Regionalist Social Movements in Contemporary Chile: Production of Space, Place, Territory, and Scale Through Collective Action

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Abstract

In the last decade, the organization of several territorially based social movements in Chile has expressed a significant level of social discomfort about the political and economic system of the country. The central objective of this dissertation is to analyze how motivations, achievements, and failures of these movements have a dialectical relationship with the spatial features, specifically with the concepts place, territory and scale. Critical geography, political geography, and social movements’ studies provide the theoretical framework for the analysis, highlighting the significance of social movements as producers of collective knowledge. This research used a qualitative approach with a mix-methods design that included archival and online research, as well as 58 in-deep semi-structured interviews conducted in a 6-months fieldwork in Chile. Collected data identified 21 cases of territorially based social movements during the period 2006-2016 that reached different levels of significance. This research selected three case studies for a deeper comparative analysis: Aysén, Chiloé, and San Antonio. The main findings are: (1) these territorially based social movements, while not revolutionary, criticized the neoliberal small state, demanding effective provision of social rights and more territorial autonomy; (2) these movements appealed to a place-based identity connected to natural elements, and their collective action reframed such identity, leading to social empowerment; (3) material space framed collective action of these movements since isolated conditions allowed long-lasting demonstrations; also, collective action produced ephemeral places and temporarily changed the territorial dynamics; and (4) the regional scale was a crucial for these movements because it politically engaged local problems with national debates regarding economic, social, and environmental issues. All this shows that collective action conducted by social movements strongly engages with the spatial realm in multiple, creative and diverse ways.
Regionalist Social Movements in Contemporary Chile: Production of Space, Place, Territory, and Scale Through Collective Action

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On March 6th, 2012, the BBC reporter Gideon Long wrote from Chile: “Think of Patagonia and you might think of glaciers, majestic mountains and crystal-clear lakes. The region tucked away at the bottom of South America […] has long been a magnet for tourists looking to escape the rigours of urban life. Which is why the images from southern Chile in recent weeks have been so incongruous. Since mid-February, protesters have fought almost nightly battles with police in the Patagonian region of Aysén, setting up barricades and hurling rocks at armed officers, who have responded with tear gas and water cannon. One protester has lost an eye, allegedly after being shot by the police, and several others have been seriously injured. Amnesty International has urged an investigation into claims of ‘an excessive use of [police] force, the unwarranted use of tear gas, the use of metal pellets and possible arbitrary arrests’ […]” (Long 2012). Similarly, on April 14th, 2012, The Economist stated: “Thousands of residents of Aysén, a remote region in Patagonia, have blocked roads to demand cheaper petrol and in protest over a new fishing law. Similar regional protests have occurred in Calama, a mining area in the northern desert, and (last year) in Punta Arenas. Such protests have been commonplace for years in Peru, a poorer and more diverse country. But Chile?” (The Economist 2012).

Why did such social conflict in a distant Latin American country surprise these reporters from transnational news media? Why did these riots and protests in Chile produce such interest in these global publications? The likely answers relate to the positive social image of Chile, perceived by most of the international community as a stable democracy that has been part of the
OECD since 2010, a “good example” of a modern capitalist economy in the usually unstable South American political context (Collier and Sater 2004). These violent conflicts in Chile do not reinforce such a perception and do not correspond with the peaceful natural landscapes of the country, such as the Patagonian fjords or the Atacama Desert. The conflicts depicted above imply a significant level of social unrest in the country, despite many good social and economic indicators (Ministerio de Desarrollo Social 2017). As the epigraph of this chapter suggests, some people felt they showed up on the Chilean map for the first time by protesting on the streets and criticizing several aspects of the country’s current conditions.

This research addresses some of these conflicts and focuses on the emergence of territorially based social movements as found in many regions of Chile during the last decade. Such movements have had significant political effects, not only on the local level but also at the national level, because they have expressed significant tensions around the political, economic, and territorial systems of the country. The following sections present the main features of this dissertation, describing the problem, the research questions, the general theoretical framework, the methodological approach, and some reflections about the author’s positionality and specific difficulties encountered during the research process. The last section of this chapter summarizes the general structure of this dissertation.

1.1. The cycle of protest in Chile during the early twenty-first century

In the last three decades, Chile has achieved many positive social and economic indicators. Notably, there was an impressive reduction of the poverty rate, from 38% in 1990 to 11.7% in 2017 (Agostini, Brown, and Góngora 2008; Larragaña and Rodríguez 2015; Ministerio de Desarrollo Social 2017). Such a remarkable index has been consistent with high yearly growth in the gross domestic product (GDP), nearly 5% in the period, which rose from US$4,407 per
capita in 1990 to US$22,128 in 2014 (Schmidt-Hebbel 2006; World Bank n.d.). Furthermore, according to the United Nations Development Program, Chile is currently classified as a country with a “very high” level in the Human Development Index (HDI), ranked first in Latin America and number 38 in the world (UNPD 2017).

This socioeconomic success also relates to Chile’s recent political history. Augusto Pinochet’s dictatorship, which lasted 17 years, was peacefully defeated in a plebiscite in 1988 without significant levels of political violence. Since 1990, Chilean citizens have elected democratic authorities in presidential, legislative, and local elections. Additionally, despite the regime change from a right-wing dictatorship to center-left democratic governments (which governed from 1990 to 2010), the central aspects of the economic system implanted during Pinochet’s regime remain, with no significant changes to the present day. Thus, Chile has maintained neoliberal policies, including open markets, as well as the privatization of water and sanitation services, energy production and distribution, retirement funds, and other natural resources (Collier and Sater 2004). Democratic governments slowly implemented policies aiming for social protection in crucial areas such as healthcare and housing, but they did not change the general structure of the economy (Atria et al. 2013). However, in the 2000s, many authors considered the Chilean socio-economic system as a combination of representative liberal democracy, partial social protection, and an open market economy called neoliberalism with a human face (Atria 2013; Collier and Sater 2004; Undurraga 2015). This model remained arguably successful until at least 2006 in economic, social and political terms and implied the consecutive re-elections of the center-left wing coalition (in the elections of 1994, 2000, and 2006).
Nonetheless, behind this peaceful political and economic landscape, critical paradoxes started to emerge in the country in the last decade. Despite economic growth, the historically high level of economic inequality did not show any improvement and Chile demonstrated the worst income distribution among the 33 Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries in terms of the Gini\(^1\) coefficient (Larragaña and Rodríguez 2015). Additionally, the privatization of essential services (e.g. energy, water, communications) and the poor quality of public education and healthcare started to be questioned by a growing number of citizens and intellectuals (Moulian 2002). Finally, the economic model relies on an extractive mode of production, which has produced severe environmental problems, affecting the quality of life in many cities, towns, and communities (INAP, Universidad de Chile 2016).

Thus, during the last few years, people in different regions of the country have started to express social and political discontent outside the institutional structure and beyond the institutional act of voting every four years (McSherry and Mejía 2011). At least since 2006, large groups of students, fisher people, workers, miners, and environmental activists have organized social movements, expressing the emergence of a cycle of protests (Martin 2015). Organized people, then, have conducted several collective actions such as large street parades, road blockades, and the temporary occupation of schools, universities, and other public buildings.

Some of these movements have a national reach and emerge around problems that affect all Chileans, despite where they live. Examples are: the movement pro-reform of the retirement fund system (\(No+AFP\)), the student federations that demand improvements in public education

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\(^1\) The Gini coefficient is a measure of statistical dispersion designed by Conrad Gini in 1912 to represent the distribution of income among a nation’s residents. In the quoted publication, Chile ranked first, with the worst income distribution among the 33 countries of the OECD in 2011, followed by Mexico, Turkey, and the USA. The most egalitarian countries were Slovenia, Norway, Iceland, and Denmark.
(CONFECH, CONES), the feminist organizations that fight against gender discrimination and violence against women (Ni Una Menos), and the LGBT groups focused on issues around civil rights (Movilh, Iguales). Many of these movements push for national changes in the economic and political organization of the country (Salinas 2016), and some demand a new National Constitution (Atria et al. 2013).

In contrast, other social movements do not have a national reach since they emerged in specific subnational spaces. In these cases, people organize massive demonstrations in specific territories, as well as local strikes that last days and weeks. This research focuses on this specific kind of territorially based movements. Some Chilean scholars have addressed this issue and named these groups los indignados (the outraged people) by Salinas (2016, 239), and territories rebeldes del siglo XXI (rebel territories of the twenty-first century) by Valenzuela (2015, 229). However, participants have called these movements citizens’ assemblies, territorial assemblies, regional assemblies, or regional boards (in Spanish: Asambleas ciudadanas, Asambleas territoriales, Asambleas regionales, or Mesas regionales). This research uses the generic term citizens’ assemblies for these movements since this name is most commonly used by participants during mobilizations.

These citizens’ assemblies requested, among other issues, greater autonomy to determine the future of their territories, a “new deal” with the central government, more direct democracy, and sustainable development. Examples of these assemblies include the “Asamblea Ciudadana de Magallanes,” organized in 2011, the “Tu Problema es mi Problema” movement in the Aysén Region during February–March 2012, the “Movimiento Socio-Ambiental Valle del Huasco” in 2012, the “Asamblea Ciudadana de San Antonio” in 2013, and the “Chiloé Está Priva’o” social movement during May 2016, among others.
Citizens’ assemblies, then, highlighted two primary concerns regarding the current organization of the Chilean state: (1) the administrative centralization of the political power of the country in Santiago, and (2) the adverse socioenvironmental outcomes produced by the economic model in subnational spaces. Both aspects are deeply rooted in Chilean history but also have specific features in recent times. The following two subsections briefly explain these issues, while the third subsection describes the common features of the citizens’ assemblies.

1.1.1. Political and administrative centralization

Chile has developed a centralized model of territorial administration that currently consists in administrative units organized in three subnational levels: Regions (Regiones), Provinces (Provincias), and Communes (Comunas). Therefore, it is necessary to clarify that, in this dissertation, the uppercase expressions “Region,” “Regional Government,” and “Regional Authorities” refer specifically to the political administrative divisions of Chile that are explained below. In contrast, the words “region” and “regional” (lowercase) refer to the subnational spaces in general, located between the local and national levels. In 2018, there were 15 Regions, 54 Provinces, and 346 Communes in the country. The city of Santiago is the political center where all the national authorities live and make decisions for the rest of the country (Collier and Sater 2004). Currently, 40% of Chileans reside in the Santiago Region (which hosts the capital city), and this Region produces 42% of the national GDP.

Besides this demographic and economic concentration, the Chilean government structure concentrates most political power around the President of the Republic. A crucial aspect of this political centralization relies on the fact that Chilean presidents have historically appointed all the Regional and Provincial authorities, as well as all Ministers (E. Valenzuela 2015). This kind of territorial and political concentration of power is not exceptional in Latin America (A. Morris
and Lowder 1992), but in Chile, this centralization had two significant effects: it promoted the early consolidation of the state structure and produced a remarkable degree of cultural homogeneity, especially at the elite level (Salazar 2012).

In the case of communes—the local level—there is a historical political autonomy since, between 1882 and 1973, citizens elected local mayors through democratic and competitive elections. However, Pinochet’s military coup interrupted this process, and during the dictatorship, the military junta designated all local authorities. In this period, the regime transferred (via a top-down policy) public education and healthcare to the local level in a process called “municipalización” (Atria et al. 2013; Collier and Sater 2004; Montero and Samuels 2004). However, the National Government retained control over the public budget, while municipalities lacked financial resources. In 1993, the first democratic government, led by Patricio Aylwin, re-institutionalized local elections but did not change the budget system. These days, most Chilean Municipalities do not have sufficiently strong technical capabilities to administer their territories and depend on the National Government to implement their policies.

The centralization of political power in Chile is almost absolute at the Regional and Provincial levels. The President still appoints the executive authorities in every Region and Province, without citizens’ participation (however, residents elect the Regional Council). Regional Governments also lack an autonomous budget and cannot conduct their territorial development (Oxhon, Tulchin, and Selee 2004). In February 2018, the National Congress approved a bill on the democratization of the Regional Governments, and in 2020, Chilean citizens will elect their Region-level Authorities for the first time.

Statistics may be helpful in expressing the high degree of centralization of political power in the country: By 2006, the national government had defined 90% of the public investment, one
of the highest proportions in South America; municipal-level decisions accounted for 9% of public investment, while Regional Governments only determined 1% of it (Finot 2007). More than ten years later, this situation has not changed significantly.

1.1.2. The economic model and the production of subnational spaces in Chile

Like many other Latin American countries, since colonial times, Chile has oriented its economy toward the production and export of raw materials, especially food and minerals (Alimonda 2011). In Chile, the abundance of natural resources and the absence of a large workforce made only a few economic activities competitive. Productive cycles of wheat (first half of the nineteenth century), nitrites (1890–1920), and copper (1930–today) have been a central part of the national economic history and have shaped the social and material landscapes of its regions (Collier and Sater 2004).

Under Pinochet’s dictatorship (1973–1990), the ideas of Milton Friedman and the Chicago school of economics became hegemonic, and many neoliberal policies were designed, conducted, and materialized in the National Constitution, approved in 1980, albeit without a parliament, regular citizen records, or any opposition campaign (Atria 2013). Therefore, some scholars consider Chile an iconic case of a neoliberal economy imposed by a dictatorial government, without consideration of regular citizens’ opinions or democratic debate (Harvey 2007; Klein 2008). Pinochet’s regime established free markets, privatization, integration with the global economy, and state withdrawal from the economic and social spheres.

Once Chile returned to democracy in 1990, most of the Pinochet regime’s economic policies continued with minimal changes: an intricate constitutional framework, which is difficult for democratic institutions to change, guarantees the continuity of the economic model (Atria et al. 2013). According to the Chilean Constitution, any constitutional change must obtain
the agreement of 3/5 of the legislative power (60%) in both chambers: Parliament and Senate. In some crucial aspects of the Constitution, this proportion rises to 2/3 of the Parliament (66%). In sum, this implies the existence of a vast parliamentary majority that is very difficult to achieve for any political sector. Currently, after 29 years of democratic governments, almost every aspect of Chile’s economy is working under the neoliberal principles of private profit, privatization, and free markets (Undurraga 2015).

Additionally, neoliberal policies deepened the historical dependence on the extraction of natural resources (Atria 2013; Vidal-Suñé and Pezoa-Fuentes 2012). Today, the Chilean economy depends on the intensive exploitation of a few natural resources with a conspicuously low level of industrialization that is consistent with the model of extractivism, a regular feature in most Latin American countries (Bebbington 2015; Svampa 2015).

Due to its particular geographic conditions, extractivism in Chile shows a regional differentiation, with copper being produced in the north, fruits and wine in the center, forestry in the south-center, and salmon in the south (Vidal-Suñé and Pezoa-Fuentes 2012). Many Chilean areas fit the concept of resource-dependent regions, in accordance with Tonts (2010), or commodity-producing regions, as defined by Neumann (2010). These kinds of spaces lead to restricted social development because they depend on a small number of economic activities and also imply the presence of nonspecialized labor, volatile unemployment, and low wages that are contingent on the fluctuating commodity prices (Stedman, Parkins, and Beckley 2004).

Regional dependence on a few natural resources engages with the idea of the resource curse coined by Richard Auty (1993), which explains how a high degree of dependence on the exploitation of natural resources (e.g., mining and plantations) may compromise long-term development. In 2011, the Chief of the World Bank for Latin America and the Caribbean,
explained the main processes of the resource curse: first, volatile prices of commodities in global markets and the consequent unpredictable economic development of the dependent economies; second, low growth in productivity, since activities tend to use less skilled labor; and finally, the institutional weakness that creates difficulties in the distribution of wealth (De la Torre 2011).

The negative consequences of more than 30 years of neoliberal practices in the regions of Chile help explain the specific demands of citizens’ assemblies (Salinas 2016; E. Valenzuela 2015). Some initial factors promoting such collective actions are the adverse effects of extractive activities on the health of communities and the environment and the lack of public infrastructure and services in these areas. In addition, when locating new productive private investment projects and infrastructure, strongly supported by the national government, the opinion of local communities is not considered, which stimulates the emergence of local resistance.

1.1.3. The organization of citizens’ assemblies throughout Chile

Despite their particularities, Chilean citizens’ assemblies shared many features. People initially organize assemblies to address specific local problems, such as environmental degradation, water scarcity, the need for roads and public infrastructure, perceptions of abandonment by the state, and the implementation of public policies considered harmful for local communities. In response to these triggering issues, communities set up public demonstrations to show up on the Chilean map and conduct open meetings to organize future actions. Later, participants link the original problems with other diverse local or regional issues affecting their lives, producing a more integrated diagnosis of the economic and political dynamics working in their territories. Furthermore, in many cases, participants of citizens’ assemblies have thought about their collective identity—related to their Region, Province, or Commune—and their relationship with the rest of the country (Salinas 2016; E. Valenzuela 2015).
Citizens’ assemblies have expressed a remarkable grassroots character linked to specific subnational territories. Furthermore, people organized these assemblies outside the traditional sociopolitical institutions and have displayed flexible structures. All are socially heterogeneous, comprising students, fisher people, miners, workers, housewives, and other residents living in the same area. Finally, mobilized people have staged diverse public demonstrations, ranging from symbolic acts such as raising black flags (an expression of collective sadness) to more aggressive actions, such as blocking roads and installing barricades. In response, the Chilean police forces have often violently repressed such actions.

Participants identify the assemblies as regionalist or territorial movements since they established their actions in specific areas and places. Other collective aspects such as class, gender, language, nation, ethnicity, or race do not define them. Most assemblies’ participants consider themselves Chileans, they speak Chilean Spanish, and their religion and beliefs do not differ from the rest of the country. In Chile, there are ethnic struggles related to indigenous communities fighting for their land and rights, like the Mapuche, mostly in southern Chile, and the Rapa Nui people on Easter Island (Salinas 2016, 227–38), but these groups are not the focus of this research. The regionalist citizens’ assemblies do not emerge around indigenous culture or identities, but they do build their collective action around specific subnational spaces: They are territorially based social movements.

Finally, it is crucial to point out that, despite police repression, the National Government has acknowledged the citizens’ assemblies as relevant social actors. In fact, under considerable social pressure during social mobilizations, the government had to negotiate with many assemblies (such as the cases of Magallanes, Aysén, Freirina, and Chiloé) and even retracted some policies, yielding to the assemblies’ claims. This idea suggests that the assemblies may be
establishing themselves as a new category of sociopolitical actors in Chile. Simultaneously, for the first time in Chilean history, people from regions are building a coherent discourse to achieve higher levels of autonomy and a deeper decentralization of political power.

1.2. Research questions: social movements and space

Some Chilean social scientists have addressed this type of “new” social movement. One of the most influential Chilean historians, Gabriel Salazar (2012), links citizens’ assemblies to the tradition of the historical “cabildos,” civic organizations originated during the Colonial period to coordinate local resources in response to specific emergencies. He also sees a (possibly inaccurate) connection between assemblies and traditional workers’ unions, especially when considering their mass demonstrations and political occupation of the public space. However, citizens’ assemblies, in general, display an interclass character and do not always resemble working-class organizations. Other authors consider these assemblies both a consequence of and a form of resistance to neoliberal policies and as new social organizations that are fighting for political autonomy (Fauré, Karmy, and Valdivia 2014; Salinas 2016; E. Valenzuela 2015). These approaches help in understanding the roots and general factors affecting contemporary social movements in the country. These scholars have focused on the process, political significance, or internal organization of the assemblies, but they have not directly addressed the inherent spatial aspect of such assemblies as “territorial” movements.

In the analysis I develop in this dissertation, the geographic/spatial realm plays a central role in the organization of the regionalist Chilean citizens’ assemblies. Spatial elements, especially those related to the production of subnational spaces, place-based identity, territorial power, and collective action on different spatial scales, are the key factors that frame the origin, development, and consequences of the assemblies. Therefore, this research postulates that these
territorially based forms of social mobilization have a dialectical relationship with the geographic space around them. Thus, the organization and actions of the citizens’ assemblies shape, and at the same time are shaped by, the regional/local space through a complex process that is geographically situated. Hence, the central goal of this research is to analyze how the mutual interaction between collective action and the geographic space framed the motivations, achievements, and failures of the citizens’ assemblies. To achieve this aim, this dissertation addresses the following interrelated questions:

- What aspects of the current model of organization and production of subnational spaces in Chile did the citizens’ assemblies contest and criticize?
- Which aspects regarding space and place did the citizens’ assemblies use and appropriate to build their regional identity and legitimize their political goals?
- How did citizens’ assemblies use the regional space and its specific places in order to control the territory and public space during their demonstrations?
- Which social networks and scales did citizens’ assemblies produce and use to organize their collective actions?

By addressing these questions, this research offers some insights for social movement studies, Latin American studies, political geography research, and spatial theory in both theoretical and empirical dimensions. For social movement studies, it facilitates a greater understanding of regionalist movements organized around a specific territory that does not respond to a nationalist, ethnic, racial, or class factor. These citizens’ assemblies were socially integrated movements that expressed a strong collective identity linked to a specific space and, in some periods, reached exceptional levels of legitimacy. This research also offers significant insights for Latin American studies, highlighting contemporary social struggles, framed under
neoliberal extractive economies and recently democratized political systems, within the context of a country with a “successful” economic and political model. Contributions to political geography engage with the discussion regarding the concept of territory as a complex realm in which different actions express their power, far beyond the simple idea of sovereign space. Finally, the empirical data of this research can facilitate valuable reflections on geographic theories concerning the production of space, place, territory, and scale, focusing on the dialectical relationships between these concepts and the organization of social movements.

1.3. General theoretical approach

The theoretical backbone of this research involves approaches from critical geography that understand space as socially constructed. Space and the related categories of place, territory, and scale are the result of a set of complex social relationships among different actors (Lefebvre 1991; Santos 2000; Soja 1980; 2011), with different levels of power and territoriality (Raffestin 2012), and operate under the structure–agency framework (Giddens 1986; Werlen 2003). From this perspective, many social movements resist and criticize the current production of social space defined by the hegemonic neoliberal mode of production (Harvey 2014; Jessop 2002; 2007). However, they also produce and transform their own spaces, places, territories, and scales during their collective action (Nicholls 2007; Zibechi 2012). In so doing, the actions conducted by mobilized people express a substantial level of collective agency that has the potential to change spatial structures.

Each chapter of this dissertation presents a theoretical framework addressing each research question. All are consistent with the broader ideas presented above: The organization of territory-based social movements, as well as their collective actions, dialectically engages with the geographic space and its production/transformation. Despite that, in this section, I present a
general summary of the main theoretical concepts used in this research, including social movements, the neoliberal organization of space, the relationship between identity and place, the connections between power and territory, and the production of spatial scales.

Most social movements constitute forms of collective action with specific features: They are groups of people who share some social and political goals, and who are self-organized in flexible and informal structures that participants are free to join or leave at any moment (Della Porta and Diani 2006; Klandermans and Staggenborg 2002; Nicholls 2007; Zirakzadeh 2006). These groups of people are formed outside the institutional framework and use a wide range of political tools: legal actions, public demonstrations, the occupation of public space, and online resources (Davis et al. 2005; Froehling 1997; Meek 2012). Beside these aspects, in this research, I understand social movements as spaces for *cognitive praxis*, which means that they are sites of production of new collective knowledge, in which participants debate ideas, share experiences, and build a set of reframed values and goals (Eyerman and Jamison 1991; Zibechi 2012). Additionally, a social movement is also a relevant expression of a community’s autonomy and has the potential to become an instituting kind of power (Castoriadis 1991).

Social movements also emerge as a response to collective unrest in the contemporary economic and social context defined by neoliberalism and its contradictory dynamics (Harvey 2014). This research considers neoliberalism as a total ideology that imposes its values on every aspect of social life, beyond economic or productive aspects (Castree 2008b; Prechel 2007). Two aspects of neoliberalism are crucial to understanding the emergence of the Chilean citizens’ assemblies. The first is the promotion of a small state that leads to an increasing vulnerability of a significant part of the society (Jessop 2007; Peck 2001; Polanyi 2001). The second is the extractive relationship with nature, which produces polluted spaces and sacrifice zones
Social movements studied in this research have a territorially based character. Communities build their collective identity through a historical process that takes and selects diverse existing elements that are spatially located (Della Porta and Diani 2006; MacKinnon 2011; Snow and McAdam 2006). Place, therefore, has an interesting role in the production of identity, as it links everyday experiences and conflicts to the spatial realm (Cresswell 2004; Hauge 2007; Massey 1994). The idea of place includes specific natural elements and the local history in the community’s identification, affecting collective action (Clayton and Opotow 2003; Halbwachs 2011; Said 2000; Stephenson 2012).

Collective action also implies direct interventions in material space, taking temporary control of places and sites. Thus, the concept of territory is central in this research, being linked to the idea of space appropriated by groups or social actors and not restricted to the jurisdictional space of the state (Aliste 2008; Antonsich 2011; Raffestin 1984; 2012; Soja 2011). For social movements, the ultimate expression of territorial control is the actual occupation of public space by barricades, blockades, and parades, thereby rendering such space a site of civic encounter and democratic, free expression (Jones et al. 2015; Mitchell 2003; Salcedo 2002).

Finally, social movements emerge on a specific spatial scale and usually mobilize their claims through different scales. In this research, scale involves three realms simultaneously: first, the emergent property of socioecological processes (Perreault 2003a; Swyngedouw and Heynen 2003); second, the particular perspective used by scientists to describe and explain a specific phenomenon (Howitt 2003; Sayre 2015); and third, a social practice experienced, built, and used by people in their everyday lives (S. Marston 2000; McCarthy 2005; Swyngedouw 1997). Social
movements have the potential to transform scales and their interactions, reframing the scalar levels or even producing new scales (Brenner 2001; McCarthy 2005).

This theoretical framework is not a set of isolated processes and concepts. On the contrary, all aspects of the spatial and social realms interact intensively in a highly complex dynamic. Therefore, neoliberalism, space, identity, place, appropriation, territory, social actors, and scale engage in a historical process that never ceases.

1.4. Research methods and case studies

This research employs qualitative methods aimed at facilitating an understanding of the origin, evolution, and organization of social movements. The qualitative approach enables the collection of complex information concerning meaningful, everyday experiences, emotions, and the internal dynamics of a social group, which is fundamental in addressing the research questions about social movements (Klandermans and Staggenborg 2002; Klandermans and de Weerd 2000). Qualitative methods also provide support in examining the underlying processes that define place, identity, and collective action that are critical in the organization of citizens’ assemblies (Mendoza and Morén-Alegret 2013).

To address the objectives of this research, I initially incorporated information from newspapers, archival research, and online sources. Later, I collected extensive, rich primary information through semi-structured interviews with participants of citizens’ assemblies in specific case studies, as explained in the following subsection.

1.4.1. Methods and sample selection

To build a general perspective on regionalist citizens’ assemblies, as a first step, I reviewed the news and notes published in the period 2005–2016 regarding citizens’ assemblies in seven Chilean media with a national audience. I included two right-leaning newspapers’ websites (El
Mercurio and La Tercera), one center-left news website (El Mostrador), one left-leaning news website (El Desconcierto), two national radio station websites (Radio Cooperativa and Radio Biobío), and one university news website (Radio Universidad de Chile).² I also identified the presence of assemblies on one of the leading news media websites in every Chilean Region.³ Once I identified all the citizens’ assemblies in the period, I searched for their presence in the leading online social networks used for social movements at the time: Facebook and BlogSpot. Most online sources contained valuable information regarding the assemblies, including meeting reports, interviews with spokespeople, videos of demonstrations, and complementary documents.

I was, then, able to build an initial database of social movements, identifying the place where they emerged, their spatial extension (Commune, Province, and Region), the period of mobilization, the central triggering struggle, the key participants, their principal actions, the general response of the authorities, and their political outcomes. This database provided a broader perspective of social movements and helped illuminate the magnitude and characteristics of the citizens’ assemblies in the period as part of a cycle of protests.

After that, and as a central part of this study, I conducted fieldwork in two different periods to collect primary information from participants and witnesses of the social movements. First, I conducted preliminary fieldwork in May and July 2014, in which I visited Coyhaique, Puerto Aysén, San Antonio, and Calama to contact participants of social movements and carry out initial interviews. Later, I conducted a more extended period of fieldwork in March–August 2016, in which I visited numerous places in the Aysén Region, Chiloé Province, and the city of

² El Mercurio: www.emol.com; La Tercera: www.latercera.com; El Mostrador: www.elmostrador.cl; El Desconcierto: www.eldesconcierto.cl; Radio Cooperativa: www.cooperativa.cl; Radio Biobío: www.biobiochile.cl; Radio Universidad de Chile: www.radio.uchile.cl
San Antonio. In the cases of Aysén and Chiloé, I stayed in the areas for several weeks, which enabled me to understand the material and environmental conditions of these places, such as the relative isolation and lack of specific goods and services, but also the natural landscapes surrounding the communities’ life. In the case of San Antonio, located close to Santiago, I did not reside in the town but commuted from the capital on several days to conduct the interviews.

During fieldworks, I conducted 58 semi-structured interviews, using a series of open and flexible questions. The interviews afforded me various testimonies and narratives, which were useful for understanding collective action from the perspective of the movements’ participants, including their motivations, beliefs, attitudes, hopes, expectations, critiques, projections, perspectives, and justification for their actions (K. Blee and Taylor 2002). I selected interviewees through snowball sampling (Johnson 2014) in every study area. Initially, I considered four case studies: Aysén Region, Chiloé Province, San Antonio city, and Calama city. After the preliminary fieldwork, I discarded Calama as a case study because many of the locals were not willing to be part of this research. Consequently, I later focused my research on Aysén, Chiloé, and San Antonio. Despite this, the few interviews conducted in Calama provided significant insights into the local social movement.

Thus, I conducted six interviews in Calama, 31 interviews in the Region of Aysén, 15 interviews in the Province of Chiloé, and six in the city of San Antonio (Table 1). Twenty-seven women and thirty-one men constituted the group of interviewees, with an age range of 22–98 years. The group included social leaders (a bishop, fishermen’s leaders, and former spokespeople of local organizations) and former and current authorities at the municipal level, although most interviewees were ordinary citizens. I conducted the interviews at the homes of the interviewees or in places where they felt comfortable (their workplace or a local coffee house).
### Table 1: Sample Description

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social Movement</th>
<th>Place/City</th>
<th>Interviewees</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Born in the region</th>
<th>Not born in the region</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aysén</td>
<td>Coyhaique</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Chile Chico</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Puerto Aysén</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lago Atravesado</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chiloé</td>
<td>Ancud</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Castro</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>San Antonio</td>
<td>San Antonio</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calama</td>
<td>Calama</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>58</strong></td>
<td><strong>31</strong></td>
<td><strong>27</strong></td>
<td><strong>43</strong></td>
<td><strong>15</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All interviewees explicitly agreed to be recorded, and I backed up each interview in a stored and protected digital file. I changed all the names of interviewees in this report to protect their personal information. All interviewees were older than 18 and had direct experience with social mobilizations and the citizens’ assembly. Only two interviewees expressed direct criticism of the social movement; however, all understood the causes of the social mobilization and sympathized, at least partially, with mobilized people’s demands.

I designed the interviews to cover four primary topics addressed in a long, free, and flexible conversation (interviews lasted between 45 minutes and three hours). First, we discussed the main aspects of interviewees’ personal history, ancestors, families, and role in the community, to define how long they had resided in the area and their connection to the Region, Province, or Commune. Second, I addressed topics concerning issues of collective identity from the perspective of interviewees and their relationship with the space and place in which they lived. Third, I asked participants about their personal experiences and roles inside the social movement, their memories before, during, and after social mobilization, and their hopes and fears during those times. At this point, we discussed the different social and political networks that they could recognize inside and outside the social movement. Finally, we talked about their
evaluations of the experience, as well as the failures and victories of the social movement, in both personal and community aspects.

I transcribed the interviews in Chilean Spanish and later translated them into English while trying to retain the meaning of the testimonies as far as possible. Later, I worked with both registers—written transcriptions and digital records—and started a discourse analysis of the testimonies, considering the text, context, voice tone, and pace of the conversation and identifying critical moments of the interview as well as noteworthy findings (Lazaranton 2009). Later, I conducted a thematic analysis consisting of “a method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data” (Braun and Clarke 2006, 6). Subsequently, through iterative hearing and reading of the interviews, I identified emerging themes (Fereday and Muir-Cochrane 2006). In general, I followed the stages suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006) to systematize the analysis: first, familiarization with the data through iteratively listening to recorded interviews to identify emphasis and mood changes; second, coding, that is, assigning codes to common topics raised while reading the transcriptions; third, searching for themes by identifying common patterns among the selected codes; and finally, reviewing themes, defining and naming them, and writing up the codes with results. The process was thus inductive (or data-driven), whereby “the researcher carefully reads and rereads the data, looking for keywords, trends, themes, or ideas in the data that will help outline the analysis” (Guest and MacQueen 2008, 138).

I systematically incorporated the results obtained from these processes into the analysis and the present document. Furthermore, I selected specific quotes from the testimonies to provide evidence of the findings and to highlight the local voices in analyzing social mobilization. Additionally, I selected other testimonies in a continual process of data triangulation
that also included information provided by secondary sources (e.g., online news and official documents).

1.4.2. Case studies

This research considers a comparative analysis of case studies. Based on preliminary fieldwork, complementary data, and personal contacts with participants of citizens’ assemblies in different places, I selected three sites that provide interesting and significant examples of citizens’ assemblies in Chile: Aysén, Chiloé, and San Antonio. I selected them to analyze cases that emerged in three different administrative levels: Municipal (San Antonio), Provincial (Chiloé), and Regional (Aysén).

The Aysén Region, in Chilean Patagonia (1,360 km / 845 miles south of Santiago), is the third largest administrative Region of the country, with more than 108,904 km² (41,889.9 sq. mi), but it is also the least populated, with only 103,158 residents (2017) or less than 1% of the Chilean population. The Region is partially isolated from the rest of the country due to its physical and topographic conditions: Fjords, channels, glaciers, and steep mountains render the construction of roads, ports, and airports difficult. During February and March 2012, diverse actors organized in the Mesa regional (“regional board”), which later took the name Tu problema es mi problema (“Your problem is my problem”). The social mobilization of the regional community is rooted in Aysén’s recent history. In the 1990s, local communities rejected the establishment of a large aluminum processing plant that could damage the environment (ALUMYSA). Later, by 2000, the national government supported five large hydroelectric projects in the area (Hidroaysén), which most of the regional community also rejected (Núñez et al. 2017). Finally, in 2012, several regional struggles (privatization of regional fishing resources, official approval of hydropower dam projects, and deficiencies in public infrastructure and social
services) led to massive protests (Salinas 2016). For 40 days the Region was on a general strike and cut off from the rest of the country. During meetings, people debated ideas of an autonomous government and new forms of social organization (Fauré, Karmy, and Valdivia 2014). The National Government, under Sebastián Piñera’s right-wing administration, received the demands and actions of the assembly of Aysén poorly. First, the National Government initially denied the importance of the social movement. Later, it repressed the movement violently, and finally it ceded and started tense negotiations. The conflict ended in relative agreement, but as this research demonstrates, its final evaluation has many faces. Among its material successes were the opening of the first public university in the Region (2015) and the cancellation of the hydropower projects (2014).

Chiloé is an archipelago located in northern Chilean Patagonia, 1,000 km (625 mi) south of Santiago. With a surface area of 9,181 km² (3,545 sq. mi) and 164,356 residents (2017), Chiloé is a community with a proud, distinctive identity. Mostly dependent on fishing activities for the majority of its history, in recent decades, Chiloé has become the site of an economic boom produced by salmon farming (Bustos-Gallardo 2013). For many years, environmental groups have denounced the serious effects of such activity. In early 2016, more than 4,600 tons of dead salmon were dumped in the ocean, not far from the coastline (INDH 2016). Local communities perceived a connection between this action and many subsequent environmental problems, especially the deterioration of marine ecosystems. Given the productive issue faced by the salmon industry at the time, as well as the damage to the local ecosystems, a social and environmental conflict emerged in the area. During May and June 2016, communities occupied streets and public squares and organized citizens’ assemblies in every town under the name Chiloé está priva'o (“Chiloé is extremely angry,” a local idiom that is not wholly understandable
for people outside the archipelago). The national government, in this case under the presidency of Michelle Bachelet (supported by a center-left political coalition), did not repress the social movement but instead negotiated with each local community, Commune by Commune, disarticulating the general mobilization.

The citizens’ assembly of San Antonio emerged around the harbor activity of this city located in Valparaíso Region, Central Chile (110 km / 68 miles west of Santiago). San Antonio, with more than 91,350 residents (2017), has one of the principal seaports of the country. Most agricultural production in central Chile uses this harbor to export fruits and food. Currently, the operation of San Antonio port is in the hands of a private company, which has outsourced several services. The local community has criticized the environmental impacts of this private economic actor, especially the total occupation of the coastline by its installations, which is destroying the beach and coastal ecosystems. The community also rejected the installation in the coastline of two large containers for sulfuric acid projected by the largest copper mining company, CODELCO, owned by the Chilean State. People started to organize the local assembly in 2010, following the massive earthquake of February 27th, which destroyed part of the coastline. It mainly consisted of a network of environmental groups, cultural collectives, neighborhood associations, fishing unions, and workers’ associations.

In summary, the case of Aysén is the largest and most significant one because it mobilized an entire Region and its strikes lasted for more than 40 days. It was thus the most important case of regional mobilization in contemporary Chile. The case of Chiloé refers to a medium-sized mobilization since it covered an entire Province and lasted for one month, but its significance lies in the fact that, as of the moment when this dissertation research ended, this was the most recent citizens’ assembly organized in Chile. Finally, the assembly of San Antonio is
small, located on a Commune scale, faces numerous challenges, and enjoyed few political achievements. Thus, the case of San Antonio enables us to contrast the reasons that could explain the success or failure of assemblies’ social mobilization.

1.4.3. Some methodological limitations and notes on the researcher’s positionality

This work provides valuable empirical information regarding the effects of collective mobilization on the lives of participants in the three case studies. One of the decisions I made at the beginning of this research was to let the interviewees talk freely, offering them the space to express their ideas, feelings, and hopes, whenever possible. However, some significant methodological limitations rendered it difficult to fulfill such an objective.

In general, I displayed an open approach to potential interviewees who were welcoming and available to talk about the issues of this research. Furthermore, I was able to generate a relaxed conversation with all of them, many of whom shared a mate, a cup of tea, and even food during interviews. In many cases, the interviewee and I reached some level of rapport, producing a friendly environment in which their ideas and memories could emerge. However, during fieldwork, my positionality tended to bias the sample of interviewees and the kinds of testimonies they provided. It was not a conscious process, but it inevitably affected my research. In particular, my age and professional qualifications made it easier for me to contact people of a similar age and socioeconomic class. I attempted to contact and interview older people, as well as participants of assemblies from the lower social classes, but the process proved challenging; hence, these groups are underrepresented in my sample. Ultimately, following numerous phone calls and emails, I partially achieved my goal by contacting and interviewing some appropriate participants. Nevertheless, in these cases, the conversation was often challenging, as interviewees tended to talk about their current social and economic concerns—the problems that
an educated person like me could help solve—and did not often focus on the memories of the social movement. Of course, I did not force the conversation, allowing them to explain their concerns, but in the end, these exchanges made the narration of experiences of older and more vulnerable people harder to obtain.

A second significant issue emerged after fieldwork in the process of translating from Chilean Spanish to English. I do not want to explain here the extent of the differences between Chilean Spanish and standard Latin American Spanish, but they are remarkable. However, it is essential to note that despite the fact that I fully understood the idioms, or the specific words and the particular grammar used by Chileans in their everyday language, the process of translation took a long time and always ended with some degree of frustration. The pragmatic solution I took was a double-step translation: from Chilean Spanish to standard Spanish and then to standard English. During this process, I could have lost some qualitative aspects of the discourse. However, repeatedly listening to interviewees allowed me to identify emotive moments in their discourse, usually expressed by a Chilean idiom or slang, something I tried to underline in my analysis.

In qualitative studies, being constantly aware of one’s positionality as an individual, and how such a positionality might affect the research process, is crucial for interpretation and analysis. My past and present history, therefore, undoubtedly framed my analysis: Being a male Chilean raised in a lower-middle-class family that self-identifies with the center-left political wing, I know the consequences of neoliberal policies in Chile. Besides, I have personally witnessed and experienced the effects of state withdrawal in crucial social spheres such as education and healthcare. Therefore, I tend to empathize with mobilized people, and I had to be aware of this eventual bias throughout the research process.
On the other hand, I was born and raised in Santiago. I am, then, an urban dweller, a professional from the leading university of the country, and my physical aspect reflects a middle-class Chilean man. I am also relatively “white” in the Chilean context, with all the implicit privileges that such an image involves. In addition, I have not experienced the level of isolation that people from the Chilean regions (outside Santiago) regularly feel. Finally, I am not part of the Chilean lower class and its struggles, a vulnerable situation that, despite my political and personal empathy, I have not directly experienced.

1.5. Dissertation structure

The structure of this dissertation consists of four main chapters that directly relate to the four research questions presented above: (1) What aspects of the current model of organization and production of subnational spaces in Chile did the citizens’ assemblies contest and criticize? (2) Which aspects regarding space and place did the citizens’ assemblies use and appropriate to build their regional identity and legitimize their political goals? (3) How did citizens’ assemblies use the regional space and its specific places to control the territory and public space during their demonstrations? (4) Which social networks and scales did citizens’ assemblies produce and use to organize their collective actions?

As previously stated, I understand the Chilean citizens’ assemblies as territorially based social movements that established a dialectical relationship with the geographic spaces in which they emerged (Figure 1). The term “dialectical relationship” means that the collective action frames, and at the same time is framed by, geographic elements: specifically, the concepts of space, place, territory, and scale. This document’s main chapters articulate these spatial concepts that are crucial for citizens’ assemblies, respectively:
- The production of neoliberal space and resistance from communities.
- The social construction of place-based identity during mobilizations.
- The shifting power relations in the territory during demonstrations.
- The networks of social actors on different spatial scales that support the movement.

Chapter 2, then, analyzes how the economic and administrative structure in Chile organizes its subnational spaces and how the highly centralized national government, located in Santiago, has promoted neoliberal policies that commodify nature and establish an extractive economy. In this process, the national government and private investments shape regional and local spaces, with almost no intervention from communities, producing adverse social and environmental effects. Additionally, neoliberalism promotes a small state, with few provisions of social rights and public services, leading to a generalized sense of abandonment that is present in isolated areas of the country. This combination of extractivism and abandonment is a central feature for understanding the emergence of citizens’ assemblies. I also explain the key features of citizens’ assemblies, focusing on their different goals, levels of significance, and common aspects, such as flexible organization structured beyond regular institutions.

Chapter 3 addresses a second relationship between the spatial realm and assemblies, which works at the ideological level. This chapter explains how participants understood and conceptualized their regions, provinces, and communes, highlighting the significant role played by natural elements. It also addresses how assemblies used such spatial concepts in the construction and reconstruction of their regional collective identity and how this identity legitimizes their actions. The conceptualization of the assemblies as self-organized producers of knowledge and identity is the central idea unfolded in this chapter. The chapter also describes
how, in the case studies, collective action by itself produces significant effects on regional or local identity, increasing participants’ self-esteem and regional pride.

Chapter 4 refers to the relationship between space and citizens’ assemblies concerning material or physical issues (i.e., how citizens’ assemblies, at least temporarily, controlled their territory). First, the analysis explains how locals’ knowledge regarding regional space has permitted some citizens’ assemblies to paralyze vast territories in a very effective collective action, blocking roads and building barricades, as evidence of the use of space as a logistic and strategic tool. Second, it addresses how barricades became an ephemeral integrative place, a contemporary agora for the movement, where the community debated regional struggles and the social movement itself. Finally, this chapter explains how material landscape played a vital role in the response of the Chilean government to retake power in regional territories.
Chapter 5 addresses the ability of citizens’ assemblies to transcend different spatial scales to build social alliances. In the first part, it explains that citizens’ assemblies are indeed a network of heterogeneous social actors, involving mutual relations and internal tensions. They have different scales of action (both local and regional) as well as alliances outside the region. It also explains the primary connections between citizens’ assemblies and other actors across interregional and national levels, highlighting the relevance of scaling-up and scaling-down actions. Here, the chapter explains the significance of the regional level as a crucial scale for political action, as it engages both local and national politics. The final chapter summarizes the main findings of this research and its most significant insights, both empirically and theoretically. It also presents the conclusion, and main contributions that emerged from these findings, as well as ideas for future research on this topic.
Chapter 2. Questioning neoliberalism from the Chilean regions

What common process is happening in our ocean, rivers, and air? Well, they are part of an extractive, exploiting, and polluting model, which considers them as part of sacrifice zones for the enrichment of a few. (Hartmann 2016).

The idea of sacrifice zone, used in the epigraph above by one environmental activist who joined the citizens’ assembly of Aysén in 2012, is the concept that many Chilean citizens use to describe how neoliberalism has produced a large number of polluted and environmentally deteriorated spaces inside the country. For many residents of these spaces, the neoliberal model has negatively affected not only the natural environment, since it is extractive, polluting, and exploitative by nature, but also the entire society, since its economic benefits enrich just a few.

Many other activists would consider such adverse effects to be especially severe in Chile, not only because neoliberalism has ruled the country for more than 40 years, but also because the Chilean state has a centralized political structure that ignores the voice of local communities, especially in areas distant from the capital city, Santiago. Residents of distant areas suffer the negative consequences of neoliberal policies promoted by officials that live and work in Santiago, who do not understand the particular features of the diverse regions of the country. Of course, not all Chileans agree with every aspect of these critiques, but the emergence of many citizens’ assemblies in different regions during the last decade reflects a significant level of social discomfort with the negative outputs produced by the economic and political system.

Several authors highlight the neoliberal character of the Chilean economy since Pinochet’s dictatorship (Collier and Sater 2004; Ffrench-Davis 2010; Harvey 2007; Klein 2008). Neoliberalism oriented the Chilean economy toward the export of raw materials such as copper, wine, fruits, forestry, and salmon, among others, defining regional economic clusters related to a marked regional specialization (Ffrench-Davis 2010; Zahler et al. 2014).
Additionally, the country has been a representative presidential democracy for more than 28 years (conducting competitive, transparent, and regular elections), but the levels of electoral participation have dramatically dropped from 87% in 1989 to 36% in 2015, mainly due to distrust in the way that political parties work (UNDP Chile 2016, 4). Some authors relate this feature to the politically centralized structure of Chile, which has been constant since the early-nineteenth century (Boisier 1992; A. Morris and Lowder 1992; Salazar 2012; E. Valenzuela 2015). Besides, it is notable that such a low level of electoral participation has happened at the same time that social mobilization has risen among student federations, environmental groups, and territorially based social movements (Mayol 2013; Salinas 2016; E. Valenzuela 2015).

Between 2006 and 2016, people organized many citizens’ assemblies in many places throughout of the country. Participants in these assemblies criticized various actions displayed by the national government, mainly the increasing privatization and outsourcing of public services (such as education and healthcare) and the promotion of free markets that do not consider the specific conditions of subnational spaces (e.g., deregulation of fuel prices in cold areas). Communities consider these situations to be an abandonment by the state, especially in remote and isolated areas. Assemblies’ participants also criticized the political centralism, since the administrative regions are not able to decide most aspects of their development, which are determined by the national government in Santiago. Mobilized people also criticized the state’s support for the installation and operation of private initiatives for the production of energy and exploitation of natural resources, wherever natural conditions allow them. Finally, people demanded better policies to deal with the adverse environmental effects of the productive model, especially in the so-called sacrifice zones.
This chapter analyzes the aspects of the current model of organization and production of subnational spaces in Chile that the citizens’ assemblies have contested and criticized. While communities have been fighting against particular social or environmental struggles, they also contest three features of the Chilean political and economic model that have significant spatial implications. First, the neoliberal state withdrawal: Assemblies have criticized the policies that fail to provide social services for citizens, especially in isolated, distant areas. Second, political centralization: Participants have demanded a decentralized, communitarian control of their territories. Finally, the consequences of the neoliberal exploitation of nature: Mobilized people have questioned the neoliberal relationship with the environment, in which local spaces suffer degradation while external private actors extract the economic benefits.

The next section unfolds the main theoretical concepts that structure the analysis. Specifically, after defining neoliberalism, it addresses two aspects of this mode of organization: the specific neoliberal state, which is, at the same time, small, robust, and decentralized; and the neoliberal use and production of nature that involves environmental degradation and the creation of vulnerable spaces.

The second section presents findings that describe the foremost citizens’ assemblies organized in Chile during the last few years, providing a broad picture of their origin and development. The third section analyzes how assemblies questioned the general organization of the Chilean state as a “small government.” Thus, mobilized people demanded a reinvolvement of the state in the provision of services such as education and healthcare. The fourth section addresses the demands of the assemblies for political decentralization. Chile has taken specific actions for a particular neoliberal decentralization (municipalization) that has weakened the state. In contrast, assemblies’ participants demanded an alternative communitarian decentralization.
The fifth section analyzes the neoliberal production of nature in Chile, in which economic actors transform natural elements into commodities without addressing environmental degradation. Many mobilized people, then, have suffered from the negative consequences of productive activities and have been very critical of such an extractive method of production.

The last section concludes that assemblies did not become coherent revolutionary movements, not only because their demands often remained unclear, but also because many were short lived and not able to promote effective actions beyond the initial demonstrations on the streets. Despite this, it is remarkable that a few well-organized assemblies, located in isolated areas far from the capital city, mobilized diverse and massive groups, built integrative arguments, and debated about some alternatives to neoliberalism.

2.1. Theoretical debates about neoliberalism, state, and nature

Since the 1970s, most countries have adopted neoliberal economic policies that include liberalization of international trade, deregulation of the economy, and marketization, among others (Harvey 2007; Klein 2008). Influential international organizations (the World Trade Organization, the World Bank, and the International Monetary Fund) promoted these policies in countries with different cultural, historical, and natural conditions (Harvey 2014). Despite the specific particularities that any country expresses, the central rules of the neoliberal framework have become the hegemonic political and economic praxis almost everywhere (Brenner and Theodore 2003).

The neoliberal economic system replaced the previous Keynesian capitalist models presented in developed countries such as the welfare state in western Europe and the New Deal State in the USA (Wacquant 2010). In addition, neoliberalism replaced the centralized socialist models that ruled eastern Europe, Russia, and China for many decades and the import
substitution industrialization model (Lyne 2015; Perreault and Martin 2005) promoted in Latin America and some African countries during the twentieth century. With some exceptions (e.g., North Korea and Cuba), in the early twenty-first century, neoliberalism rules everywhere, in countries not only with different cultures, but also with diverse political structures (including dictatorships, authoritarian regimes, and multiparty representative democracies). The model is thus remarkably adaptable to different cultural frameworks, historical backgrounds, and political systems (Harvey 2007).

In this global landscape, it is necessary to analyze the main features of this hegemonic model and its spatial implications for understanding the emergence of citizens’ assemblies in Chile. The next section describes the neoliberal model as a radical mode of capitalism and later addresses two specific issues regarding the model that have some spatial implications: the organization of the neoliberal state and the neoliberal production of nature.

2.1.1. Neoliberalism as a radical mode of capitalism

According to Harvey (2007), neoliberalism is a class project that has been promoted and imposed by the wealthiest groups in the world—the owners of capital—to recover their economic, political, and cultural power. This power was at risk after the Second World War, due to the implementation of redistributive policies and political control of markets in most countries (e.g., the welfare state in western Europe). Neoliberalism, then, “is a transnational political project aiming to remake the nexus of the market, state, and citizenship from above,” which is carried out by a global ruling class (Wacquant 2010, 213). The neoliberal model is radical capitalism that brings back the nineteenth-century ideas of economic freedom, reduction of the state’s control on the economy, and free markets. These ideas were modernized and diffused by the University of Chicago’s economists and, since the 1970s, implemented in several countries,
such as Reagan’s administration in the USA, the Thatcher government in the United Kingdom, and Pinochet’s regime in Chile (Grigor Suny 2017, 14; Harvey 2007).

The model naturalizes the supremacy of capital over all other productive factors, including labor and land/nature (Marx 1967). Neoliberalism also follows a group of core ideas that states and elite classes have promoted over extensive periods: individual liberty and contractual agreements between private actors; free markets for commodities, labor, and land; competition among economic actors; and nonintervention of the state in markets (Polanyi 2001).

Williamson (1990) explains that neoliberalism is a group of economic ideas summarized in the so-called “Washington Consensus,” which includes 11 actions: (1) fiscal policy discipline; (2) redirection of public spending to pro-growth initiatives; (3) public services restricted and focused only on the most vulnerable groups and public investment in infrastructure; (4) tax reform adopting moderate marginal tax rates; (5) interest rates determined by markets; (6) competitive exchange rates; (7) trade liberalization; (8) liberalization of inward foreign direct investment; (9) privatization of state enterprises; (10) deregulation of competition; and (11) protection of private property rights. Besides, neoliberalism also involves the articulation of four institutional logics: economic deregulation; welfare state devolution, retraction, and re-composition; an expansive, intrusive, and proactive penal apparatus; and the cultural value of individual responsibility (Wacquant 2010, 213). Thus, neoliberalism is a framework that works beyond the economic realm, since it rebuilds the social and cultural dimensions (Kawai 2009, 17).

In this way, neoliberalism is a global hegemonic ideology that expands its core concepts to every aspect of reality, promoting free-market forces, commercialization, and privatization of both material and immaterial things, such as land, water, carbon, industrial products,
entertainment, culture, health, education, housing, landscapes, communication services, science, and knowledge, among others (Castree 2008a, 164–65). Neoliberalism is, then, a radical form of capitalism that goes beyond classical liberalism by embracing a fundamentalist notion of free markets and private property to regulate every aspect of social life. In a similar perspective, Harland Prechel considers neoliberalism to be a “total ideology,” in which “markets are morally good in themselves, and thus should be applied to all aspects of life” (2007, 6–8).

A second significant feature of neoliberalism is its capacity to adapt and thrive in situations of crisis (Klein 2008). For instance, in 2010, after the subprime crisis in some European countries such as Spain, most neoliberal analysts pointed out that the origin of the crisis was not the excessive freedom in the assignation of loans and credits but an extreme level of public debt (Gentier 2012). Additionally, Castree (2008b) and Mansfield (2007) explain how environmental problems, mostly produced by large capitalist actors, are used as useful tools to extend and intensify the neoliberal model.

A third central aspect of neoliberalism is its paradoxical character. Marx (1967) described the deep and violent struggle that emerged between capital and labor along with the history of capitalism as a central contradiction of the system. This class struggle is present in most capitalist societies and happens inside the production-consumer cycle. O’Connor (1988) considers this capital-labor conflict to be the first contradiction of capitalism, and he unfolds a second one, in which capital faces nature: Capitalism depends on the environmental conditions but simultaneously exploits and worsens these conditions. This second contradiction is conceptually located at the limits of the productive system and has been the basis of many Marxist environmental approaches (e.g., Bellamy Foster 1999; Clark and York 2005).
Harvey (2014) does not directly follow these arguments and focuses his analysis on the
general paradoxical character of the system that expresses 17 contradictions. In his perspective,
seven of these contradictions are *foundational* since reproduction of capital cannot work without
them: (1) use value and exchange value; (2) the social value of labor and its representation by
money; (3) private property and the capitalist state; (4) private appropriation and common
wealth; (5) capital and labor; (6) capital as a process and capital as a thing; and (7) the
contradictory unity of production and realization. He also identifies a second group of *moving*
contradictions, which are inherently unstable and constantly changing: (8) technology, work,
human disposability; (9) division of labor; (10) monopoly/centralization and
competition/decentralization; (11) uneven geographical development and production of space;
(12) disparities of wealth and income; (13) social reproduction; and (14) freedom and
domination. Finally, Harvey describes three *dangerous* contradictions to both capital and
humanity: (15) endless compound growth; (16) capital’s relation to nature; and (17) the revolt of
human nature and universal alienation.

How, then, has such a paradoxical system been able to subsist and expand? Karl Polanyi
(2001) addresses this issue from a different perspective: Capitalist societies are the result of a
“double movement” of policies and actions that have corrected the adverse and contradictory
effects of the model. The *first* movement relates to the promotion of pro-capitalist and pro-
market policies and structures to boost economic growth. However, since markets are not
entirely predictable and crises are always recurrent with significant adverse effects, societies
build a structure of social protection by laws and institutions to avoid such effects; these actions
are the *second* movement. The emergence of social policies related to the welfare state in
western countries during the twentieth century is an example of Polanyi’s second movement.
Therefore, under this perspective, the solutions to the contradictions presented above are not related to the organization of an alternative noncapitalist system but a mixed model that relates to Keynes’s proposal (2009).

In summary, neoliberalism is a radical mode of capitalism that aims for its expansion over every aspect of life: a total ideology. It also thrives in situations of crisis and can integrate the deep contradictions that emerge from its imposition and development. In addition, neoliberalism presents several engagements with the spatial realm, including natural and political spaces as well as their institutions. The next subsection analyzes how neoliberalism produces a specific kind of state, involving a restructuration of its size and roles (in society and the economy), as well as a redistribution of political power.

2.1.2. The neoliberal state: small, strong, and decentralized

Neoliberal ideas regarding the state express an apparent double discourse: On the one hand, the state must have a small structure, distant from the economic and productive realms, and on the other hand, the state must be a strong protector of a pro-market environment and private property. Harvey describes this tension as a fundamental contradiction that emerges between private property and the capitalist state (2014), and as a paradox between neoliberal theory and practices (Harvey 2007). Wacquant (2010) points out that neoliberalism promotes at the same time a “small government” in the economic realm and a “big government” in the areas of warfare and criminal justice since the state must effectively punish any damage to private property. Other scholars have analyzed this paradox in different countries, including in Africa and Asia (Konings 2010; Hilgers 2012).

Neoliberal ideology, in theory, emphasizes the central role of private entrepreneurs in organizing economic activities, since they are assumed to be the most efficient. At the same time,
the state is considered bureaucratic, inefficient, and rigid. Despite these ideas, in practice, markets and private property cannot work without state organization (Polanyi 2001). Hilgers suggests that in many African countries, “neoliberal policies […] clearly reinforced the paradox of a state that is both omnipresent and completely absent” (2012, 85); “we see a state that is expanding and even becoming stronger in some ways. Yet its weakness and porousness are revealed on a daily basis” (2012, 85–86). The neoliberal model, then, reframes the state as both “small” and “strong,” as explained in the next subsections.

a) The small neoliberal state

Two of the main guidelines of the Washington Consensus engaged with the idea of the small state: fiscal policy discipline and privatization of state enterprises. Thus, neoliberal policies push for a reduced or “minimalist” role on the part of the state (Peck 2001; Jessop 2002) or a “small” government (Wacquant 2010) that does not interfere in the provision of services, the production of goods, and the accumulation of capital.

Neoliberal ideas also promote the incorporation of private enterprise logic to design and operate the state, transforming the “bureaucratic mentalities into entrepreneurial identities” (Steger and Roy 2010, 12–13). With the purpose of minimizing the size of the state, governments have used two actions: privatization and outsourcing. Privatization relates to the productive realm (such as mining, energy, and communications), in which the state transfers the ownership of public companies to private actors, while outsourcing is a policy in which the state hires private companies for the provision of public services, such as healthcare and education (Prechel 2007).

The process of shrinking the state follows IMF suggestions for fiscal policy discipline. Such a policy implies cutting budgets for social services (education, healthcare, and housing),
thereby affecting their quality negatively. The state is thus blamed as being inefficient and bureaucratic since it is not able to provide good-quality services. Later, pro-neoliberal actors push for outsourcing social services to private actors (Fanelli 2014; Sakellariou and Rotarou 2017). State withdrawal from the social and economic spheres, considered as neoliberal abandonment, also produces indebtedness in many families and rising levels of socioeconomic inequality (Babidge and Belfrage 2017; Power and Gaete-Reyes 2018). In the case of the US and western European economies, it is notable that the unequal income distribution in the 2000s, under generalized neoliberal policies, is almost the same as that found 100 years before, when the classic liberalism ruled and the welfare state did not exist (Piketty 2014).

In countries like Chile, privatization and outsourcing include most aspects of social life: healthcare, education, housing, infrastructure (highways, harbors, airports, railroads), administration of retirement funds, water supply, energy distribution, national parks, social housing, and the penitentiary system, among many others (Cypher 2005; Davis-Hamel 2012; Sapelli 2000). Not all these services were provided by the state before the neoliberal turn, since a lack of resources and a low level of institutional organization were prevalent during most of the twentieth century (Collier and Sater 2004). Therefore, in Chile, the welfare state was an unfinished project, and the provision of public services was partial or nonexistent (e.g., universal education and healthcare). After Pinochet’s strike in 1973, the imposition of the neoliberal “small” state implied the abandonment of that national welfare project: Polanyi’s second movement was interrupted.

People organized citizens’ assemblies in the Chilean regions as a response to this “small” state, demanding stronger social protection. For residents of regions located far from Santiago, such as the Atacama Desert (northern Chile) and Patagonia (southern Chile), “small state”
implies the neglect of public services by the state. Such neglect is a crucial source of social conflict in Chilean regions, since it generates diverse everyday problems (such as poor public education, a lack of healthcare, and lower quality of life) that relate to social reproduction or “the capacity of a society to reproduce itself and change over time” (Calderón et al. 2011, 33).

b) The strong neoliberal state

Despite the discourse against the state, in practice, neoliberalism needs a political structure to protect private property, the rule of law, the operation of market forces, economic growth, and the reproduction of capital (Harvey 2014). Moreover, the neoliberal state becomes an eventual partner for private initiatives by protecting their investments as a guarantor, securing economic profit (Prechel 2007). This transformation does not necessarily mean a less interventionist state; “rather, it organizes and rationalizes its interventions in different ways” (Peck 2001, 447). There are three significant roles played by the “strong” neoliberal state: (a) protector of private property and liberal social order; (b) promoter of free markets; and (c) partner of private investments to encourage economic growth (Perreault and Martin 2005; Piketty 2014).

Private property, one of the central fundaments of neoliberalism, establishes exclusive and perpetual ownership over things, means of production, and technology, “whether it is being actively used or not” (Harvey 2014, 39). Private property must be recognized and respected by the rest of society and protected by laws and institutions. Thus, property rights depend on the existence of legal systems and the rule of law. Wacquant (2010) has analyzed how, during neoliberal hegemony, the coercive power of the state in western democracies has increased significantly. In his study of prison systems in the US and Europe, he focuses on the enforcement
of laws regarding crimes against property and harsher penalties and concludes that there is an emergence of a stronger “police” state.

In cultural terms, neoliberal societies idealize the penal aspect of the state since it generates a sense of security for private actors (Hilgers 2010; Wimmer 2014). Furthermore, coercive power engages with the reinforcement of authoritarian, nationalist states. Many pro-market policies can be unpopular, and the nationalist discourse supports authoritarian governments that, in the absence of organized political opposition, implement more straightforward neoliberal policies (Crouch 2017; Grigor Suny 2017; Kawai 2009).

Neoliberalism also requires a robust state because it is an essential prerequisite for economic competition and free markets since they are not self-organized or stable. Free markets are not natural, and they do not produce equilibrium on prices without specific conditions; on the contrary, the construction of a good environment for markets is the result of complex historical paths and profound cultural changes in most societies (Polanyi 2001). Furthermore, the centralization process described by Marx (1967), a permanent tendency in markets, concentrates wealth in a few economic actors and generates regular crises. Thomas Piketty (2014) empirically explains the existence of such crises in nonregulated capitalist markets when the state does not monitor private actors. Therefore, a functional free market “requires that the state be properly positioned to correct the natural phenomena that hamper competition [such as] monopolies, or price instability” (Hilgers 2012, 81).

Finally, the neoliberal state works as a partner in private productive projects through diverse cooperation strategies. Many scholars consider the private–public partnership as a specific feature of neoliberalism and show how private investment needs the permanent support of the state, especially in developing countries (Peck 2010; Taylor and Friedel 2011; Xaba 2015).
The liberalization to international capital fluxes increases the economic competition among countries, regions, and cities to attract private investments. One way to be more competitive is to secure some level of economic profit for investors by designing private–public contracts that differ significantly from the classic capitalist model. Taylor and Friedel provide an interesting analysis of the effects of private–public partnership in the oil sands exploitation in Canada, concluding that the idea of partners “connotes equality, cooperation, and consensus,” but a public–private partnership tends to produce the opposite, and its effects “include fragmentation, competition, and a lack of overall accountability” (2011, 815).

In Chile, both aspects of the strong neoliberal state are present. On the one hand, the private–public partnership is a central feature of policies deployed by democratic governments since 1990 (Cypher 2005), and there is a lot of evidence of it in Chilean regions in which the state supports large private projects, especially in mining, energy, and fishing (e.g. the Pascua Lama gold mine in Huasco, large power dams in Patagonia, and the salmon industry in Chiloé, among others). On the other hand, the Chilean state expresses its strength in the generalized use of police forces to keep public space under control, not only by acting against criminal acts but also by repressing political demonstrations, including those organized by citizens’ assemblies. In these cases of state control, police abuse has been a constant dynamic, even during periods of democratic government (Pousadela 2013; Uildriks 2009).

c) Neoliberal decentralization

In theory, the neoliberal state is decentralized and organized into administrative units that are efficient and compete among themselves as private actors (Steger and Roy 2010). In Latin America, neoliberal reforms have promoted decentralization by emphasizing ideas such as good governance, accountability, and responsibility (Perreault and Martin 2005, 197).
Neoliberal decentralization is a multifaceted process involving “complex changes in the relations between different levels/scales and branches/departments of the state apparatus” (Peck 2001, 447), in which power is redistributed to actors located closer to individuals: from the national government to local governments. Nevertheless, it does not entail an absolute weakness of the national government since it controls all the subnational administrations. Decentralization, then, must be seen as “a qualitative process of state restructuring, not as a quantitative process of state erosion or diminution” (Peck 2001, 447).

Since the national government transfers power and responsibilities to smaller units, the logic of competition starts to work (i.e., competition among cities to attract foreign investment). Local governments find their place in the global hierarchy according to their capacity to transform themselves into competitive entities with an entrepreneurial style of governance (Sassen 2011). In the same vein, “newly empowered cities across the world have joined a growing number of entrepreneurial, relatively autonomous local governments concerned to promote and expand economic activities” (Robinson 2005, 761).

Neoliberal decentralization, then, involves not only a mechanical restructuring of the distribution of political power or sets of procedures and controls but also new approaches to governance that are focused on local economic growth and competition against other territories. Notably, decentralization does not necessarily involve more engaged participation of communities since it is a top-down policy in which the national government voluntarily cedes power to other institutions.

In Chile, Pinochet’s dictatorship promoted neoliberal decentralization by transferring public education and primary healthcare from the national government to municipalities (local administrations). Subsequent democratic administrations have maintained this policy until today.
However, most of the political power remained under the control of the national government (Puga 2011). In many regions, especially in those that are geographically isolated and without sufficient budget, decentralized services decayed in terms of quality. Decentralization from national government to municipalities, then, engaged directly with the “small” state, previously analyzed in this chapter, and fostered social mobilization in many regions.

Besides the restructuring of the state explained above, neoliberalism also redraws the relations between society and nature. The next subsection explores this issue: the neoliberal production of nature, which has adverse effects on both the environment and communities.

2.1.3. Neoliberalism and nature

With regard to the issues around the links between nature and neoliberalism, several authors report on avoiding the binary conceptualization of nature as opposed to culture and unfold the idea of neoliberal production of nature (Castree 2003; N. Smith 2010; Watts 2005). Beyond this debate, the presence of serious problems such as the pollution of water, air, and soil, the irreversible alteration of ecosystems, and global climate change produced by capitalism in the last century is an undeniable fact that social scientists must address. Such “environmental” issues are central for understanding the emergence of Chilean citizens’ assemblies.

Many critical geographers have been analyzing for a long time the interactions between capitalism/neoliberalism and nature, taking as its starting point the idea of a “metabolic relationship” between humans and nature (Marx 1967, 290). Marx considers nature the “inorganic body” of humans, in that nature is something separated and different from the human body, but with an enormous influence on it. In his view, humans and nature are interrelated, although while nature “is linked to itself,” humans are “a part of nature” (1967, 76). The metabolic relationship relates to the labor process in which humans transform natural elements
and use natural processes to produce commodities. However, this relationship has been starkly affected, altered, and alienated by the capitalist system of production, generating many contradictions and divergences between humans and nature.

Here, two aspects of the neoliberal use of nature are significant in understanding the Chilean case: the adverse environmental effects generated by the exploitation of nature and the consolidation of extractive spaces that are socially fragile.

a) Environmental deterioration under neoliberalism

Following the idea of disruption of the metabolic relationship between humans and nature originated by capitalism, O’Connor (1988) analyzes the “second contradiction” of capitalism. His analysis highlights that capitalist production has evolved in a growing contradiction with the conditions of production (nature), produced outside capitalist dynamics. The productive capitalist system uses these external conditions as simple commodities and, by doing so, tends to destroy them, leading to periodic crises of underproduction (e.g., exhausted natural resources). A complementary concept for this analysis is the “Metabolic Rift” (Bellamy Foster 1999), that is the increasing divergence between nature and capital under neoliberalism, which leads to at least three main effects: “the disruption or interruption of natural processes and cycles, the accumulation of waste, and environmental degradation” (Clark and York 2005, 391). Moore (2010) shares this general idea, emphasizing that the capitalist production system relies on this rupture with nature. Since natural elements that originated and emerged through natural processes are not actual commodities (Polanyi 2001), the capitalist system does not pay the

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4 O’Connor’s first contradiction works inside the mode of production (capital–labor). The “second contradiction” emerges between capitalism and the natural environment.
actual value of their production, leading to an ecological surplus that is appropriated by private actors and incorporated in the reproduction of capital (Malm 2012; J. Moore 2010).

In Chile, environmental deterioration, linked to the exploitation of nature, fosters many social movements. Mining, forestry, salmon farms, agriculture, and other activities have generated several problems, including air, water, and oil pollution (Delamaza, Maillet, and Neira 2017; Smart 2017). Environmental problems due to extractivism are, then, a central effect of neoliberalism in Chile and crucial factors in the origin of many current social mobilizations.

b) Neoliberal extractive spaces

Under neoliberalism (and capitalism), nature is transformed into commodities by a complex process analyzed by many scholars (Bakker 2007; Castree 2004; 2003; Prudham 2009). For Castree (2003), neoliberal commodification involves complex dynamics of abstraction, privatization, alienability, individuation, valuation, and displacement. Moreover, in places where some specific natural elements or conditions are present, neoliberal commodification produces regional specialization. Thus, private investments arrive in areas containing such elements (i.e. minerals, water, and oil) and start to extract them, generating socioecological effects. In these spaces, Tonts (2010) identifies the existence of resource-dependent regions, which involves firm reliance on a specific industry that drives the local economy. Usually, this dependence produces a high level of economic vulnerability and limits the range of alternative economic opportunities.

From the political ecology approach perspective, Neumann (2010) proposes the concepts of commodity-producing regions and commodity supply zones as spaces where economic activities shape the landscape and local culture, and define the processes of access, appropriation, and extraction of resources.
Some scholars have examined the relationship between local dependence on natural resources and the level of poverty: In some areas of the US and Canada, fishing, forestry, mining, and agriculture define commodity-producing regions that show poor development, unemployment, lower wages, nonspecialized labor, and higher rates of social pathology and crime, among other related phenomena (Stedman, Parkins, and Beckley 2004). In the Global South and especially in Latin America, the high level of economic dependence on a small group of natural resources is a central form of many economies on both national and subnational scales. Some scholars use the terms extractivism and neo-extractivism for this mode of production (Bebbington 2015; A. Marston and Perreault 2017; Perreault 2013; Svampa 2015) that is, the “nonreciprocal, dominance-based relationship with the earth” (Klein 2008, 169). Thus, extractivism is the accumulation pattern based on the overexploitation of natural resources directed by large private projects (primarily, but not exclusively, minerals and fossil fuels), which involves the expansion of the productive frontier toward nonproductive territories (Svampa 2015). Neoliberal extractivism has generated sacrifice zones, where overexploitation of nature and pollution have produced a generalized environmental and social collapse. The concept of a sacrifice zone was proposed by Lerner (2012) for analyzing highly polluted areas in the US, mainly due to chemical components emitted in large industrial districts for an extended period. In Latin America, Di Risio et al. (2012) use the idea of sacrifice zones to analyze the effects of oil extraction in Argentina. Besides, many activists also use the concept to describe places, regions, and cities where it is possible to find two features at the same time: extractivism and pollution (Hartmann 2016; Oceana n.d.).

Extractive activities have been present in Chile throughout most of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (Collier and Sater 2004). However, under neoliberalism, these kinds of
spaces rose in number and intensity (Bustos-Gallardo 2013). In the production of sacrifice zones, mining activity is one of the most important causes, not only in the extraction site, but around the whole mining process, including tailings dams, railroads, ports, and deposit areas (Smart 2017; Swanson 2015; L. Valenzuela 2016). In summary, neoliberalism reshapes state and nature, affecting societies and nature profoundly and these effects has several spatial implications.

The following subchapters present the main findings of this research about how citizens’ assemblies in Chile have directly criticized and resisted the aspects of neoliberalism described above. The first part provides a wide view of the assemblies organized throughout the country, and the following subsections address the critiques of mobilized people to small state, political centralization, and neoliberal extractivism.

2.2. General view of the citizens’ assemblies in Chile

An analysis of Chilean media and complementary sources shows, for the period 2006–2016, the existence of 21 social movements that self-identify as citizens’ assembly, citizens’ movement, citizens’ coordination, regional assembly, socioenvironmental movement (of a specific place), and other similar names. Table 2 presents an overview of the 21 identified assemblies ordered in terms of their location from north to south. As previously mentioned (Chapter 1), this research does not include two Regions of the country: first, the Region of Santiago, where social movements organize around metropolitan issues; and second, the Araucanía Region, where native communities (Mapuche) live, and where collective actions are part of an ethnic struggle, a topic beyond the scope of this research. Thus, this research focuses on nonmetropolitan and nonethnic social movements that some contemporary Chilean analysts have identified as “los indignados”—the outraged people (Salinas 2016, 237–58) or as “territorios rebeldes”—rebel territories (Penaglia and Valenzuela 2014; E. Valenzuela 2015).
Among the 13 Regions that remain in the analysis, people organized assemblies in 12 of them. Most assemblies were restricted to Communes, did not achieve significant control of public space nor produced generalized social mobilization. However, the assemblies organized in the far south of the country (Chiloé, Aysén, and Magallanes), achieved a remarkable significance since they occupied public spaces, controlled vast territories, and exercised self-government for days and weeks. According to collected information, the first citizens’ assembly emerged in the southernmost Region, Magallanes, in October 2010, and the last one developed in Chiloé in June 2016. There was not any movement before 2010, so this kind of collective mobilization emerged during two Chilean administrations: Sebastián Piñera’s right-wing presidency (March 11th, 2010 – March 11th, 2014), with 17 social movements, and Michelle Bachelet’s center-left-wing government (March 11th, 2014 – March 11th, 2018), with four movements.

Significantly, most assemblies and movements emerged in the period when the political right was governing with a clear pro-business agenda, an expression of Polanyi’s first movement (2001). The government plan of Sebastián Piñera stated: “Our macroeconomic program looks for an increase in investment of around 5 points. We will eliminate the bureaucratic obstacles that today make the creation of businesses difficult, and we will promote free competition, pushing innovation, entrepreneurship, creativity, and efficiency” (Piñera 2009, 11). In addition, Piñera’s program wanted to “improve the capital markets, cutting tax distortions that currently reduce their international competitiveness [and also] cut taxes for exportation of financing services” (2009, 24–25). These objectives do not mean that previous center-left governments were against neoliberal policies (in fact, they kept most neoliberal guidelines for 20 years), but Piñera’s administration was the first openly neoliberal government to be in power in Chile after Pinochet’s dictatorship.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Place and Residents (2017)</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Territorial Dimension</th>
<th>Initial Struggle</th>
<th>General Evolution*</th>
<th>Initial Date</th>
<th>Actions in Public Space</th>
<th>Police Repression</th>
<th>Media News</th>
<th>Significance**</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Far North – Norte Grande</td>
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<tr>
<td>Arica 226,068</td>
<td>Asamblea Ciudadana por la Vida y Dignidad de Arica y Parinacota</td>
<td>Region</td>
<td>Environmental (coal power plant)</td>
<td>Integrated D+Ss+Nat</td>
<td>March 2012</td>
<td>Demonstrations, Barricades, Black Flags (as sign of mourning)</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>National</td>
<td>Medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iquique 191,468</td>
<td>Asamblea Ciudadana Iquique</td>
<td>Commune</td>
<td>Environmental (coal power plant)</td>
<td>Not Integrated: Nat</td>
<td>April 2011</td>
<td>Demonstrations</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>Local</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tocopilla 31,643</td>
<td>Asamblea Ciudadana de Tocopilla</td>
<td>Province</td>
<td>Environmental (coal power plant)</td>
<td>Integrated: D+Ss+Nat</td>
<td>July 2013</td>
<td>Demonstrations, Barricades, Black Flags</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>National</td>
<td>Medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mejillones 13,467</td>
<td>Coordinadora Fuerza Mejillones</td>
<td>Commune</td>
<td>Environmental (pollution)</td>
<td>Not Integrated: Nat</td>
<td>August 2013</td>
<td>Not registered</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>National</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calama 165,731</td>
<td>Asamblea y Movimiento Ciudadano de Calama</td>
<td>Commune</td>
<td>Economic (mining resources)</td>
<td>Integrated: D+Ss+Nat</td>
<td>June 2011</td>
<td>Demonstrations, Barricades, Local Strike, Bolivian Flags</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>National</td>
<td>Medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Antofagasta 607,534</td>
<td>Asamblea Ciudadana Regional de Antofagasta</td>
<td>Region</td>
<td>Political Decentralization</td>
<td>Not Integrated: D</td>
<td>March 2013</td>
<td>Not registered</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>Local</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taltal 13,317</td>
<td>Asamblea Ciudadana de Taltal</td>
<td>Commune</td>
<td>Social Public (healthcare)</td>
<td>Not Integrated: Ss</td>
<td>September 2013</td>
<td>Not registered</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>National</td>
<td>Low</td>
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<tr>
<td>Near North – Norte Chico</td>
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<tr>
<td>Freirina-Huasco 74,406</td>
<td>Movimiento Socioambiental de la Provincia del Huasco</td>
<td>Province</td>
<td>Environmental (agroindustry)</td>
<td>Integrated: D+Ss+Nat</td>
<td>May 2012</td>
<td>Demonstrations, Barricades</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>National</td>
<td>Medium</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* General evolution of demands. (D) asking for decentralization; (Ss) asking for more state services; (Nat) asking for protection of nature
** Significance related to the control of space: Low: no actions in the public space or just a single demonstration; Medium: demonstrations, barricades, and other actions in the public space; High: demonstrations, barricades, other actions, and temporary self-government
Table 2: Regional Citizens’ Assemblies in Chile 2006–2016 (cont.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Place and Residents (2017)</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Territorial Dimension</th>
<th>Initial Struggle</th>
<th>General Evolution*</th>
<th>Initial Date</th>
<th>Actions in Public Space</th>
<th>Police Repression</th>
<th>Media News</th>
<th>Significance**</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Central Zone – Zona Central</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>La Ligua 35,390</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Asamblea Ciudadana de La Ligua</td>
<td>Commune</td>
<td>Economic Natural Resources (water)</td>
<td>Not Integrated: Nat</td>
<td>June 2015</td>
<td>Not registered</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>Local</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Los Andes 110,602</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>El cobre para Los Andes</td>
<td>Province</td>
<td>Economic (mining resources)</td>
<td>Not Integrated: D</td>
<td>May 2012</td>
<td>Demonstrations</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>National</td>
<td>Low</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Valparaíso 296,655</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Asamblea Ciudadana Ciudad Puerto Valparaíso</td>
<td>Commune</td>
<td>Economic (port services)</td>
<td>Not Integrated: D</td>
<td>June 2011</td>
<td>Not registered</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>Local</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>San Antonio 91,350</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Asamblea Ciudadana San Antonio</td>
<td>Commune</td>
<td>Economic (port services)</td>
<td>Integrated: D+Ss+Nat</td>
<td>March 2012</td>
<td>Demonstrations, Barricades</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>National</td>
<td>Medium</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Machalí 53,505</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Asamblea Ciudadana Machalí</td>
<td>Commune</td>
<td>Environmental (agroindustry)</td>
<td>Not Integrated: Nat</td>
<td>October 2011</td>
<td>Not registered</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>Local</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pichilemu 16,394</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Asamblea Ciudadana Pichilemu</td>
<td>Commune</td>
<td>Social (public services)</td>
<td>Not Integrated: Ss</td>
<td>June 2009</td>
<td>Not registered</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>Local</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Curicó 149,136</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Asamblea Ciudadana por Curicó</td>
<td>Commune</td>
<td>Social (public healthcare)</td>
<td>Not Integrated: Ss</td>
<td>April 2015</td>
<td>Demonstrations</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>Local</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* General evolution of demands. (D) asking for decentralization; (Ss) asking for more state services; (Nat) asking for protection of nature

** Significance related to the control of space: Low: no actions in the public space or just a single demonstration; Medium: demonstrations, barricades, and other actions in the public space; High: demonstrations, barricades, other actions, and temporary self-government
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Place and Residents (2017)</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Territorial Dimension</th>
<th>Initial Struggle</th>
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<th>Initial Date</th>
<th>Actions in Public Space</th>
<th>Police Repression</th>
<th>Media News</th>
<th>Significance**</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Southern Zone – Zona Sur</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Santa Bárbara 13,733</td>
<td>Asamblea Ciudadana Santa Bárbara</td>
<td>Commune</td>
<td>Environmental (pollution)</td>
<td>Not Integrated: Nat</td>
<td>March 2014</td>
<td>Not registered</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>National</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corral 5,302</td>
<td>Asamblea Ciudadana de Corral</td>
<td>Commune</td>
<td>Social (public infrastructure)</td>
<td>Not Integrated: Ss</td>
<td>July 2013</td>
<td>Demonstrations, Barricades</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>National</td>
<td>Medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Osorno 161,460</td>
<td>Asamblea Ciudadana de Osorno</td>
<td>Commune</td>
<td>Social (public healthcare)</td>
<td>Not Integrated: Ss</td>
<td>July 2012</td>
<td>Not registered</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>National</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patagonia</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Chiloé 168,185</td>
<td>Chiloé Está Privado</td>
<td>Province</td>
<td>Environmental (marine pollution)</td>
<td>Integrated D+Ss+Nat</td>
<td>May 2016</td>
<td>Demonstrations, Barricades, Provincial Strike, Self-Government</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>National</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aysén 103,158</td>
<td>Tu problema es mi problema</td>
<td>Region</td>
<td>Economic (fishing resources)</td>
<td>Integrated D+Ss+Nat</td>
<td>October 2011</td>
<td>Demonstrations, Barricades, Regional Strike, Self-Government</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>National</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Magallanes 166,533</td>
<td>Asamblea Ciudadana de Magallanes</td>
<td>Region</td>
<td>Economic (energy prices)</td>
<td>Integrated D+Ss+Nat</td>
<td>October 2010</td>
<td>Demonstrations, Barricades, Regional Strike, Self-Government</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>National</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* General evolution of demands. (D) asking for decentralization; (Ss) asking for more state services; (Nat) asking for protection of nature

** Significance related to the control of space: Low: no actions in the public space or just a single demonstration; Medium: demonstrations, barricades, and other actions in the public space; High: demonstrations, barricades, other actions, and temporary self-government
Collected evidence shows that most assemblies emerged around a specific environmental struggle (eight) or an economic conflict over the use of natural resources, including mining and energy (seven). Therefore, the effects of neoliberal exploitation of nature and the distribution of economic benefits were part of the social unrest in most cases. The social demands for better public social services, education, and healthcare explain the emergence of five assemblies. Besides, eight assemblies evolved and built more integrated demands, including decentralization (in terms of greater regional autonomy), better public services, changes in the management of natural resources, and environmental protection.

Assemblies achieved different levels of control of public space: Some social movements did not produce any activity in public space, while others were able to control the public space of administrative territories in which they organized (Commune, Province, or Region) for weeks. It is also significant that mobilized communities widely used the ideas of “citizen” and “assembly” to identify themselves, which could mean the production of a more democratic and egalitarian form of political participation.

Every assembly organized at least one open meeting and started collective reflections and debates. These initial meetings were usually conducted in a semi-public local space (a local gymnasium, local school, community centers, or similar facilities) and worked according to a logic of horizontality, in which every citizen had the right to speak, to be heard and to be respected. In these meetings, local leaders and ordinary citizens expressed their opinions about the main struggle as well as other problems, articulating a collective discourse. After one or more meetings, participants usually wrote down a list of requests (*petitorio*) to the Communal, Regional, or National Government, and also made decisions for further collective actions.
In nine social movements (Mejillones, Antofagasta, Taltal, La Ligua, Valparaíso, Machalí, Pichilemu, Santa Bárbara, and Osorno), the citizens’ assembly ended in this initial stage, without any further action due to the solution of the conflict or the assembly’s disarticulation (by government action or due to a lack of legitimacy). In other three cases (Iquique, Los Andes, and Curicó), people demonstrated in collective marches, once or more, on the main street of the respective town or city and attended a final activity on a stage, where local leaders presented a speech. However, in these cases, the movement stopped after the demonstrations. This research considers that these twelve cases achieved a low level of significance in terms of control of space.

Six social movements (Arica, Tocopilla, Calama, Freirina-Huasco, San Antonio, and Corral) developed more complex actions and extended their activity for a longer period. These cases included one or more demonstrations in public space, the organization of local strikes (paros) in which people stopped their regular activities, the installation of barricades, and hoisting of black flags (an expression of collective sadness). In Calama, some people displayed Bolivian flags next to local flags as an expression of discontent against the abandonment of the Chilean state. In this group, citizens’ assemblies reached a medium level of significance since they used and occupied public space for short but significant periods.

Finally, the three movements organized in Patagonia were able not only to use and occupy public spaces, sustaining barricades and general strikes, but also to develop methods of self-government for several weeks while disconnecting their territories from the rest of the country as a form of protest. Communities ruled these vast regions for one week in Magallanes, six weeks in Aysén, and two weeks in Chiloé, showing by far the highest level of collective organization among Chilean citizens’ assemblies. Moreover, the Chilean state was not able to
disperse them quickly, demonstrating a notable weakness in its ability to control such territories. In these cases, the physical isolation of Chiloé (an archipelago), Aysén, and Magallanes (isolated by fjords and channels) and the consequent lack of terrestrial connectivity allowed communities to disconnect themselves from the rest of Chile and reach a higher level of success in their mobilization, a situation not replicable in other regions of the country.

Map 1 displays the general spatial context of the citizens’ assemblies, as well as some features of them. Notably, most assemblies that produced medium and high levels of significance in terms of control of space emerged in the north and far south of the country, a long distance from Santiago (more than 1,000 km, or 620 miles, in both directions).

As part of the reaction by the Chilean state, the national government violently repressed assemblies in six places. All these cases occurred under Sebastián Piñera’s administration, expressing the power of the strong neoliberal state (Hilgers 2012; Wacquant 2010). The national government sent hundreds of police officers, many armored cars, police buses, and water cannon trucks to Calama, Tocopilla, Freirina-Huasco, San Antonio, Aysén, and Magallanes to take back control of public space. Aysén was the most extreme case of repression, resulting in several citizens being seriously injured. Eyewitnesses described these events as the most brutal in the entire regional history, even worse than episodes that occurred under Pinochet’s dictatorship.

It is important to emphasize that most Chilean citizens’ assemblies had a short duration, and many did not necessarily develop a comprehensive critique of Chilean neoliberalism. In many cases, their claims had a short-term perspective and focused on a single social or environmental issue. However, citizens’ assemblies emerged throughout the country, expressing a level of generalized social discomfort.
Map 1: Chilean Citizens’ Assemblies 2006–2016: Location and Main Features

Legend
- Regional boundary
- Barricades and police repression
- Barricades
- Police repression

Spatial significance
- Province-Region
  - High
  - Medium
  - Low
- Commune
  - Medium
  - Low

Source: Prepared by the author
Therefore, it is remarkable that nine citizens’ assemblies produced complex demands, massive public demonstrations, and medium and high level of spatial significance. They all debated critical and central aspects related to the neoliberal model, specifically in terms of the organization of the state and production of nature. Information about these nine social movements brings the most significant insights for the following analysis, while data from the other twelve cases provide complementary information.

2.3. **Assemblies demanding more state**

As stated above, Pinochet’s dictatorship adopted and imposed the main ideas of the Chicago school of economics, introducing partial privatization to education (1979) and healthcare (1981) (Atria et al. 2013). Thus, the regime redesigned and retracted the Chilean state to become smaller and more efficient. Furthermore, the Chilean state eliminated some preexisting subsidies that specific communities had in the realm of energy consumption to build free, nonregulated energy markets, following the neoliberal economic policies explained by Wacquant (2010) and Williamson (1990), in which markets must define prices according to regional demand and supply. These actions produced a sense of vulnerability in communities, which organized assemblies to demand a return of the state, calling for Polanyi’s “second movement” (2001) after decades of open markets and neoliberal policies.

In November 2013, in the city of San Antonio, more than 250 activists and participants of many citizens’ assemblies, regionalist movements, and environmental organizations participated in the Second National Meeting of Social Movements, called “We are all assembly” (*Todos somos asamblea, TSA*). In that meeting, activists shared experiences of social

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5 Harbor city located in central Chile; 91,350 residents in 2017.
mobilization from different territories. In March 2014, they made public a final document that demanded the return of the state, highlighting its significance as a provider of social rights. Among diverse topics, the document focused on the defense of social rights denied by decades of neoliberal policies:

[We fight for] the defense of the inalienable social rights that have been denied and immensely commoditized by the neoliberal model, such as the access to free, secular, and high-quality education, multicultural and qualified healthcare, and decent housing to live as a family. (TSA 2014, 3)

Mobilized people consider the neoliberal small state as an abandonment; and such perception have been registered by some scholars (Babidge and Belfrage 2017, 237; Penaglia and Valenzuela 2014, 167; Power and Gaete-Reyes 2018; Salinas 2016, 246), but not totally highlighted as a crucial consequence of neoliberalism. The following sections address how the Chilean citizens’ assemblies questioned the state’s withdrawal on education, healthcare, and other sensitive services that was perceived as abandonment.

2.3.1. Education

Decentralization and semi-privatization of primary and secondary education in Chile were used to organize a small neoliberal state, a situation theoretically analyzed by many authors (Jessop 2002; Wacquant 2010). Pinochet’s administration dismantled the national-level supervision of the educational system in the early 1980s (Atria et al. 2013). Thus, the government transferred public education to municipalities (municipalización), maintaining free education but lowering its quality and coverage. In addition, the regime fostered private schools, administered by for-profit actors, co-financed by both the state (through subsidies) and families (co-payment), an indication of the private-public neoliberal partnership (Peck 2010; Taylor and Friedel 2011).

In the case of universities, in 1981, Pinochet’s regime abolished free enrollment in state-owned universities, and families started to pay increasing tuition fees. Additionally, the regime
encouraged the creation of new private universities that should function under market logic, but it did not design a robust regulatory framework.

Therefore, the education landscape, according to an OECD report (2014), was as follows: 37% of 15-year-old students attended a free public municipalized schools (against an OECD average of 82%); 48% of students attended “government-dependent private schools,” in which families had to pay partially (the OECD average was 14%); and 14% of students attended “government-independent private paid schools” (the OECD average was 4%). This privatization of the education system led to serious debates about whether education was a social right or a commodity. The municipalization of public education also led to serious social consequences: “[P]eople that studied in the previous state-managed schools systematically got better results than people that studied in the municipalized schools” (Puga 2011, 230).

In general, the fight for free, public education was taken up by student organizations, which conducted massive public demonstrations during 2011 (Bellei, Cabalin, and Orellana 2014). Besides, citizens’ assemblies in most regions agreed on the overall demand for free and public education, and participants included this topic in their petition lists:

We [citizens’ assembly of Arica6] completely support the students’ petitions, and we demand the right for quality public education, secular and nonsexist. (Arica Región 2012)

We [the participants of the citizens’ assembly of Tocopilla7] are demanding quality public education for all young people. (Region2 2013)

Demands for better education were stronger in more isolated areas, such as small towns in Chiloé and Aysén, where private schools could not provide the service since there was not enough demand to pay for education. Additionally, municipalities in these areas did not have

6 The northernmost Region of Chile located on the coast of the Atacama Desert; 226,068 residents in 2017.
7 Mining Province located on the coast of the Atacama Desert, northern Chile; 31,643 residents in 2017.
enough free budget to deliver high-quality education and depended on the restricted funds assigned by the national government. These demands, however, do not concern only primary or secondary schools. Assemblies also called for a stronger commitment from the state in the provision of higher education in regions and the promotion of a robust connection between regional universities and future development of such territories:

We demand a regional public university, high-quality education, and full coverage of the educative system. (Citizens’ Assembly of Aysén 2012)

We support the demands made by students’ organizations; we will emphatically insist on the state’s responsibility on this issue. At the regional level, we demand that the University of Magallanes takes its role in the future regional development, beyond the market’s logic. (Asamblea Ciudadana de Magallanes 2011)

For many communities, public schools and public universities are the only chance to access education and achieve social mobility. Therefore, assemblies demanded the state’s return to provide this social service, which would require a substantial investment in education at all its levels, from preschool to university. As a corollary, one of the achievements of the assembly of Aysén was reached in 2015 when the national government decided to create a new regional university, the University of Aysén, which started its activities in 2017.

2.3.2. Healthcare

There is not complete privatization of healthcare in Chile. Since 1979, there have been two parallel systems: one is public, administered by the Healthcare National Fund (Fondo Nacional de Salud, FONASA), and the other one is private and administered by the Private Healthcare Institutions (Instituciones de Salud Previsional, ISAPRES). Both systems rely on monthly payments discounted from the workers’ salaries and have different levels of copayment when

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8 Aysén Region, located in southern Chile, Patagonia; 103,158 residents in 2017.
9 Magallanes, the southernmost Region of Chile, Patagonia; 166,533 residents in 2017.
accessing the system for any medical service according to income (people at the lowest income levels do not pay anything in the public system). Chilean neoliberalism has not been triumphant in the absolute commodification of healthcare; however, the public system always works under restricted budgets, at the limit of its capacity, making the private system more attractive.

In 2011, almost 80% of Chileans received healthcare from FONASA, the public system (MDS 2012, 96), which means that a significant proportion of the middle class used public hospitals. The Chilean state, then, still plays a crucial role in the provision of this social service, which is usually considered a social right. Nevertheless, there are significant differences in quality between private and public healthcare, and when the government enacts austerity policies, the public budget is usually affected, producing deficits in the attention given to patients, especially those from the lower social classes. Since most Chileans still use the public system, the claim for better healthcare and the state’s responsibility in this issue played a vital role in the origin of citizens’ assemblies. The struggle for better public healthcare was the central and initial struggle in the cases of Taltal, Pichilemu, Curicó, and Osorno, and later it was incorporated into the assemblies of Arica, Tocopilla, Calama, Freirina-Huasco, San Antonio, Chiloé, Aysén, and Magallanes. Assemblies’ participants discussed this claim many times:

We understand healthcare as a human right that must be protected by the Chilean state. Therefore, we [participants of the citizens’ assembly of Tocopilla] demand the public healthcare system be strengthened directly, which means we do not want the outsourcing from the state to private entities. (Region2 2013)


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12 Chiloé: province located in southern Chile, Patagonia; 168,185 residents in 2017.
We demand the state to address the current problems and deficiencies of the public healthcare system. (Asamblea Ciudadana de Magallanes 2011)

The fight for better public health infrastructure in Chiloé is a persistent issue for social mobilizations. The priority for Chiloé’s community is the construction of a new hospital on the [main] island. (Aliro, 30, Ancud, Chiloé)

Healthcare is a sensitive topic for communities, as lives depend directly on an efficient system. In Calama,13 Jacky (46), a participant of the local citizens’ assembly, decided to be involved in the movement after her father’s death: “Dad had a heart attack, and it was impossible to find medical care in the city for him, even in the private medical center.” In her testimony, she mentioned a lack of “medical specialists and suitable infrastructure at the city hospital.” Under these conditions, critical patients must be transported by ambulance to the Capital of the Region, Antofagasta, on a three-and-a-half-hour trip, putting their lives at risk. In a similar perspective, interviewees from Aysén and Chiloé also claimed that the lack of healthcare infrastructure (and physicians) in their territories was a critical, historical problem for the regional communities. Therefore, many assemblies demanded a stronger and more direct investment of the state in the construction of new hospitals, the provision of medical facilities, and the modernization of the existing healthcare infrastructure.

2.3.3. Other sensitive services

A third aspect of the abandonment by the Chilean state refers to its withdrawal from the economic sphere and the promotion of free markets (Harvey 2007; Jessop 2002; Prechel 2007). In specific, the promotion of a free market for energy prices played a significant role in the emergence of the Aysén and Magallanes assemblies.

13 Mining city located in the Atacama Desert; 180,283 residents in 2017.
In the last part of Pinochet’s dictatorship, several companies owned by the state were privatized in a highly questioned non-transparent process (Mönckeberg 2015). Companies that produced and distributed natural gas led the process, and the state began to deregulate the energy prices (Romero 2015). In Magallanes Region, during the democratic governments (1990–2010), the price of natural gas was subsidized by the state because of the cold, sub-Antarctic climate that makes the gas supply a vital element for heating. Furthermore, Magallanes is the only Region of the country with natural gas production; it is located in the Strait of Magellan. For many decades, the people of this Region benefitted from a subsidized gas price, gas produced in the area (Romero 2015).

In 2010, the administration of Sebastián Piñera announced the end of gas subsidies for families in Magallanes and the equalization of gas prices to the international markets. These decisions led to a 19% price rise and were the cause of the initial conflict that started the social movement in this Region, as well as the subsequent massive demonstrations, barricades, a few days of territorial isolation, and partial self-government (Romero 2015). The assembly of Magallanes was acting against “the bill of gas prices presented by the government that keeps and makes deeper the same private, neoliberal ideological framework that has been widely rejected by citizens” (Asamblea Ciudadana de Magallanes 2011). After one week of social conflict, from January 11th to January 18th, 2011, the national government gave up and retained the gas subsidy. Agreement with the regional assembly led to a lower rise in prices (3%), which was gradually implemented during the following ten months.

In the Aysén Region, another Patagonian cold-weather area, the regional assembly urged a “substantial reduction of [the prices of] fuels: firewood, oil, and gas” (Citizens’ Assembly of Aysén 2012), according to the environmental conditions of the Region, where heating is also a
basic need for families. It was part of the regional list of petitions, but the government only partially conceded this point to the regional community.

The projected rise in energy prices in these regions (after the end of the subsidies) would have had a substantial impact on families’ economic position because there was no actual possibility of quickly reducing the consumption of firewood or gas for heating. According to some interviewees, when the Chilean state only applies the market’s rules in these critical resources, under specific environmental conditions (cold and long winters), people “feel the abandonment of Chile that is also historical” (Mariela, 31, Coyhaique, Aysén Region). This feeling of abandonment also feeds the sense of isolation and increases the perception of an absolute ignorance of the specific geographical conditions outside Santiago.

An initial observation about this demand for more state involvement in education, healthcare, and other essential services is the spatial distribution of these claims and its broader implications. In citizens’ assemblies that emerged far away from Santiago, in the Greater North and in Chiloé/Patagonia (as shown on Map 1), it is remarkable that the neoliberal withdrawal by the Chilean state fueled a historical sense of abandonment, a feature not usually remarked on by scholars working on Latin American neoliberalism, with some exceptions (Babidge and Belfrage 2017; Power and Gaete-Reyes 2018). In some way, isolated communities always felt the state as something distant. These days, the state is supposed to be wealthier, and many people would expect better public services, but neoliberal policies offer something different: outsourced, private services that must be partially paid for by families. For isolated regions, neoliberalism also means an absence of the Chilean state and its institutions.
2.4. Decentralization to resist neoliberalism

In the 1980s, the historically centralized structure of political power in Chile started a top-down decentralization process, transferring some responsibilities from the national government to municipalities (the lowest level of government), a process that followed the main guidelines of the neoliberal framework described by many authors (Jessop 2002; Steger and Roy 2010; Williamson 1990). In this process, the national government transferred many responsibilities, such as public education and primary healthcare, to local governments. In contrast, the intermediate level of administration, the Regions, were still directly ruled by the national government, which designated all Regional Authorities and leading officials. Even recently, in 2018, the President of the Republic designated the chief of the Regional Government as well as its Regional Cabinet. In the same year, Chile was the only South American country in which citizens did not elect their subnational authorities through a direct vote.

Therefore, Chile is still politically centralized, and the national government located in Santiago makes most policies and public decisions. Furthermore, since Chile is a Presidential Republic in which the executive power concentrates most governing responsibilities, while legislative has comparatively less power (Collier and Sater 2004; E. Valenzuela 2015), several implications emerge during social conflict. Thus, for many protesters and activists, the Chilean State is reified in the figure of the President of the Republic. Thus, Despite State is a complex structure that overlap political authority with other social realms, such as civil society and private actors (Krohn-Hansen and Nustad 2005; Jessop 2007; Steinmetz 1999), the Chilean structure of the state tends to focus social mobilizations their demands directly to the President.

\[14\] In February 2018, the Chilean National Congress approved the law that implements the direct election of the Regional Authority through open elections. In 2020, for the first time, after 200 years as an independent democracy, citizens will be able to elect their Regional Governments.
Regarding centralization, for most participants of citizens’ assemblies, “municipalization” is not considered an actual decentralization, since most important decisions are still taken by the national government and many municipalities do not have enough free resources to govern their territories and depend on the national budget and its centralized criteria. Accordingly, participants of citizens’ assemblies have criticized the high degree of political centralism, both historical and contemporary:

[We want to] change the current state policy that keeps centralism; we push for a state policy that promotes the [international] integration, development, and peace. (Arica Región 2012)

Tocopilla is tired of centralism. It has seen years of abandonment. Down with centralism! (Region2 2013)

Beyond these general claims, regular citizens explained what centralization meant for the ordinary people who were born and lived in Regions outside Santiago: a sense of a paternalistic centralized state. Rolando (38), an official of the local government in Coyhaique (Aysén), stated: “The central level continues to believe that we are the youngest sibling of a family, and therefore it does not have confidence in our abilities. Like you have a daughter of 10 or 12 years old, and you are afraid to give her much money because you think she will spend everything on candies; then, you buy stuff for her, rather than giving her the money […] . The model is brutally centralized and controlled by the markets. That [situation] has been happening regardless of the political ideology of the national government.”

The link between centralized decisions and market dynamics was brought up by many interviewees during fieldwork: centralization is also an alliance between the national government and large private investors that does not consider the local needs. In regions located far from the national capital, centralization goes beyond the specific act of administering political power: Chilean political centralization is an unequal relationship between two actors (Nation and
Region) that should be more horizontal. Thus, interviewees expressed centralism as a polarized binary (father–son, center–periphery, state/companies-communities), which promoted the sense of abandonment and an obstacle for the regions’ development.

Raúl (45), born and raised in Aysén, explained how this perceived centralism and abandonment were fundamental in the emergence of Aysén’s social movement: “The sense of isolation emerged during the social movement. A feeling of abandonment that has been historically growing inside every person from Aysén. The Chilean state is to blame for the emergence of this feeling of abandonment.” He also reframed his view about isolation and made a distinction between the natural conditions of isolation and the absence of the state as abandonment: “Abandonment does not mean isolation: You could be physically isolated but not abandoned.” During fieldwork, many other witnesses evaluated how the Chilean state had administered its subnational spaces:

I have seen this social discomfort [against the national government] all my life. This Region has been historically left behind, with many broken promises. (Mario, 35, Coyhaique, Aysén)

[Here.] people are exhausted, facing the long-lasting situation of abandonment. (Jimena 52, Coyhaique, Aysén)

In regard to alternatives to the aforementioned highly centralized structure, most regional citizens’ assemblies, at the most basic level, demanded the democratic election of the leading authority in the Region (Intendente), currently designated by the President of the Republic:

We demand the direct election of the Regional Government Chief, through the universal vote of citizens. (Arica Región 2012)

We demand an effective decentralization of resources and attributions, the democratic election of the Regional Officers, and the creation of binding regional plebiscites. (Asamblea Ciudadana de Magallanes 2011)

The current practices of Chilean political centralism are somehow functional and consistent with the neoliberal concept of state withdrawal. Since municipal administrations are
often weak and lack funding and since Regional Governments are embryonic in practice, the national government quickly makes eventually unpopular neoliberal decisions, such as cutting national budgets in education and healthcare and de-regularizing markets. In the specific case of Chile, government centralization engages efficiently with the neoliberal policies, since Regional Governments and Municipalities are not able to directly produce any active resistance.

Communities perceive these actions of the national government and assume that the state is not fulfilling its duties, not providing social rights, and not recognizing their personal and family efforts—crystalizing the idea of the abandonment of the Chilean state. Therefore, many assemblies (e.g. Arica, Freirina-Huasco, Chiloé, Aysén, Magallanes) tried to build a different discourse about decentralization, focusing on the idea of “regionalization,” aiming for distribution of power not just toward Regional Governments but also toward regional communities. These proposals also mean a new balance of power inside the country:

Responsible decentralization and regionalization: We note that the Chilean state lacks sustainable public policies promoting that people living in the territory decide about their own political and social destinies. This lack of policies produces a deep inequality that also results, among other things, in a leakage of the regions’ social capital, and actions against the harmonic regional development. (Asamblea Ciudadana de Magallanes 2011)

[We demand a] binding citizens’ participation for the valuation of large productive projects, including big hydroelectrical dams, protecting people’s lives, and guaranteeing Aysén as a reserve of life. (Citizens’ Assembly of Aysén 2012)

During fieldwork, some interviewees unfolded ideas about a participatory decentralization, in which the power of communities to decide about their future would be more significant. Aparicio (40), a journalist living in the Aysén Region for more than 20 years, pointed out: “Decentralization means more democracy and redistribution of power, especially for the [regional and local] communities. It also relates to social and environmental sustainability.” In the same vein, Mery (52), born and raised in Aysén, explained: “I would like every Chilean region to develop in their specific way, using their particular resources. Chile is losing much
money by not allowing its regions to develop on the base of their territorial vocations. If we, people from the regions, take power, the country will be prosperous, since the intelligence of the regions will not be lost.” Celeste (42), an active participant of an environmental organization in Aysén, took a similar view, commenting: “Chile is an extended, diverse, multi-identity country and centralism plays against that character.”

Therefore, the idea of decentralization, debated by participants of regionalist social movements in Chile, connects at least two main ideas that significantly differ from the neoliberal concept of decentralization. On the one hand, decentralization must recognize the highly heterogeneous nature of the Chilean Regions: The same political framework would not work for every Region, and future development projects, as well as future administrative transformation, should consider this fact. On the other hand, citizens’ assemblies proposed a decentralizing process linked to community governance, not the mere transference from one central authority to the regional one. Mobilized communities urged for more power for themselves and the possibility of producing future regional development collectively. Ideas such as plebiscites and community control over the regional space were present in their claims. They were not thinking about decentralization for economic efficiency, but a stronger, deeper democracy.

Of course, decentralization is an ideal; there is no certainty that communities would not repeat the mistakes of the current national government. Furthermore, communities could be divided, coerced, and even “bought” in the face of crucial development decisions, depending on the collective cost–profit analysis. However, decentralization based on community governance could lead to a higher level of regional autonomy since people who reside in the area would live with the problems and benefits that are the consequence of their own decisions, not of choices made by distant authorities.
2.5. **Resisting and adapting to the neoliberal production/destruction of nature**

Many indicators suggest that the production and export of natural resources, mainly copper (48% of export in US$), are the basis of the Chilean economy (CNC 2018). Natural elements are a central factor conditioning the economic growth and reproduction of capital in the country. Vidal-Suñé and Pezoa-Fuentes (2012) identify the existence of productive regions (clusters) that present a high degree of specialization in the extraction/production of specific natural resources. From north to south, they identify the mining cluster in Antofagasta and Atacama, the oceanic fishing cluster in Coquimbo, the wine cluster in O’Higgins and Maule, and the salmon cluster in Los Lagos and Aysén. These clusters, dominated by international companies, are poorly connected to the rest of the national economy and have demonstrated a low innovation capacity, manifesting the main struggles of the “commodity-producing regions” (Daher 2003; Neumann 2010; Stedman, Parkins, and Beckley 2004).

There are two categories of tensions produced by the neoliberal extractivism that explain social mobilization in Chile. The first relates to conflicts over the administration and property of the resources (in the hands of large public–private companies) and the distribution of economic benefits. The second refers to the existence of polluting activities that have generated sacrifice zones (Lerner 2012; Di Risio et al. 2012).

**2.5.1. Administration of natural resources and distribution of benefits**

The first main issue around the production of nature in the organization of citizens’ assemblies relates to who owns and administers the natural resources and how to distribute the benefits of their exploitation. In Calama and Los Andes, assemblies debated the benefits of copper mining production (Penaglia and Valenzuela 2014; 2014), and in Aysén and Magallanes (Romero 2015; Salinas 2016, 239–47), communities presented alternatives to the use of natural resources.
For many citizens, Chile is a mining country, and the production of copper has always been “the wage of Chile” (El sueldo de Chile). Accordingly, areas abundant in copper are essential sites for the national economy. In two of the leading copper-producing areas, Calama and Los Andes, assemblies emerged as a result of the perceived small benefits that these places have obtained, in contrast to the high level of economic wealth they have historically produced.

In the case of Calama, the slogan, “We produce copper, but we are still poor”, (Producimos cobre, pero seguimos pobres) is still the most prevalent expression of this perception. In 2012, a spokesperson of the Assembly of Calama announced public demonstrations in the face of the “indifference expressed by Sebastián Piñera’s administration to this land, which is the one that contributes most to the country” (El Mercurio 2012b). The case of Calama is an example of how an area full of natural resources can present consistently low levels of social development (Penaglia 2015). The significant amounts of economic surplus extracted from the natural resources of the region contrast with the scarcity of social benefits and reinvestments in the extractive regions. The assembly of Los Andes15 that emerged in a city near a large copper mine in central Chile stated that “It is not possible that a city located in an area full of rich resources can be so lacking in terms of education, healthcare, and the environment” (Aconcagua News 2012).

However, these assemblies did not contend with the neoliberal production of nature itself, nor the commodification of nature’s processes analyzed by many authors (Blaschke 2006; Castree 2008b; Prudham 2009). In the cases of assemblies organized in these mining cities, there was not much criticism of the actual exploitation of the mineral resources; no one called for paralyzing mining activities. The intrinsic character of mineral resources may promote this

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15 Los Andes is a copper mining and agrarian Province located in central Chile; 110,602 residents in 2017.
vision, since geological processes, far from human control, originate them. Paraphrasing Moore’s idea of the ecological surplus (J. Moore 2010), mining activity extracts a **geological** surplus from geophysical processes (owned and managed by no one), working beyond the human historical scope. This temporal and conceptual distance eventually fosters the understanding of minerals as given commodities, and most people do not question such issues.

In these cases, the debates were more about the redistribution of economic benefits and the reinvestment of capital in mining territories and towns. Thus, this struggle directly linked to the first contradiction of capitalism (O’Connor 1988), the traditional struggle around how society distributes the surplus value.

In contrast, Patagonian assemblies (Aysén and Magallanes) organized in areas of higher ecological value (presence of native forests, wildlife, glaciers, and a less polluted environment) addressed the issue from a different perspective. Here, people proposed the regional administration of natural resources, involving community exploitation, and a new deal with the national government:

> Exploitation of our Natural Resources and Land Use Planning: If we wanted to make our Region a hub of human and economic development, built in sustainability and harmony in the use and management of our natural resources, we would require, beyond any doubt, a fair deal with the center of the country. It means […] a new development strategy, in which our community participates actively […]. We believe that regional communities must participate in the decision-making process about natural resources, as well as the use of territory and its protection. (Asamblea Ciudadana de Magallanes 2011)

> [We demand] the regional administration of the natural resources: hydro-biological, water, minerals, soils. (Citizens’ Assembly of Aysén 2012)

In the case of Aysén, the regional assembly of 2012 had many precedents of regional environmental groups (against an aluminum plant during the 1990s, and hydropower dams during the 2000s). A significant actor in all mobilizations was the Catholic bishop of Aysén, Luis Infanti. In 2008, he published a document based on Catholic precepts and scientific arguments,
in which he criticized the Chilean water policy under capitalism and called for a new approach to the use of water. Among the conclusions, this document proposed the return of water property to the state and the use of local and regional plebiscites to decide its future use (Infanti 2008, 79). The letter was firmly supported by mobilized people in 2012, as it set an idea for the future development of the region, Aysén life’s reserve, that was adopted later by regional organizations.

Therefore, critiques around the property and use of natural resources developed by citizens’ assemblies moved through a broad spectrum. Some communities accepted, with no significant discomfort, the use and exploitation of nature (mainly in the case of copper mining cities), as long as the redistribution of benefits improved the quality of life. Other communities built a bolder environmental critique including demands for more cautious interventions on natural elements, more public control, and even the ceasing of the most damaging activities. Citizens’ assemblies in Patagonia (Magallanes and Aysén) developed a more transformative discourse around the production of nature, calling for new ways of administering natural resources under the community’s control.

2.5.2. Polluting activities and environmental deterioration

The location of polluting environmental activities that cause harmful effects to both ecosystems and communities’ lives was the primary source of conflict for the cases of Arica, Iquique, Tocopilla, and Mejillones16 (in northern Chile, coal/fuel power plants); Freirina-Huasco, Machali,17 and Santa Bárbara18 (agricultural business); and Chiloé (in southern Chile, salmon farms). Many of them were consistent with the second contradiction of capitalism that emerges

16 City located on the coast of the Atacama Desert, northern Chile; 13,467 residents in 2017.
17 Agrarian city located in central Chile; 53,505 residents in 2017.
18 Agrarian and forestry city in southern Chile; 13,753 residents in 2017.
between the productive system and its environmental conditions (O’Connor 1988). In the cases of the northern regions, the national government supported the installation of many coal/oil power plants after 2000 to supply the production of mining activities. Many communities started to organize against this problem, especially in light of the atmospheric pollution that directly affected the community’s health:

We want a region free of toxic pollution, and we want to protect the human life, communities, flora, and fauna. (Arica Región 2012)

We [the participants of the assembly of Iquique] want to define our coastline as a protected zone in order to block its tendency [to become] a sacrifice zone […] This should be decided through a communal plebiscite that forces authorities to respect such a decision. (El Boyaldía 2011)

We want an unpolluted environment, with clean beaches for all men and women. Coal power plants in our land have polluted the lives of Tocopilla’s people. The price we pay for them is infinitely higher than their benefits. (Region2 2013)

The case of the citizens’ assembly of Freirina-Huasco was a remarkable example of the community fight against private companies supported by state-capital partnerships, as mentioned by many authors around neoliberal state (Peck 2010; Taylor and Friedel 2011; Xaba 2015). In this Province, a large pork meat processing plant, containing more than 480,000 animals, polluted the air and water and had severe effects on the local community. People organized in the citizens’ assembly started to share experiences, becoming aware of a generalized environmental degradation in the Province because of the existence of other large-scale productive projects: coal power plants on the coast and a massive open-pit mine in the Andes that were affecting sensitive mountain glaciers (Salinas 2016, 251–56).

The community started to understand these struggles as a systemic problem that was producing a sacrifice zone (Di Risio et al. 2012). Later, mobilized people were able to think beyond the specific pollution issue, producing a collective understanding of the systemic character of the hydrological basin, the whole Huasco Valley. At the same time, they criticized
specific neoliberal issues, such as the privatization of water in Chile, as an example of commodification (Prudham 2009; Castree 2003):

We want to nationalize water, the nation must be the owner of water […], and we demand the abolition of the current water law. [We ask for a] Chile without coal/fuel power plants; [and we say] no to large chemical mining, with open pits in the Andes, especially around the water sources of our valleys. We demand a new environmental law. (Citizens’ Assembly of Freirina 2013)

Chilean police violently repressed the Freirina-Huasco movement. At the same time, the citizens’ assembly took legal actions and sued the pork processing plant for environmental damage. Mobilized people continued their public demonstrations and took legal actions against a new coal power plant and the massive mine in the Andes. After several weeks of conflict, the company closed the pork processing plant, and the government suspended the power plant project. In general, the citizens’ assembly of Freirina-Huasco is considered to be a successful case of a territorially based environmental movement (Citizens’ Assembly of Freirina 2013). However, it did not become a robust regionalist movement, since their demands regarding decentralized political power were not clear or explicit enough.

An environmentalist discourse was present in other citizens’ assemblies, but it does not necessarily mean the consolidation of systematic critiques of the neoliberal framework or commodification process. In fact, these critiques against the productive system are often indirect and cannot be considered an alternative coherent “post-neoliberal” discourse.

In May 2016, a social movement called Chiloé está priva’o (in the local slang the word priva’o means “enraged”) organized after several months of algal bloom (red tide) that affected the artisanal fishing and shellfish collection (the livelihood for many local family producers). This bloom also affected the salmon industry, raising the levels of local unemployment (Daughters 2016). According to all interviewees in Chiloé, the crucial action that intensified the environmental crisis was the national government’s permission that allowed salmon companies
to dump a total of 4,600 tons of dead salmon in the Pacific Ocean (INDH 2016). For many Chiloé’s residents, such a massive dump aggravated and extended the algal bloom, affecting the entire marine ecosystem.

This phenomenon produced interconnected social and economic problems since communities could not fish and commercialize marine products (seafood was toxic for human consumption). At the same time, many workers were fired by the salmon farming companies, raising the unemployment rate in Chiloé—a current feature of resource-dependent regions as analyzed by Tonts (2010) and other scholars (Dasher 2003; Jonas and Pincetl 2006; Neumann 2010). The local community fell into a deep economic crisis, and many residents started to criticize the national government because of its slow reaction to the crisis as well as its ultimate responsibility in the salmon dump. People also criticized the salmon factories, their unsustainable practices, and their decision to dump dead salmon in the ocean. Among their many petitions, Chiloé’s social movement demanded a thorough, objective investigation into the origin of the environmental problem:

[The citizens’ assembly of Chiloé demands] transparency on the issue of the salmon waste dumping in the Pacific Ocean carried out by the fish farming companies, and a faster pace in the urgent and necessary studies of environmental impact [of salmon production]. (Radio Universidad de Chile 2016)

The complexity of the social and environmental crisis in Chiloé was well-known by locals and most participants of the social movement. During fieldwork, interviewed divers and fish farming workers talked about the inadequate productive practices developed by salmon companies in Chiloé that profoundly altered the marine ecosystem. Unsustainable productive practices are sensitive issues that are beyond the primary goal of this research, but interviewees highlighted four central problems: first, “overpopulation of salmon in cages” beyond the capacity of the farm in question; second, “excessive use of antibiotics” in salmon far beyond international
standards; third, “an excessive amount of salmon food,” which falls to the sea bottom and produces anaerobic conditions and the death of marine species; and finally, “illegal dumping of dead salmon in the ocean,” without considering natural conditions (all this according to testimonies provided by Miguel, 44, diver, Ancud; Orlando, 55, diver, Ancud; Alonso, 28, fishing farm worker, Ancud). Despite the actual impact of these practices on the whole salmon industry, the community felt that these actions were common and a strong expression of the fish farming extractivism that was reaching an environmental limit. In this regard, Jaime (47, Ancud, Chiloé) expressed: “This is a production system that has this fantasy in which corporations can do whatever they want with the natural resources.”

However, social mobilization emerging from environmental problems does not imply an anti-neoliberal discourse. Many environmental activists have talked about the unsustainable practices of salmon producers for many years, but most of the community did not share their claims until they were affected in their salaries and employment:

Only when salmon companies fired their workers, and when people could not extract any marine resources because of the red tide, people became aware of the problem. Here, people mobilized when their pocket started to hurt. (Aldana, 34, environmental activist, Ancud, Chiloé)

Therefore, many citizens’ assemblies that were related to environmental problems, even those with a high level of political relevance in Chile, still had a reactionary character that only revealed itself in emergencies, usually when companies and authorities lost control of environmental pollution, leading to blatant ecosystem deterioration and economic crisis.

2.6. **Conclusion: Regionalist citizens’ assemblies questioning the neoliberal space**

In a relatively short period, from 2011 to 2016, many Chilean communities started to organize social movements to express a high level of social discomfort concerning diverse political, economic, and environmental issues. Remarkably, communities took back the concepts of
“citizen” and “assembly” to self-identify their collective mobilizations. Through such notions, they called for the promotion of more democratic and egalitarian relationships in which people, with equal rights and duties, debated and decided about their collective future.

People organized regional citizens’ assemblies around different struggles although many did not cause long-lasting effects, did not last for a long time, and were not able to produce a sharp, structured, and coherent discourse. However, citizens’ assemblies at least were able to gather people to debate and express common ideas around diverse issues in a political system that does not promote any citizens’ participation beyond the electoral process and the liberal representative democracy. Therefore, even if most may not seem successful, they expressed a deeper problem with the neoliberal Chilean model, which is not able to channel such social tensions through its traditional mechanisms (political parties, mayors, constitutional authorities). Therefore, educational, healthcare, and environmental problems triggered collective action through flexible, open, and adaptive citizens’ assemblies, which also demanded new methods of decentralized government that must be monitored by the community.

Some communities were able to organize more integrated social movements, and in these cases, greater geographical distance from Santiago tended to imply a higher level of organization. At least three citizens’ assemblies (Chiloé, Aysén, and Magallanes) stand out, not only in terms of the complexity of their demands and actions, which implied that national government had to negotiate with assemblies’ spokespeople directly, but in their spatial capability since they were able to partially or entirely control their territories.

Many regional citizens’ assemblies did not directly question the Chilean neoliberal system as a whole, but after analyzing their claims, it became evident that all made partial or specific critiques of it. Three topics were central in assemblies’ demands: a call for the state’s
return to some social spheres, mainly education, healthcare, and the provision of crucial services such as energy, criticizing the small neoliberal state; a democratization of the decision-making process by involving directly local and regional communities; and different levels of critique of the use of nature by the productive system.

Thus, most citizens’ assemblies demanded the return of the state in the provision of education and healthcare, which were increasingly considered social rights and not mere commodities in Prudham’s terms (2009). In these topics, assemblies reached a higher level of agreement, since they all felt that the Chilean state has abandoned their regions, especially those that were more distant and isolated. State abandonment, a consequence of the neoliberal idea of the small state, is not usually remarked on by literature as a significant feature of neoliberalism. A significant finding of this work is that, especially in the most distant Chilean regions, the neoliberal state’s abandonment fueled social mobilization since the state did not secure the basic needs of society. Besides, mobilized groups strongly criticized the partial or total privatization of social rights.

Despite a very influential national political and economic elite that mostly commits itself to a neoliberal model, many mobilized Chileans think that the state must provide free education and public healthcare and protect people from the market dynamics in some sensitive services. Thus, citizens’ assemblies are expressions of the necessity of the “second movement” of Polanyi, which means the protection of society beyond the realm of the capitalist processes.

The issue of decentralization exhibits a significant contrast between the meaning given by the neoliberal framework (Williamson 1990) and the ideas expressed by mobilized communities. In general, participants of regional citizens’ assemblies did not demand a top-down neoliberal decentralization; they called for a decentralization that must empower the regional communities.
In the view of the citizens’ assemblies, decentralization meant more control of local communities over local resources and more power to decide about the production of their territories.

The struggles around environmental deterioration and the use of natural resources look heterogeneous. Most assemblies agreed on stronger protection of the environment, although they did not question the use of nature and its permanent transformation and production under neoliberal rules as many authors describe (Castree 2008b; 2008a; 2003; McCarthy and Prudham 2004; Prudham 2009). However, some assemblies elaborated more in-depth and articulated critiques, urging a more democratic and communitarian control over natural resources, and, by doing so, seeded new ideas that could lead to alternative discourses on the production, protection, and administration of nature beyond neoliberalism.

Finally, even though it is not possible to describe all citizens’ assemblies as anti-neoliberal movements, many sharply criticized specific neoliberal dynamics and showed significant transformative potential. Thus, a number of them framed temporary spaces of hope for citizens that allowed regional communities to think and debate around future alternatives.

Besides the elements addressed in this chapter, citizens’ assemblies organized their actions by building other interrelations with the spatial realm. Since they appealed to place to frame and reframe a sense of community, they were able to occupy public space and control vast territories for significant periods, but they needed to articulate their actions and claims through different spatial scales. Therefore, the next chapter presents evidence regarding the relationship between the collective identity of citizens’ assemblies and the ideas regarding place, addressing the ideological issues that relate social mobilization, collective identity and the spatial realm.
Chapter 3: Transforming place-based identity through collective action

Most of the identity of Chiloé’s people relates to the ideas of the cold weather and the sea.

Cristian, a participant of Chiloé’s social movement, 2016.

Issues regarding identity are central to the study of social movements (Snow and McAdam 2006). A robust collective identity fosters more coordinated actions and legitimizes the political demands of the movement (Stryker 2006). Moreover, identity has multiple engagements with several aspects of the spatial realm, and such engagements are crucial for place-based social movements (Nicholls 2007). In the epigraph above, Cristian (23 years old), a resident of Chiloé, expressed that the sea and cold weather have been essential elements of Chiloé’s people identity. When salmon companies polluted the ocean, communities organized social movements to express their social unrest: Their collective identity and themselves were in danger.

This chapter addresses the aspects regarding space and place the citizens’ assemblies used and appropriated to build their regional identity and legitimize their political goals. Therefore, it analyzes the ideological relationships among citizens’ assemblies, collective identity, and place (including its natural, historical, and cultural components). In the case studies, place-based features reinforce collective identity during mobilizations, and such place-based identity is used to legitimize the actions and political goals of the movement. Simultaneously, assemblies reconfigure the ideas about their place during their meetings, debates, and actions.

The first section of this chapter presents the theoretical framework for this analysis, outlining three topics: (1) identity as a discourse that affects individuals and groups; (2) the structural influences of place in the production of identity, including natural, cultural, and historical features; and (3) the significance of social movements as producers of identity. The second section unfolds the first group of findings from the case studies, which relates to the idea of nature and physical space as significant sources of the identities that gathered people and
fostered their participation in the Chilean citizens’ assemblies. The third section presents arguments regarding other sources of collective identity that also have place-based conditions: historical processes, particular cultures, and contrast to “others” (mainly people from Santiago, the nation’s capital). The fourth section discusses how citizens’ assemblies themselves transformed and reshaped collective identity: Through collective action and debates, mobilized communities produced new definitions of the regional/local identity. The last section presents the main conclusions of the relationships between identity, place, and the citizens’ assemblies.

3.1. Theorizing identity and social movements

This section addresses the conceptual aspects of collective identity, place, and social movements that this research has used for the analysis of the case studies. The first part presents the main theoretical concepts around the process of identity construction. The second part analyzes the identity sources that are significant for territorially based social movements: nature, history, and culture. The last part addresses the role of social movements as producers of collective identities.

3.1.1. Construction of identity

When we ask someone about her/his identity, the most common questions we use are “who are you?” and “what are you really?” As a response, most of us initially identify ourselves with our name, using the deictic function of identity as described by Joseph (2004). However, identity is also associated with a deeper meaning, the semantic aspect of identity, that tells us “who that person really is” (Joseph 2004, 2). Social structures have many labels that cover different aspects of individuals to describe their identity: nationality, age, gender, ethnicity, social class, profession, and role in the society, among other features. Therefore, defining personal identity involves a process of classification into categories, a process also known as “identification” (Stryker 2006). In this identification process, individuals have “the idea, sense, and perception of
self or self-concept” (Evans 2014, 15), and from such a self-concept, people interact with others. Therefore, identity, and especially its semantic aspect, always emerges from a relational dynamic.

Individuals and communities can accept or reject the socially assigned identity. Here, two relevant aspects permanently work in the process of identity construction: First, the links between individual and collective identity affected by the dynamics between agency and structure (Giddens 1986; Palm 1986; Werlen 2003), and second, the understanding that identity changes over time. The following subsections present ideas around these issues.

a) Individual and collective identities:

As previously said, in every society, people receive several labels through cultural practices, institutions, and families. According to Giddens (1986), the social structure imposes these labels, which have specific social meanings and produce personal consequences. For instance, in many cultures, biological sex usually trend to define the social gender, which relates to cultural expectations, in the same way the color of the skin defines race, which affects social status. According to McKinnon (2011), many Marxist scholars assume that social and economic structure is central in the assignation of identity since it shapes the social system as well as the specific social class in which people are born. However, during their lives, individuals understand the personal implications of such assigned identities, producing situations of acceptance, resistance, and rejection.

In many contemporary societies, individuals have an increasingly strong capacity to define their identity—a remarkable level of agency (Giddens 1986), especially in western countries. Even children are becoming subjects with levels of agency never found before, as they are allowed, for example, to contest and define their own gender identity, even in countries
considered relatively conservative, like Chile. It is significant that these days, gender identity is often far more flexible than race or cultural identity, in which social constructions seem more difficult to challenge. In this context, the case of Rachel Dolezal is interesting: she was born as a white American and, in 2015, she controversially defined herself as black. Her self-identification was widely criticized and even ridiculed, despite living, socially and politically, the identity of an African American for decades. This example shows that there are still fairly sharp limits to the social acceptance of race identity construction, at least in the US.

Despite the role that individual agency has today in the construction of identities, the influence of structural aspects cannot be dismissed. As the theory of structuration (Giddens 1986) proposes, contemporary identity emerges somewhere between what is imposed by society (structure) and the self-definitions made by individuals and groups (agency). Often dominant institutions define labels for groups, but “they become identities only when and if social actors internalize them and construct their meaning around this internalization” (Castells 2010, 7). Most of the contemporary approaches highlight the process of negotiation that individuals undertake concerning assigned collective identities (Evans 2014).

Most people, then, establish their identity based on a “group identification” that emerges from preexistent categories (Klandermans and de Weerd 2000). In this realm, individual identity is not defined in isolation since it resides “in a shared sense of ‘one-ness’ or ‘we-ness’ among those individuals who compose the collectivity” (Snow and McAdam 2006, 42) and “operates as an organizing principle in relation to individual and collective experience” (Della Porta and Diani 2006, 93). Besides, “identification is a way of thinking about how we make ourselves, how

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19 Between 2017 and 2018 the Chilean Congress debated the bill that would include transgender children’s right to decide about their own gender identity.
we name ourselves, how we place ourselves, how we become the labels by which we explain ourselves to others” (McKinnon 2011, 38).

Therefore, “the distinction between individual and group identity is not so clear as it first appears,” and the “reciprocal tension between individual and group identities gives [to the] overall concept of identity much of its power” (Joseph 2004, 5–6). Individual and collective identities interact, having different levels of tension and complementation. Halbwachs (2011) identifies a similar connection between individual and collective memory: They construct each other in a dialectic relationship.

Identity production, according to Joseph (2004), is also affected by material elements that societies consider relevant: the color of the skin, educational level, biological sex, personal income, and birthplace, among others. Thus, identity emerges from a process of negotiation between structure, agency, and materiality in a continuous and historically rooted dynamic.

b) Identity as a historical process

Individual and collective identities are not fixed concepts or essential facts since they emerge through a continuous sociohistorical process, which mixes preexistent conditions with emerging ideas. As McKinnon (2011) points out, the inner truth that defines identity is not permanent but transitory; identity is, then, continuously remade through social practices, especially through discourse and language (Joseph 2004; Evans 2014).

In the words of Della Porta and Diani, identity is at the same time static and dynamic: “[I]dentity evokes the continuity [and] is also open to constant redefinitions” (2006, 92). Under this perspective, identity involves a mix of preexisting historical conditions and imagined futures (Polletta and Jasper 2001). Snow and McAdam (2006) believe that the production of collective identity has at least four stages: amplification, when many individuals start to share one layer of
identity; consolidation, when most of the core group adopts such an identity; extension, when the specific identity spreads to other groups; and transformation, when diverse groups adopt such an identity and reframe its meaning.

When a social group is defining a specific identity, it tends to homogenize a specific feature or group of ideas among the individuals involved; similar features associate all people as a way to build solidarity and cohesion. In a historically situated process, groups of people select specific features as central elements of a collective identity (birth place, cultural patterns, or language), and these core concepts become the identity salience of the group (Stryker 2006).

Simultaneously, group homogeneity is differentiated and contrasted with other groups to “help actors to identify their allies and their adversaries” (Della Porta and Diani 2006, 92), as well as reinforce group cohesion. However, it is notable that “the definition of lines of solidarity and opposition is often anything but clear” in the production of collective identity (Della Porta and Diani 2006, 93). Thus, there is always a process of selection in the construction of collective identity, defined for internal or external forces of the group. This process of selection is always negotiated among individuals and groups and does not always define strict boundaries between them and us.

Bearing in mind the general idea that identity is the result of a continuous interlinked social dynamic that defines and differentiates groups and communities, it is necessary to point out the primary sources of the identity that would have effects on spatial-based communities—Regions, Provinces, and Communes in the Chilean case. Here, geography, history, and culture are crucial elements from which collective identity emerges. The next section presents these features.
3.1.2. Place as a source of collective identity

Among the different structural aspects that play a role in the formation of identity, the geographic concept of *place* emerges as a crucial one because it embodies the natural, cultural, and historical aspects on which individuals and communities develop their lives. Like most central concepts of geography, *place* has been deeply theorized, debated, deconstructed, and reconstructed. However, some central ideas linked to place remain: Place is the psychologically meaningful material space in which human life is rooted (Buttimer and Seamon 1980; Tuan 1979). Place is a central part of the structural conditions in which human life operates and is subject to these conditions’ particularities (Agnew 2014). Place is also a specific location that produces spatial imaginaries with some levels of permanence (Harvey 1996) and an inevitable part of being in the world (Cresswell 2004). Finally, place is lived every day, is a common space for communities, the local, which is also considered a form of collective home (McDowell 1999; 1997; Massey 1994). This specific relationship between everyday space and personal experience connects to the emotional realm, attaching people to places, which is the idea of topophilia (Tuan 1979).

Natural, historical, and cultural conditions of place, then, affect identity, and the production of collective memory plays a central role in this process (Agnew 2005a; Halbwachs 2011; Staeheli 2003; Said 2000). Thus, the “subjective human experience” of place is central to the production of individual and collective identity (McKinnon 2011, 39). According to Hauge, the influence that place has on identity is a “result of a holistic and reciprocal interaction between people and their physical environment; people affect places, and places […] influence how people see themselves” (2007, 45). In his view, there is an interesting process of inclusion of
place in the individual and collective identity, as part of the broader concept of self: the theory of *place identity* (Hauge 2007).

Different aspects of place can be part of the specific identity of a community (McDowell 1999). Among them, the presence of natural elements as part of collective identity does not imply any degree of geographical determinism since in the construction of identity, individuals and communities selectively incorporate some natural or environmental aspects while discarding others. Some authors have analyzed cases of the construction of identity discourses rooted in natural elements (Clayton and Opotow 2003), including cases in the US (Stephenson 2012) and Europe (Nicolescu 2014; Schwartz 2007).

The relationship between collective identity and nature not only emerges around the idea of nature as a pristine landscape but also through the relation of labor between nature and humans. Many collective identities emerge from the livelihoods practices by agrarian communities and agro-ecological groups (Perreault 2003b; 2008; Perreault and Martin 2005; Wolford 2004). Collective identities can also evolve around extractive and even predatory practices concerning nature like the collective identity of miners in Latin America (Penaglia and Valenzuela 2014; Perreault and Valdivia 2010). Scholars also emphasize the indigenous identities that emerge in contrast to neoliberal societies, which build a different relationship with nature, as in the case of the Zapatista movement in Mexico (Stahler-Sholk 2010; Vargas and Reza 2010; Zibechi 2004) and the Australian native communities analyzed by Merlan (2005). In all of them, communities produce a specific understanding of nature not only as a source of raw materials but as a collective provider of livelihoods.

Other scholars have analyzed collective identities linked to place and specific territories that do not entirely lie in the natural aspects, but on territorial aspects. These identities link the
ideas of nationalism and regionalism. In the first group, Anderson (1983) brings a foundational perspective to the understanding of national identity by introducing the idea of “imagined communities,” which are rooted in culture, language, religion, and territory. Building on these ideas, as well as the remarkable insights provided by Hobsbawm (2012), other scholars have studied the empirical emergence of contemporary national identities in Europe (Siroky and Cuffe 2015; Greer 2008) and Latin America (Eaton 2007; Peña 2010) as the basis of the nation-states.

Identities organized around subnational spaces, or regional identities, relate to spatial economic specialization as well as to responses to economic inequalities between regions (Deas and Ward 2000; Jonas and Pincetl 2006; Painter and Jeffrey 2009). John Agnew (2001, 2015) suggests that regional identity in the last few decades have emerged as a reaction to globalization, its spatial inequalities, and its negative consequences for local communities. Nicholls (2007) explains the general link between subnational collective identity and place through the notion of imaginaries that considers landscape, nature, and built space as essential elements in the production of regional identity. Tomaney (2007) analyzes the formation of place/regional identities shaped by specific environmental conditions and highlights their political implications. Similarly, Diprose and McGregor (2009) use the term environmental imaginaries to understand how communities value their landscapes and environmental qualities. All these approaches link to the broader concept of collective imaginaries developed by Castoriadis (1991) that refers to how communities conceive and organize themselves as well as the space around them.

Place-based identities have roots in the past (ancient and recent), and they are the result of a shared history among the people involved. Several scholars have described the significance of collective memory and nostalgia as active emotional sources of collective identity and social
cohesion in specific places (Bennett 2016; Wildschut et al. 2014). Thus, “people are more likely to derive a sense of collective self-continuity from groups that are seen as relatively stable and immutable over time” (Smeekes and Verkuyten 2015, 162). According to Castells (2010), history is also significant for the resistance identities that emerge in groups that have suffered historical marginalization, segregation, or persecution.

In the Chilean case, some scholars have analyzed the production of place-based identities in the different regions and provinces as a contrast to Santiago and through the presence of specific natural elements and raw materials (Amtmann 2017; Asún and Zúñiga 2013; Lacoste 2005; Zapata 2002). Many analysts agree that place-based conditions (including nature, culture, and history) have played an essential role in the production of specific regional identities. Examples of these place-based conditions are historic sheep production and cold sub-Antarctic climate in Magallanes, agrarian and winery activities in Maule, geographic isolation in Aysén, marine livelihoods in Chiloé, mining activity in Tarapacá, and cattle raising in Los Lagos, among others (Letelier and Concha 2016; Mansilla 2007; Molina 2011; Núñez et al. 2017; Vergara and Gundermann 2012). In addition to the structural factors (e.g. geography, history, and culture), the agencies of individuals and groups reframe collective identities. Here, social movements by themselves are important actors that produce and transform identities, as the following section explains.

### 3.1.3. Social movements as producers of identity

Social movements are self-organized groups of people that want to achieve social and political goals by conducting and developing different strategies of collective action. Thus, for Greg Martin, social movements are “collective forms of protest and activism that aim to affect some kind of transformation in existing structures of power that have created inequality, injustice,
disadvantage, and so on” (2015, 1). This definition seems problematic from the moment it assumes an inherently progressive character to all movements and denies the existence of conservative groups that can be considered social movements that also produce collective identity, such as religious groups in the US (K. M. Blee and Creasap 2010). Also, other groups of organized people, not considered social movements, could fit Martin’s definition, such as NGOs, some political parties, religions, and others.

For this research, a crucial element of social movements is that they emerge and self-organize outside the preexisting institutional structures of society and self-define their actions, goals, and strategies collectively (Della Porta and Diani 2006; Eyerman and Jamison 1991; Jasper 2007; Nicholls 2007). Thus, institutionalization and legal recognition define the limits between social movements and other forms of collective organization (e.g., political parties, NGOs). However, often these limits seem blurred: Some social movements operate within and in conjunction with institutions and the state (e.g., some labor movements in Europe in the twentieth century and campesinos movements in Bolivia under the Evo Morales administration). Plus, some social movements can move toward institutionalization over time, becoming a political party, an NGO, or something similar. However, in such a process, many social movements’ features change profoundly, generating a less flexible organization.

Collective identity of social movements begins around a sense of dissatisfaction among a group of people regarding certain aspects of the current social or economic situation (Blummer 2006). A sense of discomfort, social unrest, and exclusion is the first brick in building a social movement and its identity (Zirakzadeh 2006). Thus, in many cases, identification with a self-perceived exclusion—a marginalized identity (Castells 2010)—tends to erase other layers of participants’ identities. In so doing, social movements utilize collective identity as a political tool
by selecting and homogenizing a few key aspects to define the group. In a process of strategic essentialism, a concept that emerges from Spivak’s ideas (1987), members of a group “engage in an essentializing and to some extent a standardizing of their public image, thus advancing their group identity in a simplified, collectivized way to achieve certain objectives” (Eide 2010, 76). This strategy allows social movements to achieve external visibility and internal legitimacy (Veronis 2007).

There are three main theoretical approaches to analyzing social movements: collective behavior, resource mobilization, and the political opportunity perspectives (Bert Klandermans and Staggenborg 2002; Della Porta and Diani 2006; Zirakzadeh 2006; Nicholls 2007; Martin 2015). Despite the theoretical value of these approaches, they do not directly address the engagements between social movements and collective identities. In these perspectives, identity is something given, produced before the organization of the movement. There is a different, complementary perspective provided by Eyerman and Jamison (1991), which is helpful for analyzing the issues around collective identity construction: the cognitive praxis approach.

This approach conceives social movements as producers of new ways of gathering collective knowledge, generated by the shared experience of participants during mobilizations and other collective activities. Social movements, from this perspective, are “processes in formation […] forms of activity by which individuals create new kinds of social identities” (1991, 2). Both participants and activists learn and accumulate experiences by acting, meeting, and debating over time and consider previous experiences related to individual and collective identities. The movements’ success is not linked to the permanence in time, their institutionalization, or even an eventual political electoral success but to spreading new ideas and values to society in general, including reframed collective identities.
In Chile, Hernández (2019) has addressed how students’ social movements organized in the last decade were able to produce a robust collective identity throughout the country, in an exciting learning process developed during meetings and public demonstrations for decades. Such collective identity reinforced the social movement and rendered their claims more legitimate to the rest of the Chilean society.

In summary, social movements as collective learning processes reframe the identity aspects of the regions and their communities. This process is social and political, and it works at the ideological level, which involves meaning, language, and representation. Additionally, materiality in the form of landscape, economic activities, natural elements, and others is central in the formation of regional identity. The following section starts to present the main findings of this topic by initially discussing how natural elements play a role in the construction of the place-based identity in the case studies.

3.2. Natural conditions and regional identities in Chile

Since the times of European colonization, lands that are now Latin America have been territories that export raw materials for the global economy, including minerals, timber, fish, meat, wheat, sugar, and coffee, among others. Therefore, “nature” has been a central factor in Latin American economic history, with profound implications for the political structuration of its states (Alimonda 2011). Nature and the exploitation of natural resources have become essential ideas for the construction of national and subnational identities, as described by Coronil (1997) in the case of Venezuela. Similarly, the cases of Bolivia and Ecuador show how the exploitation and extraction of hydrocarbons during the twentieth century reshaped discourses about national imaginaries and redefined the meaning of these countries as oil nations, fostering a sense of these resources as national property which should be used for common benefit (Perreault and Valdivia
Other Latin American countries have also built, at least partially, their national identities on specific natural elements (Argentina and the production of beef, Colombia and the coffee fields), and these identities connect to cycles of economic “booms” and “busts” related to the exploitation of specific natural resources.

Chile also expresses links between national identity and natural resources. Chile was a “nitrite” country by the end of the nineteenth century and has been a “copper” country until today (Collier and Sater 2004). The construction of a nature-based national imaginary is an unfinished process and a contested dynamic, since not all the actors of the country agree about a single national identity.

Nature as the source of collective identity is also expressed at subnational levels in Chile. However, as this chapter explains, such identity is not exclusively associated with the direct exploitation of natural resources but also with the natural elements that are meaningful for the communities. The next section elucidates the essential elements highlighted by participants in citizens’ assemblies as part of their collective identity: natural conditions and spatial configuration of the landscape.

3.2.1. “We are proud of living in full nature”

While traveling across the diverse regions of Chile, the Andes and the Pacific Ocean dominate every place. Roads, cities, and towns are small elements surrounded by magnificent mountains, hills, bays, fjords, volcanoes, islands, lakes, rivers, forests, and glaciers. It is not surprising, then, that Chileans always mention natural elements as a source of national identity. The lyrics of the national anthem refer to the blue sky, soft breezes, flowery fields, snowy mountains, and the calm sea.
In the three areas visited during fieldwork, Aysén, Chiloé, and San Antonio, interviewees indicated the significance of nature when asked about collective identity. In response to the questions “What is it to be Patagonian?,” “What are the things that identify the people of Chiloé?,” and “What is the identity of San Antonio’s people?,” all mentioned at least one word related to natural elements of place, including forests, sea, coast, weather, mountains, beaches, and others.

The city of San Antonio, located in central Chile, 100 km west of Santiago, is currently the main shipping port of central Chile (in terms of container traffic) and is fostered by the neoliberal export-oriented economy. The role of this city as the critical point that connects central Chile to the global economy has distorted the traditional local identity related to small-scale fishing. Today, San Antonio’s society lacks a robust collective identity discourse that is able to organize critiques related to the adverse effects of the urban transformation produced by neoliberalism.

The citizens’ assembly of San Antonio emerged as a response to two large projects that would transform the coastal area of the city entirely (Map 2): first, the expansion of the harbor infrastructure, which was necessary to improve its role as the main harbor of central Chile; and second, the planned construction of two large sulfuric acid storage facilities (an input for copper mining) by Chile’s leading state-owned copper company, CODELCO. During the conflict, the eventual damage to the ocean and the seashore was a central argument presented by the assembly. In the end, authorities dismissed the projected containers for sulfuric acid but did not discard the harbor expansion.
Map 2: San Antonio city: Projected Sulfuric Acid Deposits and Harbor Expansion

Source: Prepared by the author
Although interviewees in San Antonio did not express a robust sense of collective identity around nature, some recognized the relevance of the ocean as something that historically had meaning for locals. Even today, the ocean fosters a sense of place for the local community and their claims. Thus, Maribel (50, San Antonio) argued that “[t]he harbor is a strong presence here; this is the main harbor of Chile. Years ago, there were more works related to the sea. The historical identity of San Antonio was attached to the sea and the harbor.” Similarly, Kelly (22, San Antonio) described the significance of marine livelihoods for local identity in the past: “My father told me that when the economic situation was hard, they started to offer sea tours around the bay on small boats; or they started to collect algae and seafood to eat or sell” (Kelly, 22, San Antonio).

The location of San Antonio on the coast of the Pacific Ocean, then, is the natural condition that has shaped the local economy throughout its history, initially as a fishing town and later as commercial port. The traditional fishing culture that conceived the ocean as a source of livelihood for the local community had essential effects on identity and is similar to cases analyzed in other Latin American countries (Perreault 2003b; 2008). Nowadays, that traditional sense of identity has weakened, as harbor activities concentrate local economic growth. Thus, the economic specialization in maritime transport is the current basis for a new collective identity (Deas and Ward 2000; Jonas and Pincetl 2006; Nicholls 2007).

San Antonio is the case study in which interviewees had most difficulty in defining the main aspects of local identity. This citizens’ assembly was a relative unsuccessful social movement. Such a reduced level of success relates to a weak local collective identity that roots in the profound neoliberal transformations that affected San Antonio. The growth of the harbor company as one of the most important employers in the local economy divides the community
when analyzing the adverse effects that maritime activities have produced in the area (excessive truck traffic, noise, air pollution, and destruction of the beach). Thus, neoliberal practices have disarticulated communitarian links in San Antonio, as well as the collective identity of the city.

Chiloé, an archipelago located in southern Chile, presents a unique geographic configuration, composed of dozens of islands, an ocean rich in biodiversity, and cold, rainy climate. Here, since 1990, neoliberal modernization has consolidated a number of large salmon industries, exploiting natural marine conditions to build a highly profitable activity that has also become one of the most vital employers of the area. However, working in a salmon factory implies a direct connection with the ocean, which is a historical feature deeply rooted in Chiloé’s collective identity. Many of these marine and maritime aspects are sources of local identity, as many interviewees highlighted:

We have a coastal culture, in which we used to live not farther than 100 meters from the ocean. The sea, aside from being your food source, was also the fertilizer source for farming. [In the past] there was no electricity; we got news via a small battery radio, and we lived among marine myths, ghost ships (Caleuche), and ocean spirits (Pincoya). The sea was the only connection between Chiloé’s settlements and the rest of the world. (Alicia, 45, Ancud)

I am grateful for all the things that the ocean gave us. (Luisa, 48, Ancud)

Here, everyone looks to the sea. I do not work on the sea and do not have any relatives working in marine activities, but I cannot deny that the sea is a huge part of my life. (Cristian, 23, Castro)

Clearly, beyond the value given to nature, there is an underlying connection to the marine livelihoods traditionally prevalent in Chiloé, which is consistent with a historically built sense of place identity (Hauge 2007; Staeheli 2003). Also, being a marine area with a harsh climate that differs considerably from central Chile has become part of Chiloé’s people identity. This collective identity, based on natural conditions, does not imply exploitative/extractive terms and is similar to that presented by Nicolescu for the case of Romania (2014).
Initially, the neoliberal development of salmon factories did not dismantle the link between Chiloé’s community and the ocean. However, when the adverse effects of this activity became evident everywhere, and the ecologic crisis exploded, communities in the Archipelago started to mobilize. In the words of Luisa (48, Ancud), the salmon industry “killed our sea”: The ocean pollution directly attacked a crucial part of the identity of Chiloé’s people.

The conditions of the Aysén Region, located in Patagonia, are notoriously distinct from the other two case studies. The area is a vastly complex mosaic of mountains, fjords, channels, forests, glaciers, hundreds of islands, and a complex topography (similar to New Zealand, the Pacific coast of Alaska, and Norway). The cold, rainy, and snowy climate also toughens the conditions for human settlement. Since the 1970s, the Chilean state has valued these natural features by assigning most of these territories as protected natural areas (Map 3).

This Region was forcefully occupied by the Republic of Chile in the late-nineteenth century in a process called the “colonización de la Patagonia,” in which the Chilean state, after killing and expelling the scarce native population of this area (Chonos, Tehuelches and Kaweskar), granted land to sheep companies and families (“colonos” o “pioneros”). This occupation produced many adverse effects on the ecosystem, mainly deforestation, especially in the northern half of the Region. Despite such a process, vast regional spaces have remained unaltered, relatively untouched by the hand of capitalist production.

The most sizable private companies in the Region are the salmon factories in the fjords, but they do not produce a considerable number of jobs in the regional economy. Large projects supported by international capital and the state, like mining and dam power plants, have not been developed successfully in the Region. Therefore, small-scale fishing, agriculture, sheep farming, and tourism are the largest employers, with a relatively low level of international investment.
Map 3: Natural Protected Areas in Chile

Legend
- Regional boundary
- Priority Sites for the conservation of biodiversity
- National system of wild protected areas of the state (SNASPE)
  - National park
  - National reserve
  - Natural monument

Data source: IDE, 2017
Geographic Coordinate System Datum WGS84

Source: Prepared by the author
Given a context in which Chilean society perceives the Aysén Region as a “pristine” landscape, it is not surprising that elements like mountains, fjords, and glaciers play a significant role in the production of regional identity. Indeed, some researchers have emphasized the significance of nature in the production of Aysén’s identity (Núñez et al. 2017).

Most interviewees from this Region, while talking about collective identity, mentioned natural elements and consistently expressed a sense of pride about living in a natural territory. Marcos (29, a resident of Coyhaique) said that Aysén “has always had a special connotation because of the concept of nature. It means that you are living in a place where you can have some guarantee that you are living naturally.” Lucy (52), a primary school teacher and resident of the city of Chile Chico, also expressed a sense of pride regarding local nature: “We are proud of living in full nature, [with] a wonderful lake.” Interview after interview, Aysén’s people proudly articulated a sense of connection to natural conditions, including landscape, weather, topography, forests, lakes, rivers, and weather:

The environment in which we live, in a land that unfolds extensively [...]. We have many rivers here, many lakes, distinct colors on the trees, especially during the fall. (Rosa, 60, Coyhaique)

Here, winter is a central factor. It is a difficult, hard period in which you must be ready; you have to gather food. Snow and rain cut off the roads, so you must be prepared to stay without medical care. It is a strong sense of disconnection and isolation. (Danilo, 37, Coyhaique)

All interviewees changed their body language, tone of voice, and general mood when they started to talk about nature in Aysén and its links to personal and collective identity, expressing an intense attachment and topophilia, a deep connection to place conditions, addressed by many authors (Agnew 2014; Buttimer and Seamon 1980; Massey 1994; McDowell 1999; Tuan 1979). Interviewees, thus, showed a more relaxed rhythm in the conversation and became more fluent. Elisa, the owner of a small restaurant, who expressed sharp criticisms
against the social movement of 2012, started to relax when she narrated how Patagonian nature affected her identity, using a language that could be considered almost poetic:

[Our identity is rooted in…] Patagonian memory and contact to nature, the smells of nature; that is Patagonia. I like the protection of nature. We are people full of nature. Farmers here can grow everything; people are coming back for farming. Patagonia is a beautiful land, a wonderful land with an amazing lake [General Carrera Lake], which is a huge reserve of life. There is water, then there is life […] Patagonia calls, and people come here to enjoy the landscape and the peacefulness that comes from the falling leaves. Also, from the trees that are outside, from the cold water that we have here, which is ice that has melted from the Cordillera. Also, from walking and getting your boots covered in mud. Also, from hiking on the mountain, and from smelling herbs; the smells of Nature. (Elisa, 42, Chile Chico)

Often, interviewees referred to a prominent environmental group organized in the Aysén Region over the last 15 years, Patagonia Without Dams (Patagonia sin Represas), and its fight against large hydroelectric dams projected in the area (Hidroaysén). This group conducted several demonstrations before the citizens’ assembly of 2012, and they spread innovative ideas about the global value of Aysén’s nature and its ecosystems. Even today, people from this group play important social and political roles in the Region, questioning the Chilean extractive neoliberalism, forming new citizens’ associations, and promoting a general concept for the future of the Region: Aysén as a Reserve of Life (Aysén Reserva de Vida 2018).

Such an “ecologic” discourse has also engaged with the creation of extensive private, protected areas, such as “Parque Patagonia,” developed by the American entrepreneur Douglas Tompkins and transformed into a National Park in 2018. However, the notion of a pristine region is also leading to a substantial growth of private tourism companies that promote neoliberal practices in the regions, such as temporary employment without workers’ unions and overexploitation of some touristic attractions by increasing the number of visitors using hiking routes, causing saturation. Therefore, in Chile, even the natural value can be eventually commoditized, despite the shared goals of protection of nature.
In summary, in the case studies, natural elements played different roles in the production of collective identity, although neoliberalism mediates this process. The collective identity is weaker in San Antonio, where the notable effects of neoliberalism have entirely transformed the natural landscape. In contrast, in Chiloé and Aysén, where neoliberalism effects seemed less evident and the transformation of nature appeared less intense, residents felt a remarkable relationship between natural elements and their collective identity that resembles analysis conducted by several scholars in other territories (Clayton and Opotow 2003; Nicolescu 2014; Stephenson 2012; Schwartz 2007). In Chiloé, nature has historically provided the main livelihoods for local communities—something that people today still feel is part of their communitarian identity—even though recently specific natural resources have seemed less substantial for local economies. In the case of Aysén, nature is valued in itself as a vital part of the regional identity, with no specific emphasis on the productive use of natural elements. However, such an environmental discourse does not necessarily lead to a post-neoliberal mode of development.

3.2.2. Spatial configuration, geographic isolation, and identity

Two elements of the physical landscape configuration have a formidable influence in the production of regional identities in the cases of Chiloé and Aysén: the high degree of geographic isolation and the vast extension of sparsely populated areas that produce a sense of ample space. Isolation is evident in the case of the Chiloé Archipelago, separated from the rest of Chile by the Chacao Channel. Moreover, to move between the different islands, it is necessary to take other boats and ferries. Many interviewees highlighted the significance of physical isolation as an element on which communities built their local identities. Aliro (30, Ancud) pointed out that
Chiloé’s people had “a feeling of autonomy and the sense that we need to be a specific territory: an insular and seashore territory, an archipelagic territory with a particular culture.”

The sense of insularity is strong in Chiloé, and many people organize against the construction of a suspension bridge that will connect the main island with the continent (Madeira 2016). In the words of Luisa (48, Ancud), the Chilean government “wants to build a huge bridge now, and whom did they ask? They do not take any time to ask us what we want for the island.” Thus, isolated conditions allow the facilitation of a sense of local identity that contrasts with outsiders. Isolation influences how people see themselves (Hauge 2007, 45), a clear expression of the production of place identity that resembles identities in other archipelagic areas in Europe and South-East Asia (Picornell 2014; Ririmasse 2010).

Aysén is not an actual island, but there is no road connectivity between the Region and the rest of Chile. There are three main ways to gain access: The first is by airplane; the second is by Chilean territory, using route 7, which implies at least two ferries (one lasts five hours); and the third is by road without ferries but through Argentinian territory. Therefore, Aysén is truly isolated from the rest of the country. Many interviewees emphasized the relevance of such isolation for regional identity. Rosa (60, Coyhaique) explained that “being Patagonian is to have an identity that is different […] because of physical geography, we do not have connectivity. We are so isolated, so far away from Chile.” Similarly, Mariela (31, Coyhaique) felt that the identity of the Aysén Region “has developed detached from the country. You cannot travel to the rest of the country by road directly.” Although isolation could be considered for many to be a problem, some thought of it as something positive. Elisa (42, Chile Chico) said: “I do not feel isolated. For me, it is better living this way, in peace”; Jimena (52), owner of a small store in Coyhaique,
agreed: “I see isolation as a great opportunity. I am not interested in being connected to the rest of the country.”

A spatial aspect often mentioned in Aysén refers to the notion of vast landscapes and surfaces that locals feel are part of their identity, as well as some sense of appropriation of such extensive areas. As Rosa (60, Coyhaique) explained, Aysén is “an immense land, a large space.” Effectively, Aysén is the third largest Region of the country and the least populated. The largest city, Coyhaique, is small within the Chilean urban system, and people are keenly aware of this sense of immensity. Celeste (42, Coyhaique) suggested that “being Patagonian means a lot; it means we have an identity linked to territory. Our territory is so big, and we are so small, not only in terms of the low population density, but we, as humans, are so tiny in this landscape.”

In conclusion, in addition to natural elements, the conditions linked to physical isolation as well as the sparse population produce substantial effects on the communities’ identities. The material configuration of place and landscape affects collective identity (Agnew 2005b), an aspect that is not highlighted enough by scholars. In the case of Chiloé and Aysén, isolation has caused a sense of cohesion and collective identity, and many people expressed some fears about an increase in connection in the future. However, nature is not the only element on which communities built their identities. In this regard, the following section presents and describes other sources of place-based identity pointed out by interviewees that link to culture and history.

3.3. **Social sources of regional identity**

Besides the conditions framed by natural elements, communities had their place-based historical and cultural narratives that intervened in the production of local and regional identities. The first part of this section unfolds the main historical and cultural aspects that participants in the case studies emphasized when thinking about their collective identity. The second part describes how
the process of contrasting local culture and history with the rest of Chile affected the 
construction of collective identities in the three case studies.

3.3.1. Place-based identity: historical and cultural aspects

At the national level, Chilean identity has evolved over more than 200 years in a process that 
includes cultural homogenization and a firm differentiation from other South American countries 
(conceived as the others) in a specific kind of exceptionalism. Such self-perceived 
exceptionalism has been an efficient way to produce national cohesion and involves several 
elements that are both historical facts and imagined ideas. Chilean exceptionalism in the 
nineteenth century relied on the early political stabilization after independence in 1818, the 
relatively peaceful institutional consolidation during the following decades, and the expansion of 
the national territory (due to war victories against Bolivia and Peru in the north and occupation 
of indigenous people’s lands in the south, including Patagonia). In the twentieth century, the 
narrative of exceptionalism related to the succession of democratic governments and competitive 
elections until Pinochet’s coup in 1973 (Cortés Aliaga 2009; Larrain 2006). Like most 
contemporary nations, authors agree on the dynamic process of the construction of Chilean 
identity, in which there are historical continuities and changes (Lacoste 2005; Zapata 2002).

At the subnational level, there are certain places where people have built a strong sense of 
collective history that relies on cultural differences, especially in areas far from Santiago, as in 
the cases of Chiloé, Aysén, and Magallanes. Such regional identities foster collective action and 
more social movements (Polletta and Jasper 2001). Penaglia and Valenzuela (2014) addressed 
the influence of historical identity on social movements in the Chilean regions. In their analysis, 
for instance, on the assembly of the city of Calama, in the Atacama Desert, participants had 
struggles in political organizing because two different historical identities coexisted inside the
group: the miners (whose identity linked to work, class, and extractivism) and the indigenous people (whose identity rooted in ethnicity). As these two groups differed in their claims, they constantly clashed, weakening the actions of the movement, which ultimately resulted in its disarticulation.

Considering the cases of Chiloé and Aysén, a firm historical identity was critical to boosting the success of the organization of social movements. In contrast, in the case of San Antonio, where the local community could not make use of a definite historical narrative, the social movement faced a much more complicated process. Interviewees in San Antonio did not mention any historical element in defining their local identity, and people were more concerned about the current environmental struggles.

In Chiloé, a strong sense of a specific local history emerged in the discourse of many interviewees. Testimonies collected during fieldwork emphasized the racial and cultural mix of Spaniards, indigenous (Huiliches and Chonos), and other nationalities that formed a new subject: the Chilotes (people of Chiloé), who embraced that multi-ethnic origin. They also considered essential the late political integration of Chiloé into the rest of the country, which took place in 1826, eight years after Chile’s independence. In this period, most of Chiloé’s communities did not support independence from Spain. After the annexation of Chiloé, the Chilean state directed the occupation of Patagonia during the nineteenth century, and many Chilotes migrated to the south, colonizing Aysén and Magallanes. The testimony of Aliro (30, Ancud) expressed this sense of specific history: “My ancestors came here 400 years ago. We, the people of Chiloé, are a mix of many types of blood. Being Chilote means a feeling and lifestyle linked to our ancestors. Chiloé carried out resistance against Chile between 1824 and 1826, and Chiloé was the last colonial area annexed to Chile.”
Interviewees also mentioned the presence of solid communitarian ties and traditions as a source of collective identity in Chiloé. Communitarian work was expressed in the *minga*, a calm way of life, and family life organized around the fireplace or wood stove. Adolfo (37, Ancud) explained that “[o]ur Chiloé identity is rooted in traditions, culture, and our supportive, fraternal communitarian relationships.” Cristian (26, Castro) argued that “the wood stove is the fundamental place of homes in Chiloé; around the wood stove, children grow; it is a very intimate place.” Aside from such cultural particularities, interviewees highlighted the cultural changes that the archipelago faced due to the neoliberal modernization brought by the salmon industry, as well as the associated environmental problems.

In the case of the people of Aysén, the sense of regional history was also crucial in the production of the collective identity of *Patagones* (people of Patagonia and specifically of the Aysén Region). Most interviewees knew about their family roots and the migrations of their ancestors who arrived to colonize Patagonia, these memories that are consistent with previous analysis about Aysén’s identity conducted by Chilean scholars (Osorio 2010; Núñez et al. 2017). People from Aysén use the term “colonization” for the process in which people arrived and settled in Patagonian territories in the early-twentieth century. Native people from Aysén (*Tehuelches* on the prairies and *Alacalufes* on the coast) died from disease, famine, and the actions of the Argentinian and Chilean armies in the late-nineteenth century.

After this genocide, colonizers or pioneers (*pioneros*) arrived in these territories, supported by the Chilean state. There were two main routes of colonization in Aysén: by the Pacific coast from Chiloé, by which many *Chilotes* arrived, and from the east through Argentina.

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20 *Minga* is a pre-Columbian tradition that exists in parts of South America, especially in the areas under Inca influence. This is named “*minga,*” “*mingako,*” or “*minka,*” words that have roots in the Quechua language.
a migratory flux composed of people from central Chile and some groups from Europe and the Middle East. The links to these pioneers are alive in the oral history of the regional community and emerged in testimonies collected during fieldwork, as in the case of Marcos (39, Coyhaique), who explained that “[m]any aspects make the people of Aysén different, mainly the idea of being pioneers. People talk about the elders who came first. People came, stayed here, and built these landscapes.”

Colonization of Aysén is also present in a concept used by some people in the area: hacer patria (“making a homeland”). This local idiom refers to the action of the colonizers that, in the words of Carlos (40, Coyhaique), “came here to live without knowing anything about this land and with nothing else but their desire to live here. They came to use the land and settle here, so other countries [like Argentina] could not claim this land; they ‘made a homeland’ in the name of Chile, in very inhospitable territories.” In the early-twentieth century, both Chile and Argentina had territorial claims on Patagonia, and one way to decide the territorial boundary between the two countries was the actual presence of colonizers. Therefore, when Chileans arrived there, they defined the boundaries of the Chilean area and “made” the Chilean “homeland.”

In current times, some interviewees think that many people in Aysén are still “making a homeland” since they are “living under extremely isolated conditions” in “very isolated towns” (Mario, 35, Coyhaique). This concept not only involves a historical identity linked to the ancient colonizers living in hard conditions but also is a current invocation to Chile as a nation-state project. By means of this idiom, Patagonians demand a stronger presence of the Chilean state in the Region (through the construction of roads, hospitals, schools, and other public services); they wanted the government to remember that this territory is Chilean because they are living here.
From the perspective of the Aysén community, there would not be Chilean sovereignty in Patagonia without Chilean people living in that space.

There are other cultural elements that interviewees identified as specific features of the Aysén people. They mentioned the widespread custom of drinking *mate* since in Patagonia people drink much more *mate* than do residents of central Chile. As in Chiloé, people mentioned the central role of the wood stove in their homes (which is for both cooking and general heating), as well as regional cuisine. Mario (36, Coyhaique) said that “drinking *mate* and eating roasted lamb for breakfast are cultural aspects of my Patagonian identity.” For Mariela (31, Coyhaique), “*mate* is very significant for people here because it links people, and takes them to their history, their roots. It produces a sense of home. It is the same situation around the wood stove, which is something beyond a device for warming up the house or cooking food; it is an entire experience being around the stove with the family; it has a deeper meaning.”

Therefore, the specific ways in which Chile incorporated Chiloé and Aysén, and the regional culture that emerged through such processes, are fundamental in the construction of collective identity in these areas. Thus, to build some identity salience in accordance with Stryker (2006), people selected a set of characteristics to define a *Chilote* or a *Patagón* by resorting to cultural and historical terms. In this process, it is noteworthy how *nostalgia* played a central role, as it helped create a sense of stability and historical continuity that fostered self-identification as part of a place-based community, as many scholar have addressed (Bennett 2016; Smeekes and Verkuyten 2015). Collective nostalgia selects specific “good” elements from the past while erasing others (such as historical famines, poverty, and diseases). In so doing, nostalgia becomes a crucial part of the imagined regional identity, which is rooted in the past but also constitutes a strategic, emotional tool for political goals in the present.
However, the construction of identity also needs some level of contrast in front of others: in the cases of Chiloé and Aysén, other Chileans. The next subsection explains the main aspects that interviewees mentioned to differentiate their regional community from other communities in the country.

3.3.2. Contrasting regional identities to Santiago and Chile

It is worth noting that during interviews, people talked about Chile with different meanings. Most people considered themselves Chileans, but at the same time they had some level of geographic (and administrative) distance from the idea of Chile. However, in the three case studies, notable differences emerged. Thus, in San Antonio, interviewees did not highlight any significant cultural difference between the people of the city and the rest of the country. Since San Antonio is located in central Chile, close to Santiago (100 km, 62 mi), the local history, culture, and economy strongly relate to mainstream Chilean history; in this case, it is challenging to build a local identity in contrast to the rest of the country.

The cases of Chiloé and Aysén are entirely different. In these areas, people used expressions such as “Chile ends in Puerto Montt” (a city located North of Chiloé and Patagonia) or “When I go to Chile” to demonstrate their sense of remoteness. For many Chiloé and Aysén residents, Chile was a synonym of “the national government” or “the Chilean state,” which increased the idea of distance, since people faced the state and its police forces during mobilizations. Therefore, in Chiloé and Aysén, Chile was often rendered as “the other,” and they defined their particular collective identity with this “other” in sight. Thus, the construction of regional identity followed the processes of homogenization and differentiation addressed by many scholars (Della Porta and Diani 2006; McAdam and Scott 2005).
In Aysén, there is a categorization of people in terms of their family history. The ones who were “born and raised” in the Aysén Region (*Nacidos y criados* or *NYC*), and those who “came and stayed” (*Venidos y quedados* or *VYQ*). Although most people did not take these categories seriously, it was usual that during conversation, interviewees presented themselves as “NYC” or “VYQ” to summarize their personal history and identity. In both cases, they were proud Patagonians. In Chiloé, local culture and history also fostered a regional identity that contrasted with other Chileans. This contrast emerged in many testimonies collected in fieldwork in Chiloé and especially in Aysén:

There is a regional identity in Aysén. People in this Region are different from the rest of Chile. This identity is firstly related to culture: the way we talk, not only our idioms but also the tones of our conversations. (Raúl, 45, Coyhaique)

Our traditions are different from the rest of the country in the affective dimension, in how we face life. (Claudio, 47, Chile Chico)

There is this idea that you could be “eaten” in the north; that they will cheat you, steal from you, because people here are confident, innocent. (Julio, 43, Coyhaique)

There are some strong ideas in most Patagonians linked to certain fears about people from central Chile. In the past, people from central Chile, from the north, came here and cheated people, because Patagonians were less educated and more innocent. (Raúl, 45, Coyhaique)

Many testimonies were similar to these: People from Aysén and Chiloé are innocent, honest, good, with strong family ties, while people from the north, especially Santiago, take advantage of such innocence. It is clear, then, that some level of strategic essentialism (Eide 2010; R. Morris 2010; Spivak 1987) emerged from these testimonies in both Chiloé and Aysén. Such a strategy was used to self-define the regional communities as different from others and, at the same time, regionally homogeneous. Thus, communities fostered the group cohesion through an essential way of being *Chilote* or *Patagón* that also implied historical disempowerment—a marginalized identity as proposed by Castells (2010). Also, the construction of the other (people
of Santiago, from the north, or the rest of Chile) as historically powerful and aggressive relied on this strategic essentialism.

Strategic essentialism selected some actual material and cultural differences that existed between Chiloé, Aysén, and the rest of the country. Such essentialism was reinforced when people from these regions traveled to Santiago and other places since they realized their cultural particularities. It was not unusual that students going to universities located in the north (until 2016 Chiloé and Aysén did not have university institutions) adopted a prouder regional identity:

I studied outside, in Valdivia, and I met and hung out a lot with other students from Aysén. I started to value my identity outside. I did not use to wear a beret [kind of hat not used in central Chile] before, but I started to use it when I lived outside. (Julio, 43, Coyhaique)

When I was studying outside Chiloé, I was in shock when I saw a food truck that supposedly sold Chiloé food. It was not like the food of Chiloé; it did not have the actual ingredients! So, when I went outside, I realized that I was Chilote and started to be proud of it. (Nancy, 30, Castro, Chiloé)

Identity production, through contrasting with the other, is thus a powerful dynamic that works on both the collective and the individual scale. Identity is always relational and implies several abstractions and concepts that relate to belonging, attachment, and self-perception to others (Della Porta and Diani 2006; Klandermans and de Weerd 2000; McKinnon 2011; Polletta and Jasper 2001). In the production of regional/local identity, people also build the identity of others: When Chilotes and Patagones define their historical and cultural collective identities, they also define other Chileans’ identity, and both aspects are part of the same simultaneous process.

In conclusion, contrasting history and culture with other Chileans was a crucial part of the construction of regional identity in Chiloé and Aysén. Citizens’ assemblies in both cases took many aspects of such collective identities and reframed them, selecting specific features, through defining identity salience (Stryker 2006), and fostering strategic essentialism (Spivak 1987).
However, collective action always implies collective reflection, and in this regard, the next section analyzes how, through this reflection, social movements mobilized and reshaped their regional identity.

### 3.4. Citizens’ assemblies rebuilding collective identity

This section initially explains how citizens’ assemblies in the cases of Chiloé and Aysén appealed to the marginalized collective identities and actively used them in order to legitimize their claims and demands. Later, it analyzes the main effects of the organization of the assemblies on the regional identity and the sense of community, legitimizing the movement.

#### 3.4.1. Marginalized identities and the Chilean citizens’ assemblies

The emergence of citizens’ assemblies usually relies on the sense of abandonment and relative marginalization prevailing in many communities, especially where people feel that the Chilean state has historically neglected them (E. Valenzuela 2015). However, in physically isolated areas, such marginalization could reach a deeper meaning, fostering a regionalist identity of excluded or marginalized groups, as some authors suggest (Blummer 2006; Castells 2010).

It is interesting that after talking about the links between identity and nature, many interviewees started to underline the deep feeling of abandonment by the Chilean state as a central part of their regional identity.\(^{21}\) In the words of Mario (35, Coyhaique) referring to Aysén, “this Region has been historically left behind.” Marcos (39, Coyhaique) agreed, emphasizing that “the situation in which the Chilean state neglects this Region is a fundamental part of the Patagonian culture.” This feeling of marginalization also emerged in radical

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\(^{21}\) This sense of abandonment is considered something historical in Chiloé and Patagonia, but according to the analysis presented in Chapter 2 of this work, the neoliberal policies associated with the state withdrawal from the public sphere (the small state) have increased this sentiment in many of these areas.
expressions: “I do not expect anything from Chile: snow has covered us for weeks, and Chile never responded very well. I do not care about Chile” (Julio, 43, Coyhaique).

Some interviewees explained this sense of abandonment through the idea that, in the Chilean context, neither Aysén nor Chiloé are relevant in demographic and electoral terms. At the same time, people have felt that the Chilean government does not consider regional communities as equals, and does not recognize their capacities, generating a paternalistic relationship. Many interviewees expressed such feelings of abandonment, disparagement, and neglect. Hernan (62, Coyhaique) informed me that “Patagonians do not count in electoral terms; therefore, the Chilean state has left our Region behind.” Other interviewees supported his testimony: “Chile has abandoned this Region for a long time; it abandoned us because we are so few” (Celeste, 42, Coyhaique); “We [people of Chiloé] are so few. They [the government officials] do not see us” (Alicia, 45, Ancud); “Chiloé and Aysén are abandoned; a feeling that you are just the backyard in which Chile throws its dumps” (Raúl, 45, Coyhaique).

Therefore, marginalized identity (Castells 2010) in Aysén and Chiloé relates to the ideas of a small demographic weight, distrust of national officials to local or regional capabilities, and a sense of internal colonialism (Hechter 1975; Mayhew 2015) in which national government has ruled territories with little interference from local people. Beyond these feelings, participants of citizens’ assemblies highlighted the lack of political autonomy that has existed in Chile, from Pinochet’s dictatorship to the following democratic governments:

The sense of postponement, isolation, and neglect by the Chilean state is permanent. (Danilo, 37, Coyhaique)

Often, we feel abandoned. It is something historical. Sadly, we have said this to authorities many times, but they do not listen. (Lucy, 52, Chile Chico)

Chile never took Chiloé into account. Chiloé does not exist for Chile in terms of social rights and historical, social demands. (Aliro, 30, Ancud)
In Aysén, people tended to contrast the actions of the Chilean state with those conducted by Argentina, which seemed to have deployed better policies on the Patagonian territories. Argentina has a more straightforward policy toward the development of these territories (including several subsidies), which is facilitated by topographic conditions (it is far easier to access Patagonia from the Argentinian side). Also, since people from Aysén usually travel to Argentinian Patagonia, they learned and compared how both national governments implemented specific policies. Here, the opinion of Celeste (42, Coyhaique) is notable: “[When we were mobilized,] we started to make a comparison with Argentinian Patagonia: they, for instance, have benefits such as subsidized fuels, but here, we do not have that.” In contrast, the sense of abandonment by the Chilean state has evident material expressions in everyday life for the people of Chiloé and Patagonia, as Mario (35, Coyhaique) argued: “They promised many projects to pave our main road; they have not done anything. Even for common things, such as watching TV—we do not have a local public TV station, we have to watch the news from Santiago.”

The neglect of these remote territories by Chile is felt more dramatically when faced with emergencies or catastrophic events. In the last 30 years, Chiloé and Patagonia have suffered several disasters. Three volcanic eruptions (the Hudson Volcano in 1991, the Chaitén Volcano in 2008, and the Calbuco Volcano in 2015) destroyed some towns and covered vast areas with layers of ash. Two massive earthquakes (Aysén in 2007 and Chiloé in 2016) damaged houses and infrastructure, and one tsunami (Aysén in 2007) killed people and destroyed installations in the Aysén fjord. Finally, one severe environmental crisis (Chiloé in 2016) damaged local livelihoods, and one devastating snowstorm (Aysén in 1995) isolated areas, killed livestock, and
destroyed crops. In most of these cases, the Chilean national government reacted slowly, which may be partially explained by geographic isolation.

Despite these geographic conditions of isolation, the degree of political difficulty that the Chilean state has in understanding and evaluating the level of urgency when critical events occur in areas distant from Santiago is evident. Furthermore, once the government reacts, it takes some time to help southern territories with food, clothes, and other materials. It is a belief shared in Patagonia and Chiloé that usually Chile is not able to react fast and efficiently to emergencies, and the sense of abandonment is stronger and more profound in such situations. Here again, the comparison to Argentina was frequently pointed out during interviews:

When the Hudson Volcano erupted (in 1991), the first help came from Argentina. Here, the Chilean state cannot respond and when it does it is slow and late; therefore, people here felt they were far away. You can analyze the problem from many perspectives, but the conclusion is the same: We are isolated. Santiago is so far away. (Mariela, 31, Coyhaique)

When the Hudson Volcano erupted here, we got help from Argentinian Patagonia, which sent trucks and trucks full of things and food. After 14 days, the Chilean government’s help arrived. (Julio, 43, Coyhaique)

When there are natural disasters in the north, in Santiago, the government appears immediately, and even the president visits the damaged areas… but not here in Chiloé. Here we had the environmental crisis, and no one came, not even the Regional Governor from Puerto Montt. (Alonso, 28, Ancud)

Marginalization fostered rage and social mobilization. Thus, people who actively participated during mobilizations pointed out that rage against historical and permanent marginalization was the primary foundation on which communities started to mobilize:

Rage… the social movement emerged from the rage originated by the authority’s behavior, in which they did not take us into account. We were nothing to them. (Rolando, 37, Coyhaique)

The feeling of abandonment emerged during the 2012 mobilizations. It is a strong feeling that people are keeping deep inside, which is historical but also current. (Raúl, 45, Coyhaique)
It was the fatigue of people, supporting negative situations for a long time—a feeling of helplessness. (Jimena, 52, Coyhaique)

You feel bad because they [the national officials] do not consider you, and this resentment makes you mobilize and protest. (Alonso, 28, Ancud)

Mobilized people had a feeling of dispossession, a feeling of being ignored. (Cristián, 26, Castro)

Apart from such a marginalized identity, it is remarkable how participants of the citizens’ assemblies considered and collectively analyzed these feelings. During public meetings, at the barricades, and through phone calls to local radio stations, people shared their own experiences of neglect. Celeste, a radio personality from Coyhaique, remembered that during the 2012 mobilizations, her show was extended for hours as she received calls from people who lived across the entire Region. Many shared experiences of historical and contemporary abandonment and a lack of consideration from national and regional authorities. In a therapeutic process, she said people initially just wanted to recount and share their experiences; Patagonians just wanted to be heard.

This process of sharing experiences also happened in Chiloé, and even in San Antonio, in meetings, demonstrations, and barricades. In all the case studies, collective mobilization implied an intense exchange of personal testimonies about the past and present sociopolitical situations. Citizens’ assemblies, therefore, were producing collective knowledge, mobilizing a marginalized regional identity to produce social cohesion and legitimize their demands in front of the authorities. Thus, citizens’ assemblies, by building collective knowledge about their situation, became successful social movements as producers of knowledge as the cognitive approach suggests (Eyerman and Jamison 1991).

It is not accurate to think that the assemblies built the marginalized identity because marginalization has been a historical fact. What citizens’ assemblies did was to provide spaces to
share these experiences of abandonment and analyze them collectively. They built a collective meaning of such marginalization to generate social cohesion and to produce more structured demands to the Chilean state.

However, collective action led to other effects in terms of regional identity, especially since communities had to negotiate with national authorities, sustain the local order, and even self-govern territories for several weeks. The next section addresses these issues and explores how citizens’ assemblies reframed collective regional identity.

### 3.4.2. Collective action transforming regional identity

Despite their diverse locations, Chilean citizens’ assemblies shared some common aspects during mobilizations. At meetings and during long conversations at the barricades, people shared their experiences and built collective knowledge. In the case of Chiloé, some towns kept their barricades for more than two weeks in 2016, and in the case of Aysén, the Region sustained 40 days of barricades and a *regional strike*. In so doing, collective actions fostered regional identity.

In this regard, Rolando (37, Coyhaique) explained that “the movement produced the opportunity to shake us up. We were so small at that point, not considered, but we could organize a regional strike and be on the news every day. We were a permanent protagonist, and mobilizations produced a sort of pride in us.”

Thus, social movements almost immediately transformed regional identity, showing the social effects of collective action pointed out by many authors (Eyerman and Jamison 1991; Jasper 2007; Nicholls 2007; Polletta and Jasper 2001). The first essential element was the realization that regional communities could organize and legitimize a shared discourse; assemblies became visible, important actors that the national government had to respect:

The movement “Your problem is my problem” [tu problema es mi problema] started… the entire Region was united in a beautiful way and a local identity that I never saw
before emerged. Being Patagonian, being from Aysén. People started to drink mate and wear traditional costumes; people valued our dances, our way of speaking. (Mario, 35, Coyhaique)

I feel that the common people awakened. Young people learned that it is possible to make visible your unrest and fight for your rights without hurting anyone. Many adults from Chiloé learned that lesson too. (Nancy, 30, Castro)

The movement helps us realize that we have a Patagonian identity, a sense of place. We have something to say about the place where we live. (Luis, 65, Coyhaique, emphasis added)

The process of self-government and efficient organization during mobilization also produced a new meaning of collective identity linked to pride and self-esteem, also present in the analysis of several social movements’ researchers (Della Porta and Diani 2006; Klandermans and de Weerd 2000; Snow and McAdam 2006). Mobilized people controlled public space and provided a remarkable degree of security. Most interviewees in Chiloé and Aysén claimed that communities were able to organize and take care of their cities and towns (see Chapter), and such a level of organization strengthened regional identity. In the case of Aysén, the testimony of Rosa (60, Coyhaique) is explicit: “We, Patagonians, took and governed our region through the social movement. That was remarkable.”

A second issue that affected collective identity was the organization of the social movement when facing the possible intervention of the police forces. Here, the three case studies provide different outputs. In the case of Chiloé in 2016, the Chilean government did not repress the social movement, so the entire process was relatively peaceful, but the local community had several formal and informal meetings with police officers, and such conversations fostered a sense of good civic behavior.

In contrast, in San Antonio, the police forces quickly repressed the local assembly during the initial demonstrations, dismantling barricades and dispersing protesters. This “defeat” affected the sustainability and social cohesion of the social movement, which slowly faded. In
this case, the social movement only reached the initial stage of *amplification* proposed by Snow and McAdam (2006) since the movement only appealed to one identity layer to build its discourse (sea and coastline in danger). However, this movement was not able to transform or reframe the collective identity though its actions.

Finally, the process in Aysén was unique since the national government sent special police forces to retake territorial control of the Region. This repression (analyzed in Chapter 4) was extremely violent; however, the movement resisted and defeated the police:

The people of Puerto Aysén wanted to expel the Chilean police from the town, and we did it! However, we did not attack them beyond the limits of the town. (Mario, 35, Coyhaique)

How many young Chileans can say that they defeated the state? The state sent everything to repress us, but the police forces could not defeat us. (Ricardo, 39, Coyhaique)

We shouted at the police: We are Patagonians! Patagonians are not for sale! (Ciro, 67, Lago Atravesado)

The different experiences and stages of the social movement (organization, self-government, and defense) produced collective interpretations, learning, and new meanings of the sense of community and regional identity. During many interviews, I found expressions of pride, to different degrees, of being part of a community that was able to claim its rights and accept the negative costs of conducting collective actions.

Therefore, mobilizations directly enforced collective identity in Chiloé and Aysén as well as citizens’ empowerment, leading to consequences that still impact today. Thus, Fernando, the current mayor of Coyhaique, explained: “Today the social control upon authorities is stronger; people are powerful now.” Beyond the fact that people could feel that the citizens’ assembly did not get anything from the petition list, the experience of collective action and social mobilization was valuable in itself:
There is a sense that the Aysén’s people did something powerful. (Marcos, 39, Coyhaique)

The social movement brought us much more energy to defend our Patagonia. When facing any problem, we are united, stronger. (Lucy, 52, Chile Chico)

We always felt proud of being Patagonians. However, the social movement made this feeling stronger because we were able to defeat the Special Forces. (Hortensia, 52, Puerto Aysén)

In the cases of Chiloé and Aysén citizens’ assemblies were able to identify the preexisting features associated with regional identity. Leaders and participants identified geographic, historical, and social elements to produce an identity salience of marginalization and isolation that gathered citizens together and made collective action stronger. Finally, the different activities conducted by social movements, and even the violent acts of police repression, produced a sense of pride that is currently part of regional identity, even though the social movement did not achieve its initial demands directly. In this regard, in these cases, social movements achieved all the stages of identity production proposed by Snow and McAdam (2006): amplification, since they selected specific layers of regional identity; consolidation, as a core group adopted these layers; extension because diverse groups of the region adopted these identity layers; and transformation, since collective action reframed the meaning of being Chilote and Patagon. In summary, through collective action, Patagones and Chilotes became significant political actors, capable of deciding about their territories and organize complex political actions.

3.5. Conclusion: social movements, identity, and place

As an initial point, the testimonies provided by interviewees in the three case studies show a strong association between the level of organization of the citizens’ assemblies and a sense of place-based identity engaged with a historic feeling of marginalization and abandonment.
Citizens’ assemblies appealed to such marginalized identity and transformed it through their self-organization, working as inspiring examples of flexible organizations that most scholars describe as characteristic of contemporary social movements (Jasper 2007; Zirakzadeh 2006).

Assemblies affected the production of regional identity because they provided different spaces (meetings, barricades, and demonstrations) in which participants actively debated, shared experiences, and built new collective knowledge. In the specific cases of Chiloé and Aysén, assemblies integrated previous experiences of collective mobilization, conducted primarily by environmental groups that in the last few decades had reframed regional and provincial self-perceptions. In these cases, despite the apparent low level of success they achieved in a number of their demands, citizens’ assemblies were productive in terms of collective learning and the production of a regional identity, becoming relevant social movements, as understood by the cognitive praxis approach (Eyerman and Jamison 1991).

Collective identity does not emerge from a vacuum; it relies on previously framed imaginaries that embrace different aspects of reality. In the case studies of this research, there were place-based sources of identity that were historical and present. In all of them, people connected their collective identity to the presence of natural elements that affected their everyday life not only in terms of livelihoods or the extraction of natural resources but also through the presence, magnitude, and singularity of natural elements in themselves, as some scholars have identified in other global areas (Tomaney 2007; Nicolescu 2014). In San Antonio, local identity was influenced by the presence of the Pacific Ocean and its coast as the source of marine resources; in Aysén, by the conditions of a harsh climate and the presence of extensive natural landscapes with fjords, mountains, islands, and forests; and in Chiloé, by the rain, the ocean, and the archipelagic character. Also, the last two case studies show that physical isolation from the
rest of the country shaped past and current identity. Such isolation has affected communities and led to an emboldened sense of attachment to place, or topophilia (Tuan 1979).

Evidently, historical and cultural elements of place are also essential parts of the production of identity, and whenever local knowledge of history differs from the official Chilean narrative, communities build a distinct regional identification based on collective memory (Halbwachs 2011; Said 2000), and appeal to nostalgia to foster social cohesion (Bennett 2016; Smeekes and Verkuyten 2015; Wildschut et al. 2014). In Chiloé, people were building a new meaning to their racially mixed origins and their late integration into the Chilean state. In Aysén, people traced their roots to pioneers of the early-twentieth century and the main routes of colonization and settlement.

Beyond geography, nature, history, and culture, citizens’ assemblies organized around the notion of marginalized identity (Castells 2010; Nicholls 2007). As previously mentioned, everyone involved in the assembly was able to engage in the idea of being neglected and marginalized by the national government. Geographic isolation deepened the feeling of abandonment and produced a stronger sense of regionalism in Chiloé and Aysén. In these two cases, natural elements, their potential use to benefit local communities, and the conception of a clean and pure nature were always part of regional identification, but during citizens’ assemblies, they reinforced this identity. In contrast, in the case of San Antonio, the collective sense of isolation was not shared among the population, since the city is located in central Chile, close to Santiago. Such condition made the movement weaker and placed the focus on specific environmental struggles.

In the cases of Chiloé and Aysén, it is evident that the process of contrasting identity roots in the regional history, in confronting stereotypes about people from Santiago and central
Chile: the clean, honest community (us) and the modernized and often-corrupt people (them). This identity differentiation, using the concept provided by Della Porta and Diani (2006), was notable during social movements: A very significant part of residents of Aysén and Chiloé actively engaged in the mobilizations, and “the other” was materially personified in the authorities from Santiago, as well as the police forces that arrived in the areas. These cases demonstrate how mobilized communities use strategic essentialism to organize their claims (Veronis 2007; Spivak 1987).

Social movements, in Chiloé and especially in Aysén, were active promoters of change in the production of regional identity. The most relevant aspect was the ability of mobilized people to self-govern their territories for many weeks. During these periods, regional communities did not fall into chaos and disorder. On the contrary, interviewees remember a calm period in which social organization was efficiently carried out and when there was almost no crime or violence. Thus, some level of regional pride and a revalorization of the community emerged in Chiloé and Aysén. Another element integrated into regional identity in Aysén was the resistance and solidarity they expressed in the face of police repression. Although many assemblies’ participants showed their sadness when remembering the violent action of the Chilean police, they valued the resistance of the community and exhibited pride in it.

Citizens’ assemblies, in conclusion, were able to mobilize collective identities, especially in the cases of Chiloé and Aysén. Preexisting elements of identity were debated during the regional strikes, building a socially shared interpretation of the regional situation and the local communities. Assemblies provided spaces for the production of collective knowledge. Furthermore, actions conducted by assemblies and the experience of being part of a collective mobilization empowered people and communities, allowing them to positively revalue their
regional identity, to reach all stages of identity production: amplification, consolidation, extension and transformation (Snow and McAdam 2006).

The analysis of the case studies provided insightful ideas around the mutual interaction between social movements and the concepts of place and identity that engaged with place-based historical and cultural issues. In general, these links work at the ideological, imagined, and conceptual level. Nevertheless, social movements also work in the physical/material aspects of geographic space, since collective action unfolds in public space and must control such space, at least for a short period. The following chapter analyzes the interactions between social mobilization and space that emerge when people occupy public space, control vast territories, and generate ephemeral places, specific territories, and unique spatial dynamics.
Chapter 4. Territory, place, public space, and political action

Then, mobilization started to transform the public space. When people, in every town, took back control of their territories, they broadened their private space, and transformed it into a communitarian space. (Fauré, Karmy, and Valdivia 2014, 86).

On May 3rd, 2016, the British newspaper *The Guardian* published an article called “A silent catastrophe: Chilean fishermen protest [against] failure to mitigate toxic red tide” (Reuters 2016) that analyzed the social crisis in Chiloé. The article presented a picture of a barricade with a caption that read: “Chilean fishermen protest after blocking some of the main routes of Isla Grande in Chiloé.” One week later, the *Daily Mail* provided a more sensationalist depiction, stating, “[A] fisherman places a Chilean national flag in his boat that is serving as a barricade, blocking a road in Ancud in Chile’s Chiloe Island, during the country’s worst ever ‘red tide’ environmental disaster. Food and gasoline have been scarce after small-scale fishermen blocked the island from the mainland, lighting flaming barricades for days to demand more compensation from the government” (Associated Press 2016). These representations emphasized the adverse effects of the political occupation of public space during demonstrations. For many, especially for the state’s officers and right-wing political parties, images of barricades are negative, as they convey an interruption of everyday routines and even riots.

However, after reading the initial epigraph of this chapter, which is part of the book “Patagonia’s Rebellion” (Fauré, Karmy, and Valdivia 2014), the ideas around barricades acquired a more complex, vibrant meaning. This book provides a broad set of pictures and testimonies collected during the mobilization. Despite their somewhat romanticizing and pessimistic perspective (the authors believe that the government defeated the social movement), this work is highly informative about the crucial role of barricades as material sites for citizens’ empowerment.
The material occupation of territory, place, and public space is essential for social movements. It forces political negotiation and fosters the visibility of collective demands, despite its negative consequences. Thus, this chapter addresses how citizens’ assemblies used the regional space and specific places to control territory and public space during their demonstrations. Then, it analyzes the territorial power deployed by the movements and how the material landscape framed and was framed by such power.

The first section of this chapter presents the theoretical perspective by addressing three concepts: territory, as the idea that connects space, communities, and power; place and its significance as the closer space, full of meaning; and public space and its connections to social movements. The second section presents the first group of findings, analyzing how the Aysén and Chiloé social movements controlled vast territories for substantial periods and how the geographic configuration of these areas provided unique conditions to boost this control. The third section focuses on the site scale, explaining the organization of the barricades and their diverse roles in social mobilization, especially as sites for debate and solidarity. The fourth section explains that public space was the material stage for demonstrations, on which the movements built an exceptional self-governed space, the mobilized territory. This section also describes the strategies used by the Chilean state to recover control of these territories. The last section summarizes the main conclusions of this chapter, which emerge from the relationship between social movements, territory, place, and public space.

4.1. Conceptual framework: territory, place, and public space

This theoretical section develops three critical concepts about the control and appropriation of space. The first section examines the concept of territory as an idea not restricted to the state and its administration but also a complex mechanism of power relationships. The second section
presents the concept of place and its integrative–exclusionary implications. The last section appraises the significance of public space for social movements and collective action.

4.1.1. Territory, power, appropriation, and control of space

There are some essential debates in geography literature regarding the notion of territory that may vary depending on the disciplinary tradition. Among many Anglophone geographers, the use of this concept seems relatively restricted to the jurisdictional space of the state. Thus, Stuart Elden (2010) claims that, within this tradition, territory is “a portion of geographical space under jurisdiction of certain people” (Elden 2010, 801). Similarly, Alexander Murphy believes that the Anglo-Saxon concept of territory relates to a limited and controllable geographical space “with clearly demarcated edges” (Murphy 2012, 163). Additionally, Gottmann (1973), Sack (1986), and Paasi (2003) suggest that the idea of territory firmly lies in the notions of sovereignty and, as such, is a central feature of modern states, their limits, and their internal organization.

John Agnew critiques this perspective and proposes avoiding the “territorial trap” that involves three misleading assumptions about state and territory: “states as fixed units of sovereign space, the domestic/foreign polarity, and states as containers’ of societies” (Agnew 1994, 53). Other complementary critiques emerge from debates on the concept of power in contemporary societies. Foucault believed that in current times, power is not explicit but diffuse; it operates at the micro level through self-discipline, and social actors resist it everywhere and all the time (Foucault 1988). Therefore, different actors, not only states, have some power to control spaces and produce territories. Allen agrees with this perspective, arguing that “fixed territories and bounded states no longer possess the last word on power” (2003, 95), and Marco Antonsich suggests that “neither boundaries nor state define territory by themselves” (2011, 422).
Approaches from the Francophone tradition use a far broader conceptualization of territory: “a social space, produced by specific social practices and meanings, which turns territory into both a semiotic and a lived space; where the ‘living together’ is produced” (Antonsich 2011, 425). Guy Di Meo (1996) addresses the idea of “everyday territories” (territoires du quotidien) that link space and place in the same material concept: territory. Claude Raffestin (2012) builds most of his concept of territory as something expressed in/by materiality; it is “social space; it is the result of the production of actors […] the projection of labor, energy, and information by a community into a given space” (2012, 126). In part, the problem with this tradition is that territory seems to be a synonym for the notion of geographic space from Anglophone geography (Painter 2010), producing some conceptual confusion. Thus, it is crucial to establish a moderate approach in which the concept of territory is neither too narrow nor too broad.

This concept of territory should emphasize the links between the material realm and the diverse aspects around power and control of space. Thus, territory is the materialization of the social space that emerges from the power relationships among different actors. According to this perspective, Alexander Murphy (2012) considers territory not only as something semiotic (working on the ideological level) but also as mainly material. Social actors embodied with different levels of power construct territory, and, in this process, the idea of appropriation becomes crucial, as people “assimilate and incorporate the geographical space, as an extension and part of themselves” (Aliste 2010, 59).

From this perspective, the concept of territory emphasizes the idea of power and its diverse natures (political, cultural, and economic) in the organization of geographic space. Power is a dynamic social relation full of complementarities, contradictions, struggles, and resistance;
therefore, territory shares a similar complexity. Also, territorial appropriation has different levels, intensities, and qualitative features. Appropriation of territory can be legal (such as the state and its different institutional levels), traditional (indigenous communities), semi-formal (local community, a social movement), or illegal (gangs, occupations) (Delgado 2003). For this research, the concept of territory is a useful sociopolitical concept that directly relates to the concepts of power and appropriation of material space exercised by diverse social actors.

4.1.2. **Place as everyday space: inclusion and permanence**

As with most central concepts in geography, *place* is challenging to define. Many authors contrast *place* to *space*, employing dichotomies in which space is global, abstract and linked to present and top-down influences, while place is linked to local, concrete, associated with the past, and bottom-up processes (Agnew 2005a; Jones et al. 2015). Despite the Manicheism of such binaries, it is possible to define the idea of place as the close area surrounding individuals and communities. Closeness to individuals is commented upon by Agnew, who states that “place represents the encounter of people with other people and things in space. It refers to how everyday life is inscribed in space and takes on meaning for people and organizations” (Agnew 2005a, 84). Additionally, Jones et al. (2015) connect place to the idea of community itself and how communities engage in place-based everyday activities.

To avoid an unproductive confrontation between space (general) and place (particular), Merrifield (1993) refers to Lefebvre to conceal these concepts as they emerge in a *trialectical* process composed of *spatial practices, representational space,* and *spaces of representation* (Lefebvre 1991). Place is then part of spatial practices, the *perceived* space formed by “particular locations and spatial sets […] of each social formation” (Lefebvre 1991, 41). Additionally, place
is central in the representational space, or *lived* space in which social life occurs, rooted in culture, history, memory, and feelings and where cohesiveness is not absolute (Lefebvre 1991).

Analyzing other approaches to the concept of place, Agnew identifies three dominant meanings: (1) as a location, which “relates to other sites” (relatively unproductive in theoretical terms); (2) as a “locale or setting where everyday activities take place”; and (3) as a “sense of place or identification [...] as a unique community, landscape or moral order” (Agnew 2005a, 89). Agnew also suggests that, for individuals, place is not merely the realm of the immediate but also the sphere where they express their agency (Agnew 2005a): Place is the space in which people and communities act and interact directly.

Other authors have analyzed the implications of the meaning of places and their attachment for communities and individuals, from the early work of Tuan (1979) and his idea of *topophilia* to the extensive works of Massey (1994; 2002) and Buttimer and Seamon (1980). Most of these approaches explain how meanings and feelings around place are socially constructed and mediated by different layers of attachment.

However, the specific meaning of a specific place is not immutable, but an endless product recreated by social interactions (Massey 1994). The meaning of place is always contested (Halbwachs 2011; Jones et al. 2015). Edward Said (2000) addressed the concept of *memory* to analyze this sense of place, highlighting the critical role of materiality in the construction of memory and meaning. The role of materiality around places is also discussed by Jones et al. (2015) and Agnew, who points out that “place is the setting for social rootedness and landscape continuity” (2005a, 83).

Assuming place is about rootedness, there have been debates around its progressive or regressive character (Massey 1994). Often, place-based identities, including nationalisms
(Anderson 1983) and regionalisms, have exclusionary tendencies and could even promote isolations as well as xenophobic attitudes. Therefore, “place is often decried or condemned as retrograde, reactionary, and/or misleading” (Agnew 2005a, 86). In this debate, Massey proposed understanding the idea of “the global sense of place,” which implies understanding places as nonstatic, not bounded or segregated, and not based in a single identity (Massey 1994, 155).

In general, scholars have poorly addressed the relationship between time and place beyond the general ideas presented above, in which place relates to some level of permanence. Tuan (1979) presents the idea of stability of place in his analysis of public symbols and fields of care, where stable conditions for humans and communities unfold. At the same time, place is always emerging (Staeheli 2003). Although time matters for place, the construction of a sense of place does not need much time. Anthropologists Olszewski and al-Nahar (2016) present the idea of ephemeral places: specific sites in the Jordan Highlands, where Paleolithic migratory communities resided for short periods. Despite their temporality, these sites had a definite meaning and had specific functions for those communities. From a different perspective, Clay (1989) considers that “all places exhibit some form of ephemerality […] Some places, however, are less ephemeral than others” (Clay 1989, 4). Thus, ephemeral places “remind us that time endures [and] the past never wholly disappears” (Clay 1989, 35). This approach is useful in understanding specific temporal transformations that social movements produce in the areas where they act. For example, barricades become a place since they affect collective memory, despite their short duration.

By considering the ideas presented above, this research sees place as material, immediate, everyday space for individuals and communities, where space is perceived and lived directly. Such closeness also relates to collective meaning, which is socially constructed and mediated by
memory and materiality. In terms of time, places present different degrees of ephemerality. Thus, even ephemeral places can produce substantial effects on community memory and can be significant parts of the collective imaginary and social cohesion.

4.1.3. Public space and collective mobilization

The issue of public space may also be controversial since it may be conceived as the space of fear and the space for social and democratic integration at the same time. Don Mitchell analyzes American ideas about public space and suggests: “Public space engenders fears, fears that derive from the sense of public space as uncontrolled space, as a space in which civilization is exceptionally fragile” (Mitchell 2003, 13). Many laws and public policies aim to control such chaotic and conflictive qualities. An example of the increasing level of control is the “S.U.V. model of citizenship” that relates to “floating bubbles” and “buffers” of privacy, protecting individuals in the public space (Mitchell 2005). The continuous and increasing surveillance by governments (employing street cams and drones) is a clear example of the desire to control space in the contemporary world. In South America and Chile, the fear of public space often relates to experiences of criminality and social violence. Accordingly, social movements must achieve substantial social support to legitimize their demonstrations in public space: If people perceive such collective action as violent, the social movement may lose support.

Public space is also the space for citizenship, social integration, and democracy. Jones et al. (2015) underline its relevance for democratic construction through demonstrations, parades, and pageantry. Salcedo (2002) points out that public space in Latin America is the “unfulfilled promise” of modernity, which should entail an egalitarian, democratic system. According to this view, public space should be the realm in which people and socially acceptable groups are
allowed. However, since public space is also the expression of power relationships it never achieves completely its emancipatory potential.

For social movements, the occupation of public space is a powerful act. It is also an expression of the practice of “spatial citizenship” that opposes the privatization of most spheres of everyday life (Martin 2015, 180). Numerous social movement researchers consider the use of public space crucial for collective mobilization (Blummer 2006; Davis et al. 2005; Della Porta and Diani 2006; Jasper 2007; Klandermans and de Weerd 2000; McAdam and Scott 2005; Morell 2012; Mountz 2017; Nicholls 2007; Zirakzadeh 2006).

Some social movements act in public space to become visible to the rest of the society and often conduct marches or parades (e.g., gay pride parades or environmentalist rallies). Other social movements demonstrate their strength and legitimacy in the face of governments through massive gatherings, rallies, and street protests. Finally, other collective actions are aimed at explicitly controlling public space and disturbing the regular activities; in these cases, they might organize sit-ins or build barricades. In general, social movements utilize a broad range of tools to use and occupy public space, which may have different durations (Fluri 2011). Most democratic societies accept the first two kinds of actions as part of their political and social life (parades and rallies). In contrast, sit-ins and barricades are usually not tolerated by governments, as they lead to loss of territorial control.

Barricades, therefore, emerge as a fundamental political tool that directly defies the state’s control of space, as they express the territoriality of social movements. This tactical tool for controlling territory has been present in diverse social and political mobilizations during the last three centuries. Some scholars have identified many continuities as well as relevant collective learning in the organization of barricades over time, especially in a European context.
(Hazan 2015; Traugott 2010). However, beyond their practical utility, barricades are also the expression of cultural features of mobilized people and have become sites for social interaction, solidarity, social cohesion, and debate, which are fundamental aspects of social movements (Bos 2005; Estrada Saavedra 2010; Fluri 2011; Magaña 2015).

Barricades, or “barricadas” in Spanish, also known as “piquetes” in Chile and Argentina (Zibechi 2012), despite their ephemeral and relatively violent character, are sites that generate profound effects on the lives of participants. These collective actions deployed in public space produce solidarity. Barricades, through face-to-face exchanges, foster “the ability of actors to recognize others, and to be recognized, as belonging to the same social unit” (Hunt and Benford 2004, 439). Physical closeness among people that need to address tactical issues keeps the barricades in the right conditions to resist the police, producing belonging, and compromise (Estrada Saavedra 2010; Hunt and Benford 2004; Traugott 2010).

In conclusion, a clear conceptualization of public space is crucial for the study of social mobilization. Despite the possible risks associated with the occupation of public space (police repression and vandalization), usually, social movements cannot avoid unfolding their demonstrations in such a space to make their demands visible and foster negotiations with authorities. Thus, social movements occupy and control public space by making use of sidewalks, streets, parks, and/or public squares. The following sections examine the main findings of this research regarding the links between social movements in Chiloé and Aysén and their territories, places, and public spaces.
4.2. Citizens’ assemblies controlling territory

In February 2012 in the Aysén Region, the local community supported a regional strike in which, as analyzed in Chapter 2, people demanded better public services, fuel subsidies, and decentralization of political power through direct elections of the Regional authorities. Similarly, in May 2016, Chiloé islanders started a general strike in response to the economic and environmental crisis caused by extensive algae bloom that hampered the extraction of marine resources. In both cases, mobilizations were massive, strongly supported by local communities, and widely covered by national media.

This section examines how citizens’ assemblies called for a generalized strike that implied controlling and paralyzing regular activities of vast territories, in order to express their demands and force the national government to negotiate. The first section describes how the Chiloé and Aysén movements cut off their territories from the rest of the country through a fast and coordinated action that made use of the geographic conditions of isolation. The second section examines the crucial points that communities occupied to control territory. The final part appraises how participants of the social movements used their territorial knowledge to exercise such control.

4.2.1. Isolated territories and the “regional hunger strike”

Traveling to the Aysén Region is an exciting but lengthy trip. From Puerto Montt, the largest city in southern Chile, and by using the main road (Route 7), it takes 16 hours to get to Coyhaique, the capital of the Region, across 661 km (410 miles) of complex topography, with only a few small towns scattered along the road (Map 4). The trip involves three ferries to cross fjords. The travel time also depends on weather and navigational conditions, which are infamously harsh during the Patagonian winter. There are three other ways to access Coyhaique from the north: by
plane (two hours, but expensive), by road through Argentinian territory (15 hours), and via the ocean, on a ferry (24 hours). To get a picture of the area and the landscape, Chilean Patagonia shares topographic and climatic aspects with the Pacific coast of Canada and southern Alaska or the Norwegian coast, where long distances, mountains, fjords, and the general topography seriously limit the construction of roads.

Chiloé does not have that level of isolation and intricate topography, but because no bridge connects the island to the mainland, it is necessary to take a 30-minute ferry crossing to access the north of the archipelago, while traveling by car or bus across the entire island requires more than three hours (see Map 4). There is a second, six-hour-long ferry crossing between Chiloé and the continent to the east (to Chaitén). Between the islands of the archipelago, all communications rely on short ferries and boats, whose services depend on weather and maritime conditions. Additionally, commercial flights to Chiloé are not regular, and they operate only during the summer, connecting Santiago and Castro (the capital city of Chiloé) in two and a half hours. In sum, physical isolation is a central fact of life for Chiloé’s communities, even in the twenty-first century.

The unique geographic configurations of these zones directly influenced the remarkable level of success of the social mobilizations of 2012 and 2016. The landscape helped communities isolate their territories from the rest of the country by occupying just a few, but nonetheless vital, points with fast, coordinated actions. These collective actions were called a “regional strike” in Aysén (Paro regional) and a “provincial strike” in Chiloé (Paro provincial). The material configuration of space had an essential effect on the success of the regional strikes and stopped the Chilean state from reimposing its authority.
Map 4: General Connectivity between Aysén, Chiloé, and Puerto Montt

Source: Prepared by the author
For these mobilizations, the territory in terms of materiality, as Raffestein suggests (2012), directly shaped the collective strategies. The only other similar cases of social mobilization capable of producing this level of territorial control were the citizens’ assembly of Magallanes in 2010, also in Patagonia (Romero 2015), under comparable geographic conditions of isolation (see Chapter 2).

One of the most remarkable features of these mobilizations was their speed. Once the initial social crises reached a certain point (demands for fuel subsidies in Aysén and improvement of the policies to face the environmental crisis in Chiloé), residents of cities and towns set up barricades, blocked roads, and occupied strategic points within two or three days. In Chiloé, interviewees used expressions such as “in one or two days” and “it was speedy” to describe how quickly the collective action started after the toxic algae bloom had made the extraction of marine resources impossible. Antonio (60, Castro) explained: “Everything was so fast, from one moment to another. Fishermen began the strike, with four or five barricades [in the city of Castro]. Later, it was the same in Quellón, Chonchi, Ancud [other towns in Chiloé]. Immediately we had 10 or 12 barricades.” In Aysén, a group of social actors gathered on the “Regional Board” (Mesa Regional) to address the main local struggles and produced a “petition list” (petitorio) for the National Government. This document demanded fuel subsidies, enhanced public services, and more regional autonomy and obtained social support immediately. In the words of Claudio (47, Chile Chico), “after reading the petition list, people gathered and blocked the roads.”

Strikes in Aysén and Chiloé implied stopping all regular activities, wholly or partially, and isolating vast territories from the rest of the country. Strikes involved fast actions at different sites that did not have any explicit previous coordination. Instead, they were unprompted, as Luis
(65, Coyhaique) expressed: “[P]eople took the initiative. The Regional Board never asked for the strike; that idea emerged from the people.” Similarly, Rolando (37, Coyhaique) agreed: “People spontaneously blocked the roads.”

Communities went on strike to make social unrest visible, to attract the attention of the national government, and to foster political negotiations. Gabriel (35), a local workers’ union leader from Chile Chico, provided an interesting perspective: “It was like locking yourself in your house and turning the light off to protest. It was a huge regional hunger strike.”

Additionally, the strikes were complex actions that implied the control of space and reflected the territoriality of the communities; they were the expression of the communities’ power in that space, as Allen (2003) and Aliste (2010) suggest for different social actors. Spaces controlled by social movements were different from the territory controlled and organized by the Chilean state, and during the strike, communities deployed specific spatial practices (Lefebvre 1991) that involved dynamics framed by barricades and blockades.

Mariela (31, Coyhaique) was surprised by the level of social organization: “The entire Aysén Region stopped, from the smallest village, Lago Verde. All towns and villages had their barricade at the town entrance; it happened everywhere.” Remarkably, even peaceful communities, with no history of social mobilization, joined the strike, as Mario (35, Coyhaique) pointed out: “The entire Region was mobilized, from Melinka in the north to Villa O’Higgins in the south. People took over and occupied the streets and public space of their towns.”

The installation of a large number of barricades in urban areas complemented the occupation of roads in small villages. In the Aysén Region, and specifically in the two main cities (Coyhaique and Puerto Aysén), residents set up barricades everywhere inside the urban area. In Chiloé, the citizens of the three main cities (Ancud, Castro, and Quellón), resisted at
barricades for two weeks. The number of protestors was also significant, as Aliro (30, Ancud), a resident of Chiloé, stated: “In the most active moments there were 11 or 12 barricades inside the city, organized day and night. Each barricade was made up of up to 60 people participating.”

The city of Puerto Aysén was the place where demonstrations were most continuous, organized, and massive. All interviewees highlighted the extraordinary level of organization and resistance in Puerto Aysén, an excellent example of social mobilization and cohesion. Luis (65, Coyhaique) observed: “In Puerto Aysén, almost every block had a barricade. It was almost impossible to drive a car in the city.”

Initially, barricades allowed protestors to control the space, which helped them establish a different sense of territory and impede the usual influxes of people, traffic, commodities, and fuel. The explicit goal was to stop the territory and its everyday functioning but also to block territorial control by regular institutions (such as the Chilean state, the Regional Government, and the police). In the period of social mobilizations, the meaning of territory as space under control of the state, as defined by Gottmann (1973), was replaced by a more vivid, contested notion of territory. Communities controlled and built a new territory that was both materialized by barricades and legitimized by massive social participation.

Barricades as sites of political action, then, operated at two levels: the regional, disconnecting the Region (in Aysén) or the Province (in Chiloé) from the rest of the country, and the urban, thwarting the free flow of traffic inside the cities while establishing spaces of political expression and massive demonstrations. The next section examines what kinds of points were occupied by barricades to control the territory; later, it appraises how communities used their territorial knowledge to face the response of the Chilean state.
4.2.2. **Blocking crucial points to stop the region**

As previously analyzed, social movements took control of their territories by disconnecting the Region or Province from the rest of the country. To achieve this goal, mobilized people occupied two types of sites: (1) the points of entrance to the towns and villages that connected them to other settlements; and (2) specific transport infrastructure, including ferry docks, harbors, airports, and bridges. The level of success of these actions, as stated above, was directly fostered by the geographic configuration of these territories, especially by its natural isolation.

During the strikes of 2012 in Aysén and 2016 in Chiloé, every city, town, and village occupied the roads that connected to other areas. In small villages, after building a single barricade on the main road, traffic was effectively stopped. Examples of this kind of actions happened in Melinka, La Junta, Puyuhuapi, Mañihuales, Cochrane, Cerro Castillo, and El Blanco in the Aysén Region (Map 5) and also in Cucao and Chacao in Chiloé (Map 6). In larger settlements, demonstrators blocked every road exiting the cities. In Chile Chico, a small city located near Argentina, the local community occupied the international route, as Lucy (52) described: “We started to occupy the road on the route that connects our town to the west (to other Chilean towns). At first, such occupations were simply symbolic, just the flag and people around. Later, we blocked the road that connects to Argentina.”

In the Aysén Region, people installed barricades on bridges and crossroads to stop the inter-urban movements and delay the action of the police. Ciro (67, Lago Atravesado) stated: “The police could not come from the airport because there were three barricades: the first one outside the airport, the second one in El Blanco, and the last one at the entrance to Coyhaique. At these barricades, no one was allowed to pass through.” Simmilarly, Mary (55, Puerto Aysén) said: “There were barricades everywhere to impede the access of the special police forces.”
Map 5: Location of Barricades in the Aysén Region (February 2012)

Source: Prepared by the author
Map 6: Location of Barricades in Chiloé (May 2016)

Source: Prepared by the author
The occupation of bridges and roads was also fundamental for gaining control of the territory, as Mario (35, Coyhaique) explained: “People occupied the bridge in Puerto Aysén. All commodities, food, and fuel had to pass over that bridge. When protesters cut off the bridge, the entire Aysén Region became economically isolated.”

In most cases, demonstrators at the barricades allowed emergency vehicles to pass through or defined some specific hours to let the traffic through. This action allowed volunteers, spokespeople, and regular citizens to move between different places. As Fernando (55, Coyhaique) said, “when negotiations started, protesters began to make barricades more open, and allowed the cars to move every hour.”

The occupation of airports and maritime infrastructure (ramps and docks) was also a necessity for controlling territories, especially in Chiloé. Here, mobilized residents set up barricades on the ramps and harbors, obstructing the functioning of the ferries, especially in the Chacao Channel that separates Chiloé Island from the mainland. In Aysén, protestors occupied the accesses to the regional airport in Balmaceda and the principal harbors of the Region, Chacabuco and Cisnes. Interviewees referred to the occupation of these crucial points: Mario (35, Coyhaique) explained that “fishermen occupied the small airport of Melinka”, and Gabriel (35, Chile Chico) added: “[W]e seized the international road and the ramp on the lake so the ferry could not work.” Mariela (31, Coyhaique) pointed out that “people just did it; they took and occupied sites. In Villa O’Higgins, protestors blocked the small local airport, which was controversial, as they did not allow Andrónico Luksic’s private jet to take off. He is the wealthiest landowner in the area, and one of the richest men in Chile. He could not travel to Santiago for a couple of days.”
By taking over these specific, crucial points, social movements controlled vast territories for lengthy periods and interrupted the regular activities. Laura (46, Coyhaique) explained the difficulties of getting around in a landscape where barricades abounded: “My family and I were on vacation in central Chile. We had to come back, and we initially decided to take Road 7, but there were blockades at several points. Therefore, we took the 7 Argentinian route.” Danilo (37, Coyhaique) agreed: “I arrived at Balmaceda airport, and there was no transfer service; there was no way to travel to Coyhaique. The road had a blockade at El Blanco, a small village between the airport and the city.”

For weeks the Chilean state could not exercise its territorial power in Chiloé or Aysén, and communities deployed a *territorial* power, as suggested by Allen (2003). By occupying roads, bridges, and harbors, communities built their own, specific territoriality (Aliste 2010; Antonsich 2011; Raffestin 1984; 2012).

The national government did not predict the level of success of the strike conducted by mobilized residents of Aysén and Chiloé. Since communities knew their territories from experience and everyday routines, they cooperated in a remarkably efficient way. In contrast, the Chilean government’s reaction was slow, and the state forces needed weeks to return the territories to normality. In all this process, protesters’ knowledge about their territory mattered in the conflict. The next subsection, therefore, examines how mobilized communities benefited from their territorial knowledge in confronting the Chilean state.

### 4.2.3. Local knowledge in controlling territories

From the beginning, communities were aware of their tactical advantage, due to knowing and understanding their territories better than the police or national officials. Many interviewees referred to such knowledge: “We had the advantage because we knew our place, our territory,
and the police forces did not” (Rosa, 60, Coyhaique). Residents, then, used their knowledge to
decide their action, for example, on the location of urban barricades, as Tamera (35, Chile Chico)
described: “Coyhaique has three main avenues connecting downtown and the east zone, and we
had to block each one of them.” In Chiloé, Antonio (60, Castro) commented: “[W]e built too
many barricades at too many sites, everywhere; therefore, the police would have to divide
forces.” In this situation, protesters changed the location of barricades when they were not
achieving the goal of stopping the traffic. Orlando (55, Ancud) explained: “We saw that some
cars avoided the barricade by using a path on the beach; our barricade was in a difficult point to
control. Then, we moved the barricade to the bridge, where the road is more controllable.”

In addition to the quick, initial move, mobilized communities waited for the state’s
response and took strategic decisions ahead of an eventual reaction. They followed the news by
listening to the local radio stations’ news about the movements of the police forces. In Aysén and
Chiloé, the national government sent police troops to regain control, but the police action was
completely different in each case.

In Chiloé, mobilized residents had face-to-face discussions with the police. In such
dialogues, locals often mentioned their advantage due to their knowledge of the territory. Adolfo
(37, Ancud) explained that “people found policemen in rural areas, hidden, trying to avoid the
roads, and people told them: You are passing through our backyards; we know this area because
this is our home. We know our countryside, our lands.” Beyond these encounters, there was no
police repression in Chiloé.

In contrast, police forces repressed the social movement in Aysén, and regional
communities reacted by increasing the number of barricades. Celeste (42, Coyhaique) remarked:
“People from Puerto Aysén told us that they had a complicated situation because of police action; so, we had to organize more barricades here in Coyhaique, to divide police forces.”

Mobilized communities in both Aysén and Chiloé were successful in implementing strategic actions to tackle problems that emerged during the strikes. They were able to react by moving people from one site to another and reorganizing their forces in different spaces. Most of these actions were spontaneous, after brief debates among participants. Their level of success lies in the previous territorial information that communities had. As the theory suggests, according to Lefebvre (1991) and others scholars (Merrifield 1993), dialectic relationships emerged between mobilized communities, the perceived space expressed in the collective territorial knowledge, and the lived space associated with the material action over the territory.

The ideas presented above suggest the importance of the control of vast territories for social movements. The next section appraises the effects of social mobilization at the site level, involving a discussion about the significance of barricades as integrative and democratic places, fundamental for the cohesion of the social movements.

4.3. **Barricades as ephemeral places**

It is evident that in Chiloé and Aysén, barricades were not only strategic tools that helped control territories but also socially integrative places that gathered diverse participants, thereby producing political reflection. The barricade became an agora where the mobilized community debated the collective struggles affecting the areas and causing social discomfort: the demands for fuel subsidies, improved public services, and more political autonomy in the case of Aysén and the environmental crisis caused by the algae bloom and the salmon activity in Chiloé. However, participants also held debates (and made decisions) about the logistical problems of the strike, such as how to control areas and how to distribute food and other supplies, as well as
how to organize the social movement itself. Thus, barricades became the core of the social mobilization, a feature coherent with most theoretical approaches addressing this kind of collective action (Bos 2005; Estrada Saavedra 2010; Fluri 2011; Hazan 2015).

A typical barricade, as explained by interviewees in Aysén and Chiloé, consisted of accumulations of wood, tree branches, roofing sheets, garbage, old tires, debris, and other materials gathered by protestors on the streets, from one sidewalk to the other, blocking the traffic. Close to this barricade, there was a bonfire (fogón or fogata) burning day and night, fueled by wood and debris. Protestors gathered around the fire, something that was natural for them, considering the cold nights in Chiloé and Aysén and the fact that all families in these areas have fireplaces in their homes. The barricades also had chairs, tables, and pots for cooking, boiling water, and preparing coffee, tea, and mate, the typical drink of Patagonia and Chiloé.

The actual number of barricades built during the mobilizations of Aysén and Chiloé is challenging to calculate, but it was over two dozen in each study case. The barricades attracted diverse groups of people, including families, fishermen, miners, students, public workers, housewives, professionals, and even children. In the city of Puerto Aysén, interviewees claimed that protestors installed barricades on most urban corners (Map 7), and they lasted for weeks, despite “the rain or the bad weather” (Fernando, 55, Coyhaique). Moreover, most interviewees emphasized the high number of participants gathered at the barricades. Cristian (26, Castro) commented that “at every barricade, there were at least 50 people during the daytime, and 20 people at night. Sometimes, people gathered in numbers that were hard to believe, like 200 people during the day and 100 at night.”
Map 7: Schematic Location of Barricades in the City of Puerto Aysén (February 2012)

Source: Prepared by the author
The most often repeated expressions that interviewees used to describe the barricades were “beautiful” or “wonderful,” and all articulated how powerful the experience of being part of such a political action was. Julio (43, Coyhaique) said: “It was so good feeling that my neighbor was my partner at the barricades, my equal. If now we see each other on the street, we greet with a complicit smile; we mobilized together.” The feeling of joy and pride was not only communicated through words: Most interviewees smiled, and in general their faces expressed happiness, something not necessarily expected when many people think about barricades as places of conflict. Adolfo (37, Ancud) explained: “We found each other, during the march, the protest, at the barricades; those were places for encounters, and community re-encounters.”

As previously mentioned, residents stayed for days and nights at the barricades, talking, cooking, drinking *mate*, sharing testimonies, and debating about the causes of the social mobilization thereby rendering their demands more precise and integrated. In so doing, participants created an essential social and political place that, despite its short life, became a relevant site for collective memory, a unique social and political experience of a communitarian organization.

Other interviewees emphasized the sense of solidarity that emerged among demonstrators at barricades, something addressed by several scholars (Hunt and Benford 2004; Fluri 2011; Traugott 2010). Julio (43, Coyhaique) commented: “I felt part of a massive movement. It was perfect for my soul being part of a bottom-up social movement. We were one during demonstrations, distributing water, keeping order on the streets, and preventing hoarding; it was beautiful being part of this social dialogue.” Similarly, Rosa (53, Puerto Aysén) added: “We were all one; we all helped each other. What we lived these days was very beautiful; such a good coexistence. It marked us for the future.”
Solidarity also emerged when scarcity of food became relevant after a few days of mobilization. Most participants happily remembered the collaborative environment built during mobilizations. Ana (58, Ancud) remarked: “People came and gave us food. Later we all started to help other barricades, sharing bread and milk.” Ciro (67, Lago Atravesado) added: “People brought food and water to the barricade I was participating in. [There was] much solidarity, people gave us lamb, bread, potatoes, spaghetti.” Similarly, Mary (55, Puerto Aysén) pointed out that “people spent the night at the barricades until dawn; so, I brought them coffee at night [...]. If a compañero de barricada [barricade mate] did not have a certain thing, we collected it and gave it to him.”

Additionally, there were two specific remarkable features of barricades in both Aysén and Chiloé: (1) their interclass character as places of social inclusion where most people and their families participated; and (2) their role as contemporary ephemeral agoras—political places where the assemblies worked, built new ideas, shared knowledge, and took decisions during mobilizations. The following subsections scrutinize these features.

4.3.1. **Barricades as socially integrative places**

At first, barricades were strategic tools that were helpful for achieving provincial and regional strikes in Chiloé and Aysén, respectively. In Chiloé, communities demanded that the national government take more effective action to deal with the environmental crisis generated by the toxic algae bloom in 2016 and the subsequent economic problems caused by the impossibility of extracting and commercializing marine resources. In Aysén, most supported the petition list that the Regional Board presented to the National Government, which included demands for fuel subsidies, improved public services, regional autonomy, and the end of the historical neglect of the Region, among other aspects.
In both cases, barricades were actions taken within public space. They all implied some level of aggressive occupation that blocked the free transit of cars, buses, and trucks. However, an exciting fact detailed by interviewees was the relatively peaceful environment at the barricades. In Chiloé, mobilizations were peaceful during the entire provincial strike, with no clashes against police forces. In Aysén, despite some days of violent repression, barricades were surrounded by a calm atmosphere for weeks, in which participants mostly shared *mate* and food next to the bonfire.

Mariela (31, Coyhaique) explained: “[B]arricades here were the places where elders and folks talked. In Santiago, you see that barricades were 100% violence and confrontation. Here it was different.” In the case of Chile Chico, located near the Argentinian border, there was even some complicity between the mobilized community and the local police, as Gabriel (35) explained: “It was always peaceful here. There was no confrontation against the police. We stayed day and night at the barricade, taking turns. At night, we drank *mate* and talked to the local policemen while they took care of us.”

Another significant element provided by testimonies collected during fieldwork— in Coyhaique, Chile Chico, Puerto Aysén, Lago Atravesado, Ancud, and Castro—referred to the participants themselves: Interviewees in Aysén expressed a family-friendly environment at barricades located in both urban and rural areas. Danilo (37, Coyhaique) commented that in the village of El Blanco, “the road was cut, and there was a very family-like barricade with men, women, elders, kids, and dogs.” Similarly, Ricardo (39, Coyhaique) added that “at 11 pm, during the night, people were drinking *mate*, making jokes, laughing, and cooking next to the barricade. I mean, large barricades, from one sidewalk to the other, entire families with kids, laughing.”
In Chiloé, images of families marching on the streets and gathering at the barricades also constituted a central feature of the mobilizations frequently mentioned by interviewees. Antonio (60, Castro) explained that “it was impressive, beautiful. Families made up the marches,” while Cristián (26, Castro), who actively stayed at one blockade, said: “I participated in a barricade, in the Chichería area. We always kept a kind of family spirit.” Orlando (55), a fisherman from Ancud, agreed: “The environment was like a family. Families came from different areas of the city.”

This family-friendly environment also helped establish a place for fraternity, in which many neighbors met old friends, former classmates, and workmates. Mobilized people greatly appreciated such a place for social encounters. Tamera (35, Chile Chico) explained: “We gathered, all neighbors, friends from childhood, we all knew each other from before.” Mariela (31, Coyhaique) said that “at the barricades, you could find some old friend that you had not seen for a long time.”

In the moments when barricades were peaceful, family-friendly, and fraternal, they presented two remarkable features: (a) they were loaded with cultural meanings and (b) they were places of social integration. Thus, despite their short duration, they became actual places, involving meaning, feeling, and a sense of place as presented by scholars (Agnew 2003; Massey 1994, 2002; Buttimer and Seamon 1980). The next subsection addresses these two features.

a) The symbolic and cultural meaning of barricades

In Chiloé and Patagonia, as explained in Chapter 3, there were at least three key elements that gathered people, family, and friends together in everyday activities: the fireplace, mate, and food. The kitchen, typically one with a wood stove, is the core of family homes. In rural life, outdoor bonfires are also an essential element of social and familial interaction. Thus, during
mobilizations, barricades provided a communitarian bonfire located in public space. Barricades were also a notable expression of local culture, as a barricade echoed the Patagonian tradition of the kitchen wood stove and the bonfire as sites of social encounter.

Alicia (45), from Ancud, remembered: “At 3 am, at night, we had everything at the barricade: fire, coffee, bread, everything.” For Cristián (26) from Castro, “food was crucial” to keep people mobilized and gathered at the barricade day and night. Several testimonies regarding the significance of sharing food and mate while talking for hours reflect the general “sense of place” linked to historical and cultural roots, as suggested by Said (2003). Barricades, then, turned into communitarian homes, constructed around the fireplace, the mate, and the food:

People started to do “mateadas” (drinking mate in groups). It was something so simple, but, for people here, drinking mate is something very significant, it is more than just sharing a cup of tea. Mate takes them to their history, their roots. It is the same situation with the wood cooking stove, which is far more than just a thing for heating and cooking; it has a deeper meaning for people here. The barricade was burning all night and day, the whole week. It was like that ancient fire, like being next to the wood cooking stove at home. (Mariela, 31, Coyhaique)

Sharing mate, cooking, and having dinner near the barricade reinforced the intimate, family-like bonds. Numerous women participated in collecting and preparing food for those staying at the barricades. Mery (52) in Coyhaique said: “I cooked for mobilized people; I went several times to the barricades to cook lunch.” Similarly, Lucy (52) from Chile Chico remarked: “We took turns, cooked, organized marches and other activities.”

Therefore, barricades expressed cultural elements of local communities. They were organized in specific cultural and material contexts, building a temporary or ephemeral place full of meaning (Clay 1989; Olszewski and al-Nahar 2016) where people felt comfortable and at home. All these conditions provided an actual place where fraternal ties were reinforced and social organization emerged fluidly.
b) Places for social integration

The second relevant aspect of barricades in the case studies was their socially integrative character. People of different ages, educational level, income, and ethnicity gathered at the barricades. Many interviewees expressed their surprise at the presence of protestors from different political perspectives and educational backgrounds, participating and debating in these places of encounter, and even confronting the police:

I had never imagined people from Coyhaique facing the police on the streets and throwing stones. We had a barricade in which public workers from the municipality and other public services participated. (Laura, 46, Coyhaique)

I even found people that I know are from the political right-wing, but they were marching next to me. (Soledad, 50, Coyhaique)

In the case of Aysén, where most demands were highly diverse but already part of a petition list from the beginning of the mobilizations, protestors from different backgrounds quickly joined the movement. This diversity was visible at the barricades:

Most of the time, there was no dissidence here. At the community level, they were all paddling in the same direction; and that is the reason for the movement’s motto, “Your problem is my problem.” Everybody realized that the things your neighbor was asking for were the same things you were asking for. (Mariela, 31, Coyhaique)

In Chiloé, demands that emerged from within the fishermen’s community quickly mobilized the rest of provincial society. Thus, barricades became places of civic encounter, solidarity, and interclass interaction. Aliro (30, Ancud) believed that the barricade “was a place for fraternal encounter among all groups of society.” Antonio (60, Castro) added that “barricades were not only under the control of fishermen; folks from poor neighborhoods came and joined in, intending to collaborate, with boundless generosity.” Other participants emphasized the socially integrative value of barricades:
What happened here in Chiloé was exceptional; there were marginalized people meeting intellectuals. Barricades were places for encounter and fraternity: a teacher, a nurse, a young guy that could look like a delinquent, they all acted as one. It was a space without social classes. The fact that you had university studies to do did not mean that you could not move a tire. That kind of horizontal coexistence was powerful. I know about barricades in other places, but here it was different, it had an interclass character.

(Cristián, 26, Castro)

Barricades were successful at bringing people together by providing food to share and *mate* to drink, as well as a sense of solidarity and collective meaning by establishing a place for social encounter. Since barricades did not exclude anyone and allowed social and even political diversity, they became places for progressist transformation, as Massey suggested (1994). A diverse number of experiences at the barricade, as a unique and ephemeral place of both political action and social regeneration, had strong effects on numerous participants. Aldana (34, Ancud) claimed: “At the barricades, you met many people you had not met before. Moreover, barricade friends are my friends, even today.”

In light of the ideas above, it is evident that the social movements of Aysén and Chiloé accomplished building barricades as places in the whole progressive meaning of the concept: emotional, integrative, and diverse. Such characteristics, despite the temporal and ephemeral existence of the barricades, led to profound effects on the lives of the participants. However, beyond the socially integrative aspects analyzed above, the barricades also provided a valuable political site for public debate, as the following subsection explains.

4.3.2. **Barricades as sites of assembly**

While barricades were the material elements used to discontinue regular activities within the territory, they also provided remarkable sites for public debate and collective learning. Since most commerce, services, and workplaces had closed, the everyday lives of residents changed; they had to halt their usual routines, which provided time to participate in the assemblies and
barricades. Once a barricade was set up and the fire started to burn, people began talking, exchanging information, and debating, thereby engaging in the typical dynamics of blockades everywhere (Traugott 2010). As Mariela (31, Coyhaique) explained, “barricades gave the space to stop, just imagine: the entire Region paralyzed for a month.” Antonio (60, Castro) expressed a similar view: “There were meetings every afternoon, and then people marched to the barricade located at the north entrance to the city. There was a stage there, and people gave speeches.” Finally, Raúl (45, Coyhaique) felt that barricades established spaces “for communication and conversations.”

Most interviewees emphasized the fact that people engaged in deep, meaningful conversations at the blockades. For instance, Aliro (30, Ancud) said: “My barricade was full of long discussions and reflection.” His testimony suggests that everyone had permission to talk and express opinions, ideas, and feelings. There were no assigned leaders at the barricades, and demonstrators worked with extraordinary horizontality. By debating and communicating, people established a place where the barricade and assembly merged. These sites were not only sites for action, but places for collective thinking:

There were assemblies on the streets too, where people gathered, talked, and decided how to organize protests or other actions. […] They said: “Look, I think we can do this…,” “tomorrow we can do that…” “We could do this to protect ourselves…” People at the barricades would also call the radio station and propose an activity, and people from other barricades would reply. (Celeste, 42, Coyhaique)

However, it was not only the specifics of the struggle that were the subject of discussion at the barricades. Participants also learned from testimonies of diverse actors and individuals who shared their everyday experiences about broader problems, current and historical, and developed collective spatial knowledge as well as informed political opinions:

I met salmon factory workers, divers, and they informed me how these companies work, so I started to build my opinion. Later, other people arrived with more information, and everybody shared their histories, their problems. At the barricades, people would put
different information on the table so each one could build their version of Chiloé’s problems. (Aldana, 34, Ancud)

Therefore, a collective learning, a communitarian production of knowledge, occurred at the barricades—a clear example of the ideas of Eyerman and Jamison (1991), who conceived of social movements as producers of collective knowledge. Participants learned from others’ experiences, became informed about hidden problems, and reached their conclusions. Interviewees vividly described this process in the case of Chiloé:

Our barricade was a school, a family. We talked to everybody about the value of our nature. We said that we were all responsible for what happened to our sea. People came to our barricade; they listened to us, and we talked. (Luisa, 48, Ancud)

As mentioned above, for long periods, blockades and barricades were peaceful sites where family and friends shared food and beverages and spent time together. In these progressive and integrative places, communities created a collective agency, as indicated by Agnew (2003)—diverse individuals met one another, exchanged experiences, debated, made decisions, and acted upon the space. The materiality provided by the barricades (fire, food) was central in the production and organization of these places (Jones 2015; Agnew 2013), and the alteration of the routine offered some space and time for political action and collective reflection.

Thus, barricades transformed the entire space, altering streets, squares, and institutional buildings. Faced with these conditions, the state aimed to return public space to normality, and its actions had substantial consequences in the case studies. The following section appraises, on the one hand, the effects of the strikes on public space beyond the barricades and, on the other, how the Chilean state reacted to reclaim control of public space.

4.4. Public space: the mobilized territory and the state’s repression

The regional and provincial strikes deeply affected the routines of residents within these territories. The shortage of food and fuel, the impossibility of moving from one town to another,
and the difficulty of getting around inside the cities were some of the adverse effects that everybody faced in Chiloé and Aysén. Mobilizations also included several other activities in public space that complemented the barricades: marches, cultural and musical performances, and the temporary occupation of symbolic points. This section describes how these collective actions altered public space. The first part identifies and analyzes how assemblies built an exceptional type of space, the *mobilized territory*. The second part examines the reaction of the Chilean state in confronting these mobilized territories to re-establish a status of normality, which included negotiation (in Chiloé) and police repression (in Aysén).

### 4.4.1. Actions in public space beyond the barricades

In Chile, displays of political action in public space are deeply rooted in the political tradition. For many activists, the last public words of the President Salvador Allende, in the morning of September 11th, 1973 (during Pinochet’s *coup d’état*), constitute the ultimate form of such expression. Allende proclaimed: *Más temprano que tarde, de nuevo se abrirán las grandes alamedas por donde pase el hombre libre para construir una sociedad mejor* (“Sooner rather than later, the great avenues will open again, where free men will walk to build a better society”).

For many Chileans, then, demonstrations in public space are a powerful political tool for expressing social discomfort; public space is a contingent political site, as Salcedo (2002) suggests. The cases of communities mobilized by social assemblies in Chiloé and Aysén were not an exception: Massive, crowded marches were conducted every day in the main cities. As part of a political ritual, during the strikes, demonstrators would go out onto the streets, march, sing, and attend cultural events organized by the movement.

Using public space to manifest political ideas is not unusual in Chiloé and Aysén, but since demonstrations were so massive and frequent during the strikes, the community eventually
met again on the streets. As Soledad (50, Coyhaique) said, “citizens occupied the whole public space with large demonstrations every day.” Many other testimonies also included the relevance of marches and cultural acts in public space:

Barricades blocked the streets, so we all walked. It just happened. At the beginning there were 50 people on the streets, then 100, later 200, and so on. Artists and musicians visited the city; we organized cultural activities in the central square, and people were part of that, everybody [was] singing. (Soledad, 50, Coyhaique)

I participated in marches and demonstrations and also attended assemblies of my neighborhood association. There also were two huge rallies in Coyhaique’s Armory Square, with music. (Mario, 35, Coyhaique)

Mobilization was incredible; people were very supportive. There were more than 2,000 people marching on the streets! (Ciro, 67, Lago Atravesado)

In Chiloé, massive, peaceful marches were also a central aspect remarked on in detail by interviewees:

There were 15 days of social mobilization, with people demonstrating every day. There were two marches every day at 2 pm and 7 pm. In my view, noon marches were a little smaller, with 2,000 people, while 7 pm marches were at least twice as large, with 4,000 and even 6,000 people. (Luciano, 57, Castro)

There was an enormous social effervescence: four or five very massive marches; nothing like that had ever happened here before. (Aliro, 30, Ancud)

In addition to the massive occupation of public space, some iconic places became central for specific demonstrations or civic organizations. For instance, Fernando (55, Coyhaique) explained that in Puerto Aysén and Coyhaique, citizens “gathered at two main meeting points: the headquarters of the Public Workers Union in Coyhaique and the building of the Chamber of Commerce in Puerto Aysén.” These locations, despite their private owned character, became open, public places for the social movement and fundamental for political coordination.

A report from the National Institute of Human Rights (INDH) registered several demonstrations on the streets during the strike in Aysén. They included velatones (lighting of candles on the streets to express grief over police repression) and cacerolazos (consisting of loud...
noise made by banging pots, pans, or other utensils). The INDH also reported massive protests in front of the Regional and Provincial Government buildings (INDH 2012a, 12). Evidently, demonstrators exercised the spatial citizenship proposed by Martin (2015) by actively occupying all public spaces, especially those surrounding iconic places of institutionalized power, the police station, and government buildings:

Here in Coyhaique, we occupied the local police station to express our rage against the violent repression by the police. (Fernando, 55, Coyhaique)

We always marched in front of the police station, but the police did not come out. We used to sing the national anthem, painted murals, and gathered in front of the Regional Government building. (Ciro, 67, Lago Atravesado)

At the same time, the central squares of the main cities of Chiloé and Aysén became the sites for organizing and expressing cultural activities (such as music performances), as well as places where leaders delivered political speeches. Ciro (67, Lago Atravesado) reported: “In the center of the square, there was the stage where citizens gave speeches. We gathered there. However, anyone could talk, and musical groups played.”

In conclusion, it is notable how communities occupied and utilized public space during mobilizations and how they transformed it into a stage for their activities. Assemblies used the public space thoroughly, as several scholars who analyze social movements in different contexts have suggested (Blummer 2006; Davis et al. 2005; Della Porta and Diani 2006; Martin 2015; McAdam and Scott 2005; Zirakzadeh 2006). Moreover, entire urban areas in Aysén and Chiloé modified their regular routines; everything worked differently during the strikes, producing an exceptional space under communitarian control that the following section examines.

4.4.2. The mobilized territory produced by the social movements

Mobilized communities, by paralyzing an entire territory, building barricades, and occupying the streets, squares, parks, and all public spaces, constituted an exceptional space that this research
calls mobilized territory. Difficulties in moving between and inside the cities caused by barricades, and the subsequent general shortage of goods, food, and fuel, explain its exceptional character. These difficulties forced communities to organize, share supplies, and help those in more critical situations. Additionally, the fuel shortage forced residents to leave cars at home and share transportation when necessary. These situations occurred in both Chiloé and Aysén:

People began to gather and distribute foods and other supplies. For example, some informed us that the community of Cucao had a shortage, and we sent supplies. Here, people just walked, because there was no fuel. (Antonio, 60, Castro)

People started to express solidarity. With no cars, everything was different. People driving a small truck told pedestrians to get in the truck, for free. (Mario, 35, Coyhaique)

The absence of cars on the streets markedly transformed the usual dynamics of urban areas. Children started to play on the streets freely, people started to walk more, and for most, the general landscape recalled memories from past times when the city was smaller and few people owned cars. This mobilized territory, defined by the general strike and barricades, was a reminder of the close-knit dynamics of small towns from the past, where citizens interacted in public space while simultaneously integrating themselves within the whole community. Thus, public space became an integrative place, as Agnew (2003) suggests.

Furthermore, for many interviewees, residents felt safer in this mobilized territory:

“During mobilizations, authority disappeared, and at the same time, Chiloé was very safe,” explained Lorena (37, Castro). Ricardo (39, Coyhaique) argued that despite the absence of police in Puerto Aysén, when people took control, “the number of crimes dropped.” The perception of public space as unsafe, as Mitchell presented (2003, 2005), did not apply in the mobilized territories in Aysén and Chiloé, and interviewees were explicit about this situation:

There was no crime; we were happy, as in the past. Children played on the streets until [late at] night. We were all friends, brothers, and sisters. (Luisa, 48, Ancud)
We all walked, there was no public transportation, no cars, no fuel; so, by walking we re-encountered each other. Public space was our space, everybody’s space. (Rosa, 60, Coyhaique)

Therefore, the calm environment and the remarkable sense of space appropriation and safety constituted a central feature of these mobilized territories, as they also became a space of solidarity, cooperation, and coordination. Participants organized a system to collect and distribute groceries, cleaning products, first-aid supplies, and other essentials. In Puerto Aysén, the mobilized community developed a scheme of food distribution that included the help of local organizations, neighborhood associations, and ordinary citizens:

We went to the countryside and collected food; people gave us lettuces and other vegetables, and later we distributed such things to different neighbor associations in the city. We did the same with water and flour. Supplies from other areas arrived at the office of our Chamber of Commerce, and we sent them to the barricades. (Soledad, 50, Coyhaique)

We cooked here in the community center. Also, we gave lunches to everyone. People brought us food, and we cooked and shared lunches. Some people that came from other towns slept in our community center. (Hortensia, 52, Puerto Aysén)

Since institutions were not working, the community needed to organize different actions to keep the cities working: for instance, collecting garbage (in Coyhaique, Puerto Aysén, and Chile Chico) or taking care of children by taking turns among female neighbors (in Coyhaique).

In this mobilized territory, without any regular, formal institutions, communities had to organize, deploying remarkable abilities of communitarian self-government:

In those days, the national government was overwhelmed. I mean, the state was not working, but the city worked pretty well. The central committee of the assembly informed citizens of its decisions, and people followed these decisions, always supporting the movement. (Luis, 65, Coyhaique)

I never thought that I would see something like this: There were no police in Puerto Aysén, only barricades, and people on the streets. It was a self-government, people’s power. Citizens got the power, the control. (Ricardo, 39, Coyhaique)
There was a lot of community self-government. For example, we had to organize a system to collect the garbage in the town, and we had to get trucks and everything to move the garbage. (Tamera, 35, Chile Chico)

It was absolute self-organization. People organized through neighbor associations, and some of them cooked for everyone. (Soledad, 50, Coyhaique)

Exceptionally, communities in this mobilized territory needed to take specific actions to maintain control, since not everyone behaved appropriately. Some problems emerged, such as random acts of violence perpetrated by men under the influence of alcohol or youngsters who vandalized public infrastructure. However, in most cases, mobilized citizens controlled these situations efficiently:

There were a couple of security problems, mainly from drunk guys, who did what the national government wanted us to do: vandalism. However, communities controlled anyone who was involved in vandalism. (Tamera, 35, Chile Chico)

The community also condemned some situations where there were charges of abuse. For example, Mary (55), who lived in Puerto Aysén, arrived from Santiago during the period of mobilization. She had to travel one entire day from the regional airport to her home, a trip that usually takes an hour and a half. During the trip, she stopped at a barricade with a checkpoint. According to her testimony, participants at the barricade discovered that one truck driver was demanding a fee from passengers far more expensive than the regular prices that public transportation services charged. Thus, demonstrators at the blockade forced the driver to leave the truck and return the money. As soon as the rest of the participants noticed this, they organized transportation for passengers by asking other motorists to take them to the city. The driver and his truck were expelled from the site.
Mobilized communities controlled other situations through less explicit actions. In Puerto Aysén, some storeowners overpriced certain goods; residents spread the word about the situation and agreed not to buy anything from those stores anymore. In Coyhaique, a fuel truck that was being escorted by police vehicles crashed violently through a barricade, leaving some protesters wounded. So, the community decided to voluntarily cease purchasing fuel from the filling station served by that truck. No one did so until the end of the mobilizations. Given this context, many noticed that they were the actual rulers of this exceptional space, a specific mobilized territory they had built themselves. In Chiloé, Luisa (48) expressed some sense of achievement when she said: “We realized that we, the people, were ruling the island by ourselves, we lived our way. That was the best feeling for me.” In Aysén, Luis (65) pointed out: “In those days the social movement ruled the Region, literally. Therefore, instructions from the Regional Governor and other officials did not have any influence over people.”

However, a mobilized territory cannot last indefinitely. Regardless of the success in controlling the territory and community behavior, mobilized citizens and leaders started to feel exhausted. They all understood that self-government was temporary and that it emerged from the mobilizations, and in this regard, territorial control was a tool for negotiating with the national government and the national authorities, not a political goal in itself.

Therefore, besides the mobilization, leaders and spokespeople from social movements received different responses from the national government regarding how to address and solve the conflict. In general, the cases of Chiloé and Aysén manifested two opposite ways in which the Chilean state managed the conflict, and these reactions had different consequences for local spaces. The following subsection addresses this issue.
4.4.3. The state’s responses: from fragmenting negotiation to violent repression

During the regional strikes, the main goals of the Chilean state were returning to normality and regaining control of public space to provide normal conditions for the operation of the productive system. After analyzing several cases of social mobilization (see Chapter 2), it is apparent that in Chile every mediation process between mobilized communities and authorities started with the standard government response: The state does not negotiate under pressure from the streets.

However, in Aysén and Chiloé (as well as in other citizens’ assemblies) demonstrators stayed on the streets and maintained high levels of social support because of which, the national government was forced to negotiate. In the process, state authorities conducted diverse actions to face the regional or provincial strikes. In Aysén, the government repressed the social movement by sending special police forces. In Chiloé, there was no direct intervention by the police.

a) Chiloé: fragmenting negotiations

In May 2016, Michelle Bachelet, head of a center-left political coalition integrated by the centrist Christian Democrat party and the leftist Socialist and Communist parties, led the Chilean government. These last two political organizations had some ties to local communitarian organizations and workers’ unions in Chiloé and the rest of the country. Many militants and supporters of both socialist and communist parties had some presence within the fishermen’s unions, salmon industry workers’ organizations, and even in some environmental groups, as well as other actors involved in the mobilizations of Chiloé. In consequence, some political tensions emerged inside Chiloé’s social movement and in its relationship with the government. Those tensions led to at least two developments. First, Bachelet’s government quickly recognized the legitimacy of the movement as an expression of the broader community. In this case, officials of the national government partially understood what was happening in Chiloé and contacted local
leaders. Second, many organizations’ leaders expressed a dual loyalty to both the community and the government, something that many participants of the social movement sharply criticized.

The occupation of the streets and public space by mobilized communities fighting for issues related to social equality is always a dilemma for left-wing political parties since they usually agree with their demands. Besides, in Chile, most of the left-wing electorate is strongly opposed to police repression, which reminds them of the worst days of Pinochet’s dictatorship. In Chiloé, Michel Bachelet’s administration only mobilized a small group of policemen to the island but kept them in police stations. Bachelet’s government only dared to make a few strategic movements with the police but in general did not apply any police action against mobilized communities. In this case, government conducted an intricate process of negotiation that used two complementary strategies to demobilize people.

First, the government restricted the problem to a specific issue of artisanal fishermen’s communities, salmon factory workers, and their families. Since the problem was the impossibility of fishing in oceanic waters (due to algae bloom and red tide) and the massive dismissal of workers from the salmon industry, the government offered financial compensation to families. By doing so, the government prevented a debate on broader social and environmental problems, thereby focusing on a specific economic issue. Then, once fishermen and workers accepted compensatory payments, the mobilization would end. Second, the government used a territorial strategy and conducted independent and parallel negotiations in every commune in Chiloé. Bachelet’s officials never accepted a generalized provincial negotiation, and since every community was negotiating at the same time, local leaders did not know what was happening in other communes. This strategy rendered impossible the production of a provincial-level petition list, including broader and systemic demands. Thus, Chiloé’s social movement could not
organize itself across the entire archipelago, and after the first agreement in one municipality, the rest of the communities started to accept financial compensations.

As a result of this strategy, public space returned to normality, barricades were dismantled and cleaned up, and residents returned to their regular lives, with a shared sense of defeat. Without any bullets or any wounded people, the social movement and the mobilized territory built by the collective action in every city and town in Chiloé came to an end.

b) Hard negotiations and police repression in Aysén

In February 2012, when Aysén’s social mobilization began, Chile was governed by Sebastián Piñera. It was the first right-wing administration after the return to democracy in 1990, and the first conservative president democratically elected since 1958. In general terms, the government did not have any link to fishermen’s organizations, workers’ unions, or any other grassroots organization in the Aysén Region. Furthermore, parties supporting Piñera’s government did not have any substantial experience in dealing with mobilized communities or demonstrations on the streets.

In the previous year, 2011, secondary and university students have conducted massive strikes and demonstrations on the streets. In the same year, citizens from the Magallanes Region actively mobilized against the end of fuel subsidies promoted by the government, and after some repressive actions, Piñera’s administration dismissed this initiative (Romero 2015). However, these events were not opportunities for learning how to handle social protests. Therefore, when the social mobilization started in Aysén, the government’s initial reaction was not to recognize the legitimacy of the movement.

Besides, the citizens’ assembly of Aysén was conceived, from the beginning, as an integrative coalition of local organizations. Their petition list represented the interests of diverse
organizations across the Region: fishermen, salmon workers, public workers, environmental organizations, commerce institutions, neighbors’ associations, and others. Given this context, most of the community strongly supported these demands, and the government had no chance of conducting parallel negotiations.

After the first stage of rejecting the validity of the social movement, the government had to sit at the negotiation table, but at the same time, they tried to recover control of the territory by sending special police forces to Aysén, as well as by using a law against terrorist acts (approved under Pinochet’s dictatorship). All these actions were a clear manifestation of the hard face of the neoliberal state (the police state) described by Wacquant (2010), Wimmer (2014), and Hilgers (2012), among others. The level of violence in Aysén, according to several interviewees, had no precedents in local history. Many stated that the repression was far more violent than that exercised by the Pinochet dictatorship. The most extreme episodes of violence took place in the cities of Puerto Aysén and Coyhaique.

The National Institute of Human Rights (INDH) investigated and denounced the brutality shown by the Chilean police (Carabineros) in two official reports. The first report summarized a visit conducted by specialists between February 22nd and 25th, 2012, and described the violent environment in the cities of Puerto Aysén and Coyhaique. This document condemned the frequent, illegal, and disproportionate use of anti-riot rubber bullets by the police against protesters at the barricades or on the streets. In this action, the Carabineros hurt people with varying degrees of severity. Medical analysis of the wounded showed close-range shots directed at their bodies, in violation of police protocol. At least two participants were shot in their eyes, losing their vision permanently. In addition, INDH visitors were witnesses of the indiscriminate
use of tear gas and collected abundant testimonies claiming that police mistreated detainees. Of
the 77 arrested, 44 were hurt, including some minors (INDH 2012a, 21).

The second report, from March 2012, also criticized police repression by describing that, in Puerto Aysén, Police Special Forces shot tear gas and threw stones and other objects directly at houses and neighborhood backyards, severely affecting men, women, senior citizens, and children. Furthermore, in some cases, police forces entered private residences and performed illegal arrests. All this violence merely increased the number of wounded (INDH 2012b, 18–19).

Testimonies collected during fieldwork confirmed the INDH reports. All the good memories and sense of happiness expressed when interviewees explained the mobilized territory under community control immediately disappeared once they remembered the police repression. Many, even today, are still in shock from the level of violence they witnessed or suffered first-hand. Their testimonies were forthright: Interviewees confronted the police directly and threw stones; most ran away, many were arrested, while others helped the wounded on the streets. Interviewees recall the circumstances of police repression vividly:

Police Special Forces arrived, and they broke all the *piquetes*. They arrived via Puerto Cisnes, and they shot down that barricade in just 10 minutes; later in Mañihuales, a small town, they took 30 minutes to break the barricade, and finally, they arrived in Coyhaique, the capital city. (Rolando, 37, Coyhaique)

Police took advantage here in Puerto Aysén when most men had gone to a meeting in Coyhaique. At that moment, police got into the city and broke the barricades with heavy violence, hitting defenseless women. (Mary, 55, Puerto Aysén)

All interviewees in Puerto Aysén, including Fernanda (98), Mary (55), Hortensia (52), Arturo (68), and Nieves (84), spent a long time recounting their sad memories about the clashes with the police. They did not hesitate to label police repression as violent combat, a *war*. In the face of vicious assaults, the reaction by the community of Puerto Aysén was one of rage, especially after the police attacked women at the barricade. People burnt one of the Police buses
and turned a water cannon truck upside down. After two days of fighting, the mobilized community of Puerto Aysén succeeded and expelled the police from the city. The government did not regain control of Puerto Aysén until the end of negotiations on March 20th, 2012.

After that success, the mobilized community of this city had to take care of the wounded, as Hortensia (52, Puerto Aysén) remembered: “The neighborhood association office was not only a ‘hostel’ but also an actual infirmary to receive the injured. The girls from the city hospital brought us medical supplies to take care of the wounded. All of them volunteered; people even came from Coyhaique to help here.”

The police repression was also extremely violent in Coyhaique. When a massive police squad was approaching the city, many citizens went to the bridge on the Simpson river to block the main entrance to Coyhaique. However, the police forces were stronger and dispersed the protesters. After that, violence spread to the main avenue of Coyhaique as well as most neighborhoods of the city. In this situation, many rioted and vandalized chain stores and banks. Interviewees agreed on the fact that small commerce and neighborhood stores, usually owned by local citizens, were not vandalized.

Even during moments of hard repression, collective solidarity emerged. Franco (35), a local physician who explicitly shared ideas from the political right-wing, gave his testimony about how he went outside to help wounded people in Coyhaique and Puerto Aysén. His story is critical in understanding how Aysén’s society still operates in current times: as a community in which political ideologies do not split society entirely:

I had no problem with the protestors, although I do not share their ways. However, when I saw the violent confrontation that was happening, I could not ignore it. Later, when I knew about people being injured during confrontations, I went outside to give them medical assistance. I did not have good medical supplies, just alcohol, Band-Aids, and other first-aid implements. Later, with other doctors and nurses, we formed squads attending people around the city. (Franco, 35, Coyhaique)
After most clashes between the police and protesters were over, Piñera’s administration called for an “actual” final negotiation with the citizens’ assembly. The government called the leaders of the movement to a meeting in Santiago, in a direct conversation with the group closest to the president. The struggles on the streets ended, but Puerto Aysén remained under the control of the social movements. After negotiations, the mobilized leaders reached an agreement with the government.

Initially, the Aysén community celebrated the agreement cheerfully. The mobilized territory saw spontaneous celebrations, as mobilizations seemed successful. Later, many realized that the movement did not achieve most of its initial goals, and a sense of frustration emerged among citizens. Significantly, the idea of “winning but not winning” became a common sentiment among many of Aysén’s interviewees.

4.5. Conclusion: territory, place, and political action

This chapter consisted of an analysis of the relationships that emerged between mobilized communities and the regional space that worked around the material realm. Such relationships were a dialectic link, with mutual influences between mobilized communities and material space. Therefore, the specific spatial configuration of both the Aysén and Chiloé areas allowed local communities to take territorial control, and by doing so, they produced a different space, with its own specific configuration and temporality.

On the one hand, the complex topography of mountains, valleys, fjords, and channels and the subsequent difficulty of connecting Aysén to the rest of the country, helped mobilize people to control a vast territory through blocking key neuralgic points of transport infrastructure. On the other hand, the insular character of Chiloé brought similar conditions of potential isolation by occupying maritime infrastructure. In both cases, the material configuration of the landscape,
topography, and poor transport infrastructure constituted essential conditions that partially explain the level of success of the strikes conducted by communities.

Those who participated in social movements in Chiloé and Aysén placed their bodies on the front line of social mobilization. The occupation of crucial points (maritime ramps, airports, roads), the installation of barricades, and the continuous occupation of public space did not rely solely on tree branches, woods, old tires, and other materials but most importantly on citizens’ bodies. Additionally, mobilizations did not only occur in cyberspace or through social media discourses, but on the streets, in public squares, and on bridges. Strikes were a material occupation of the space by people, families, friends, and neighbors. Such action altered all everyday dynamics (fluxes of fuel, food, cars, trucks), and in so doing, a different, albeit ephemeral, mobilized territory emerged.

Territory as an analytical tool that involves various levels and layers of attachment, appropriation, organization, and control (beyond the state organization), as well as the stage of political struggles, helps inform us about the social mobilization in Chiloé and Patagonia. Mobilized communities understood from the beginning the relevance of territorial control for political action. Territory was not an empty container for them; territory was part of them, their history, their identity. Communities had an attachment to, and a special kind of appropriation of, these spaces. Furthermore, the main goal of the strikes, stopping the regular activities of the region, involved a temporal occupation of crucial points of territory. To achieve this goal, communities benefited from their spatial knowledge in deciding where to occupy and build barricades efficiently. The existence of a significant collective spatial knowledge explains the remarkable speed and success of the strikes of 2012 and 2016.
At the local or site level, barricades were the main materialization of social mobilization, and they played a double role: as sites where citizens exercised collective power by blocking traffic, but most importantly, as places for collective reflection, debate, social integration, and democratization. In Chiloé and Patagonia, barricades not only gathered together individuals but produced democratic communities. Wrapped in specific cultural elements that have substantial value for locals (fire, food, *mate*, coffee, and long conversations during cold nights), the barricades produced a feeling of solidarity and even safety, generating the conditions for a communal environment.

In accordance with this inclusive character, most of the time the barricades attracted men, women, senior citizens, children, entire families, and neighbors from different social classes and educational levels. Many people cooked, shared supplies, helped one another, and built a sense of community and place. However, the barricades were not only a familial place but also a site for the assembly: an actual political place for citizens. At the barricades, participants debated, shared experiences, talked about the contingencies and the conflict, and made decisions. Barricades in both Chiloé and Aysén became ephemeral places for the social movement that, while they did not last for extended periods, but only days or weeks, had profound effects on the communities.

Those who mobilized during the strikes not only built barricades but also occupied all the diverse elements of public space: parks, squares, avenues, and streets. Regular massive demonstrations on the streets, cultural events with music and speeches in public squares and parks, and symbolic actions in front of government buildings and police stations, among others, reflected a vibrant, active, and mobilized community. All these activities, besides the control of territory and the setting up of barricades, generated the mobilized territory in which both
community and space established a uniquely ephemeral form or organization. This mobilized territory was under the direct control of communities, without the influence of regular institutions. Although some disperse episodes of vandalism occurred, in most settlements in Chiloé and Aysén, residents displayed remarkably good civic behavior, and in the case of the city of Puerto Aysén, several actions of collective control and self-government manifested the will of a highly empowered and organized community.

Regional and urban landscapes were transformed entirely: With no cars on the streets, people walked everywhere, and children played in groups in public spaces all day long. The appearance of the landscape from old times emerged, with a slower temporality. The sense of peacefulness that interviewees expressed while recalling this period is noteworthy. Despite the alteration of everyday routines, a sense of community and solidarity reinforced the social mobilization during negotiations. In general, interviewees did not romanticize this mobilized territory. For them, it was a difficult time: There were shortages of food and fuel, and it was a tense time waiting for government and police reaction. However, these aspects do not negate the empowering feeling produced by the mobilized territory and the sense that the community had the power, at least for a short period.

The end of the mobilized territory and the strikes depended on the government reaction, and the national government presented different tactics in the two study cases. In Chiloé, the government opted for a divisive strategy, fracturing the social movement. They focused negotiations on financial issues and obstructed provincial-level negotiation. By using this approach, the Bachelet government fragmented the social movement and disarticulated the mobilized territory. In the case of Aysén, Piñera’s government applied direct police repression and brutal violence. Many men, women, and senior citizens were hurt, and barricades became
sites of an unequal war of bullets against stones. Through this action, the national government tried to take back control of territory. However, in Puerto Aysén, people expelled the police from the city. Under such circumstances, the government called for negotiation in Santiago. After an initial agreement, Puerto Aysén’s community felt a sense of significant political achievement and stopped the mobilization.

Although the movements did not meet all their specific demands, mobilized citizens in Chiloé and Puerto Aysén controlled and transformed their territories. They built mobilized territory disconnected from the rest of the country, with its specific, spontaneous organization, and its specific temporality. At the local level, barricades became ephemeral places with cultural meaning and social integration. For a short period, communities experienced self-government and ruled the streets and public space. With all these actions, communities shaped an entirely different space that, despite its ephemerality, generated significant effects on people and communities.

Beside these territorial issues, social movements need to address a different spatial feature that relates to the scalar scope of their action. During their actions, assemblies emerged at a specific spatial scale, but they had to conduct their claims through different scales, from local to national and even international. The next chapter addresses this topic by analyzing the different links that exist between social mobilization and the spatial scale.
Chapter 5. Social Movements, Spatial Scale, and Networks

It is urgent to establish solidarity networks and activate them, interlinking our fights, because, in the end, we always find common enemies and obstacles. (TSA 2013, 1).

On March 22nd, 2012, the website of the conservative Chilean newspaper El Mercurio reported:

“[Tonight], the Caupolicán Theater [one of the most iconic theaters in Santiago, the capital of Chile] was full to its maximum capacity with people attending a solidarity concert in support of the mobilized people of Aysén. The activity, organized by a group of artists and members of Aysén’s social movement, had the goal of collecting money to buy food to help the residents of that Region […]. Leaders of Aysén, headed by the spokesman Iván Fuentes, arrived at the theater after a meeting at La Moneda palace [Chile’s national government headquarters] with Prime Minister Rodrigo Hinzpeter. ‘When a few of us started this movement in Aysén, we never thought that we were going to mobilize Chile completely,’ said Fuentes” (El Mercurio 2012a).

Social movements need to build alliances and obtain the support of other social actors that work on different spatial scales. The epigraph of this chapter expresses the desire to achieve external solidarity, an explicit goal for the social movements’ three-day meeting called “We are all assembly” organized in San Antonio in 2013. Similarly, El Mercurio’s report addressed the sense of success among spokespeople of Aysén’s movement when they received support nationwide.

This chapter addresses the relationship between space and social movements as established around the concepts of scale and networks by examining how Chilean citizens’ assemblies conceived and used these aspects during their collective action. The first section of this chapter addresses the concepts of spatial scale as a social construction that reveals unequal social power relationships and social movements as complex networks of diverse actors. It also examines the ideas of networks and communication tools as crucially affecting social
movements. The second section presents findings about what geographic scales the Chilean social movements recognized during their organization. The third part refers to the action of social movements on the initial spatial scale of the struggle, in which they had to deal with social diversity and dissent. The fourth section explores the ability of social movements to move their political claims across scales. Finally, the last section summarizes the main conclusions of this chapter. In general, the findings show that scales are a core idea that exist for mobilized people, especially those scales engaged with the administrative organization of the Chilean state. Evidence also suggests that the ability to conduct political actions through different spatial scales correlates directly with the level of success of the citizens’ assemblies.

5.1. Theories about scale, networks, and communications

This section presents theoretically four conceptual aspects that help analyze the Chilean citizens’ assemblies: first, the general concept of scale; second, the ideas regarding the politics of scale; third, social movements as networks of actors; and finally, the diverse media employed to coordinate heterogeneous actors during social mobilizations.

5.1.1. Spatial scale

Spatial scale relates to many ideas, such as size, extension, level of detail, resolution, and hierarchy, among others. In current times, digital maps on smartphones provide a sense of spatial scale through the zoom-in and zoom-out tools, which show views from the entire world (global) to streets and buildings (local). However, the concept of spatial scale is far more complicated than the simple relation between the material world and digital maps.

According to Jessop et al. (2008), scale is one of the four dimensions that frame sociospatial relations, along with territory, place, and networks, and relates to the spatial extent of social processes. Sayre (2015) examines the epistemological and ontological character of the
spatial scale. Thus, scale-as-size implies an epistemological matter that depends on the analyst’s perspective. In contrast, scale-as-relation emerges from real attributes of the world and is an ontological character. Scale is also an “articulating, organizing element of spatial processes” (Perreault 2003b, 98). Finally, scale-as-level implies both epistemological and ontological dimensions (Sayre 2015, 507–10).

Several metaphors describe scale: hierarchical ladder, concentric circles, Russian matryoshka (nesting dolls), earthworm burrows, tree roots (Herod 2010; Herod and Wright 2002), and even mosaics (Brenner 2001). Among them, scholars emphasize the structure of nested hierarchies as the central idea in the definition of scale (Brenner 2001; N. Smith 1992; Sheppard and McMaster 2004; Swyngedouw 1997). This structure reflects the functioning dynamics of the material world since “socioecological processes give rise to […] a nested set of related and interacting socioecological spatial scales” (Swyngedouw and Heynen 2003, 912).

However, scale is not only the emergent property of socioecological dynamics, or the particular perspective that the observer takes to describe a specific phenomenon; spatial scale is also a social practice that people experience, build, and use in their everyday lives (S. Marston 2000; McCarthy 2005; Swyngedouw 1997). Spatial scale is, then, a flexible and fragmented socially constructed structure (A. Moore 2008). Scale emerges “through the exercise of power, as the outcome of negotiation, struggle, and compromise” (Perreault 2003b, 98); it is something “relational, contingent, and contested” (Neumann 2009, 404), and its structuration is not politically neutral (S. Marston, Jones, and Woodward 2005; Swyngedouw 1997).

Smith (1992) postulated that societies generate specific scales and that the capitalist mode of production is not the exception. Moreover, as capitalism produces scales, it simultaneously creates specific interscalar interactions (S. Marston 2000). Many authors address the scalar
division for capitalist societies. Moore (2008) recognizes three scales: the world-economy scale (global), the national scale (linked to the ideological realm), and the urban scale (experienced by people). Other authors identify four scales: local, regional, national, and global (Cox 2013; Perreault 2003b; Swyngedouw 1997). Neil Smith (1992) recognized five scales: the global (linked to financial capital and world markets), national (related to politics and military), regional (defined by economic activity and labor), local (defined by social reproduction), and home scale (associated with family reproduction). Later, feminist geography scholars, recognize the crucial role of the human body scale as relevant to analyze spatial dynamics (Dowler and Sharp 2001; S. Marston and Smith 2001; McDowell 1999). In this regard, body scale is critical for many political activism since “Bodies challenge and subvert state control of territory, become vulnerable to violence due to state bordering practices, and experience and produce smaller scale forms of territory” (S. Smith, Swanson, and Gökariksel 2016, 259).

All scalar levels operate in permanent interaction through economic and social processes (Swyngedouw 1997). The local scale seems diminished since “political and economic power is exerted nationally and globally [and] ‘the local’ is immobile and relatively disempowered” (Perreault 2003b, 99). As a result of this process, many local communities have reacted and organized collective actions and social movements “resisting globalization from below” (Martin 2015, 231).

For many scholars, neoliberal dynamics have changed the interaction of scalar levels. Brenner (1999) suggests that neoliberal globalization has decentered the role of the national scale (countries), causing an increased relevance of the subnational and supranational scales (e.g., the north of Italy and European Union, respectively). Moreover, there is evidence that urban scales,
especially in large metropolitan cities, are also emerging as critical levels for the reproduction of capital (Brenner and Theodore 2002; McCarthy 2005; N. Smith 1992).

Modern states are still relevant to the production of scale. Thus, Paasi (1991; 2009) explains that states design organizational levels through a number of stages (territorial shape, symbolic shape, institutional shape, and regional establishment), and local communities tend to adopt such administrative levels as part of their conception of spatial scales. Notwithstanding the strong links between spatial scale and levels of government, they are not equivalent, even though “many of our most deeply embedded and operative notions of scale do correspond to long-established levels of government” (McCarthy 2005, 33).

This work, then, considers spatial scales as both physical expressions of reality (including ecological and sociopolitical aspects) and socially constructed relationships in which the communities, the dynamics of the capitalist system, and the state play crucial roles. As Mackinnon (2011, 32) suggests, this analysis adopts a “critical realist philosophical position, which views scales as ‘real’ material entities, which are known and understood through particular social representations and discourses.” In this context, social movements, as social actors, organize their actions on a specific scale. They usually move their claims through varied scales during collective action. The next section examines this scalar dimension of social movements.

5.1.2. Social movements and the politics of scale

Many social movements emerge as a response to the effects of globalized neoliberal dynamics over regional or local scales, where people live. Interscalar interactions, then, usually define the initial struggle that originates collective actions (Della Porta and Diani 2006; Klandermans and Staggenborg 2002; Martin 2015).
However, while scale provides a means of control and oppression of the global realm over local spaces (S. Marston, Jones, and Woodward 2005), it “may also be employed in ways that empower social movement and challenge the existing spatiopolitical hierarchies” (Perreault 2003b, 99). Besides, “social movements operate (or aspire to operate) on different spatial scales” from local to global (Painter and Jeffrey 2009, 133). Thus, social movements have to face two crucial aspects during their organization: (1) the consolidation of their action in the specific scale of the movement and (2) the construction of alliances and support from other scales. These aspects are not opposed or exclusionary because they engage in a complex political process (McCarthy 2005).

In regard to the first aspect, Brenner proposes the idea of the *single meaning* of the politics of scale, which implies “the production, reconfiguration, or contestation of some aspect of sociospatial organization *within* a relatively bounded geographical arena” (2001, 599). Thus, participants of the movements debate, discuss, and organize actions on the initial scale of the struggle and, in so doing, increase their political capacity from the initial situation in which they had little power (Howitt 2003). According to McCarthy (2005, 744–46), social movements use two main strategies at this level: the defense of established scales and the use of such established scales as stable platforms to foster political action.

Additionally, social movements must “assert their specific concerns on a wider, more general scale” (Howitt 2003, 138). Neil Brenner considers such political action as the *plural meaning* of the politics of scale, which is the “production, reconfiguration, or contestation of particular differentiations, ordering, and hierarchies among geographical scales” (Brenner 2001, 600). In this aspect, McCarthy considers three strategies used by organized people: participation and construction of new scales, redefinition of relationships among scales, and jumps among
scales (McCarthy 2005, 747–49). Among these actions, *jumping scales* increases the ability to render more successful the social movement’s political claims. It also implies the control of both space and place by building multiscalar networks and sociopolitical alliances. However, political action is not only directed towards upper scales, by the so-called *scaling up* actions but also implies the “simultaneous mobilization of actors on multiple scales of social actions” (Perreault 2003b), including *scaling down* dynamics.

In conclusion, for social movements, spatial scale is, initially, a given operating framework defined by economic, political, and social structures. Moreover, scale is a political tool that works on two levels: as the initial realm of mobilization (initial scale) and as a set of levels on which movements build alliances and support networks. The following section summarizes the idea of social movements as complex multiscalar social networks.

5.1.3. **Social movements as formal and informal social networks**

A central element in analyzing social movements is the fact that they organized around a set of relatively informal and temporary networks that link individuals, groups, organizations, and institutions (Nicholls 2007; Painter and Jeffrey 2009). Della Porta and Diani (2006, 20) consider this a central factor in the conception of social movements, pointing out that people involved in this kind of collective action build and use “dense informal networks to connect” them. For Zirakzadeh (2006), social movements are groups of actors from a broad range of social backgrounds that build informal networks to organize collective mobilizations to achieve common goals. The informal nature of these networks is a key difference between social movements and other kinds of organizations (e.g., political parties and NGOs).

Additionally, Jasper (2007) proposes that social movements must last for some time (which distinguishes them from single events such as riots), and this persistence allows them to
develop an organization where informal structures coexist with more formal connections. Nicholls (2007) suggests that the potential of collective action lies in established and preexistent networks (social, cultural, economic) that are also formal and informal. Thus, despite their informality, social movements use pre-established structures to conduct their actions.

Since social movements are networks of heterogeneous groups and individuals, both cohesion and dissent are crucial elements during mobilizations. Movements usually deal with these elements by means of communication tools. The next section examines how social movements utilize these tools to improve their coordination.

5.1.4. Communications, media, and social movements

A central feature of contemporary collective action is the intensive use of mass media to spread the ideas of the social movement and gain external support. Koopmans (2004) summarizes this aspect as three mechanisms of “discursive opportunities”: visibility (coverage of the message by mass media), resonance (reaction from other actors), and legitimacy (degree of support). Communication media used by social movements include the traditional ones such as newspapers, television, and radio stations, online tools such as digital social networks (Facebook, Twitter), and video sharing sites (YouTube), as well as text messages and chat applications (WhatsApp, Telegram), among others.

During the last decade, there have been many cases of Internet-based social mobilizations, such as the Arab Spring, Occupy Wall Street, the Indignados movement in Spain, the Chilean Students Federation, and other similar groups. The Internet provides a subversive space, not totally controlled by governments, where anyone can express personal opinions. Of course, some governments know about the potential risks of these online spaces and today are trying to increase the control of the Internet and social networks (China, North Korea, and more
recently Turkey). A paradigmatic case is the Zapatista movement in Mexico, which expanded its aid networks using online tools, communicating its message and ideas worldwide (Perreault 2008; Zibechi 2004; Froehling 1997). However, digital tools are also widely used by conservative social movements and groups, such as white supremacists in the U.S.A. and conservative religious groups in Latin America.

In general, the web pages and websites of social movements are the “institutional” place of the group. In these digital spaces, some people within the social movement exercise some degree of control over the information published and communicated through the website. Others cannot post certain types of news or information. When it is available, the dialogue between the social movement and the community is usually limited to the “comments” below some news in which individuals (some of them anonymous) express their ideas about the topic.

Turner (2013) indicates that, in 2011, the European wave of protests demonstrated the key role of online tools, not only in communicating collective ideas but also in fostering offline action. Online tools provide a network of supporters on a national and, usually, international scale, as well as a place to coordinate collective actions and define the social movement’s goals. This aspect is highly relevant in the processes analyzed here, since there is significant evidence that established media actors tend to “validate the political class, which, in the long run, dilutes social protest” (Martin 2015, 193). Therefore, the use of the Internet in contemporary social movements is vital in promoting new, radical methods of expression, as it relates to three patterns of online behavior: polycentricity through a recursive relationship between online and offline mobilization, reticulation through the use of Web 2.0 tools, and segmentation through the organization of decentralized networks (Turner 2013). Meek (2012) analyzes the strong, interconnected links between online and offline spaces and the activities of social movements.
and focuses on the concept of *cyberplace*, which would reproduce some aspects of the classic concept of place: personal everyday experience and sense of proximity and belonging. In his view, “like any place, cyberplace both includes and excludes. However, it is in its potential to connect geographically disparate peoples in solidarity that cyberplace and terrestrial place coincide in a global, deterritorialized world of flows” (Meek 2012, 1444).

As a general summary, the study of social movements must address the issues concerning spatial scale, networks of social actors organized around a specific struggle (materialized on a specific scale), and the use of communication media, both traditional (such as TV and radio) and contemporary (online resources). The following sections present the main findings related to the use and production of scale and networks in the Chilean citizens’ assemblies. The first describes the spatial scales that the Chilean assemblies recognized during their action.

5.2. **Spatial scales recognized by the Chilean citizens’ assemblies**

As is the case of almost all social movements that occupy public space to conduct collective actions, the first relevant scalar element that emerged in the Chilean citizens assemblies was the direct use of protesters’ bodies for political action and subverting the State power, as most feminist scholars have suggested (Fluri 2011; MacKinnon 2011; S. Smith, Swanson, and Gökarıksel 2016). As explained in Chapter 4, barricades were not only made of fire, garbage, tree branches, wood and tires but mainly by protesters’ bodies, women and men, occupying the public space and controlling territory. In Chiloé and Aysén, protesters were able to control their territories for several weeks, staying for days and nights in public space. Besides, personal experience on barricades, talking, listening and sharing ideas from others, were also an experience that worked at the body or individual scale. Therefore, barricades and other actions
such as parades and cultural acts operated initially at the body scale, and at this scale, the movement achieved and kept its legitimacy.

A second relevant fact that emerged by analyzing the citizens’ assemblies was the strong correlation between the specific spatial scale where they emerged and the political–administrative levels of the Chilean state. These levels consist of: Communes (local administration) governed by an Alcalde who is chosen by free local elections; Provinces (group of communes) administered by a Gobernador who is appointed by the President of the Republic; Regions (group of Provinces) administered by an Intendente who is also appointed by the President; and the Country (Chile) governed by the President of the Republic, elected through free, democratic elections. It is necessary to point out that a systematic process defined the Chilean administrative structure under an economic perspective in the 1960s (Collier and Sater 2004). Later, the 17-year-long Pinochet dictatorship (1973–1990) consolidated this structure, and the successive democratic governments (1990–today) adopted it without important modifications.

After an analysis of a variety of online resources (web pages, blogs, and Facebook pages), as well as of testimonies collected during fieldwork, it has become evident that citizens’ assemblies define themselves as heterogeneous, organized groups of actors that operate within specific administrative levels. An example of this definition is explicit in the call for social participation in many of the identified assemblies, as in the following (emphasis added):

We have a sense of belonging that calls us to look for and build the integral development of all inhabitants of our Commune [Rancagua], as well as the defense of the natural environment that surrounds us. (El Rancaguaso 2011)

We, men and women [who are] citizens, as well as the social movements of the Region [Arica and Parinacota] demand the following... (Mapuexpress 2014)

In Punta Arenas, a large group of organizations from the Region has called us to organize the citizens’ assembly of Magallanes to collect, integrate, and express the aspirations and
demands of this Region, about the current and future development of this austral Chilean Region. (Asamblea Ciudadana de Magallanes 2011)

Between 2006 and 2016, as shown in Table 3, people organized 21 social movements. Most emerged at the level of communes (14 movements), as a response to tensions between global processes (large productive activities) and local communities (Perreault 2003b). Painter and Jeffrey (2009) argue that this feature is consistent for social movements, which circumscribe their action to the local spaces.

There were more local social movements in the central and southern zones of the country, which contain the most populated cities. Despite the local scale of organization, national media reported on these movements, achieving significant visibility in Koopman’s terms (2004). At the Provincial level, three movements organized in the period, and all reached nationwide visibility in the media. Finally, four social movements organized around the regional level, and the national media reported on three of them. It is also relevant that social movements organized at regional level appeared in the most distant and least densely populated Regions of the country: the far north and Patagonia.

In line with the ideas of McCarthy (2005), the Chilean citizens’ assemblies are examples of movements organized around a defense of established scales, and they used such scales as stable platforms to conduct their collective action. Additionally, the information provided above, and the testimonies collected during fieldwork in Calama, San Antonio, Chiloé, and Aysén, do not show evidence of any innovative production or conceptualization of spatial scales by the social movements. In consequence, the definition of a social movement based upon an intercommunal integration or related to hydrographic basins did not emerge in Chile, even though some socioecological struggles, in accordance with the ideas of Swyngedouw and Heynen (2003), may have such scalar characters.
### Table 3: Citizens’ Assemblies 2006–2016. Significance of Media and News

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Place</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Spatial Scale of the Movement</th>
<th>Initial Date</th>
<th>Significance of Media and News(^{22})</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Far North – Norte Grande</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arica</td>
<td>Asamblea Ciudadana por la Vida y Dignidad de Arica y Parinacota</td>
<td>Region</td>
<td>March 2012</td>
<td>National</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iquique</td>
<td>Asamblea Ciudadana Iquique</td>
<td>Commune</td>
<td>April 2011</td>
<td>Local</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tocopilla</td>
<td>Asamblea Ciudadana de Tocopilla</td>
<td>Commune</td>
<td>July 2013</td>
<td>National</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mejillones</td>
<td>Coordinadora Fuerza Mejillones</td>
<td>Commune</td>
<td>August 2013</td>
<td>National</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calama</td>
<td>Asamblea y Movimiento Ciudadano de Calama</td>
<td>Commune</td>
<td>June 2011</td>
<td>National</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Antofagasta</td>
<td>Asamblea Ciudadana Regional de Antofagasta</td>
<td>Region</td>
<td>March 2013</td>
<td>Local</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taltal</td>
<td>Asamblea Ciudadana de Taltal</td>
<td>Commune</td>
<td>September 2013</td>
<td>National</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Near North – Norte Chico</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Freirina-Huasco</td>
<td>Movimiento Socioambiental de la Provincia del Huasco</td>
<td>Province</td>
<td>August 2012</td>
<td>National</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Central Zone – Zona Central</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>La Ligua</td>
<td>Asamblea Ciudadana de La Ligua</td>
<td>Commune</td>
<td>June 2015</td>
<td>Local</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Los Andes</td>
<td>El cobre para Los Andes</td>
<td>Province</td>
<td>May 2012</td>
<td>National</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valparaíso</td>
<td>Asamblea Ciudadana Ciudad Puerto Valparaíso</td>
<td>Commune</td>
<td>June 2011</td>
<td>Local</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>San Antonio</td>
<td>Asamblea Ciudadana San Antonio</td>
<td>Commune</td>
<td>March 2012</td>
<td>National</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Machalí</td>
<td>Asamblea Ciudadana Machalí</td>
<td>Commune</td>
<td>October 2011</td>
<td>Local</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pichilemu</td>
<td>Asamblea Ciudadana Pichilemu</td>
<td>Commune</td>
<td>June 2009</td>
<td>Local</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curicó</td>
<td>Asamblea Ciudadana por Curicó</td>
<td>Commune</td>
<td>April 2015</td>
<td>Local</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Southern Zone – Zona Sur</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Santa Bárbara</td>
<td>Asamblea Ciudadana Santa Bárbara</td>
<td>Commune</td>
<td>March 2014</td>
<td>National</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corral</td>
<td>Asamblea Ciudadana de Corral</td>
<td>Commune</td>
<td>July 2013</td>
<td>National</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Osorno</td>
<td>Asamblea Ciudadana de Osorno</td>
<td>Commune</td>
<td>July 2012</td>
<td>National</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chiloé and Patagonia</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Chiloé</td>
<td>Chiloé Está Priva'o</td>
<td>Province</td>
<td>May 2016</td>
<td>National</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aysén</td>
<td>Tu problema es mi problema</td>
<td>Region</td>
<td>October 2011</td>
<td>National</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Magallanes</td>
<td>Asamblea Ciudadana de Magallanes</td>
<td>Region</td>
<td>October 2010</td>
<td>National</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^{22}\) Presence of the social movement on newspaper websites. Local implies that the movement was only registered in local or regional media. National implies that the social movement appeared on the main national newspapers’ websites.
For instance, in San Antonio, the trigger of the conflict (the installation of sulfuric acid storage facilities in the urban area and the expansion of the harbor infrastructure in the coastal zone) potentially affected not only the Commune of San Antonio but also at least two adjacent communes (Santo Domingo and Cartagena). However, San Antonio’s movement did not demand the participation of people from other communes and restricted the struggle to a local scale. Given such dynamics, assemblies directly adopted and used as a spatial scale the administrative levels defined by the Chilean state structure, in accordance with the stages of the structuration of subnational spaces proposed by Paasi (1991; 2009).

Social movements at the communal level confronted their respective communal authorities (the municipal administration) exclusively, and their struggle never translated towards other spatial scales. In the case of movements at the levels of Region and Province, another process occurred: They initially presented their demands to the Provincial and Regional governments, but since these levels directly depended on the President, activists normally requested a direct negotiation with the national government. In these cases, the movements emerged as interscalar issues from the beginning.

These aspects reinforce the importance of the administrative levels of the Chilean state for the organization and mobilization of citizens’ assemblies. These levels define the actual public power involved in the specific space, the administrative responsibilities, and the political accountability that authorities should have; therefore, social movements identify who is the authority they confront and to whom they communicate their claims. At the local level, social movements deal with the Mayor, who is an independent authority of the National Government; in consequence, their struggle usually ends at this level, and the movement remains on a local scale. In contrast, movements that emerged at the Provincial or Regional level must negotiate
with officials appointed by the President of the Republic (Gobernadores and Intendentes), which is why, in these cases, the national government cannot avoid being directly interpellated by communities.

Evidence suggests that the Chilean citizens’ assemblies adopted the nested administrative levels (Commune, Province, and Region) to conduct their activities. Consequently, the administrative structure of the state firmly explains the scale of action of the Chilean citizens’ assemblies, as most naturalized such organizational levels as spatial scales and did not create new scalar levels of action or mobilization.

No matter what the initial scale on which social movements emerge, they need to coordinate a variety of actors and even reconfigure the social relationships within such a level/scale. This coordination implies a management of dissent and internal debate on the local, provincial, and regional scale. The following section analyzes this key feature.

5.3. The single meaning of politics of scale: social coordination on the initial scale

Even in the smallest and least successful cases, Chilean citizens’ assemblies always consisted of a network of heterogeneous social actors located in a specific territory. This social diversity generated a set of complex relationships among participants, which ranged from complementarity, solidarity, and political agreements to dissent over the forms of mobilization, due to divergent approaches to the struggle and deep political tensions. During their organization, social movements needed to deal with such diversity on the initial scale of the struggle, addressing the single meaning of politics of scale (Brenner 2001). This single meaning implies the ability to organize dissimilar groups, a major achievement in itself, especially considering the current lifestyle characterized by individualism and skepticism regarding political activism.
This subsection examines key issues regarding the articulation of diverse actors in the social movement on the initial scale of the struggle, the single meaning, which, as McCarthy (2005) points out, implies the use of established scales as stable platforms for organizing collective action, and also the reconfiguration of the relationships within the initial scale of the struggle. Later, this section describes the situations of dissent that emerged in social movements; and finally, it addresses the relevance of the previous social and cultural conditions that could affect the organization of the diverse actors of the social movements on the scale of the struggle.

5.3.1. Internal social diversity of the Chilean citizens’ assemblies

Initial review of websites and blogs by Chilean citizens’ assemblies evidences the diversity of participants, even at the communal level, which is consistent with the idea of contemporary social movements as highly varied social networks (Della Porta and Diani 2006; McAdam and Scott 2005; Zirakzadeh 2006). In the case studies, interviewees presented such diversity as a two-faced feature: On the one hand, diversity is a robust and powerful tool that allows the movement to achieve social legitimacy; on the other hand, diversity is also a difficulty for mobilization since it implies the existence of assorted goals, perceptions, and ideologies that delay organization.

In the assembly of San Antonio (organized in March 2013), integration of diverse actors proved difficult from the beginning, and the social mobilization could not consolidate and sustain itself on the local scale. In this case, the movement stayed at the initial stage described by Blummer (2006), consisting of a reduced level of organization and a lack of structure, without further developments. A heterogeneous group of left-wing activists, secondary students, teachers,
fishermen from the Llolleo area, representative women from “allegados” committees, and local environmental groups participated in this movement. They conducted open assemblies and organized rallies and other activities focusing on two main goals. The first was halting the construction of two massive facilities for the storage of sulfuric acid produced by a state-owned copper mine, “El Teniente,” located more than 200 km east of the city in the Andes Mountains. The second was curbing the expansion of harbor infrastructure along the city shoreline, which would destroy two coastal lagoons and a large sandy beach.

Despite participation of a diverse array of groups and the conducting of some collective actions, the assembly of San Antonio faced key problems when integrating other important local actors into the collective mobilization. María José (39, San Antonio) and César (50, San Antonio) explained that one of the goals of their organization was to obtain the support of public service workers (including from areas such as education and healthcare) and the unionized workers from the San Antonio harbor, but they were unsuccessful. As an explanation, Isabel (50, San Antonio) described a historical “lack of citizens’ participation” among the people of San Antonio, while Juan (31, San Antonio) considered the robust economic and political dimensions of the adversaries to be a factor. San Antonio’s citizens’ assembly was unable to mobilize a more substantial proportion of the local or urban actors or to incorporate them in its collective actions, and neither could it create relevant mobilizing structures in accordance with McAdam and Scott (2005). The group had an incomplete ability to generate politics of scale in the single meaning.

This movement restricted its actions to specific but significant demonstrations in public space—organizing parades with more than 1,000 participants, stopping traffic, and building

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23 In the Chilean context, families who lack their own housing often live in the home of close relatives and are called “allegados” (from the Spanish “allegar”: to bring close). To be eligible for a public subsidy to obtain their own house, the Chilean state promotes their organization in groups of families, usually represented by women: the “allegados” committees.
some short-term barricades in particular moments of protest. They achieved a certain level of success, as one of their main goals was attained: The government dismissed the installation of harmful infrastructure (sulfuric acid storage tanks) inside the city and its surrounding area.

The social movement organized in Chiloé in May 2016 started from a problem affecting marine activities, in particular workers from the salmon aquaculture companies and fisherfolks24 who extract sea products in the area (fish, algae, mussels). During the first half of 2016, a massive mortality of salmon occurred in Chiloé’s productive centers. This event coincided with a vast micro-algae bloom, known as the “red tide,” which emanated deadly toxins, contaminating all marine products. As a result, salmon companies fired a considerable number of workers. Moreover, in attempting to avoid sanitary problems, the national government did not allow fisherfolks to exploit any marine resources. After a few weeks, a severe economic crisis spread across the Province, affecting not only salmon workers and fisherfolks but also the entire provincial economy.

Collective mobilization in Chiloé began with the actions of unionized fishermen, but other actors joined immediately: former salmon company workers, unionized seaweed collectors (all of them women), environmental groups, students, teachers, indigenous communities, and others. For two weeks, most of Chiloé’s society organized by establishing mobilizing structures (McAdam and Scott 2005) and changing the relationships within the provincial scale. According to interviewees, generalized support for collective action was evident. Alvaro (31, Ancud) stated that “this was initially a fishermen’s movement organized around the red tide crisis […], but

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24 In this analysis I am using the term “fisherfolks” to include men and women that extract, on a small and medium productive scale, diverse marine resources that grow in the area, such as fishes, octopuses, mussels, clams, crabs, and algae. They have a variety of productive practices and approaches to organization, but they all depend on the marine conditions. When I use the term “fishermen,” I am referring specifically to men organized in unions that extract animal species. Other organized groups include associations for the cultivation of abalones, and unionized women collecting algae close to the shoreline.
[later] the entire society joined in.” Similarly, Luis (60, Castro) added that “social mobilization surpassed the fishermen’s organizations. All the people joined their demands.”

Even though all Communes of Chiloé province joined the initiative, fishermen’s leaders could not lead to an actual provincial movement with unified demands, demonstrating an incomplete framing process, according to McAdam and Scott (2005). In Chiloé there was a gap between the massive social mobilization organized by the diverse actors within the whole community and the social movement negotiations conducted by fishermen’s leaders. Álvaro (30, Ancud) explained that “there was no consensus or agreement among the fishermen. Besides, every commune had different aspirations and built their independent petition list, and these lists did not circulate throughout the island. Internal communication in the movement was terrible.” Rodolfo (37, Ancud) added that “fishermen lacked a clear, explicit political goal, beyond the simple economic compensation.”

Outside fishers unions, communities in Chiloé understood the problem as a Provincial struggle, as a Provincial socioecological process, in accordance with Swyngedouw and Heynen (2003). Those who built barricades in their commune also helped set up barricades in other communes throughout the Chiloé Province and expressed their solidarity by sharing food and information. Evidence suggests that Chiloé’s community conducted effective collective actions functioning on a provincial scale since the entire Province became paralyzed and isolated from the rest of the country for several days—an example of successful politics of scale operating as the single meaning defined by Brenner (2001). This social movement, then, reconfigured the relationships within the provincial scale, in accordance with the dynamics proposed by McCarthy (2005).
However, the fishermen’s unions leading the movement only worked on the communal scale, conducting deliberative meetings during the conflict on this specific spatial level. They were not able to build a unified Province-level mobilization binding all fishermen’s unions. As a result, it was not possible to complete the politics of the provincial scale or to overcome the contentious character of social movements described by Nicholls (2007). In this situation, the national government used this gap and kept the negotiations restricted to a fishers’ struggle, negotiating on the communal scale (commune by commune).

In the case of Aysén, at least two notable aspects emerge when analyzing the social actors mobilized and the spatial scale of organization. First, even though fishermen were the first group mobilized, the actual social movement started in a large meeting organized in the capital city, Coyhaique, the “Regional Board” (“Mesa Regional”). Thus, most significant regional actors participated from the beginning, establishing efficient mobilizing structures as well as a productive framing process. Second, social actors organized the initial meeting on the regional scale as a response to conflicts that had emerged on a local scale.

Evidence of the diversity of social actors involved from the beginning of the movement, as well as the immediate support from the entire regional community, appeared in most of the testimonies collected during fieldwork. Alejandro (55, Coyhaique) reported that “fishermen called for a meeting to several union leaders, public sector representatives, the *Patagonia sin Represas* environmental movement, and representatives from other organizations. From Aysén, fishermen and some neighborhood associations came; they organized the Regional Board.”

Some environmental activists attended that initial meeting. Participants understood the strength provided by diversity and how it can be useful in dealing with complex political actions. Claudia (42, Coyhaique), an environmental activist, said: “They invited me to the initial meeting
because I am an activist from *Patagonia sin Represas*. I thought it was fascinating. It was a meeting with groups I had never seen together before. Fishermen organized that meeting, and they wanted to join several demands that people made in isolation for years. *Patagonia sin Represas* and fishermen, we had some special connection in our claims; we had supported each other in previous situations. Also, fishermen invited public sector workers and people from labor unions. There were strong groups from the Aysén Region invited to that meeting.”

The Catholic Church was also a relevant social actor in this movement. It allowed the coordination and organization of social actors by fostering a reflexive environment for the collective debate. During fieldwork, Luis (65), the Bishop of Coyhaique, pointed out that:

Many social leaders concluded that the fishermen’s problems were not exclusively fishermen’s problems; they were regional issues related to a lack of systemic regional and national projects. Several goals, interests, and wills were joined in the movement with a clear perspective. There was a notable leadership, especially among fishermen. The Regional Board represented different organizations: fishermen, public service workers, truck drivers, taxi drivers, traders, tourism actors, the Catholic Church, and others.”

Every commune in the Aysén Region joined in the regional strike (as described in Chapter 4) and organized their local collective mobilization. In Chile Chico, a small city near the international border, Corina (34, Chile Chico) said that the local movement included “construction workers’ union, public service workers, political parties, and cultural organizations.” Such local organizations, which were also a manifestation of the local diversity, spread to every part of the Region. Interestingly, only locals living inside the Aysén Region’s borders took part in the strike, as this mobilization was strictly restricted to the Regional territory. As a remarkable example, on the northern border of the Aysén Region, residents of the small town of *La Junta* joined in the Regional strike, while in the neighboring town of *Santa Lucía*, located in the Los Lagos Region, people did not join the strike.
In both Chiloé and Aysén, social movements reached the advanced levels of organization and consolidation proposed by Jasper (2007) and Blummer (2006) and became robust social movements that operated efficiently on their scalar levels, defending the established scales, using them as stable platforms to conduct their actions, and reconfiguring the internal relationships within them (McCarthy 2005). Despite their differences, all case studies presented high degrees of social diversity, as well as internal tensions, consent, and dissent, which demonstrate the vibrant, mobilized character of these communities.

5.3.2. Dissent during mobilizations

For social movements, the presence of diverse and robust citizen participation does not imply a lack of conflict and dissent. In every case study, social diversity led to notable tensions among actors participating in collective actions. Even when a citizens’ assembly had strong social support, there were situations when social actors differed in their opinions, causing them to leave the movement. Kristopher (26, Castro), who participated in the barricades in the city of Castro, Chiloé, reported: “There were several tensions inside the movement: for example, between intellectuals and less educated people. There were also some differences between younger and older people about how to mobilize and demonstrate.” Often such tensions shaped internal, productive debates that kept the movement politically alive.

In Aysén, some interviewees criticized the diversity of actors involved in the mobilizations and considered it something artificial that did not necessarily express a deep reflection about common issues. The opinion of Fernando (62, Coyhaique) reflects this critique: “For me, the integrative [character of the movement] was just the addition of demands that emerged from very diverse groups, and each group has significant contradictions.” However, even the eventual addition of demands in a petition list involves an interesting framing process—
with debate and negotiation—that itself can be considered a positive outcome for the social movement. As Miriam (52, Coyhaique) suggested, these debates led to interesting conclusions: “Initially, environmental problems were not relevant among the demands of the Regional Board, but slowly they became important after several conversations about our territory.”

However, there were other tensions with notable effects on the evolution of the social movement and its negotiations with the authorities. In Chiloé, as stated above, a critical difference of positions affected the entire period of mobilizations. While most participants at barricades conceived the red tide as a complex environmental and social problem, fishermen conceptualized it as specifically restricted to those who work in marine activities. These two perspectives coexisted during mobilizations, as several interviewees expressed:

There were two visions of the situation that clashed because many of us thought that it was not only a fishermen’s problem but a broader social and environmental crisis that involved the entire society, not just the fishermen. That tension existed from the beginning of the mobilization. (Antonio, 57, Castro)

There were considerable differences between fishermen and other organizations. For example, people at the negotiations were only fishermen; they did not allow the indigenous communities (Huilliche) to participate. (Ana, 48, Ancud)

There was no time to think about what was happening and to try to unify criteria about what we were demanding. There were selfishness, and individual private interests among some fishermen’s leaders, and they did not express enough generosity to build a broader consensus. The national government knew about this division and took advantage of it. (Arturo, 54, Castro)

The social movement of Aysén also presented differences among social actors. Additionally, certain groups did not join the movement. They consisted mostly of private business associations as well as a sizable part of the regional political elite that supported Sebastián Piñera’s national right-wing administration. In general, these groups did not participate in the strike or in any other mobilization. Miriam (52, Coyhaique), owner of a restaurant in the
center of Coyhaique, said: “Business organizations, such as salmon, forestry, and other companies, did not join the movement. However, the Chamber of Tourism did.”

During mobilizations, participating actors also expressed dissent, especially about actions in public space, such as the location or character of the barricades (i.e., total or partial blockade of the traffic). In Chile Chico, Corina (34, Chile Chico), a resident and environmental activist, mentioned some conflicts between cultural organizations and a local miners’ union. However, this kind of dissent was unusual among actors inside the movement, as most of them supported collective actions for weeks. In cases in which difference and dissent could not be overcome or solved, the social movement ended up losing strength and cohesion. As described above, these situations quickly become an advantage for officials and authorities of the national government.

5.3.3. Previous social conditions and the consolidation of assemblies on the initial scale

The levels of success in organizing and coordinating social actors on a specific spatial scale on the Communal (San Antonio), Provincial (Chiloé), and Regional (Aysén) levels are consequence of a wide range of factors. The main difference among the case studies that testimonies highlighted is the preexisting social fabric in the territories, that is, the preexistence of formal and informal social networks among a variety of actors and people (Nicholls 2007). In the case studies, interviewees considered this a fundamental explanation of both the relative weakness of the movement in San Antonio and the strength expressed in Chiloé and Aysén.

San Antonio’s interviewees pointed out that the local society, in general, lacked confidence and was suspicious about political struggles, as well as about most social leadership. María José (39, San Antonio) explained that both in regular times and when facing a social crisis, people hardly take a stand and organize collective actions. In her view, those who mobilized were almost always “the usual activists,” and they knew each other. Isabel (50, San Antonio)
emphasized her frustration when people did not react even when the problem directly affected their security and health (e.g., the installation of a sulfuric acid storage complex). Additionally, César (50, San Antonio) felt that rivalries among leaders and a generalized perception of local corruption were the basis of the social disarticulation, leading to the lack of a dense social fabric. Isabel (50, San Antonio) stated that accusations of corruption among leaders emerged in the public debate, and many people believed them. Under these conditions, it is notable that this social movement was still able to organize several demonstrations and political actions in this city.

In Chiloé and Aysén, while public opinion expressed a generalized lack of confidence in politicians and political parties, the positive perception of social ties, citizens’ participation, and solidarity actions tended to be stronger and more explicit. This perception emerged not only in small towns and villages but in cities too. Such dense social ties have roots in the geography, history, and culture of these territories, as explained in previous chapters. In Chiloé, for example, many interviewees related their ability to organize barricades and other collective actions to their cultural background. Rodolfo (37, Ancud) explained that “the ability to remain on strike for 18 days relies on the preexisting communitarian practices of Chiloé. Here, people know how to prepare a communitarian lunch because supporting each other is part of our culture. We have the *minga*, which is a communitarian organization built around our food, and sharing food.”

However, cultural elements alone do not explain the notable social ties that emerge in Chiloé’s culture in moments of crisis. Several social organizations have been working collectively in recent decades on specific topics, such as environmental issues, healthcare rights, indigenous communities, and workers’ unions, among others. A sizable number of people
regularly participate in these organizations, and it was the foundation from which the social movement of 2016 emerged:

There are several peasants’ organizations in rural areas. Here, people usually organize collectively to solve some problems, for example to get public funds. Historically, there is a strong tradition of small organizations in the rural sector. (Luis, 60, Castro)

We have a long history of social organizations here: movements demanding healthcare, environmental movements, NGOs, and indigenous communities. (Alvaro, 30, Ancud)

There are several organizations here: unemployed committees, small orchard owners, and other organizations in which women are crucial actors. (Adriana, 34, Ancud)

In Aysén, the solidarity ties developed under conditions of geographic isolation in a historic process previously addressed in this research. Moreover, most interviewees described a variety of aspects of the relatively high level of participation in social organizations and how such participation was one of the main reasons for the success of the 2012 social movement. Mariela (31, Coyhaique) believed that “here, everyone participates in specific organizations. The public workers participate in the ‘ANEF’, bus and taxi drivers have their union, truck owners have their organization, and wood providers have their institution. Here, we all belong to at least one organization, at your work or at home.”

Corina (34, Chile Chico) shared this view and emphasized the preexistence of a vibrant “social fabric in the Aysén Region.” In her opinion, “there is an interesting number of organizations: NGOs such as ‘Ecosistemas’ and the ‘Antukulef’ cultural organization, among others. These organizations performed several previous activities. [Besides], the leaders of the organizations know each other very well; therefore, calling for meetings is easier.”

The ability to organize thriving, diverse collective movements depends on the preexisting social fabric and ç level of citizen participation in normal times. Such conditions do not rely on the spatial scale of the struggle: Aysén, the most relevant and coherent social movement among
the case studies, emerged at the Regional level. In contrast, San Antonio, the least cohesive case, emerged at the Communal level.

Additionally, organizing all actors on the initial scale of the struggle does not imply the nonexistence of dissent, but the way in which the movement deals with such a dissent also makes a difference. In Chiloé, an inability to solve disagreements between fishermen and the rest of the society caused a split in negotiations. In contrast, in Aysén, once the groups that did not support mobilizations left the movement, dissent was addressed inside the meetings and assemblies. As a result, participants could address negotiations in a unified front.

Beyond the organization and coordination of actors in the initial scale of the struggle, citizens’ assemblies must achieve the support of social actors and organizations that work on other spatial scales. The following section addresses how these movements conducted actions to achieve such interscalar support.

5.4. The plural meaning of politics of scale: moving through scales

Once a social movement achieves a considerable level of coordination and legitimation in the initial scale of the struggle, it must build alliances and support in other territories and spatial scales. As previously summarized, the scalar politics of any social movement usually implies a scaling-up of political action (Howitt 2003; McCarthy 2005; Perreault 2003b), in which social movements aim to change the context of the conflict to a broader spatial scale. In so doing, they conduct politics of scale in the plural meaning described by Brenner (2001). Thus, alliances can link the movement to other organizations, state officials in the national government, political parties, and international organizations, among others.

Many Chilean citizens’ assemblies, indeed, aimed for social and political support and alliances beyond their specific territories. These assemblies understood that they could not
restrict their activities and claims to a specific spatial scale and that it was always necessary to present critical local struggles as national problems, as issues that could not be solved locally. However, they also had to conduct scaling-down actions, which at least means: (1) communicating to each city, town, and village the ideas and goals of the movement; (2) coordinating local communities in conducting collective actions in public space at the same time; and (3) informing communities about the results of negotiations. By means of scaling-down dynamics, assemblies increased their legitimacy. In this realm, the ability to scale up and scale down their ideas and claims directly relates to the level of success of a social movement in Chile. Scaling-up and scaling-down politics can be read from the perspective of a “glocalization” process as proposed by Erik Swyngedouw, which means “a parallel and simultaneous movement to a smaller and larger scale” (1997, 142) that could change the power relations among scales.

In San Antonio, as Figure 2 shows, local citizens organized a movement as a reaction to the tensions caused by large public–private investment projects (the harbor expansion in the coastal zone of the city and the sulfuric acid facilities for copper mines located in the Andes). Both the national government and other institutional actors across the entire political and administrative structure (Regional, Provincial, and Communal governments) backed the projects, without any actual consideration of the local community.

In this case, the social movement organized itself on the local scale that engaged with the communal level of administration, and it was not able to create successful actions for scaling up the struggle. Testimonies provided during fieldwork did not express any evidence of significant external support for their demands, even though nationwide news websites registered the conflict. Therefore, San Antonio’s social movement kept working on the communal level/scale, facing the local government. In the words of Isabel (50, San Antonio), the local assembly
“became a pain in the neck” for the municipality. It was able to mobilize more than 1,000 people during public rallies and demonstrations, a high number for this city. As a result, sulfuric acid tanks were not allowed in the city, a partial but sizable success.

![Figure 2: Politics of Scale in the Social Movement of San Antonio](image)

On the Provincial level/scale, it is interesting to analyze the case of Chiloé in the emergence of scalar politics in Chilean citizens’ assemblies, as shown in Figure 3. The social movement emerged at the Provincial level as a response to environmental and social struggles (red tide and sea pollution), but participants organized on the local scale (Communes) and made their claims to the provincial, regional, and national governments. At the local level, some municipalities of Chiloé explicitly favored social mobilization. Fishers and salmon workers called for mobilizations throughout Chiloé (the provincial level), and their message took a scaling-down path, and every local community joined the movement.

Participants employed various means for scaling down the information to local communities. Mobilized communities utilized online social networks, mainly Facebook and WhatsApp, to coordinate actions, similarly to the case of some European social movements, as explained by Turner (2013), and the Zapatista movement (Zibechi 2004; 2012; Froehling 1997).
However, interviewees often pointed out the relevance of local radio stations, mainly because national media did not regularly report on the struggle. As Armando (55, Ancud) explained, “we got the information by listening to the radio.”

**Figure 3: Politics of Scale in the Social Movement of Chiloé**

Despite the fact that the entire Province of Chiloé was mobilized, the social movement could not consolidate the negotiations on the provincial scale. Moreover, the national government did not negotiate directly with the movement and delegated such issues to the regional level of administration. In so doing, the Chilean government partially allowed a scaling up of the struggle to the regional level but stopped any possibility of recognizing the problem as a national one. Additionally, fishermen’s leaders recognized the Los Lagos Region Government as a legitimate counterpart for negotiations. At the same time, they also accepted a mode of negotiation disarticulated commune by commune, without a Province-level integration of their demands. As a result, the movement did not consolidate its action on the provincial scale. Some interviewees described this situation:

There was never a unified petition list, nor a united organization of the Chiloé Province. In the beginning, there were some attempts to build a Province-level petition list, but
fishermen, the main and strongest organization of the movement, could not achieve such unity. (Álvaro, 30, Ancud)

We tried to organize a provincial workgroup, formed by representatives of four communes (Dalcahue, Queilén, Chonchi, and Castro). This workgroup later included seven communes, but we did not succeed. (Arturo, 54, Castro)

Even though the struggle was consolidated on the communal/local scale and incomplete on the provincial scale, the community of Chiloé used traditional media and online resources to obtain the attention of social actors nationwide. Later, several actors from outside the Chiloé Province backed the mobilizations, specifically people who were born in Chiloé but lived in other parts of Chile. Luis (60, Castro) explained that “there are many Chiloé students spread throughout the country, and they support the mobilization. There are ‘Children of Chiloé’ clubs everywhere [Hijos de Chiloé]. There was a strong connection and support from them. The first expressions of solidarity came from these people, who gathered food and other stuff and sent it here.” Similarly, Álvaro (30, Ancud) commented: “We had support; many cities in Chile supported our mobilization.” It had different manifestations, as Ana (48, Ancud) described: “We had phone calls from Temuco, from indigenous organizations, even when we did not have significant space on TV news.”

In these cases, online connections and interactions established between those who mobilized in Chiloé and the “Children of Chiloé” in other parts of the country constituted a cyberplace, as proposed by Meek (2012), as a virtual bond among people living in different places that helped boost the social movement. This not only was the expression of support messages and diffusion of news about the struggle but also included the collection of money, food, and other items for the island.

The case of the social movement that emerged in Aysén in 2012 revealed a more complicated politics of scale, as summarized in Figure 4. The mobilization arose initially at the
regional level when several actors of this Region had a meeting where they defined a series of common problems and demands, many of them with historical roots. Mobilized actors presented these demands to both the regional and national governments. Additionally, some local authorities of the communes of the Aysén Region favored the mobilization. All these features reflect the strong degree of consolidation of the movement on both regional and local scales.

Regional actors who participated in the Regional Board called for a generalized mobilization, a regional strike, and communicated their ideas and goals to the local communities. The Regional Board informed communities by using radio stations, online networks, and phone calls, especially in the cases of isolated towns and villages not covered by the Internet. Such actions were clear examples of a scaling-down politics that was highly successful: Every city, town, and village of the Region joined the movement, followed the decisions made by the Regional Board, and maintained the social mobilization for several weeks.

Figure 4: Politics of Scale in the Social Movement of Aysén

Aysén’s social movement did not consider the local or provincial officials to be valid counterparts in negotiating their demands, and they directly appealed to the regional and national governments from the beginning of the struggle. After some days of failed negotiations, the
movement dismissed the Regional Government of Aysén as a legitimate actor and demanded an exclusive negotiation with the National Government. Mobilized people wanted the Prime Minister, and even the President of Chile in the Region, to address the problems. As a result, the movement rapidly scaled up the struggle and, in so doing, was able to obtain support from outside the Region. This included national political parties, a sizable part of the Catholic Church, and environmental and social organizations (e.g., university student federations), as well as cultural agents (musicians, writers, actors, and artists) and TV figures:

In Las Lumas Park the musical group Inti Illimani played. [The fact that] these musicians came here was an expression of support; they understood that we were fighting for something fair. In Santiago, I attended a huge concert supporting our leaders in the Caupolicán Theatre. That was strong! (Miguel, 39, Coyhaique)

In the social movement of Aysén, online communication tools (such as Facebook, Blogspot, and WhatsApp) played a crucial role in the coordination of collective actions and provided an instantaneous way to communicate news and other information from different places and on different spatial scales. Claudia (42, Coyhaique) claimed that “the use of online tools was essential for being well informed. The possibility of uploading images and videos immediately helped the social movement a lot.” Cell phones also constituted an efficient tool for coordinating people: “We contact each other by cell phone, they call us [from the Regional Board], inform us, and then we organize our local meetings and activities” (Orlando, 37, Coyhaique).

Beyond online tools, people participating in barricades and other collective actions listened to the news on the Santa María radio station25 to be informed about the general situation, reactions from the government—including police repression—and the evolution of negotiations between the movement and the National Government in Coyhaique and Santiago. Radio was far

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25 Santa María Radio was established in 1979 by the regional Catholic Church in Aysén. Nowadays its broadcast covers the entire Region of Aysén, and it is also received in part of the adjacent Argentinian Provinces of Chubut and Santa Cruz.
more relevant than the Internet in the case of Aysén. Broadcasts were key for informing and connecting the regional and local scales, since most people had a radio and could listen to it, even in conditions of blackout or isolation. As Claudia (46, Coyhaique) stated, “[i]n those times everyone in this Region followed the transmissions of Santa María Radio Station. I don’t usually listen to Santa María, but during mobilizations, I listened to it every day because they told us what was going on.” Under these conditions, the radio became a powerful tool for the social movement and was accessible for people of all ages (including the elderly) and social classes, as well as for people living in rural, distant, and isolated areas.

Most interviewees in Aysén recognized the relevance of the regional radio station as a powerful tool for building scaling-up and scaling-down politics. This tool also permitted visibility, resonance, and legitimacy for the movement, all the stages of social mobilization proposed by Koopmans (2004). Claudia (42, Coyhaique) explained:

Chile found out everything that was happening in Aysén, and other countries found it out too. There was strong solidarity from other areas of the country. People from social organizations sent their messages, and the Santa Maria Radio Station transmitted them to us. That radio station did not stop informing. People called the radio; they expressed themselves. Through the Santa María Radio Station people gave testimony about their sadness, rage, and solidarity; the radio explained about what was going on in every sector and place. We knew what was happening in Mañihuales, Simpson Valley, La Junta, Cochrane, in every part of the Aysén Region.

The ability to move their claims across geographic levels and produce at the same time scaling-down and scaling-up actions is a prominent feature of the Aysén social movement, which partially explains the high level of social and political success:

Solidarity started inside the Region when small communities took over their streets. Later, other places in the country sent their support, some social movements, some social leaders. Then, we had a network of Latin American radio stations from Mexico to Patagonia, and other radio messages from Australia. Media are central in the production of the political reality. (Claudia, 42, Coyhaique)
The examples provided by the case studies evidence the connection between scalar politics, in the plural meaning of Brenner (2001), and the level of legitimacy and success of social movements. Successful mobilizations can scale up the struggle, the most common goal of any social and political action. On the other hand, in many Chilean citizens’ assemblies, the “scaling down” of politics was also crucial—not only to legitimize the movement but also to provide specific space for debate and analysis of the struggle in specific local conditions.

5.5. **Conclusions: the relevance of spatial scale for citizens’ assemblies**

There are some interesting conclusions concerning the relationship between Chilean citizens’ assemblies and the concepts of spatial scale, networks, and the use of media by mobilized people. According to a critical realist perspective (MacKinnon 2011), an interaction between material processes and social power relations generates spatial scale. However, analyzing the Chilean citizens’ assemblies, it is evident that they did not question or reformulate, in general, the spatial scales that the Chilean state has defined during its recent history. The analyzed movements, then, tended to organize and mobilize around the levels defined by the political–administrative structure of the country, a notable example of the role of the state as a producer of spatial scales, in accordance with Paasi (2009). Thus, when the Chilean state defined the limits and levels of Commune, Province, and Region, it also led to effects on society that legitimated such structures, and later built a sense of community around them that defined their collective action. In the case studies, there was no evidence of the production of any alternative scale or even a critique of the scalar structuration of the country, as McCarthy proposes (2005). These findings reveal the strong influence of the political structure in defining the scale of community action in countries like Chile, where a consolidated, heavily centralized state has organized internal space for centuries.
Most citizens’ assemblies emerged on the scale of Commune, the smallest level of Chilean political administration. This aligns with ideas about contemporary scalar interaction, in which local and urban scales, the everyday spaces for people, are negatively affected by dynamics defined on national or global scales (Perreault 2003b; N. Smith 1992; Swyngedouw 1997). Local social movements in Chile usually confronted the local government and were organized around a specific issue (e.g., environmental conflict or the lack of public services), involving people who lived in specific local spaces. Despite their number, only a few social movements that emerged on the local scale had a major effect on the social and political life of the country.

Nevertheless, there are some cases of social movements that have not emerged at the local level but at upper administrative levels: Province and Region. Such movements have had a stronger and more visible effect on Chile’s internal politics during the last few years. The events of Chiloé (Province) and Aysén and Magallanes (Regions) were notable cases of social movements in terms of the number of mobilized citizens and the long periods of mobilizations (weeks and months). These cases involved a clash with the regional and national governments and simultaneously received the support of some local administrations, indicating a break inside the political structure of the country. In addition, movements on provincial and regional scales tend to understand their struggles as being more complex than a specific, limited conflict.

Regardless of the spatial level from where they emerge, social movements are themselves networks of various social actors that interact on a specific spatial scale. In the three case studies, citizens’ assemblies were not only formed by individuals but also by organizations with wide-ranging levels of formality: workers’ unions, fishermen, environmental groups, neighborhood communities, student organizations, trade organizations, and cultural groups, among others.
Evidence suggests a strong relationship between the level of organization and coordination and the previous density of the social ties among actors in the territory. In other words, the more regular the functioning of social organizations and citizens’ participation in regular times, the easier it is to establish an organic social movement. Additionally, the presence of specific cultural aspects connected to solidarity practices, as well as geographic conditions of isolation promoting association, explain the excellent levels of coordination of the movements.

While assemblies must consolidate their actions and organization in the initial scale of the struggle, the single meaning of the politics of scale, they have to move their actions through the upper and lower scales, the plural meaning. The most evident direction is toward scaling up the struggle, as usually described by theory, to move the conflict from a specific, restricted issue to a broader one that affects the entire society. Also, the provincial and regional cases of social movements in Chile show that the opposite interscalar direction, the scaling-down actions, is also crucial for sustaining and legitimating the social movement. This action relates to the glocalization process defined by Swyngedouw (1997). When social mobilization is expressed closer to the human scale (villages, streets, squares), the collective compromise to the movement becomes stronger. Therefore, provincial and regional movements cannot sustain their actions without the support of the local scale.

Both scaling-up and scaling-down dynamics rely on the efficient use of communication networks, including both traditional media and online tools. Most Chilean social movements engaged in numerous online activities during and after collective mobilizations. They all made use of digital platforms such as Facebook, Blogspot, and YouTube and communicated intensively through messages transmitted via the WhatsApp application. By using online tools,
they shared information that originated at a particular moment, sent pictures, posted comments, and shared videos to broadcast information on the scale of the struggle and beyond that scale.

In addition, a highly relevant fact mentioned by most interviewees who directly experienced and participated in collective mobilizations in Chiloé, and especially Aysén, is the key influence of radio broadcasting (a traditional communication medium with a regional reach) as a convenient tool that consolidated and made coherent the social movement. The Santa María radio broadcasting, in the case of the Aysén Region, for example, became a political place for the mobilized community. Since the radio was broadcasting for all regional spaces, including rural, isolated areas, without interruptions and was open to the opinions and debate of citizens, it created a sense of identity and collective cohesion for the entire regional community and sustained the collective actions for a significant period of time. Thus, the regional scale of the social movement and the regional scale of the radio broadcast coincided spatially, and they engaged in a very productive approach that sustained the collective action for weeks.

Therefore, place-based social movements initially need to organize and structure their action on the initial scale of the struggle; later, they move their claims through the other scales, scaling down to obtain legitimacy and scaling up to achieve broader visibility. In these processes, movements connect with other actors and try to build alliances through diverse strategies, spreading their message via radio, TV, and online tools. In the study of social movements, spatial scale and networks of actors cannot be isolated or analyzed independently. The cases of the Chilean citizens’ assemblies clearly reflect such intricate engagement.
Chapter 6. Conclusions, Recommendations, and Future Research

Defeat has something positive: It is never definitive.
However, victory has something negative: It is never definitive.
(José Saramago).

On February 5th, 2013, almost one year after the organization of Aysén’s social movement called “Your problem is my problem,” a digital regional media website, Medio a Medio, announced that a group of citizens from the region had started “an initiative to reflect on the achievements of the social movement organized in February and March 2012 [and] evaluate what happened after mobilizations.” According to one of these citizens, “we thought that the energy and the experiences lived during mobilization cannot be wasted, and we cannot feel that all our sacrifices were in vain” (Medio a Medio 2013).

A similar exercise was carried out by a group of residents of Chiloé in 2017, one year after the provincial mobilizations. After some meetings, the spokesman of the group Defendamos Chiloé (Let’s defend Chiloé) said, “we are still waiting” for answers from the national government. Many people from Chiloé still needed to know “what actually happened in the area that affected so badly the marine environment” (Radio Estrella del Mar 2017).

The Chilean citizens’ assemblies usually ended their collective action after negotiations with the authorities that produced different outcomes, most of which were not considered successful by mobilized people. However, many participants kept reflecting on the experience, and specifically in the most significant movements—such as Aysén and Chiloé—citizens met once again to evaluate the collective mobilization they had organized. This collective reflection after mobilizations is remarkable: Participants of the movements are still thinking about the current struggles and future of the region or province. Of course, the level of attendance at these meetings organized to think about the movement has not been so high as those organized during
mobilizations, but people are still able to exchange and debate ideas and experiences; the social fabric of these communities is still alive and linked to the problems of their territories.

The level of success of the social movements can be interpreted from different perspectives: for instance, counting and evaluating the material aspects that the movement achieved in relation to its initial demands or, as the cognitive approach postulates, identifying how the values collectively constructed by the social movements are spread to the rest of the society. However, most social movements present a mix of achievements and failures, and, as the Portuguese Nobel Prize winner José Saramago wisely expressed in the epigraph that opens this chapter, such outcomes—victory and defeat—are always temporary, and most social movements include both advances and setbacks.

This research does not directly focus on evaluating the levels of success of the Chilean citizens’ assemblies in material terms, but in light of the findings, several aspects can be considered, especially those linked to the production of the spatial collective knowledge framed by the assemblies. As previously stated, this work analyzes the most significant spatial implications of the collective action by addressing the initial research question: How have the motivations, achievements, and failures of the Chilean regional citizens’ assemblies been framed by a dialectical relationship between collective mobilization and the geographic space? In this final chapter I present the main conclusions implied by the empirical findings and the theoretical framework regarding this question. Additionally, I discuss some of the contributions of this study to the theoretical debates on social movement studies and critical geography, as well as the empirical field of study. Finally, I provide some ideas for future research.
6.1. Conclusions and answering the research questions

This analysis has explored four relationships between the spatial realm and the organization of specific territorially based social movements: the first is related to the production of neoliberal space and the response of mobilized communities; the second is about the reconstruction of collective identity by mobilizations and its engagements with the concept of place; the third is linked to the control of material territory and its organization during collective action; and the last is about the use and production of spatial scales to articulate the claims of the social movements. Each relationship is directly associated with a specific research question, and I summarize here the main conclusions related to them as follows.

The first relationship is structured around the question: What aspects of the current model of organization and production of subnational spaces in Chile did the citizens’ assemblies contest and criticize? Evidence shows that initially, three main elements were questioned: the state withdrawal from the provision of public services under the neoliberal model—specifically education and healthcare, the high centralization of political power in the country, and the presence of environmentally neglected areas as a consequence of an extractive productive model.

As expressed in Chapter 2, in just five years—between 2011 and 2016—citizens of many communes, provinces, and regions in Chile organized a number of collective actions, expressing a high level of social discomfort with regard to diverse political, economic, and environmental problems that affected their territories. This research identified 21 relevant social movements organized in the period, in which many people actively participated in different actions—meetings, parades, protests, and demonstrations—and debated ideas in a collective way, conducting a form of democratic participation that was beyond the traditional, conjunctural electoral process. While many of these movements did not produce durable effects or a strong,
structured, or coherent discourse, they did become a democratic space, very flexible and adaptive, in which people expressed their critiques in open and uncensored discussions. Many assemblies did not directly question the Chilean neoliberal system as a whole, but after analyzing their claims, it is evident that all made partial or specific critiques of the economic model.

Initially, participants of the citizens’ assemblies demanded the return of the state’s provision of education and healthcare, which were widely considered social rights and not mere commodities. Here, participants expressed a high level of agreement: They considered the lack of provision of public services to mean that the Chilean state abandoned their regions, especially the most distant and isolated territories. Abandonment by the state was a direct consequence of the neoliberal idea that consistently favors small-government policies. In addition, mobilized groups criticized the partial or total privatization of social rights in Chile, especially education and healthcare. Here, the citizens’ assemblies expressed the necessity of Polanyi’s “second movement”: the protection of society from the negative effects of capitalism.

Second, regional citizens’ assemblies demanded an effective decentralization of the political power that does not fit in the model promoted by neoliberalism, as a higher level of community control over the regional resources and the production of their respective territories is required. Finally, in general, most citizens’ assemblies agreed that stronger protection of the environment was necessary and criticized the pollution and degradation of many subnational spaces generated by extractive activities fostered by neoliberal policies. However, such critiques did not question the use of natural elements as commodities for economic growth, and citizens’ assemblies expressed different views on this: Some agreed with commodification but asked for a better distribution of economic benefits, whilst other assemblies elaborated deeper critiques of the exploitative relationship with nature, calling for a more democratic and communitarian
control over natural resources. Even when it is not possible to describe all citizens’ assemblies as anti-neoliberal movements, many did boldly criticize some aspects of the model and showed a significant transformative potential beyond this hegemonic framework.

The second relationship between citizens’ assemblies and the spatial realm emerges as a response to the following question: *Which aspects regarding space and place did the citizens’ assemblies use and appropriate to build their regional identity and legitimize their political goals?* In general, this relationship works within the realm of the ideological and the imaginary, and evidence shows that assemblies took aspects of place, especially nature, to legitimize their demands and that this identity was transformed by collective action. Thus, citizens’ assemblies in Chile were remarkably productive in terms of the revalorization of local, provincial, and regional identities.

As a starting point, evidence presented in Chapter 3 firmly connects the organization of the citizens’ assemblies with a preexisting collective identity defined in terms of a sense of marginalization, isolation, and historical abandonment. These aspects were the initial basis upon which social mobilization of the assemblies was organized. Besides this sense of marginalization, the main elements of collective identity for mobilized people come from the spatial realm: People connected their collective identity to the presence of natural elements that affect their everyday life, not only in terms of livelihoods or extraction of natural resources but by the presence, magnitude, and singularity of these natural elements. In San Antonio, identity was influenced by the Pacific Ocean and its coast as the/a source of marine resources; in Aysén, by the presence of harsh weather and extensive natural landscapes with fjords, mountains, islands, and forests; and in Chiloé, by the rainy climate, the ocean, and the archipelagic character. In addition, physical isolation from the rest of the country is also a source of past and
collective identity, especially in Chiloé and Aysén. Evidence also suggests that these elements were interconnected with the evolution of local culture and history that were more differentiated from the rest of the country in cases where there was more physical isolation.

Social movements not only recover different aspects of geographic space, nature, culture, history, and marginalization to legitimize their claims and incorporate people in the collective action. In the case studies, social mobilization reframed and transformed these elements, providing conditions in which participants debated about their spaces, communities, and collective problems, revaluing natural elements and assessing the environmental damage as well as its consequences in their own lives. These conditions, as exemplary dominions of cognitive praxis, produced effects on the collective identity of mobilized people, highlighting the conditions of place in which communities lived. Additionally, mobilized citizens conducted a large number of activities, including meetings, live performances, parades, and, in the cases of Chiloé and Aysén, they even self-governed their territories for many weeks. Thus, some level of regional pride and a revalorization of the local community emerged as a consequence of mobilizations: People became aware of their collective ability to conduct and organize successful complex actions, and a generalized sense of pride and satisfaction emerged. In other words, the experience of being part of a collective mobilization in itself empowered citizens and communities, making them able to positively revalue their regional identity.

The third reciprocal relationship between social movements and the spatial realm emerges around the following question: How did citizens’ assemblies use the regional space and its specific places to control the territory and public space during their demonstrations? Here, this research focused on a material aspect of the spatial realm, on the specific physical configuration of the landscape that allowed local communities to take spatial control. In so
doing, such communities produced a different territory and specific ephemeral places, with their own configurations and temporalities.

Chapter 4 highlighted how the intricate topography of Aysén and the isolated configuration of Chiloé played a crucial role in the level of success of the regional strikes conducted by communities. Mobilized communities, including leaders and the rest of the participants, understood from the beginning the relevance of territorial control for political action and used their local spatial knowledge to decide where to occupy space. Thus, spatial knowledge about the material conditions and physical organization of the space favored a fast control of territory for communities. By taking some key points—maritime infrastructure, airports, bridges, and the main route of the region—and installing barricades, communities disconnected extensive territories from the rest of the country. Additionally, barricades not only were made of tree branches, wood, old tires, and other materials but most significantly included citizens’ bodies: In Chiloé and Aysén, the regional strikes involved a material occupation of space by people, families, friends, and neighbors.

At the site level, barricades played a double role: as sites where collective power was exercised, by blocking the traffic, and as places of collective reflection, debate, social integration, and democratization. Barricades, wrapped in specific cultural elements that have importance for locals—fire, food, mate, coffee, and long conversations—produced a feeling of solidarity and even safety, generating conditions for a hospitable environment. At barricades people debated, shared experiences, talked about the situation and the conflict, and made decisions. Barricades in both Chiloé and Aysén became places for the social movements that did not last for a long period of time, only days or weeks, but had deep effects within the communities.
The regional strike altered all the everyday dynamics (fluxes of fuel, food, cars, trucks, provision of services, etc.), and in so doing, communities built an entirely distinct, ephemeral space that I have called *mobilized territory*. This mobilized territory was under community control, without the influence of regular institutions, and here people displayed remarkably good civic behavior and an impressive level of self-discipline and coordination. Additionally, with no cars on the streets, people walked everywhere, and children played in groups in public space all day long. An image of a peaceful, old-time town landscape emerged with a slower temporality. Despite the problems generated by the alteration of everyday routines, a generalized sense of community and solidarity emerged in this mobilized territory.

The end of the regional strike directly depended on the reaction of the government, which used two different strategies: In Chiloé, the government used a fragmenting negotiation, fracturing the social movement and disarticulating a generalized coordination of the social movement, whilst in Aysén, direct police repression and brutal violence were used to take back control of the territory. However, in both cases, the long distances and the intricate topography made police action difficult and tended to favor the actions of local communities that were able to sustain their collective actions for several weeks.

The last aspect that addresses the interaction between citizens’ assemblies and space is related to the following question: *Which social networks and scales did citizen assemblies produce and use to organize their collective actions?* In the case of the Chilean citizens’ assemblies, in general, there is no evidence of the production of new spatial scales, but some fundamental actions are found to reorganize the interactions among established scales. There is, in fact, an interesting reinforcement of the regional scale as a key factor for collective action.
According to the analysis detailed in Chapter 5, the Chilean citizens’ assemblies did not question the spatial scales that the Chilean state defined throughout its recent history—commune, province, and region; and participants initially organized collective actions in one of these previously defined scales. Most assemblies emerged in the local scale (commune), which represents everyday spaces and problems (social, environmental, economic, etc.). Local social movements usually confront local governments and are organized around a specific issue (e.g., environmental conflict or the lack of public services). However, there are some cases of social movements that have not emerged in the local level but in upper administrative levels: provincial and regional. Such movements have had a stronger and more visible effect on Chile’s internal politics in recent years. These cases involved a clash with the regional and national government and simultaneously received support from some local administrations, indicating a rupture within the political structure of Chile. In addition, movements on provincial and regional scales tend to understand their struggles as being more complex than just a specific, limited conflict.

Assemblies need to organize their action in the initial scale of the struggle, which requires coordinating and communicating a highly heterogeneous group of actors that express communal, provincial, or regional diversity: workers’ unions, fishermen, environmental groups, neighborhood communities, student organizations, trade organizations, and cultural groups, among others. Evidence suggests there is a strong relationship between the level of organization and coordination and the previous density of the social fabric existing in the mobilized territory. Citizens’ assemblies consolidated their organization in the initial scale of the struggle and simultaneously moved their actions to the upper and lower scales. The most obvious direction is toward scaling up the struggle, facing the national government, and widening the scope of their claims. However, the cases of movements that emerged on the provincial and regional scales
show how crucial scaling-down actions are: Only by building a social legitimacy on the smallest spatial scale can the regional and provincial claims obtain a sustainable level of support. Scaling-up and scaling-down dynamics rely on efficient use of communication networks, including traditional media as well as online tools. A highly relevant fact in the cases of Chiloé and Aysén was the crucial role of radio broadcasting in consolidating and making the social movement coherent.

In summary, this research provides information that elucidates the ways in which territorially based social movements engage with different elements of the geographic realm: (1) citizens’ assemblies emerged as a response to the spatial organization of the neoliberal state and the productive spaces framed in Chile during the last few decades; (2) they used and transformed place-based identities to legitimize their actions and, through their actions, reinforced the collective identity of participants; (3) they occupied and controlled their surrounding spaces to achieve their goals, producing ephemeral places and mobilized territories; and (4) they organized their actions on an initial spatial scale defined by the administrative levels of the Chilean state, and, at the same time, conducted diverse actions across different scalar levels. In other words, assemblies were, in several ways, framed by spatial elements, but during collective action they transformed such elements, becoming significant producers of space, place, territory, and scale. Under this perspective, there are some theoretical insights that have emerged from this research, and in the following I briefly present these contributions.

6.2. Contributions to knowledge that have emerged from this research

In light of the conclusions presented above, there are four significant elements that this research and its empirical findings add to disciplinary knowledge: the dynamics linked to the neoliberal state’s abandonment, the emergence and significance of ephemeral places, the collective
organization of mobilized territories, and the significance of the regional/provincial scales as key levels for the organization of productive mobilizations. Additionally, there is a fifth contribution that is linked to the empirical case studies and their analysis in the Chilean context.

The first important element for the theoretical debates of critical geography regarding neoliberalism is the sense of abandonment of communities by the neoliberal state that is evident in Chile, especially in less developed and extractive subnational spaces. Most theory regarding the spatial effects of neoliberalism emphasizes the idea of extractivism and accumulation by dispossession dynamics, as well as the negative social and environmental effects of neoliberalism in specific areas, such as sacrifice zones. However, the idea of a state’s abandonment and its spatial implications are scarcely addressed in critical geography. As part of the small-state model, a core idea of the neoliberal framework, public services must be provided only for the lowest social classes, while for middle and upper classes, the private provision of services must be fostered. In spite of 40 years of neoliberalism, many Chileans still think that the state must provide some services as social rights, especially healthcare and education, as well as some infrastructure. State withdrawal of these aspects is widely felt as abandonment and is a common topic that all citizens’ assemblies included in their claims as a central social problem in Chile. However, there is a spatial aspect that is important to highlight: Residents of the most isolated and distant areas of the country (such as Magallanes, Aysén, Chiloé, Calama, and Arica) tended to perceive a higher degree of neglect; they were not physically able to move easily to Santiago to access some of the services that the state does not provide. This situation affects all the social classes of these regions as a generalized consequence of neoliberalism.

The second element that this research contributes in theoretical terms to social and critical geography debates is about the existence and significance of the ephemeral places in
social life, especially during collective actions. Evidence provided by the case studies, as well as information from other assemblies in Chile, shows that when people occupied spaces for some periods of time due to roads being cut off, barricades, and live performances, they produced actual places that, in spite of their ephemeral character, had deep significance for people involved in their construction. Barricades in Aysén and Chiloé became fundamental sites for political debate and social integration, which emerged as a consequence of collective action. These sites contained most of the positive aspects of place, such as local identity, social interaction, interclass character, and social inclusion; in contrast, this research did not find negative aspects about place such as exclusion and segregation. These ephemeral places did not last after the mobilizations, but they produced significant effects in the life of participants, such as a sense of empowerment and a stronger identity. Additionally, the political debates in these public agoras are exemplary actions of political mobilization and reflect vibrant, active communities. In conclusion, the ephemeral character of these sites of collective action did not prevent the conception of them as actual places. Thus, for the construction of place, the intensity of the social interaction during the period of mobilizations is more important than the time that such sites physically last.

The third significant element this research has provided is the idea of *mobilized territories* as a concept that could be analyzed in other kinds of collective actions and social movements. During mobilizations, especially at times when social movements were able to control their spaces for some period of time, the entire society was altered as well as the spatial dynamics. Since the regular institutions did not work, communities needed to solve several problems: food, fuel, transportation, garbage collection, etc. Chilean citizens’ assemblies in Chiloé and Aysén (but also in Magallanes) were able to organize and self-govern their territories
for significant periods of time, and society did not fall into chaos or anarchy. On the contrary, communities produced mobilized territories, with their specific organization, pace, and character, expressing solidarity in several ways. This is significant because it provides a different meaning for the concept of territory, beyond the institutional perspective of the state. In the exceptional times of collective mobilization, the hegemony of the state in some parts of the territory can be replaced by the autonomous actions of the local and regional communities.

The fourth contribution of this research is the political significance for social mobilizations of the spatial scales located between the national and the local. In the Chilean case, most assemblies emerged at the local level, but most did not achieve any significant goal. Despite their legitimacy, provided by local communities, they faced the national government in a very unequal balance of forces, as well as several difficulties in scaling up their actions. In contrast, a few social movements organized on the provincial or regional scales were able to reach a higher significance. These scales, provincial and regional, then, emerge as crucial for social mobilizations since they are not “local” or “particular” but more generalized. However, they were not that far from the local communities, and, by using communication tools, these scales allowed social movements to conduct scaling-down actions to gain local legitimacy. Additionally, as the mobilizations considered here were regional or provincial, they were able to face the national government in less unequal conditions: They had more cultural and social resources than isolated local communities.

Finally, in empirical terms, this research is deeply informative for the discipline in the Chilean context. Until June 2018, citizens’ assemblies, as part of a generalized cycle of protests, had not been studied enough by Chilean scholars. A few, interesting approaches have been conducted from the perspective of political science studies (Salinas 2016; Penaglia 2015;
Romero 2015; Penaglia and Valenzuela 2014; E. Valenzuela 2015), but they did not address the spatial aspects of these social mobilizations. Also, approaches from the perspective of social and critical geography have not been undertaken systematically until this research. Thus, the analysis presented in this dissertation is innovative in the Chilean context and allows a dialogue to be formed between the Chilean empirical cases and the main theoretical concepts of contemporary social, critical, and political geography.

6.3. **Recommendations and future research**

In 2008, the world economic crisis fostered the emergence of diverse voices criticizing neoliberalism, especially in terms of its negative effects on social inequality and unpredictable cycles. Additionally, climate change and environmental crisis have also been highlighted as the most significant limits to economic growth. Chile has not been an exception, and the emergence of the Chilean citizens’ assemblies can be considered part of these sets of critiques. However, it is not correct to consider them as producers of a wholly coherent alternative discourse for the future development of the country: They are diverse, and even contradictory, in their claims and they might be part of an incompletely structured critique that may be emerging in different parts of the country. Considering the conclusions provided here, there are some elements that may lead to future research, as briefly discussed in the following paragraphs.

It could be interesting to address other experiences of Chilean citizens’ assemblies and case studies that this research did not analyze deeply. The cases of Tocopilla in the Chilean far north and Freirina-Huasco in the near north are important social movements organized around the idea of sacrifice zones and generalized environmental crisis affecting all social classes. Thus, a deeper understanding of the way in which social movements build collective knowledge around environmental conflict and its eventual alternative solutions could constitute a dialogue
with the findings of this research. From a broader perspective, the analysis of how social movements during collective action build knowledge about climate change and environmental crisis is a key research area that can be developed by social movement studies, environmental geography, and political ecology.

The material occupation of public space by barricades and other actions, as well as the eventual identification of ephemeral places in other cultural areas beyond Chile and Latin America, is also a future line of analysis that emerges from this research. Occupation of public space by barricades and other similar actions have a long history in Western societies (even in the US there are some contemporary cases such as Zuccotti Park in New York) as a material form of collective action but also has some significant expressions in other global areas (e.g., Tahrir Square in Cairo and Maidan Nezalezhnosti in Kiev), where specific sites become actual places for political action, social integration, and collective debate and solidarity. Comparative analysis can be conducted to know how these places were self-organized and self-regulated and how they affected the surrounding space. Additionally, further research projects can address the meaning that these places produced in participants and the rest of the society once they ended and their background cities returned to normality. Furthermore, theoretical reflections can be carried out around the concept of place, including its political significance and its relationship with the temporal realm.

Additionally, citizens’ assemblies in Chile were able to isolate and self-govern significant parts of the Chilean territory for some periods of time, producing unique spatial dynamics and organizing their own mobilized territory. It would be highly informative to identify other similar experiences in Latin America and other global areas. Thus, the re-emerging significance of the
concept of territory as something that does not solely depend on the capitalist state could provide an interesting insight and topic for future analysis.

Therefore, several new productive ideas for research could begin from this dissertation by developing a more comparative analysis, especially in the areas of social movement studies, social geography, political geography, political ecology, and political science. I hope that the remarkable experience of mobilized people in the far south of the Americas inspires future research in these fields, not only in Chile or Latin America but also in the USA and other countries. I also hope that this analysis, as well as future lines of research, will return to the communities as a valuable source of knowledge that empowers and brings people closer to democracy, and fosters a more equal socio-environmental justice, helping to define alternatives to the current socioeconomic model.
One month after I sent this dissertation to my advisory committee, and just ten days before I had to travel to the US for its defense, a massive, unexpected, sudden, and even violent social crisis started in Chile. In just hours, thousands of Chileans went out to the streets of Santiago, massively marched, blocked roads, set subway stations ablaze and faced police repression, expressing their rage and a remarkable level of social discomfort. It all started around October 10th, when large groups of High School students entered the public transport stations, hopping turnstiles as a protest against a rise of 30 Chilean pesos (US$0.04) in the transportation fare in Santiago. The government replied through a number of punitive actions against students evading payment. However, protests did not stop and became massive (McGowan 2019). On October 18th, 2019 protesting students occupied many stations of Santiago’s subway, and the officials decided to close the entire subway network, at 6pm, in the middle of the Friday’s rush hour. Since commuters were unable to reach transportation to return to their homes, a large number of citizens started to protest, and, in an unexpected expression of deep rage, many started to riot and built barricades throughout all the Metropolitan area: the Chilean October started.

Sebastián Piñera’s government, in the same way that it conducted its actions in Aysén in 2012, replied with violent police repression. On Saturday the 19th, the riots and protests extended to almost all the cities of the country, and the national government declared a state of emergency, sending military forces to the streets in order to control public space. On Sunday the 21st, President Sebastián Piñera declared that “we are at war against a powerful enemy” (Laing and Miranda 2019) and directly supported all repressive actions of military and police. However, protests did not end; in Friday the 25th more than 1,200,000 residents of Santiago gathered in the
Baquedano Square under the slogan “We are not at war, we are united”; other thousands congregated in almost all cities and towns of the country (Franklin 2019). I will not detail all the facts that happened in Chile, but after 3 weeks, the social crisis has not ended. It is necessary to highlight, however, that more than 20 people participating in protests and riots have been killed, hundreds have been hurt, especially by getting shot in their eyes (as happened in Aysén in 2012), which apparently shows a systematic action of the Chilean Police that when controlling demonstrations; policemen shoot in the face of protesters (Fernando Espina 2019). Besides, there are many denunciations of Human Rights violations, including sexual abuse of women and men in police buses and police stations. Thus, Piñera’s administration has expressed the worst punitive and violent face of the strong State, on citizens’ bodies.

Beyond the protest over the rise of transportation fare, claims and demands of mobilized people express a deeper and more comprehensive criticism of the national elites and the Chilean socioeconomic model; there is a large number of expressions addressing the neoliberal model as protestors demand more equality, economic distribution, social protection (an improvement of pensions, public healthcare, free public education, cheaper transport fares and better housing policies), and a social State that must be built under a new Constitution (Ramos 2019) in which Chileans feel represented. Therefore, the Chilean October protests apparently are expressing and articulating more clearly the diverse demands previously expressed in the citizens’ assemblies analyzed in this dissertation.

Some issues regarding the ephemeral place have also been emerging in the Chilean October of 2019. For three weeks (so far) thousands of citizens has been occupying public space through several and diverse collective actions: cultural acts and performances (including musicians, actors, plastic artists), parades, rallies, flash-mobs. In all these activities, the assembly
aspect has emerged not by talking but by expressing ideas in hand made posters that are exhibited to the rest of the participants and also through songs and anthems. Additionally, many groups have organized cabildos (citizens’ meetings) throughout the country, to articulate the public debate and build social consensus. However, it is interesting that all this civic action coexists with street violence, vandalism, burnt buildings, public infrastructure destruction, and police repression in most Chilean cities.

Mobilized territory also has an expression these days in Chile. All regular activities are entirely altered. Work hours are very short since public transportation schedules are variable, and people need more time to commute. Thus, many people get home early, and spend more time with their kids and family. In more difficult days, many people have shared their cars to transport strangers, and in many areas, neighbors have organized collective surveillance, and other solidary actions. This modified territory is paradoxical and uncertain, since many times solidarity is mixed with fear and also violent acts of vandalism.

As a final reflection, citizens’ assemblies, their demands, and their diverse features, could help in understanding many elements of the current social and political situation in Chile. There are a number of continuities, such as the state repression through police action and the paradoxical character of places and territories under mobilizations as simultaneous spaces of citizenship and fear. However, there are some changes, such as the more radical character of the Chilean October, far beyond the expected in most previous regionalist social movements. Thus, the protesters’ critique of neoliberalism and the general structure of the Chilean state is more coherent, stronger and more explicit than before; and the political answer is still not clear. Beyond this situation, is not difficult to say that Chile will not be the same it was before October 2019.


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