

# SAME STRUGGLE, DIFFERENT GOALS: TERRITORIAL STRATEGIES FOR THE RIGHT TO THE CITY IN TWO ENCAMPMENTS IN TEMUCO, CHILE<sup>1</sup>

MISMA LUCHA, DISTINTOS OBJETIVOS: ESTRATEGIAS TERRITORIALES POR EL DERECHO A LA CIUDAD EN DOS CAMPAMENTOS DE TEMUCO, CHILE

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Los campamentos habitacionales en Chile representan la marginación urbana en el país. Debido a las limitadas opciones que el Estado ofrece en términos de vivienda, estos asentamientos históricamente han desarrollado formas de organización y lucha en busca de su derecho a la ciudad. En esencia, estas acciones se centran en la autogestión para obtener un lugar donde vivir. Sin embargo, a pesar de compartir necesidades similares, estos grupos muestran diversas formas de lucha. En el contexto actual, con una creciente demanda de viviendas en el país se pueden observar variadas estrategias adoptadas por estos grupos para integrarse en la ciudad. Este artículo se enfoca en analizar las estrategias de ocupación y gobernanza espacial implementadas en dos campamentos ubicados en la ciudad de Temuco (Chile), Los Pinos y Los Ripieros. Se utiliza un enfoque cualitativo que se basa en la aplicación de una cartografía social a los líderes de ambos asentamientos y la exploración de las narrativas relacionadas con la gobernanza espacial pasada y futura. Se identificaron diferencias entre estos dos campamentos, a pesar que comparten una ubicación física contigua y surgieron al mismo tiempo. Los resultados revelan que, a pesar de similitudes iniciales en términos del desarrollo urbanístico, existen diferencias en cuanto a las motivaciones que guían sus acciones futuras. Mientras que Los Ripieros busca activamente influir en la obtención de una solución habitacional permanente en otros sectores de la ciudad, Los Pinos opta por involucrarse en el marco de las normativas urbanas vigentes para asegurar una solución habitacional en el mismo lugar. Estos hallazgos enriquecen la discusión sobre la marginalidad urbana, al mostrar que las luchas por el espacio de grupos excluidos se centran en el equilibrio entre el arraigo y la obtención de vivienda. Esto último debe ser considerado por el estado, al momento de diseñar políticas urbanas.

**Palabras clave:** marginalidad urbana, asentamientos informales, cartografía social, planificación territorial, políticas públicas.

The housing encampments in Chile represent urban marginalization in the country. Due to the limited housing options the State provides, these settlements have historically developed forms of organization and struggle in search of their right to the city. Essentially, these actions focus on self-management to obtain a place to live. However, despite sharing similar needs, these groups show diverse forms of struggle. In the current context, with a growing demand for housing in the country, various strategies these groups adopt to integrate into the city can be observed. This article focuses on analyzing the occupation and spatial governance strategies implemented in two encampments located in the city of Temuco, Chile: Los Pinos and Los Ripieros, through a qualitative approach based on the application of a social mapping to the leaders of both settlements and the exploration of narratives related to past and future spatial governance. Differences were identified between these two encampments. Although they share a contiguous physical location and emerged at the same time, the results reveal that, despite initial similarities in urban development, there are differences in the motivations guiding their future actions. While Los Ripieros actively seeks to influence obtaining a permanent housing solution in other sectors of the city, Los Pinos chooses to get involved within the framework of existing urban regulations to secure a housing solution in the same place. These findings enrich the discussion on urban marginality by showing that the struggles for space of excluded groups are centered on the balance between rootedness and obtaining housing. The latter is vital for the state to consider when designing urban policies.

**Keywords:** urban marginality, informal settlements, social mapping, territorial planning, public policies.

## I. INTRODUCTION

The concept of urban marginalization appears due to a systematic relegation or exclusion of certain groups or communities outside what is known as the urban center. In this context, historical spatial marginalization has negatively impacted the urban social fabric, precipitating territorial stigmatization (Abufhele, 2019). This phenomenon is derived from not only the accumulation of poverty but also the presence of a punishing and absent State (Wacquant, 2015; Perlman & Delgadillo, 2019), exacerbated by the negative perception of these sectors transmitted by the media and academia (Ruiz-Tagle, Álvarez & Labbé, 2023).

However, its residents build alternative narratives and meanings about the city (Pérez, 2019) by establishing, among other things, informal economies to meet their needs (Aceska et al., 2019) and self-management to mitigate their marginalized situation (Pino & Ojeda, 2013; Cortés, 2014; Castañeda & Hernández, 2021; Moreno, 2021). In this sense, the active participation of residents in urbanization and the defense of their rights have promoted legitimate and participatory territorial governance models (Wigle, 2014), where the informal habitat they occupy represents a variant to build the city (Pino & Ojeda, 2013).

In this context, although irregular encampments, or informal settlements comprising precarious housing and without essential services, represent a spatial expression of urban marginalization in Chile, they have a rich history of organizing and fighting for the right to the city (Moreno, 2021). In this line, some studies mention that the residents of these spaces act as active agents in the transformation of their territories to be part of the city despite the emerging vulnerabilities, job insecurity, and personal and family challenges they face (Castillo, 2014; Imilán et al., 2020). However, the political strategies employed by the irregular occupants of diverse urban spaces vary considerably, adapting to each group's particular circumstances and objectives.

This article examines the occupation and spatial governance strategies used in two camps in Temuco, Chile, using the social cartography technique applied to leaders of irregular occupations. Although these encampments or camps are located contiguously and emerged during the same period (2019-2020), each exhibits a unique and differentiated self-management policy in addressing the central challenges they face regarding housing and the right to the city. According to Lefebvre (1969), the latter is understood as the right to participate democratically in the production and administration of urban spaces, allowing

a deeper exploration of how these communities actively seek to get involved and exert influence over their urban and housing environments. With this in mind, the article aims to contribute to the discussion on urban marginality, considering the reflections, strategies, and projections used by the "excluded" to win the right to live in the city.

## II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

### Encampments in Chile and State Action

The Chilean State has designed different strategies to address irregular settlements, which paradoxically have often intensified the original challenge. The first effort was the Workers' Housing Law of 1906, which aimed to stimulate the construction of affordable and healthy housing. However, this law ended up encouraging the illegal occupation of land in the urban peripheries due to the chronic inability to cover the demand for housing (Hidalgo, 2010).

During Pinochet's military regime (1973-1990), housing policies adopted a neoliberal orientation, marked by the elimination of taxes and the liberalization of urban land. The market was considered the optimal agent for allocating urban uses (Sabatini, 2000). This increased land value in the consolidated central areas, making the periphery a viable option for low-income families and housing policies seeking more affordable land (Ducci, 1997).

With the return to democracy in 1990, Chile's housing policies maintained their neoliberal nature, but focused on reducing the housing deficit and irregular settlements. Despite a notable decrease in the deficit and an increase in homeownership, the preference for quantity over quality resulted in the construction of low-quality housing in peripheral areas with limited access to services and employment. This situation motivated the initial beneficiaries of these policies to leave their homes, generating two patterns of displacement: towards areas with cheaper land and leases (Tant, 2017; Fuster-Farfán et al., 2023) and better-located areas in the city, in search of personal and family progress, which rejects the stigmatization that living in social housing often entails (Brain et al., 2010).

However, despite the Chilean State's efforts to reduce the housing deficit and avoid the presence of encampments in different cities, the emergence of irregular occupations remains a reality. Although policies are associated with the camps, they still focus mainly on providing housing, neglecting the dynamics of the social construction of the space (Matus et al., 2019). This is essential to address, for

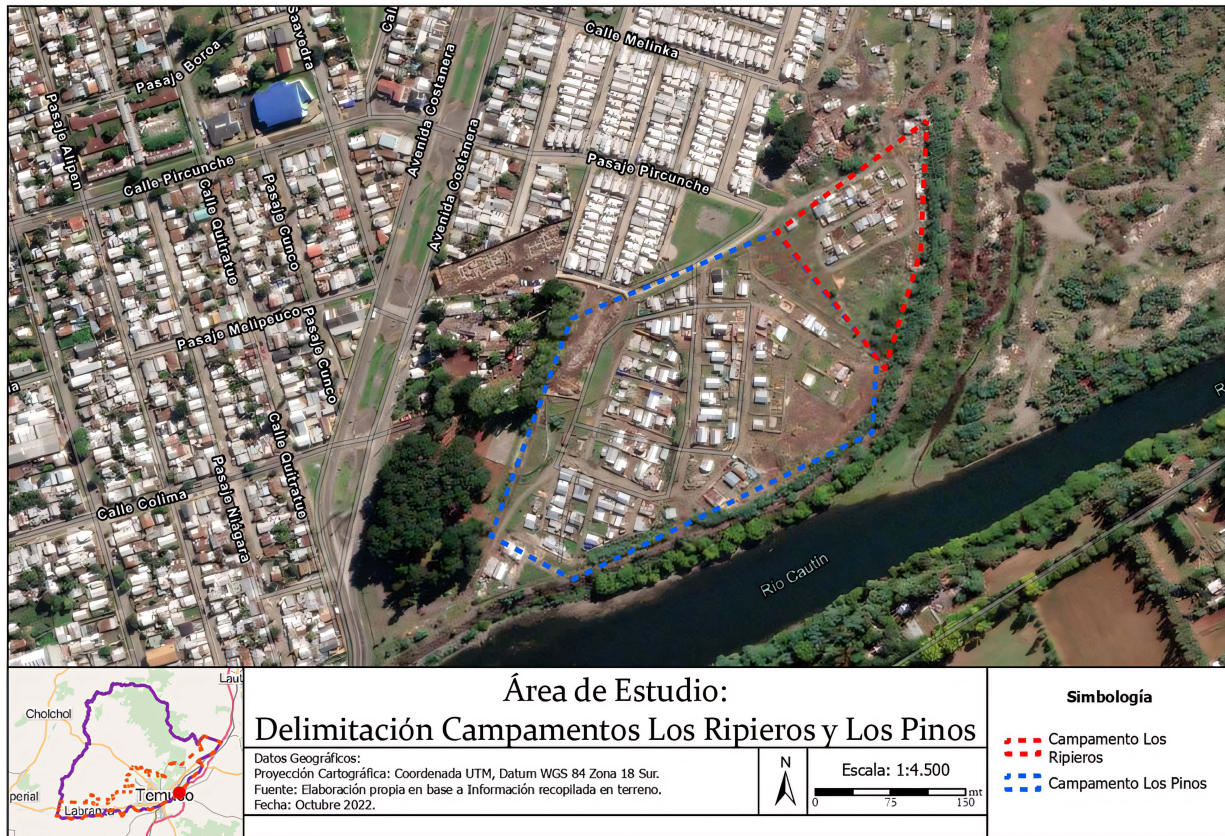


Figure 1. Location of both encampments in the city of Temuco. Source: Preparation by the authors.

example, the self-management of vulnerability scenarios in which some populations are (Carrasco & Dangol, 2019).

Today, there are 1,091 housing encampments in Chile (MINVU, 2022). This figure exceeds the 971 that existed in 1996, which was the critical year in this area and led the government of Eduardo Frei Ruiz-Tagle to intensify the urban policy associated with the increase in the production and delivery of own housing. In the same vein, the city of Temuco registered a sustained increase in housing encampments, reaching 34 that were home to 1,040 families (MINVU, 2022; TECHO, 2021).

### The marginalized and the possible planning in the cities

In Chile, residents have acquired skills related to constructing and consolidating new neighborhoods, allowing them to create residential spaces outside the guidelines established by traditional planning. This

experience made them stop being passive actors in their relationship with housing policies and become active protagonists (Fernández, 2023; Castillo, 2014). Relevant examples of this type of organization are the La Victoria and La Toma de Peñalolén neighborhoods, both in the Metropolitan region, and the Manuel Bustos camp in the Valparaíso region (Sepúlveda, 2019). All have shown that, through collective action and negotiation with state entities, the old encampments can be incorporated into the city (Cortés, 2014; Zenteno et al., 2020).

Since the 1990s, this dynamic has challenged the traditional vision of urban planning, as it transcended mere regulations and technical and architectural decisions by encouraging greater diversity and participation in the city's configuration. In this period, more inclusive and collaborative planning emerged, where the inhabitants began to play a fundamental role in building and developing the urban environment. This supports the notion of subaltern urbanism as an

alternative that has shaped and continues to adapt the construction of cities in the Chilean context. Subaltern urbanism implies recognizing that self-construction goes far beyond being just informality, marginality, or a response to housing problems. This urbanism implies understanding the efforts of the inhabitants to coordinate and organize the work that transforms territories into habitable places, which also constitutes political actions (Magliano & Perissinotti, 2020).

In this sense, it is crucial to recognize and assess the existing practices in the territories, regardless of whether they come from the State or the market, to reveal what is called “insurgent planning” (Mirafab, 2018). This approach implies recognizing citizens as empowered actors who seek self-determination and challenge the dynamics of global capitalism, as well as the representations that specialists and politicians make of inhabited territories (Regitz, 2019).

### III. METHODOLOGY

The methodological approach used in this research is based on a qualitative and exploratory perspective. The territorial scope addressed includes the Los Ripieros and Los Pinos encampments, established during 2019-2020 and located in a macro zone of Temuco called San Ramón (Figure 1). The selection of these camps considered two crucial criteria for the research: a) their recent emergence in the urban context of the city and b) their mutual proximity, a relevant factor to contemplate the logic of spatial governance in groups with the same housing needs.

A participatory methodology was adopted to address the study objective, distinguished by its close collaboration with the communities involved in these urban issues. This research design is based on the dialectical interaction between the most representative members of the community and the participating researchers (Pájaro & Tello, 2014). Regarding this approach, social cartography, which involves creating maps that reflect the interrelation between the spatial environment and people (Pájaro & Tello, 2014), was used. An essential element of social cartography is that it transcends the mere representation of a given time and space, aspiring to harmonize the perspectives of various social agents (Gil & Gómez, 2019).

In the observed camps, the implementation of social mapping followed two lines of inquiry. First, the narratives related to the planning and self-construction processes

of the camps were explored. Secondly, projective spatial governance was established, which allowed an understanding of the relationship between the current organization's past, present, and future. The three leaders of each participating camp were asked to discuss and capture the highlights of the inhabited space following the research lines. It should be noted that, in preparing these cartographies, made in September 2022, general questions were used that encouraged discussion and design in paleographers. The resulting maps, retrospective and prospective scenarios created by the leaders, were validated and discussed by the group that made them.

As an information analysis strategy, the social maps created by the participants were first described, highlighting the spatiotemporal dimensions and changes in the environment. This made it possible to visualize the occupation strategies of both camps. Later, the representative leaders evaluated and discussed the details of the spatial governance established in their territories, highlighting the differences and similarities in occupying the territory.

To record the information, the discussions related to the preparation of the maps were recorded with audio and then analyzed following the qualitative classification layout proposed by the Grounded Theory (Strauss & Corbin, 2002).

### IV. RESULTS

The two encampments studied<sup>5</sup> are located on vacant lots in Temuco, along the banks of the Cautín River (Figure 1). Historically, these were the points of settlement for rural migrants during the first decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when they faced rapid urban consolidation and could not find space in the city (Rojo-Mendoza & Hidalgo, 2021).

To revitalize the area defined as wasteland and future settlement space of the two camps studied, the municipality of Temuco established a beach-like spa called “Los Pinos” in the 1990s. Despite its initial success, its condition worsened over time, degenerating into a wasteland full of micro-dumps and with a notable incidence of criminal acts. Subsequently, this area was also exploited for the extraction of aggregates. In this way, the lands on which the Los Pinos and Los Ripieros camps were located reflect an urban space degraded over time, something not very different from the lands used for land grabs in Chile (Imilán et al., 2020).

<sup>5</sup> Formed between November 2019 and February 2020.

### Similar origins: who can and what is needed

The Los Ripieros camp has 36 families, and its leadership comprises women between 20 and 40 years old. Before this, none of the leaders had experience participating in organizations or leading community projects. However, they occasionally get advice from relatives or acquaintances with experience in these fields. On the other hand, the Los Pinos camp comprises 154 families, and its leadership is led by men between 25 and 50 years of age who already have experience in camps and community organizations. Migrants from Haiti, Venezuela, Colombia, Ecuador, and Bolivia also reside in this camp (López et al., 2018).

Both encampments implemented an initial territorial strategy based on three interconnected actions: cleaning the area, creating a meeting point for constant reorganization, and having essential services for the community. In this context, and regardless of the final meaning of the camp, the initiatives and the types of organizations that are discussed, and the orientations that each actor wants to give to the settlements, there are concrete actions that ensure the survival of the encampments in the cities, which is called the *formalization of urban informality*. It should be noted that this formalization seeks, in essence, to address the material and institutional marginality of the first-time installation (lack of state presence).

“The neighborhood’s meeting room is the main thing. It was our beginning; we used to get together here... Here we joined together, here we shared as a community” (Los Ripieros Camp Leader, September 2022).

“The issue of electricity, we said we need electricity; where do we get it? And the closest thing we had was the state neighborhood, or there in Los Pinos. We worked, through installments ..., we made contact with an engineer, then another electrician who worked at another camp, to make a quote on how much it would cost us to put electricity here” (Camp Leader Los Pinos, September 2022).

When the land occupation began, the Los Ripieros camp established a selection process to determine which families would be part of the community. According to the camp leaders, coexistence and harmony are essential to consolidate the community project. The initial population of 92 families was reduced to 30 through the mechanism used, a figure that later increased to 36. In addition, the leadership held conversations with selected individuals who were potentially perceived as conflictive to prevent future issues.

“They had problems with other neighbors; we left the ones who did not cause trouble. Or they

didn’t help in absolutely anything and wanted to receive everything... They thought that if they did not have a plot, they couldn’t participate, but then they didn’t come to the meetings, and if you notice that they don’t come to the meetings, to the activities, it’s because they’re not interested in working with you for the same purpose” (Camp Leader Los Ripieros, September 2022).

In the Los Pinos camp, the selection process was less rigorous. It was based primarily on the land’s capacity and the two founding families’ previous knowledge of the space. Quickly, and because the information circulated mainly among acquaintances and relatives, this number increased to 77 families in a matter of weeks. Although the initial occupation in Los Pinos is broader and less structured than in the Los Ripieros camp, certain criteria were established to prevent conflicts. For example, to prevent the formation of ghettos and promote coexistence and tolerance, it was stipulated that migrant families should not be grouped by nationality in the same sector.

The land determined the number of neighbors, then no one else entered” (Camp Los Pinos Leader, September 2022).

Despite the discrepancies in the criteria for incorporating families between the two camps, both share a common origin: the aspiration and strengthening of a residential area in a given area in the city of Temuco.

In this way, the sense of marginality refers not only to the spatial exclusion that people experience when they are deprived of residing in consolidated urban areas, but also, considering these two cases, to the meaning of the first occupation actions that seek to claim the right to participate in the life of the city.

### Differences begin: Governing informality

Within the organization of the camps, the leadership plays a key role in guiding the progress and advancement of the project and resolving conflicts in daily life. On the one hand, the most experienced residents of Los Ripieros proposed the election of a board responsible for organizing and leading future actions. The board’s experience, composed only of women, cemented social cohesion and opened up new competencies and leadership skills. With this organizational background, the first list of families was made to start with the procedures of the housing committee and plan the space for housing construction. The construction location inside the camp was agreed upon based on being next to related people or relatives.

"...it was a very pleasant consensus because no one later complained or said anything. The land size is the same for everyone" (Camp Leader Los Ripieros, September 2022).

On the other hand, in the Los Pinos camp, the first board had the experience of living in an old camp called Avenida Ferrea. They were in charge of organizing the camp, enrolling the families, and designating the location and size of the sites. For this, each family had to delimit the place according to the homogeneous meters:

"...we were going to the person, and we were saying Ok, that place is going to be yours, so 10 (meters) this way and 15 (meters) that way, those were like the specifications. Then, after, he corroborated (Camp Leader Los Pinos, September 2022).

However, the differences in the governance of both camps arise from the characteristics related to urban infrastructure. The Los Pinos camp adopted professional management to ensure the permanence of the settlement in its current location, a common practice in informal settlements since the 1960s and 1970s, according to Cortes (2014). On the other hand, Los Ripieros actively seek to influence the obtaining of a permanent housing solution, which includes the possibility of integrating into different areas of the city.

To achieve its objectives, Los Pinos entered the game of the current urban regulations, trying to *formalize informality*. To do this, electrical and architectural plans for the camp's housing complex were prepared and presented to state agencies to guarantee the proper use of space and the request for urbanization. In October 2022, they were formed as a neighborhood board, which was the foundation stone in the search for the ownership of the land currently used. In this sense, political action in Los Pinos is characterized by the creative use of laws, regulations, and citizen participation mechanisms to achieve a negotiating position with the ability to influence, in a binding way, what we could call a *territorial formalization strategy*. This type of strategy used by marginal populations to stay in the same places has been observed in populations that also experience risks associated with their lives (Addo & Danso, 2017; Carrasco & Dangol, 2019).

On the other hand, beyond the efforts to legitimize the space they occupy, Los Ripieros have focused their pressure on obtaining a definitive housing solution instead of staying in the current settlement, thereby establishing an *extensive territorial formalization strategy*. This means that they are implicitly open to relocating to

a social housing project in other areas of the city as long as a move of the entire community without exceptions is guaranteed. To this end, the committee is responsible for keeping the list of members updated and managing the application for the housing subsidies offered by the state. However, while waiting for a permanent home, they plan to improve the camp's infrastructure to prevent fires and create recreational spaces for children.

## V. DISCUSSION

In the historical panorama of urbanization in Latin America, marginalized populations' occupation of vacant and peripheral lands evolved since the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Initially, the tendency was to occupy and reside in available areas, distant from urban productive centers. However, this occupation transcends the simple residential need and has been transformed into a concrete political strategy. This strategy seeks to influence government planning policies significantly. This includes obtaining property titles to strengthen the neighborhood project and forming territorial organizations, such as the Los Pinos Neighborhood Board, to dispute spaces of political power. This represents a paradigm shift in the relationship between informal settlements and the state.

Traditional planning, closely linked to state policies, often fails to recognize the camps' inhabitants as key actors in the production and transformation of the city. This vision considers them more as a problem than as active participants, which is why state initiatives are more concerned with the housing solution of these populations than with the principle of living that mobilizes these groups (Matus et al., 2019; Carrasco & Dangol, 2019; Addo & Danso, 2017). In response, contemporary approaches, such as insurgent planning (Miraftab, 2018), seek to recognize and value these groups' self-management capacity in their residential habitability processes.

In this sense, even though the two camps analyzed emerged under similar circumstances, with similar initial strategies in the space's occupation and development and the professionalization of their irregular establishment, marked discrepancies are evident in their visions of the future. These relate precisely to projective forms of spatial governance. On the one hand, the Los Pinos camp emphasizes the importance of the place, considering the land as the central axis of its claims and dialogs with the State to consolidate a permanent residence in that location. On the other hand, for Los Ripieros, housing is the focus of their struggle, a priority



Figure 2. The boundary between the two camps (wooden fence). Source: Photograph of the authors taken from the Los Ripieros camp.

that could encourage them to move to other city areas. These divergences reflect, in part, the historical influence of the Chilean State on the valuation of housing ownership since the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Hidalgo, 2010), an influence that continues to affect current residential aspirations, even within the most disadvantaged sectors of society (Rojo-Mendoza et al., 2023).

The dissimilarity in objectives of the studied camps shows that, although both camps originated in the same temporal and geographical context, substantial discrepancies predominate between them in terms of the organizational tactics they adopt. An example is the creation of physical boundaries between settlements (Figure 2). According to community leaders, this strategy helps preserve the identity of each group's project. However, these limits have different roles in each camp. For Los Ripieros, it safeguards the social essence of their project, while for Los Pinos, it is a challenge to overcome in the search for the consolidation of their community.

## VI. CONCLUSIONS

Self-management in informal access to urban space is a process fed by urban imaginaries that guide from the initial taking of land to the consolidation of a camp in a particular space. These imaginaries, rooted in both the leaders and the families that make up the Los Pinos and Los Ripieros settlements, are fundamental since it is through their social practices and skills that they shape their daily lives and interaction with the urban environment.

However, although self-management is a shared trait in self-built settlements, each human group has distinctive urban imaginaries. This is evident in settlements such as Los Pinos and Los Ripieros, which clearly define their boundaries despite sharing the same terrain. These delimitations arise from the need to differentiate themselves and the intention to develop unique projects that affect their way of living and their daily life. In



particular, the latter is related to the ultimate goal of both camps: on-site formalization versus extensive formalization of the housing solution.

The diversity of strategies used by irregular settlements contrasts sharply with the homogeneous and static vision that state agencies usually have of the camps, revealing instead a phenomenon that is particular to each context, time, and place and eminently dynamic.

In the social network of Los Ripieros, a vital community cohesion stands out, where the ties of kinship and mutual knowledge among its members allow it to weave a network that is closed to new members. Such a perception is a key deterrent that promotes deliberate distancing from the adjoining camp. For its part, Los Pinos pursues expansion beyond the established boundary with the neighboring camp. This effort is due to a strategic plan to recover spaces for new housing development. The political vision of Los Pinos is based on the conviction that the numerical strength of its members is a fundamental pillar for negotiation and adequate pressure on the State to guarantee a future transfer of ownership of the land.

The analysis of these camps highlights their residents' resilience and self-management capacity, challenging traditional notions of marginalization and turning them into active agents in the construction and transformation of their urban environments. This leads to a rethinking of state intervention in irregular urban settlements, stating that the response is not limited to the simple formalization and urbanization of the same area, but also contemplates the political and social instrumentalization of the camp as a dynamic and constantly evolving phenomenon in the urban fabric of Chile and Latin America.

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