

# Youth and Social Outburst in Chile: Collective and Territorial Identities in Dispute\*

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**Abstract:** This article aims to characterize collective and territorial identity disputes among young participants in the 2019 Social Outburst in Chile. It highlights the crisis of representativeness that the country has been experiencing for years and focuses on the youth subject as a protagonist of social movements. A mixed methodology was designed, which resulted in an online questionnaire applied to a sample of 41 young people and students between 15 and 24 years old, residents of communities in the Metropolitan Region. It is concluded that distrust towards political institutions persists. Still, new collective-territorial identities emerge through the resignification of public spaces, various mass demonstrations, and a militant symbology.

**Keywords:** Youth, Identity, Territory, Social Outburst, Chile.

## I. Introduction

The purpose of this article is to identify and characterize the identity disputes experienced by the young population in a symbolic place in the city of Santiago de Chile: the *Plaza Baquedano* or *Plaza Italia*, which, during the Social Outburst of October 2019, acquired the renamed as *Plaza Dignidad*. This study focused on young people as prominent drivers of the social movement based on the hypothesis that the event altered the collective-territorial identity of Chilean youth, coming from different places and ages, who transit and inhabit the territory. This event generated a rupture in understanding the space when it was renamed *Plaza Dignidad* (Paredes, 2021). The concept of Chilean identity is linked to the transformation of society through successive crises (Larraín, 2014). This research adopted an exploratory approach based on the recent history of Chile and the geographical turn, which highlights the identity-territorial element to broaden knowledge towards new perspectives and foster a renewed relationship with spaces. In this way, territory is redefined as a space of social convergence in which the individual transforms their sense of belonging.

On October 18, 2019, a succession of massive events followed in the face of the 30-peso fare hike in Santiago's metropolitan transport. Peaceful protest marches (Pérez, 2019) were observed in the center of the capital and neighborhoods symbolic of the resistance to the dictatorship, but also in affluent places, such as *Plaza Ñuñoa*, *Avenida Manquehue*, and the exclusive suburban area of *Chicureo*. Demonstrations that had the support of the public at the time (Center for Public Studies, 2019; INDH, 2020).

In November, after the intense demonstrations of October, there was a shift toward an active liberation of the word (Martucelli, 2019). The cabildos and citizen meetings gained prominence, displacing, to some extent, the

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assemblies, which maintained a more secondary role. The *cabildos*, characterized by collective participation and the absence of hierarchies, stood out as spaces for citizen expression, especially in institutions such as universities. However, their logic had yet to be generalized to other social sectors. Let us recall that on November 8, the Chilean Association of Municipalities (AChM) announced its intention to promote a national consultation for December 7-8, with the participation of more than 330 communes (Spyer & Alvarado, 2021). On November 15, 2019, political leaders signed the agreement for a new constitution, which brought several referendums and two constituent assemblies whose proposed *carta magna* were rejected by the citizenry.

It is estimated that the march on October 25, 2019, had the largest turnout in recent history. These demonstrations arose spontaneously by anonymous actors, without the apparent intervention of political parties or visible leadership, which hindered the overall understanding of the events (Avendaño, 2019). According to Martucelli (2019), assuming the risk of interpretation in the face of ongoing events, Chile experienced a social crisis triggered by the increased Santiago subway fare. The initial protests turned into mass actions of fare evasion on public transport and later into riots and looting, leading to a state of emergency and curfew (Verdugo, 2020). The government's response and the dominant social discourses generated multiple interpretations. The crisis revealed a deep political disconnect and manifested itself through various collective actions. The posters of the marches alluded to Chile's historical problems, such as inequality and the over-indebtedness of social rights (subsidiary State) of aspects of life. According to Jiménez (2021), the causes of social breakdown could be linked to an unequal income distribution that significantly impacts the most vulnerable households. This inequality manifests in various aspects of daily life, constructing a sense of marginalization or exclusion and contributing to people not feeling integrated into the system (Gutiérrez, 2020).

## II. Research Problem

Contemporary youth face a dynamic environment with technological advances, socioeconomic precariousness, and educational and labor pressures in a context of increasing globalization that challenges traditional identities and a sense of belonging. During the mobilizations, there was talk of a generation that “awakened” a dormant citizenry with a model “marked by a chronic sense of frustration, with a deep indignation towards politics” (Rivera & Jiménez, 2020, p. 25). Secondary and higher education students staged demonstrations that redefined the collective-territorial identity and re-signified spaces during the outburst, conceived as a historical, political, and media process in Chilean society (Alé et al, 2022).

Since the beginning of the decade (2011), our country has witnessed several protests. Although there were breaking points during the previous five years, such as the *mochilazo*<sup>1</sup> (period from 2001 to 2006), it was not until the emergence of an organized student movement that called for a series of massive marches that education was placed at the center of public debate (Duarte, 2004). Political leaders like the current president emerged from this historic movement. In 2006 there was a series of protests by the student movement.

This era has been marked by nonconformity, irritation, and discontent, where certain claim groups, such as feminist and ecological movements, to name a few, have managed to place their demands on the political agenda. A study (Pavez-Soto et al, 2014) evidences the concern of university students regarding the preservation of nature and the urban environment of the city of Santiago. However, these efforts represent a minority in the youth population studied. It is revealed that some university students participate in massive demonstrations, such as marches and bicycle rallies, mainly in the urban environment of the city of Santiago, including emblematic places such as *Plaza Italia* and *Alameda Libertador Bernardo O'Higgins*. The choice of these forms of political expression (marches, among others) could be influenced by the media impact of the student marches carried out in 2011 and 2012, which had a significant impact as avenues of protest and opinion and that managed to place crucial issues such as education on the public agenda and has instigated educational reforms (Avendaño, 2014).

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<sup>1</sup> The April 2001 mobilization emerged within the context of the modernization of public transportation in Chile, wherein private companies were tasked with producing and administering the student transit pass. This underscored the perceived neglect by the Chilean Ministry of Education (MINEDUC), which merely replicated preexisting state policies. Consequently, the Coordinating Assembly of Secondary Students (ACES) advocated for MINEDUC to assume responsibility for the student transit pass, aiming to prevent arbitrary fare increases.

One of the most mentioned environmental protection activities in the study by Pavez-Soto et al. (2014) was a march held in downtown Santiago against *Hidroaysén*, even though this energy project would impact more than two thousand kilometers (Leal & Negrón, 2012).

Collective activities of peaceful protest (marches and bicycle rallies) allow young university students to become an influential group, legitimize their demands, exert influence on public discourse, position themselves as relevant actors, and generate a significant media impact to transform the political agenda. These activities suggest new forms of expression with informal or temporary structures, without indicating a distancing from politics or a rejection of the democratic system, but rather a redefinition of the political and the youth (Arias Cardona & Alvarado, 2015).

Linked to the above, for some decades in Chile, a profound representativeness crisis has affected the political and institutional system (Araujo, 2019). Citizens experience a lack of representation by the authorities, expressing distrust towards social institutions and the democratic system. Political parties affected by corruption cases that undermine public probity have seen their reputation deteriorate.

In this context, during the mobilizations of the Social Outburst, it became evident that the citizens themselves sought and disputed new spaces, such as public squares and city streets, intending to find representation and give them a new meaning. A space is “always social (...) to explain it, it is necessary to unravel the structure and functioning of society and the social groups that configure it” (Balaguer, 2018. p. 84).

### III. Theoretical framework

Identity is a concept widely used in the social sciences that acquires a polysemic complexity and requires a clear definition. From a philosophical perspective, it is presented as a questioning of the being of an object, individual, or group. In this context, we focus on the collective manifestations of identity in Chile today. According to Larrain (2014), identity can be approached from a metaphysical perspective, considering it as the logical relationship between the characteristics of a being and the being in question. This correlation, not free of contradictions, implies a philosophical questioning about the essence of an object, individual, or group. From the sociological perspective, Vera and Valenzuela (2012) point out that identity has an individual dimension but is also influenced by the social environment. Haesbaert and Mason-Deese (2020) highlights two etymological senses of the word territory, one related to land as materiality and the other to feelings inspired by the territory.

Identity constantly evolves, shaped by the time and territory it develops. Understanding the crisis as an engine of change is an essential component of understanding the various identity discourses promoted by the state.

#### *Social Outbursts and identity rupture*

Peña (2020) analyzes the social movements associated with the Social Outburst from interactionism and the Marxist current. He highlights the contradiction between neoclassical economic theory, which sees individual actions as logical operations with gains exceeding costs, and the altruistic actions observed in the demonstrations, especially among students, where individual gains do not justify extreme measures. Peña (2020) argues that capitalist production now involves the manipulation not only of concrete space but also of the social and symbolic reality of the individual. The term *Rulers breakers* used by Peña (2020) describes a minority marginalized by the system, capable of generating mobilizations that highlight and externalize social problems subsequently endorsed by the social mass. The author suggests that social issues become visible through actions driven by marginal individuals, the *Ruler Breaker*, who, suffering the worst social conditions, manage to change values and motivate society. In the context of modernity, the question arises about who manages our social reality.

According to Peña (2020), collective identity can be manipulated by power groups, as argued in the concept of identity and its relationship with territory, pointing out the harmful capacity of discursive manipulation in identity diffusion that favors the interests of groups that have shaped the understanding of social reality in Chile until the end of the 20th century. Araujo (2019) indicates that the outcome of the October revolts in Chile is presented as an open and essentially desired process since premature closure would not be beneficial. The need for time is highlighted as fundamental to making dialogue a habit, unraveling social complexities, and avoiding repeating past mistakes. In this context, an analysis of a circuit of detachment in Chilean society, composed of

immoderations, disenchantments, irritations, and detachments, is proposed. This circuit, which has its roots in historical transformations of the last four decades, reflects the interconnection between various elements and acts simultaneously and complementarily. Understanding this circuit is essential to facing future challenges and understanding the dynamics of current Chilean society, influenced by neoliberalism and the democratization of social relations.

Araujo (2019) points out that the neoliberal economic and social model in Chile, in force for more than four decades, has brought structural transformations, from the export orientation of the economy to the flexibilization of the labor market and the privatization of social services. This model has redefined principles such as social protection, education, and social security, turning consumption into a structural pillar and credit into a critical element of social relations. Despite improving living conditions, the gap between consumption expectations and quality of life has widened, generating a widespread feeling of immoderation. Job insecurity, social instability, and the pressure of indebtedness have contributed to a growing disenchantment and criticism of the system perceived as uncontrolled and unequal. The lack of institutional support has led people to perceive themselves as abandoned to their fate, strengthening autonomous individuals' image, and generating irritation and disaffection towards institutions. The tension between excessive demands and individual empowerment has led to the perception that acting without depending on institutions is possible, causing disenchantment and strong disaffection towards them.

Araujo (2019) argues that Chilean society still grapples with hierarchical, authoritarian, and confrontational dynamics, despite efforts to promote egalitarianism and rights. This tension between ideals and realities results in social disenchantment, where critical attitudes coexist with the reproduction of these dynamics for social identity maintenance. Social irritation arises from perceived inequalities, abuse awareness, and structural demands, shaping a conflicted social landscape characterized by distrust and detachment from normative principles. The complex social scenario in Chile, as summarized by the author, involves renewed expectations alongside enduring forms of domination. Decades of unfulfilled promises and growing social irritation have led to a detachment from common values, resulting in a society marked by individualism, horizontal expectations, institutional distrust, and residual authoritarianism. Amidst this context, society faces the challenge of redefining principles for viable and desirable coexistence, particularly concerning power and wealth redistribution. This endeavor represents a long-term process fraught with uncertainties and conflicts, underscoring the need for active engagement in reconstituting societal norms and principles.

On the other hand, Duarte (in Alé et al, 2021) points out that the resignification of the territory has been enhanced by an emotional component linked to the Social Outburst. Through the accounts of active participants in this process, such as that of Vilma, a 25-year-old young woman from the commune of *Independencia*, new forms of collective organization in the territory are revealed. Vilma relates how, after October 18, a territorial assembly was formed, and daily pots and pans were banged on her street corner, reconnecting with old friends and reflecting on the events. This type of experience, according to Vilma, is unprecedented in her generation. Duarte (in Alé et al, 2021) identifies an identity break in these stories, attributing it to the impact of neoliberalism on the Chilean educational system. This breakdown manifests as a rupture of identity, affecting individuals' projected image and self-perception, especially those who invested in an essential life project. Failure in this vital path entails the loss of a project of being, marking a milestone in the identity journey of these young people.

In his research on the Social Outburst, Alé et al (2021) focuses on the student movement as a critical element, using a qualitative methodology based on testimonies of direct participants, especially students born after the return to democracy. These testimonies reveal central motivations, such as the rejection of the conditions of the educational system, the impact of intergenerational transfers, and the spontaneous nature of the movement. The author emphasizes how the discourse of meritocracy and social mobility, fundamental elements of the "new Chile", fed the aspirations of the middle strata, generating largely unmet expectations, evidencing the closed reality for most of the country's inhabitants.

Besides, Oporto (2019) points out that during the social crisis in Chile, there has been a notable inability among representatives of alternative and progressive visions to recognize the seriousness of the facts, such as the systematic destruction of public and private infrastructure. Violence, looting, and fires have affected several cities,

including Valparaíso, Quilpué, Concepción, and Santiago. Oporto (2019) states that the barbarism intensified during the national strike, with attacks on police stations and state institutions and continuous looting and arson. Complementarily, Martuccelli (2019) recognizes that in *Plaza Baquedano*, a pattern had been established as an almost daily ritual: at nightfall, a group of protesters, many of them hooded and known as the “front line”, would engage in violent confrontations with the Carabineros police. Despite the blatant human rights violations (with the current prosecution of the then director of Carabineros), attention has focused on specific cases. At the same time, moral and physical violence is downplayed or denied. After visiting Chile, U.N. experts criticized both the disproportionate use of violence by the Carabineros and their inability to separate the violent from the demonstrators during marches (INDH, 2020). This criticism pointed to the techniques used to maintain public order in the country. Some yellow vests marched through the streets of Santiago, demanding a return to order, and highlighting the government's responsibility to ensure public tranquility. However, their action was not commonly interpreted in this sense (Martuccelli, 2019).

For Oporto (2019), both the priest Mariano Puga and the historian Gabriel Salazar (2019) adopted positions that trivialize the violent acts perpetrated by some demonstrators. Puga presents a contradictory discourse to the author, conciliatory but justifying destruction, even deifying widespread violence. Salazar (2019) attributes violence to the historical postponement of the “mestizo people”, explaining it as a response to transgenerational traumas. Both unacceptably legitimize violence, disassociating it from its real impacts and promoting a romanticized image of the “vandalistic people”. For Oporto (2019), the notions of “Chile woke up” and “Chile changed” in the context of the social outburst are seen as superficial and opportunistic. The author argues that the social crisis does not represent an awakening but rather the manifestation of unconscious and shadowy processes incubated over time. It is hypothesized that the impunity of the dictatorship and post-dictatorship may have contributed to this social decomposition. The text addresses various issues in Chile, from natural events to social conflicts, atrocious crimes, corruption, abuses, and the crisis of institutions such as the Catholic Church.

Furthermore, the destruction of religious symbols is highlighted as an act of satanic symbolism, and the fundamental nature of the social “awakening” and the direction it could take in the future is questioned. Oporto (2019) criticizes the slogan “The material does not matter; total, it is recovered”, arguing that it masks the inability to spiritualize matter due to the consumer society. It highlights the trivialization of sabotage and denying affairs as disposable, even in human relationships. In addition, the term “familiar” in demonstrations is examined, relating it to the condition of having a family to be able to participate. The idea of humanization, *lumpen* fascism, and lumpen consumerism is introduced as a system that ranges from large predators to the most vulnerable sectors. Oporto (2019) says that impulsivity in the social crisis is related to the cravings of the consumer society, according to Pier Paolo Pasolini, who describes education as encouraging competition to possess and destroy.

The concepts of *lumpenization*, lumpen fascism, and lumpen consumerism reveal the perversion of genuine social demands by the anthropological cataclysm of consumer society's hedonism. The current crisis does not represent a spiritual transformation, but an insurrectionary imposture aimed at satisfying the cravings of consumer society: to have, to possess, to destroy. The systematic destruction, looting, and fires reflect the social crisis in Chile, highlighting the deep rupture in the country's soul (Oporto, 2022). Chilean society is presented as empty, fascist, and obsessed with having, possessing, and destroying. The crisis unmasks the false “country image”. It evidences the collapse of the rule of law, with the impunity of lumpen fascism ranging from the owners of the country to the most vulnerable sectors. The author criticizes “citizen” insurrections as impostures linked to the surrender to the consumer society, suggesting that the anthropological perversion of hedonism has perverted genuine social demands. In this context, legitimate social demands are seen as excuses that cover up the greed inherent in the consumer society, undermining the social dimension of severe events such as sabotage, looting, and arson. The narrative concludes by expressing little hope in the country's ability to make profound changes, highlighting the persistence of lumpen consumerism and the agony of Chilean society. However, it introduces an image of beauty and innocence during the horror. For Martuccelli (2019), Chile's modernization and economic growth process increased expectations, especially among the middle classes and popular sectors, driven by the desire to emulate the standard of living of the more affluent strata. Despite criticisms of imitative consumerism, consumption and economic success became consensual collective aspirations, reflecting an oscillation between different economic and consumption models.

#### IV. Methodology

The research had a mixed approach, quantitative-qualitative and exploratory in scope since the subject matter would be emerging within our country's social sciences and humanities. On the one hand, a review of various bibliographical sources was made, preferably published in 2019 and the following years, containing multiple interpretations of the Social Outburst. On the other hand, a questionnaire composed of open and closed questions and some Likert-type scale questions was elaborated. Analysis categories were established to know the subjective interpretations the subjects give to the phenomena they experience (Valles, 2000). The method used was the case study since we worked with a specific population from which we sought to learn about their experience (Yin, 2011). The sample consisted of the following inclusion criteria:

- Age: From 15 to 24, according to Census demographics, youth is understood as a generation from five age groups.
- Sex-gender: both sexes.
- Educational level: high school and higher education students.
- Territory of residence: The following table shows a breakdown of the urban and peripheral communes of the Metropolitan Region, some located more than thirty kilometers and one hour from downtown Santiago, where the demonstrations took place.

Table N° 1. Communities of residence of participating youths

Commune	N	%
Puente Alto	10	24%
Colina	6	15%
La Florida	4	10%
Maipú	4	10%
Peñalolén	3	7%
San Bernardo	3	7%
San Joaquín	2	5%
Cerrillos	1	2%
Cerro Navia	1	2%
El Bosque	1	2%
Estación Central	1	2%
Lo Prado	1	2%
Pudahuel	1	2%
Quilicura	1	2%
Renca	1	2%
Santiago	1	2%
<b>Total</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: Own elaboration.

Based on the “snowball” practice, the sample consisted of 41 subjects, to whom the data collection technique defined as a questionnaire was applied. The usefulness of the questionnaire lies in the fact that this instrument can collect a wide variety of topics through closed questions mixed with open ones (Valles, 2000). For this purpose, an indicative script of questions was prepared, which was worked on digitally on a freely accessible platform (Google Forms). The fieldwork was conducted during the period pandemic and two years after the Social Outbreak (October 2021).

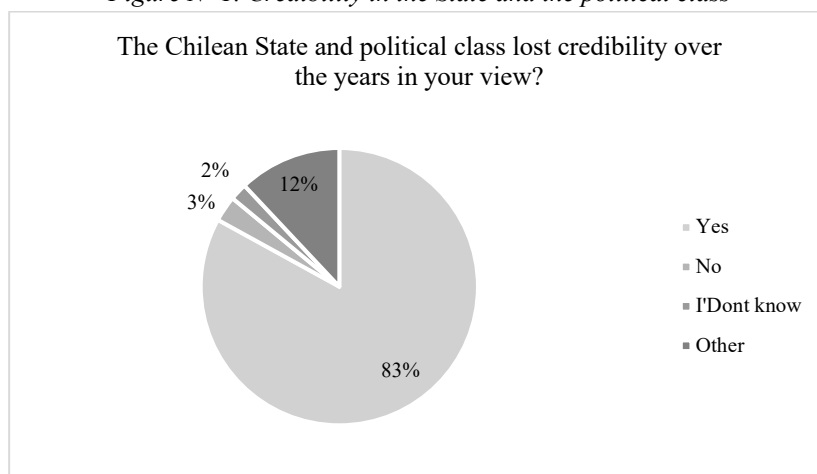
## V. Results

The results are presented below, arranged in the following categories of analysis: a) credibility of the political class; b) perception of public order institutions; c) relationship with spaces in dispute, such as *Plaza Dignidad*; d) level of influence of the Social Outburst in their way of understanding reality; f) degree of participation in the process and g) use of symbolism associated with the outburst.

Our research examines the rupture generated by the lack of credibility, perceiving that the State and the political class have lost credibility over the years. The results reveal that 73% said yes, 23% answered no, and 4% chose “I do not know”. These statistics become relevant to other questions in the same study, such as the inquiry on confrontations between uniformed officers and demonstrators in protests: Why do you think confrontations occur between people in charge of public order and demonstrators in protests? The main answer, indicated by 61%, is “Because of distrust in the actions of public order institutions”. However, the second predominant cause is “because of the scale of violence in the streets”. These findings are evidence of the deep distrust in institutions and social tensions that contribute to conflicts between protesters and law enforcement.

How youth perceive the authorities running the country could reflect the health of our democracy. According to previous studies (Araujo, 2019), the credibility of the State, the political class, and various institutions has declined during the last few years. An example of this is what happened during the first term of President Sebastián Piñera when his approval level reached 23% in 2011, a phase of student protests that lasted for a long time and were supported by the citizenry, according to opinion polls of the time (Segovia & Gamboa, 2012). In our case, and as can be seen in Figure N° 1, we obtained that 83% of the surveyed population perceives that government institutions and agencies have lost credibility:

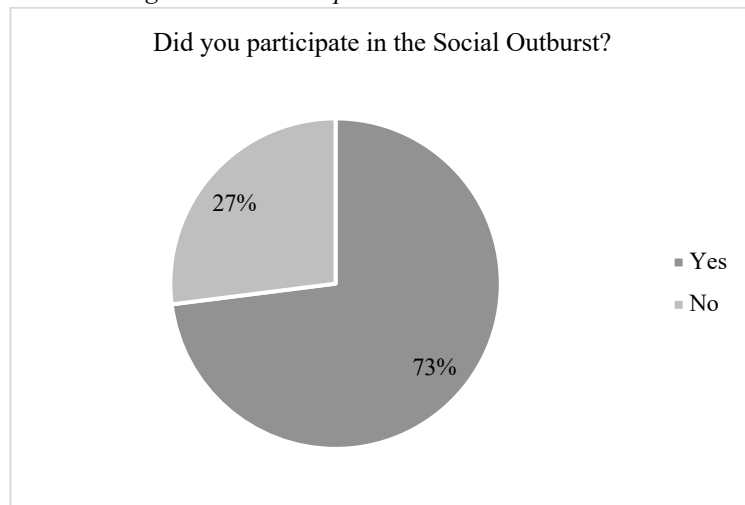
Figure N° 1. Credibility in the State and the political class



Source: Own elaboration.

Such exponential participation, at least within the sample group, confirms this since when asked about involvement in experiences linked to Social Outbursts, 73% claim to have participated in some of these experiences. In our study, we inquired about personal experiences related to Social Outbursts. According to our data, 73% of the young participants claimed to have participated in protest activities. As mentioned above, according to Larraín (2014), identity necessarily incardinate the individual and collective dimension of the modern individual, understood in context. Participation in the outburst is considered a symbolic expression carried out in a specific territory that did not belong to them but which they appropriated.

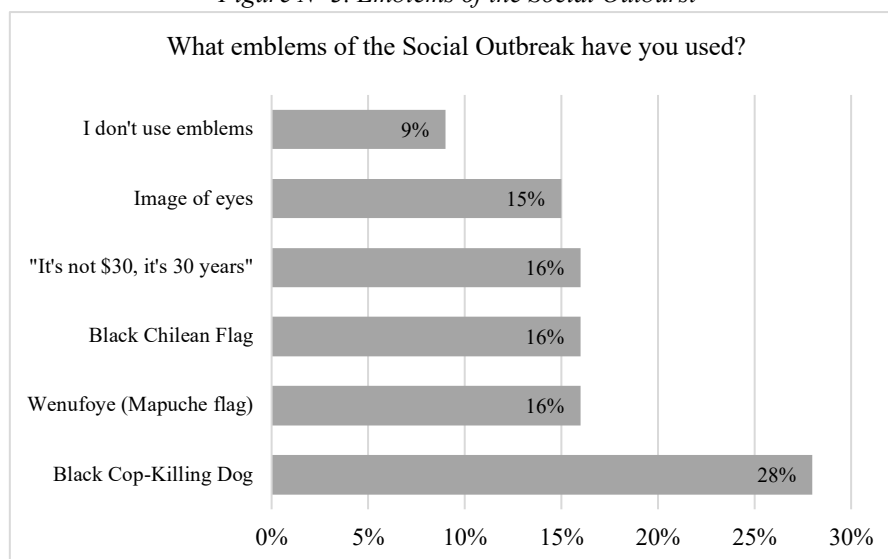
Figure N° 2. Participation in the Social Outburst



Source: Own elaboration.

On the other hand, our study asked about using accessories or artifacts that stand as symbolic emblems of a cause. The young participants indicated discomfort using various emblems, such as images and flags. These cultural products “are the symbols of this century, which come from the meme, from the Internet. There is a generational identity, a Chilean people, who are building their icons from their memory” (Manzi, 2020, p. 17).

Figure N° 3. Emblems of the Social Outburst



Source: Own elaboration.

Figure N° 3 shows that the young participants in our study have primarily used the image of a stray dog that became known during the revolt, which is attributed to an aggressive and defiant attitude towards the Carabineros, hence its nickname. The dog in question has a black coat and represents a typical case of the species called “quilter”, which alludes to dogs that are not purebred. Hence, it evokes a popular identity for the Chilean people. They then followed a series of icons that were seen during that period, such as the black Chilean flag as a sign of mourning and indignation and the flag of the *Mapuche* indigenous people (*Wenufoye*) (Pairicán, 2019). On the other hand, the image of the eyes emerged as a reference to the cases of police violence in which one or both eyes were mutilated. Finally, the use of a phrase repeated on banners and in the media during the Outbreak alludes to the period from the end of the dictatorship to the present, marked by the implementation of an economic model -

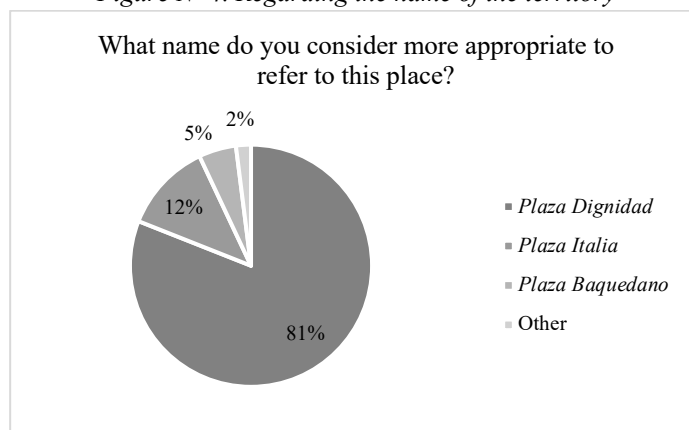


or Chilean-style modernization. As Giménez (2005) states, the identity development and transformation process imply the (re)creation of reference symbols. The referents are produced concretely and symbolically and are anchored to a given culture. Therefore, this social group (re)appropriates icons or symbols to reproduce, determine, and differentiate its semantics.

Our research explores the territorial perception and the link of young students from the Metropolitan Region with spaces relevant to the Social Outburst, emphasizing the resignification of the name of one of these places. In this context, 81% of the sample considered *Plaza Dignidad* the most appropriate term, while *Plaza Italia* obtained only 12% approval, highlighting the majority preference for the new name.

Likewise, the research reveals significant data on the current territorial resignification of this square, exploring the symbolic interpretation attributed to this space by the sample. According to the results, the majority perceives it mainly as “a meeting place” (57%), followed by the consideration as a “Heritage space” (49%) and, in third place, as a “Space of power” (39%). These findings reflect the diverse symbolic and social dimensions that young people associate with this site in the post-Social Outbreak context. The reappropriation of identity is also linked to the territory. In our case, the population that participated in our study indicated that the sector of Plaza Baquedano or Plaza Italia should be renamed with a concept related or significant to the Social Outburst. Figure N° 4 shows that 81% of the participants agree that the most appropriate name for that place would be *Plaza Dignidad* compared to 12% who consider that it should keep the name of Plaza Italia.

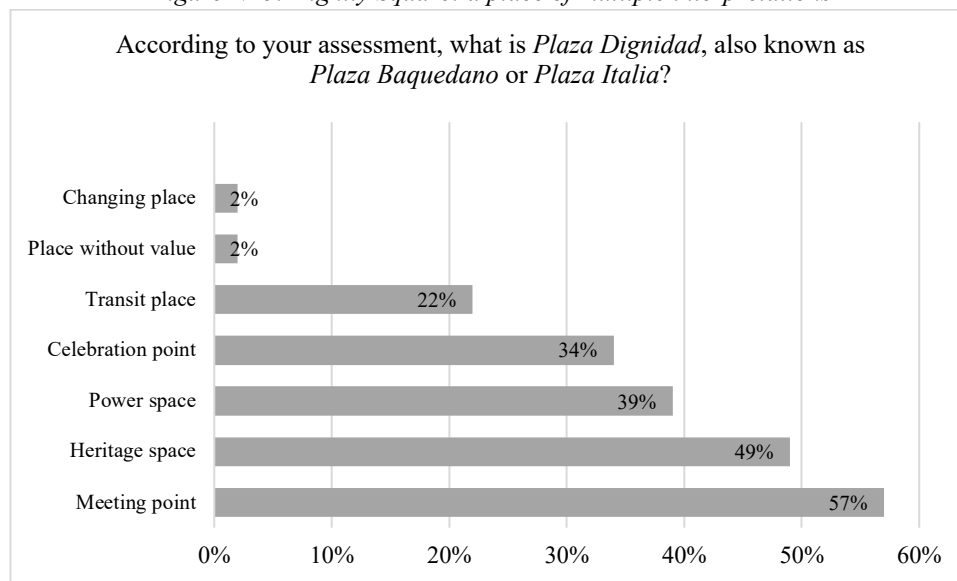
Figure N° 4. Regarding the name of the territory



Source: Own elaboration.

Our study found that young people forged a collective-territorial identity with the space they renamed *Plaza Dignidad* through multiple reconstructed meanings. It should be said that the concept of “dignity” emerged spontaneously and became a symbolic demand of the protesting citizenship, which occurred during the process of the Social Outbreak. One of the main characteristics of territory lies in its capacity to include or exclude people. In this sense, a person can feel excluded from the territory and the perception of their identity. They can also feel highly identified, generating an attachment to the place and a sense of belonging, resulting in a feeling of control and power over this space. Giménez (2005, p. 56) states that “the appropriation process would then be consubstantial to the territory. This process, marked by conflicts, explains how the territory is produced, regulated, and protected in the interest of the power groups”.

Figure N° 5. Dignity Square: a place of multiple interpretations



Source: Own elaboration. Note: The percentages do not add up to 100 because more than one option could be chosen.

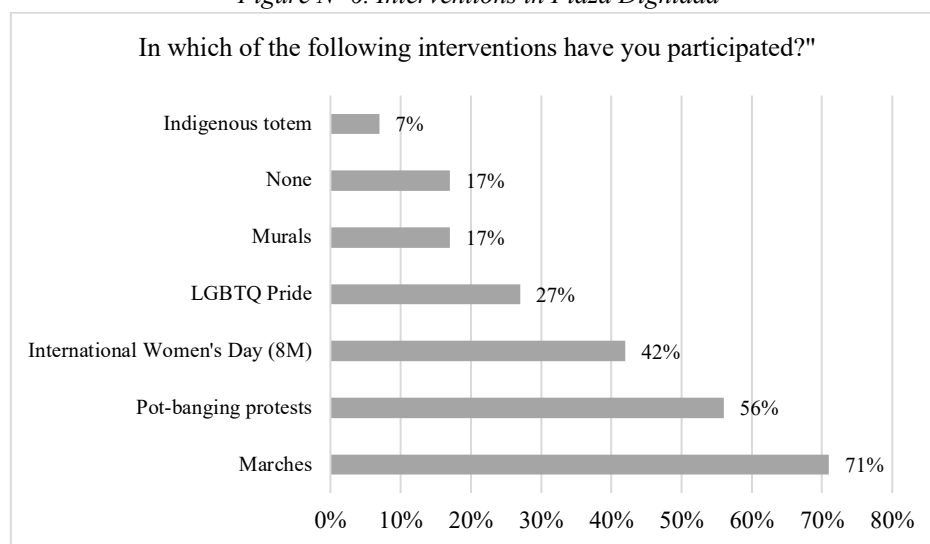
In Figure N° 5, these results clearly show that citizens understand this place with precise functionality, not simply as a transit space that divides the Metropolitan Region. Let us recall that the Plaza Baquedano or Plaza Italia sector has historically been considered a symbolic border dividing the upper and lower classes. On this occasion, the people participating in the protests reappropriated the space. They gave it a new purpose, now as a meeting place for mass demonstrations, both of joy (celebration of sporting triumphs, among others) and discontent, which points to a power game, by using space without the authorities' authorization. The young people in our study grant diverse functionalities to the space they renamed *Plaza Dignidad* (Dignity Square). As was to be expected, in the first place, this territory is identified as a meeting place (57%) since, during the Outbreak, it became “Ground Zero”. Secondly, this place is appreciated as a heritage space. Through heritage, it is reflected in how this struggle to re-signify the spaces in dispute takes place. This is made clear by authors such as Márquez (2020), Manzi (2020), Caulkins et al (2020), Cabezas and Villarroel (2021), and Ferrada (2021), who identify material changes and changes in patterns, stressing historical relationships and making visible demands that have been silenced for years. These authors point out that heritage served for many years to create a common identity, where the traces inherited from colonial times are represented with patriotic heroes far from the current reality, where the population is more diversified, seeking new forms of national unity. In this regard, Muñoz (2019) points out that it is the way the ruling class must intervene in the space, maintaining national unity. However, that little relates to what represents the people who try to express their demands graphically in the streets, seeking recognition, rights, quality of life, and justice. In this sense, authors such as Manzi (2020) and Caulkins et al (2020) explain different ways the population must express itself, such as graffiti, the human body, marches, dances, chants, flags, and performances. that show the new face of the public space, much more colorful, representative, and boisterous that resembles the reality of the populations, leaving in oblivion the figures of patriotic heroes. During the Social Upheaval, the statue of *General Baquedano* (which gives its name to the square) was repeatedly intervened. In addition, in several cities in Chile, statues of patriotic symbols were demolished according to official history. Every human group tries to protect its heroes as a symbol of unity. However, in our country since the nineteenth century, heroes have been questioned as monuments and pantheons only make visible a social (and sex-gender) hierarchy that must be respected (Ortega, 2021). In this way, the population must maintain submission to authority, following the official history, which shows the victors as heroes.

In the Outbreak, a turning point occurred because the population questioned the official history and redefined those vital public spaces of the city. From here, they confronted each other in different spheres, where heritage

would be a means to express their support or dissatisfaction with the imposed national identity. As the same authors point out, we are facing a de-monumentalization by saturation, that the population is tired of the history told from above, to give way to create its narrative. Spaces change their meaning because of the interaction with the people who interact with them. Individuals provide them with a purpose that is transformed over the years and with the inherent development: “The identity of a place is always in the process of change, of formation, of modification” (Massey, 2012, p. 79). From human geography, the subjective component is added to understand the place changing depending on a specific community. For authors such as Tuan (2001) and Relph (1976, cited in Ramírez and López, 2015), the place constantly searches for meaning. This is because the community of a given territory will give it specific components with which it identifies. In this regard, Muñoz-Duque & Ortiz (2024) add that space as a dimension in which interpersonal and social relationships necessarily take place is revalued as part of the sense of belonging, identity, and affective bond.

The use of the space renamed *Plaza Dignidad* implies massive agglomerations and different demonstrations that, although they are integrated within the demands requested during the Outbreak, other forms of protest consider specific causes. Thus, this territory can be understood as constantly changing its shape, depending on the occasion and the reason for the event. As can be seen in Figure N° 6, 71% of the participants took part in activities related to the Social Outburst: *cacerolazos* (pot-banging), LGBTQ marches, 8M commemorations, murals, and other types of artistic interventions:

Figure N° 6. Interventions in Plaza Dignidad

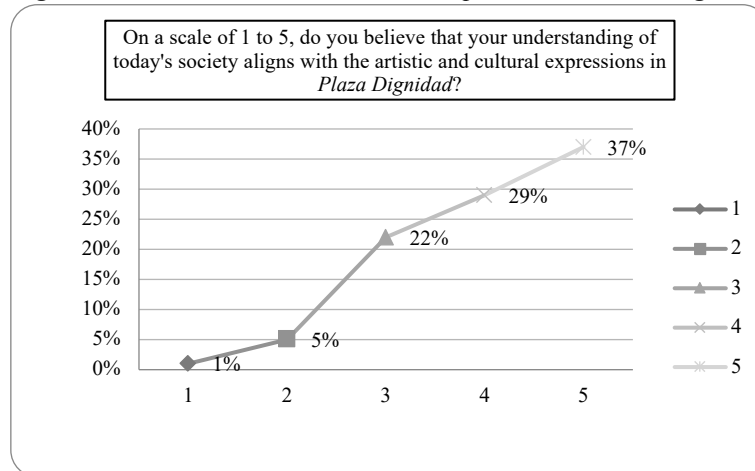


Source: Own elaboration. Note: The percentages do not add up to 100 because more than one option could be chosen.

Following Massey (2004), each place has a specificity resulting from the mixture of all its relationships. Tomadoni and Grezzi (2014) point out that “these places must be taken into account because they represent identities, symbols, memories, other times and other people” (p. 108). For their part, Ramírez and López (2015) state that since the 1980s, the public place has become a tool at the service of power, generating disagreements within the community. Since “social actors were not conceived as authors of their own meanings and intentions, bearers of social identities were not created by themselves” (Ramírez & López, 2015, p. 166).

Another central element in this new conception of collective-territorial identity centered on the Social Outburst is the type of activities, whether cultural, commemoration, or protest, carried out because of this process. For this reason, it was decided to consult the youth about the influence of these artistic and cultural expressions visualized in *Plaza Dignidad*.

Figure N° 7. About artistic and cultural expressions at Plaza Dignidad



Source: Own elaboration.

As shown in Figure N° 7, on a scale of one to five, where one means that they do not feel identified at all and five means that they feel very identified with such expressions, the results show that 37% of the respondents feel very identified, followed by 29% who reason identified, with the two options exceeding 50% of the preferences. Places are physical and symbolic (Augé, 1992). In the case of the results obtained, the participating population developed an affective bond with the *Plaza Dignidad* space, recognizing its importance as a social, cultural, and power center. Thus, despite living in sectors far from the so-called “Ground Zero”, they are interested in attending the demonstrations that took place there.

According to the study's methodology, the commune of residence of the sample of our research does not correspond to the place in dispute and the one it occupies. However, instead, they transit through it daily due to their social context, work, studies, or day-to-day circulation in the city. Their motivation when using this territory goes hand in hand with nonconformity towards the ruling class; they seek to exert pressure and confront them to generate a rupture in the quiet daily scheme of the city. Therefore, they are usually spaces with a high flow of people. Haesbaert & Mason-Deese (2020) suggests that the construction of the nation-state is associated with the political dimension of power-space as a territory delimited and controlled on a large scale. The territory also has a cultural, symbolic, and subjective dimension related to the appropriation of a group.

Now taking place in their hands, it is charged with meaning by the participants, reflecting the collective-territorial identity while seeking its vindication, reproduction, and permanence over time. Copeta & Louis (2009) postulate that specific guidelines appropriate for its investigation must be followed to recognize the collective-territorial identity, where the objective characteristics are observed directly, understood as the constants that are manifested repeatedly in a specific territory, which are expressed through values and symbology proper to the social group and the appropriate territory.

## VI. Conclusions

The underlying hypothesis of our research holds that, because of the October 2019 demonstrations, new social, cultural, artistic, and identity expressions were generated, focused mainly on youth. This phenomenon, with *Plaza Dignidad* as a prominent icon in Santiago, inspires the coining of the concept of collective-territorial identity. When addressing the question of territorial identity in the context of the Social Outburst, its significant impact on the identity perception of the population studied becomes evident. This historical milestone provoked a profound questioning and criticism of ingrained values, leading young people to reconsider the conceptions of their role in society.

From the data collection instrument, an analysis of present constants emerges, revealing that, although not all the population is involved in social protest, a significant fraction does so, integrating values that influence their behavior as citizens, both current and future. These values, rooted in negative experiences conditioned by the

context, the pace of life, inequality, and the perception of state abandonment, shape the collective-territorial identity in a significant way.

A crucial aspect is the limited scope of this collective-territorial identity compared to broader forms of collective identity, such as national identity. Given the specific nature of our sample, which is composed mainly of young people, this identity change cannot be extrapolated in a generalizable way. The relevance of incorporating these new identity perceptions of emblematic places in the country lies in its potential as a valuable tool for current generations. These generations appreciate society from an integrating perspective and are always ready to express their positions and criticisms of the existing model of society.

As for the projections of the research, there is a need to explore other cases of identity-territorial changes, not necessarily centered in the capital but also the regions. In addition, the possibility of extending the research to different age groups is raised since the current sample focuses on a specific range. This approach would allow a better understanding of the manifestation of a new collective-territorial identity in other generations.

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