



Creative industries in transition: A study of Santiago de Chile's autopoietic cultural transformation

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ABSTRACT

Much of the research on cultural and creative industries has been 'Western-centric', but recent interest into cultural and creative industries in the Global South confirms that this conceptual frame is not always directly transferable. This first comprehensive analysis of the last three decades of cultural and creative industries in Santiago de Chile is based on detailed participant observations and multiple in-depth interviews with cultural professionals in the city. The findings indicate that 'Western' economic narratives fail to capture the role of Chile's political and cultural context, and especially the socio-urban fabric of Santiago itself, in the eclectic mix of practices that has developed across various locales. The city's self-transformation can be seen to embody a process of *autopoiesis*, a concept first proposed by Chilean scholars. This cultural autopoiesis has been impacted by external shocks that include COVID-19. The study advances existing empirical and theoretical understandings of the development of cultural and creative industries in the Global South and beyond.

1. Introduction

In contrast to the extensive research on cultural and creative development in Western cities, few studies to date have explored these processes in metropolitan areas of South America. The present paper addresses this gap by exploring the development of the cultural and creative industries in Santiago de Chile. The study draws on two distinct academic streams: the rise of the cultural and creative industries and the role of creative cities in this process. Within this extensive body of research, most studies have focused on the Western hemisphere while such developments in other regions, such as the Global South¹, remain poorly understood.

This omission is surprising in light of South America's rich tradition in film, music and literature and because the cultural and creative industries are a key area of economic growth (see Yúdice 2018, Jaramillo 2019); for instance, the region has more winners of the Nobel prize for literature than anywhere outside the Western world. In that context, a number of South American countries have

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¹ The "Global South" refers to a relational grouping that includes regions such as Africa, Latin America, Asia, and Oceania (see Berger 2021). This term moves beyond mere geographical identification to emphasise the shared socio-economic conditions and historical contexts, notably colonialism and exploitation, that these regions have experienced and that set them apart from the so-called "Global North." It is defined by its unique developmental challenges and histories, yet is integrally connected and contributes to the broader global processes. This definition challenges a traditional North-Western hemisphere-centric view of development and interaction, promoting a more inclusive and critical understanding of global interdependencies. (see Levander & Mignolo 2011).

begun to map their cultural and creative industries, and the 2012 report *A Cadeia da Indústria Criativa no Brasil* (The Chain of Creative Industry in Brazil) produced some surprises, including the finding that those working in the creative sector earn about three times the national average. As a consequence, the *Secretaria da Economia Criativa* (Secretariat of the Creative Economy) within the Ministry of Culture was founded in May 2012, and several subsequent reports confirm that the creative sector is among the fastest growing in Brazil, outpacing most other world regions (Garcia, 2019).

Similar developments have been reported in other South American countries. Among these, the Peruvian Ministry of Culture (founded in 2010) includes a cultural industries and management unit, and Uruguay launched a Department of Creative Industries within the Ministry of Education and Culture in 2016 (Berger & Sequeira, 2018; Valenzuela Saldaña, 2018). Other South American countries have also reported rapid growth in the creative economy; in Argentina, for example, the sector achieved an annual growth of 14.5% between 2002 and 2007 (see Abbasian and Hellgren 2011). Yet despite this dramatic growth and the attention it has attracted at a political level, there are few in-depth studies of these industries and their potential impact (see also Morató and Zamorano 2018). In particular, there is little research on the concept of the creative city in South America, and the few existing studies consider only smaller cities or specific topics like tourism (Nunes et al., 2020), urban policy (Lederman, 2015) or branding (Herrera-Medina et al., 2021).

This oversight in comprehending these developments is not merely attributable to a scarcity of empirical data but also stems from a deficiency in conceptual frameworks capable of contextualising the data. In this regard, the aim of this paper is twofold: it necessitates a comprehensive empirical study and the co-development of a theoretical framework with the intention of applying it to other empirical cases in the Global South.

This co-development of a theoretical framework must actively avoid the inadvertent importation of Western notions of creative industries, which could skew or obscure the unique cultural and economic realities of the “Global South.” To this end, an important segment of the paper will focus on addressing the overarching question of how a theoretical framework can be developed that sidesteps these limitations (see also Menon 2022)? Such a framework must be capable of reflecting and respecting the local contexts and indigenous knowledge systems of the regions under study. To deliver this agenda, this study returns to its roots of the concept of autopoiesis to reconstruct, from the bottom up, a framework that aligns with local insights and realities (see Comaroff and Comaroff 2012). It is essential to construct a framework that not only supports empirical research but also enhances our understanding of how creative industries can evolve and function within the specific socio-economic and cultural parameters of the Global South, rather than replicating models that are rooted in Western perspectives. This approach ensures that the theoretical underpinnings are both relevant and applicable, fostering a more nuanced interpretation and application of the data gathered from these regions.

Based on this overarching question, this case study of Santiago de Chile examined the development of cultural and creative industries in the city between 1990 and 2022 by addressing the following research questions. (1) From a participant’s perspective, how have creative practices and institutions changed during this period? (2) What are the key discourses and themes for creatives and the creative industries? (3) How does the city contribute to creatives activities and vice versa? (4) Are there particular local conditions that impact the creative industries in Santiago de Chile?

The first part of the paper presents a brief overview of some of the conceptual considerations, followed by an overview of the creative industries in Chile, with particular reference to Santiago, including the sector’s size and development and government policies and directives. This provides a context for the qualitative study, which develops a critical account based on those statistics and policy discourses. The next section outlines the study methodology, including data collection and analysis. After reporting the results, we relate the principal findings to the research questions and discuss the development of Santiago’s cultural and creative industries from the perspective of cultural workers or practitioners. In conclusion, we link these findings to the wider discourse on the creative industries and identify directions for further research and practice.

2. Autopoietic meaning-making of creative industries in the Global South

The concept of the creative city is by now well established among the panoply of urban concepts, which includes the industrial city, the historical city and the smart city (see Evans 2017). The concept has been received with great enthusiasm by those for whom the city is a place of innovation and buzz. Researchers typically emphasise how a city’s urban fabric or culturally oriented planning creates the necessary tolerance and openness to attract creative individuals and businesses. This idea is perhaps inspired by global cities like New York and London (see Evans 2009, Scott 2014, Julier 2017). However, some scholars have highlighted the negative impacts of the creative city concept, including gentrification, rising rent prices and the unequal distribution of associated benefits (Donegan & Lowe ,2008; Pratt, 2011; Grodach, 2017).

More importantly, within the context of this paper, is a range of other criticisms that highlight the Eurocentrism or Western bias inherent in empirical research on creative cities (Nkula-Wenz, 2019; Santos et al., 2020; Khoo & Chang, 2021). With particular regard to developments in Asia (Gu et al., 2020) acknowledge similarities in terms of deindustrialisation and uptake of the creative city concept in metropolitan cultural economies in Europe and Asia, some researchers insist that concepts like *creativity* and *culture* must be handled with care to avoid the mere appropriation of imported Western ideas. A range of authors has argued that there need for more culturally sensitive research that takes account of local meanings rather than imposing Western models (see for instance Throsby 2008, Potts and Cunningham 2008, De Beukelaer 2014).

Furthermore, current academic research typically conceptualises the rise of creative industries in terms of top-bottom approach based on broader global factors such as increasing urbanisation (see Florida 2002, Flew 2010, Landry 2012) and the rise of ICT and the so-called knowledge economy (see Garnham 2005, Moore 2014, Lee 2016). Others cite globalisation, a globalised economy or global interconnectedness as drivers of cultural innovation (Potts, 2009; Flew and Cunningham, 2010; Flew, 2013). A few studies have noted

the changing values that make cultural work a more meaningful and acceptable career path (Harney, 2010), but the role of urban, cultural or public policy is perhaps the most common preoccupation in studies of the rise of creative industries (see Oakley, 2004, O'Brien 2013, Hesmondhalgh 2018).

While these studies have made a significant contribution to our broader understanding of these societal changes and their impact on the cultural and creative industries, some have also attracted criticism. First, the emphasis on broader or singular factors may neglect the complex and sometimes contradictory nature of cultural change (Pratt, 2011). Some have also argued that these accounts present a very linear narrative and that these factors seem to apply equally across the sector (see Banks et al. 2013, Brook et al. 2020). However, some recent research highlights the role of disruptive events, unplanned side-effects and sectoral inequalities (Lange & Schüller, 2018; Cohendet et al., 2021; Lee et al., 2021), and there is evidence that broader studies tend to offer too coherent or clean an account of the 'messy' everyday realities of creative practice (Banks & O'Connor, 2009).

To address these concerns, our approach moves away from top-down methodologies, singular statistical methods, universalisation of categories, singular factor analyses, and linear cause-and-effect models. Instead, we explore the emergence of cultural and creative industries through a meaning-centred framework that challenges the assumed 'universality' of current theories, offering a more nuanced understanding of self-generating meaning-making within broader contexts. As detailed in our findings section, this theoretical approach was developed in conjunction with empirical research, drawing on the concept of cultural autopoiesis as introduced by the Chilean researchers Maturana and Varela (1980). The term autopoiesis suggests that a product is the result of its own processes, not merely through self-contained activity but through 'the basic circularity of their production of their components' (Maturana & Varela, 1980: XIV). Although originally framed within biology, this concept has been applied across various fields to study forms of meaning-making.

For example, the Brazilian-born music theorist and composer Chagas (2005) applied the concept of cultural autopoiesis to analyse polyphony and embodiment in music, suggesting that musical expressions can be viewed as autopoietic meaning-making processes that not only generate their own structural coherence but also engage in a dialogue with the listener's perception, creating a dynamic, self-sustaining cycle of creation and interpretation. The Mexican scholar Gershenson (2015) explored autopoiesis in the context of urban development, examining how cities adapt their complexity to match urban variety, thus becoming self-generating entities (Gershenson, 2013). Colombian anthropologist Escobar (1992) considered autopoiesis in the study of social movements within black communities, not just as reflections of crisis but as organisations producing their own meaningful structures.

This brief overview demonstrates a rich tradition in the Americas of engaging with the term autopoiesis, which has also been embraced by scholars outside this region, including Portugal's musicologist Mário Vieira de Carvalho, Germany's sociologist Niklas Luhmann, and information scientists Heinz von Foerster (United States) and Toru Nishigaki (Japan), as well as management scholars Peter Checkland (United Kingdom) and Rajiv Joshi (India). Morgner (2022: 14) encapsulates this idea, noting, 'Meaning is presented as something that refers both to itself and to something else, with what is actualised in the present drawn from a surplus of represented possibilities; in essence, meaning is selection.' When applied to the creation of meaning, autopoiesis underscores the self-referential and self-sustaining nature of meaning, where meaning constellations are continuously produced and reproduced through their own mechanisms. Autopoiesis, a term borrowed from biology, here describes how meanings are not only formed but also continuously recreated and sustained within their own network of cultural practices. We employ the notion of practices as "open-ended spatial-temporal manifolds of actions" (Schatzki, 2005, p. 471), but emphasising that the making of meanings is self-referential, where practices continuously regenerate meanings and thereby reproducing such cultural practices. The idea of "meaning constellations" further illustrates how interconnected and complex these makings of meanings are, with the making of meaning contributing to a larger, dynamic network of cultural practices. Meaning is not just established once but is continuously regenerated through cultural practices. This continuous production and reproduction of meaning highlights how cultural and social systems evolve and maintain their identities through their own inherent processes.

This dynamic production and reproduction of meaning underpin our analysis, aligning with our ethnographic-anthropological empirical research. By weaving together a local meaning-centred approach with a systematic-evolutionary theoretical framework, we aim to explore the experiences of creative workers in Santiago de Chile and the transformation of cultural and creative industries since the end of the Pinochet regime in 1990, taking into account regional traditions and meanings and their influence on the development of creative industries in this area.

3. Methodology: case selection, strategy, data collection and analysis

We focused on Santiago de Chile as one of the cities in South America that experienced a considerable transformation in terms of creatives working in this field, infrastructure and cultural policies. Since Chile's return to democracy in 1990, the government has actively supported the revitalisation of the arts and culture sector, which suffered during 17 years of military dictatorship (Thorrington, 2014). Initial steps included the creation of a grant fund for artistic projects in 1992 and laying the groundwork for cultural institutions through new laws aimed at supporting the publishing and audio-visual sectors (Stanziola, 2002). The establishment of the National Council for the Arts and Culture in 2003 and subsequent laws further bolstered this support, culminating in the formation of the Ministry of Culture, Arts and Heritage (MINCAP) in 2018 to drive the economic development of creative and cultural industries (Hamdaoui, 2021).

With 0.3% of the national budget allocated to MINCAP (£278 million in 2022), Chile's creative sector now contributes 2.2% to the GDP, surpassing industries like fisheries and tobacco and alcohol (CNCA, 2017). The National Arts Development Fund (FONDART), operational for over thirty years, supports a wide range of cultural activities with a budget of £36 million for 2022, managed by MINCAP's Creative Economy Secretariat (CNCA, 2017). This sector, informed by UNESCO and UNCTAD principles, has seen

accelerated growth, contributing significantly to the national economy and employment, despite challenges such as low incomes, poor social security, and job instability among cultural workers—a situation exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic and the 2019 social revolt (Estrategica, 2015; Pinochet et al., 2021).

The capital, Santiago de Chile, serves as the country's cultural hub, attracting the majority of cultural workers, artists, and MINCAP grant funding (OPC, 2016). It boasts the highest cultural sales and marketing indexes and is home to numerous cultural and creative companies, organisations, and educational offerings. Significant government initiatives, like the Start-Up Chile programme and the Centre for Technological Revolution in Creative Industries, underscore Santiago's pivotal role in fostering innovation and supporting the creative industries within Chile and Latin America (Creativo, 2021; ODMC, 2021).

The data collection strategy was similar to the approach employed by the authors in earlier studies of other cities, including New York, London, Paris, Beijing and Tokyo (Morgner, 2015 and Morgner, 2019). In particular, we relied on participatory observation, analysis of images of selected urban areas and in-depth interviews. Data were collected during the period 2018–2022; the process included city walks, observing people and architecture in different districts and shadowing creatives during their daily interactions. We also made regular visits to art museums, galleries and openings, off-spaces, music venues, bars and cafes. In addition, we collected data during studio visits or while 'hanging out' with creatives in key neighbourhoods. As one of the authors resides in Santiago de Chile, this local knowledge further enhanced our exploration of the city.

As it was of course impossible to engage with every creative professional in Santiago, our access to this unknown universe depended on three main strategies: identifying gatekeepers, seeking referrals and making contacts in common meeting places (Salganik & Heckathorn, 2004). All of these strategies share the disadvantage of affording only one perspective; that is, gatekeepers' inputs tend to reflect their more established role; a referral may include only like-minded people; and meeting places may be frequented only by certain creative professionals. For that reason, only a limited sample of the population could be accessed in this way. However, as the purpose of the research was to comprehend Santiago de Chile as a creative city rather than to study individual professionals or spaces, combining distinct perspectives to reveal common features was likely to provide valid findings. To that end, we pursued the method of maximal versus minimal contrast described in the well-established body of research known as grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

In the present case, the technique of multiplying gatekeepers, referrals and meeting/entry combinations was used to gather contrasting data reflecting the range of differing dimensions, social settings and creative media that informed diverse emerging and established perspectives. Gatekeepers, who typically represented the more established view, included organisations like municipal museums and theatres, as well as private institutions like advertising agencies, TV stations and local fashion brands. We also engaged with creative professionals from cultural sectors like animation, music, design, visual art and cultural policy. In total, we conducted 26 in-depth interviews (see Table 1), which included creative professionals from all these sectors at different career stages. The Chilean nationals included a number of expatriates who had returned from abroad after the dictatorship, as well as some who had emigrated to Chile from Brazil, Peru or held dual citizenship (e.g. Chile/United States). All interviews, images and notes from the participant

Table 1
Participants (anonymised) by occupation and level of experience.

Interviewee (F = female, M = male) Numbers indicate different people in the same cultural area	Occupation/Industry	Level of Experience (emerging/mid-career/established)
F_actress	theatre, film, tv	mid-career
F_critic	publishing	mid-career
F_cultural_administrator	cultural policy	mid-career/established
F_cultural_management	cultural policy	mid-career
F_cultural_management (1)	museum	mid-career
F_designer	fashion	mid-career
F_designer (1)	fashion	established
F_journalist	publishing	mid-career/established
F_musician	music	mid-career
F_photographer	visual art	mid-career
F_producer	film, music	established
M_actor	theatre, advertisement	emerging/mid-career
M_cultural_management	cultural policy	established
M_designer	advertisement	established
M_musician	music, film	established
M_musician (1)	music	mid-career/established
M_musician (2)	music	mid-career
M_musician (3)	music	mid-career
MPainter	visual art	mid-career/established
M_producer	tv	established
M_producer	theatre	established
M_producer/designer	animation, gaming	established
M_producer1	music	emerging/mid-career
M_researcher	cultural policy	mid-career
M_visual_artist	visual art	mid-career
M_visual_artist/designer	visual art, design	mid-career/established

observations were recorded, translated from Spanish and transcribed for analysis using NVivo software. Based on the interviews, we performed an imaginary mapping of urban spaces (see [Lindner and Meissner 2019](#)). Ethical approval was obtained prior to the research, and access to the field was carefully negotiated. All translations from Spanish to English were performed by the authors (unless otherwise noted). Passages involving more than three quotes are presented in table format to enhance readability.

4. Changes in creative practice and institutional organisation (1990–2022) from the perspective of autopoietic meaning-making

4.1. Day Zero and cultural practitioner identity (1990–2001)

Unlike accounts that present the rise of the cultural and creative industries as a linear outcome of broader societal transformation, creative workers in Santiago de Chile felt that their own identity had a specifiable starting point.

Theme 1: Day Zero

So, it was a country then [in the early 1990s] where culture had to start from zero. (M_cultural_management)
 ...culture was like somebody whose lights were turned off. (M_musician)
 ...it [arts and culture] was totally destroyed by Pinochet. (M_musician)
 During the dictatorship we had what was called the *apagón cultural* [cultural blackout]. (F_cultural_administrator)

One common theme among those who experienced the dictatorship of Pinochet (as well as some born subsequently) was that the years before 1990 were a period without culture (see Theme 1). Radio and TV stations, cinemas, theatres and advertising agencies were owned by the government or those affiliated with the government and were subject to censorship. Their 'cultural' products were produced under conditions that were actually anti-culture because they constrained, silenced and therefore countermanded the very idea of arts and culture that was seen to emerge after the dictatorship.

Theme 2: Dictatorship 'culture' versus creative culture

...there was also this ... spark of creativity and art in Chile, of course, after a dark period. There was almost no cultural work around, and anyone who was doing anything important was in exile outside the country or struggling to do something [covertly] in Chile but with a lot of difficulties. (M_producer/designer)
 I would say the military coup in Chile provoked huge depression and fear in our society—fear for your neighbour, fear for your fellow person next to you. Theatre was a huge space of resistance; it's also a very social career, working with others. (F_actress)
 But Chile was also coming out of a dictatorship that ended in the late 80s ... So, during the 90s, there was a huge political void in theatre, a big quest for identity, and this only began to be defined at the end of the first decade of the 2000s. (M_actor)
 I think ... when democracy arrived, our very first show was at the national stadium where my father was tortured. ... And that was the very first big rock concert in Chile—a huge festival—and we couldn't believe it because we didn't know what it was. (M_musician(1))
 During Pinochet's dictatorship, it was really quiet [in fashion] here in Chile when I started (F_designer)
 For me, I grew up in the 80s. It was strange that there were no concerts at all, of course, because of Pinochet. But then there were a few in the 90s, and more in the 2000s. Then, in 2010, we had Lollapalooza. Every year, there's a Lollapalooza in Chile. Chile was the first country in South America to host this event, which was crazy for us, because we saw all these new things at Lollapalooza. (M_musician(1))
 First of all, it's important to say that ... during those terrible years of dictatorship, we had big problems. Policy rejected the cultural environment, and all fields of artistic activity were almost completely destroyed. The cultural field or industry in Chile ... was paralysed until the 90s. (M_researcher)
 Most of the culture in museums locked artists out. So, I think the beginning of the 90s was very interesting in Chile because a lot of things started happening. A lot of things ... happened in theatre. After a first big concert, [there were] international concerts. (M_cultural_management)

'Culture' under Pinochet denied culture or 'did not disturb what was going on at all' (F_musician(1)), and this serves to contextualise the self-identity of creative workers (see Theme 2). As experienced by creative workers, important cultural work only began to emerge in Chile after that 'dark period'. Feelings of fear or anxiety that cultural work was unacceptable were transformed into creative expression through cultural resistance or breaking the rules. Under Pinochet artistic expression had to find ways to flourish clandestinely or through subtle forms of resistance. Various forms of artistic expression, including visual arts, film, and theatre, became mediums through which artists critiqued the regime, preserved Chilean culture, and voiced the collective trauma of the society. Examples include the Grapus Group or Brigada Ramona Parra, who created politically charged murals and posters. Eugenio Dittborn airmail paintings were aimed at raising awareness abroad. Patricio Guzmán's documentary filmmaking work critically examined the impact of the Pinochet regime. Teatro Aleph performed plays that highlighted the plight of Chileans under Pinochet's rule, which led to its members being exiled. These few examples illustrate how the dictatorship suppressed the arts, through a politics of fear, censorship, exiling of artists or worse (see [Jelin 2003](#), [Richard 2004](#)).

For many, there was thus a sense of achievement—that cultural healing was possible and that a new culture could emerge within a relatively short time despite the terrible destruction of cultural life under Pinochet. This rapid transformation served to motivate creative work; according to cultural practitioners, musician felt this motivation very strongly, and a few bands like Los Tres, Lucybell and La Ley (among others) experienced huge success in the sense that they captured this new mood, which provided a cultural narrative to fill the void after Pinochet:

I think culture is very important for the new generation because Chileans now feel proud about art-related matters and about their cultural history. And for many years, during Pinochet and all that stuff, I think that cultural history was degraded.
 M_cultural_management

Cultural work was not seen in terms of commercial success but instead played a more political role in a new cultural spirit for a country that had been denied that for so long ('We couldn't believe it'). While Theme 2 indicate that this new spirit was also developing in other sectors, it was most strongly felt in music, radiating from there to other forms of cultural work. In that sense, developments in the cultural industries were perceived as unequal, with some sectors taking the lead and creating a pull effect for others. While this process was quite rapid, most of the interviewees did not experience it as a concerted or intentional effort driven by cultural policies or career plans; indeed, many practitioners noted that they had no real plan. 'I had no good plan' (M_musician); 'I think ... it connected with what we started doing later, but it wasn't a plan ... It was just how things went' (M_producer/designer). That absence of any framework was considered important, and interviewees typically described the 1990s as a time of great freedom, experimentation and creativity (Theme 3).

Theme 3: Freedom and Creativity in the 1990s

And so, we were very active in our free time—very independent but also amateurish in the sense that we didn't know anything about theatre, just our own impulse and desire. (F_actress)

We had a lot of freedom. (M_producer/designer)

I started directing music videos. We set up an office—first at my parents' house, then [we moved] into these small crappy offices on the second floor of a restaurant. (M_producer/designer)

We were very fortunate just to be there. (F_critic)

It was very vibrant ... no establishment had yet developed. (M_painter)

A lot of variety—get together, put together—that's why I think we grew up so fast. (F_cultural_management(1))

There was this very diverse group of creative people—experimenting, pretty much [just] experimenting. (M_producer/designer)

Clearly, then, cultural work during this period was experienced as somewhat 'unorganised'. There was no strict plan, but this was exactly what many found attractive—the absence of any overarching political regime, framework or established elite defining what cultural and creative work should be. As such, there was a great sense of independence, combined with experimentation and an amateurish atmosphere, with only loose connections between people and spaces (see Fig. 1). This non-existent 'umbrella' brought many different creative activities together, which in turn energised cultural work. There was also a noticeable absence of institutional drivers; as the quotes indicate, developments during this period were very much grass-roots and bottom-up, with people coming together and finding each other.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, these understandings and meanings are rooted in Chile's recent political history, at a time when an

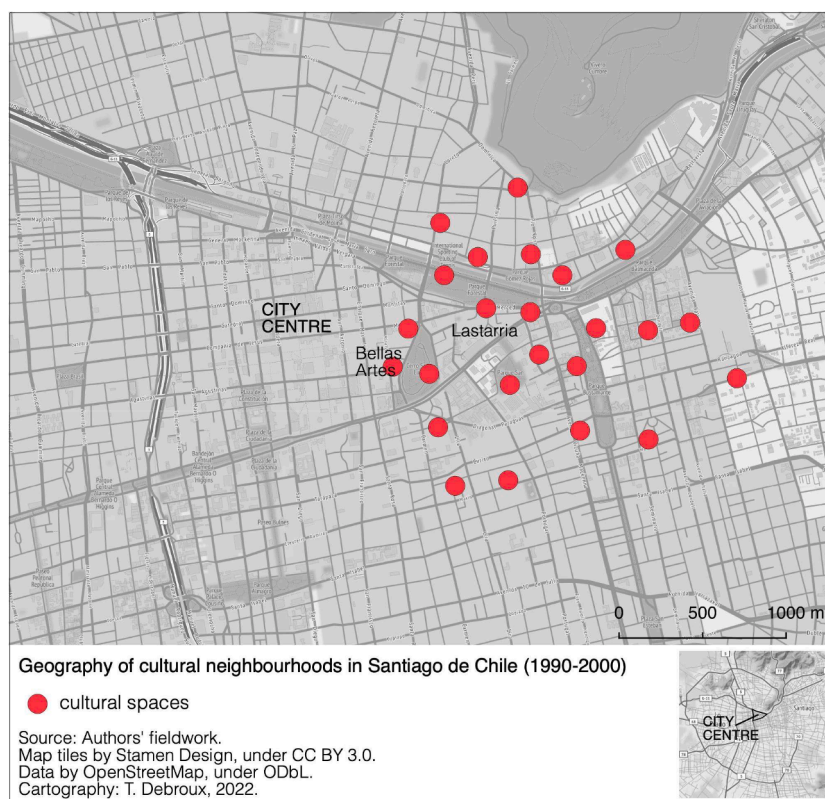


Fig. 1. Loose connections between people and places (Source: Interviews and fieldwork).

authoritarian government and its political elite defined and subjugated culture. As well as shaping personal motives, this fundamental conflict highlights the significance of emotions in cultural work (Gill & Pratt, 2008; Taylor, 2014; Lindström, 2017; Heinze 2020). This effect is typically explained in Romantic terms of the artist suffused with positive emotional qualities (see the classic study by Kris & Kurtz, 1979; for more recent accounts, see Santagata 2010 and Wesner 2018). This form of emotional labour or passionate work is mainly theorised within a Western context as transforming capitalism—the idea that emotions serve as a kind of camouflage for this arduous and exploitative work (Hesmondhalgh & Baker 2008, 2013; Veldstra, 2020). Chile also underwent a rapid economic transformation during this period, but the passion and love that drives cultural work stand in contrast to the ongoing anxiety and worry that characterised the political dictatorship.

Theme 4: Anxiety, Love

In the 1980s, there was a kind of anxiety to expose yourself, like, this is my song. (M_musician(1))	... basically, you just can't help it. Music is my passion, and I cannot not do it ... (F_musician)
We had curfew, so there were many deaths. It was a very difficult time, with a lot of terror—a lot of not saying what you thought. People were afraid of getting killed for nothing, and it was very unfair, especially for young people. (F_designer (1))	I was working in the area ... for love of the activity. (F_producer)
I would say that ... the military coup in Chile provoked huge depression and fear in our society—fear for your neighbour, fear for your fellow person next to you. (F_actress)	And I just said 'I want to do that' because theatre allows me to be whoever I want to be and to change. And so I would never get bored of this variety. (F_actress)
And whatever happened in the culture in those years was very subterranean. It was not easy to break into that culture because radio and media were taken over by the government. So, we had to grow up with this kind of persecution or pain or fear. And that made us a very weird society. (M_musician)	What I fell in love with was the possibility of fashion as a form of art ... of expression or telling things. (F_designer (1))
When Chile was coming out of the dictatorship, there were few creators, and people felt insecure. Teachers and professors from schools were insecure, and they transmitted that to their students. (M_actor)	Because I fucking love it. I'll probably get bored of it, but if I continue like this ... there are people who just do it because they have political convictions. (M_actor)

The anxieties and fears that come with cultural work are a consequence of its personal nature—the fact that expressing one's personal point of view could lead to prosecution, torture or death. In such complex circumstances, cultural practitioners do not simply reflect on an oscillation between polarised accounts; there is anxiety and fear, passion and love, but these are felt and expressed together. Cultural work during that period had an important transformative quality. Rather than a simple black-and-white formula of forgive and forget, it afforded a positive search for meaning rooted in Chile's political history. The shared values of love and passion did not simply invoke the Romantic image of the artist but signalled a cultural transformation. Beyond the impact of the movement known as Chilean New Song (Nueva Canción Chilena) as a uniting force in the early 1970s (see McSherry 2017), bands like Los Prisioneros, La Ley, Los Tres and Lucybell captured this emotive state for many of those working in music and the arts: 'The first goal in Chile ... is to reunite our art community, a community of different people' (M_cultural_management). Looking beyond themselves, they envisaged a kind of emotive community, pursuing a new identity rather than getting lost in the post-transition struggles that afflicted so many other Latin American countries (see Zúñiga 2003; Ponce 2008). All of the interviewed practitioners felt that accounts of Chile's transition from a military to a civilian regime should acknowledge emerging practices of cultural work as well as the rise of democratic institutions and economic development: 'I believe the reality of arts and culture in Latin America is closely related to the contingency of politics' (F_cultural_management(1)).

The concentration of diverse activities in Santiago de Chile means that the city itself plays an important role in facilitating cultural progress.

Theme 5: Santiago de Chile and Cultural Activities

Here in Santiago, I would say there are more opportunities because there are more places to play. (M_musician)	
I think the early 90s was a very interesting time in Chile because a lot of things began to happen, mainly in our capital Santiago. A lot of things were happening in theatre ... the first big concert, international concerts. (M_cultural_management)	
It was a very curious time. I think we were very fortunate to see plays in Santiago that were very important in Chile's theatre world. Big companies like Teatro la Maria and Ropa de Teatro were producing epic plays, and we were very fortunate to be there at the time to see work that has influenced many people, not just us. (F_actress)	
... very, very diverse. ... There was huge variety, always something to see. (F_actress)	
It was very vibrant... (MPainter)	
There were a lot of venues and places that welcomed that style of music, which was like a fusion of Latin American folk and typical regional music. A lot of venues welcomed that. They offered a lot of space, so we would go there and often filled the place. (F_musician)	
... everything happens in Santiago. (M_musician)	

While many of these activities were clustered in Santiago, our informants noted that, in the early days, many of these activities were not densely interlinked but occupied small pockets dotted around the city: '...the art world in Santiago ... comprised these small pockets of different artists' (MPainter); 'And we felt like we were just a few people talking and enjoying working in this tiny area' (F_critic).

5. Concentration, interlinking and reflexivity of cultural practices (2001–2010)

As these small pockets of activity increased in number, there was an accompanying increase in the range and variety of artistic and cultural innovation. Concentrated in Santiago, this growth meant that individual creative practices were more frequently compared. This promoted stronger bonds as practitioners positioned themselves in relation to others and developed a greater sense of reflexivity in defining their own creative identity.

I remember one time, we went to see a band, and we discovered there was a small scene of clubs with audiences of about 40 or 50 people. For me, that was really something special because I realised that these guys were playing their own music. I know it was only a few people, but ... they were paying to see this band and hear their songs. And then I realised that we should move a step forward and try to get more serious about playing our own music. I realised I didn't want to be playing just to entertain people [who] don't really care who's playing. I think that was the first time we realised 'Oh, this thing is real, here and now'. (M_musician(1))

That greater sense of reflexivity meant that cultural innovators were now reacting to and building selectively on each other's work. In the words of one practitioner, this marked a transition from 'sporadic effervescent' activity to a 'dynamic art scene' (M_painter) in districts where a stronger connection between people and places first emerged (Fig. 2).

The Chilean biologists Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela coined the term 'autopoiesis' (from Greek αὐτο- (self) and ποίησις (poiesis, meaning creation or production) to describe processes that can produce and maintain themselves (Maturana & Varela, 1980). Between 2003 and 2005, a form of cultural autopoiesis gathered momentum across Santiago's various cultural sectors. This was most strongly expressed in the greater complexity generated as more activities continued to emerge, in turn demanding greater selectivity, as cultural innovations could not be linked if they differed too much or were literally 'too far apart'. As mentioned throughout the interviews, this idea of *selection* was not a matter of chance. It drove the emergence of small and larger institutions, including music labels, theatres, advertising agencies, publishers, fashion labels and art galleries. As facilitators of selective interlinking, these hubs pulled related expressive forms together: 'During the 90s, the huge political void in theatre drove an active quest for identity, which gained more definition in the early 2000s' (M_actor). An overarching framework also began to emerge, and cultural practitioners began to use terms like 'art scene', 'art system' or 'cultural sector'. This clearer identity and sense of boundaries prompted more overt links between loosely coupled creative practices and cultural work in Santiago and across Chile. As one practitioner recalled, it became more acceptable to pursue a career in the cultural sector.

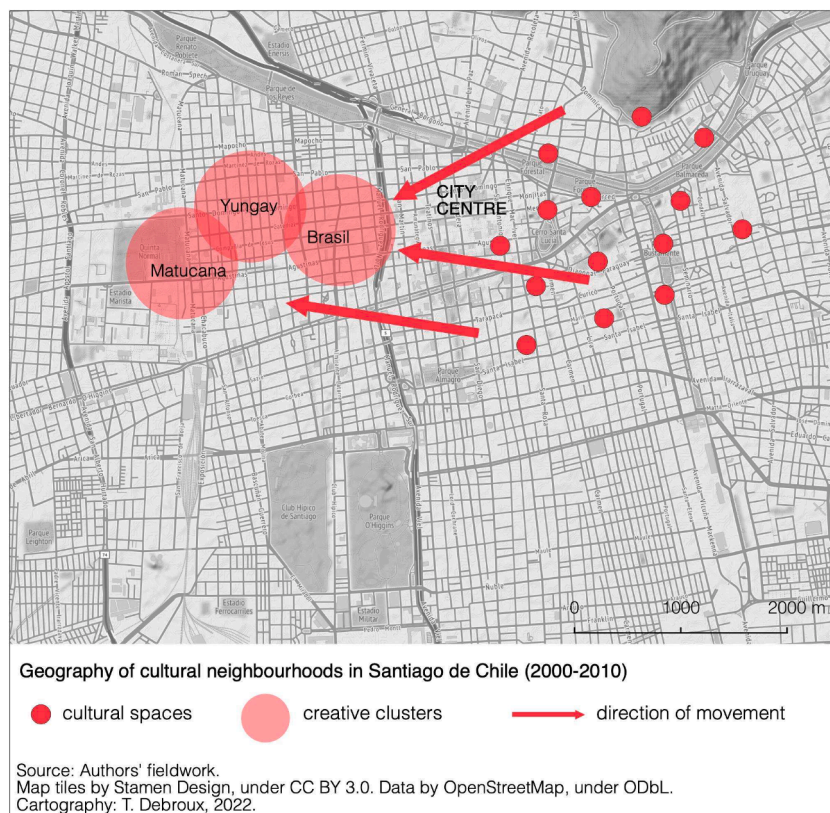


Fig. 2. Art scenes: increasing connections between people and places (Source: Interviews and fieldwork).

I still remember my parents' reaction was 'What the fuck's that?' Under the local process, to get into college, you took a test based on tuition. If you got a high score, you could go for any career. I wanted to be a doctor, but my score wasn't high enough, so I switched to my second choice, which was advertising. So I came into advertising without...it was, again, a matter of luck. I thought 'Okay, I didn't get into medicine, so I'm going to try something else, and if I don't like it after the first year, I can switch. But I stayed in advertising for more than 20 years, and looking back, I'd say everything has changed. It has become normal to work in this field. (M_designer)

According to our informants, this increasing normalcy and acceptance has meant that people increasingly study creative subjects at university. This contributes to the growing numbers working in the sector and greater pressures in terms of selection and creative and economic competition.

...in my generation at university, there were about 80 students—yes, 80! By the time we finished university, there were maybe five or six who continued to work as artists; the rest had moved on to some other career ...as a teacher or a designer while no more than five or six were artists. And that trend has increased over time in all universities. (M_painter)

According to our informants, these trends accelerated as the ICT revolution gained momentum during the same period (2003–2005), and the evidence suggests that creative industry discourse in Western countries is largely an extension of ICT discourse. Certainly, immaterial forms of cultural production can be facilitated by virtual or digital worlds (see [Gandini 2021](#)). However, that situation was reversed in Santiago, where no comprehensive ICT infrastructure existed before the millennium. This meant that film makers still needed expensive analogue cameras; advertising and fashion and visual art promotions were still largely paper- and print-based, and music was recorded in expensive traditional studios. For many practitioners, this constrained creative practices and outputs, not least because only a minority could afford the expense of material resources and infrastructure. The wider availability of ICT was seen as a leveller because it allowed more people to engage in cultural work.

That was the conversation at the time; this technological change democratised access to production. So that was the first change, and I think it made a huge difference for everybody. (M_producer/designer)

So now there were no technical excuses for saying 'I like your music, but it doesn't sound so good, so we can't have it here' or whatever. And I think that really changed the scene. It created more labels because more people could record, and if one guy made good records in a technical way, then more bands wanted to work with him. (M_musician(1))

To make a film, you had to pay a lot of money for cameras and so on. Nowadays, everything is done with HD cameras; it's all about the technology, which reduces a lot of the artist's costs. In the last five or ten years, technology has completely revolutionised art-making in Chile. (M_researcher)

The growth in numbers, the greater acceptability of cultural work and the clearer boundaries and identity of cultural work as a scene, system or sector did not simply reproduce the status quo. In this cultural autopoiesis, each added element altered the nature of current practices. As new meanings emerged, this autopoietic reproduction became increasingly complex, with new forms of selection and interconnection. For instance, increasing specialisation heightened the demand for unique self-presentation and internal differentiation through increased professionalisation. These autopoietic processes became a common feature of cultural work in Santiago between 2010 and 2013.

6. New creative differentiation dynamics and emergence of creative industry discourse (2010–2018)

Many authors have noted the difficulty of conceptualising creative practices from an occupational or professional perspective (see [Wassall and Alper 1989](#), [Menger 2005](#), [Lena and Lindemann 2014](#)). One such challenge is that some creatives do not hold a degree or certification in their chosen field and may not be members of a practitioners' association. Additionally, some do not make a living from their creative work. In reality, creative practices are often defined by their position within a network of other practices (see [White 1993](#), [Morgner 2019](#)). In contrast, accountants, schoolteachers, dentists or lawyers gain professional status by virtue of their specialised education and prevailing public or industry standards that are 'objectively' defined. Studies that investigate creative practices from this occupational or professional perspective tend to use a top-down approach classifying creatives based on existing occupational categories ([Baldin & Bille, 2021](#)). In contrast, the present study employs a bottom-up approach, which explores how professionalism and related standards emerge through cultural autopoiesis. We are exploring how the discourse on professionalism enables new form of differentiation, for instance, in terms of different cultural sectors and genres, but also different types of reputation, for instance, emerging versus established. Based on the interview data, we identified three salient aspects of professionalism and cultural autopoiesis: memory, social distinction and complexity management.

[Santiago's music scene] changed as these independent labels grew; I would say they became more professional. And suddenly you realise, okay, I was part of one wave of musicians. Now there's another wave coming, and another; now I'm older, and things have changed—new younger journalists and people who are really interested in music and cultural issues. (M_musician(1))

A lot of generous people were willing to share their knowledge to help people like us. And I think as older peers who have had opportunities to understand and learn and make mistakes, we need to share that information with the people coming next, and I think everything will be more prepared and more professional. (M_producer/designer)

One recurring idea voiced in the interviews was the growth in knowledge during this period as earlier creative practices become a source of foresight for future creatives. Informants felt that the relationship between hindsight and foresight was not simply a matter of quantitative growth but a form of sedimentation, as earlier cultural practices became a backdrop for present and future practices. In that sense, memory was not regarded as storage because this memory ‘is all over the place, realized in the structures of the connection scheme and in the operational modalities of all nodal elements of this network (von Foerster, 1967, p. 429). To that extent, professionalism can be characterised as a function of memory. The complexity generated by cultural autopoiesis creates a need to remember or store everything that has happened. However, a more selective approach that retains only what must be remembered to guide future practice can free up capacity and so facilitate the interconnection of cultural forms under pressure from increasing complexity.

That’s what I remember from my first experience of working here, and the unique mix of professionals that you find in this industry makes it very challenging and very attractive, both personally and professionally. (M_producer)

My professional creative process is very personal. I watch every runway show across the world, but that does not inspire me—these are only references. ... I think my process is grounded in personal questions that are always linked to social movements—contemporary content, but always very personal. (F_designer)

So in that sense, she’s really professional in that she writes well, and she’s a serious person. (M_musician(1))

Our informants also referred to professionalism as a form of social distinction. Unlike earlier studies that distinguish professionals and amateurs—in other words, those who are paid versus those who are not (see Becker 2008, chapter 8)—professionalism refers here to the creative process and its outputs. Linked to quality and excellence, professionalism was seen to improve rather than constrain or undermine creative practice. Equally, creativity was not understood as divine inspiration or spur of the moment but as process-driven, pursuing challenges and asking questions to create something unique. As new routes of social differentiation open to accommodate these developments, creative activities begin to spread, shaping new identities and forms of meaning-making in other areas of the city (see Fig. 3).

Our informants’ accounts imply that creativity is not purely cognitive but social, and the ability to deliver unique outcomes over time is linked to the twin ideas of social creativity and professionalism.

People who don’t work professionally can cause conflict and bad feelings. To take this seriously rather than as a hobby or something for the weekends ... you need to find this connection with people who say ‘Okay, are you going to grow your life and your work around this and think like this every day, Monday to Friday?’—just like real work. (F_producer)

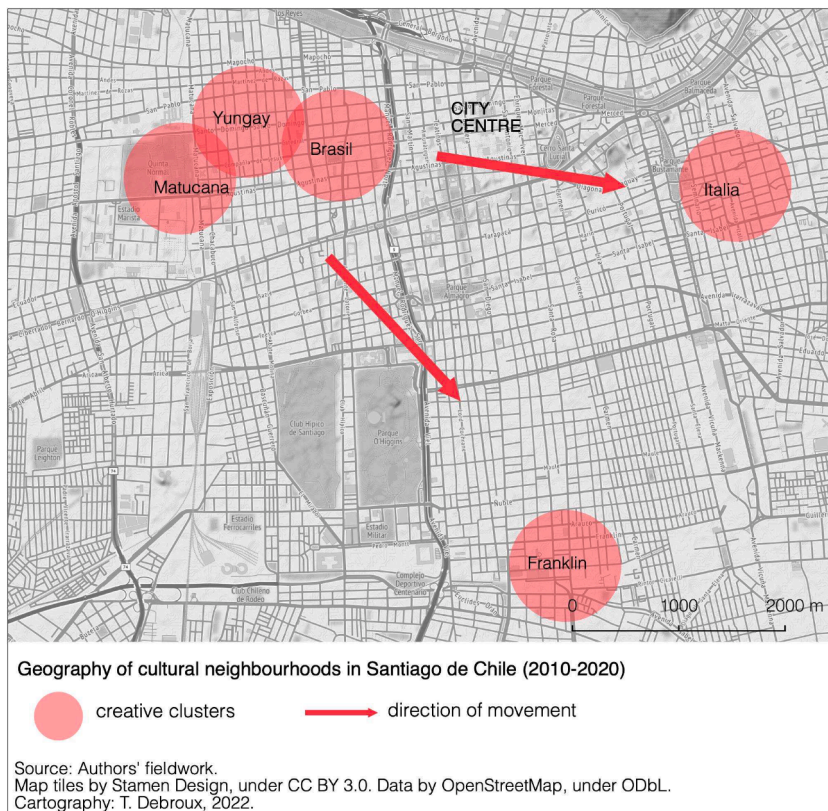


Fig. 3. Differentiation and expansion of people and places (Source: Interviews and fieldwork).

I used to work with lots of people who were full of passion, and the organisation was the most important element in developing lots of projects. So, I think the common characteristic of these people was a passion for the work. And then, I began to choose people who were more serious because while some people may have a lot of passion, they don't always have the skills to organise or coordinate with someone else to get things done. (M_producer)

Finally, the idea of professionalism arose when comparing creative practices with creative work. As the above quotes indicate, work in the context of cultural and creative practices is not an automatic process, and as we will see, that notion is strongly resisted in Santiago. This resistance to the idea of cultural work as a profession or occupation relates to the implicit link to business and money. An extensive body of Western literature assigns a negative value to money in art contexts (Wilson, 2000; Bain, 2005; Oakley, 2009; Peters & Roose, 2020) because the authentic and self-realising creative artist can only engage with art for art's sake. In short, while artistic freedom depends on creative practice driven by artistic purpose, money is viewed with suspicion because it pursues external commercial goals (Bille et al., 2017). This external influence is seen to undermine artistic freedom by bowing to the demands of the consumer, and typical Western images of the artist or artists living in poverty are frequently assigned a positive value (Abbing, 2008, 2011). While such images also prevail in other parts of the world, our informants referred to resistance provoked by a different version of this challenge: social inequalities in Chile and across South America.

In Chile, and perhaps in many other countries in South America, there are real issues of unfairness and inequality. Some people are earning a lot of money while others have no money for food or can't afford a place to live. So, when you live in a place where people don't have access to education, or health, or food or quality food, you find that business means something different here because the businessman is the one in charge of these big companies that help to create this inequality. (F_producer)

In this kind of work, it's like money is something bad. People don't feel comfortable about the relationship between money and the arts ... it's not okay for them. ... Maybe it's because money has... how can I put it... a bit of a bad history in South America. As soon as money comes into it, there are poor people and rich people, and a divide between them. (F_journalist)

People don't want to mix culture and business because business or economics is associated with inequality. As soon as we start to turn culture into business, they say, we increase inequality. (M_researcher)

In terms of the distribution of economic wealth, Latin America is among the most unequal regions in the world. According to the World Inequality Database, about ten percent of the richest people own nearly fifty-five percent of the region's wealth (World Inequality Database, 2021). As others have reported, this inequality not only creates a deep divide between poor and wealthy individuals but extends into other areas of society, including education, politics, media and religion (see Huber et al. 2006, Blofield 2011, Cornia 2014, Hughes and Machado, 2016). In light of this impact on other institutions, it is perhaps unsurprising that this is also a concern in the arts and culture sector, especially in a society where culture is seen as interconnected and shared and not simply as the individualised production of creative goods. Rather than simply diluting the purity of art, as in Western accounts, the key issue in South America is that something that can and should be shared by all is divided and appropriated, leading to a vitiated form of culture.

In this light, it is perhaps unsurprising that the more economic focus of governmental cultural policy has raised concerns. Before 2010, Chilean cultural policy was largely driven by memories of the negation of arts and culture under Pinochet's dictatorship. Prior to 2010, arts funding and cultural institutions focused on reconciliation, and support was based on artistic merit rather than audience numbers or impact. However, this position began to change in the wake of Chile's so-called 'Salmon Crisis' in 2008–2009 (see Hosono et al. 2016). The salmon fishing industry was highly regarded, and a number of wealthy families controlled a large part of the market. When the sector collapsed and the government shifted its focus to possible replacements, one cultural policy analyst noted that 'government politicians were very surprised about the importance of this sector because, despite its contribution to the economy, it was not commonly discussed as an economic sector' (F_cultural_administrator). For the first time, the government realised that cultural activities contributed more to GDP than the fishing industry. This triggered a number of international workshops in 2010 and 2011 involving invited international cultural professionals, policy planners and academics. Following these deliberations, Parliament discussed legal provisions introduced in 2013 for the creation of a Ministry of Arts and Culture, which was officially launched in 2018.

Between 2011 and 2018, preliminary structures and initiatives included a cross-ministerial committee formed in 2015 to discuss the development of the creative economy (*comité interministerial de fomento a la economía creativa*). A national plan (*plan nacional de fomento a la economía creativa*) formulated in 2016 included funding provisions and a number of sub-policies related to music, film, TV and publishing. The government also conducted statistical mapping exercises to assess the scale, shape and impact of the creative economy. Despite the reservations of cultural workers, this new discourse prompted numerous changes, including government investments and supports to develop the country's cultural infrastructure and to make it more accessible. These initiatives included the Centro Cultural Gabriela Mistral (GAM) (2010), the Museum of Memory and Human Rights (Museo de la Memoria y los Derechos Humanos) (2010), the Chilean Art Fair (Chaco) (2010), Lollapalooza (2011), Chilemonos International Animation Film Festival (Festival Internacional de Animación Chilemonos) (2011), the Contemporary Art Festival (SACO, 2012), later to become the Chile Biennial of Visual Arts (2021) and the Chile National Centre for Contemporary Art (2016). Governmental funding remains an important source of income for many parts of the cultural industries in Chile. While some of these targeted domestic audiences, the main goal of these institutions, including new funding and international exchange programmes, was to grow Chile's creative economy through global exports and representation abroad. For that reason, many cultural practitioners based in Santiago de Chile noted that their primary audience is abroad.

Theme 6: The Creative Economy and Global Exports

For countries like Chile, or poor countries, it's very important that our artists participate in important events like the Sao Paulo Biennale or the Biennale Venezia. It's like football—it's our football. (M_cultural_management)

This exhibition [at Museo Malba, Buenos Aires] showcases our country but also exports it to other parts of the world. (M_cultural_management)

And so, we said 'If we don't have an audience and a market here in Chile, we need to start searching internationally'. (M_producer/designer)

... from 2010, we began to attend international fairs and festivals. It was very difficult to begin with, but we sold from the very start. (M_producer/designer)

I've been working in this field for 15 years. I have representation in Argentina and in Paris, and I've started working now with a guy from Cuba and someone from Panama. That enables me to make a living and to work as a full-time artist. (M_painter)

... today, we have 30, 20 projects, placing Chilean artists in group shows in New York, in Pakistan. (M_painter)

... going to New York and Miami, exporting to Brazil and Argentina. (M_musician)

So, for example, we also ran seminars in New York because somebody who loved the book said 'Why don't you launch in a bookstore in New York?' (F_cultural_management(1))

... five or six years ago, the government created a culture and fashion design department to show our work outside Chile. (F_designer)

We're exporting our creativity [advertising] beyond Chile. We're starting operations in Peru, and I'm planning to go to Mexico in the very near future. (M_designer)

Across sectors that include music, visual arts, advertising, fashion and publishing, the creativity harnessed through cultural practices in Santiago is consumed elsewhere. While these opportunities have contributed to the growth of Chile's creative economy, this does not translate directly into greater cultural or social relevance. For instance, the film 'A Fantastic Woman' (directed by Sebastián Lelio) won a first Oscar in the Best Foreign Language Film category following Chile's first Oscar for the animated film 'Bear Story' in 2016. Despite significant international attention, the film was watched by only 30,000 people in Chile in the weeks following its release (see [González 2018](#)). This reflects a growing disparity between Chile's cultural exports and domestic interest; our informants noted that success is increasingly measured in monetary terms, highlighting the economic and cultural limitations within their own region.

I think we decided to go international around 2009 and 2010 because it was too difficult to continue working exclusively in Chile. We didn't have a market or an environment here to develop our work. (M_producer/designer)

If you play guitar and you're famous here in Chile, no one knows you elsewhere in South America ... to be famous, you have to go to Mexico. Mexico is the biggest market and gives you a way in to the rest of South America. (M_researcher)

We moved there [to France] just to look for more opportunities. We heard that they love this kind of Latin American fusion music in France. (F_musician)

While the shift in cultural policy has facilitated the creative economy's international growth, this has created new challenges, creative practitioners expressed concerns about the sustainability of this model ([OPC, 2021](#)). In particular, the quotes above suggest that international success does not always translate into a stable financial situation. A rapidly changing and highly competitive global market means that success is precarious and does not necessarily translate to the home market. This lack of a strong and stable domestic base was seen as one of the key challenges for a sustainable creative economy.

Santiago is a cosmopolitan city, but Chile is quite conservative, and we [in Santiago] are an island. (M_researcher)

We live in a very conservative society. Inside the university, I saw another kind of society, another kind of work, another kind of people, and their world opened to me in a different way. (M_painter)

... the other problem, I think, is our conservative society and the size of the market. Because it's too small and too conservative, good new or avant-garde ideas are difficult to introduce. (F_designer)

The concept of conservatism, as applied in this discussion, necessitates a more in-depth examination, given its incomparability with Western instances, due to its deep-seated roots in Chile's cultural heritage. To elaborate, conservatism in the United Kingdom is profoundly influenced by issues surrounding national sovereignty and immigration ([Goodwin, 2023](#)). The phenomenon of cultural globalisation is approached with a degree of ambivalence, highlighting a focus on safeguarding British values and traditions. Although proponents of UK conservatism also endorse the principles of a free market, their interpretation of conservatism encompasses the sovereignty of the United Kingdom and its longstanding tradition of legal and institutional continuity, which includes the welfare state and public health system (refer to [Bale 2010](#), [Vincent 2019](#)).

Basically, the cultural elite, is liberal in economic terms but conservative in behaviours and those kind of things. (M_researcher)

I remember the Chilean elite is conservative in terms of beliefs and behaviours and so on, but super liberal in terms of economical stuff. (M_cultural_management)

These quotes highlight that the concept of conservatism in Chile is perceived differently compared to that in the United Kingdom. Chilean conservatism has been profoundly shaped by the legacy of Augusto Pinochet's dictatorship, with a marked emphasis on neoliberal economic policies, including free-market capitalism, privatisation, and minimal governmental intervention. Economic globalisation receives strong support. Social conservatism in Chile is further intertwined with Catholic values, significantly shaping views on social issues such as abortion, same-sex marriage, and gender roles (see [Huneus, 2007](#), [Smith 2014](#), [Silva 2019](#)). Within this conservative framework, the creative economy encounters a challenging landscape, characterized by profit-driven motives on one side and a religiously informed status quo on the other, presenting considerable obstacles to change. In light of these domestic conditions, a

major challenge for cultural practitioners and policy planners lies in devising a sustainable model for the country's creative economy (refer to [Lopez and Munoz 2021](#)).

7. The impact of Covid-19 on Santiago's cultural and creative industries (2019–2022)

In the late 2010s, Santiago was rated as one of the safest cities in Latin America, with strong economic prospects. In 2019, Chile scored 0.851 on the Human Development Index (HDI), joining Uruguay, Argentina and Costa Rica as countries with 'very high' human development potential ([UNDP, 2022](#)). On this index, Santiago achieved the best score at city level, and the unemployment rate for cultural workers (artists) was at its lowest historical level, promising a decade of high economic and cultural progress ([Pinochet et al., 2021](#)). However, on October 18, 2019, this 'true oasis' within a politically 'convulsed' Latin America—as described by President Sebastián Piñera a few months before the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation Forum (APEC) and the United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP25)—was abruptly challenged by the people of Santiago ([Garcés, 2019](#)). An increase in public transportation fares triggered an unprecedented 'social outburst' that undermined this fragile imaginary of economic success ([Funk & Velasco, 2020](#)). Despite the country's positive economic figures, the social reality was entirely different; accumulated historical demands ([Navarrete & Tricot, 2021](#)): low retirement pensions, unequal access to quality education, a weak health system, high private indebtedness with banks, and social justice inequity were among historical problems that triggered the urban social revolution that first erupted at Santiago's Plaza Baquedano, subsequently renamed by the demonstrators as 'Plaza Dignidad' (Dignity Square). From then until early March 2020, Santiago de Chile witnessed a social upheaval characterised by looting, confrontations with police and human rights violations by the State. These events led to the suspension of artistic activities, and cultural spaces closed, with an exponential increase in unemployment rates among artists and creators. It drastically impacted on the complexity of the eco-system and possibilities for meaning-making.

Theme 7: The 'Social Outburst' (October 2019)

The Social Outburst was a pressure cooker that could explode at any time ... reflecting the frustrations of Chileans born in the last five decades. As a visual artist and as a citizen, I have conflicting views. For example, it hurts that the destructive images of Santiago's architectural heritage, monuments and urban landscape in the first weeks seemed to turn them into war sites in just a few hours. (M_visual artist/designer)

Undoubtedly, the most difficult work-related events I experienced during this period were the social outburst and the subsequent pandemic. As the demonstration area was in front of our theatre, the social outburst hit us with full force. Those were very hard months, especially because most of us understood the historical moment and that art and culture are ultimately seen in our underdeveloped countries as something associated with mandarins or Asian princes. In the best-case scenario, this serves as a model of consumption for bourgeois individuals with aesthetic aspirations. This precariousness of the very concept of work in the art world led us to believe that we could quickly disappear. (M_producer1)

The outburst on October 18 greatly affected musical activity in professional terms, especially playing and performing live. In my case, I was scheduled to play at festivals, concerts and concert halls, and everything fell through. We were going to present our new album, but we couldn't, as the social outburst meant that transport routes were cut; streets were blocked and so on. Theatres and concert halls closed, and I was out of work. Not knowing what to do caused uncertainty and anxiety, and money was lost on concert hall leases and production dates. And then came the pandemic, leading to even greater uncertainty. (M_musician (2))

Like most Chileans, my experience of the social outburst was surprise, followed by lots of hope. I participated as a citizen in the protests and mobilisations. As an artist ... I experienced the shutting down of the neighbourhood where I work. I could not play anymore, and then, every engagement fell through. At the employment level, I experienced a halt, a blackout. Yet, although nothing looked good, our hope remained intact. (M_musician(3))

One thing that caused me to reflect on the period of the outburst and the subsequent pandemic was the relationship with the public space in Santiago. I feel that the public space was somehow claimed by the social movement. Many people felt that this space belonged to them again and that they could decide who was represented there. Before October 18, the public space was to be avoided; get home as soon as possible because that is the only safe place—a legacy of the dictatorship. Paradoxically, this act of recovery was followed by a pandemic that forced us to lock ourselves in again. (M_visual artist)

The social outburst overlapped with the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020, and the cultural domain was particularly affected by health measures that included confinement and a total shutdown of public spaces. According to official numbers, about fifty percent of the country's artists and creators lost their jobs ([Pinochet et al., 2021](#)). The social outburst had reduced cultural supply and demand; the pandemic delivered a further blow to the creative scene, and Santiago was particularly affected by both events. As noted earlier, the country's artistic and creative activities are concentrated in the capital, and while this provided them with multiple opportunities under these circumstances this concentration worked to their disadvantage due to the need for social distancing. The authorities were slow to respond and persisted with the historical logic of resource distribution through competitive projects. Unlike other countries in Latin America and Europe, resources were not delivered directly to artists in Chile, nor was there any economic support for creative companies. Sebastián Piñera's government allowed Chileans to withdraw up to 30% of their retirement savings from their pension fund administrators (known as AFPs). Additionally, a bonus 'Emergency Family Income' was issued to nearly eighty percent of the most vulnerable households in the country, which benefited 10.4 million people. However, the Ministry of Culture, Arts and Heritage adopted a more passive and indifferent attitude, assuming that artists and creators would be able to access the same state supports and personal retirement savings.

Many of us knew that this series of events in Chile was inevitable and that the unsustainable pressure on the lives of Chileans would someday result in actions like the outburst. And so it happened, and it was our turn to pay the price that such changes demand from some people. But we also knew that ... it could be fatal for the theatre where we worked. The pandemic added to this complexity; not only were we unable to open the theatre but even if we did, we could not gather the musicians. We are still suffering the effects of the complications introduced by the pandemic: reduced seating capacity, a permanent fear of infection among the orchestra, containment measures, and above all, the fear of growing increasingly distant from people, the fear of being forgotten. But spaces must be

reinvented. (M_producer1)

When COVID came and the quarantines were announced, my partner and I decided to be prepared. As we worked in a studio, we divided the instruments and computers between us to work at home. It was a difficult period, with a lot of anxiety. Recording from home, we were able to complete some projects, but working like that was very slow. I had to produce the music, make musical arrangements and so on, all alone and without feedback. I could not have conversations ‘in the moment’ with the musicians. As I worked very slowly, profits were also slow. Livestreaming concerts did not appeal to me either; as the music I make has lots of arrangements and many textures, doing it live online seemed of little value. (M_musician(3))

What affected me most was the changing facades of many businesses in Santiago—retail stores, supermarkets, banks—with the installation of metal doors etc. During the outburst, it was as if some shops in the city ‘went dark’ inside because their windows were sealed and closed. This image of confinement is still vivid to me—welded plates with a ‘Mad Max’ look. (M_visual artist)

By March 2022, Santiago had not completely recovered from the effects of the pandemic. Seating capacities continued to be limited at cultural venues, and audiences were slowly returning. It seems likely that many cultural workers switched employment sectors, and some creative companies moved from physical spaces to virtual workspaces. Creative neighbourhoods did not disappear but had to reinvent their meanings to adapt to ongoing health measures. In collaboration with local governments and municipalities, new circulation logics were organised for cultural goods and services: funding virtual concerts and theatre shows through social media, for instance, online versions of the Valdivia International Film Festival or online versions of the Santiago a Mil Theatre Festival, closing streets and opening stores in neighbourhoods like Italia, Franklin, and Yungay. Financial support mechanisms were introduced to reduce taxes and associated expenses. Local creative spaces generated formal and informal partnership networks built on solidarity and an ethics of mutual care. At the same time, there is wide-ranging debate about cultural rights and the role of the state in supporting the cultural and creative sector in the context of moves to incorporate specific articles about cultural rights in the country’s new constitution.

My neighbours and I took out our drums and guitar. We were conscious of the crisis regarding venues and concert halls, but we had great hopes for the ongoing constitutional process. I see that process as enthusiastic, but I don’t have many expectations. I would rather not have my heart broken, so I keep a healthy distance. I don’t want to be disappointed. I am enthusiastic about the process, and I trust it, but I keep my distance. The social outburst caused us to rethink a lot. (M_musician(3))

... although Chile has seen remarkable macroeconomic development over the last four decades, various frustrations persist across society, and these need to be addressed. Issues like economic collusion, the concentration of wealth, inequalities that subjugate desire and speculate with bodies, the violence suffered by various social groups, environmental damage—these and other issues demand a constitutional process and resulting legislation that legitimises these needs and gives a voice to all Chileans.

(M_visual artist)

In the early 2020s, the use of urban space changed in Santiago. Although the city experienced confrontation and violence between demonstrators and police during the social outburst, this set the stage for new forms of meaning-making. There were street performances like ‘A Rapist in Your Path’ by the Las Tesis Collective (Martin & Shaw, 2021), as well as theatre plays, graffiti, concerts, murals, xilographies, paintings and dance performances. All of this came to a halt with the pandemic. However, new President Gabriel Boric, a former student leader and key actor during the social outburst, has indicated that the creative and cultural sector will be a priority for his government, with a promised one percent budget increase (up from 0.4 percent) by 2025. This plan envisages a city of Santiago committed to the good living standards, sustainability and creative development demanded by Chile’s social movements.

8. Conclusion

This text offers an in-depth analysis of the development of cultural and creative industries in Santiago de Chile from 1990 to 2022. It explores the transformation of creative practices and institutions, prevailing discourses and themes, and the impact of the city on creative activities. It also examines local conditions that influence the creative sectors and discusses the co-development of a theoretical framework tailored to these contexts. A significant challenge in this process was to avoid inadvertently incorporating Western concepts of creative industries, which might distort the distinct cultural and economic realities of the Global South. Consequently, the empirical research required a theoretical framework that could effectively contextualize these data. The paper proposes transposing the concept of autopoiesis originally developed by Chilean biologists Maturana and Varela to the study of meaning-making and evolutionary cultural transformation. Although the term has been associated with German sociologist Niklas Luhmann, this study returns to its roots with Maturana and Varela to reconstruct, from the bottom up, a framework that aligns with local insights and realities.

The present research confirms that the development of Chile’s cultural sector is deeply rooted in experiences of the Pinochet dictatorship and the associated suppression of arts and culture. The cultural activities that subsequently emerged were in search of a new language and a sense of meaning, driven by issues such as the freedom of personal expression, passion versus fear, and resistance to plans and definitions. These issues found various expressions across different cultural practices, with film and music, in particular, playing pioneering roles in the early phases.

Most of these cultural activities are concentrated in Santiago de Chile, where they initially mushroomed and flourished in small pockets, with limited linkages. Musicians, actors, and other cultural practitioners highlighted the early 1990s as a particularly vibrant

time in the city, noting the abundance of venues and platforms for showcasing their work. Here, we identified a discourse on the transition from cultural blackout to creative reawakening. This shift is marked by a resurgence in cultural and creative activities as individuals and collectives navigate the newly opened spaces for expression and innovation. The narrative of recovery and revitalisation becomes a central theme, emphasising the resilience and adaptability of Santiago's creative community.

However, as the beat of music spoke to Chile's soul, these activities grew rapidly, and by the beginning of the new millennium, they became mutually visible. This development was non-linear, eventually crossing a threshold as new forms of meaning-making and cultural innovation began to interact, forming networks of cultural practices. The increasing complexity of cultural activities led to the formation of more selective local clusters and a growing wave of non-profit off-spaces and start-ups. This clustering facilitated stronger connections among practitioners and contributed to a greater sense of reflexivity in defining creative identities. These developments cannot be explained simply as cause-and-effect or by external factors like new technologies or policies; instead, we invoke the concept of self-organisation to explain how mutual reactions and interactions reframe and reconfigure these activities rather than merely expanding their number. This discussion builds upon and extends the work of researchers like [De Beukelaer and Spence \(2019\)](#). This qualitative change occurs when a cultural threshold is reached, creating new pressures for greater internal differentiation to differentiate cultural outputs and retain their uniqueness through increasing professionalism. This includes a discourse on professionalisation and identity in creative work. This development is attributed to broader educational and technological shifts that have expanded access to creative production and fostered a more competitive, yet collaborative, creative ecosystem. The advent of digital technologies has significantly influenced Santiago's creative industries, democratising access to creative production and distribution. This technological shift has enabled local artists and cultural practitioners to reach global audiences, fostering cross-cultural exchanges and collaborations. However, it has also raised questions about copyright, remuneration, and the sustainability of creative practices in the digital age. The discourse around professionalisation also touches on the challenges of balancing artistic integrity with economic viability, reflecting on the tensions between creativity, commercialisation, and cultural authenticity. It echoes and extends findings from works like [Jenkins \(2006\)](#), exploring the implications of digitalisation for copyright, remuneration, and the sustainability of creative practices, particularly in the context of the Global South.

In this context, cultural practice becomes cultural work, establishing closer links to financial gain. This includes the emergence of a discourse on the creative city concept, especially, how policy aimed at shaping Santiago's creative landscape. However, this transition presents a fundamental challenge, as money is linked to inequality and social division while cultural growth is grounded in togetherness. It is therefore unsurprising that government discourse around a creative economy has raised concerns because of the former dictatorship's attitude towards arts and culture and the wider history of inequality in South America. We critiqued the global adoption of the 'creative city' concept, noting the need for a nuanced understanding of how urban spaces and policies interact with local cultural practices. Our study highlights the importance of considering the specific socio-political and economic contexts of the Global South in discussions about urban creativity and innovation.

While these new policies supported the international rise of the creative economy, the new challenges of sustainability were further highlighted by the impact of the pandemic. This addressed the challenges facing Santiago's creative sector, including the impact of economic and social conservatism, as well as the effects of globalisation and technological change. Our research discussed the sustainability of the creative economy in the face of these challenges, suggesting that a more culturally sensitive and locally grounded approach is needed to foster a thriving and equitable creative industry.

This summary reflects that changes in creative practices and institutions, predominant discourses and themes, the city's impact on creative activities as well as local conditions influencing the creative sectors cannot be considered in separation from each other. Even though our initial questions suggested four different answers, our research proves that these processes cannot be explained as simple cause and effect but demand an understanding of threshold effects and a sensitivity to the local historical and social contexts in which they are embedded. Furthermore, we were able to move beyond mere statistical data collection, providing an in-depth analysis of the development and transformation of cultural and creative practices in South America. As noted above, such use of data presents a very linear account but also uses classifications that introduce a Western framework through the back door. The present study takes a first step towards bridging this gap by investigating the development of cultural and creative practices, cultural institutions and discourse around the creative economy in Santiago de Chile. This understanding of the meaning-making of cultural practices and their transformation was enabled through a contextual framework using the notion of autopoietic meaning-making. The core theoretical framework enabled us to understand the self-generating and evolving nature of creative practices in Santiago. This approach offers a new lens for understanding the self-generating and self-sustaining processes of cultural production and innovation, moving beyond traditional discussions found in works of [Maturana and Varela \(1980\)](#) and extending the application of autopoiesis to cultural phenomena as suggested by scholars, such as, [Luhmann \(1995\)](#) and [Morgner \(2022\)](#). This approach allows for a deeper exploration of how creative industries continuously produce and reproduce their own structures and meanings. The concept of autopoiesis illuminates the dynamic interplay between individual creativity and collective cultural production, offering insights into the autonomous yet interconnected nature of Santiago's creative ecosystem.

In conclusion, our research connects these findings to the wider discourse on the creative industries, suggesting directions for future research and practice. It underscores the significance of understanding cultural practices within their specific historical and social contexts and the potential of autopoietic meaning-making as a theoretical lens to explore the complex development of creative industries in global society.

CRediT authorship contribution statement

Christian Morgner: Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Visualization, Resources, Project administration,

Methodology, Investigation, Funding acquisition, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization. **Tomás Peters:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Investigation, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization.

Declaration of competing interest

X No conflict of interest exists.

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