

An Argentine Taboo: Educational Patronage.
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A few days ago, President Macri announced a draft law of cultural patronage. According to Telam, “what is sought with such laws is to inaugurate a direct and transparent way of financing cultural projects of social interest through contributions from private companies, which would be deducted from their respective fiscal obligations”.

The Minister of Culture Pablo Avelluto estimated that the program could enhance cultural investment in two billion pesos per year, which if repeated every year, “soon would impact on the training of artists, in the theater market, dance groups, the maintenance of monuments and historical sites, modernization of museums and other aspects that at present are seeking for financing”.

The project could have a significant social impact; however, given the educational reality faced by Argentina, it is reasonable to ask why not evaluate a legislation of educational patronage endowed with similar characteristics, targeting children who have the least and need it most.

Why not generate fiscal incentives that facilitate the operation of private schools of excellence, free, religious or secular, in areas deeply disadvantaged?

In Uruguay there is a legislation of such characteristics. It enables the operation of schools like the Liceo Jubilar, of the Catholic Church, and the Liceo Impulso which is secular. Both, free schools, privately funded with contributions from companies or individuals, not receiving any subsidies from the State, providing high school education to adolescents living below the poverty line, and reaching comparable academic performance with the best schools in the country.

The project of cultural patronage constitutes an advance towards a better Argentina, a project of educational patronage would be its logical complement. However, it has not been proposed nor mentioned as a possibility. Why? What is the cost of this?

The Real Academia Española defines the term taboo as the “condition of the people, institutions and things which may not be lawfully censored or mentioned”. In education, it is possible to illustrate it with any expression that does not make explicit defense of public education, as is the educational patronage.

A tragicomic illustration of this fact is provided by the comedy of entanglements that closed the last electoral process in Uruguay, which culminated with the election of Tabaré Vázquez.

For years, the Frente Amplio had opposed an educational system that would allow parents to choose the school to be attended by their children, regardless of their budget, arguing that it would induce the funding of private schools to the detriment of public schools.

On October 2014, five days before the presidential election, Tabaré mentioned in an interview the possibility of providing vouchers for students to attend private schools. He said that those students who want and deserve them would have access to the vouchers, after an assessment conducted by the Ministry of Education. He clarified that there was not an estimated number of beneficiaries.

Tabaré immediately found himself under friendly fire. The teachers union did not hesitate to oppose, the same reception was found within his party. Meanwhile, its



candidate for Vice-President, Raúl Sendic, tried to calm the waters by stating that “the voucher is a transient tool allowing to maintain coverage where the infrastructure of public education is not enough, but the big bet is public education”.

For its part, the opposition presented a picture as confusing as the ruling party. The vice-presidential candidate of the Partido Nacional, Jorge Larrañaga, accused Tabaré of proposing a neoliberal model: “Vazquez has confessed that he wants to privatize public education, because that is what the system of vouchers means. We are going to defend public education, not like Vazquez and the Frente Amplio who give it up”.

However, as stated by the Senator for the Partido Nacional Gustavo Penades, the proposal of Tabaré “is an old idea of the Partido Nacional”, which is found in every electoral campaign since the 1994 elections to date.

Given the magnitude of the dispute, Tabaré, under crossfire with an opposition that prefers to forget they once proposed the same idea, with the teachers union and with his own party, said in a new interview that his proposal would be applied in not more than thirty outstanding cases, given that the main commitment of the Frente Amplio is to strengthen public education to which “it gives absolute preference”.

Thirty children! Three days before a presidential election, Tabaré Vázquez had to devote his time to explain that his comment about the vouchers was directed, at most, to 30 children. Absurd!

It is time to return to our reality. What better illustration of a taboo than the educational patronage? All of the political class, regardless of representing the ruling party or the opposition, do not even consider analyzing a project of educational patronage. All of them defend public education by means of emotional discourses while, curiously, they send their children to private schools.

It is essential to understand that there exists a taboo that prevents even considering a project of educational patronage. What better way to facilitate greater equality of opportunities for children who have the least and need the most? What better example of social justice?

A project of educational patronage will be explicit evidence of the strong will of Mauricio Macri to carry out a real educational revolution.