Ayni:
Collective occupations as a response to the COVID-19 pandemic in Santa Clara del Mar, Argentina in 2020

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Abstract: This article reflects on the contribution of collective occupations to social transformation processes in a small town in Buenos Aires Province: Santa Clara del Mar, Argentina. On March 20, 2020, imposed a lockdown which, among other things, required people to stay at home. In response, a group of residents came together to carry out community activities with the aim of providing assistance and support to the most vulnerable people in the community. This group of people called themselves 'Ayni', after some Andean communities, emphasizing reciprocity. This article describes the community organization that emerged among this group of residents. It explores the individual and collective transformations that arose, seeking to construct knowledge based on the logic of social actors. A qualitative research methodology used for data collection was structured, using the techniques of participant observation and in-depth interviews. Other data sources used included a WhatsApp group and written records of 'Ayni' meetings. As part of the main conclusions. This work highlights the value attributed to collective occupations as a possibility for building community networks in people's daily lives.

Keywords: Collective occupations, community participation, occupational therapy, COVID-19

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Introduction

Santa Clara del Mar is a coastal city on the Atlantic coast, located on the shores of the Argentine Sea, to the east of the province of Buenos Aires, and 386 km from the country's capital. Its urbanization only began in 1949, and currently, the district to which it belongs has a total of 33,127 inhabitants, with an estimate that around 20,000 residents live in the city of Santa Clara del Mar, distributed across its six different neighborhoods. While its economy is primarily based on sun and beach tourism, this is mainly active during the summer months, leading to a high percentage of families who rely on temporary and occasional jobs for their livelihood. This peculiarity, combined with the informal labor market, which is one of the main current issues affecting 42.8% of workers, results in the majority of its population commuting daily in search of better job opportunities in the neighboring town of Mar del Plata, which has a larger urban development and is located just 18 km away.

On March 20, 2020, through a Decree of Necessity and Urgency, the National Government declared Preventive and Mandatory Social Isolation (PMSI), which required people to stay in their usual residences. It also restricted access to work and the circulation on roads, highways, and public spaces for those who were not considered essential personnel. This situation had the consequence that residents in a vulnerable employment situation had no income for their daily sustenance, in contrast to those who were able to continue receiving their paychecks even if they were not physically present at their workplaces or were working remotely. Faced with this critical and desperate situation, a group of self-convened residents decided to organize themselves to carry out community activities with the goal of providing assistance and food support to people in a food emergency within the community. During this process, this group of people named themselves 'Ayni,' taking this name from Andean communities, emphasizing the concept of reciprocity, a central quality that we will particularly develop.

First, this article describes the community and assembly organization that emerged among this group of residents. These terms will be explored in the sections *Community Organization as a Response to Isolation* and *The Assembly as a Tool for Self-Management*, but we briefly anticipate that they refer to the active, autonomous, and horizontal participation

of individuals in relation to common collective objectives, which in the Argentine context, are rooted in an extensive tradition of anti-capitalist resistance spaces. On the other hand, it seeks to build knowledge from the logic of social actors based on their experiences in collective occupations. It is important to note that the project in question did not originate from a professional intervention or a government program; it was the result of the self-determination of a group of residents who operated autonomously.

Methodological aspects

As members of the Santa Clara del Mar community, we have actively participated in the process referred to as Ayni: vecinos en comunidad. In this sense, this work constitutes a hybrid piece as the authors have participated in this process as participant observers. This process, along with discussions with other members, was structured within the framework of a qualitative methodological design. This article, framed as a reflective essay based on data, deliberates on a set of research questions aimed at understanding, on one hand, community organization as a response to isolation, and on the other, the transformations and meanings—both individual and collective—that arose from the lived experiences of members of a neighborhood group as a result of the collective occupations developed. Thus, there emerges the need to undertake a complex and holistic approach to social reality, seeking to 'understand the entirety of the phenomenon of interest from the perspective of the social actors involved' (Colón, Gutierrez, Marcos, and Santos, 2019, p. 43)

It is important to clarify the authors' involvement in the analyzed project and the retrospective reflexivity brought into play when constructing the data presented. In Gil's (2009) words, 'Reflexivity should be considered a starting point for analyzing how data is collected in the field and how the empirical material obtained is conditioned by the presence of the researcher' (p. 1).We believe that our position in the field, far from being an impediment to understanding the process, has been essential in facilitating the dialogue of many aspects and counterpoints that arise from the development of the research process. It is clear that this position was possible because we considered reflexivity

from the beginning as a central tool that allowed us to clarify the motives guiding our interest as well as our position in knowledge construction, seeking to subject our personal experiences in Ayni to a process of estrangement. It should be noted that:

> Neither experience nor sameness (of nationality, gender, or class) guarantee an authentic or authorized voice to speak. The point here is to understand how the issue is specified from the actors' perspective, adapting the boundaries of the field based on their notions and practices (D'Angelo, 2023, p. 34).

In this sense, participant observation has been crucial in understanding the complexity of the actions carried out in Ayni. In addition, the in-depth interview technique was used with eight people who actively participated in that experience. Our position in the field facilitated obtaining consent from these individuals to participate in the interviews, as well as the trust that underpinned their development. In addition to these techniques, access was gained to Ayni's WhatsApp group, the notebook of notes, digital files with information allowing for the characterization of the family groups receiving assistance, and finally, the social network Facebook of the group 'Ayni: residents in community' was viewed. Given the trust relationship between interviewers and interviewees, digital recording of the interviews was chosen in order to have a comprehensive record of each interview, before turning them into written textual material.

Data analysis from various sources (observations, interviews, notebooks, etc.) was initially conducted separately and then integrated into a joint analysis, as described below. First, a thematic analysis was applied to the transcribed interview texts, following an emergent coding scheme that involved: data familiarization, code generation from the data, theme development from the codes, review of potential themes, and finally, theme definition. Subsequently, based on these themes, data obtained from other techniques were integrated and contextualized to enrich the different segments of this article. The constructed results are organized under the following titles: 'community organization as a response to isolation,' 'the assembly as a tool for self-management,' 'living food,' 'the senses, feelings of participation and receiving,' and finally, 'the metamorphosis of Ayni.

In relation to the ethical aspects of the research, the guidelines for ethical behavior in the social and human sciences established by the National Council of Scientific and Technical Research of the Argentine Republic, the highest scientific body in our country, were followed. The individuals who participated in the research provided their informed consent to be part of the study and also gave their approval for the article's preparation, acting as collaborators and, to some extent, as co-authors. Privacy and confidentiality have been safeguarded in all aspects, using pseudonyms to refer to all subjects of the research, assigned following a conciliatory strategy. At all times, the dignity, freedom, and self-determination of each participant have been respected, along with their views on the topics investigated.

Theoretical aspects

The study of people's occupations and their relationship with the promotion of well-being and quality of life, both in the workplace and socially, as well as in health recovery, has been the subject of studies, debates, and research in Occupational Therapy and the Science of Occupation (Trujillo Rojas et al., 2011). Throughout the entire last century and in recent decades, the theoretical and methodological approaches to the treatment of this study have been transformed based on the realities and demands of political, social, economic, and cultural contexts. This situation has favored the development and growth of interdisciplinary academic currents linked to the study of occupation as an academic subject, with the aim of understanding how individuals and groups carry out their occupations in the course of everyday life (Morrison et al., 2021).

In this direction, the study of occupations must necessarily include their social, political, economic, cultural, and ecological determinants that influence the occupational well-being of individuals (Simó Algado et al., 2016). It is necessary to understand the consequences of a model of society that violates human and social rights, exacerbates inequality, poverty, and exposes individuals to various forms of social violence. It is important to note that the cultural aspect is considered in a dual sense, both in the search to understand the ordered system of meanings and symbols through which each individual defines the world, as well as

in order to question the cultural forms that underlie both professional and academic practices. Thus, reflexivity as a continuous process allows for a critical lens on the researcher's position in their own society and on their role as a researcher (Guber, 2016). Therefore, we start from 'reconceptualizing occupation as more than what people do to organize their time, but as a means for promoting social transformation and justice' (Farias Vera, 2017, p. 11).

We start from the understanding that collective occupations involve a series of dimensions that define the framework for people's participation in specific actions. These actions take place in the encounter of more than one person who can share common goals with a high level of interdependence and collaboration (Pickens and Pizur-Barnekow, 2009). Social and health situations that emerge as a result of sudden events, such as the Covid-19 pandemic, allow us to investigate the role of occupation in social transformation. Thus, we believe that 'understanding the role individual and collective occupations play in social transformation requires appreciating these real and distinctive situations through which this transformation occurs' (Schiller et al, 2022, p. 5).

Social transformation has been studied from various theoretical and methodological perspectives within the social sciences, connecting to different fields of knowledge such as education, epistemology, gender perspective, resource redistribution, and political action, among others. In all cases, the essence of this concept is deeply linked to actions aimed at reconfiguring power relations so that all people can access resources equitably and fully exercise their social rights. Thus, participation emerges as an emancipatory action, grounded in the principle of social justice. In the words of Farias Vera (2017), it is 'essential to note that social transformation, aligned with a critical stance, not only seeks to point out the causes of oppression but also to reveal hidden possibilities that can promote justice' (p. 11).

In this regard, we focus on adopting the concept of social transformation in a micropolitical sense where people challenge injustices, question established norms, and promote more equitable practices and relationships. Consequently, micropolitics plays a key role as it can reveal how seemingly small and local actions have a significant impact on building a fairer and more equitable world. It is in this sense that we consider that:

Social transformation through occupation, therefore, encompasses efforts that deploy occupation as a means to enact changes at group to societal levels so as to enhance occupational justice. Communities resist or challenge existing structures that limit their possibilities for participation in everyday living (Schiller, 2022, p. 1).

Community organization in response to isolation

The activities of the group of residents were spontaneously supported by different initiatives. One of them is Salvador, a photographer who has lived in a neighborhood in the city of Santa Clara del Mar for 11 years. A father of twins from the neighborhood was injured in a traffic accident and could not work for some time. He asked Salvador for help to buy powdered milk for his children. This became the trigger for Salvador to initiate a series of isolated requests to other residents and successfully address this demand. Following this episode, he received another request to assist a couple who had lost their jobs due to the pandemic. Again, Salvador reached out to acquaintances, friends, and some WhatsApp groups to request assistance. He recalls that from these two situations, '*a group of residents was formed who assisted other residents, with no personal interest, no political agenda, just to fill the gap of the immediate need.*' Margarita, a retired teacher, confirms this version of the group's founding moment: '*I remember a couple with twins who needed help. And it seems to me that it was from there and then with another couple, around 50 years old, who had lost their jobs and had jobs until that moment.*'

One of the means that several interviewees highlight as a communication channel that contributed to the initial formation of the residents' group is the Whatsapp group called '*compras comunitarias*'. Luna, a retired social worker and teacher, mentions, '*I was participating in the community shopping group, so besides getting to know some specific people, I also participated in some community shopping, and then when it started to come together, I think I didn't go to the first [meeting], but I went to the second, I didn't hesitate to go.*' Meanwhile, Tamara, an actress and a local theater figure, emphasizes that this community shopping group facilitated communication and played a central role due to the underlying trust relationships that allowed for the consolidation of

willpower. She refers to it in the interview with the following words when she joined Ayni: '*I felt like I was joining a group that had been working on some issues; it was like the feeling that several dialogues had already taken place, and several agreements had been formed.*' It can be identified that the initiative was channeled into a group that had been building relationships and networks that served as an articulation for the subsequent group process.

In the narratives, there is a turning point in the belonging and cohesion of the group of residents when collectively they decide to name the group of residents as '*Ayni, vecinos en comunidad.*' The name is inspired by a concept used by Andean communities, based on a philosophy of reciprocity or mutualism. This perspective on community practice allowed many Ayni members to engage in a collective, cooperative, and reciprocal action that goes beyond assistentialist practices, where 'receiving' becomes a passive and unequal action associated with charity that undermines the construction of strong bonds based on trust, consideration, and affection. Margarita, one of the people in charge of buying food, recalls the moment of adopting the name with the following words: '*Personalism was left behind; it was a beginning. I felt that on Wednesdays, I wasn't giving; I was receiving. I came back full, tired, and happy.*' Since adopting the name Ayni, it has been collectively redefined and taken as a guide for a particular mode of work and more horizontal organization, on equal terms, where everyone has the possibility to '*give*' and '*receive.*'

The assembly as a tool for self-management

An idea was gradually consolidated throughout the meetings and various activities started to be developed in order to create an autonomous space. In addition to this, there was a need to consider self-management as the mechanism through which this group of residents would carry out their actions. Collective organization required decision-making processes and, with it, the need to seek dialogue modalities that would facilitate them. In this direction, a meeting space was gradually constructed: the Ayni assembly. This form of horizontal organization has a significant precedent and symbolic history in our country over the last two decades. From the crisis of 2001 and the popular uprising against the government of Fernando De la Rúa in December of that year, a movement was established across the country that united popular discontent with

the political class in general and the capitalist way of life. Numerous popular assemblies emerged in many parts of the country, attracting significant participation from residents in search of an alternative form of political participation that would defend the essential elements and resources of communities. Some examples of these assemblies were '*La deuda o la vida*', '*El grito del Caladero*', '*Paren de fumigar-nos*', '*América Libre*', among others.

The Ayni assemblies met regularly, at times on a weekly basis and at other times every 15 days. They generally took place in person, outdoors, with the recommended health precautions. When the situation required it, an 'assembly' was conducted through the WhatsApp group. The assembly logic and functioning were developed during the same process, with the contributions of some members who had been involved in popular assemblies, mainly between 2003 and 2020. The Ayni assembly was a dynamic space with a stable group and open to new additions, with regular participation of 20 to 30 people in their in-person meetings. Various interesting perspectives, complementary, and some with differences, emerge about the operation of the assembly, as it is a central element in decision-making. We decided to give a prominent place in this writing to the narratives that seek to conceptualize and understand the role of the assembly.

Luna reflects that this mode of operation gave importance to consensus and decision-making, considering the critical context. In her own words, she says: 'I found it central that decision-making was done through the assembly. I thought that it was a space that went beyond who attended, how many attended, or how the meetings unfolded, whether there was conflict or no conflict, it didn't matter. But we chose a form that allowed us, as much as possible, horizontal participation. So I think that was very important. With its great difficulty, many times we couldn't agree, it was very hard to make a decision. Someone might have been offended or hurt, someone might have misunderstood something, or someone might not have been able to express themselves, there were definitely wounds and hurt feelings.'

On the other hand, and in a complementary way, Margarita describes some very important characteristics for her and the impact that this assembly space had on her subjectivity: '[the assemblies] *weren't manipulated; the horizontal aspect, well, every time I left the assemblies, I felt like a better person. It was meeting people with different thoughts, different histories; it challenged me with everything related to my education. Ayni*

really changed me.' Selva, on the other hand, thinks that the assembly was a space where '*we put our senses, opinions, and saw how things could be improved. And well, there were also some things like anger.*' For her part, Tamara highlights the 'request for the floor' mechanism as an action that allowed for listening and being listened to, where what the other person says can change my opinion. Requesting the floor implies patience, waiting while listening, not interrupting, and respecting the use of another person's speech. She describes it by saying: '*I think there were interesting things in the assembly, like the request for the floor. It seems very basic, obvious, [...] many times, the most challenging thing in most community organization is the rule, the organization until it reaches that point. I believe that respecting the request for the floor and the development that could be achieved happened quite spontaneously in the assembly.*'

The Ayni assembly became the main mechanism for decision-making on how to carry out actions, but, above all, it constituted a space for building strong relationships, a space surrounded by affection, and a place where each member enriched themselves through agreements and disagreements. The assembly allowed for a precise collective reading of reality, where the action plan was constructed day by day through listening and dialogue among the participants. Luna sums up the power of this experience by saying, '*Collective work made it so that in moments of greatest discouragement, greatest conflict, there would always be someone's words or someone bringing something that helped to redefine´.*

The Living Food

The process of creation and self-management of Ayni was a complex, dialogical phenomenon in which activities, decisions, actions, and strategies often overlapped. Ayni's goal was to provide live food to families in the city of Santa Clara del Mar who were in a critical situation due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The local government provided assistance to some families with dry goods, so the primary purpose was to provide food that would complement a balanced diet with fruits, vegetables, and eggs. An apparently simple goal entailed various organizational actions aimed at raising funds, identifying families in need, purchasing groceries, and organizing their distribution, among other activities. The underlying idea of Ayni's actions was based on

micropolitical initiatives that aimed to remain autonomous from any political party or state intervention.

Regarding economic resources, initially, they came from direct contributions from residents who, for the most part, had incomes unaffected by the lockdown. However, as the period of isolation extended, and the number of families in need grew (reaching up to 60 families), more funding was required. At this point, Ayni initiated actions that went beyond simple donations. Raffle sales were organized, with various prizes donated by the beneficiary families themselves, local merchants, entrepreneurs, and artisans who wanted to help. Virtual cultural events were held where viewers could send money via a bank account. Another activity involved preparing and selling traditional dishes such as locro, and paella stews, always accompanied by a vegan alternative. This led to the formation of a team that cooked and delivered the meals from a social and cultural space that was essential for meal preparation: the Poquelin theater. Paloma explains that '*the groups were divided, and the kitchen team decided who could help that day, who knew more about that type of food. We formed a Whatsapp group and communicated internally with each other. One person was in charge of buying the vegetables. Then we organized how we did it. Others were mainly involved in sales*'.

The purchase of live food was made from local stores that consistently offered discount prices to support the cause. Initially, the preparation of food packages took place in different homes as an itinerant process. Some Ayni members offered their homes for this activity. The rotation was designed to avoid putting too much pressure on the same household and to prevent conflicts with residents, considering the mandatory preventive lockdown. Eventually, the Poquelin Theater offered part of its facilities for the weekly preparation and distribution of groceries. The distribution was organized by zones based on each family's address, and the responsibility for delivery in each area was rotated among volunteers, taking into account the number of vehicles, etc. Notably, they tried to ensure that each distributor was responsible for the same area to establish a connection with the receiving family. This approach helped them understand each family's specific situation and needs.

Ayni's actions unfolded within a network of pre-existing social media connections that extended the reach of their initiatives. A variety of social actors played a crucial role in providing collaboration, assistance, and logistics at different stages of this project, with varying degrees

of cohesion. In the first case, local shopkeepers and entrepreneurs generously contributed with groceries, raw materials, items, or products. On the other hand, community organizations, such as the aforementioned Poquelin Theater, local community kitchens, religious entities, and the '*N.G.O. Mujeres en lucha*'. The latter played a key role in coordinating actions because their purpose is to assist, support, and accompany women in the city who experience gender-based violence. The pandemic exacerbated these situations of violence, and the joint work between Ayni and this organization established networks that went beyond the mere provision of food.

Bread of poetry

Ayni connected with families through affection and sought strategies to deliver food to their homes with a hopeful message that could also serve as 'soul food,' a restorative action in such an adverse context. This led to the idea of sending a text in poetic form, which was later called '*Bread of Poetry*.' Over the weeks, different residents joined in with a desire to share and exchange poems that accompanied the fresh groceries being delivered. Here's one of the messages that also invited the receiving families to join in writing:

´The isolation awakened the desire to meet,
the need, the desire to share,
the need to give and receive,
And, like sprouting from the earth,
The community is coming together.
Today, we write, and we invite those who want to write for the next 'Bread of Poetry'.

Luna recalls this action, saying, '*The Bread of Poetry added something that had to do with a more heart-to-heart connection, in a way, where everyone put a bit of themselves connected to art.*' Juliana received the food boxes and the poems. She remembers it by saying, '*They saved my life because I was waiting for that box, and those notes that came with the box, those messages of love and hope, the little gift for Children's Day, the children who knew that the fruits were coming, the smell of fruit in a box, in my dining room, made me rethink life in a different way. We pasted* [all the messages] *on a cardboard and read them every day*'.

The Senses and Feelings of Participation and Receiving

An analytical category that emerged from the narratives is the issue of the senses and feelings surrounding participation and the specific moment of the onset of the pandemic. The measures decreed by the national government effectively led to almost complete isolation of the population, with the exception of essential personnel. Some comments from the interviewees about that particular moment reveal common points about their living environment, the sensation of breaking from routine, fears, family ties, control, and social fragmentation. On the first point, Luna mentions that '*the environment preserved us from much of the paranoia that was present in the cities, but it was tough to see the restrictive measures. I felt it was very tough, the limitation of freedoms, because it was understandable. I believe there was a lack of knowledge from all sides, regarding the healthcare system implementing the measures.*' Family bonds were important for support, as Margarita recalls the beginning of isolation, saying, '*We didn't experience it so much because we were with family, and we were all together. So, I can't say that we felt confined*'.

A point for reflection based on the narratives is the feelings that the pandemic and isolation brought, including the sense of breaking away from the routine and the pace of life. Selva recalls that time, saying, '*After the tourist season, we were coming from a summer with a lot of work, and it was also a bit of a slowdown and some rest. We thought it was just a week until later when awareness began to grow, people were dying, and there were really scary stories*' On the other hand, Tamara says, '*I think of that moment as a situation in which I feel very fortunate with my family. So, I understand that my perspective at the beginning of the pandemic was quite dreamy in terms of opportunities, possibilities. It's like that moment when you suddenly find yourself indoors for 15 days dropped like a coin*'. We believe it is relevant to introduce this sensation of breaking away from the rhythm of life and the everyday, but this should be read in the initial context of an isolation that initially seemed to be for a short period and with no intention of underestimating the situation being faced.

Participation in Ayni was framed within a context where gatherings were prohibited. On this topic, some interviewees shared their perspectives and arguments from that time. Margarita mentioned, '*It was permission to do something charitable, but we were also transgressing*

the imposed order, respecting each other, respecting positions on vaccines and non-vaccines, masks and no masks. To believe and not believe, I don't know, that was crucial. I think the respect we had for each other when participating outdoors was fundamental´. On the other hand, Juliana, a domestic worker, recalled a conversation with her niece: *´My niece had seen it on the internet. People had told her in the street when I sent her to shop, and they had mentioned that they were providing groceries, helping people. We were having mate, and my niece said, 'Could we help/could we join? So we won't be stuck here'.*

The restrictive measures implemented by the government brought about a sort of social control not only exerted by the authorities but also by the community itself. The police patrolled the streets, the roads connecting Santa Clara del Mar to Mar del Plata had constant checkpoints that prevented citizens from entering or leaving the city without special permits, and local roads were blocked with mounds of earth. These elements created a scenario as dystopian as it was desolate. Luna described that initial period where *´you couldn't even go down to the beach living one block away. The police would pass by, and a neighbor could report you. It was very rigid among neighbors, which also created a lot of fragmentation because it was about identifying who is who´.* In this sense, participation in collective activities emerged as a response to the system. Luna expressed this with the following words: *'I felt like we were tripping up the system... they won't fully control us; they want to control us almost 100%, but we found a way to unchain ourselves in some way and transcend something that was fear because I believe that through collective organization and service, in some way we shared, we transcended the fears that existed because you see, I never heard anyone say, 'I'm afraid to go here or there, I won't go to that house,' I never felt that, I never heard it... not only did I not feel it, I never heard it. It seems to me that it helped us exorcise the fear that was present socially´.*

A phrase that was mentioned in an Ayni assembly was evoked by several interviewees: *'Ayni saved us from the pandemic.'* According to the data collected from the interviews, participation in collective activities had a powerful impact on the subjectivity of each participant, structuring a daily work agenda in a context marked by an endless stream of tragic news disseminated by the mass media. Luna, in the same vein, reaffirms, *'Someone once said in an assembly once that it saved us from the pandemic because transcending individuality to generate something collective helped us*

transcend Ayni's original goal.' Selva, on her part, remembers that '*We had a good time because we felt very good, because I really felt useful doing things like this, and that we were helping a lot.*'

Community participation played a transformative role, not only through collaboration and assistance to families but also because, in some cases, it helped structure significant occupations after retirement. This is the case for Margarita, who says, '*I feel that the social and community aspect is fundamental to me, participation... it's necessary for me. Perhaps, upon ending my career* [retirement], *I had that void that was filled, and even more so, by Ayni. I never thought about being part of such a group, and today it's part of my life*'. Regarding the changes, Luna adds, '*I believe there were signs, not of radical transformation, but of small changes, and one small change after another, with another, is a change. The changes in subjectivity were seen in a lot of people, for example, meeting a family and hearing them say, 'I found a little job,' 'a gig,' or 'don't bring it anymore because we don't need it,' that also seemed like a sign of people growing up, being able to say, 'Well, give it to someone else because we don't need it right now*'.

The Metamorphosis of Ayni

To conclude this development, we would like to share a moment that can be considered a turning point in the entire Ayni experience. After almost 9 months of food delivery and all the actions that were carried out, the growing reopening of activities and changes in government regulations regarding safety measures gradually allowed many families to return to their work. Another summer season was approaching, which generated a certain expectation. Around October and November 2020, there began a reflection on ending the food distribution. This decision brought multiple perspectives, agreements, disagreements, and also a strong sense of unease about the future without the Ayni space. A crucial moment is discussed with the interviewees: the assembly where the decision to stop delivering food to families is made. One of the people who received food and also participated in the assemblies made an intervention that set the direction of the group. Luna recalls it this way: '*In that assembly, it was decided not to continue delivering food. We were very distressed because the end of the year was approaching* [...]*summer was coming, and we were exhausted because it had been a year of hard work.*

Ana said, 'Girls, girls, relax. Most of us are a little better now.' It was a relief that it came from someone who received the food. We were afraid to make the decision ourselves; it was a heavy burden. An actor from the team somehow found the starting point'.

The feeling of not having a common project for the Ayni assembly created some uncertainty in the group. Several participants remember taking a few months of rest, and in February 2021, they resumed meetings to see if there was a possibility of redefining that participation and setting new goals. Margarita mentions it in the following way: '*There were meetings to see the need to find a way to continue being part of the community, participating in something*'. Various initiatives and decisions arose to focus on continuing to participate in collective activities, maintaining the assemblies as a space for meetings, reflection, and organization of future actions. They held workshops on vegan cheeses and ferments, and some workshops were held in the MILPA Fair in one of the squares of Santa Clara del Mar. But there was also a need to do other things, to meet weekly. An afternoon gathering to make toys and shopping bags that would then be sold at the local fairs.

The MILPA Fair received a significant boost from Ayni in its creation, maintenance, and also in promoting the assembly as a mechanism for decision-making. Ayni members conducted workshops to create objects from recyclable materials, seeking to contribute to a sustainable way of life. These items were sold at the fair, and the proceeds were used for training workshops and activities like the annual 'tomato event,' which is repeated during the peak tomato harvest season. This activity is open to residents, and people are invited to produce tomato sauce from a communal purchase of organic tomatoes, with the production distributed equitably among all participants. These micropolitical actions demonstrate a network of social connections that persist over time. Ayni is in a continuous process of metamorphosis.

Final Words

In this work, we reflect on the basis of an autonomous experience, one of self-determination, where a group of residents in a community engage in the creation, development, and support of shared occupations in response to an issue such as food sustenance within the context of the

crisis triggered by the Covid-19 pandemic. While that was the initial reason for collective organization, it can also be seen that this response sought to address the isolation of individuals and the progressive social fragmentation. We use the concept of collective occupations to describe how these residents engaged in a reflective process of co-occupation, appealing to creativity and an organizational approach that favored dialogue, consensus, and respect for diversity.

We consider it relevant to highlight the perspective of those who engage collectively as a powerful methodological, ethical, and political tool for understanding complex and multidimensional phenomena that contribute to the science of occupation. The experience of 'Ayni: vecinos en comunidad' is, among other things, an experience of resistance to fatalism, understanding it as 'a pervasive discursive message that there is nothing that can be done to change reality, even when its implications are tragic' (Rudman, 2021, p. 103). In a context where inequalities are considered inevitable, collective occupations mark a potential path for social transformation on a micropolitical scale.

Notes

1. According to the latest census of the year 2022 conducted by the National Institute of Statistics and Censuses (INDEC).
2. An informal wage earner or self-employed worker is identified as someone who is not registered in the Social Security System. This labor informality is directly associated with low incomes and, often, with poverty, as well as with precarious situations regarding labor rights such as having paid vacations, health insurance, unemployment benefits, and a future retirement or pension.
3. Data provided by the National Survey of Workers on Employment, Work, Health, and Safety Conditions of the Ministry of Production and Labor of the Nation in 2018.
4. Based on our interest, we align with García Sánchez (2007) in conceptualizing the collective social actor as 'that entity whose members are integrated around similar—or at least converging—interests, perceptions, and beliefs regarding a problem, which possesses a certain degree of organization and resources and has mechanisms for resolving internal conflicts, and which has the means and capacity to decide and/

or act intentionally and strategically to achieve a common objective as a sufficiently cohesive unit, distinguishing it from others and to which, therefore, some responsibility can be attributed for its decisions and/or actions' (p. 206).

5. Native terms will be used for certain designations due to the loss of meaning that can result from their literal translation. This name seeks to reflect the association of community residents with the goal of developing activities jointly and building a network of reciprocity

6. We refer to the notebook as a small journal where Ayni members recorded various matters related to the ongoing work. Some examples of these notes include the amount of fruits and vegetables purchased in a week, the names and addresses of the families receiving the goods, among others.

7. The whatsapp group 'compras comunitarias' is a virtual and physical network of residents who organized themselves to carry out collective purchases with the aim of improving product prices, eliminating intermediaries, and promoting purchases from small entrepreneurs, including agroecological agricultural producers among them.

8. "La deuda o la vida' was an assembly aimed at denouncing the negative implications of Argentina's external debt, which led to the 2001 crisis.

9. This assembly focused on the issue of the plundering of the fishing resources on the Argentine Atlantic coast and the denunciation of precarious labor in the port of Mar del Plata. https://elgritodelcaladero.wordpress.com/about/

10. This group of neighbors is working on the issue of pesticides.https://parendefumigarnosmdp.blogspot.com/

11. It's a reclaimed space where a cultural center called "La Casa del Pueblo' operates. https://ccamericalibre.wixsite.com/mysite/sobre-la-casa-del-pueblo

12. The term "living food' is used to refer to those foods that have not been processed and that contain all their enzymes and nutrients in their natural state.

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