

## TERRITORIALIZED PANDEMIC: EVERYDAY LIFE IN TWO NEIGHBORHOODS OF BUENOS AIRES

### *A PANDEMIA TERRITORIALIZADA: VIDA DIÁRIA EM DOIS BAIRROS DE BUENOS AIRES*

### *LA PANDEMIA TERRITORIALIZADA: LA VIDA COTIDIANA EN DOS BARRIOS DE BUENOS AIRES*

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**ABSTRACT:** This article deals with the experience of the COVID-19 pandemic from the perspective of inhabitants of two neighborhoods in the City of Buenos Aires, Argentina. In this framework, it dwells on the changes, adaptations, and redefinitions that the pandemic context imposed on daily life at its interface with the territory. It pays special attention to the experience of preventive and compulsory social isolation and its impacts on neighborhood sociability. The analysis is based on the assumption that the pandemic, although global in nature, has effects and meanings with a local anchor, emphasizing its situated nature. Effects and meanings are read in articulation with the adaptation practices carried out by citizens. The methodological strategy on which the work is based is qualitative, 11 in-depth interviews were carried out with residents of the Lugano and San Telmo neighborhoods of the City of Buenos Aires, in the month of July 2021. The main findings have to do with the individual and collective adaptation strategies that are configured in the pandemic context to support daily life.

**KEYWORDS:** Pandemic. Territory. Daily life. Mobility. Buenos Aires.

**RESUMO:** *Este artigo trata da experiência da pandemia de COVID-19 na perspectiva de moradores de dois bairros da cidade de Buenos Aires, Argentina. Neste quadro, debruça-se sobre as mudanças, adaptações e redefinições que o contexto pandêmico impôs ao cotidiano na sua interface com o território. Dá atenção especial à vivência do isolamento social preventivo e obrigatório e seus impactos na sociabilidade do bairro. A análise parte do pressuposto de que a pandemia, embora de natureza global, tem efeitos e significados com ancoragem local, enfatizando sua natureza situada. Efeitos e significados são lidos em articulação com as práticas de adaptação realizadas pelos cidadãos. A estratégia*

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metodológica em que se baseia o trabalho é qualitativa. Foram realizadas 11 entrevistas em profundidade com moradores dos bairros Lugano e San Telmo da Cidade de Buenos Aires, no mês de julho de 2021. Os principais achados têm a ver com as estratégias de adaptação individual e coletiva que se configuram no contexto da pandemia para sustentar a vida diária.

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** *Pandemia. Território. Vida cotidiana. Mobilidade. Buenos Aires.*

**RESUMEN:** *Este artículo trata la experiencia de la pandemia por COVID-19 desde la perspectiva de habitantes de dos barrios de la Ciudad de Buenos Aires, Argentina. En ese marco se detiene en los cambios, adaptaciones y resignificaciones que el contexto pandémico impuso en la vida cotidiana en su interfaz con el territorio. Presta especial atención a la experiencia del aislamiento social preventivo y obligatorio y a sus impactos en la sociabilidad barrial. El análisis se apoya en el supuesto de que la pandemia, si bien de carácter global, tiene efectos y sentidos con un anclaje local, enfatizando su carácter situado. Efectos y sentidos se leen en articulación con las prácticas de adaptación que realiza la ciudadanía. La estrategia metodológica en la que se apoya el trabajo es cualitativa. Se desarrollaron 11 entrevistas en profundidad a residentes de los barrios de Lugano y San Telmo de la Ciudad de Buenos Aires, en el mes de julio de 2021. Los principales hallazgos tienen que ver con las estrategias de adaptación individuales y colectivas que se configuran en el contexto pandémico para dar sostén a la vida cotidiana.*

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** *Pandemia. Territorio. Vida cotidiana. Movilidad. Buenos Aires.*

## Introduction

Since January 2020, the changes that have taken place after the spread of the COVID-19 virus and the actions taken by different States have become an unavoidable topic in social studies. This concern finds particular significance when considering that urban life has changed substantially. Policies aimed at preventing and containing the spread of the virus had a central effect on urban lifestyles and city perceptions. Referring to the Mexican case, Alicia Ziccardi (2021 p. 16, our translation) states that:

[...] the slogans 'Stay at home', 'Wash your hands', 'Keep a healthy distance' and even 'Wear a mask' force us to review the urban way of life, to refunctionalize the private use of housing space and public use of urban goods and services. In the same way, they forced to rethink essential economic activities, educational activities and work practices, as well as redefine the different modalities of family, community and social life, reducing their intensity and replacing, as far as possible, face-to-face interaction with virtual interaction.

These global 'slogans', however, had local translations or adaptations. Not only because they varied from country to country, but also because the urban systems and ways of life in which they were recorded differ from region to region, city to city, and often neighborhood to



neighborhood. In this way, life in the pandemic generated new practices and uses of public and private space that changed forms of sociability and ways of seeing the city. In this framework, the article proposes to expose a territorial vision of isolation, quarantine and its progressive opening in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic in two middle-class neighborhoods of the City of Buenos Aires, recovering the experiences of its residents, both in their homes and in work, school and care circles.

In Argentina, the national government decided on a strict quarantine as a strategy to prevent infection and the spread of the virus, which remained in the city of Buenos Aires for more than eight months<sup>4</sup>. Social, preventive and compulsory isolation (hereinafter, ASPO) provided for a series of "exceptions" for health personnel, officials at different levels of government, the Armed and Security Forces, workers in the food, medicine and transport sectors. It also contemplated that those businesses remain open to guarantee the supply of food, medicine and basic needs. The quarantine was extended by different phases that were enacted based on the doubling time of infections.

In this framework, the article reports how the measures taken by the national government and the government of the City of Buenos Aires to prevent massive contagions have changed the forms of sociability, mobility, work and care in Buenos Aires. This is done from an in-depth case study in two neighborhoods of the City of Buenos Aires: the neighborhood of Lugano and San Telmo. Based on fieldwork, it aims to contribute to thinking about the complex changes that have taken place in urban lifestyles during the pandemic, which we understand must be thought of in a multidimensional and multiscale way<sup>5</sup>. Although the spread of the virus has generated a global crisis, *a situated view from within* (MAGNANI, 2012) allows us to understand how the pandemic impacted the urban space of Buenos Aires, reconfiguring public and private uses, feeding back existing inequalities and producing new.

The analytical perspective built from the research has some theoretical-methodological implications. In principle, the way of thinking about the pandemic. As we plant in other (excluded) places, although - as we pointed out earlier - a pandemic, by its very nature, is global in nature, its effects and meanings have a local anchor. These effects and meanings are configured in dialogue with the measures that different governments take to face the challenges of the pandemic in their interface with the characteristics of urban environments, local

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<sup>4</sup> On 19 March 2020, within the scope of the pandemic declaration issued by the World Health Organization, the National Government decreed Social, Preventive and Mandatory Isolation through Decree-Law 297/2020.

<sup>5</sup> Multidimensional because the pandemic and the measures promoted to face it had an impact on the domestic, social, economic and work life -among other dimensions- of families. They also affected the dynamics of housing, neighborhoods and cities.



assistance systems<sup>6</sup> and, also, with the practices that citizens develop to adapt and face the new situation. Likewise, we understand that the pandemic cannot be thought of in the abstract. Not only because the spread of the virus is eminently spatial, but because space itself has its logic, its dynamics and its history. In short, its territoriality. The 'slogans' of a global nature are transferred to the territory as policies that oscillate between the form of punitive mandates or health recommendations, inscribing themselves in people's practices and ways of life, transforming their relations with the urban environment, as well as their perceptions of space and the ways in which they relate to the city and to others. In this sense, the policies that have contributed to mitigating the pandemic(s) – the “stay at home”, the ban on movement, etc. – and policies aimed at remedying the effects of this immobility at the level of neighborhoods and families, can be thought of spatially.

The pandemic and the practices of common people (acceptances, resistances, new relationships) can be understood from the understanding of the effort involved in 'sustaining life' in the pandemic, recovering the collective dimension of these practices. Sustaining life involves forms of cooperation, union or participation in groups that give meaning to a life that is "worth it" (NAROTZKY; BESNIER 2020, p. 27). We understand that this perspective allows us to understand "the way in which a society represents social value" (NAROTZKY; BESNIER, 2020, p. 27) and the significant differences (limits, institutions, categories of people) with the values that are promoted from the field of public policies. In short, the study of practices cannot be thought of without understanding the assessments – multiple – that people make. These practices are not only understood by the frames of reference and experiences, but also by the place and vital coordinates in which they occur.

The work is supported by conducting 11 in-depth interviews with middle class people living in the neighborhoods of San Telmo and Lugano (5 and 6 interviews, respectively) in the city of Buenos Aires. The interviews were conducted virtually during the month of July 2021. These interviews aimed to produce descriptive information about the importance of territorial anchors and local roots among the interviewees in the processes related to the reproduction of daily life and care and the form and meanings that they acquire in the different territories. Likewise, its objective was to bring us closer to the perceptions of flesh and blood inhabitants and their ways of understanding and representing the pandemic context.

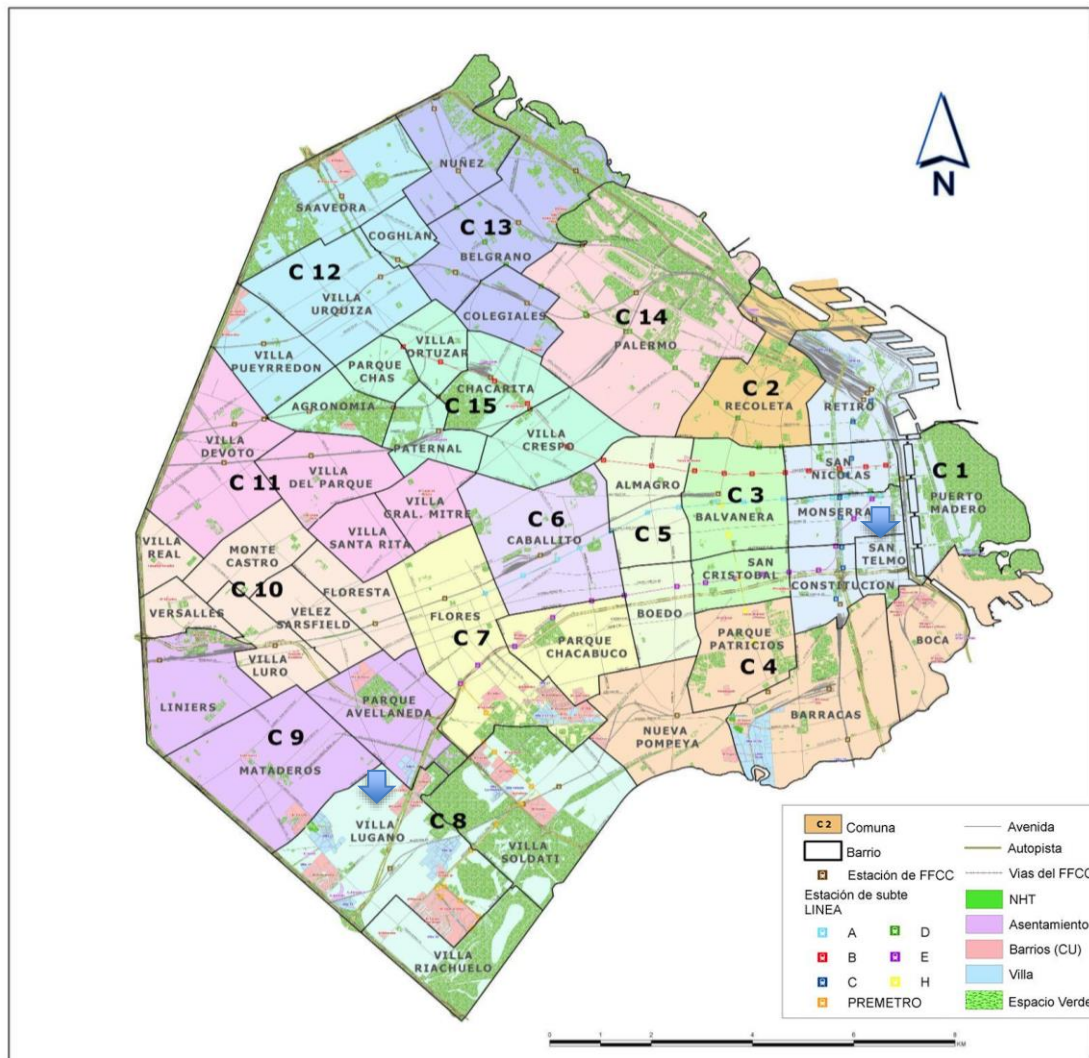
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<sup>6</sup> The concept refers to the actions and interventions that governments and local administrations prioritize in the field of well-being. In this framework, it includes policies and programs, strategies and practices of organizational innovation and guidelines for interaction with public and private agents for the provision and production of services. (HUETE GARCÍA; MERINERO RODRÍGUEZ; MUÑOZ MORENO, 2015).



## Buenos Aires and its neighborhoods

**Figure 1** – Neighborhoods of the City of Buenos Aires



Source: Department of Cartography, General Directorate of Statistics and Census (Ministry of Finance, Government of the City of Buenos Aires)

San Telmo is a neighborhood located in the southern part of the city of Buenos Aires (see Figure 1), very close to the city's financial center and the public administration centers of the federal and municipal governments. It is adjacent to the Puerto Madero neighborhood. The urban services and infrastructure that characterize it are adequate, well maintained and, in some areas, have standards much higher than those of other neighborhoods in the south of the city - despite registering some isolated signs of degradation. It is a small historic district that concentrates numerous landmarks and emblematic places that have remained since the founding of Buenos Aires. Since the 1980s, the neighborhood has undergone a process of strong transformation. Gradually, it ceased to be a residential neighborhood and many houses were

demolished in favor of the development of other uses, mainly skyscrapers and services related to tourism. Simultaneously, other types of precarious occupation emerged, including hotels, pensions and real estate occupations. However, the permanence of these types of habitats has progressively diminished vis-à-vis the evolution of the renovation process – in terms of urban uses and the sociodemographic profile of its inhabitants – that has been taking place in San Telmo since the late 1970s. Thus, squatters were evicted, and boarding houses were converted into youth hostels (hostels).

Neighborhood changes take approximately four decades. In this context, activities related to services, especially hotels, gastronomy and cultural services, have been progressively expanding. This process took off especially after the 2001-2002 crisis and was linked to the international tourist boom in the city that promoted new commercial and real estate businesses. In recent years, tourism-related activities have diversified and become more complex, from traditional antiques to a wide range of food services, boutique hotels, inns and designer clothing stores. The neighborhood has also become an educational magnet and has consolidated itself as a cultural space since the expansion of the Museum of Modern Art and the renovation of old mansions transformed into trendy bars and esplanades. Historical protection policies regressed to favor market initiatives linked to tourism. The pandemic has hit the local economy hard, related to tourism, gastronomy and hospitality activities. According to the administrator of one of the most emblematic places in the neighborhood that has existed since the 19th century, the Market of San Telmo, during 2020, 12% of stores had to close (the Market has 150 stores): "Item and souvenir shops were the most affected by the lack of tourism and because Argentines do not usually shop<sup>7</sup>. Then, the second most affected item was gastronomy, due to all the restrictions that were implemented" (CASADO, 2021, [s.p.], our translation).

Lugano, on the other hand, is located on the old outskirts of the City of Buenos Aires (see Figure 1), on the boundaries that separate it from the municipalities that make up its conurbation. Unlike San Telmo – the founding neighborhood – the Villa Lugano development is relatively recent. Its origins date back to 1908, when businessman José Soldati started the subdivision of the land that gave rise to it. To stimulate the process, Soldati managed to modify the original route of the railroad of the old General Belgrano railroad, making it pass through his property. In return, he would be responsible for paying the workers' salaries and the costs of building the Villa Lugano station.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Although the local population does not consume in these stores, they are either employed in these businesses, or – directly or indirectly provide services – cleaning, supply of products for sale, stationery, etc.

<sup>8</sup> The station became operational in 1919.



In its early years, the growth of the Villa Lugano area was modest, as it did not allow for significant advances in construction, leaning mainly towards the installation of factories and shops (CUTOLO, 1996). The 1920s and 1930s saw the expansion of the lottery process. Through the subdivision, the establishment of new European and/or local migrant families was encouraged. One of the elements that characterizes the initial period of urbanization of the area is the fact that the growth of the housing stock occurs thanks to the initiative of the private real estate market. The latter was able to promote the development of single-family houses on its own land, alternating with a commercial and service area in the vicinity of the old railway station.

At the beginning of the 1940s, the installation of the municipal dump (or *la Quema*) – where waste from other neighborhoods in the City was dumped – discouraged the process of populating the neighborhood and the attractiveness of the area for private real estate development. In the mid-1950s, the neighborhood became denser with the formation of precarious urbanizations and the placement of urban sets of social housing that attracted low-income sectors.

Currently, Villa Lugano is the neighborhood of the city that concentrates the largest number of informal settlements. Likewise, the existence of a large number of empty spaces led to the construction of public buildings and urbanizations by the State and/or other social organizations. Since the early 2000s, the neighborhood has undergone important motorized transformations through projects carried out in public-private partnerships under the auspices of the Buenos Aires Sur Corporation (CBAS). The process accelerated in 2014, with the creation of the Sports District and the development of the Great Urban Project “Vila Olímpica” in the former City Park. The initiative was developed in pursuit of the 2018 Youth Olympic Games and was supported by the promotion of activities for the production of sporting goods or similar and the practice of sports, accompanied by strong investments in large public works. (GOICOECHEA *et al.*, 2020).<sup>9</sup>

### **Everyday life in a pandemic**

The lives of all people have been affected due to the restrictions that were put in place from the spread of the COVID-19 virus. The most immediate effect of preventive isolation

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<sup>9</sup> In August 2021, the proposal to sell these homes with affordable credit was completed. However, according to a group of neighbors, green spaces and equipment are lacking. In 2020, 40 commercial spaces were auctioned but remained empty in mid-2021. City Housing Institute (IVC) and Southern Corporation, the state-owned company responsible for the works, indicated that the deals were registered in April 2021. (POORE, 2021).



measures to prevent and contain the spread of the virus in Argentina were a drastic and sudden immobilization of people as a result of the ASPO decree. This immobilization made people stay at home, only those who were exempt from the obligation to carry circulation authorizations that justified their transfers could circulate. Mobility controls were implemented throughout the national territory and the City of Buenos Aires was no exception.

In this way, the houses assumed an unusual role: they stopped being spaces circumscribed by the private sphere and the intimate space (MILLER, 2001) to become total spaces - according to Mauss (2009), work, education, care, dispersion, health, interaction with other people; all this happened for long months in the housing field. This meant, on the one hand, a series of transformations in everyday practices, in the evaluation of space, of interactions with the rest of the people, with the neighbors and with the neighborhood. On the other hand, all these adaptations were built, updated and modified based on the possibilities and reflexive capacities of those who incorporate them.

The suspension of labor mobility affected the dynamics of daily life, redefining the daily circuits organized around the workplace<sup>10</sup>. In some cases, even the children's choice of schools was determined by the proximity of these spaces and not by the house. Daily shopping, shifts with doctors or therapies were also organized around the workplace. This is the case of Noelia, a resident of Lugano, who accommodated her daughter's educational activities close to her work, in the center of the city:

*[...] being there all day I looked for a school there, psychopedagogue there, therapy there, everything there, because you say you leave work, you take her out of school, you go to the psychopedagogue for a while, she has two hours, an hour, and then we come back together. Everything was supposed to be done there, it was much more practical (Noelia, Lugano, our translation).*

Although some of the people interviewed - who work in essential services or in "exception" sectors<sup>11</sup> - were able to immediately resume their work activities in person, fulfilling pre-pandemic schedules, their routines associated with daily mobility were also changed. That is, in general terms, social life was strongly affected. Much of the interactions that, before the pandemic, involved travel and were integrated into daily itineraries, are now mediated by technology.

<sup>10</sup> The testimonies and the interview material that served as the basis for the work correspond to a group of neighbors and residents of medium sectors. In this context, it is not possible to investigate differences between workers from different social groups. It is a qualitative sample that is homogeneous in its social composition and heterogeneous in its residential insertion - a central neighborhood and a peri-central neighborhood.

<sup>11</sup> Healthcare professionals, transport professionals, commercial workers, etc..





Pía, 57 years old, resident of San Telmo, actress and theater teacher at a private school in Palermo, says:

*I had many phases, there was a surprise phase, a phase where I didn't have much fun because I had to develop a knowledge of technology that I didn't have and it was traumatic for me, in the sense that I had to do it out of obligation. I teach, I'm an actress and I'm also a theater teacher, so I had to adapt quickly to technology in addition to teaching theater classes, which with the girls and their friends you saw "hey, what are you doing", well, I'm doing this exercise, it was not so much because as we were all in this situation it was not so difficult to ask for help, but what was difficult for me is the technological knowledge itself (Pia, San Telmo, our translation).*

Life support was associated with the use of technologies, requiring great efforts in learning to use devices and programs that were previously unknown. Juan, a resident of Lugano who works in the metallurgical industry, resumed his work a few weeks after the start of the pandemic, together with his wife who works in the same company, converted to mass production of masks. However, he admits that his social life was heavily affected, especially regarding bonding with friends – he was forced to stop playing football. Because they missed the *third period* they used to share on Saturdays after games, they started using zoom, every Saturday at the usual *third period* time. Likewise, and as other interviewees reported, she stopped seeing her relatives who live in the province of Buenos Aires.

### **The reorganization of everyday sociability**

The reorganization of everyday sociability in the pandemic seems to have been affected, in fact, by feelings associated with the management of the pandemic itself. The fear of contagion appears strongly and the concern is expressed in relation to the possibilities of infecting or being infected by non-cohabiting family members. One of the care modalities adopted for family gatherings is reported by Gabriela, from San Telmo: “in the case of my family, well, my mother lives a block away, but I don't go into her house, you know (...) not going further for two weeks it was one of my sisters birthday and to go to the birthday we had to test all of us first” (our translation).

The bonds are organized in the 'bubble' modality, which includes a family member or friend(s) with whom it is possible to meet more regularly and in a relaxed way. Encounters are reported as a “mental” or “emotional health” need for face-to-face meetings “without a mask” with others with whom to share and decompress the daily life of confinement. Around these face-to-face 'bubbles' of shared intimacy, a series of new practices or forms of bonding unfold.



In this regard, Facundo comments that at the beginning of the pandemic, they shared with their friends an Excel document where each one reported their other meetings (before and after their meetings) as a precautionary measure to prevent the spread of the virus in case a contagion appeared:

*After it started to loosen up, still in the first quarter we set up a small group of friends who are always the same bubble, four in total. We set up an excel to see "I have contact with this person, he is with this person" well, as long as we let you know if we have contact with third parties besides the list, everything went well (Facundo, San Telmo, our translation).*

Paula's account of her meetings with a friend allows us to observe the justifications that support the need for face-to-face meetings:

*She has her three daughters, she has her husband and well, fresh air I beg you please, it was the same thing I don't know, have a mate for an hour or two, she with hers, I with mine, have a coffee and well, let's talk because the truth is that otherwise I would end up [going crazy] (Paula, Lugano, our translation).*

Negative assessments of isolation are also associated with a sense of confinement:

*One of the things that happened to me during the pandemic, halfway through, we still couldn't go out, and I had what I later realized with my psychologist and my sister who is also a psychologist, I had a crisis of claustrophobia. But it was very noticeable, because I felt it in my body, I got agitated, I felt the symptoms of COVID, but more exaggerated, I had a tachycardia as you saw, I was short of breath and I couldn't (Pía, San Telmo, our translation).*

Or fear and anguish: "I was also very afraid, the fear of getting infected, the fear of "the end of the world has come", that the world will end, what is happening, I felt that I was living in a movie, and that at some point someone would stop it" (Pía, San Telmo, our translation). "Sometimes I was also a little paranoid, I dreamed, yes, for example, COVID everywhere... but I tried on a conscious level, I wasn't thinking about it all day" (Santiago, San Telmo, our translation).

Other reports point to the feeling of dissociation. This is the case of Sofía, 30, who lives alone in San Telmo and works in a civil association. She was part of the isolation with a friend, also interviewed, from San Telmo (Facundo). On feelings of dissociation, she says:

*In the beginning, what happened to me was that I started to lose the dimension of time, because I was no longer in those nine hours of work, nine or six, whatever each and every one works. That's what shocked me, I started to lose this notion of working hours when I was at home. So it was like suddenly my home was: my home, my office, the place where I later wanted to paint my*

*nails, where I drank my own beer, welcomed my own companions, my home became my 100% habitat. I live alone, I clarify* (Sofía, San Telmo, our translation).

## Experienced Feelings

However, in some interviews, a certain positive evaluation emerges, especially associated with the beginning of isolation. In this context, respondents ponder the opportunity to spend more time with their families. In other cases, it describes the feeling (especially at the beginning of isolation) of rest or “mini vacation” and with the possibility of making better use of the time for personal matters – doing some physical activity, reading books, etc. Anyway, with the passage of time, the sensation changed and came to be experienced as an excess of time living with the same people in the same house. Likewise, the time spent on technological devices to support daily activities proved to be excessive: excess technology expressed in whatsapp groups, hours of zoom or virtual meetings, messages outside working hours. Sofía highlights about her experience: “At one point there was a lot of use of Zoom, I was very much in favor of people who said that this can be resolved in one email” (our translation).

On the other hand, one of the sensations experienced is that of loneliness.

*And then, in relation to loneliness, it's complex, because I don't think it has anything to do with loneliness, but I went through moments in 2020 of mental, creative block and I work in communication, I work with creativity, and if it is blocked, the path becomes very complex, because the days don't stop, but I also do therapy and I managed to overcome it by focusing on things like: buying plants, concentrating on the apartment, making it beautiful and that kind of thing* (Facundo, San Telmo, our translation).

It draws attention, in the case of single people or those who do not have dependent children, among whom there is a reevaluation of their homes, seeking strategies to re-inhabit their spaces. These experiences were associated with the possibility of purchasing new furniture or changes in the layout of the house, in addition to a greater number of plants and the use of balconies, terraces, windows or patios. Cristina is retired and lives with her husband in the 'houses' area of Lugano. In their accounts of the changes in daily life since the pandemic, there is a reassessment of their 'privileges' for having a patio: "in everyday life, not much has changed for me, because here is a neighborhood of ground houses, so we have land, we have plants and we have green, so I have a lot of space, and that...and well, that meant the only thing that was restricted was basically going out.” (our translation)



## **Difficulties in maintaining life**

A story repeated in the pandemic context refers to the fact that the greatest difficulties around sustaining daily life are associated with the management of children's schooling. Schooling in times of a pandemic was marked by complications in the implementation of new strategies around the management of remote and/or face-to-face work schedules to adapt them to virtual classes (in all cases synchronous). An important issue regarding the return to school attendance is that it did not occur in the same way in all establishments or levels of education. Thus, managing the schedules and days of children's courses implies, in many cases, adaptations of work days and routines<sup>12</sup>. Likewise, accompanying children during the process of adapting to virtuality brought challenges for parents of young children, who had to fully assume their children's education. This is the case of Daniela, from San Telmo. Daniela is a teacher and mother of two school-age children and, like her partner, at the beginning of the pandemic, she started working remotely. In this situation, she says: “the organization lasted two weeks, [then] we had to recalculate because the circumstances changed, we had to reorganize again... organization in a very short period of time” (our translation).

In addition to the strategies implemented to support their children's schooling, families had to generate adaptations around the ways of caring for their children. This is the case with the children of Micaela de Lugano, whose return to work did not coincide with their children's return to school. In the new dynamics, although at first they took turns taking care of their children with their partner, when they both have to go to work, the eldest daughter, 11 years old, spends a few hours a day in charge of her younger brother, 4 years old: “It was the first year that I decided to leave my little boy to his sister, Martu, 11, because he also had that thing that I had to go to work and with that they didn't go to school, so I also had to organize myself” (our translation). Micaela is 35 years old, works as a porter's assistant at a school in Caballito and lives in one of the towers in Lugano with her children and her partner.

In some cases, the situation was reversed. The dissociation was due to the return of school attendance and continuity of virtual work. This brought complications because the children's school was close to the place of work and not to the house. This is the case of Noelia, a resident of Lugano, mother of a 12-year-old girl with ADHD, who, although she does not have to go to work in person, is obliged to travel constantly to her daughter's classes: “I am at

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<sup>12</sup> The interviews were carried out mainly with women. In this work, it is not possible to delve into this topic from the perspective of male respondents. Respondents who changed their routines worked in more flexible jobs or with good relationships with their bosses. This would partly explain, in these cases, why they were able to modify everyday life.



home for an hour and a half and I go back and look for her, and we come back in like two, [...] when she doesn't have therapy, that therapy is also there in the center” (our translation).

Juan considers that his daughters were the most affected by the isolation, as they were finishing high school when the pandemic began:

*[...] he saw them as the most affected in that sense, because of the subject of studies, you see, they finished the fifth year last year with the pandemic, they didn't travel, they didn't have meetings, they didn't have a party, all of that, so it was, let's see, we came from work around you saw one that you didn't notice but then you saw them and I realize you saw, I don't know, walking around depressed, because of the issue of not having the to do, just lying down all day or with the cell phone, watching TV ... (Juan, San Telmo, our translation).*

*With my friends in the neighborhood, the reality is that everything became very complicated, because many of them have children and the fact that they go to school virtually and everything like that became very complicated for them to be able to get together, you know, we see each other from time to time, it's kind of complicated. Most of my friends have kids, so there's a complication (Gabriela, San Telmo, our translation).*

Once again, life-sustaining difficulties emerge strongly in the dissociations or gaps that occur between virtuality and face-to-face, care tasks and maintenance of social life.

In some cases, adaptation to these new forms of life was positively valued. Such is the case of Paula, 34 years old, who lives in Lugano with two school children and her husband. In some cases, adaptation to these new forms of life was positively valued. Such is the case of Paula, 34 years old, who lives in Lugano with the school children and her husband:

*[...] I always say [to my husband], when we get back... Now, put it, we are on vacation for us, when we get back to normal hours again, I work from 7 am to 2 pm, and he worked from 4 pm to 11 pm. It was literal, I arrived "hello yes how are you", poured three drinks, with luck, and he would leave and until 12 pm we didn't see each other, and sometimes we didn't even see each other because I was exhausted from getting up at 6, I would stay sleeping, then we're like on vacation, we're enjoying everything and it's quiet (Paula, Lugano, our translation).*

## **Solidarity and new bonds in the neighborhood**

Adult care also reorganized sociability in buildings and neighborhoods:

*Many adult people didn't want to leave their homes, they didn't want to go. So the part of the neighbor, the doorman, played a lot there, he can talk, he can lend a hand... that role played a lot there. What was this pandemic a lot, between us here you saw, if we knew that someone was positive in the house or couldn't move, well, we left things in the hallway, you know, you give each other a hand that way (Micaela , Lugano, our translation).*

The neighbors played a key role in maintaining the lives of the elderly in the building. Shopping and helping with technology (instructions for using video calls, ordering private cars or virtual payments) were the most reported experiences among respondents. In this context, the role of the building's doorman appears as a fundamental actor in the management of care tasks.

The pandemic context seems to have promoted the revaluation of solidarity ties articulated in networks supported by neighbors to facilitate the experience of isolation, especially for the elderly and people isolated by COVID.

*A WhatsApp group was created in which adults, if they needed to, could go shopping for them, so they wouldn't go out, so they wouldn't expose themselves. As [that] solidarity was activated a little bit, I liked it a lot, mainly because I didn't know my neighbors well, so it was a nice way to get closer in a way. That was cute (Sofía, San Telmo, our translation).*

In this regard, Santiago, professor and director of a master's degree in cultural management who has lived in San Telmo for 10 years, highlights:

*Since the pandemic, I felt like something that the neighborhood has historically been quite horizontal and generous and organized, the neighborhood is very organized, it is a neighborhood with, historically with that passivity, so (...) the street or in the square park, there was, it seems to me, an issue that was very good, that there was a certain possibility of organization around more than health issues, mainly issues of good, of care (Santiago, San Telmo, our translation).*

With regard to new strategies for supplying everyday consumer goods, these practices resulted in a new connection with the neighborhood and nearby businesses, as well as new ways of shopping. In the accounts of residents of Lugano, there is a greater emphasis on virtual shopping due to an outbreak of cases in the Coto hypermarket, one of great importance for its magnitude in the neighborhood. In both neighborhoods, respondents say that rationalization strategies were implemented for shopping and going to supermarkets or stores, seeking to reduce them to the minimum and essential during the first stage of ASPO. Likewise, while in some cases these strategies largely continue today, in other cases they have reverted to pre-pandemic consumption practices of making the purchase of the day. There is an assessment in the reports about living in the vicinity of stores<sup>13</sup> that are sufficient to satisfy their needs. Then,

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<sup>13</sup> These are stores that sell food and basic necessities. Also, clothing stores, books, bars and restaurants offering delivery services, etc. In the interviews, no mention is made of the working conditions of its workers in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic..



the perceptions, appreciations and mobility practices in the neighborhoods where the interviewees are located are presented.

### Perceptions around the neighborhood

Just as the daily practices that have to do with the maintenance of people's lives were affected by the imposition of ASPO measures, the appreciations, ways of seeing and experiencing the neighborhood were also modified. From the interviews, we recovered some stories that reflect the reflections of the inhabitants of San Telmo and Lugano on the changes, continuities and ruptures in the context of preventive and mandatory social isolation.

In the context of the pandemic -as we pointed out earlier-, San Telmo has undergone substantive changes. In their reports, the interviewees point out that this has to do with the loss of one of its distinctive characteristics: its tourist quality. Suddenly, tourists and the activities associated with them disappeared. They point out that during the restrictions they noticed less traffic noise and other neighborhood noises, such as street musicians. They point out that in the context of the pandemic they have a greater use and enjoyment of public space. In some cases, the proximity to Puerto Madero – as an area of dispersion and promenade – is perceived as a privilege associated with the location of the neighborhood. As for the negative aspects, they highlight a greater identification of people in poverty and on the streets in the neighborhood.

In both San Telmo and Lugano, respondents value green spaces:

*I started to rediscover places and people I didn't see when I went to work on Monday, Wednesday and Friday. The contact with the neighborhood was different and with the people. So, I rediscovered the neighborhood, we have everything in the neighborhood, in terms of food. Although there is a market, which Cata helped me, I bought more in the neighborhood.*

*One of the things about San Telmo is that it lives off tourism, tourism was intense, and you find 20,000 tourists all the time. Tourists say they choose San Telmo, besides being beautiful, picturesque, because there is something that makes you feel that there are people from the neighborhood who were born here, or lived here, that's what I feel. What San Telmo has is that it's a neighborhood you can't leave, or that you always come back to (Pía, San Telmo, our translation).*

In this situation, Facundo reflects on the distinctive features of San Telmo:

*I don't know how to explain it, it seems to me that it is different from other neighborhoods. And it's very unique in this distinction, it's like a neighborhood that's still in fashion, let's see, it's not trendy like Palermo, you see the trendy neighborhood, but it's always trendy, there's always a lot of cultural activity, it's present among the bohemia and the university all the time. I live in a small, seven-story building and all the apartments are similar*



*to mine and the vast majority of my neighbors are people my age, professionals, single, everyone else is more or less the same. For me, there's a lot to do in San Telmo, activities, and it's also the neighborhood that stays the most on days when everything is dead, on holidays, on Sundays. San Telmo is a festival, and it has a lot of neighborhood personality, the San Telmo community is very committed to the neighborhood, they defend it a lot (Facundo, San Telmo, our translation).*

And he adds, about his personal relationship, his roots with the neighborhood:

*There's something that happens to me in San Telmo that I don't know if it happens in other neighborhoods, which is that when I go out I recognize the faces of San Telmo. As neighbors on the block, even downtown, I come across people I know are from the neighborhood. The very traditional businesses are generally owned by people who have lived in San Telmo for a long time. There really is this feeling, or I feel this feeling of belonging, I don't feel that it has changed that much, I think it remains (Facundo, San Telmo, our translation).*

During the isolation phase, the boundaries of the neighborhood became relevant, as recognizable barriers: “Possibly I have, on the 9th of July, a block away, a butcher shop, but I don’t even know, because the 9th of July is the Great Wall of China , I go to downtown San Telmo instead of crossing it” (Facundo, San Telmo, our translation) and Puerto Madero. The difference is that Puerto Madero appears as an area for walking or external dispersion, which is integrated through the new practices of daily mobility.

In the case of Lugano, like those of San Telmo, the parks (Indoamericano, Malvinas, de la Ciudad, de las Victorias) play a central role in the revaluation of the neighborhood. Having green spaces nearby emerges as a recognizable value in the neighborhood environment. Likewise, having patios, terraces or balconies appears as a privilege. Related to green spaces, new leisure practices arise, such as disconnections, walks or sports. In this regard, Sofia says:

*and I bought this chair to sunbathe on the balcony, because it was good if I was going to be on the balcony, I wanted to stay sunbathing, getting that vitamin that I wasn't going to get any other way at this time. Before the pandemic, I also gave classes in a school, worked in a radio. So, I left the house at seven in the morning and came back at eleven, twelve at night. So, my house is a transit area, so I think I liked it a little bit at first. Sometimes I feel guilty for saying this, but then I say that each one dealt with this situation in the best possible way... (Sofía, San Telmo, our translation).*

Those who live in the buildings value the deals that are offered in each 'lane': “In each lane you have your own businesses, let's say, they multiply. Bakeries, hairdressers, laundries, bookstores, shops, kiosks...” (Paula, Lugano, our translation). Rua Chilavert, as a shopping and walking area, is also valued in the testimonies as a neighborhood place that contains a wide commercial offer of goods and services related to clothing and gastronomy, mainly.



Finally, respondents from both neighborhoods highlight the quality of 'neighborhood', of how they feel as they walk through its spaces daily and, at the same time, value the connectivity of the neighborhoods with the rest of the city, either thanks to the multiple options public transport, such as access to travel in their own vehicles. In this sense, Juan highlights in his neighborhood:

*What's there, what you were telling me before, what's good about it, that's another thing that doesn't happen in other neighborhoods, especially here in the Capital, is that when I talk to friends I usually tell them what it's like, when they arrive at home, and he's surprised because we're walking into the neighborhood and everyone says, 'Hey, hello, how are you?' Like most of the provinces, which are more of... it's just that it doesn't happen here in neighborhoods like Palermo (Juan, Lugano, our translation).*

Likewise, Paula says:

*[...] this neighborhood has something like that, I perceive it as nostalgia, so whoever is here realizes that we treat the neighborhood, because I don't know my case, for example, I inherited it from my grandparents who are no longer here, and we who live in my building are all children, grandchildren of, it's as if we give, I can't tell you, a value (Paula, Lugano, our translation).*

### **By way of closing. Transformations, persistence and values in a pandemic**

The pandemic has generated major changes in urban lifestyles. As we said, looking at concrete practices -that is, thinking about the temporal-spatial pandemic- allows us to understand the situated processes that -ultimately- build the pandemic.

In this article we focus on two "traditional" neighborhoods in Buenos Aires -San Telmo and Lugano- in which there is a strong residential presence in the middle sectors. Socio-urban transformations were taking place in both neighborhoods in the pre-pandemic years. However, the pandemic generated ruptures in these transformations and others occurred. San Telmo has a tourist brand that has been brewing for decades. During the pandemic, however, San Telmo's status as a tourist district is lost. This led the neighbors to perceive it as a 'neighborhood'. In Lugano, new social ties between neighbors were generated, with central actors such as doormen, in the case of buildings. In the stories of the residents of these two neighborhoods, adapting and using open and/or green spaces, both in public parks and inside their own homes, was fundamental to maintaining the quality of life.

In this text, we were interested in investigating the ways in which the pandemic was experienced territorially. In other words, we focused on the experience of preventive and compulsory social isolation and its impacts on the sociability of the neighborhood, seeking to



understand the way in which people of flesh and blood sustained life. Sustaining life has an economic component. However, as we have shown, it does not end there. Changes in the forms of sociability, evaluations of networks and neighborhood relationships, affectivity as a constructor of ways of being in the neighborhood show the importance of thinking about practices in terms of life: sustaining life implied a socio-territorial affective rearrangement. If the pandemic put in parentheses for millions of people 'the good life' understood as a moral-intimate-economic thing (BERLANT, 2020) or processes of 'normal life', new ways of living the pandemic were also produced beyond the crisis and the break.

This life-sustaining process produced a change in the spatiality of bonds and sociability. With the restriction of mobility, proximity assumed a central role in sustaining life, implying a (re)appreciation of local networks and new relationships with neighbors that led to a reconstruction and recognition of the neighborhood environment in physical and affective terms. By this we mean that the reconstruction of the neighborhood was not just a process given by the pandemic, but that it was an active work of building forms of life that involved sustaining it during the pandemic.

As practices settle into time-spatial processes, the pandemic will undoubtedly change urban cultural practices. On the one hand, the physical space has changed. Many of these were modifications that are likely to be rolled back (certain pedestrians, barriers to encourage distancing). However, the lived space is not only nourished by materiality, but also by experiences. Thus, the spread of the virus - we believe - will generate changes much more lasting than the pandemic itself. This new normality will be built by practices such as the proximity conquered, the neighborhood revisited, the fear of new changes even when the virus has become naturalized or disappeared. 'Taking pleasure in it', 'new normality' or simply naturalizing the new ways of sustaining life are ways in which the pandemic will continue daily in cities.

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