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## TOPOGRAPHIES OF MEMORY IN A LANDSCAPE OF RESISTANCE AND TRANSFORMATION: THE CASE OF THE FORMER EL MORRO FORT OF TALCAHUANO, CHILE

TOPOGRAFÍAS DE LA MEMORIA EN UN PAISAJE DE RESISTENCIA Y TRANSFORMACIÓN: EL CASO DEL EX FUERTE EL MORRO DE TALCAHUANO, CHILE

TOPOGRAFIAS DA MEMÓRIA EM UMA PAISAGEM DE RESISTÊNCIA E TRANSFORMAÇÃO: O CASO DO ANTIGO FORTE EL MORRO EM TALCAHUANO, CHILE



**Figure 0.** Inside El Morro.  
Source: Prepared by the authors.

Este artículo es parte de un proyecto que ha recibido financiamiento a través del Fondecyt Regular 1241635 "La ciudad en dictadura. Institucionalidad, modernización autoritaria y planificación urbana en Chile (1973-1990)".

## RESUMEN

Este artículo analiza cómo en el Sitio de Memoria y Monumento Histórico el ex Fuerte El Morro, en la comuna de Talcahuano, Región del Biobío presentan distintas capas históricas del territorio, a través de diferentes periodos históricos: desde su rol estratégico militar, tanto en la época colonial como en la dictadura, hasta su uso como refugio para las familias damnificadas post tsunami del año 2010 y su posterior proceso de monumentalización, patrimonialización y memorialización por la Corporación de Socorros Mutuos Bautista van Schouwen Vasey. Por medio del análisis de las entrevistas realizadas y fuentes de archivo, los resultados de esta investigación muestran cómo los procesos de memoria se entrelazan con la reconstrucción física y emocional del territorio, y cómo en el sitio se presentan distintas materialidades de la memoria a través de los elementos arquitectónicos que funcionan como archivos vivos de sus transformaciones y significados, que permite conservar narrativas de diferentes temporalidades; no obstante, estas se presentarían como contranarrativas respecto a cómo comprender y dar significado al sitio. Se concluye que el ex Fuerte El Morro, a pesar de ser un monumento histórico, aún presenta algunos problemas, debido principalmente a los significados que este sitio evoca y a la falta de financiamiento y voluntad política. Este caso muestra cómo el patrimonio se resignifica y tensiona a través de los usos, los que están volcados a los atributos del patrimonio que son identificados a partir de la memoria política e histórica del sitio, con ayuda de la comunidad y del territorio como tal, al comprender a éste como un patrimonio difícil, debido a que en este lugar se conjuga no sólo la biografía del lugar sino también la de los protagonistas.

**Palabras clave:** memorialización, patrimonialización, patrimonio urbano, producción del espacio, Talcahuano

## ABSTRACT

This article analyzes how the former El Morro Fort, a Site of Memory and Historical Monument located in the municipality of Talcahuano, in the Biobío Region, presents different historical layers of the territory over different historical periods, from its strategic military role during the colonial era and the dictatorship, to its use as a refuge for families affected by the 2010 tsunami, and its subsequent processes of monumentalization, heritage designation, and memorialization by the Corporación de Socorros Mutuos Bautista van Schouwen Vasey. The study, through an analysis of interviews and archives, examines how memory processes intertwine with the physical and emotional reconstruction of the territory and how the site displays different materialities of memory through architectural elements that function as living archives of their transformations and meanings, preserving narratives from different times. However, these narratives often emerge as counter-narratives that challenge dominant ways of understanding and giving meaning to the site. The article concludes that, despite its designation as a historical monument, the former El Morro Fort still faces challenges, primarily due to the meanings it evokes and the lack of funding and political will. This case demonstrates how heritage is re-signified and contested through its uses, which are tied to the attributes of heritage identified through the site's political and historical memory, with the aid of the community, and the territory itself. It suggests that this site can be understood as difficult heritage, encapsulating not only the place's biography but also the stories of its protagonists.

**Keywords:** memorialization, heritage designation, urban heritage, production of space, Talcahuano

## RESUMO

Este artigo analisa como o Sítio de Memória e Monumento Histórico do antigo Forte El Morro, na cidade de Talcahuano, Região do Biobío, apresenta diferentes camadas históricas do território, através de diferentes períodos históricos: desde seu papel estratégico militar, tanto na época colonial quanto durante a ditadura, até seu uso como refúgio para as famílias afetadas pelo tsunami de 2010 e seu posterior processo de monumentalização, patrimonialização e memorialização pela Corporación de Socorros Mutuos Bautista van Schouwen Vasey. Por meio da análise das entrevistas realizadas e das fontes de arquivo, os resultados desta investigação mostram como os processos de memória se entrelaçam com a reconstrução física e emocional do território e como, no local, se apresentam diferentes materialidades da memória por meio de elementos arquitetônicos que funcionam como arquivos vivos de suas transformações e significados, o que permite a conservação de narrativas de diferentes temporalidades. No entanto, estas se apresentariam como contranarrativas em relação à forma de compreender e de atribuir significado ao local. Conclui-se que o antigo Forte El Morro, apesar de ser um monumento histórico, ainda apresenta alguns problemas, principalmente devido aos significados que este local evoca e à falta de financiamento e de iniciativa política. Este caso evidencia como o patrimônio é resignificado e tensionado através de seus usos, que estão intrinsecamente ligados aos atributos que a comunidade identifica a partir da memória política e histórica do local. O antigo Forte El Morro, como patrimônio difícil, não apenas encarna a biografia do lugar, mas também as experiências e narrativas daqueles que o habitaram e transformaram.

**Palavras-chave:** memorialização, patrimonialização, patrimônio urbano, produção do espaço, Talcahuano

## INTRODUCTION

In the 1990s, following Chile's return to democracy, the country's heritage experienced two significant transformations. On the one hand, new actors appeared in applications for declarations, as communities organized themselves to declare elements as patrimonial, especially in typical zones, through neighborhood movements that defended their neighborhoods against the real estate market (Ibarra & González, 2021). On the other hand, there were changes in the valued attributes, where the monumental and architectural emphasis shifted towards the social value of heritage, generating processes of resignification and memorialization (Colin, 2017; Matus Madrid, 2017).

Over the decade, memory began to gain importance in the patrimonialization processes, changing how heritage is approached (Márquez, 2019; Ibarra & Álvarez, 2024). In particular, in the post-dictatorship context, a heritage of human rights and memory began to emerge (Alegría & Uribe, 2018), driven by new citizen subjectivities focused on democratic recovery and the pursuit of reparation and justice (Jelin & Langland, 2003).

In this context, this research analyzes how the former El Morro Fort Site of Memory and Historical Monument (hereinafter El Morro), located in the commune of Talcahuano, province of Concepción, Biobío Region, has appeared as a space of multilayer significance with geographical and symbolic transformations that has gone through different periods of use and abandonment, from its creation as a military fort in the 18<sup>th</sup> century to the monumentalization, patrimonialization and memorialization process conducted by the Bautista van Schouwen Vasey Mutual Aid Corporation (hereinafter the Mutual) from 2010 to the present day.

The hypothesis is that memory is embodied both in the territory's architecture and in the people who preserve it, intertwining with its physical and emotional reconstruction. This difference between the material and the immaterial would present counter-narratives about how to understand and give meaning to the site, producing tensions over its preservation and resignification.

Despite the extensive literature on heritage and memory in Chile, this research is relevant for evidencing the tensions and complexities in the patrimonialization of sites with multiple memories that evoke dissonance in meaning, producing counter-narratives and, in turn, making heritage difficult. Regarding the latter, this research will be approached through the concept of difficult heritage, which is still incipient in Chilean heritage studies.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

### HERITAGE AS A SOCIAL AND POLITICAL CONSTRUCT

Heritage is a social construct with a dynamic character that represents the identity and history of specific groups (García Canclini, 1999; Dormaels,

2014), which “is configured by a landscape with socio-cultural content product of a determined historical development” (Ortega & Ibarra, 2021, p. 4). In this sense, heritage creates a sense of inclusion and exclusion (Smith & Akagawa, 2009) that involves a political dimension manifested in three ways (Van Geert & Roigé, 2016): 1) Identity producer: heritage evokes community identity with its history and territory; 2) Power and counterpower strategy: legitimizes official narratives or functions as resistance to threats; 3) Memory producer: claims collective memories, particularly visible in historical sites.

It is in this performative sense that the processes of patrimonialization take place, which entail ideological visions that seek to be re-signified, that turn heritage into a terrain of struggle where dissensions and alternative narratives converge (Márquez, 2019), that allows the formation of new identity projects, those that take place through the struggles for memory(ies).

For Smith (2011), the construction of an authorized heritage discourse (AHD) has historically fallen on those who possess the power to speak, that is, those who occupy an authorized discursive position. This implies a struggle between the AHD and the subaltern or counter-narrative discourses, which translates “into simultaneous processes of contestation, desacralization and resignification of monuments and their public space, and which result both from social, political and cultural demands, as well as resistance to the narrative of an official history” (Matus Madrid, Ibarra Alonso, & Méndez Layera, 2023, p. 66). This allows certain assets to be categorized as difficult or uncomfortable.

This heritage emerges when significant sites are questioned or uncomfortable (Logan & Reeves, 2009; Macdonald, 2009), such as detention and torture centers during Latin American dictatorships. That said, difficult heritage will be understood as “heritage that evokes counter narratives and dissonances regarding the value of heritage, which generates feelings of discomfort and pain, not only in the people who lived the events, but also in those who visit these places” (Fuentes Zuleta, 2025, p. 15).

## MEMORY AS A CORE ELEMENT OF HERITAGE

Memory, as Kuri Pineda (2017) points out, “is inserted in a field of confrontation where dominant and subordinate sectors confront and negotiate, disputing visions of the past.” Considering the dynamic nature of memory, Samuel (2012) characterizes it as an active, historically conditioned force in which each period develops new ways of remembering. In this sense, memory is a social form and, as such, varies over time.

Continuing with this idea, Macdonald (2009; 2015) suggests that heritage is a way of reclaiming memory by revealing how the past is

articulated at specific times and places. In a similar vein, Jelin and Langland (2003) define heritage as a “memory vehicle”, a tool for collective, political, and symbolic action.

Within this framework, various actors, including human rights defense organizations, the academic community, and institutions, have promoted initiatives to recognize the value of memory and foster a culture of respect for human rights (Monsálvez Araneda, 2023).

Those who lead these initiatives of patrimonialization and memory construction are what has been characterized as memory entrepreneurs, defining them as those “active subjects in a political scenario of the present, who link in their actions the past (paying tribute to victims) and the future (transmitting messages to the “new generations”) (Jelin & Langland, 2003, p. 4).

Taking this into account, Schindel (2009) states that in the processes of reclaiming memory or memorialization, “the multiplicity of meanings that diverse actors grant to spaces based on their memories is put into play” (p.69). This allows memories previously omitted in the official history to emerge.

## PRODUCTION OF SPACE THROUGH MEMORY

Memories are inscribed in territories through “landscapes of memory” or memoryscapes (Arora, 2018), shaped by processes of remembering, forgetting, and commemorating. Thus, space functions as a fundamental support for the constitutive processes of memory, both materially and symbolically.

In the field of analysis on the relationship between memory and space, the contributions of Rebolledo Hernández (2022), who examines the spatial dimensions of memory by studying objects that represent crucial moments for particular social groups, are particularly relevant. Authors such as Jelin (2021) go deeper into this idea, pointing out that this materialization of memory, through objects such as plaques, stones, murals, among others, can be inside or outside what are recognized as memory sites, which are defined:

as physical spaces that witnessed situations in which many victims suffered or resisted human rights violations, and that are claimed to remember these facts through the denunciation and political action of social groups that actively seek their visibility (Tesche-Roa et al., 2023, p. 71).

This configures heritage as a space of constant tension and dispute (Smith, 2006), thereby constituting what has been defined as difficult, uncomfortable, or dissonant heritage (Macdonald, 2009). In the case of El Morro, the use of memory forces one to situate oneself not only

spatially, but also temporally, since this case illustrates the convergence of three types of memory: historical (colonial fort), political (torture center during the dictatorship), and social (shelter after the tsunami of 2010).

As Alegría-Licuime, Acevedo-Méndez, and Rojas-Sancristoful point out, “the interaction between territory and memory transforms a place with no apparent significance into a place of memory” (2018, p. 26), which generates potentially patrimonializable spaces for communities. In this sense, the production of space, through memory, is materialized through spatial practices, representations of space, and spaces of representation, which show how processes of collective remembrance actively shape the territory and its patrimonial meanings (Fuentes Zuleta, 2024).

This research uses a qualitative methodology. The fieldwork was carried out in September 2024. A visit was made to El Morro, and semi-structured interviews were conducted with three members of the Mutual, focusing on the dimensions of patrimonialization, tensions, practices, management, and the site’s current use. The three interviewees were chosen according to the level of relevance for the investigation, since they were the current president of the Mutual, so their testimony served to know more about the management of the site at present; the former president of the Mutual, who was in the entire process of patrimonialization, so his testimony served to inquire more about the process that lasted 7 years; and finally, one of the people in charge of conducting the guided tours, to tell his experience as a living heritage of the site, having been imprisoned in this place during the dictatorship. The selection of the three key players was conducted in conjunction with a key informant from the Mutual, who assisted with the selection.

Subsequently, based on the information gathered in the interviews, together with the preparation of a map of actors based on the power and influence of each one, interviews were conducted with different institutional actors relevant to the case, specifically, with representatives of the Memory and Human Rights Unit of the Council of National Monuments, with the chief of staff of the Local Cultures, Art and Heritage Authority of the Biobío region and with a councilwoman of the municipality of Talcahuano. The objective of interviewing these actors was to learn more about the management of memory sites and the specific problems El Morro faces in this regard.

Along with the collection of primary sources, a review of secondary sources was conducted to provide background and support the construction of the case study’s history, enabling an

## METHODOLOGY



**Figure 1.** Location of the former El Morro Fort Site of Memory and Historical Monument. Source: Preparation by the authors using Google Earth (June 29, 2024).

## CASE STUDY

examination of the key milestones of this monument. To do this, we searched for studies on the place's history, videos and documentaries, press coverage, and social media.

This research will analyze the case of El Morro, located in the commune of Talcahuano, province of Concepción, Biobío Region (Figure 1). It is located on the hill of the same name, near the city center, next to the El Morro Stadium and the main access road to the port of Talcahuano, where the El Morro Cove is located. It should be noted that, on being located in an urban area, it is spatially inserted directly into the Talcahuano commune.

### ONE PLACE, THREE MEMORIES

El Morro (named initially San Agustín Fort) was located on the homonymous hill in 1777 in the city of Talcahuano. During the time that this site served as a military fort, several battles were fought due to its importance as a strategic surveillance position of the bay (Cartes & Luppi, 2013), as the scene of battles in different periods ranging from independence to the civil war of 1890 and the uprising of the navy of 1931. Finally, after the Second World War, El Morro was dismantled, leaving only its structure and losing its use as a military fort (Tesche-Roa, González-Alarcón & Antonio-Inostroza, 2021).

It is not until about thirty years later that El Morro became useful again, serving as a place of detention and torture during the military dictatorship. Between the years 1973 and 1975, the former fort was used by the Regional Intelligence Center (CIRE) and the Naval Intelligence Service (SIN), also known as Ancla II. Subsequently, the fort passed to the National Intelligence Directorate (DINA), and in 1977 it passed to the National Information Center (CNI), where it operated as a base until 1985, after which it was abandoned (Tesche-Roa, González-Alarcón, & Antonio-Inostroza, 2021).

During these years, it is estimated that about 300 people were detained there, including workers, residents, student leaders, and militants of left-wing parties, mainly of the Revolutionary Left Movement [MIR] (Tesche-Roa, González-Alarcón, & Antonio-Inostroza, 2021).

After the February 27<sup>th</sup>, 2010, earthquake in Chile, which greatly affected the southern part of the country, El Morro served as a shelter for people who lost their homes to the subsequent tsunami. As a result of this, the recently created Bautista van Schouwen Vasey Mutual Aid Corporation<sup>1</sup> decided to head there to provide help to the affected people.

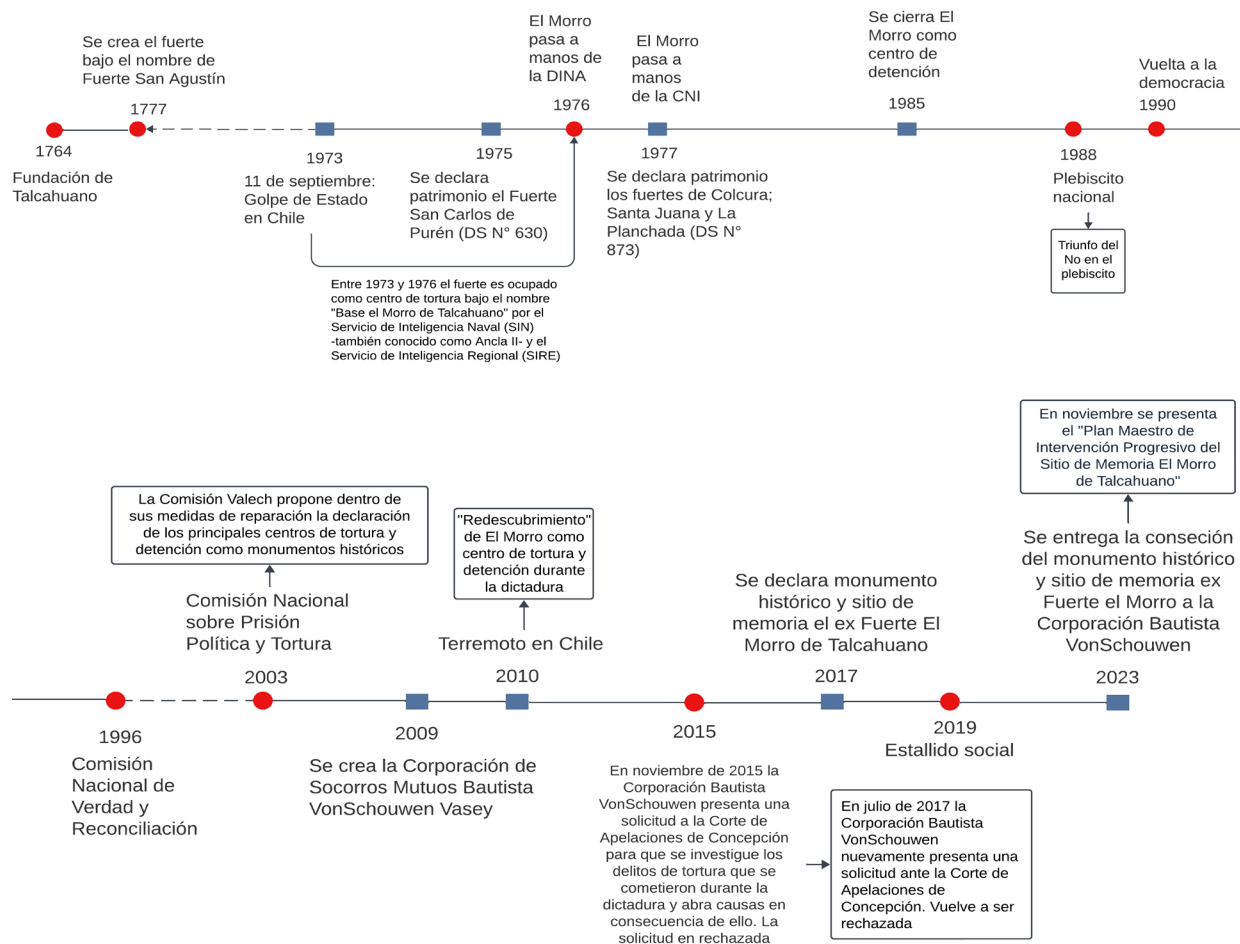
In this context, some members of the Mutual, who had been MIR militants during the dictatorship, recognized the place as the one where they had been detained and tortured. It is from this that the process of patrimonialization and memorialization of El Morro began to obtain its designation as a Site of Memory and Historical Monument (HM). In 2017, the declaration was made official as the former El Morro Fort Historical Monument and Site of Memory, becoming the first memory site in the HM category in the Biobío Region.

From what has been presented, the history of El Morro can be divided into three clear periods:

1. Firstly, from its construction in the 18<sup>th</sup> century to its abandonment after the Second World War, it stands out for its strategic location and its importance in defending the bay.
2. Secondly, the period covered by the military dictatorship in Chile, where it served as a clandestine detention and torture center until 1985. It should be noted that the fort's disuse and abandonment did not occur with the return to democracy; it had already happened before: first from 1945 to 1973, and then from its abandonment in 1985 to its rediscovery in 2010.
3. Finally, the period that covers from 2010 to the present is when the process of patrimonialization and memorialization of this place begins.

The following timeline summarizes the history of El Morro (Figure 2).

<sup>1</sup> The Bautista van Schouwen Vasey Mutual Aid Corporation was founded in 2009.



## DEVELOPMENT

**Figure 2.** Timeline summary of the history of El Morro. Source: Prepared by the authors (2024).

## MULTILAYER FORT

The structure of El Morro houses the manifestation of different periods and memories. The fort's structure is a vestige of the colonial era, when it served to defend the Bay of Concepción. Today, despite neglect and deterioration, it is still possible to see the structure of this ancient fortification (Figure 3).

The vestiges of the dictatorship are currently the least visible places, since, although the place in its entirety was a clandestine detention and torture center, there are currently no explicit vestiges of this beyond the stories that the survivors of this site can tell and who currently make the guided tours of the spaces narrating what each one was used for and what roles they fulfilled during the time that El Morro functioned as a center of repression by the various repressive agents of the military regime, that occupied this site during its years of operation, such as mentioning what was done in certain rooms, in the bathrooms or in the basement, to mention some spaces.



The other observable vestiges are the remains of this place's use as a shelter for tsunami victims in 2010. According to the plans of the SERNAGEOMIN and SENAPRED, El Morro is contemplated as an evacuation place and a safe zone in the face of an imminent tsunami (Mella, 2023), which meant that several people, particularly the inhabitants of El Morro Cove, a neighborhood alongside the homonymous hill, evacuated to it. The victims, according to one of the members of the Mutual, were about four years in this place until they could be transferred elsewhere. Currently, floors, walls, and ceilings show burn marks from bonfires lit to provide shelter during their time in the fort, still bearing vestiges of that time. In addition, in the collective memory of Talcahuano, the earthquake is a recent event, so the memory of El Morro as a refuge remains alive.

Finally, regarding the current situation of El Morro, which has been a Historical Monument and a Place of Memory since it was declared as such, the only thing that shows this is an identification plaque of its status as an HM and a drawing that is on a wall adjacent to the site (Figures 4 and 5). Since November 2023, the Mutual has held the concession for the El Morro site, where it prepared a "Master Plan of Progressive Intervention of the former El Morro Fort." As a result, modifications to the infrastructure and surroundings have made this new stage in the history of El Morro more evident. This will be seen later.

**Figure 3.** Exterior facade of the El Morro Fort. Source: Prepared by the authors.

**Figure 4.** National Monument Plaque. Source: La Voz de los que Sobran (2022).

**Figure 5.** Exterior of El Morro, in front of the entrance to climb the hill to reach the site. Source: Prepared by the authors.



This Master Plan consists of six components: site museum, interpretive museum, access square, trails, viewpoints, and slope structural reinforcement (Figures 6 and 7). These projects aim to make El Morro a place that not only serves as a site of memory and education about human rights violations under the dictatorship, but also as an accessible and recreational destination, using its green spaces and location.

To recapitulate what this research reveals, the fort's architecture is not understood today only as a military vestige, but also as a physical support for the dictatorship's violence and as a shelter after the tsunami. The site's walls and spaces are simultaneously loaded with these memories,

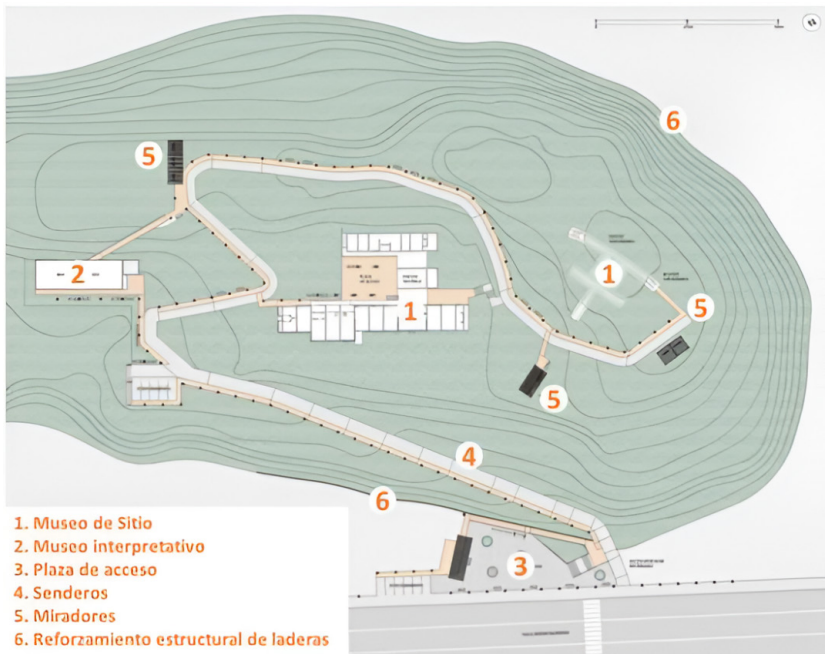


Figure 6. Project outline.  
Source: Mella (2023).

Figure 7. Interpretative museum / Access square / Paths-viewpoint / Reinforcement of slopes. Source: Mella (2023).



becoming living archives that condense collective biographies and function as the common thread that integrates different times into a unique spatial experience.

Likewise, the military memory clashes and coexists with the repressive and social memories of the post-tsunami shelter. None of these disappear; they challenge one another, creating a space where the heroic story is problematized by state violence and resignified through practices of care and solidarity. It is this friction that makes it a dissonant heritage.

What makes El Morro's heritage difficult is not that there are different memories, but that they coexist inseparably. It is impossible to walk around El Morro and think of it only as a fort, only as a repressive center, or only as a shelter: the heritage experience arises precisely from the superposition of those layers, which evoke both pride, pain, and resilience.

### DISPUTES AROUND MEMORY

Although El Morro has multiple historical layers, it is usually visited by archaeologists or historians to learn more about its colonial fort history. Currently, the prevailing memory in this place is that of the dictatorship, given its status as a memory site. It is in this sense—understood as a space for promotion and education on human rights and the memory of events during the dictatorship—that a large part of the activities carried out by the Mutual are directed.

However, when El Morro became an HM, the Municipality of Talcahuano thought about promoting tourism in the commune; for this it wanted to make this place a space similar to the San Sebastián de la Cruz Fort (located in the commune of Corral, Los Ríos Region), that is, a space where recreations of battles that took place there, such as battles of the Independence period between patriots and royalists, the Civil War of 1890 or the Uprising of the Navy of 1931. However, the Mutual immediately rejected this option, arguing that El Morro was already occupied for these purposes.

Currently, guided tours are carried out at the El Morro site by members of the Mutual, some of whom were imprisoned and others who were not, where they tell the events that occurred at the place while it served as a clandestine detention and torture center. These activities are carried out to all kinds of civil society actors, but mostly to schools in the Greater Concepción area.

In addition to guided tours, El Morro hosts commemorative events on key dates: March 8<sup>th</sup> for Women's Day, August 30<sup>th</sup> for the Day of the Disappeared Detainees, and December 10<sup>th</sup> for Human Rights Day. These acts, particularly the last two, are also framed as promoting memory, in keeping with the site's purpose.

Added to this, as already mentioned, the Master Plan seeks to insert El Morro spatially into the Talcahuano commune, making it a space with meaning since, currently, despite its status as a memory and HM site, the former fort presents a serious state of abandonment and deterioration (Figure 8), mainly due to vandalism by right-wing groups and other inhabitants of the commune, who do not take care of the place.

In addition, there is a lack of financing and support from the municipality, which further aggravates the problem, as it does not fulfill its



role of maintaining the site by collecting garbage or installing lighting that makes the site safe and passable at night.

**Figure 8:** Inside El Morro.  
Source: Prepared by the authors.

## EL MORRO AS A CASE OF DIFFICULT HERITAGE

El Morro represents a case of “difficult heritage” due to its dissonant histories that generate moral and political disagreements, which becomes even clearer when considering that there are still ambiguities about the condemnation of human rights violations during the dictatorship (Monsálvez Araneda, 2023). Instead of creating a unitary sense of identity, it rather reflects, as Seguel Gutiérrez (2019) points out, the figure of a counter-monument that does not glorify the past that it remembers.

Although its recognition as an HM and memory site has increased thanks to the activities of the Mutual, primarily through guided tours, its condition as a difficult heritage can be observed in two main dynamics:

### Memory of repression and the challenge of representation

As a clandestine detention and torture center, El Morro is part of what Uzzel and Ballantyne (2008) conceptualize as a heritage that hurts, by evoking a traumatic past that generates painful emotions. For some former detainees, it is impossible to return because of the reactivation of traumatic memories. Even visitors without direct experience can feel overwhelmed when learning about what happened.

This phenomenon transforms El Morro into a space that viscerally confronts people with historical memory, serving as a living witness to human rights violations. In this sense, the difficulty of dealing with these emotions makes it an uncomfortable place for society, which emphasizes the importance of preserving it as a memory space, but also highlights the challenge of making its history visible without revictimizing those who were imprisoned there.

In this regard, the way in which what happened at El Morro is represented and narrated is another element that reflects the monument's difficulty. There is a paradox in the reconstruction of memory: because the former political prisoners themselves lead the tours, a personalistic vision is presented that may not reflect the complexity of the repressive phenomenon as a system. This shows the need to balance individual memories with a more pluralistic narrative.

### Political and social controversies: the dilemma between forgetting and memory

El Morro faces social and political tensions arising from its preservation and management. The Mutual denounces vandalism actions by right-wing groups, in addition to municipal obstacles such as the lack of utilities and garbage collection, which they interpret as expressions of institutional denialism.

Simultaneously, the municipality accuses the Mutual of promoting social division through its activities, by revealing an ideological-political conflict in which efforts to preserve memory and to dialogue with other actors, such as the El Morro Cove neighborhood council, are interpreted as political polarization.

This situation highlights the tension between those who seek to resignify sites of repression to reconstruct memories of the dictatorship and those who prefer to dilute these historical episodes in the name of a supposed social reconciliation or the development of other projects. The latter, according to the Mutual, would be due to institutional denial by both the municipality of Talcahuano and the State.

This denialism causes sites like El Morro to remain silent, making it difficult for it to preserve and promote memory, not only in

architectural and urban terms - given its state of abandonment and that it is located next to an irregular settlement where people have accused assaults, which makes this site unsuitable to visit for security reasons—, but also socially, due to the lack of interest of the municipality to promote education around human rights and memory (Tesche-Roa et al., 2023).

El Morro has faced various problems during and after its patrimonialization, mainly due to its location and lack of state support. This situation underscores the need for greater political commitment to safeguard this key space for regional historical memory, the first and only HM memory site declared in the Biobío region.

Currently, El Morro exemplifies “difficult heritage” by facing challenges in how to remember, commemorate, and use a space where traumatic events occurred, emerging as a deeply significant yet problematic place that evokes a dilemma between forgetting and memory.

To the emotions generated by its history as a detention and torture center during the military dictatorship, political and social tensions are added that transcend memory and its representation. El Morro thus becomes a mirror of the unresolved tensions around historical memory in Chile. Its preservation entails not only remembering the authoritarian city's memories during the dictatorship but also challenging the power dynamics that seek to make it invisible.

These tensions and resignifications arise from the interaction between multiple meanings, uses, and interests of different actors. The heritage management of the site thus faces a complex balance among respect for its historical and archaeological value (given its status as a military fort), the visibility of memories of repression, and accessibility for future generations, while also facing external interests that may alter its original purpose.

Since space is in a constant (re)production, the memory of the past is invoked to be (re)interpreted and (re)imagined to shape the spatial configuration of the present. Memory, then, like space and heritage, is not static, but actively participates in the (re)creation of space.

In conclusion, El Morro is a site of heritage interest, which generates different meanings, stories and memories that have to do with forgetting and memory, the construction of space, and the actors involved, which reflect how space is part of the channels through which memory endures over time, where memory entrepreneurs had a fundamental role in facing this dilemma between forgetting and memory.

## CONCLUSIONS

## CONTRIBUTION OF AUTHOR CRediT

Conceptualization, J.F.; Data curation, J.F.; Formal analysis, J.F.; Acquisition of financing, J.F.; Research, J.F.; Methodology, J.F.; Project management, J.F.; Resources, J.F.; Software, J.F.; Supervision, J.F.; Validation, J.F.; Visualization, J.F.; Writing - original draft, J.F.; Writing - revision and editing, J.F.

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