



The nation takes to the streets: October 2019 saw the beginning of mass anti-government protests in Chile, which were triggered by an increase in subway ticket prices.

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Max Planck scientists cooperate with partners in more than 120 countries. Here they write about their personal experiences and impressions. Felipe González, associate scientist at the Max Planck Institute for the Study of Societies, leads the Max Planck Partner Group for the Study of the Economy and the Public in Santiago de Chile. He reports on the project, talks about social unrest in Chile, and recalls the culture shock he experienced while living in Germany.

Spring 2020. Coronavirus has brought the whole world to a standstill, and Chile is naturally no exception. All the same, I believe that the virus and the social distancing measures hit the population of Chile at a particularly unfavorable time. Before the pandemic, Santiago and other

Chilean cities were the scene of mass demonstrations that had started back in October 2019. These protests were triggered by an increase in the price of subway tickets. A government minister added fuel to the fire by saying that people should simply get up earlier to make use of the cheaper tickets available at that time. Looking back, this was clearly the straw that broke the camel's back. However, the social origins of the unrest actually go back some 20 or 30 years.

Almost everything in Chile is privatized, be it education or healthcare. This means that many people cannot afford basic medical care or a college education, which has led to increasing social inequality. When the government raised the ticket prices, the dissatisfaction turned into protest. Thousands of Chileans took to the streets and chanted "Give us our dignity!"

Shortly before the coronavirus pandemic broke out, it seemed as if the protests were proving successful.

Parliament organized a referendum asking whether the constitution written under Pinochet's dictatorship should be changed. It was this constitution that legitimized privatization, so many people saw it as the source of the inequality. But then the government ordered everyone into lockdown and postponed the referendum until October. Now nobody knows what will become of it. Before COVID-19, the demonstrators had momentum on their side and the politicians were feeling the social pressure. This mood could pass by October, even though the pandemic is revealing the full scope of the inequality in society and the deficiencies in the healthcare system.

For economic sociologists like me, Chile is the ideal place to research the social roots of economics. The country has been ruled by economists ever since the beginning of this neoliberal experiment, and the privatized system means that there are multiple links between the economic and social aspects. Nevertheless, I learned



SANTIAGO DE CHILE, CHILE

nothing about economic sociology during the entire time I was studying sociology at university – which is why I conducted my own research into it and came across the Max Planck Institute for the Study of Societies. I couldn't believe my luck when I was appointed to a doctoral post there.

Once I had finished my doctorate and spent some time doing research at the Institute, I decided to go back to Chile. But I never doubted that I would maintain my links with Germany, Cologne, and above all with the Institute. The Max Planck Partner Group I have been leading since January is therefore the perfect compromise. One of the Group's goals is to make economic sociology better known in Chile. There is a growing community of young students who are interested in the subject. One of the Partner Group's goals is to serve them as a meeting place. At the same time, it aims to bridge the gap between Chile and the Max Planck Society – and between Chile and

Germany. The cultures of these two countries could hardly be more different – as I experienced first hand when I moved to Cologne in 2011. In Latin America, the people are generally more relaxed, they talk loudly on the streets, and a lot of things are treated more casually. In Germany, on the other hand, there seem to be strict rules for everything: you sort your trash, you walk only on the sidewalk, and you don't make phone calls on the train! But once I had assimilated the most important customs, I had a sense of almost boundless freedom.

In my view, Cologne even has a certain Latin American flair. That's partly due to their celebration of Carnival, of course, but the people of Cologne are also very warm-hearted and open by nature. I don't know how many times I got into conversation with strangers on the bus or on the street! I didn't have this experience in other parts of Germany, but in Cologne, I formed friendships that I'm sure will last for a lifetime.

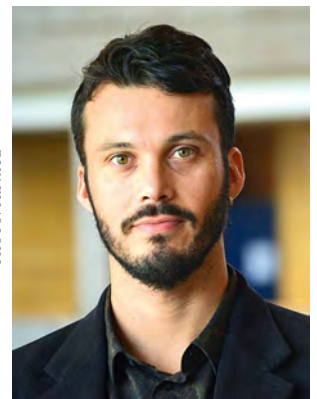


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35, studied sociology at the Alberto Hurtado University in Santiago de Chile. He worked as a research assistant for the United Nations development program and the Latin American Faculty of Social Sciences. Between 2011 and 2016, he obtained his doctorate at the Max Planck Institute for the Study of Societies in Cologne. He has been in charge of the Max Planck Partner Group for the Study of the Economy and the Public in Santiago de Chile since January 2020.