you'll look forward to them coming, too.

The Careforce Team, June 2014



All of our caregivers are:

- People we would want working in our own homes caring for our loved ones
- Directly supervised and coached by a Registered Nurse
- Carefully screened, bonded and insured
- Fully covered by the Workers' Compensation Board of Nova Scotia
- Paired with you to suit your preferences and lifestyle
- Trained and certified in First Aid and CPR
- Educated with monthly skills training so they are always increasing their knowledge and abilities
- Professional, dependable and reliable
- Friendly and understanding
- Able to access our on call Registered Nurse any time day or night
- Committed to providing, without compromise, the highest quality of care

Many of our caregivers:

- Are registered Continuing Care Assistants (CCAs)
- Are certified in the Alzheimer's Disease and Other Dementias Care Course
- Are certified in the Palliative Care Frontline Education Course
- Have completed Mental Health First Aid training
- Are certified in WHMIS and Food Safety