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**Supporting alternative organizations? Exploring scholars' involvement in  
the performativity of worker-recovered companies**

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# **Supporting alternative organizations? Exploring scholars' involvement in the performativity of worker-recuperated enterprises**

## **Abstract**

This paper analyzes the role of academics in the production and maintenance of alternative organizations within the capitalist system. Empirically, we focus on academics from the University of Buenos Aires who, through the extension programme *Facultad Abierta*, have supported worker recuperated enterprises (WREs) since their emergence in Argentina in the early 2000s. Conceptually, we build on prior studies on WREs as well as the 'critical performativity' concept that we define as scholars' subversive interventions that can involve the production of new subjectivities, the constitution of new organizational models and/or the bridging of these models to current social movements. Our results uncover the multiple roles of academics in relation to these three facets and highlight the key interactions of these roles. In so doing, our analysis advances prior studies of WREs by clarifying how academics can support alternative organizations while offering a renewed conceptualization of critical performativity as a multifaceted process through which academics and workers interact.

**Key-words:** alternative organizations, critical performativity, engagement, *Facultad Abierta* extension programme, worker recuperated cooperative.

## **Supporting alternative organizations? Exploring scholars' involvement in the performativity of worker-recuperated enterprises**

*Que se vayan todos*

(‘Throw them all out’, chant of the December 2001 rebellion in Argentina)

Ultimately, we were on the streets with them; we suffered police brutality with them, when there was repression. And we were by their side during takeovers. That distance that exists between a scholar and a worker, that distance disappeared in practice.

(Interview with a member of the Programa de Extensión Facultad Abierta)

Argentinian worker recuperated enterprises (WREs) – ‘empresas recuperadas por sus trabajadores’ in Spanish – emerged in the early 2000s, when Argentina, in the midst of a major economic crisis following the structural reforms driven by the International Monetary Fund (Patroni, 2004), was experiencing alarming rates of unemployment and bankruptcies. To avoid starvation for themselves and their families, some workers ‘took over’ bankrupted and abandoned enterprises and put them back to work by turning them into ‘self-managed’ enterprises organized around the values of equity and worker self-management (Vieta, 2014a). What at first emerged out of a concrete struggle for survival by ‘people who had not developed a utopian vision of society’ (Monteagudo, 2008: 193) became over time one of the few on-going large-scale successful attempts at performing an alternative form of organization within a capitalist system (Atzieni and Vieta, 2014; Vieta, 2014b).

Despite their relatively limited importance for Argentina’s economy overall – 300 such enterprises operate in Argentina’s economy and account for approximately 13,000 self-managed workers (Programa Facultad Abierta, 2014)<sup>i</sup> – WREs have had a huge symbolic impact on Argentinian society (Palomino, 2003; Tauss, 2015). They have proved to be a viable production model (Vieta, 2014b) while ‘maintaining their values’, hence demonstrating that it is possible to sustain over multiple years ‘an alternative moral economy to that of neoliberalism’ (Ozarow and Croucher, 2014: 1003), despite all the challenges that such a project entails (Cheney, 1999; Cornforth and Thomas, 1990; Varman and Chakrabati, 2004).

In this article, we focus on a unique feature of Argentinian WREs that has received little scholarly attention, namely, the *Programa de Extensión Facultad Abierta*<sup>ii</sup>, which is an initiative launched in 2002 by a group of academics from the School of Philosophy and Literature of the University of Buenos Aires to connect this university to the broader society. Despite the fact that WREs epitomize alternative organizational forms for academics (Parker, Cheney, Fournier and Land, 2014) and have been subjected to a growing number of inquiries from sociologists and organizational scholars (Atzeni, 2012; Palomino, 2003; Vieta, 2012), relatively little is known about the activities undertaken by these scholars – generally referred to as ‘*extensionistas*’ in Spanish – in the production and maintenance of these organizations, beyond a report that describes their ten years of activities (Programa Facultad Abierta, 2012). Through their enduring involvement in this programme, extensionistas supported WRE workers in their struggles for more than 15 years. This programme is therefore an exceptional example of long-term scholarly engagement in relation to the creation and maintenance of alternative forms of organization. It suggests that Argentinian WREs can be approached as a case of ‘critical performativity’, i.e., a case of ‘subversive intervention’ of scholars outside the university context (Spicer, Alvesson and Kärreman, 2009: 538).<sup>iii</sup> We thus focus on the activities of these scholars and their influence on the development of WREs to ask: *how can scholars support the production and maintenance of alternative organizational forms?*

To address this question, we rely on prior studies of the WREs (Palomino, 2003; Vieta, 2012) as well as recent debates about the critical performativity concept (Cabantous et al., 2016; Fleming and Banerjee, 2016; Gond and Cabantous, 2016; Schaefer and Wickert, 2016). Empirically, we build on secondary data and 19 first-hand interviews with extensionistas and WRE workers to provide a rich account of how extensionistas engaged with the WREs since their emergence in Argentina, and we clarify the activities they undertook as well as the challenges they faced to help WRE workers.

By studying Argentinian WREs through the programme *Facultad Abierta*, we contribute to organizational studies in a twofold manner. Our first contribution is to the literature on WREs. Our analysis sheds light on a relatively neglected aspect of the history of Argentinian WREs, namely, the role of academics from the University of Buenos Aires. Moving beyond the report published to celebrate the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the programme (Programa Facultad Abierta, 2012), we provide a rich account of these scholars' roles in the development and maintenance of WREs. Our analysis thus complements past WREs studies, which have mainly focused on WRE workers' subjectivities and learning processes (e.g., Montegudo, 2008) or the transformative impact of WREs on Argentina (e.g., Palomino 2003).

Our second contribution is the further elaboration of the notion of 'critical performativity'. While this concept has generated a conceptual debate (e.g., Cabantous et al., 2016; Fleming and Banerjee, 2016), researchers have only started to explore empirically what it takes for scholars to become 'critically performative' (King, 2015; Leca, Barin Cruz and Gond, 2014; Parker and Parker, 2017). Through the case of Argentinian WREs, we show that critically performative interventions may require engaged scholars to cultivate the multiple facets of critical performativity if they wish to support and promote alternative forms of organizing in the long run. In so doing, we inform discussions on the role of academics in the performativity of alternative organizations and contribute to the debate about the role of academics and intellectuals in society (Burawoy, 2005; Gibson-Graham, 2008).

## **Bringing worker-recuperated enterprises into being: A critical performativity perspective on Argentinian WREs**

### **The literature on Argentinian WREs**

Prior studies of Argentinian WREs have shown how the constitution of this new alternative organizational form transformed workers' identities and subjectivities. Palomino (2003), for instance, builds on interviews with 40 workers from 10 WREs located in Buenos Aires to

show the profound ‘cultural transformation’ that WRE workers experienced as their ‘working-class identities [*shifted*] away from the notion of ‘salaried workers’ to a new identity as ‘autonomous’ subjects, independent of a previous employer’ (p. 93). This author also shows that the transformation of workers’ subjectivities was not a straightforward process: workers had to overcome anxieties stemming from the practical and material challenges they faced, such as finding suppliers and customers willing to do business with workers of an occupied enterprise, creating physical and social spaces that allow the coordination of production in a non-hierarchical way, or organizing public arenas for democratic decision-making.

The constitution of alternative subjectivities hence resulted from new forms of practical and material engagement by workers, a fact well illustrated by Monteagudo (2008). Working as a participant observer at the cooperative *La Nueva Esperanza* – a recovered balloon factory of Buenos Aires – the author packed balloons by hand for a month in January 2007. She recalls her realization that ‘the road to Eva’s [*a worker from the factory*] trust was going to be through earning [*her own*] credentials as a hard, competent worker’ (p. 176). Thanks to her personal experience in this factory, she was able to document and narrate the changes in workers’ subjectivities and to observe that not all WRE workers embraced a new identity as self-managed and cooperative workers. Overall, this study, which was informed by the concept of subjectification (Butler, 1992; Foucault, 2003), shows how the transformation of power relations during a ‘recovery process’ constitutes new subjects.

Beyond showing how WRE workers have gradually adopted new subjectivities and identities, studies on WREs also highlight the pragmatic dynamics at stake in the making of this alternative organizational form. Building on the literature on class struggle (Lebowitz, 2003), cooperatives (Webb and Cheney, 2014), and Paulo Freire’s (1993) concept of conscientization, Vieta connects the production of identities to the emergence of ‘self-

management' in WREs (Vieta, 2012, 2013). In contrast with Leca et al.'s (2014) account of the emergence of alternative organizations in Brazil purposively shaped by university professors' interventions and based on prior knowledge of an ideal 'organizational model' of cooperatives, Vieta's analyses insist on the 'emergent' nature of the constitution of the WRE model: both the conceptualization and the physical manifestation of Argentinian WREs were coincident and co-produced through practice (Vieta, 2012, 2014a). He argues that WREs are sites of informal 'transformative learning' (Vieta, 2010) and that WRE workers' learning process occurred mostly tacitly and incidentally on the material space of the shop floor (Vieta, 2012: 140). Vieta further connects the informal nature of this learning process to the fact that WREs emerged not 'because their workers had predetermined values of cooperatives nor because they sought social change' but rather 'out of necessity and immanently out of their workers' experiences of micro-economic crises...' (Atzeni, 2012: 150). Through this process, workers 'learn by doing' how to be self-managed, and WREs operate as 'experimental sites' to explore an alternative form of management that could help produce a different socio-economic future (Vieta, 2014b: 784). In this regard, WREs can be regarded as 'prefiguring' a possible self-managed economy (Boggs, 1977), and their practice is thus meaningful in relation to broader socio-political changes.

Finally, prior WRE literature documents the broader socio-political dynamics at play in the creation of WREs. Despite the fact that workers did not initially conceive WREs as 'laboratories for social innovation', and the 'recovered factory movement did not evolve for the most part, in a classic class consciousness' (Monteagudo, 2008: 194), WREs have had a profound symbolic impact on Argentinian society (Palomino, 2003). Peter Ranis, a political science professor specializing in the use of cooperatives as a labour strategy against poverty and unemployment, has documented the transformative impact of WREs on Argentina's economy and society (Ranis, 2005, 2006a, 2006b, 2008, 2010, 2015). His research, which



conceptualizes WREs as a social movement that ‘question[s] the moral authority and legitimacy of predatory capitalist behavior’ (Ranis, 2005: 2), suggests that Argentinian WREs ‘...offer a strong critique of [*the capitalist system*’s] modus operandi’ and ‘symbolise an alternative path of economic development that is predicated on worker solidarity and democracy in the workplace’ (Ranis, 2006b: 22-23). Other studies have argued that ‘[WREs] alternative vision for labor [*offers*] an alternative moral economy to that of neoliberalism’ (Ozarow and Croucher, 2014: 1003) and documented the emancipatory impact of WREs on local communities (Vieta, 2004).

Missing from these prior accounts of WREs, however, is an in-depth, reflexive study of the roles played by the extensionistas from the *Facultad Abierta* programme in the creation and development of WREs. This is not to say that extensionistas and scholars studying WREs have lacked reflexivity on their practice. They have criticized the lack of engagement of scholars with the working class (Ruggeri et al., 2012) and extensively reflected on how their values and actions influence their research during interviews or in their publications (Monteagudo, 2008). In 2012, extensionistas also released a collective report to celebrate the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the programme (Programa Facultad Abierta, 2012), where they explain how they repositioned the *Facultad Abierta* programme as a ‘political-academic’ programme in an attempt to overcome the distance between the university and the working class (see Fernández Alvarez, 2012; Girardi, 2012) and show how sharing the day-to-day allowed them to construct a committed relationship with workers (see Antivero, 2012; Martínez, 2012).

However, no study has yet systematically investigated the roles played by extensionistas in the WRE movement, since extensionistas have been mostly interested in understanding WRE workers and their struggles, favouring the promotion of the organizations they seek to help rather than theorizing their own contribution. To analyse with more depth the relationships between the history of WREs in Argentina and the extension programme

*Facultad Abierta*, we propose relying on critical performativity studies that provide us with a vocabulary to unpack the multiple activities engaged in by the members of this programme to help sustain the development of WREs.

### **Analysing scholars' subversive engagement through the 'critical performativity' lens**

The notion of critical performativity has been introduced in the organization studies literature as a way to describe scholars' 'active and subversive intervention into managerial discourses and practices ...achieved through affirmation, care, pragmatism, engagement with potentialities, and a normative orientation' (Spicer et al., 2009: 538).

This notion, initially conceptualized by Spicer et al. (2009) and then recast as 'progressive performativity' by Wickert and Schaeffer (2015), has generated considerable debate recently. Critics of critical performativity have argued that this notion neglects non-discursive processes of engagement and is likely to fail because of its sole focus on managers as key targets of performativity efforts (Cabantous et al., 2016; Fleming and Banerjee, 2016; Learmonth et al., 2016). Building on an understanding of performativity as a socio-material process that 'brings theory into being' (Callon, 1998, 2007) and on a reading of Butler's foundational works (Butler, 1997, 2010), these critics have regarded critical performativity as an inherently 'political and material' process and have stressed the role of materiality in the production of subjectivities (Cabantous et al., 2016) and the creation of alternative forms of organizations in a capitalist context (Fleming and Banerjee, 2016). They have also firmly grounded critical performativity in traditional academic activities by arguing that theories – or expert bodies of knowledge – are not absent from the critical performativity process and actively help bring into being alternative organizational forms (Cabantous et al., 2016; Gond et al., 2016; Leca et al., 2014).

In their responses to these critiques, Spicer et al. (2016) recognized the importance of political dynamics by linking critical performativity to social movement, while Wickert and Schaffer (2016) acknowledged the importance of materiality in performativity.

As a whole, these developments and debates suggest that scholars must consider three facets of performativity if they wish to become ‘critically performative’ and help, through the knowledge they produce and their teaching practice, bring into being alternative modes of organizations: *the sociomaterial production of subjectivities and identities* (Cabantous et al., 2016); *the constitution of new organizational models and realities* (Fleming and Banerjee, 2016: 262; Leca et al., 2014; Schaefer and Wickert, 2016: 220-222); and *connections to broader social and political dynamics* (Spicer et al., 2016: 237-240; Willmott, 2013). In what follows, we use these facets of critical performativity to make sense of the multiple activities undertaken by extensionistas in the context of Argentina’s WREs’ experience.

## **Case context: Argentinian WREs and the *Programa de Extensión Facultad Abierta***

### **Capitalism in crisis in Argentina in the early 2000s**

In the late 1980s, after decades of state-led, populist and protectionist policies, Argentina faced a severe debt crisis and suffered from hyperinflation. In an attempt to stabilize the economy, the government followed the Washington Consensus agenda and implemented an ambitious stabilization plan focused on the privatization of public assets, trade liberalization and the dollarization of the national currency. As a result of these actions, Argentina became the ‘best student of the IMF’. However, the promise of growth was not fulfilled (Bambaci et al., 2002; Rodrik, 2006), and in December 2001, the sovereign debt default was declared.

Argentina then entered a phase of severe economic depression: unemployment rates skyrocketed, reaching 20% of the labour force, while 50% of the population fell below the poverty line (Gervasoni, 2003; Sandleris and Wright, 2014). Many small and medium

enterprises (SMEs) closed down – an average of 2600 bankruptcies were registered monthly throughout 2001 (Vieta, 2010). Some SMEs owners deserted their enterprises without following the legal procedures that regulate factory closures, while others illegally cleared out their factories of all physical assets (Palomino, 2003). Others attempted to survive by breaching labour contracts, imposing salary reductions, paying wages through vouchers, and curtailing payment of social security benefits.

### **Organizing the alternative: Worker-recuperated enterprises**

To protect their jobs, some workers, operating in a wide range of industries such as publishing, metallurgy, construction, textiles, shipbuilding, or meatpacking, took over their factories (Palomino, 2003; Vieta, 2014a; Vieta and Ruggeri, 2007). In some situations, they occupied the factory simply to put a stop to its being cleared out by the owners. Thus, paradoxically, workers became the guardians of the capital to prevent the capital from ‘steal[ing] from itself’ (Ruggeri, 2014).

Taking over an enterprise is an illegal process that typically spans a long duration of time. In the Argentinian case, takeovers lasted from a few months to several years. In many cases, as owners pursued legal recourse to recover their assets, the police surrounded the factories to prevent (exhausted) workers (who often lived there 24/7) from getting the factory back to production mode. The local population, however, often helped the workers in their effort to maintain (or re-start) production by helping them access the inputs required for production and the customers needed to buy their products. The situation of WRE workers was also terribly uncertain since they did not know if, after a long and controversial trial, judges would accept their request or ask the police to expel them. For cases in which judges pronounced that the workers were legally authorized to run the company, the recuperated enterprise had to be turned into a cooperative, as described under the *Ley de Cooperativas* (Argentinian federal cooperative law). The cooperative form is indeed the only form in the Argentinian legislation

that allows for collective practices such as self-management (Ruggeri, 2014). However, while WREs legally are cooperatives and share some of cooperatives' values (e.g., horizontality, self-reliance, and equity), they have a distinctive identity. For instance, unlike most cooperative members, WRE workers adopted self-management not because of economic, social, or cultural beliefs but because they had to operate the company in the absence of owners and managers (Ruggeri, 2014). Furthermore, most WRE workers see themselves as key actors in the struggle against capitalism (Ruggeri and Vieta, 2014; Vieta, 2010) and do not necessarily trust cooperative members who engage in discourse about solidarity but might still reproduce employment exploitation (Ruggeri, 2014).

The birth of WREs in Argentina is also linked to the intense political mobilization that, in the aftermath of the 2001 economic crisis, aimed at putting pressure on the state in order to accelerate expropriations from previous owners and at raising awareness of WREs amongst the general public. Throughout these years, the most active political movements were the *Movimiento Nacional de Empresas Recuperadas* (MNER, National Movement of Worker-Recuperated Factories) and the *Movimiento Nacional de Fábricas Recuperadas por sus Trabajadores* (MNFRT, National Movement of Worker-Recuperated Factories). Later, when the economy started to show improvement and political mobilization shifted its objectives, other political movements, such as the *Asociación Nacional de Trabajadores Autogestionados* (ANTA, National Association of Self-Managed Workers), the *Federación Argentina de Cooperativas de Trabajo Autogestionado* (FACTA, Argentinian Federation of Self-Managed Workers Cooperatives) and the *Confederación Nacional de Cooperativas de Trabajo* (CNCT, National Confederation of Worker Cooperatives), became relevant actors. These movements have actively supported the development of WREs across the country by continuously advocating for changes in legislation.

While WREs are a direct consequence of the 2001 economic crisis, the number of recuperated enterprises continued to grow throughout the 2000s. In 2004, approximately 161 WREs existed. Since then, the number of WREs operating in Argentina increased to 235 in 2010 and to 310 in 2013. Altogether, these 310 WREs, most of which are located in the areas that suffered most from the crisis (e.g., Buenos Aires, grand Buenos Aires area, Santa Fe) (Ruggeri, 2014), employ approximately 15,600 workers (averaging 20-50 workers per WRE).

### **The extension programme ‘Facultad Abierta’**

The extension programme *Facultad Abierta* was created in 2002, in the middle of the economic crisis, by professors from the School of Philosophy and Literature at the University of Buenos Aires. In the long tradition of extension programmes in Argentina, this programme’s objective was to move beyond traditional curricula and ‘[*educate*] the people of the country’ through ‘informal education programmes’ (art. 17 and 74, Statute of the University of Buenos Aires). However, while this programme initially aimed at supporting any kind of social innovation that would take place in the context of the crisis, it quickly became entirely dedicated to collaboration with WRE workers. Additionally, instead of being confined to traditional knowledge transfer activities (e.g., lectures on well-defined academic subjects such as agronomics, computer applications, or language), its scope expanded to include many unusual ‘political academic tasks’ (Ruggeri et al., 2012: 15), such as the creation of a documentation centre at a WRE, the administration of surveys of WREs, or participation in trials as witnesses and experts of WREs.

## **Methods and data**

### **Data collection**

Our sampling strategy combined secondary and primary data. We started our data collection in August 2015 by reading several papers on the programme *Facultad Abierta* and Argentinian WREs that we retrieved from Google Scholar and the programme webpage.<sup>iv</sup>

We also contacted the director of the program, Professor Ruggeri, who provided us with 4 reports and 3 papers produced by academics from the *Facultad Abierta* programme (see Appendix 1 for more details) and helped us get in touch with extensionistas and WREs.

Since the focus of our study is on the activities undertaken by extensionistas to support WRE workers, we purposively targeted extensionistas who had been involved for a long period of time in the programme and/or had participated in many of its activities. A discussion with Professor Ruggeri helped us identify 11 extensionistas who were deemed the most relevant for our study, namely, 3 former extensionistas who have deep knowledge about the history of the programme, the two coordinators of the programme, and 6 of the 19 extensionistas currently involved in the *Facultad Abierta* programme. The first author of the paper (a native Spanish speaker) contacted and interviewed these 11 extensionistas. She also formally interviewed the director of the programme. Because another important element of our study is the relationship between extensionistas and WREs, we contacted two WREs that, according to Professor Ruggeri, had developed the closest relationships with extensionistas: the WRE Chilavert (where the documentation centre is located) and the *Bauen Hotel* – one of the most symbolic WREs. The first author of this paper visited these two WREs and interviewed 7 workers (see Appendix 2).

The main topics covered during the interviews were interviewees' involvement in the *Facultad Abierta* programme or WREs as well as the context and content of their activities; the management of the relationships between WREs and the *Facultad Abierta* programme (including the co-production and co-consumption of knowledge between workers and extensionistas); and the broader institutional context and perspectives on the future of WREs. Interviews were conducted by the first author in Spanish via Skype, via telephone, or at a WRE. The duration of the interviews averaged 52 minutes.

### **Data analysis**

To construct an empirical narrative addressing our research question, we followed a two-stage process. We first extracted both secondary and interview data to construct an historical account of the *Facultad Abierta* programme and WREs since 2002. Our narrative, which includes quotes from our interviewees, academic papers published on WREs, and reports published by the extensionistas, documents the activities that extensionistas undertook to support WRE workers in their struggles, from the initiation of the programme in 2002 to the present. Using ‘temporal bracketing’ (Langley, 1999: 703), we identified three main phases in the development of the *Facultad Abierta* programme. The 1<sup>st</sup> phase ran throughout the uncertain years following the crisis, from 2002 until mid-2007, and was focused on ‘Repurposing engagement programmes to understand WREs (2002-2007)’. During this phase, extensionistas and workers got to know each other and made sense of self-management. Extensionistas’ activities were focused on gaining workers’ trust, which implied the reformulation of their identity as politically engaged scholars and the redefinition of the extension programme as a ‘political-academic’ programme. By the end of this phase, both extensionistas and workers recognized that the programme needed to enter a phase of ‘consolidation’ (an extensionista, interview #9).

During the 2<sup>nd</sup> phase of consolidation and expansion, extensionistas and WRE workers organized the 1<sup>st</sup> International Meeting for the Economy of Workers, which took place between the 29<sup>th</sup> of July and the 1<sup>st</sup> of August 2007. After this event, extensionistas’ activities centred on theorizing what WREs are in order to bring into being a new category of self-managed organization. Extensionistas also politically mobilized the newly generated knowledge about WREs to help workers win expropriation trials and gain government support. We therefore labelled this 2<sup>nd</sup> phase ‘Consolidating the WRE as a concept and as organizational reality (2007-2013)’.



Finally, a 3<sup>rd</sup> phase was characterized by a new type of relationships between workers and extensionistas, as manifested by the decision, taken during the 4<sup>th</sup> International Meeting for the Economy of Workers in July 2013, to organize the following meetings in factories rather than in universities. As WRE workers appropriated themselves the programme, and new external threats emerged (e.g., election of a liberal-conservative government in 2015), extensionistas had to adapt their activities and organize a new type of resistance. We therefore labelled this 3<sup>rd</sup> and still on-going phase ‘Organizing and supporting WREs resistance and resilience (2013-present)’. Our interviewees validated this chronology and confirmed that these three phases intertwine with ‘the [*evolution of*] WREs’ (an extensionista, interview #2).

In the second stage of our data analysis, one researcher read our data to identify the activities developed by extensionistas when working with WREs and the challenges they faced. Once the main activities were identified, this researcher coded these activities according to the specific facets of critical performativity (Miles and Huberman, 1994), namely, the (re)production of subjectivities and identities, the constitution of organizational models and realities, and the construction of connections to the broader socio-political context. The second citation used as an epigraph of this paper, for instance, suggested the emergence of the subjectivity of a critical scholar that was related to the common experience of social struggles with WRE workers. This refers to the facet of critical performativity that corresponds to the production of subjectivities (e.g., Butler, 1997, 2010; Cabantous et al., 2016) and was hence coded as such. Activities such as the counting of WREs through surveys, the systematic collection of data to define the key features of WREs, and the writing of booklets about takeover processes were associated to the facet of critical performativity related to the constitution of organizational models and realities (e.g., Callon, 1998, 2007; Leca et al., 2014). Finally, activities related to a political mobilization of knowledge (e.g.,

participation in trials as experts of WREs, writing of reports for ministries) and that aimed at making WREs more visible to a broader public (e.g., inviting WRE workers to narrate their experience at the university) were coded as related to the third facet of critical performativity since they help connect WRE workers to broader sociopolitical process in order to gain support (Spicer et al., 2016). A second researcher then analysed the data and the coding proposed by the first researcher to verify the results and propose modifications. Once a consensus was reached, two other researchers conducted a last round of control to stabilize the labels and definitions and to make sure that the final citations were aligned with the facets of critical performativity. Appendix 3 provides the outcome of this analysis.

In what follows, we present our findings in the form of a narrative structured along the three key phases we identified as corresponding to different modes of interactions between extensionistas and WRE workers. Within each phase, we highlight the extensionistas' key activities and show how they shed light on distinct facets of the process through which these scholars became 'critically performative'.

## **Academics' interventions in the performativity of alternative organizations**

### **Phase 1: Repurposing engagement programmes to understand WREs (2002-2007)**

#### *Overcoming challenges in the creation of a new identity of critically engaged scholars*

When extensionistas discovered the nascent world of WREs, workers were trying to cope with the absence of formal management hierarchies and were in search of a solution to the dilemma of succession: who had the right to become the new boss on the shop floor if they all shared the same struggle? In most cases, self-management was adopted as a means of putting the company back to work, but this was often a forced (more than a welcomed) solution, since this type of management was distant from workers' experience and remained an abstract concept.

We were a group of people that took orders. Suddenly, we became a group of people who made decisions... [*after the recovery*] A very old colleague used to say: 'when

this used to be a factory...’! I mean, it’s not that he said: ‘when this used to be a private firm’ but he would say: ‘when this used to be a factory’... We couldn’t just take a course and put that into practice. We had to learn while we were actually doing it... As we learnt on-the-go, it was difficult. (A worker, interview #18)

In this context, extensionistas realized that their potential contribution to the sustainability of WREs could be to assist workers in their efforts to make sense of their new experience in self-management. This task, however, proved challenging as extensionistas were not familiar with self-management and did not know much about this nascent organizational form.

I wasn’t an expert in self-management before this programme began... Let’s say I had some precious political ideas. Then, I started familiarizing with this, going deep in the subject, composing a theoretical framework. None of us, when the programme started... had a clear idea of where we were heading. (An extensionista, interview #1)

Importantly, extensionistas were perplexed by the situation, which challenged many of the assumptions that had guided their scholarly work so far:

[We had to] define what to do with the WREs... We are an extension programme in the School of Philosophy and Literature... What can we do with WREs without involving pure political activism as anyone else can do? (An extensionista, interview #1)

Yet, contrary to most extension programmes in Argentina, which operate through knowledge transfer activities that target populations closely linked to the university (Fernández de Álvarez, 2012), the *Facultad Abierta* programme targets a population marginalized from the university system:

Workers see university people as being superior, almost untouchable. Students will become the managers of the firm or the people managing the country. That’s what you see when you’re just a worker who hardly achieved an elementary education. (A worker, interview #12)

Because of the unusual nature of the programme *Facultad Abierta*, extensionistas had to revise their views about extension programmes and their roles in those programmes. In contrast with other collaborative research experiences in which scholars are summoned by practitioners to work together in a specific organizational initiative or problem, workers had not approached the university requesting support for their WREs. Extensionistas had to find other ways of collaborating with a population of workers whom they had never engaged with

before and who did not necessarily trust them. For instance, they had to convince workers that they did not want to ‘suck information from [*them*] and then go away to have a career somewhere else’ (an extensionista, interview #6) by publishing academic papers based on the information gained from their relations with workers. They also had to prove to WRE workers that they were genuinely committed to a collaborative relationship. All these challenges led extensionistas to grant a new ‘political-academic’ dimension to their activities:

‘Political-academic’ tasks mean that we try to put into practice a political conception of the role that the public university should have towards social organizations and in relation to the evolution of the struggles that the working-class undergo. It also means - and this is important-, to fight for a clear policy of extension within the university and within academic thinking and, therefore, to fight for a specific view of universities, which considers that universities have a role to play in society. (Ruggeri et al., 2012: 15)<sup>v</sup>

Redefining the extension programme as a ‘political-academic’ programme in turn required extensionistas to explicitly reformulate their identity as scholars and to adopt a new identity of politically engaged scholars. As one of the extensionistas made clear, this identity reformulation was not just discursive but implied the adoption of behaviours consistent with their new identity: they had to engage in a new type of ‘political-academic activism [*that*] consists of putting the tools that we have acquired through our studies at the service of something that is political’ (an extensionista, interview #5). Concretely, extensionistas performed their new identity of critically engaged scholars through a permanent physical presence in the field. Being physically present, especially during confrontations with the police, proved that extensionistas not only cared about the workers but also were committed to facing any threats alongside them. Physical exposure was vital to building camaraderie and trust and developing a close horizontal relationship with workers (an extensionista, interview #14). Maintaining the right balance between their desire to be trusted by WRE workers and their academic roles also gave the extensionistas legitimacy in the eyes of WRE workers:

...[W]e do this from the institution of the university. It is from the [*university*] that we come to work. I believe that this is what allowed us to be legitimate in the eyes [*of the WREs*]. (An extensionista, interview #1)

Another important manifestation of the adoption of an identity of politically engaged scholars is visible in the new ‘teaching’ approach that extensionistas developed with WRE workers. Extensionistas’ new role of engaged scholars supporting WRE workers in their struggle was not compatible with the traditional transmission approach by which knowledge is supposed to flow from the ‘teacher’ to the ‘learner’. Instead, this new role required putting a greater emphasis on knowledge co-creation: extensionistas and WRE workers had to ‘work together, learn together, and understand the phenomenon [*of self-management*] simultaneously’ (an extensionista, interview #3). Such an approach was also necessary since extensionistas did not have any expert knowledge about self-management, and they learned about it by observing WRE workers as they experimented with it:

I believe that this is something that is permanently in construction between both subjects... I’d use the word co-construction [*of knowledge*]. Somehow, what we do is about going there, understanding what happens, comprehending it, defending it, and then constructing something more theoretical, but after knowing it... It’s about rethinking academic work. (An extensionista, interview #5)

### ***Theorizing an emerging organizational form: bringing WREs into being***

The codification and diffusion of newly created knowledge about WREs and self-management was another important dimension of the extensionistas’ activities. While these activities may seem closer to traditional academic activities, they nonetheless had a specific flavour in the WRE context. The diffusion of knowledge, for instance, could not be done in a traditional manner: locating a library dedicated to WRE workers in the university would have been useless, since WRE workers would not have had many opportunities to visit it. Instead, it was decided to design a physical space dedicated to knowledge sharing in the middle of the Chilavert recuperated factory. The newly created document centre was open to workers, who could use it to share their experiences and their technical and legal know-how on the takeover with workers new to the recovery process, and it was also open to researchers and the general

public (an extensionista, interview #3). The idea was that those who wanted to learn about WREs should come to a workspace of WRE workers (an extensionista, interview #5).

Extensionistas also assisted WRE workers in the formalization of their ongoing implicit knowledge of the recovery process and self-management. With the help of workers, they became involved in a new project: the production of a series of booklets that are written in a language accessible to workers and compile practical, legal and administrative information about WREs and takeovers. Booklet 6, for instance, guides workers in the process of registering a newly created WRE as a cooperative, explaining how to perform such tasks as tax administration or annual balances.<sup>vi</sup> These booklets, which were ‘conceived to offer practical tools to workers who find themselves in the need to establish the cooperative but have no tools in hand’ (an extensionista, interview #2), turned workers’ tacit knowledge of the practical issues related to self-management into an explicit form of knowledge, which could then be shared amongst factories, so that WRE workers could learn from each other’s experiences. They were important tools for connecting WRE workers from different factories and helping new recoveries to occur at a faster pace.

While workers recognized the practical value of compiling guidelines on takeover processes, they had little time to dedicate to the codification of their knowledge, since they had to focus on the day-to-day challenge of survival. They accepted the extensionistas as suited to this role, seeing them as ‘historians or articulators of their experience’ (an extensionista, interview #6) and acknowledging that ‘many of the things we hear about Chilavert is because of [*the extensionistas*]. Otherwise, these would never see the light’ (a worker, interview #11). Some of them also took this as an opportunity to challenge assumptions about knowledge creation:

[*The relationship*] has crystallized in experiences we have shared in common. As the joint publication of the booklets by Chilavert and the Documentation Centre... shows. This is an interesting synthesis. Who owns the knowledge? Who is the subject of that knowledge? [*Extensionistas*] showed that this knowledge is collective and not just

owned by those who were able to go to the university... that life is a source of knowledge, and that the working class is also rich in knowledge... Then, who is supporting whom? Everything is based on a feedback relationship in the shared space of the cooperative and the university... this is not about 'how can I help you?' This is about how us [*workers and extensionistas*] can build something genuine together... the value of the documentation centre is that you find a concrete experience questioning the great concepts of what is knowledge and what is work. (A worker, interview #17)

Through all these activities, extensionistas gave academic life to the very notion of WREs. In defining and specifying the characteristics of WREs and in describing their functioning, they brought this unique and new organizational form into the scholarly realm. Establishing WREs as their own category of organization that is distinct from other alternative organizational forms later played an important role in ensuring the endurance of WREs and provided the sense that self-management was possible and sustainable:

[*Recoveries*] refute the idea that without bosses, there are no companies because [*WREs*] were able to survive. Without workers, there is no company. But without a boss, there can be companies... it becomes disruptive [*of our previous knowledge*]. It plants the seed by showing that something can be different [*from how we knew it*]. (A worker, interview #17)

### ***Helping workers have a voice in the university***

Extensionistas' activities and their collaboration with WRE workers had consequences at the broader institutional level. One of the most visible implications of the programme is that it changed workers' relationship with academic knowledge and the university. The documentation centre, for instance, facilitated workers' access to knowledge and granted them a more active role in knowledge creation. This centre also symbolized the fact that the university was now protecting the workers. In locating a documentation centre, created, organized and administered by extensionistas, at a WRE, extensionistas established a clear connection between WRE workers and the university, hence reducing the high risk of eviction that workers faced during the first years of the takeover:

It's not the same to evict a factory in which you have the University of Buenos Aires, in which you have a school. In that moment, this was relevant; it was about protecting the existence of the factory on the basis of solidarity. (A worker, interview #17)

Importantly, the programme also allowed workers to be physically present in a space from which they have historically been excluded: the university. Extensionistas invited workers to talk about their experiences in front of students and professors during academic seminars; they ‘granted [*them*] an authorized voice’ in the university and allowed them to accept and ‘be accepted by the university’ (an extensionista, interview #13). In so doing, the programme led a population of academics and students who would have never been in contact with workers to become aware of the existence of WREs and even to support them indirectly through, for instance, the collection of data about WREs as part of the surveys conducted by extensionistas.<sup>vii</sup> However, granting a voice to workers in the university also had some unexpected consequences: Some of the WRE workers used their presence in the university as an opportunity to ‘have the attention of the university’ (a worker, interview #19) and to question mainstream knowledge that reproduces capital in the context of the university.

We [*workers*] use these opportunities to bring a real discussion... For example, the School of Economics, these guys are educating future accountants, managers, and economists, all at the service of capital. I go and talk to the students, and I try to take the discussion to the most ferocious level, with everyone there. I try to open their minds; otherwise, they will become professionals at the service of capital. I tell them: ‘Hey guys! We need you to finish your studies and become professionals at the service of workers’ struggle!’... I also try to get our issues included in any syllabus. (A worker, interview #19)

This prompted academics to think differently about the roles of the university in society (Ruggeri, 2012: 6) but also generated some friction with the university authorities as well as academics and students who were not involved in the Facultad Abierta programme and questioned the redefinition of the practice of extension:

It was also something new for [*university authorities*]. Just becoming aware that these were firms that wanted to be empowered and protected by knowledge that the university could create. I’m pretty sure that university authorities freaked out [*at this new idea*] of having to instruct the working class from one day to the other. (A worker, interview #12)

**Phase 2: Consolidating the WRE as a concept and as an organizational reality (2007-2013)**



By 2007, the fiercest moment of the economic crisis had passed, and economic indicators improved. WRE workers and extensionistas, who had been collaborating together for several years, perceived an opportunity to consolidate WREs and self-management as an authentic alternative form of organization in a market economy. The organization in July 2007 of the 1<sup>st</sup> International Meeting for the Economy of Workers was an important step in that direction. By generating a space of dialogue between workers from different countries, this meeting allowed the programme to expand abroad. Importantly, it gave workers an opportunity to think about the long-term sustainability of WREs, beyond the day-to-day issues that they have to solve to survive.

The next question was: if we were able to take over the factories, are we going to be able to take over the economy? Can we make this economy become a worker-centred economy? It's a second phase for the programme. (An extensionista, interview #6)

'Expand[ing] WRE workers' experience and [*transforming the Argentinian economy*] into an economy of workers' (an extensionista, interview #6), however, was not an easy task, not least because WREs were economically fragile. For 'a lot of people, WREs [*were*] a phenomenon of 2001 or 2002, during the crisis' (an extensionista, interview #3) and were legally questionable. In addition, extensionistas and workers felt that confusion between the nature of WREs and traditional cooperatives – the only framework available in Argentina for self-managed companies – could jeopardize WREs' sustainability because it meant that workers were obliged to adopt a legal form that was not necessarily aligned with their identity. As the programme entered into this second phase, extensionistas had to find new ways to support WRE workers in their ambition and struggles, which triggered a new set of activities aiming at further theorizing the specificities of WREs.

***Theorizing the specificities of Argentinian WREs and demonstrating their vitality***

During phase 2, extensionistas purposively undertook a number of conventional academic tasks aiming at documenting and theorizing the specificities of Argentinian WREs, in order to support WRE workers:

[O]ur contribution is to show how many cases are still taking place every year...to show that this phenomenon is alive and growing. It grows faster or slower according to the times, but it's in permanent growth. (An extensionista, interview #3)

Through their writings, and thanks to their intimate knowledge of WREs, extensionistas clarified the distinctive characteristics of these self-managed organizations, which arose from the ashes of abandoned or bankrupted companies. Yet, in many cases, WRE workers adopted self-management and the cooperative form not because they shared an overarching political and emancipatory project but because this was a practical solution to the problem: if they wanted to get the factory back to production within a context in which no worker had a legitimate claim to becoming the new boss, they had to turn to self-management. This, in turn, implied adopting the only legal form that could accommodate self-management under Argentinian law, namely, the cooperative form, despite the fact that many WRE workers 'experienced no identification with the cooperative tradition or identity' (an extensionista, interview #1).

To further support WRE workers, extensionistas modified and systematized the survey of WREs they had launched at the beginning of the programme. While the first surveys aimed at gathering basic information about WREs (e.g., number of members, geographic locations), surveys conducted since 2010 centred on the specificities of WREs. Their aim was not just to demonstrate WREs' continuous development but above all to show their uniqueness (an extensionista, interview #9). The quantitative information gathered helped extensionistas elucidate the distinctive nature of WREs and theorize the differences between WREs and traditional cooperatives or other social experiments. For instance, it contributed to the solidification of the emerging organizational model by highlighting the differences

between WRE industrial firms and the micro-entrepreneurial cooperatives operating in the social economy:

...[S]ocial economy tools that we usually used for micro entrepreneurs who originate in the informal market, like the *monotributo social*<sup>viii</sup> or microcredits, didn't work at all. This is why we needed to develop new public policy and theoretical tools to understand this phenomenon. (An extensionista, interview #1)

While the tasks of research, codification and quantification represent conventional academic tasks, they were undertaken with a political purpose: supporting WRE workers in their cause. In so doing, extensionistas assisted workers in consolidating and importantly theorizing their new class identity of self-managed workers:

We used to put a lot of emphasis on the fact that they shouldn't lose their identity as workers, [*I mean*] workers in the sense of being active members of the working class. That identity of class they share with the rest of workers who are similar to them... They are self-managed workers. They are building a tool that is different from the traditional enterprise, and also from many cooperatives that are anything but self-managed. (An extensionista, interview #1)

### ***Mobilizing knowledge to change judges' and policy makers' comprehension of WREs***

Extensionistas did not just undertake these scholarly activities to theorize the specificities of WREs and to give academic life to this new organizational form. They also actively politically mobilized their knowledge of WREs to 'position WREs in the public agenda, so as to show that they exist, to have public policy developed for them' (an extensionista, interview #13). Fully aware of their legitimacy in Argentinian society, and firmly convinced of the new 'political-academic' role that they should play, extensionistas used their intimate knowledge of WREs to convince judges that they were experts on the subject (an extensionista, interview #5) and that governments should seek their advice if they wanted to understand WREs.

Activities aiming at changing judges' and policy makers' comprehension of WREs were all the more important because government support of WREs was rather ambiguous: 'it [*government support*] was mostly discourse... it wasn't really about actions... It was more of a promise than of a reality' (a worker, interview #18). Even if the federal government expressed support for WREs through subsidy programmes and new legislation favourable to

WREs, at the local level, many bureaucrats and judges sabotaged these measures, and the tension between the right to employment and the right to private property was palpable:

[*Many of*] these procedures fail[*ed*] when bureaucrats or judges had to concretely make decisions about it. Bureaucrats sabotaged the measures; they didn't approve procedures, they made them last forever. Judges challenged political decisions by sentencing against WREs. (An extensionista, interview #1)

Another related problem was that most policy makers and bureaucrats saw WREs as a temporary solution to a loss of employment opportunities rather than a new model for production and assumed that they were typical Argentinian cooperatives, i.e., very small enterprises operating in the social economy. They therefore wanted to apply either 'patch policies' (an extensionista, interview #3) or the existing public policies developed for typical cooperatives, despite the fact that many WREs were large factories in the manufacturing sector (an extensionista, interview #4). This erroneous view of WREs posed a serious threat to their sustainability:

I used to tell them: 'if you give us a \$10,000, it's nothing here!' You give that money to a self-managed entrepreneur who just started a pizza place, and that is a lot of money. But let's take the case of the Bauen Hotel. The patrimony of that cooperative is... immense. You can't just say we will give the same amount of money to these people making pizza and to these other people running such a big hotel [*already operating in the market*]. I had such a hard time trying to make the government and bureaucrats understand this difference. (A worker, interview #12)

In this context, both extensionsistas and workers considered that reframing judges' and policy makers' view of WREs was an absolute necessity if they wanted to have appropriate regulatory amendments and financial support from the State. Extensionistas hence decided to intervene actively in the political realm:

...being there is something that we, as academic researchers and social scientists, can do. We can work [*in order to*] open the discourse and to try to convince governments to design public policy that actually responds to these projects, with more opportunities. (An extensionista, interview #6)

Concretely, extensionistas acted as witnesses and experts in some expropriation trials. In a context where 'many judges were hostile to the WRE phenomenon and would do anything they could to make things difficult' (an extensionista, interview #1), one of the most

important challenges that workers faced during expropriation trials was to convince the judges of WREs' economic sustainability.

*[When we realized that the owner was emptying the factory] disobedience exploded. [This is how] the judicial, political and economic struggle began. We had to show to society why we wanted to recover the factory. And, more than anything, convince the judge. The judge would tell us, if the owner, who had capital and knowledge in his firm, wasn't able to do it, how are you planning to do this yourselves? Eight workers who remain is a practically dismantled firm... [it was a challenge] to show society and the judge that workers could run a firm. (A worker, interview #12)*

Extensionistas helped workers in this task by providing them with the results of their survey and the means to argue for the uniqueness of their enterprise model:

*Finally, when we analysed the survey... We gave it to the workers as a material that they could use in their discussion in public policy, with the federal and local governments. That meant the end of a phase for us that had to do, from the point of view of the university, with delivering workers a study that could be useful to act politically, and that has to do with our own process [as extensionistas] of involvement with this movement. (An extensionista, interview #14)*

Explicit knowledge about WREs, in the form of quantitative information, thus became a political tool that workers mobilized to illustrate the distinctive characteristics of the phenomena and their economic sustainability.

Extensionistas also intervened in the political and social spheres by spreading knowledge about WREs and advocating publicly for committed government support. For example, extensionistas provided reports and data about WREs to various ministries (e.g., the Ministry of Production or the Ministry of Labour) that lacked systematic information on WREs in Argentina so that they could design appropriate policies. In some cases, they also assisted Parliament members in the writing of bills supporting WREs. Congressman Christian Castillo, for instance, managed to put a bill granting bidding privileges to WREs in the context of public tenders of the Province of Buenos Aires by mobilizing data collected by extensionistas that showed the quantity of employment positions that WREs generated in his province. Thanks to these data, he could argue that granting this privilege position during tenders was a matter of social need.

### *Creating spaces to preserve workers' redefined self-managed identities and subjectivities*

During phase 2, extensionistas also worked hard to ensure 'that [*workers*] didn't import models that could be [*in conflict with*] their identity' and resisted attempts by cooperative movements 'to absorb them' (an extensionistas, interview #1). According to the workers, WREs faced the risk of drifting towards more traditional organizational forms:

Many WREs don't keep a memory of where they come from, they forgot... They adopt the legal framework of cooperativism but, however, reproduce [*traditional*] labour conditions; that is, those who decide and those who work... And even if you don't find this, there may be a self-centred logic, such as 'we ourselves are fine, so we don't care about the others'. That is directly against class solidarity. As if we would say 'well, [*our company*] is doing just fine, so I don't care that a particular cooperative isn't, because it's probably not efficiently managed'. This is common. You start reproducing the logic of the owner... No! We are not owners! We are workers! Otherwise, we reproduce the logic of the owners! (A worker, interview #17)

Through their academic writings about the specificities of WREs and discussions with workers, extensionistas helped workers stick to the idea that initially motivated the recovery, namely, the protection of employment sources, and consolidate their specific identity of self-managed workers.

Extensionistas also played a pivotal role in helping workers consider long-term sustainability issues, instead of being solely focused on the operational problems they had to solve on a daily basis (a worker, interview #11). With the support of other universities, cooperatives, political activists, or union leaders, extensionistas helped organize a series of International Meetings for the Economy of Workers and create the Guide of Latin American Experiences on WRE. While both networks are open to scholars interested in these issues, they are primarily oriented toward practical application and are not academic in nature. These forums helped Argentinian WRE workers network with other workers with similar experiences located in other countries. They also gave them the opportunity to debate their roles in an economy of workers as a valid alternative to traditional capitalism and develop a strategic dialogue on how to make the experience sustainable in the long term (an

extensionista, interview #1). Hence, these forums contributed to the persistence of the emerging organizational form through networking, and they consolidated collective resistance by helping WRE workers focus on long-term sustainability.

### ***Learning from WREs: Refining their identity of critically engaged scholars***

Finally, the continuous and strong relationship with WRE workers had profound effects on extensionistas' identities as researchers and teachers. On the research side, workers' solutions to practical problems, such as finding alternative ways to operate recovered textile factories without exploiting workers and relying on sweatshops (an extensionista, interview #7), led them to think differently about their own discipline and career:

...WREs were the excuse to question my whole career, where everything comes back to an object of study, which is work, and those actors that converge around the idea of salaried work. In WREs, there are no owners, nor traditional bosses; then, I question the discipline as it is conceived. In the discipline of HR, we don't even discuss the subject of power within organizations, and one of its main pillars has never been discussed: the idea of private property [*in relation to expropriations*]. (An extensionista, interview #4)

Extensionistas' long-lasting involvement and commitment with workers also had deep implications for teaching, leading them to shift towards a more engaged view of teaching.

I changed the way I teach. I see teaching as a social and political act... I try to develop the class according to the principles of self-management... to incorporate the subjects I learnt from the workers... because I'm helping [*students*] to educate themselves, to become subjects with social consciousness beyond their profession. Its consciousness for social change. It's not only about criticizing capitalism, as a system. It's about moving forward, going beyond the criticism, creating new experiences. How can we do that? Learning from current experiences that are successful today... experiences that constitute a response to concrete problems. These experiences criticize the system but also prefigure the society we want for tomorrow. This is something I learnt from WREs. (An extensionista, interview #6)

### **Phase 3: Organizing and supporting WREs' resistance and resilience (2013-present)**

#### ***Adapting their role to the growing emancipation of WRE workers***

After one decade of almost daily interaction, extensionistas had been able to build a collaborative relationship with workers. Trust issues between the two groups were resolved: 'We [*extensionistas and workers*] share a physical space ... this took place gradually, but it's

been ongoing for so many years... now, they [*the extensionistas*] are like anybody else' (a worker, interview #18). As the programme consolidated and expanded, workers gradually adopted a leadership role in the programme, as manifested, for instance, by their massive support of the *Facultad Abierta* programme when the university attempted to shut it down in 2013-2014 (an extensionista, interview #2) or by the decision to locate the International Meetings for the Economy of Workers in the factories (since 2014). They also increasingly understood their own role within the context of the programme in the co-construction of knowledge:

...If we see that our intervention is positive. It's useful if we see that the workers appropriate it, or that they read something and they say 'Hey! We've discussed this'... You suggest something and they discuss about it. Then, a journalist interviews them, and that thing you discussed with them, whether they liked it or not, implied a reformulation of what they said or how they acted. (An extensionista, interview #9)

The growing emancipation of WRE workers led extensionistas to rethink their role and engage in new types of activities, such as coaching them to represent themselves and their cause through the media:

In the beginning, we just hid ourselves! We didn't want to say a word. People were waiting for us with microphones. It was such a violent change for us when we got the key to get into the factory to restart production. We were even less ready for journalists. It was almost an emotional breakdown. The media came, we even were at the CNN in Spanish... getting so close to extensionistas in the moment of the recovery, that was useful. That fear you face, when you're just an average citizen, and from one day to the other, you're being interviewed. But because we were with them, that tension we felt around speaking became bearable... being close to them was different, and in the day-to-day struggle, we became more confident [*dealing with this process*]. But without the university? Well, it would've been complex. (A worker, interview #12)

### ***Adapting to the new political context by further disseminating knowledge about WREs***

Another important aspect of the extensionistas' resistance role in phase 3 relates to the need to adapt their activities to the new political context, marked by the election of a liberal-conservative government in October 2015. With the new president, Mauricio Macri, being openly against any initiatives at odds with liberal government views on property rights, the State started to disengage from WREs. This new political context prompted extensionistas to



reorganize the resistance and support for the phenomenon of WREs (extensionistas, interviews #2, #4, #5):

It looks like there will be a change in the circumstances, a change in the public policies related to WREs. [*Then*] we have to think about what our role will be in this new phase that may become a phase of resistance and of support for the phenomenon. (An extensionista, interview #4)

On the one hand, this new context gave extensionistas an opportunity to demonstrate, one more time, their engagement with the workers by helping fight and spread knowledge to new WRE workers. As takeovers continued (e.g., the on-going takeover of the emblematic Bauen Hotel in Buenos Aires), extensionistas stood ‘elbow to elbow with workers’ (an extensionista, interview #2). This physical presence at the site of the struggle during many takeover processes enabled extensionistas to transmit knowledge co-created with WRE workers during past takeover processes through the distribution of booklets and to advise workers on the actions they can take in order to reduce the duration and cost of a takeover:

When you go [*personally*] to a WRE [*undergoing conflict*] and you narrate the experiences of other recovered firms that managed to survive with all the complexities that they were facing, with all the horrible things that have happened to them... because recuperations are such a long process... This is a way to transfer our knowledge to them and a way to support them... For example, let’s take the booklets. We know that if we go to a place that is on the verge of conflict and we have to help them, the booklets contain the legal instructions and the steps to follow. Usually, they don’t even have a lawyer for their case... we take that as a tool for our comrades in the struggle. (An extensionista, interview #2)

On the other hand, the new political context also prompted extensionistas to engage more than ever before in activities aimed at raising awareness about the vibrant development of WREs and at enhancing the visibility of WREs for politicians and the broader public:

During Macri’s government, a difficult challenge will be to show that self-management and WREs are relevant. [*The role of the programme will be to*] support this social movement, the workers, who are the experts. We, the academics, are not the experts. They are the experts. We can help them by communicating and diffusing their experiences... help them try to change society from the bottom by using all the methods and means we, as a public university, have. (An extensionista, interview #6)

To spread knowledge of WREs, extensionistas relied on the traditional tools of academics, such as the publication of books and the teaching of courses on self-management:

One of the most important forms of collaborating is through our academic work. It's about publishing so that workers can use it, so that this will make the phenomenon visible in different spheres [*for example*] the course we teach at the university... At least, making the subject well-known, so that everyone willing to work it will be able to do it... Our job, more than influencing, is about disseminating it. (An extensionista, interview #8)

All these traditional academic activities were performed in the service of the workers' political cause in order to make the WRE phenomenon visible, to 'show its scope and how important government support is for WREs. And, at least, try to keep the public policies we have right now' (an extensionista, interview #4).

## **Discussion and implications**

In this article, we sought a better understanding of the roles played by scholars in the process by which alternative organizational forms are brought into being. We focused on the role of academics from the School of Philosophy and Literature of the University of Buenos Aires who, through their long-term involvement in an extension programme called the *Facultad Abierta*, helped WRE workers create and maintain self-managed organizations. In this section, we elaborate on these findings to discuss their implications for the WRE literature, for the debate on critical performativity, and for the critical engagement of scholars.

### **Contributions and implications for WRE studies: Documenting and theorizing the role of extensionistas in alternative forms of organizing**

So far, the emerging literature on Argentine WREs has documented the production of WRE workers' new subjectivities and has shown, in line with Butler (1997, 2010), how the performance of alternatives to capitalism profoundly reshape workers' identities (e.g., Monteagudo, 2008). It has also documented how WRE workers learned about self-management on the shop floor in a rather informal manner (Vieta 2010; 2012) and ultimately created – through their practice – a unique organizational model of self-management (Vieta, 2012) that could prefigure a self-managed economic system (Vieta, 2014b). Finally, the

literature has also highlighted the importance of the broader social dimension of WREs by showing the roles of the state and civil society in the movement (e.g., Upchurch et al., 2014). Missing from this research and prior accounts of extensionistas' work, however, is a systematic investigation and theorization of extensionistas' role in the WRE movement.

Our position of 'distant' researchers not directly involved in the WRE movement or the *Facultad Abierta* programme, as well as our theoretical approach, which was centred on performativity, offered us the opportunity to adopt a different take on WREs. Equipped with the critical performativity concept, our objective was to document how academics from the *Facultad Abierta* programme have intervened in the creation of WREs and helped 'bring into being' a new theory (or model) of alternative organization. Accordingly, our research adds to the growing literature on WREs by theorizing how extensionistas' activities have actively contributed (and still contribute) to helping workers in their struggle.

Specifically, our study highlights the process of self-reflection that extensionistas have experienced as a result of their long-term engagement with WRE workers, which led to the production of a partially novel identity and a politically loaded subjectivity of a critically engaged scholar. Our findings show that the production of new subjectivities in the context of the WRE movement does not happen solely on the side of workers, as suggested by prior studies, but can be better understood as a process of scholars' and workers' identity co-constitution and co-production.

Our narrative also shows that extensionistas have helped WRE workers by bringing academic legitimacy to the reality of WREs, by establishing the distinctiveness of WREs in political spheres, and by being present at certain critical events, such as legal trials or demonstrations, which sometimes involve the collective experience of physical or symbolic violence. By creating such personal bonds and assuming the 'political load' of their activities, extensionistas have contributed to producing the symbolic status of WREs in the

Argentinian context, hence providing some ‘ideological’ and ‘political’ substance to the WREs’ economic experiments that first emerged ‘out of necessity’.

Our analysis makes visible some of the more ‘routine’ types of academic work that extensionistas performed – such as teaching the organizational principles of WREs, documenting the number of WREs, and keeping records of their existence – which were important for the continued existence of WREs. In so doing, our paper shows that at the same moment that workers were constructing the reality of WREs, extensionistas were developing a model (or theory) of a nascent alternative organization – the worker-recuperated enterprise.

As a whole, in helping to constitute WREs as ideologically significant, theoretically relevant and politically visible organizations, extensionistas have contributed to shifting WREs from the status of a provisory economic experiment that could be ended by politicians after the crisis to the status of credible organizational alternatives to capitalism, prefiguring a form of an alternative economy based on self-management. Future research could document whether this orientation will be maintained despite the presence of a less supportive government.

**Contributions and implications for critical performativity studies: Substantiating critical performativity activities and theorizing their relationships**

Our analysis of the interactions between extensionistas and WRE workers also enriches our understanding of ‘critical performativity’ (Cabantous et al., 2016; Spicer et al., 2009) and more generally of scholars’ ‘critical engagement’ (King, 2015; King and Learmonth, 2015). By moving beyond theoretical arguments and controversies (e.g., *Human Relations*, 18(4), 2016) to provide a rich empirical account of a real, in situ historical, case of critical performativity, we offer further development of the critical performativity concept.

On the one hand, our analysis substantiates the meaning of scholars’ critical engagement, as our study of the extensionistas from the *Facultad Abierta* programme shows that being a

‘critical performative’ scholar who supports alternative organizational forms involves continuous work corresponding to each facet of critical performativity. Critical engagement requires first the production of new subjectivities. Extensionistas engaged, for instance, in tasks aiming at supporting and protecting an alternative identity of ‘self-managed workers’. Importantly, they also had to embrace a new identity of ‘critically and practically engaged scholars’ by redefining their practices and approaches to the engagement programme as well as their teaching practices and political engagement. In the words of Freire (1993; 2005), extensionistas became ‘tolerant’ or ‘progressive’ educators, constantly encouraging dialogue, problem solving and critical thinking when collaborating with workers. Being a progressive educator involves constant reflection on one’s practice as a scholar. It requires consciousness about the responsibility one has when co-constructing programmes and influencing, in this case, the ability of workers to be critical about and reflect on their reality. They became a new type of ‘extensionistas’ and reinvented their teaching practice through this transformational journey. Their experience, as reflected in our case, has strong implications for prior studies of critical engagement or engaged scholarship, as it shows that becoming a critical performative scholar also implies to adopt a new identity of critically engaged scholars, which is expressed through distinct practices of research, teaching and political engagement (Contu, 2009; Grey, 2004; Van de Ven, 2007).

Second, our study suggests that critical performativity also involves more traditional academic activities of theorization: extensionistas for instance help in the constitution of a new organizational form through the clarification of the principles of self-management and the definition of WREs. Our case thus documents a neglected and important dimension of the performativity of organizational models: ‘bringing a theory into being’ may involve co-producing a new organizational reality (e.g., actual WREs as experienced by the workers) in tandem with new academic knowledge and method of representation of this phenomenon

(e.g., definition and counting of WREs). Here our analysis hence suggests moving beyond a ‘ballistic’ model of performativity (Muniesa, 2004) that investigates how pre-existing theories became embodied through organizing (Cabantous, Gond and Johnson-Cramer, 2010; d’Adderio and Pollock, 2014) to consider critical performativity as the act of producing both a new organizational reality and a form of codified knowledge about this new organization.

Third, our study converges with Spicer et al.’s (2016) suggestion that critical performativity could benefit from being more closely studied in relation to social movements. Our findings indeed show that critical engagement also requires the connection to broader social movements to sustain the performativity of alternative organizations in the long run. For instance, extensionistas helped workers position WREs within current social and political debates by using their expertise and legitimacy and mobilizing politically the knowledge newly created about WREs.

On the other hand, our narrative enriches the analysis of the critical performativity concept by highlighting how, through the activities of extensionistas, the three facets of performativity interacted with each other in ways that open perspectives for future research. In the case we study, the production of new subjectivities had important political implications for the maintenance of the WREs movement within the political sphere through the political transformations and challenges faced by extensionistas. The enhancement of broader social dynamics surrounding the WREs involved a process of *voicing and politicizing alternative subjectivities*, notably by empowering workers so that they could speak for themselves in the media in order to define their position in political debates. Future studies could investigate how scholars can enhance or rely on such a process to facilitate the emergence of alternative organizations, as this could constitute an interesting approach to the making of a ‘public organization theory’ sharing the characteristics of Burawoy’s (2005) ‘public sociology’ yet focused more specifically on organizational rather than broader social phenomena.

Our narrative suggests that the emergence and reproduction of new workers' subjectivities also supported the constitution of the alternative organizational model, as it prompted the theorization of these subjectivities by academics in order to capture this central feature of WREs. Teaching the new model of organizations based on self-management helped to strengthen both workers' and academics' new subjectivities, so that both components of critical performativity interacted through a process of *identity and organization co-adaptation*. In this regard, the case of extensionistas exemplifies Callon's (1999) discussion of the role of intellectuals as being neither 'engaged' [*engagé*] nor 'cleared' [*dégagé*] but rather as being deliberately 'entangled' through their personal decision to associate themselves with specific actors. Scholars become *de facto* the spokespersons of the actors they study in the academic context and potentially in the public sphere, co-constructing both new knowledge about their research subjects and their own researchers' identity (Callon, 1999). But in the case of WREs, scholars did not only engage in continuous work to be associated to WRE's members, they also aimed at turning WRE workers into spokespersons operating in their own name into the media and political spheres. Here is an interesting lesson for would-be 'critically performative' scholars that suggests that engagement can consist in letting alternative organizational actors speak for themselves.

Finally, the constitution of a new organizational form became also connected over time to broader social dynamics through a process of *enabling organizational resistance*. Producing statistical knowledge about WREs and specifying their economic role in terms of job creation was central to making the political case for their specific treatment. This could be regarded as a form of 'statactivism' (Boltanski, 2014; Bruno, Didier and Vitale, 2014), i.e. the mobilization of statistics for advancing a social movement. We also observed that civil society groups have directly 'protected' WREs' workers during the takeover process, for example by preventing expulsion of workers from their plant.

## **Concluding remarks**

In documenting and theorizing the role of academics from the *Programa Facultad Abierta* in the creation and maintenance of WREs in Argentina, our paper first contributes to the literature on WREs (e.g., Ruggeri et al., 2012) by refining our understanding of the role of extensionistas in the emergence of potential alternative organizations (Parker et al., 2014). Second, our research also contributes to current debates about the critical engagement of scholars (Collins, 2013) by specifying further each of the three facets of ‘critical’ performativity (Cabantous et al., 2016), and showing how these facets interact together. In doing so, we further our understanding of the role of academics in the design, emergence, and maintenance of alternative forms of organizations (Leca et al., 2014; Parker and Parker, 2017). Future studies could extend our analysis by investigating in more depth how universities as institutions and sources of scholarship can mediate the interactions between the State and alternative organizational forms to enable the maintenance and development of these organizations.



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### Appendix 1. List of secondary data sources

Mode of identification	Sources
Papers produced by academics of <i>Facultad Abierta</i> provided by the director of the programme	<p>Fernández de Álvarez MI (2012) Producir desde la incomodidad. In: Programa Facultad Abierta (eds). <i>10 años del Programa Facultad Abierta: La Universidad, los trabajadores y la Autogestion</i>. Buenos Aires: Cooperativa El Zócalo.  <a href="http://www.recuperadasdoc.com.ar/La_Universidad_trabajadores_y_autogestion.pdf">http://www.recuperadasdoc.com.ar/La_Universidad_trabajadores_y_autogestion.pdf</a></p> <p>Ruggeri, Andrés (2012). 10 Años. In: Programa Facultad Abierta (eds) <i>10 años del Programa Facultad Abierta: La Universidad, los trabajadores y la Autogestion</i>. Buenos Aires: Cooperativa El Zócalo.  <a href="http://www.recuperadasdoc.com.ar/La_Universidad_trabajadores_y_autogestion.pdf">http://www.recuperadasdoc.com.ar/La_Universidad_trabajadores_y_autogestion.pdf</a></p> <p>Ruggeri A (2014) <i>¿Qué son las empresas recuperadas? Autogestión de la clase trabajadora</i>. Ediciones Continente: Buenos Aires.</p>
Reports produced by the <u>Facultad Abierta</u> programme	<p>Programa Facultad Abierta (eds) (2002) <i>Informe del Primer Relevamiento de Empresas Recuperadas por los Trabajadores</i>. Facultad de Filosofía y Letras: Universidad de Buenos Aires.</p> <p>Programa Facultad Abierta (eds) (2004) <i>Informe del Segundo Relevamiento de Empresas Recuperadas. Las Empresas Recuperadas en la Argentina</i>. Facultad de Filosofía y Letras: Universidad de Buenos Aires.</p> <p>Programa Facultad Abierta (eds) (2010) <i>Informe del Tercer Relevamiento de Empresas Recuperadas por sus Trabajadores. Las Empresas Recuperadas en la Argentina 2010</i>. Facultad de Filosofía y Letras. Universidad de Buenos Aires.</p> <p>Programa Facultad Abierta (eds) (2014) <i>Informe del IV Relevamiento de Empresas Recuperadas en la Argentina. Las Empresas Recuperadas en le Periodico 2010-2014</i>. Ciudad Autónoma de Buenos Aires: Cooperativa Chilavert Artes Gráficas.</p> <p>Available online: <a href="http://www.recuperadasdoc.com.ar/propias.html">http://www.recuperadasdoc.com.ar/propias.html</a></p>
Other institutional websites	<p>Statute of the National University of La Plata (Universidad Nacional de La Plata). Available online at: <a href="http://www.unlp.edu.ar/uploads/docs/estatuto_2008_final.pdf">http://www.unlp.edu.ar/uploads/docs/estatuto_2008_final.pdf</a></p> <p>Statute of the University of Buenos Aires. Available online: <a href="http://www.uba.ar/download/institucional/uba/9-32.pdf">http://www.uba.ar/download/institucional/uba/9-32.pdf</a></p>

## Appendix 2. Interviewees list\*

<b>Interview #</b>	<b>Interviewee role</b>	<b>Interviewee background</b>
1	PFA director	Anthropology
2	PFA analyst	Anthropology
3	PFA analyst	Anthropology
4	PFA coordinator	Human resources
5	Former PFA analyst	Anthropology
6	PFA analyst	Sociology
7	PFA analyst	History
8	PFA analyst	Anthropology
9	PFA coordinator	Anthropology
10	former PFA analyst	Anthropology
11	WRE worker	WRE worker
12	WRE worker	WRE worker
13	PFA analyst	Anthropology
14	former PFA analyst	Anthropology
15	WRE worker	WRE worker
16	WRE worker	WRE worker
17	WRE worker	WRE worker
18	WRE worker	WRE worker
19	WRE worker	WRE worker

\* Abbreviations: PFA = Programme Facultad Abierta; WRE = worker-recuperated enterprise.

### Appendix 3. Coding of extensionistas' activities in relation to critical performativity

Extensionistas' activities	Facet of critical performativity
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Accompanying the constitution and maintenance of workers' new subjectivities.</li> <li>▪ Protecting workers' new identities by rejecting organizational models that threaten them.</li> <li>▪ Creating and maintaining spaces for information exchange to consolidate workers' redefined identities and subjectivities, such as international networks of workers that consolidate their collective resistance.</li> <li>▪ Producing a new identity of critically engaged scholars through the redefinition of engagement programs ('extension') as a "political-academic" programme.</li> <li>▪ Expressing the new identity of critically engaged scholars in new types of behaviours such as a more engaged way of teaching, physical presence during takeover and after the expropriation, and continuous dialogue with workers.</li> <li>▪ Refining their identity of critically engaged scholars by thinking differently about their disciplines and pedagogic approaches.</li> <li>▪ Adapting the new identity of critically engaged scholars to workers' growing emancipation and leadership, by e.g. empowering and coaching workers so that they can engage more effectively with journalists.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Workers and scholars' re/production of new subjectivities and identities</b></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Redefining the organization and practice of the Argentine extension.</li> <li>▪ Facilitating knowledge sharing and knowledge co-construction on WREs through e.g., writing and distributing booklets on takeover processes and other administrative aspects of conforming cooperatives from the WREs.</li> <li>▪ Theorizing, codifying and teaching self-management.</li> <li>▪ Counting, documenting and tracking WREs development through surveys in order to define their key features and highlight their distinctiveness.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Constitution of organizational models and realities</b></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Changing workers' relationship with academic knowledge through e.g., the creation of a documentation centre at a WRE.</li> <li>▪ Locating a space that belongs to the university (documentation centre) in the physical space of a WRE in order to reduce the risk of eviction.</li> <li>▪ Granting a voice to workers in the university by inviting workers to talk about their experience during academic seminars and lectures.</li> <li>▪ Making the new organizational form visible to a broader audience to extend the political and social outreach and impact.</li> <li>▪ Mobilizing (politically) knowledge about WREs to change judges and policy makers' view of WREs in order to facilitate expropriations and trigger the development of new regulations.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Connection to broader socio-political processes to gain support</b></p>

## Endnotes

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- <sup>i</sup> Palomino (2003) estimates that in 2003, a total of 98 WREs accounted for approximately 8,000 jobs.
- <sup>ii</sup> In Spanish, this programme is called Programa de Extensión ‘Facultad Abierta’, which can be translated into English as Extension Programme ‘Open University’.
- <sup>iii</sup> We use the term ‘critical performativity’ as an umbrella concept to refer to what is called, at times, ‘critical performativity’ (e.g., Spicer et al., 2009), ‘progressive performativity’ (e.g., Schaefer and Wickert, 2016), or ‘political organizational theory of performativity’ or ‘political material performativity’ (e.g., Cabantous et al., 2016).
- <sup>iv</sup> Please see the following link: <http://www.recuperadasdoc.com.ar/propias.html>
- <sup>v</sup> Translation by the authors. Original Spanish quotation: ‘*Tareas político académicas, por su parte, significa tratar de poner en juego una concepción política de cuál es el rol de la Universidad Pública en su relación con las organizaciones sociales y el desarrollo de las luchas populares. También, y no menos importante, significa dar una batalla al interior de la Universidad y del pensamiento académico sobre la necesidad de una clara política de extensión y, por lo tanto, una disputa sobre el mismo sentido de la Universidad como parte del pueblo que la sostiene*’ (Ruggeri et al, 2012: 15).
- <sup>vi</sup> [http://www.recuperadasdoc.com.ar/Cuadernos/CUADERNILLO\\_6.pdf](http://www.recuperadasdoc.com.ar/Cuadernos/CUADERNILLO_6.pdf)
- <sup>vii</sup> WRE surveys were performed without any direct financial resources from the university (an extensionista, interview #5), through the help of some students who conducted the survey as part of the fieldwork hours required by the university to obtain their degrees.
- <sup>viii</sup> Simplified tax regime that allows entrepreneurs in the social economy to be able to bring their activities to the formal market.