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**How COVID-19 and social conflict responses relate:
from the Chilean miracle to hunger protests**

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Foreword

When the COVID-19 pandemic spread over the world, it became apparent that it exacerbated existing crises and magnified vulnerabilities. In April 2020, we therefore set out with a group of students to follow what happened in 7 countries: The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Haiti, Zimbabwe, Philippines, India, Brazil and Chile.

In all these countries, COVID-19 became part of intersecting and compounded crises. The ongoing research programme at the International Institute of Social Studies (ISS) of [When Disaster meets Conflict](#) is about dealing with intersecting crises, and became the steppingstone for the analysis of the responses to COVID-19. When Disaster meets Conflict – and hence these case studies – has been supported by the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO) (Grant number: 453-14-013); Nederlandse Organisatie voor Wetenschappelijk Onderzoek

The case-studies have been implemented by students of the countries residing at the ISS on the basis of remote interviews and secondary sources. COVID-19 widely triggered top-down and centralised emergency measures. The research set out to uncover what happens when COVID-19 hits fragile, authoritarian and/ or conflict-affected settings? It focuses on how affected communities perceive of and deal with COVID-19 restrictions, and what initiatives emerge in providing local safety nets.

This working paper reports on the research done in Chile. The authors found that the dynamics of the pre-existing conflict in Chile are strongly intertwined with the pandemic's responses. For example, the government responses to COVID-19 are perceived by many as control measures in relation to social protest rather than to the pandemic. On the other hand, collective actions resulting from the social movement later served as a platform that facilitated collaborative efforts such as "hunger protests" or the development of common kitchens that helped with the response to the pandemic

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Table of Contents

ABSTRACT	5
1 INTRODUCTION	6
2 METHODOLOGY	7
3 FINDINGS	7
3.1 Country context before COVID-19	7
3.2 Why the vision of the government and the social movement differs?	8
3.3 Top-down measures in response to COVID-19: “We have one of the best health systems in the world”	9
3.4 Consequences of top-down measures in vulnerable sectors of Santiago de Chile	11
3.5 Local initiatives for national problems: Ollas communes (common pots) to face hunger	13
4 CONCLUSIONS	15
REFERENCES	16
ABOUT THE AUTHORS	20

Abstract

COVID-19 broke out in Chile in March 2020, in the midst of an intensive social conflict rooted in the deep-seated inequalities caused by the free-market reforms in the country implemented since the dictatorship era of Pinochet in the nineties. Underlying the protests and demonstrations there was a big discontent from several sectors of the population that barely received the benefits of the free-market economy that once put the country as a leader and example in the Latin American region.

The government seemed to be unaware of the problems that most of the population was facing and, as this research showed, the measures implemented to stop the spread of the virus also demonstrated the scarce knowledge of the livelihood conditions of many. The government's response to the pandemic was to implement dynamic quarantines, to declare a "state of emergency" and to set a curfew. The population started to claim that the pandemic was the perfect excuse for the government to implement authoritarian measures to diminish social conflict.

As we researched, these measures showed the deep-rooted inequality in the country. While a part of the population could keep working and maintaining a certain level of life, many lost their jobs (mostly informal) and could not sustain their everyday life, starting a new type of demonstration: hunger protests. Chileans mobilized again but this time to cover the most vulnerable sectors immediate needs, like hunger, by organizing *ollas comunes* (*common pots*).

Through a qualitative research approach, our study used secondary data analysis (mainly press) mixed with semi-structured interviews. Five key informants from the private, social, and public sectors were consulted via the Zoom platform.

After analyzing the data, we concluded the case of Chile shows how pre-existing conflict dynamics can be strongly intertwined with pandemic responses as earlier protests for greater equality paved the way for a climate facilitating 'hunger protests' during the pandemic. However, the path for collective action was also paved as in response to growing mistrust in the state, citizens had a strong social mobilization base to face needs like hunger.

Keywords

COVID-19, Chile, social conflict, hunger protests.

From the Chilean miracle to hunger protests: how COVID-19 and social conflict responses relate

1 Introduction

For many decades, Chile was considered by the international community a developed economy due to the good performance of several macroeconomic indicators, which made the country an example for other economies in Latin America. The market-led economic Chilean model was acclaimed to be the cause behind the country's prosperity and its robust economy. However, this model brought many inequalities among the population as a result of the privatization of social security systems and market deregulation (Flores et al 2019; Gallegos et al 2018).

As the claimed prosperity left behind several sectors of the population, in 2019 the country witnessed the emergence of a growing number of demonstrations on the streets, these took place each Friday from October 2019 until the COVID-19 outbreak in March 2020. The protests started due to the increase in the public transport fare but soon summed different demands. The precarity of wages, the clear social inequalities, the increase on different public service rates, and the gender violence were some of the reasons behind the mobilization of hundreds of Chileans.

These demonstrations became the largest that the country witnessed in the last decades. Chileans were demanding social justice to a government that seemed not to be aware of inequalities as the harsh repression with which the government responded the protests showed. When the social movement became wider, president Piñera changed his discourse and, some weeks after he stated that the protesters were criminals, he declared: *“It’s is true that problems have been accumulating for decades and the different governments and mine haven’t been able to see this situation in all its magnitude”* (as quoted in Montes 2019).

Another example of how the government seemed to ignore the prevalence of inequalities was the statement made by the former health minister when he mentioned in an interview that: *“There is a level of poverty and overcrowding [in Chile] of which I was not aware”* (El Mostrador 2020) when he referred to the risks of COVID-19 infection to which the population of Santiago was exposed.

The belief that many members of the political class had about Chile, as an example of development to be imitated for others, had several implications in how the government faced the COVID-19 crisis and how people received and perceived the implemented measures. COVID-19 as a disaster of global proportions was replied in Chile in light of the social conflict and crisis the country was facing. The current social conflict in the country is rooted in a “miscommunication” or disconnection between citizens and government. This disconnection affected people’s reception of the Chilean government measures to control the spread of the coronavirus, while the distrust to the political institutions and their perceived inefficiency encouraged local initiatives to face immediate problems like hunger. Therefore, the guiding question of this research was: How top-down governmental measures in response to the COVID-19 pandemic interacted with the ones propelled by civil society in Chile?

2 Methodology

To answer the research question, analysis of secondary sources (press in particular) and semi-structured interviews were carried out. Secondary sources included relevant news and articles related to the social movement in Chile and the responses from the government to the COVID-19 crisis, particularly from October 2019 until August 2020.

In a second stage, five semi-structured interviews were done with relevant actors representing the private, government, and civil society sectors. The interviewees included representatives from *ACCIÓN Empresas*, a network of companies committed to sustainable development, *Comunidad de Organizaciones Solidarias*, a network of civil society organizations (CSO), *Coordinadora Feminista 8M*, a feminist organization, and a public servant from the *Ministry of the Interior and Public Security*. The interviews were conducted under confidentiality agreements, and the statements of the interviewees do not necessarily represent the opinion of the organizations in which they work or participate.

3 Findings

3.1 Country context before COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic reached Chile in the middle of the largest social movement in the country since the end of the Chilean dictatorship in 1990. These protests, among others, are rooted in social demands for reducing economic inequality and improving the general livelihood conditions of most Chileans. These social demands contrast with the idea of a country with a prominent economy and high standard of living.

This positive image of the country is usually backed by the fact the country presents a high Human Development Index¹ (UNDP 2019), it was the second country in Latin America to join the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OCDE) and has free trade agreements with multiple countries, like USA, China, Canada, Hong Kong, among others. The “Chilean miracle” is the concept that is used intensively in the literature to analyze how a Latin American country managed to grow economically for about 10 consecutive years by 7% on average (Valenzuela 1997; Donald 1997; Ruiz-Tagle 2010; Bernal- Leon 2011). This imaginary has also been strongly promoted by the current government. For instance, on October 9th, 2019, at a press conference, the Chilean President Sebastián Piñera pointed out: ‘In the midst of this convulsed Latin America we see Chile, our country is a true oasis, with a stable democracy’ (Cooperativa 2019).

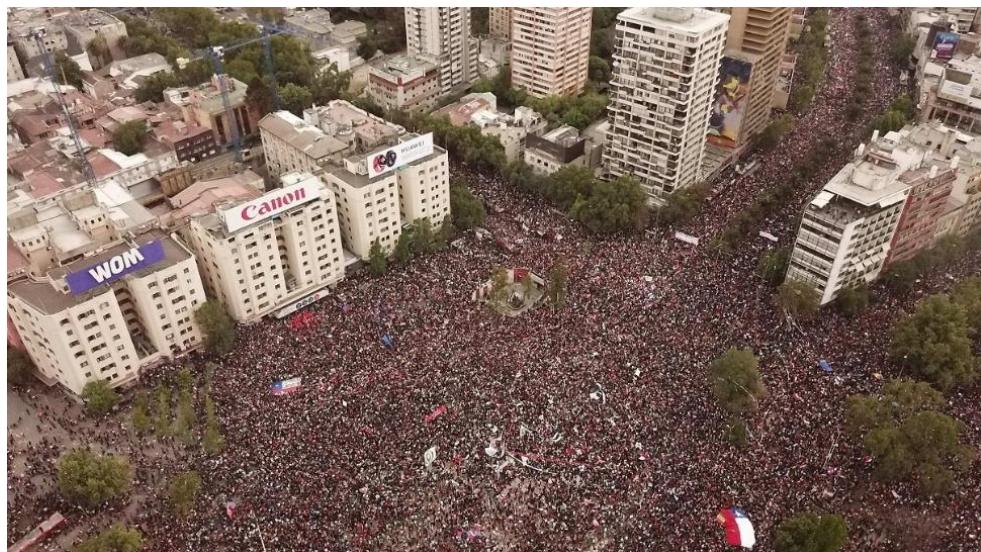
Only 9 days after this statement, the country saw the beginning of the largest social movement in decades, strongly contesting the benefits of this “miracle”. This movement started when the government announced a new increase of 30 CLP (0,032 EUR approximately) in the price of a subway ticket on October 16th, 2019. Secondary students started a campaign to not pay the subway, raiding

¹ The Human Development Index is a summary measure of average achievement in key dimensions of human development: a long and healthy life, being knowledgeable and have a decent standard of living. Chile is ranked 43 over 189 countries (being n°1 in Latin America), which is considered a high level of human development.

different stations for three days. Different riots occur followed up all over the country.

Due to their relevance and strength, on October 19th the government declared a state of emergency and a curfew, which lasted 10 days. The streets were under the control of military forces, but instead of calming the demonstrations, their actions were marked by a violent repression of the protesters. According to official data from the National Institute of Human Rights of Chile (INDH for its acronym in Spanish), more than 20 people were reported dead, 245 injured by firearms, and 2686 people detained throughout the country, only in those 10 days.

With this State violence, mobilizations increased and became a transversal citizen movement with the tagline "It is not about 30 pesos, it is about 30 years", hinting that the mobilization did not respond simply to the rise in the public transport ticket, but to the accumulated inequality that is not explained with the country's good economic performance. The mobilizations were massive and lasted almost five months, only in the capital city, more than one million people went to the street each Friday to protest against the inequality produced by neoliberal policies.



Thousands of protesters gathering in Plaza Italia, Santiago de Chile, in October 2019.
Retrieved from: [Miles de chilenos entonan a Víctor Jara en la protesta más grande desde que cayó Pinochet \(cuartopoder.es\)](https://milesdechilenosentonanavictorjaraenlaprotestamásgrandedesdequecayópinochet.cuartopoder.es), (Rodrigo Sáez, Efe).

3.2 Why the vision of the government and the social movement differs?

Some authors point out that the "stability" of Chilean democracy is not the result of a successful institutionalization, but rather the imposition of a repressive state that has established order to benefit a privileged minority at the expense of individual rights and freedoms (Loveman, 1993; Valdivia 2010 cited in Heiss 2017: 474). This translates into inequality (social, economic, cultural, and political) that contradicts the "model worthy of imitation" that the government of Chile promoted. Said economic growth based on emblematic neoliberal

policies in the region did not necessarily mean a redistribution of economic gains towards the population. If we reviewed the data related to inequality, we can conclude that it has increased in the last 30 years (Flores et al 2019), which raises a feeling of injustice that has found its vanish point through various social movements since 2006 (Heiss, 2017: 476; Freire 2020: 157) reaching its peak with the social outbreak of 2019.

This social outbreak set various precedents. The most clear was the retaking of public spaces to protest against different agendas (since the end of the dictatorship there were no demonstrations as massive as those that occurred from October); the demands were not sectorial as before (education, health, or housing), but rather united against inequality and the precariousness of life ("until dignity becomes customary" was the most common motto to see); and, finally, we could witness a re-emerge of historical strategies of collective solidarity in protests, many of which were developed and used during the country's dictatorship between 1973 and 1990.

As soon as the mobilizations began, the president invoked the State Security Law, a legal instrument that imposes higher penalties on those who disturb the order and put the security of the State at risk. Since the return to democracy after the dictatorship (1990), these measures were not used before. The presence of the military in the streets and the implementation of a curfew (the first since 1987), evoked in the public the feeling of having returned to the Pinochet dictatorship (Freire 2020: 155). By March 2020, the high levels of repression towards the movement resulted in more than 30 casualties, 405 people with eye injuries (because of the use of pellet shots to repress protesters), partial curfews by the governments, and large violent clashes. This led to a national crisis and Piñera's approval in national surveys fell to a record low of 6% (CEP 2020).

It is in the midst of this social crisis and conflict in Chile that, in early March 2020, the first cases of the COVID-19 pandemic were announced in the country.

3.3 Top-down measures in response to COVID-19: “We have one of the best health systems in the world”

When COVID-19 appeared in the country, there was a sense of confidence in the health system by the political elite of Chile. Jaime Mañalich, the Minister of Health at that time, pointed out that they had one of the best health systems in the world and were prepared to face the toughest of the scenarios. The first strategies adopted by the government were closing schools and universities twelve days after the first case was confirmed, curfews across the country between 22:00 and 5:00 hrs and dynamic quarantines.

Dynamic quarantines consist of quarantining certain areas while others continue to operate. It is a strategy that different countries chose to pursue “controlled herd immunity”: the largest amount of non-vulnerable population (children, youth, and adults without previous health conditions) is infected and in their recovery, they generate immunity to the virus, thus protecting the populations most at risk. In the case of Chile, dynamic quarantines were applied at the municipally level starting with those municipalities that had higher rates of contagion and were becoming more flexible as they showed improvements. For these measures to be effective, though, there must be two key points: reduced mobility between municipalities and traceability of contagion cases and their environment.

According to one study presented to the COVID-19 Social Committee², this model was better than a full lockdown since keeping a constant number of infections, could make it easier to contain the virus (Siebert 2020), at the same time it allows to keep the country's economy running, an explicit concern of President Piñera (Cerda 2020). This measure, however, was not exempt from criticism. Both the Colegio Médico (Chilean Medical Association) and mayors from all over the country requested to apply a total lockdown since they saw with concern how cases were increasing exponentially, to which the minister replied: "What they are saying is absurd, it is a disproportionate measure" (La Tercera 2020)

In mid-April, foreign media analyzed Chile's "successful" plan that stood out for its massive tests (Vega 2020) and lethality rates similar to South Korea, Germany, or Japan (Paul 2020), therefore, Piñera's approval increased to 21%, the highest rate since the social outbreak of October (Mardones 2020). With these indicators, the government began to install an idea of a "new normality", lifting the confinement of some municipalities (with higher income) and announcing a "safe return plan". This strategy implied public officials would return to their face-to-face activities (except for those over 70 years and pregnant women) and for children to return to school. The minister's strategy was to return to essential activities relying on the stock of beds and mechanical ventilators that were available in the country.

However, this concept of "new normality" was again widely criticized both by health experts and by the government's political sector, given that they occurred in a context that had not yet reached the peak of infections and in complete secrecy, without taking into account the recommendations of the technical or social committees (Segovia and Leighton 2020; Colegio Médico de Chile 2020b). The technical committee insisted on the need to make the traceability data of positive cases transparent, therefore isolation and quarantine can be more efficient (Colegio Médico de Chile 2020a). In addition to noting that these types of announcements gave a feeling of "false end-of-crisis environment, undermining the communications efforts of the health authority" (Colegio Médico de Chile 2020b). However, Minister Mañalich insisted that this was a concept coined by the WHO and was appropriated to use according to the great performance that Chile demonstrated.

This excess of confidence of the minister, as well as the decision-making without considering the technical reports of the advisory boards, led the government to confront the health unions and mayors (Mella 2020). They later claimed a lack of information and coordination on the part of the executive. For example, many mayors indicated to learn only on the news if their municipalities remained quarantined or not.

However, by mid-May, the capacity of the hospitals in the south-east area of Santiago (the most vulnerable population) was at its limit, with 99% occupancy. Public health experts pointed out that the dynamic quarantines allowed the virus to migrate from less vulnerable to the most vulnerable populations, triggering the contagion and mortality, facilitated by social and economic factors of these populations (Galarce 2020): High level of social

² The government created different "committees" to get advice for different public policies against COVID-19

overcrowding, low access to health, lower nutritional values, and resistance to comply with quarantine since many people live on a daily income.

In late May, the Emergency Operations Committee, the monitoring agency in charge to trace positive cases of COVID-19 and ensure compliance isolation, revealed that they were collapsed. Its call-centers in charge of these tasks left up to 11,000 calls without a trace, and that was repeated daily given the lack of human resources (Sepúlveda & Miranda 2020). With this, Mañalich's strategy failed. Traceability was a very important factor to prevent infection but was not considered on time despite constant recommendations of the technical committee and other social actors, like majors. Mañalich tardily gave this mission to trace cases to the primary health care centers of the country at the municipal level (June 3), when almost a month before (April 16) 58 mayors of the capital had offered their collaboration to the minister to monitoring and tracking the cases, taking advantage of their territorial network, offer that was refused by the minister.

On June 5, Mañalich assumed in a press point that the dynamic quarantines in Santiago had failed because mobility (trips between municipalities) did not decrease as expected. Mobility should have dropped to 35%, and it had only done so to 70% while the mechanisms for traceability that should have covered at least 80% of the persons that tested positive, had only managed to trace 60%. In the most vulnerable communes, the highest mobility rates were maintained close to 90%, in turn registering the highest mortality rate in the metropolitan region (Miranda 2020).

As the everyday diagnoses went from 500 cases per day in April to 2,660 per day by the beginning of May, the government decided to strengthen the lockdown measures. The numbers showed that the pandemic had worsened and that the dynamic lockdowns and the strategies followed until then were not giving the expected results. The complete lockdown was announced only two weeks after the government's attempt to lead the country to a “new normality”, which implied having public employees return to work and reopen schools, and which was suggested as the outbreak seemed to be controlled.

3.4 Consequences of top-down measures in vulnerable sectors of Santiago de Chile

In the context of the failure of the first measures, the now-former minister of health, stated that “Santiago's battle is the crucial battle in the *war* against coronavirus” when he announced the complete lockdown for the Santiago province and other six municipalities located in the periphery of Santiago. This vocabulary using the concepts of battle and war had been used by the government before during the social outbreak at the end of 2019. The complete lockdown was settled to start at 22:00 of May 15, affecting almost 42% of the total population of Chile (EMOL 2020). With this measure, the ghost of the curfews returned to people's memory, and many indicated that these measures sought not only to control the virus, but also a new social outbreak in the face of social discontent with the government's management of the pandemic.

Despite the awareness of some of the implications of complete quarantines, considering that the former minister of health recognized this was not an effective strategy as it affected the most vulnerable sectors (*Televisión Pública Noticias* 2020), the government measures to prevent difficulties for this population seems to be insufficient. According to a government representative, this happened not because of a lack of efficiency and coordination of the public sector, but because of the lack of trust in the institutions, and in the government in particular: “in this context, anything that we could do seemed like bad or not enough for the population. We are always under critics” (Personal interview 2020)³. Therefore, one of the most overlooked aspects of the actions implemented by the government was the impact of these measures, particularly in the lower-income neighborhoods, where many families could not acquire basic goods as several jobs were lost and the economic situation worsened with the pandemic.

However, the COVID outbreak was just a driving force that worsened conditions already occurring in the country and at the base of the social movement: poverty and informal economy. According to the last National Socioeconomic Characterization Survey, the wealthiest sector of the Chilean population obtained 38.1% of the national income while the poorest sector obtained only 1.4% in 2017 (Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile 2017). Besides, the National Employment Survey that covered the first quarter of 2020, showed that the national unemployment rate increased by 0.4% in comparison to the previous quarter, reaching a total of 28.9%, with an important number of people working in the informal sector (INE 2020).

In this given context, some of the municipalities of the Gran Santiago, particularly those of the urban periphery, received the new measure in difficult conditions: people working in the informal economy, the precarity of wages, and overcrowded households. Besides, and despite the government announced that law enforcement actors would be able to impose high fines to those that violated the quarantine, the mobility of many segregated municipalities did not reduce. The previous showed a common phenomenon occurring in Latin America: while high-income neighborhoods showed a reduction of their mobility with the measures, poor communities could not manage it as for the urgency of the daily sustenance. In this regard, a study revealed that the total lockdown in the Chilean metropolitan area did not impact much in the mobility rates of the poorest municipalities as it did in rich ones, mainly due to socioeconomic causes (Weintraub et al. 2020) as the high-income areas have greater access to public services and formal jobs that could be done remotely.

The reduced awareness of the government about the vulnerability faced by the poorest sectors resulted in protests that followed a call by the government³ for a complete lockdown. On May 18, residents of *El Bosque*, a municipality in Santiago that was under quarantine since mid-April, took the streets arguing that authorities were ignoring the fact that many people had no access to food, water, and shelter. As in many other Latin American big cities, in Santiago the periphery is a synonym of spatial segregation of poor urban communities. The geographical boundaries are also an expression of social and economic exclusion so the fact that the protests started in a municipality of the urban periphery was

³ Personal interview made to a director of an emergency department from the government.

not a surprise. According to the National Socioeconomic Characterization Survey 2015, multidimensional poverty in El Bosque municipality was 27.04%, more than the national average of 20.9%, while overcrowding reaches 18% of households, while income poverty is the highest in the Metropolitan Region (Ministerio de Desarrollo Social y Familia 2015).

The so-called *hunger protests* resulted in⁴ the President's announcement about the distribution of 2.5 million food baskets to the most vulnerable families. In addition, at the end of April, the government released an economic emergency package that included an “Emergency Family Income” intended to reach 4.9 million workers of the informal economy, consisting of a monthly payment for members of the most exposed households that did not have a formal income.

However, what the protests showed was that the poorest sectors could not wait for receiving food supplies, which distribution logistics was poorly considered in the assessment of the organizations interviewed. Together with the previous, the Emergency Family Income also seemed late in order to ameliorate the economic situation.

The government responded to the hunger protests by deploying security forces that confronted the demonstrations with tear gas and water cannons, giving signs of the authoritarian nature of Piñera's government that many human rights organizations have reported and became visible with the excessive use of force and the policy abuse towards the protesters of the social movement of 2019⁴. The hunger protests spread to other municipalities nationwide that were facing the same problem, however, due to the rules of social distancing, they were not very visible and not caught by the media.

These protests also showed the lack of coordination between local and national authorities. The mayor of the El Bosque municipality stated that the local authorities distributed around 2,000 aid packages and asked the central government “not to continue to burden municipalities with an economic responsibility we cannot cover” (Chile Today 2020). While the Association of Municipalities disapproved the logistics behind the food basket measure as its president stated that from the total households that meet the requirements to receive this aid, only 58% would receive it as for the number of boxes available. In addition, local authorities were critical to the initiative particularly for the delay in the delivery as thousands of households received the boxes at the end of June, almost a month after the initiative was launched. This led the Association to suggest to the government new measures for the second delivery of food baskets (24 horas 2020; El Desconcierto 2020; Radioagricultura 2020)

3.5 Local initiatives for national problems: Ollas communes (common pots) to face hunger

As stated by one of the interviewees, underlying the protests there was not a problem of shortage of food supply, as many media argued, but an economic crisis that led to certain sectors to conditions of food insecurity and lack of resources to acquire basic goods. As this interviewee argued, what people were

⁴ Cfr ‘Informe sobre la Misión a Chile 30 de octubre – 22 de noviembre de 2019’, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and “Chile. Events of 2019”, Human Rights Watch.

asking for was for an “economic solution rather than a food solution” (personal interview 2020).⁵

According to the survey “How the Metropolitan Region is experiencing the quarantine?”, the households from the lowest socioeconomic levels have faced a decrease in their income with the measures of confinement and social distancing, as 72% of the people from the lowest socioeconomic levels stated that their income has decreased a lot, which differs to the 32% of the high-income group (Ipsos-Espacio Público 2020).

To face the food situation, which was a consequence of the economic scenario that prevailed before the outbreak and that worsen with it, many neighborhoods in the country witnessed the resurgence of the *Ollas Comunes* initiative (common pots). As a protester of the municipality Villa San Francisco explained “We are not getting the government bonds, we don't have money to eat. We, the neighbors that have a little income are organizing ourselves, buying merchandise, and donating it, especially for those with COVID-19. But what will happen when we run out of money?” (Diario UChile 2020).

Las *ollas communes* comprise a positive experience of organization in which vulnerable sectors autonomously provide themselves with food for their subsistence. For this initiative, women play a strategic role as regularly they are the ones who carry out the work of cooking. As stated in an interview by the spokeswoman of a Chilean feminist organization, the common pots, and the supply and mutual care networks that emerged in popular neighborhoods to face the crisis were an expression of the sexual division of labour and were enabled by the previous local assemblies (asambleas territoriales) that arose from the social movement of October 2019. These local assemblies embody collective organization to resist and shape new relationships in the community, outside the frameworks provided by the State and the market. These are composed of young and elderly people and are characterized by a mistrust towards the existing institutions what makes them create mechanisms to solve the most immediate problems within the community. According to this interviewee “There are no centralized forces that take these initiatives, but rather the articulation of initiatives that arose in a dispersed manner after October 18”.

However, the common pots initiatives are not new. Clarisa Hardy (1986) traces the origins of this initiative to unions and strikes scenarios and, particularly associates them with workers' layoffs and repression that they suffered after the 1973 *coup d'état* that brought Augusto Pinochet to power. These workers' families were left without financial support for political reasons, however, the common pots not only attempted to solve the hunger problems of families experiencing this situation but also solve problems caused by the economic model implemented.

Therefore, the initiative of the common pots in the Chilean context has a strong component of collective memory, which is shaped for those elements in history that are still present or related to a collective reality.

⁵ Personal interview, spokeswoman of one of the most important feminist organizations in Chile.

4 Conclusions

The crisis generated by the coronavirus outbreak disaster added more discontent to the already harmed political, economic, and social landscape that caused the social movement and several protests in Chile during 2019 and the beginning of 2020. The social crisis that the country was facing then made evident the existent inequalities in the country which demolished the idea of Latin America's economic miracle, as Chile was considered the most successful free-market economy of the region.

The mismanagement of COVID-19 in the Chilean public arena deepened the democratic crisis that the government was facing and that was making evident the existent mistrust towards institutions and the distance between authorities and the population.

This scenario made it difficult to face a disaster like a pandemic if we consider the *spiral of ungovernability* concept, explained by Pasquino (2002), and which refers to the incapacity of the government to face problems due to the lack of credibility from those governed towards its institutions. The lack of legitimacy that the government was experiencing affected how the country faced the coronavirus, as a proper response implied a crucial presence of the State to lead and coordinate response-related actions.

However, it was demonstrated that the government's reduced awareness about the economic and living conditions that prevailed in the low-income segment, resulted in this sector not being properly reached by the governmental measures, as the hunger protests revealed. In addition, the lack of trust towards the government revealed the precarious articulation between the measures established and the local initiatives, as their emergence had to do with mistrust of the capacities of the government to face the crisis.

Some of the interviewees from civil society organizations stated that, as many countries in the world, the Chilean government was not prepared to effectively face a pandemic. As a result, the government of Chile resorted to measures like the Emergency Family Income or the food baskets, as they intended to provide basic goods to the more vulnerable sectors in an immediate way. However, these measures, named as assistance-based by the interviewee, were not able to tackle the more profound social and political causes of the social crisis and the COVID-19 disaster.

However, the findings revealed that aid did not arrive due to the lack of a proper strategy to distribute these resources, nor did it have the expected outcomes. The measures of the government seem not to have properly considered the previous economic conditions that many communities were already facing, which not only were evident during the outbreak but also during the previous protests in the country.

As in different episodes of Chilean history, where the more vulnerable are affected by political and social crisis and disasters —like the dictatorship, earthquakes, or the current pandemic—, local initiatives arise as an expression of the lack of trust towards the government. They arise in contexts where it is thought that the only alternative to get the basics for survival is through local networks and community support.

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