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– CARE INFRASTRUCTURES IN CHILE DURING THE PANDEMIC: Communitarian Weavings, Spaces and the Production of Common Goods

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Abstract

The article addresses the role that communities played in managing the social and health crisis generated by the Covid-19 pandemic in two Chilean cities. Chile is an interesting case study owing to its intense and prolonged confinement measures, which focused heavily on individuals and households. Using key concepts such as communitarian weavings and care infrastructures, this research delves into the experiences of two neighborhoods in Talca and Concepción, employing qualitative methods, participant observation techniques and interviews with key actors to explore the everyday nature of community care ties and infrastructures. The findings reveal that, despite state restrictions, people experienced confinement in close physical proximity within their neighborhoods. Four key observations emerged: first, people adapted their actions to respond flexibly to existing and new needs; second, physical spaces such as streets, squares and local businesses became vital interaction venues; third, communitarian weavings were partially (re) constructed virtually; and fourth, these weavings adjusted their actions to meet contextual demands, generating new common goods that addressed community needs. Lastly, care infrastructures complemented or replaced the state's inaction and the formal market. This illustrates that communitarian weavings demonstrated the flexibility to function effectively in diverse scenarios, both with and without state support.

Introduction

The Covid-19 pandemic presented challenges for public policies, especially around regulating physical contact and its effects on daily life and resolving collective needs. In Chile, despite alternative proposals such as that of the Municipality of Valparaíso (Municipalidad de Valparaíso, 2020) based on archipelagos or territorial bubbles that proposed maintaining a certain degree of regulated community interaction, a centralized model was imposed that emphasized individual responsibility and the establishment of strict quarantines. This latter measure, which sought to minimize contact, ignored the consequences of isolation on mental health and broke the collaborative networks essential for daily life. Furthermore, the inability of many households to follow quarantines—owing to economic needs, overcrowding and other problems—showed the limitations of an approach that omitted the community dimension and local networks in the pandemic's management.

Despite the deployment of confinement policies, the areas of physical proximity—such as the street, the passage, the neighborhood, the houses and their inhabitants, which Muñoz *et al.* (2023) call 'care infrastructures'—were instrumental in addressing the challenges of everyday life. Previous studies show that the immediate environment is essential in people's daily activities, such as taking children to school, shopping and walking to recreation places (Rasse, 2015). Furthermore, several studies indicate that,

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during the pandemic, people saw their immediate environments and neighbors as a source of help and security (Anigstein *et al*., 2021). For example, according to the results of the 2020 National Bicentenary Survey in Chile (Encuesta Nacional Bicentenario, Centro de Políticas Públicas UC, 2020), 46% of the people surveyed said they had high or broad confidence in 'the ability of their neighbors to take care of themselves and act responsibly towards other people.' This percentage is higher than the confidence expressed in the capacity of other entities, such as 'the capacity of hospitals and health services to provide intensive care to all who need it' (37%), 'the competence of the police and armed forces to enforce the quarantine' (33%), 'the ability of health authorities to control the pandemic in the country' (26%) and trust 'in the media to provide reliable information about what is happening' (13%).

Other studies have underscored the remarkable resilience of community organizations and initiatives in Chile, which have given rise to initiatives of solidarity, care and vindication of rights (Anigstein *et al*., 2021; Tapia *et al*., 2021). The study 'Community Practices, Local Policies and Governance for Crisis Management' (Departamento de Sociología, Universidad Católica del Maule, 2020) identified over 300 community experiences solely in the cities of Talca, Rancagua and Chillán. The common thread running through all these experiences was the social, material, emotional or symbolic reproduction of life. Each played a role in sustaining concrete, individual and collective lives, from temporary communal cooking pots to local-level participation, spiritual practices, care activities and feminist efforts (Letelier *et al*., 2021a). The social networks that emerged during the October 2019 insurrection in Chile, initially used to coordinate demonstrations and resist repression, swiftly transformed into support networks that aided local communities in managing the impacts of the pandemic (Guzmán-Concha, 2020).

The stark contrast between the absence of public policies that recognized and supported the invaluable role of communities in managing the social and health crisis and the undeniable evidence of their actual contributions is a call to action. Therefore, empirical study of the links and relationships that allowed the maintenance of life in proximity spaces (mainly the neighborhood) during the pandemic crisis becomes relevant and urgent. The findings in this study contribute to underscoring the role of communities during crises and the state's responsibility in generating territorial social and place-based policies that provide wellbeing and care.

The case of Chile is particularly interesting owing to its intense and prolonged mobility restriction measures. On 26 March 2020, generalized confinement was declared. Free movement was restricted, except for shopping for food or work related to health and emergency services. A control mechanism was established for leaving the home, which was limited to twice per week through a permit granted by the police. The schools remained without face-to-face activity for 18 months, the longest period of all Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries (OECD, 2022). Only on 19 July 2020, did the 'Step by Step' plan begin, which differentiated the types of restrictions according to the epidemiological characteristics of each territory (Zúñiga, 2021).

We have structured the article into six sections. The first contextualizes the social confinement policy decreed in Chile in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. Then it addresses the conceptual framework, discussing communitarian weavings and care infrastructures. The third section describes the case studies and the methodology, subsequently reporting and discussing the findings. The article closes with reflections on the importance of communitarian weavings in constructing care infrastructures.

Community confinement policies in Chile

The Covid-19 pandemic imposed challenges in various areas of public policies in governments around the world. A significant challenge was regulating physical contact between people through multiple measures restricting freedom of movement

and assembly. The nature and intensity of these restrictions affected people's daily relationships and their abilities to solve collective problems and needs in various ways (Anigstein *et al*., 2021; Irazábal, 2021).

In March 2020, the first case of Covid infection was detected in Chile. In the same month, the municipality of Valparaíso proposed the Community Confinement Model to confront the pandemic, a testament to the resilience and adaptability of the Chilean community. Recognizing that people depend on each other to meet their needs and that total isolation was unsustainable, the approach was based on the idea of territorial 'archipelagos' or 'bubbles', as it implied 'dividing the commune into a set of territorial units of community and municipal action that sought to isolate themselves and simultaneously interact in a regulated manner' (Municipalidad de Valparaíso, 2020: 2).

The national authorities should have appreciated the proposal. However, they had imposed a different centralized model, a decision that had far-reaching negative consequences. Based exclusively on individual responsibility and regulated quarantines: 'Quarantine … limits people's movements, allowing citizens to leave home only for specifically authorized essential activities. This measure is imposed to minimize interaction between people' (Gobierno de Chile, 2020). These measures included restrictions on people's mobility, mandatory quarantines in specific regions or communes with high infection rates, limitations on public and private gatherings, and the closure of non-essential establishments, among others.

On 26 March 2020, total confinement was declared in several communes in the country with a high rate of infections. On 19 July 2020, the Chilean government announced on national television the Step-by-Step Plan, which sought gradualness in the terms of the quarantines in the different areas of the country in which this measure was decreed, to avoid regrowth. The plan included five stages: restriction, transition, preparation, initial opening and advanced opening. The first two were the most restrictive. Stage 1—Restriction implied total confinement; only essential activities were allowed. Stage 2—Transition allowed people to go out from Monday to Friday, while total confinement remained on Saturdays, Sundays and holidays. Outdoor sports activities involving more than 10 people could not be carried out, sports activities were not allowed in closed spaces and meetings of more than five people in closed spaces and more than 10 in open spaces were not allowed (Gobierno de Chile, 2020).

The preceding restrictions strongly affected public life and led to a retreat into private and proximity spaces. At the same time, they led to an interruption of existing community life, affecting meetings in neighborhood headquarters, churches and public squares. Added to this was the closure of schools throughout the country, which, according to the 'Education Panorama 2022' (OECD, 2022) report, was the most widespread of all OECD member countries: more than 250 school days without available establishments. As Quinteros-Urquieta and Cortés-Mancilla (2022) point out, the pandemic and prolonged measures led to greater precariousness of life in terms of work, education, economics and wellbeing.

This model was implemented despite sufficient evidence of the consequences of isolation on mental health, a fact that should raise concern. In these contexts, 'disruptive psychosocial effects unfold in social subjectivity, human groups, communities, family groups and people's spheres of social belonging' (Madariaga and Oyarce, 2020: 13). Furthermore, not all households had the same capacity to carry out the expected home quarantines owing to daily subsistence needs, overcrowding, remote management of employment and schooling, and situations of domestic violence, among other aspects. Letelier *et al*. (2021b) severely criticized this myopic political approach:

> The indifference of public policies to the community dimension of pandemic management is not the only problem. The most serious problem is that all Covid-19-related social and health policies have an individual or, at most, familial focus. This underscores the urgent need to prioritize communitarian weavings, physical proximity environments, and neighborhoods in the approach of such policies (pp. 171–2).

Communitarian weavings and care infrastructures

Human life is fragile, and we rely on others to survive (Benhabib, 1992; Gilligan, 1993; Butler, 2004). Fragility is present in intrinsic and extrinsic ways: as an existential condition, as people are vulnerable in physical, material, psychological and emotional terms; and also, there are external sociopolitical factors that cause vulnerabilities in people's lives and uncertainty about the future (Butler, 2004; Standing, 2011; Sales, 2016). Understanding human life as vulnerable owing to existential and socially constructed conditions allows us to recognize the centrality of the reproductive dimension of existence and value care and relationships of mutual responsibility, for they allow individual autonomy, the reproduction of society and social wellbeing (Butler, 2004; Carrasco, 2013; Sales, 2016; Sanchís, 2020). Communities enact a 'natural way' of reproducing life based on 'reproductive rationality' focused on satisfying people's needs (Hinkelammert and Mora, 2013 in Cendejas, 2017) and oriented to their 'use value' (Gutiérrez and Salazar, 2019). Such rationality offers an alternative to the instrumental rationality of capital accumulation (Irazábal, 2009; Cubillos *et al*., 2022).

Congruently, we propose approaching the relationships in the territory[1] through the concept of communitarian weavings (Gutiérrez and Shokooh, 2021; Gutiérrez and Salazar, 2014). Communitarian weavings refer to the links between entities (individuals, groups, institutions and things such as food or money) connected by activity nodes (places or digital platforms) that create a changing infrastructure. They result from a complex network of weak and strong ties built and reconstructed between people to satisfy various shared needs that allow the production and reproduction of situated human and social life forms. They are based on 'respect, collaboration, dignity, affection and reciprocity' (Gutiérrez, 2011: 35) and are not necessarily guided by the logic of capital accumulation (Gutiérrez *et al*., 2016). Formal organizations are not the only agents that shape communitarian weavings. There are other manifestations of weavings such as informal networks of relationships between neighbors or family members, spaces of sociability linked to indigenous peoples (ayllus, lofs), networks of women and migrants, affinity and mutual support groups, and councils and assemblies, among others (Gutiérrez, 2011; 2017). The communitarian weavings operate cooperatively with multiple objectives to cover and expand the satisfaction of basic needs for individual and social existence. They establish, organize and coordinate links and shared practices within a framework of dynamic balances. They are not exempt from tensions and conflicts and are always subject to the possibility of renewal and self-regeneration (Gutiérrez and Salazar, 2019).

Communitarian weavings are qualitatively different from capitalist and state relations since they privilege spaces that encourage meeting, sharing, being and doing together. They cultivate closeness, not only in physical terms but fundamentally in terms of personal relationships (Linsalata, 2019). Thus, as Navarro (2019) argues, the city is not only the epicenter of capital accumulation but also a strategic space

1 We use the concept of territory to refer to an urban space whose scale is between a town or village and a city, for example, a neighborhood unit. The cases we analyze are, in effect, neighborhood units, which in Chile are the smallest political–administrative delimitations.

for the experimentation of community alternatives capable of reproducing life and regenerating it in the context of socio-environmental crises. Communitarian weavings use, appropriate or redefine various urban spaces: the street, the plaza, the warehouse, the neighborhood headquarters, etc., constituting what Muñoz *et al*. (2023) call an 'infrastructure of care'. Care infrastructures are practices, relationships, spaces and community services that are organized and emerge in response to crises and the immediate needs of affected people and communities (García-Santesmases *et al*., 2022; Muñoz *et al*., 2023). Care infrastructures are understood not only in material terms (such as the distribution of food and basic supplies) but also through social and emotional practices (such as mutual support and community activities) that help people manage uncertainty, isolation and difficulties derived from crises such as the pandemic and its ensued confinement. Caring is a practice of inhabiting, which occurs not in isolation but as relationships that are interwoven between people, other species and the environment, recognizing care as a daily practice inseparable from the socio-material contexts in which it takes place (Jirón Martínez *et al*., 2022).

Although various works highlight the practices of mutual aid and solidarity that had a community substrate during the pandemic (Lima *et al*., 2021; Castañeda-Meneses, 2022; Cabrera and Pérez-Mercado, 2023), fewer studies explore the connection between relationships and spaces. Link *et al*. (2021) argued that in the context of the decline in the activity and functions of the central spaces of the city, especially during the quarantines, the neighborhood acquired greater centrality. They articulated the infrastructures of care and daily life. The authors illustrate, for example, the importance that local commerce acquired as a space for supply and sociability. Another notable work is the book *Ciudad Confinada*, which highlights the importance of public spaces during the pandemic. The book describes various cases in which the uses of squares and parks are reconfigured, increasing their value as safe spaces that encourage encounters (Marcus, 2023).

The importance of socio-material contexts in the pandemic allows us to raise awareness about their relevance to produce fairer territories. Ana Falú and Eva Colombo (2022) maintain that care infrastructures can be instruments of social redistribution in the territories. Through an analysis of the city of Córdoba in Argentina, they demonstrate how care infrastructures are unequally distributed, especially in areas of greater vulnerability, evidencing a clear relationship between the availability of infrastructures and socio-economic and territorial conditions. Based on this, the authors appeal for urban planning and public policies to recognize and strengthen the role of care infrastructures, especially in the most disadvantaged neighborhoods.

This article explores the daily life of community ties and relationships spatialized in the neighborhood in the context of the multifaceted public health crisis produced by the Covid-19 pandemic. We emphasize the relationship between communitarian weavings, spaces and the production of common goods. This relationship is structured on two analytical axes: (1) how relationships and community spaces were reconfigured in the context of the pandemic and confinement; and (2) how these reconfigured relationships and spaces contributed to the satisfaction of individual and collective needs.

Cases and methodology

This research used qualitative methods, participant observation techniques and interviews with key actors in two cases in Chile, a neighborhood in the city of Talca and another in Concepción, to address the everyday nature of community care ties and infrastructures. The semi-structured interviews with key actors in the territory aimed to understand their experiences and perspectives (Taylor and Bogdan, 1987) on the neighborhood's daily life during the pandemic, paying particular attention to community relationships and the spaces in which they happened. We carried out the analysis using the qualitative content analysis software Nvivo, which allowed the development and use

FIGURE 1 Arturo Prat Neighborhood Association 22 (Zone 5), Talca, Chile (*source*: Google Maps ©2024. Image ©2024 Airbus, CNES/Airbus, Maxar Technologies. Map Data ©2024 Google)

of analysis categories that, in turn, allowed a higher level of abstraction in the study of the textual material (Flick, 2018) around the two analytical axes identified at the end of the section above, 'Communitarian weavings and care infrastructures'.

Talca is an intermediate city and Concepción is a central city within a larger metropolitan area. However, both cities share characteristics relevant to this research: a defined territorial identity and similar socio-economic characteristics, community trajectories and neighborhood articulations. Our previous research experience and knowledge of the organizational trajectories in both neighborhoods and the links already developed with each community by the research team facilitated identification, contact with the interviewees and the conducting of the interviews.

The first case study, in Talca, corresponds to the 22 Arturo Prat Neighborhood Association (also called Zone 5; see Figure 1). In the last Census (Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas, Chile, 2017), this neighborhood had a population of 10,565 inhabitants and 2467 homes. Despite a heterogeneous socio-economic composition, more than 60% of families belong to the lowest socio-economic level (Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas, Chile, 2002). With the support of the Territory and Collective Action Program (Programa Territorio y Acción Colectiva, 2013–17), the research team led a cooperative training process on territorial analysis, territorial diagnosis and participatory planning in this neighborhood. Based on this diagnosis, territorial roundtables[2] were established as a new way of managing the territory. This experience gave the research team access to the existing neighborhood articulation and a nuanced understanding of the territory. It was possible to identify a fragmented and atomized neighborhood culture rooted in mistrust

2 Territorial roundtables are coordination devices between community leaders representing different organizations in a territory, such as neighborhood units. In one of the case studies, the territorial table allowed consensus on a common agenda between various organizations and negotiation of that agenda with the local government.

TABLE 1 Characteristics of the participants of the Arturo Prat Neighborhood Association, Talca, Chile

Number	Name	Gender	Organizational experience
1	Amelia	Female	Participant in both a neighborhood and women's organization
2	Fresia	Female	Leader in a local neighborhood organization
3	Melania	Female	Participant in a women's organization
4	Marta	Female	Participant in a women's organization
5	Mónica	Female	Leader in a neighborhood organization
6	Muriel	Female	Participant in a neighborhood organization
7	Tamara	Female	Participant in a neighborhood organization

SOURCE: the authors.

and competition, which privileges maintaining 'good relations' with the authorities over forging alliances with other organizations and residents of the territory (Letelier *et al*., 2021c). We conducted seven interviews at the Arturo Prat 22 Neighborhood Council in 2021. We selected an intentional sample (Flick, 2018) under the following criteria: the interviewees were leaders and neighbors, inhabitants of the territory and participants in activities linked to the neighborhood articulation process (see Table 1).

The second case study is the Nonguén sector in Gran Concepción, located in a valley crossed by the Nonguén stream at the foot of a peri-urban national park, which in turn forms part of the Andalién river basin on the western slope of the Coastal Mountain Range (see Figure 2). Its location in the valley and the delimitation caused by the river facilitated the development of a shared local identity (Solís, 2022). In this sector, a more complex social articulation process has occurred, a testament to the power of collective action, as it has been carried out mainly autonomously by local organizations. The community has created a platform for multiscalar action from the bottom up, connecting various local organizations and collectives. The residents define themselves as a cohesive territory and have established relationships with civil society and state organizations (León *et al*., 2018; Letelier *et al*., 2021c). We identified 11 neighborhood associations, community organizations, non-government organizations, educational units and small businesses in Nonguén. This diversity of organizations has built a network of around 160 local actors that address shared challenges in the territory through different strategies (Saavedra *et al*., 2019; Beltrán and Castillo, 2020). We conducted 10 semi-structured interviews in the Nonguén region in 2021. The main criteria for selecting the sample were: people who have lived in the area for at least three years and participate in a local community organization (see Table 2).

Findings: communitarian weavings during the pandemic in Chile

This study addressed the links and relationships within proximity spaces, mainly the neighborhood, during the Covid-19 pandemic. The findings focus on two aspects: (1) how relationships and community spaces were reconfigured during the pandemic and confinement; and (2) how these reconfigured relationships and spaces contributed to satisfying individual and collective needs.

– The resignification of the nearby spaces and everyday relationships

The pandemic, a transformative event, disrupted the continuity of life, leaving us without the familiar frames to comprehend the new reality it ushered in (Veena Das, 1995 in Ribeiro, 2021). This upheaval led to a 'deconstruction of everyday life' (de-everydayization), rendering the replication of previous routines, behaviors, interactions, activities, locations and movements impossible (Ribeiro, 2021).

FIGURE 2 Nonguén Sector, Concepción, Chile (*source*: Google Maps ©2024. Image ©2024 Airbus, CNES/Airbus, Landsat/Copernicus, Maxar Technologies. Map Data ©2024 Google)

TABLE 2 Characteristics of the participants from the Nonguén area, Concepción, Chile

Number	Name	Gender	Organizational experience
1	Angélica	Female	Leader of a youth group in an evangelical church
2	Clemente	Male	Leader of a neighborhood organization
3	Damián	Male	Leader in an evangelical church
4	Daniela	Female	Participant of an evangelical church
5	Fabio	Male	Participant of an evangelical church
6	Gonzalo	Male	Leader of an environmental organization
7	Graciela	Female	Neighbor and university professor
8	Juvenal	Male	Participant in local educational organization
9	Jorge	Male	Leader in environmental education non-government organization
10	Patricia	Female	Women's organization participant

SOURCE: the authors.

The interviewees shared their experiences of the pandemic's disruption, primarily at the personal and familial levels, but also in the context of their close neighborhood and community relationships. In the face of this upheaval, the need to adapt and restore some semblance of normalcy emerged (Ribeiro, 2021; Roig and Blanco, 2021). This adaptation process, which we term the 'reconstruction of everyday life' (re-everydayization), was a significant challenge for many.

One of the initial findings underscored the crucial role of community spaces, particularly formal organizations, in nurturing neighborhood relations. The pandemic

and its associated mobility restrictions forced a halt to typical community activities, which were primarily centered around neighborhood gatherings in formal organizations (such as neighborhood associations and elder groups) and activities focused on shared values (such as religious institutions). The absence of these physical spaces for congregation and interaction significantly impacted the dynamics of neighborhood relationships, as two of the neighbors interviewed lamented:

> Unfortunately, all those things were no longer possible, not even in the neighborhood, community, or anywhere else because everything stopped … We had a meeting before the pandemic, and from then on, this whole situation began, and we could not meet again; not even the local council met again. So, many changes (Amelia, Talca, 2021).

She further expressed her frustration saying, 'It's been a year of isolation, and it's been really hard. We miss our community, our gatherings, our shared activities'.

> Nonguén and the parish to which I belong closed last year. It closed completely in March and recently reopened, symbolizing a small step towards the restoration of community life. Before all this, you met more frequently with the other members of the church, and that was somehow lost. Of course, with the Covid issue, communication is no longer as fluid as before (Angelica, Concepción, 2021).

Owing to gathering restrictions, community relations became virtual through video conferencing or information delivery through WhatsApp chats. Despite being valuable tools, virtual networks have limitations. Damián, leader of the Nonguén Sector (Concepción), told us that one of the problems 'was connectivity or limited access to the Internet. Moreover, access to technology, because, as I said before, adults or older adults barely knew how to answer the phone, and WhatsApp was totally unknown to them'. Fresia, leader of Arturo Prat NA (Talca), highlighted the substantial change she experienced in her way of working and relating:

> The way we work [changed] … [We were] used to face-to-face meetings, where you drink tea, share and stay a little longer. Now that strictly necessary information is shared through WhatsApp … there is no longer that need to meet. Now, you can easily send impersonal information through WhatsApp (Fresía, Talca, 2021).

A second issue to highlight is the importance of everyday proximity ties. Some interviewees say that owing to the pandemic and its limitations, interactions and communication were gradually lost: 'Before [the pandemic], we would go out to talk, and other people would join the conversation. Suddenly six or eight people gathered together; now that does not happen' (Tamara, Talca). However, others believe that maintaining relationships and communication with their neighbors became even more critical, particularly within the space closest to the street or passage in which they lived: '[When] I share with other people, I do it more in "my neighborhood, with my people"' (Clemente, Concepción).

Given the impossibility of sustaining friendships, family life and participation in groups outside the neighborhood, the street, or the alley—where circulation was allowed without breaking confinement—these spaces acquired greater relevance for relationships. Thus, the street recovered its privileged status as a place to meet others and display social interactions (Araujo, 2019). Circulation routes previously assumed to be part of the routine and without primary importance acquired a new community meaning in the crisis. Marta referred to this in the following terms:

> At least in my alley, I have seen neighbors who care about sweeping the street. They go out into the street … I go shopping, and I always see the elderly neighbors, I greet them and ask them: 'How are you? Are you okay?' and everyone says: 'Well, here we are, we're all doing well' (Marta, Talca, 2021).

Juvenal—a resident of the Nonguén Sector in Concepción—recognized the importance of community organizations:

> Community organizations are fundamental in this system of self-determination that has emerged, beyond the state, beyond local administrations, and yes, very attached to house-to-house ties, being in contact, knowing what my neighbor needs and how I can help (Juvenal, Concepción, 2021).

Another area that acquired a new central role was local commerce. Grocery stores remained open, and simultaneously, a digital sphere of operation evolved that allowed residents to interact with actors close to them with the help of information technologies. The apps facilitated the supply of products within the same neighborhood, allowing people to avoid supermarkets, which the interviewees valued: 'The small businesses are open, they have been organized very well, and we are all very respectful' (Graciela, Concepción). Grocery stores not only supplied goods but were also spaces that allowed new community relationships to be developed during shopping, both with other neighbors and with the people who served customers. In many cases, interviewees highlighted that these supply tasks were their time to leave the house, relieve themselves from confinement and meet others. Fresia recognized the benefits of 'neighborhood life', especially that of a neighborhood far from the city center where the control of urban mobility was stricter.

> Our territory, you know, I used to complain that it was peripheral. Now I like that it's a suburb because it's a place where people go out. They buy bread, they go to the store … and they know that there are no police here, so they won't have any problems. And Doña Juanita's business and Don Carlos's bakery are open, and people know their hours, or knock on the side door and get what they need. I like neighborhood life during this time, and I like it a lot. I feel that in the suburbs this confinement has been lighter, less marked than in the center (Fresia, Talca, 2021).

Finally, another area that gained relevance was the public space of the neighborhoods, valued as a common good that allows multiple needs to be satisfied (Crestani and Irazábal, 2020). Although during the first months of the pandemic—when the national health authority ordered home confinement—attendance and use of common spaces decreased, people soon returned to them. As the interviewees emphasized, the need for leisure, recreation and mental health protection led them to leave home and meet others. Community use of fields, squares and parks became common in both neighborhoods. Children and young people returned—playing, playing sports or riding a bicycle, among other activities—and adults and seniors took walks, walked their pets and attended activities such as workshops offered by various organizations. Graciela tells how activity in her sector gradually increased:

> Men and women play soccer here … and children too. Now we can watch them play and I like that a lot. I also like other activities, like … yoga classes, here at headquarters or in the field, Pilates, knitting and things like that (Graciela, Concepción, 2021).

In the case of Arturo Prat NA (Talca), Parque 17 Avenida Norte—built in 2016 based on articulated work by local neighborhood organizations—is recognized as the most important public space (almost the only one) in the area.

> [People] still use parks and squares. Here we have two places where many young people, children, and older adults live … the park on 17 [Av. North], where the elderly go for a walk and the children ride their bicycles, and the countryside in the center of Faustino [neighborhood]. There is a covered court where young people play basketball (Fresía, Talca, 2021).

In the Nonguén sector (Concepción), some interviewees highlighted their proximity to natural spaces, which they could easily visit to walk, decompress and have fun. They considered it a 'privilege'. As Clemente told us:

> I live on the outskirts of the city. My situation cannot be compared with that of a person who lives in the center of Concepción. In other words, I look, and I don't see anyone … I walk a few steps, and I'm already in the heart of the hill, and there I am like a rabbit, nobody catches me anymore. Only some of us have the privilege of living such an experience (Clemente, Concepción, 2021).

Although some neighbors visited the natural sites by themselves, some interviewees highlighted the work of one of the neighborhood organizations contributing to the visibility of these spaces in the context of the pandemic, inviting neighbors to visit various sites. Gonzalo commented:

> For us, the wetland meant that people could go to that place in the same neighborhood, a place that they had not seen before and that was now visible. People went there to watch birds, to relax and feel what it is like to be in a beautiful, pleasant environment … It may be a consequence of that [experience] because it is a space, a green area, where people realize how important green places and these spaces are for themselves since neighbors are forced to remain locked up at home, but they also have the need to go out (Gonzalo, Concepción, 2021).

In the context of pandemic and confinement, everyday relationships and spaces of proximity—previously naturalized and made invisible as part of daily routines—came to the fore and became a primary source to (re)generate relationally and care for common goods (Gutiérrez Sánchez, 2023). In this context, the neighborhood is re-evaluated as a space of public familiarity (Blokland, 2017), where people can socially locate others, recognize them and even expect to see them. In a comfort zone where people can move quickly, the environment becomes predictable and people trust others (Blokland and Nast, 2014). In short, the pandemic—as a 'critical event' (Ribeiro, 2021)—caused a gap in daily life and promoted reflexivity about ties and relationships in spaces of proximity.

– The production of common goods from proximity relations

The interviews revealed two significant problems that the health crisis deepened: on the one hand, unemployment, underemployment and economic difficulties, and on the other, mental health problems related to increased stress and confinement.

Regarding the first challenge, unemployment and underemployment were relatively high in the neighborhoods where we conducted this study. Some neighbors stopped earning much of their monthly income or, in some cases, had no income. These conditions deepened the struggle of individuals and families to satisfy social reproduction with needs such as food. Sometimes, people had to ask their neighbors for food or money. 'There was a time when many people you didn't expect came to your house to ask for food, or they asked you for money because they didn't have work, so they didn't have anything to eat' (Gonzalo, Concepción). Likewise, some interviewees stated that, although not all had lost their jobs, the majority had economic difficulties owing to the social and health crisis and its multiple implications. Collaborating with neighbors with

significant economic concerns was challenging: 'It is very difficult to help another person who is also in that situation because we are all in the same situation' (Marta, Talca).

Crisis episodes present conditions that stimulate new responses and alternative courses of action (Letelier *et al*., 2021a), hence the adverse social effects of the pandemic promoted community responses by activating and regenerating various communitarian weavings. Some were collections of money or food and the creation of provisional communal or solidarity kitchens. In the latter cases—especially in communal kitchens—the initiatives were installed in neighborhood public spaces, such as community social centers or schools. Mónica, a member of Arturo Prat NA (Talca), told us how the community helped those neighbors with economic difficulties during the pandemic:

> As neighbors we help each other, but very carefully, because now we can't go from house to house. Then, suddenly, among a few neighbors: 'Hey, you know what? We knew that this neighbor lost his job and will not have help'; 'Okay, let's take up a collection among ourselves and buy some supplies at the supermarket and deliver them to you' (Monica, Talca, 2021).

Gonzalo, from the Nonguén Sector (Concepción), told us about one of the provisional communal kitchen initiatives:

> The Nonguenche Women's Group installed provisional communal kitchens when they saw the need for people without food … A very political discourse arose about helping people who had lost their jobs and did not have access to food … That was quite true. They delivered directly to people's homes and cooked at the market in a community center there (Gonzalo, Concepción, 2021).

Given the shortcomings of the public sector's actions, the communitarian weavings assumed different strategies in each case. In the case of the Nonguén sector, the neighbors organized to create provisional communal kitchens independently of formal organizations and the municipality. This caused tension and dispute over the use of physical spaces and a feeling of non-recognition of the community and neighbors' self-organized action (or organized independently of traditional social organizations). Patricia told us that:

> The relationship with the municipality is quite tense. The municipality does not recognize those who organize more independently. A group doesn't have to be registered and be a legal entity to operate and use community spaces … During the pandemic, with the issue of the temporary community kitchen, they did not lend us a community center. We ended up renting the center and paid about 5,000 or 10,000 pesos a month … So, who owns the community spaces? To the municipality … when they saw that the communal kitchen was already working, they said they would help us, when everything was already covered. We don't do charity. We do it to give a little dignity in the current context (Patricia, Concepción, 2021).

In Arturo Prat NA, the work of municipal and community organizations was articulated, and this was evident in the implementation of a solidarity kitchen in the neighborhood. The municipal structure anchored this initiative to meet the food needs of its inhabitants derived from the economic difficulties caused by the pandemic. Although the initiative arose from the municipality, its implementation required the legitimation of the local action board (territorial table), which was central in coordinating the solidarity kitchen. Fresia, who supervised the initiative, told us about the experience:

> It was an initiative of the mayor … but I felt that I had to support it to help my people. I signed up all my people—those who couldn't leave the house due to the Covid contagion, those who were bedridden, the elderly, etc.—to start

> delivering food at home. That was tremendously important … The mayor was the one who called the board and asked us for our opinion, and we thought it was excellent. I told him: 'I support [the initiative] one hundred percent and I am going to contribute everything I can' (Fresia, Talca, 2021).

In addition to articulating the municipality and the community, the initiative had some local companies that contributed resources for its implementation.

Other goods produced by communitarian weavings are support strategies for neighbors who had difficulties marketing the products they usually sold outside the neighborhood in free markets or established stores. Highlights include the carrying out of sales activities, in the case of Nonguén, and the provision of physical spaces for marketing, in the case of Arturo Prat NA.

> With few job opportunities … you will find families that more or less feel an affinity for some entrepreneurial projects because they generate charitable and cooperative activities. To sustain the surrounding economy, we have been organizing weekly school sales of manufactured products and crafts (Juvenal, Concepción, 2021).

> Look, here in the busiest store, Mrs. Juanita's, many people who make cakes leave them with her, and she sells them. She has a very good heart … many people make her pastries, cakes and empanadas, and she offers them in her store, salads too, and people leave their products there, and she sells them, she has no issues (Muriel, Talca, 2021).

In the case of Arturo Prat NA, the critical use of virtual interaction spaces generated buying and selling groups where sector residents could offer their products. Tamara told us how she motivated a WhatsApp group to support her neighbors:

> We now have a WhatsApp group. Now everything goes to social networks. In other words, there are neighbors here, some who work in the food market, other neighbors who work in the 'tendales' as people call them, and they have not been allowed to work. So, I have created WhatsApp groups for purchases and sales so that neighbors can help each other (Tamara, Talca, 2021).

The above shows a particular community appropriation of the commercial sphere expressed in commercial activities within the neighborhood, the provision of physical spaces for commerce and the use of virtual interaction spaces to organize informal commercial associations.

Another need that communitarian weavings addressed was mental health. This challenge increased owing to confinement, the virtual adaptation of work and educational activities, and the impossibility or difficulty of interacting with other people (beyond the immediate environment), among other issues. These circumstances caused an intensification of symptoms such as anxiety, stress and depression. Fabio (Concepción) told us: 'It has been something particularly negative … in terms of psychological [health]. Many people, young people, and everyone have had depression, either because of the pandemic or because of things that the pandemic brings' (Fabio, Concepción). In turn, Melania (Talca) reported that her loved ones 'are all desperate, stressed, with depression. There are many with depression. Many have gotten sick' (Melania, Talca).

As in the case of unemployment and economic difficulties, in the face of mental health deterioration, the communitarian weavings in each neighborhood also played a role, mainly through emotional support (Roig and Blanco, 2021). For example, a church in Nonguén began to provide spiritual accompaniment to its members, including online meetings and activities. Damián (Concepción) tells us that the need for this support intensified during the pandemic:

> The issue of depression and loneliness has also increased and, as a church, accompanying these people so that they do not feel alone is important. Because many times one … stays at home and does nothing. But then you share with people online, whether it's over teatime, singing [together], or meeting up to see how everyone is doing. I think the church helps a lot in that sense (Damián, Concepción, 2021).

Interviewees also highlighted the daily interactions between neighbors that helped to manage the emotions and feelings experienced during the pandemic. As mentioned above, these interactions took place in the closest context—such as the alleys—but also through virtual social networks—such as WhatsApp—where neighbors participated in chats and communicated with their close ones in the neighborhood or members of an organization they belonged to.

> In terms of the human [community] fabric, or in terms of promoting or recovering the situation in socio-emotional and psychological terms, it is the people, the neighbors themselves [who] are now promoting approaches to allow the processing of all these emotions that overwhelm you when you are alone, isolated, or without meaningful [human] contact (Juvenal, Concepción,).

> I am part of a women's WhatsApp group. I am our president. We are always talking to each other, and when we have a problem or someone is sick, we always ask the group to pray together (prayer chain) for someone. A friend here, who lives in this alley, who is her neighbor and friend, asked us to pray for her aunt. And we all said: 'Alright! We'll do it at that time, girls'. So we all talked … we all supported her (Melania, Talca, 2021).

Finally, another issue related to mental health care is the use of public spaces in the neighborhood for walking, playing sports or carrying out recreational activities. We observed how communitarian weavings, a symbol of unity and belonging, showed their capacity to produce common goods of relational care relevant to the problems or needs in crisis. Neighbors, in their solidarity, generated provisional community kitchens and collections and physical and virtual community markets, and created spaces for emotional support and a sense of belonging, among other things. Communitarian weavings, a testament to the power of community, made it possible to meet material, symbolic and psycho-emotional needs whose satisfaction was essential for the reproduction of life, especially in times of crisis.

Care infrastructures: summary

Based on the stories of people involved in community care practices in the neighborhoods of Talca and Concepción, we created the following matrix that summarizes the leading community practices developed in the context of pandemic confinement, the spaces in which they were created, main agents, dimensions and the common goods they produced (see Table 3). The effects and common goods we identified can be grouped into three broad categories: public familiarity (feeling comfortable in the inhabited space) and sense of belonging (feeling part of a group/place); emotional, spiritual and material support; and access to information or wellbeing and practices such as physical activity or access to nature.

Although the first four practices in Table 3 (numbers 1–4) already existed before the health crisis, they acquired greater prominence and significance in a context where formal organizational spaces were unavailable and mobility was restricted. They demonstrated the vital role of informal interactions and virtual sociability in maintaining community ties, even in a situation of confinement that was not individual- or

TABLE 3 Community practices and reproduction of life during the Covid-19 crisis: Talca and Concepción, Chile

Number	Practices	Spaces	Actors	Dimensions	Effects/ common goods produced
1	Daily and informal interactions (greetings, conversations)	Streets and passages of the neighborhood	Neighbors	Symbolic, psycho-emotional, social	Public familiarity, emotional support, sense of community and belonging
2	Occupation and gathering in public spaces	Natural spaces, parks, squares and sports spaces	Young people, children, older adults	Symbolic, psycho-emotional, social	Public familiarity, emotional support, sense of community and belonging, sociability, recreation, physical activity, contact with nature
3	Trade in the immediate environment	Neighborhood shops and stores	Neighbors, neighborhood store owners	Material, psycho-social	Satisfaction of material needs, public familiarity, access to information, sense of place and belonging
4	Virtual sociability groups	Virtual social networks	Neighborhood groups	Psycho-emotional	Sociability, emotional support, access to information
5	Virtual trading groups (bartering, buying and selling)*	Virtual social networks	Neighbors, neighborhood merchants	Material, creative	Support to satisfy the material needs of neighbors, support small businesses, sense of community, solidarity
6	Accompaniment and spiritual practices	Virtual social networks	Churches and prayer groups	Psycho-emotional, spiritual	Emotional and spiritual support, sense of community and belonging, meaning and purpose in life
7	Money or goods collections	Virtual social networks	Community organizations, neighborhood groups	Material, psycho-emotional, social	Support to meet the material needs of the most vulnerable families, sense of community, solidarity
8	Community pots/ kitchens	Public spaces, social centers, schools	Community organizations, neighborhood groups	Material, psycho-emotional, social	Satisfaction of material needs of the most vulnerable families, sociability, emotional support, sense of community, solidarity

*There was a neighborhood's spatial use for the collections and delivery of money, food and other goods, although the coordination was based on virtual social networks.SOURCE: by the authors.

familial-based but communal and delimited (physically and virtually) in relation to infrastructure and the neighborhood environment.

The next four practices in Table 3 (numbers 5–8) did not exist before the Covid-19 pandemic. They arose from the crisis' generated needs and its associated restrictions. They evidenced the remarkable resilience of communities, demonstrating that the confinement was experienced as a community and the agility of the community to adapt to new contexts and needs. Currently, virtual trading groups are maintained. Spiritual accompaniment returned to an in-person format. As has happened in most places, the collections and pots ended their operation after the families' income generation capacity was normalized. These practices show that the forms adopted by community relations go beyond conventional configurations and procedures, including formal organizations, their usual face-to-face mode of operations and their emphasis on petitioning the state. The former relationships gained relevance when the latter lost prominence, and more flexible, relational and autonomous modalities emerged.

Final reflections: care infrastructures

The two case studies we discussed showed that the home confinement measures decreed and imposed by the state—with a strong individual and household focus—could not be sustained in daily life. People experienced the pandemic confinement in situated

physical proximity, in the neighborhood, a space of public familiarity (Blokland, 2017; Di Virgilio and Serrati, 2023). There, the action of multiple communitarian weavings articulated with diverse daily spaces satisfied needs and sustained life in the context of the pandemic.

We observed four vital aspects related to these emerging care infrastructures. First, with the pandemic, there was a rupture in people's daily lives and their family and neighborhood environments (Ribeiro, 2021; Di Virgilio and Serrati, 2023) and a subsequent resignification of proximity and everyday relationships. People adapted to the new context, and their actions became flexible *vis-à-vis* spaces and infrastructures to respond to existing and new needs (Roig and Blanco, 2021).

Second, this process led to a resignification of physical spaces. The street became an essential space for interaction; local businesses continued to operate and served as spaces for exchanges. Neighbors prioritized public spaces for socializing, walking and recreation, among other activities. The pandemic and the demands of confinement reinforced the neighborhood as a space of public familiarity.

Third, the virtual sphere was also reconfigured. The social dimension of neighborhood communitarian weavings was partially (re)built virtually during the pandemic. Existing virtual spaces became more robust than before the pandemic. Local actors incorporated virtual interactions to (re)create links despite the physical barriers imposed by the quarantine. The objectives included coordinating actions for intangible purposes (spiritual activities) or practical purposes (such as trading products).

Fourth, the communitarian weavings, by appropriating or recreating the physical and virtual spaces of the neighborhood, acted to respond to and satisfy needs (Gutiérrez, 2011). The communitarian weavings adapted their configurations and actions to the context and its demands, generating new common goods that helped to address these needs. The common goods produced were material—such as provisional community kitchens, solidarity kitchens, collections and virtual markets—and immaterial—such as emotional and spiritual support, affection and access to information (Roig and Blanco, 2021).

Care infrastructures complemented or replaced the in/action of the state and the formal market. In the case of Arturo Prat NA in Talca, the municipality and the community complemented actions through the joint and articulated effort to operate the solidarity kitchen. On the other hand, in the operation of the provisional community kitchens in the Nonguén sector in Concepción, communitarian weavings replaced the inactions of the state and the private sector. The community appropriated and remodeled both neighborhoods' physical and virtual market spaces to sell the neighbors' products. This shows that the communitarian weavings had the plasticity to act in various scenarios, both when there were conditions to establish agreements with the state and when there were not.

Finally, during the pandemic in Chile, the state imposed a confinement 'from above' for individuals and households, assigning responsibility for infections and their consequences to people. However, most people did not have the resources or conditions to comply with these quarantines or survive under them adequately. Although public policies did not recognize it, the confinement was experienced and endured thanks to the community relationships in proximity, which emerged as a fundamental scale for human life. Thus, the community replaced an often absent, irrelevant and obstructive state through daily life.

Communities carry much of people's physical, emotional and mental health on their shoulders. The experiences in the neighborhoods of Talca and Concepción provide evidence of the fundamental role played by communitarian weavings and the care infrastructures they build, a critical lesson to heed if we want to build and sustain public policies that promote caring cities and generate social wellbeing in contexts of crises.

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