When scarcity of space and resources seems to condemn low-income families to lose their networks and neighborhoods, the freedom of inhabitants themselves filters through the system’s rigidity. Through observing the logics of allegados in the city of Santiago, this research shows that users’ inventiveness is capable of delivering degrees of freedom where they were not supposed to exist.

Due to both housing policy restrictions (social housing subsidies’ amount and its peripheral location) and the high cost of market housing in central and semi-central areas in Santiago de Chile, families and new homes in vulnerable segments cannot access well-located housing. Thus, they live with relatives [as allegados] and have to engineer several informal architectural strategies to guarantee their independence in such a situation, while enjoying the freedom of settling in central areas. Within the economic, physical, technical and structural plot restrictions that these families of allegados have, they look for the greatest independence, privacy, and autonomy possible, altering and combining elements such as the kitchen, the access, and the building’s volumes. This is how they configure architectural strategies to obtain the best living conditions possible and to maintain the social capital associated with clan life.

In order to understand the different strategies that grant freedom in cohousing, 100 cases in a situation of allegados located in semi-central were studied. Through a one-dimensional analysis, we interviewed the families and surveyed their homes, analyzing the different typologies and their degrees of freedom through its plans.
The allegado strategy as a way of access to housing

In the 1980s, the dictatorship’s massive eradication processes of informal dwellers and settlements, together with the deactivation and dismantling of social mobilization and repression of any attempt of illegal access to land by the settlers lead to the generalization of the allegados (Necochea, 1987; Bustos, 2005). Thus, it became one of the main survival strategies and self-managed access to housing at the time. As part of the housing deficit in Chile, the process has been historically understood as the relationship between a receiving family group and the group or groups of allegados that live in the same dwelling or land (Necochea, 1987; Mercado, 1992; Arriagada, Icaza and Rodriguez, 1999). The family of allegados has thus restricted conditions to carry out their functions autonomously and there is a forced coexistence between different groups, where the conditions for privacy and habitability can be affected, even producing high levels of overcrowding (Mercado, 1992).

With the return to democracy, by the end of the 80s and the beginning of the 1990s, an interest on studying the relations of social capital and mutual support that generate among the allegados arises (Greene, 1988, Vergara and Palmer, 1990, Espinoza, 1991); not only analyzing their positive features but also introducing it as a valuable
strategy that allows correcting the city’s tendency towards excessive expansion (Vergara and Palmer, 1990).

Recently the idea of the allegados as a cohousing strategy where the cohabiting groups support each other and function as an extended family without any relationship of subordination is added, turning the allegados into a key facilitator for family and neighborhood cooperation for maximizing scarce economic resources (Araos, 2008, Moreno, 2012, Urrutia, Jirón and Lagos, 2016). This vision can be related to the Scandinavian and Anglo-Saxon phenomenon of ‘cohousing,’ according to Vestbro (2010), where cohousing refers to living in dwellings with common spaces and shared facilities among residents.

Although Chilean housing policies are considered successful for reducing the deficit on housing over the last decades, the allegados have consistently increased, especially in central and semi-central areas (Urrutia, Jirón and Lagos, 2016), being a phenomenon across all income sectors, though affecting the most vulnerable segments to a greater extent (Arriagada, Icaza and Rodríguez, 1999, Araos, 2008) yet without being exclusive of the underprivileged. The population segment that turns to the allegados strategy as a mechanism for housing survival is mainly groups of families that reside in semi-central areas of large cities as Santiago.

In the capital city of Chile, the location of this phenomenon is mainly related to neighborhoods originated from the sitio and tiza operations (meant to turn informal dwellers into formal ones) in what once was the periphery of the city. They are mainly housing projects, currently well located and with large plots that easily enable the settlement of allegados. As families grew, they had to adapt to the plots according to their needs. Residents design and build their homes, dealing wisely with budget and spatial limits, as well as with the need to meet the family’s requirements for coexistence and independence with the scarce resources they have.

These families do not have the possibility of accessing formal housing solutions provided by the State or the market. The high price of dwellings generated by real estate speculation and the inability to develop social housing in the area adds to the fact that both agents offer a typical single-family housing solution which does not guarantee a better location nor allows maintaining the family or social networks. This condemns them to a situation of dependency, little privacy, low levels of habitability and overcrowding.

Thus, families preferring to stay as allegados instead of receiving a housing subsidy that would probably take them away from their neighborhoods and networks, have modified their homes to enable cohousing, generating new self-constructed typologies that welcome this housing phenomenon with different degrees of independence and freedom, despite its restrictions. This way of living allows maintaining micro-communities and their social capital which, as in the Anglo-Saxon cohousing model, balances the advantages of living in a single dwelling with the benefits of shared facilities and the connection with neighbors and family members, guaranteeing privacy and family independence (Sargisson, 2011).
FIG 2  Plantas de viviendas con independencia en accesos / Plans of houses with independent accesses
FIG 3 Plantas de viviendas con independencia en un volumen / Plans of houses with independence within a volume
Cohousing in Santiago’s semi-central areas

Due to the aforementioned characteristics of Santiago’s semi-central neighborhoods, this area was established as a case study to analyze a sample of 100 families that have allegados and their homes. Heads of households were interviewed to characterize family groups and identify the different adaptations they made to their homes, in addition to an architectural survey of the current state of their spatial and functional organization. Then, the floor plans and family genograms were studied with a one-dimensional approach to identify and analyze typologies, in order to understand the architectural elements that allow determining the different degrees of freedom reached by each family in a cohousing situation.

The main reasons for sharing a house between families are the economic advantages (34%), with care and attachment to family or neighborhood as subsequent causes. In this sense, it is possible to indicate that the motives for sharing a house correspond to functional allegados, since resources are maximized and benefits are bigger than conflicts. On the other hand, the majority (69%) declares they don’t want to move from their place of residence and feel close to the city center (93%). To this, we must add that a high percentage of respondents (83%) declare not wanting to change their place of residence or not doing anything to accomplish that, which shows that these families prefer keeping their situation of allegados. As the benefits associated with centrality and coexistence in an extended family are more important than the inconveniences associated with the allegados, these families prefer to keep this situation rather than live in the periphery as owners of a home that does not satisfy their needs neither in spatial nor in location terms. Most of the families surveyed (69%) admit to having made changes in the house, in which the majority were made to bedrooms (50%), bathrooms (21%) and the kitchen (15%), which allows to assume that the adaptations tend to solve problems associated with family growth and the new groups among them.

Freedom in cohousing

Although cohousing is a situation where a place is shared under restricted conditions, there are architectural strategies aimed at seeking different degrees of freedom and autonomy for each family group. The main ones involve three architectural elements: the access, the kitchen, and the volume. Thus, the study identifies three organizational strategies that search for family freedom in cohousing housing: independent access, kitchen autonomy, and volumetric emancipation.

An independent access allows inhabitants in cohousing to have autonomous ways of entering their exclusive area of the house. This simplifies the fulfillment of daily activities without disrupting the rest of the family group’s life in terms of schedules, limits, and privacy. The kitchen autonomy, on the other hand, is one of the most influential ones over the family’s economy, as it supposes not only a budgetary independence from the main group, but also the authority over meals schedules and type of diet. Finally, by involving
totally differentiated spaces, volumetric emancipation guarantees a greater intimacy for each sub-family group because, despite not having differentiated access, they do have separated rooms that improve privacy conditions.

These three architectural strategies determine three degrees of freedom in cohousing. First, as the lower degree of freedom, is independence by access; this means that, although housing and food budgets are shared, a minimum degree of privacy is guaranteed, improving the family's coexistence and reducing their exposure. The second degree of freedom is called ‘autonomy within a volume’: when in addition to a differentiated access there is an individual budget in each family group, embodied in the existence of two or more kitchens for the extended family. Besides guaranteeing privacy thanks to the separate accesses, this allows managing a private nutritional budget, granting autonomy to daily life. Finally, the third degree of freedom and the one that allows greater independence for each family, is the residential emancipation, where in addition to independent accesses and the existence of two or more kitchens, there is a differentiation of living volumes according to the different family groups, which implies the existence of two or more houses that share common spaces within a single plot. In this case, family groups benefit from having their own space and budget, without losing the advantages of living in cohousing.

The spontaneity and intelligence of ‘architecture without architects’ is manifested in the numerous and simple ways of solving the practical problems (Rudofsky, 1964). In the case of cohousing, the maximization of privacy and autonomy with limited resources is one of the main challenges. On the other hand, as it corresponds to a kind of progressive-development architecture, it grows according to its dwellers’ requirements, limited by the resources they own (Haramoto et al., 1988). The different degrees of freedom associated with the following typologies (Fig. 1) define the levels of residential autonomy achieved by families in cohousing without abandoning the benefits associated with collaboration and mutual aid behind living as an extended family.

**Independence by access**
The main feature in this degree of freedom is to have an independent access connecting from public space, either for large families seeking for privacy or for those who do not have blood ties, as in the case of tenants. Although the members of the family group develop their lives around different accesses, all members eat together and share – or at least negotiate – the use of the kitchen, as the entire complex depends on the use of a single device that serves the whole extended family.

In these situations, it is possible to visualize how the families modified and adapted their space to obtain the largest independence possible despite the restricted context of a minimum-size plot (Fig. 2). In addition, the existence of a private access – despite having to share the kitchen – gives a certain level of everyday autonomy
FIG 4 Plantas de viviendas con independencia total en co-residencia / Plans of houses with total independence in cohousing
to the groups for entering and exiting without interrupting the other family. It is possible to observe here how the yard acquires relevance by becoming a distribution point, being the space that articulates the different rooms within the volume.

**Autonomy within a volume**

The particularity in this degree of freedom lies in the combination of two or more accesses in the same volume containing two or more kitchens, as an image of the presence of more than one household and/or family nucleus. The duplicity of kitchens and accesses makes a house with two or more dwelling units in the same building, still internally connected so as not to abandon the efficiency of sharing some spaces. Having two kitchens allows the independent presence of more than one dwelling, while the differentiated accesses guarantee greater privacy and autonomy in the use of each sector of the house.

The existence of a single volume enables complementarity within the house, maximizing also the plot’s common spaces. Among the most autonomous cases of cohousing, this typology encompasses the most common strategies. In addition, the presence of several living/dining rooms provides greater comfort to families living in cohousing, differentiating but not separating them in their daily lives (Fig. 3). As in the previous typology, the patio or free/empty space in the lot also acquires great relevance, as it is the area that allows for circulation and distribution to the differentiated rooms.

**Residential emancipation**

Having at least two homes in a single plot – each with its own kitchen and private access – is at the basis of this degree of freedom. This is a reflection of families with a high index of households, nuclei, members, and generations, which translates into a large number of bedrooms and rooms. Generally, these cases are in a large plot that allows the coexistence of multiple autonomous volumes.

This third category is the one that presents greater independence and family freedom within the restricted conditions of the plot. By having different accesses, two or more kitchens and separate residences, families can operate with total budget autonomy, enter and exit independently and have more privacy due to the different volumes, maintaining the benefits associated with support and subsistence networks of the *allegados* while at the same time minimizing the problems of overcrowding and potential lack of privacy (Fig. 4). As in the other cases, free space acquires relevance by being the void that guarantees articulation, a place that also ensures ventilation and natural light for the different enclosures.

**Residential emancipation in Recoleta**

As an example of this third category, we present here the case of an extended family – a group of seven members –
that, despite their co-residential status, lives with total independence in the district of Recoleta.

As mentioned before, the dwellings provided by the market or the State (new or used) which this type of families can afford to reverse their situation of allegados are located in peripheral neighborhoods away from their support networks, their work, or facilities. As the head of the household states, "I am here because my husband didn’t want to leave his mother behind. I never intervened either because I didn’t want to move to an apartment in Quilicura; that’s what they give you when you do not have money." It could be inferred thus that residents prefer to live in cohousing and maintain their status as allegados before leaving their family networks and/or their well-located houses.

Co-residence is also a progressive phenomenon, as housing grows and changes with the life cycle of its inhabitants. As shown in Figure 6, the house grew in stages, from two original one-story volumes to a second story in one of them, which was then again extended to make room for new members of the family. The patio is seen as an intermediate space for access, circulation, lighting, and ventilation for the different volumes that occupy the plot. The existence of two volumes with independent kitchens can also be noted, showing cohabitation of two homes with independent food budgets. The high number of bedrooms (five in total) expresses the number of dwellers within the house, together with three double beds. In addition, the rear volume is completely equipped: it has its own bathroom, kitchen, and bedroom as well as a workshop space, indicating that the dwellers in this area have their own budget, whether they are tenants or members of the family group.

Conclusions

Despite the conditions of poverty and the economic and spatial restrictions, families have managed to solve the need for privacy in their co-residential lives. Family groups push their creativity to face their daily habitability problems by designing precise architectural strategies such as the construction of differentiated accesses, multiple kitchens, and spaced volumes, usually ignoring normative restrictions in order to obtain independence. These elements determine the degrees of freedom that grant different levels of autonomy to families living in cohousing. The highest degree of family independence in cohousing is achieved through three simultaneous strategies – combining the existence of two or more accesses, two or more kitchens, and two or more independent volumes. This allows families to manage their own schedules, budget, and space access without disturbing their privacy or interrupting the rest of the group, combining the advantages of a traditional home with the benefits of the extended family life.

Given the limited housing offer – designed only for a standard family type – these self-managed architectural strategies seek to combine cooperativism with freedom and autonomy. They become specific solutions that
cannot be fulfilled neither through the real estate market nor privately, as these families do not have the resources to finance a customized architectural designs and so on. Thus, these strategies are a tool to be considered by the architectural discipline, whose current restrictive offer and partial potentials for adaptation could be reformulated to generate new possibilities and housing typologies.

The different degrees of freedom identified show the opportunities that arise when simple architectural elements are combined to provide new levels of independence and family comfort. In addition, the degrees of freedom reached by these families are not exclusively restricted to their budgetary constraints since the solution accomplished by combining these strategies is, in fact, the one required to meet the needs in accordance to the family’s configuration.

Architectural strategies that enable freedom in restricted conditions such as these open the possibility for future research on other dimensions of co-habitation (such as acoustic conditions, coexistence of different traditions and/or customs, caring strategies among family members, and so on). A better understanding of these residential logics would also allow moving towards a new idea of housing policies, through a re-signifying of the notion of allegados to that of cohousing, and valuing the dwellers’ own strategies to solve the different challenges in of this way of living.
Notas / Notes

1. Miembros del equipo de investigación detrás de este artículo fueron Camilo Arriagada y Alberto Texidó como co- investigadores, Catalina Jiménez y Camila Jiménez como investigadoras, Martín Álvarez como colaborador, Connie Moreira en el dibujo de genogramas y planos de edición, y Tatiana Bravo en el cargo de dibujos axonométricos.

2. Según el estudio “Acceso al nuevo mercado inmobiliario en Santiago,” llevado a cabo por el Instituto de Estudios Urbanos y Territoriales Ciudades – Observatorio UC e Inciti, un plaforma urbana y de bienestar inmobiliario.

3. Entrevista con el jefe de la casa en Recoleta (Diciembre 2017) como parte del estudio “Caracterización de los allegados en las áreas semi centrales de Santiago,” financiado por el FAU Research Fund 2.0 Research by Design 2015.

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