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Opacity, Imagination, and Futures: Exploring Climate Change
Discourses and Social Imaginaries in Santiago de Chile

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María Paz Cárdenas Briones

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Abstract (DE)

Diese Arbeit untersucht, wie urbane Akteure in Santiago de Chile Zukunftsvorstellungen im Zusammenhang mit dem Klimawandel entwickeln und was diese Imaginationen über die Möglichkeiten und Grenzen sozialer Transformation im städtischen Maßstab aussagen. Während in der Forschung vielfach globale und nationale Klimadiskurse betrachtet wurden, ist die Rolle urbaner Akteure bei der Gestaltung kollektiver Zukunftsbilder bisher weitgehend vernachlässigt worden. Diese Studie schließt diese Lücke, indem sie die Diskurse von NGOs, Jugendorganisationen, Künstler:innen und Wissenschaftler:innen analysiert und in den weiteren theoretischen Rahmen von sozialen Imaginationen, radikaler Imagination und Klimawandel einbettet.

Die Untersuchung basiert auf einer qualitativen Methodik mit halbstrukturierten Interviews, die mit zentralen Akteuren in Santiago durchgeführt wurden. Das Datenmaterial wurde mithilfe einer Kombination aus kategorialer Netzwerkanalyse und semantischer Korrespondenzanalyse ausgewertet, wodurch sowohl thematische Typologien als auch relationale Bedeutungszusammenhänge sichtbar wurden.

Die Ergebnisse zeigen ein heterogenes, aber lebendiges Feld von Imaginationen. Fünf zentrale Typologien konnten identifiziert werden: transformativ, katastrophisch, reformistisch, technologisch und status quo. Besonders stark vertreten sind transformativen und katastrophischen Zukunftsbilder, vor allem bei Jugend- und Basisorganisationen, während reformistische und technologische Vorstellungen eher bei NGOs und in akademischen Diskursen dominieren. Zudem traten zwei zentrale temporale Rahmungen hervor – lineare Zeitlichkeit und Hypergegenwart – die Spannungen zwischen schrittweisem Wandel und dringlicher Krisenerfahrung erzeugen. Über alle Akteursgruppen hinweg wurde Imagination sowohl als Möglichkeitsraum (offen für alternative Zukünfte) als auch als begrenzt (durch institutionelle, ökonomische und politische Barrieren) artikuliert.

Die Ergebnisse verdeutlichen, dass Klimawandelimaginationen in Santiago zutiefst politisch sind, in Praktiken der Teilhabe verankert und räumlich in der Stadt – insbesondere auf Nachbarschaftsebene – eingebettet. Gleichzeitig spiegeln sie Widersprüche, Auslassungen und Ausschlüsse wider, die bestimmen, wer Zukünfte imaginieren darf und unter welchen Bedingungen. Die Arbeit schließt daraus, dass die radikale Imagination urbaner Akteure sowohl eine Ressource für Transformationsprozesse als auch ein Spiegel der Begrenzungen der zeitgenössischen urbanen Moderne darstellt.

Abstract (EN)

This thesis investigates how urban actors in Santiago de Chile imagine climate change futures and what these imaginaries reveal about the possibilities and limits of social transformation at the urban scale. While much research has examined climate discourses globally and nationally, little attention has been paid to the role of urban actors in shaping collective visions of the future. This study addresses that gap by exploring the discourses of NGOs, youth organisations, artists, and academics, situating them within a broader debate on social imaginaries, radical imagination, and climate change.

The research employs a qualitative methodology based on semi-structured interviews with key actors in Santiago. Data was coded and analysed through a combined approach of categorical network analysis and semantic correspondence mapping, allowing both thematic typologies and relational patterns of meaning to emerge.

Findings reveal a heterogeneous but vibrant field of imaginaries. Five main typologies were identified: transformative, catastrophic, reformist, technological, and status quo. Transformative and catastrophic imaginaries dominated, especially among youth and grassroots organisations, while reformist and technological visions were more prominent in NGOs and academic discourse. The analysis also highlights two dominant temporal framings—linear temporality and the hyperpresent—producing tensions between gradual reform and urgent, existential crisis. Across actors, imagination was articulated both as possible (open to alternative futures) and as constrained (limited by institutional, economic, and political barriers).

These results demonstrate that climate change imaginaries in Santiago are deeply political, grounded in practices of participation, and embedded in urban space—particularly at the neighbourhood scale. At the same time, they reflect contradictions, silences, and exclusions that shape who is able to imagine futures and under what conditions. The thesis concludes that the radical imagination of urban actors represents both a resource for envisioning transformation and a mirror of the constraints of contemporary urban modernity.

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La estrella de la esperanza continuará siendo nuestra – Víctor Jara

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Introduction

The climate crisis is increasingly recognised not only as an environmental or technical issue, but as a profound challenge to how societies envision their collective futures (Adger, 2003). Across scales, climate change is articulated through discourses that question the development models and frameworks that have historically guided expectations of progress, prosperity, and social reproduction (Klein, 2015). This questioning underscores the need to envision the future through innovative perspectives that transcend the traditional paradigms of growth and continuity (Wright et al., 2013). In this sense, the climate crisis can be understood as a crisis of the social and collective imaginary (Castoriadis, 1987): the shared assumptions and symbolic frameworks that have historically grounded social life, and which now confront their limits. As with previous moments of rupture—such as Malthusian debates on demographic limits—today’s crisis highlights the exhaustion of the imaginaries tied to industrial growth, economic expansion, and particular lifestyles.

This rupture has given rise to diverse discourses that attempt to explain the crisis and to project solutions. These range from frameworks of adaptation and resilience to proposals for socio-economic transformation, articulated by global institutions, national governments, and grassroots actors. The struggle over how to define and inhabit the future is thus not only a matter of material practice but also of political contestation over meaning, sense, and legitimacy. My thesis situates itself within this debate by examining how different climate imaginaries are articulated and contested in Santiago, Chile, a city in the Global South where social and ecological crises converge.

Climate change as a Crisis of Imagination

Building on this framing, a growing body of scholarship emphasises that the climate crisis is also a crisis of imagination (Hopkins, 2019; Hulme, 2008; Kumar et al., 2025a). It challenges the capacity of existing cultural, political, and scientific frameworks to conceptualise futures beyond the parameters of industrial modernity and capitalist development. From the “limits to growth” debate in the 1970s to the Brundtland Report (1987) and more recent discussions on planetary boundaries (Rockström et al., 2009) the climate question has consistently exposed the contradictions of a development model predicated on endless expansion.

This sense of rupture destabilises inherited imaginaries of progress and continuity, producing uncertainty about the collective horizon of social life (Alexander et al., n.d.; Cantó-Milà & Seebach, 2024). As Castoriadis (1987) suggests, imaginaries are not neutral; they are generative forces that create institutions, values, and practices. The dislocation of dominant imaginaries, therefore, opens a contested terrain where new discourses emerge to make sense of climate change and to propose different ways forward (Levy & Spicer, 2013). Some of these emphasise technical adaptation and managerial approaches (Sovacool et al., 2020),

others stress collective resilience and awareness (Adger, 2003; Cairns, 2025; Loughran et al., 2015), while still others envision structural transformation of development itself (Abson et al., 2017; Profumi, 2022; Wolfram, 2016). The result is a plural and conflictive field of imaginaries that operate across global, national, and local scales, often without achieving hegemony.

It is within this contested landscape that this thesis intervenes, asking how climate futures are imagined in Santiago, and how these imaginaries reflect broader struggles over meaning, politics, and social transformation.

Cities, Imaginaries, and Everyday Life

The contest over climate futures is especially intense in urban contexts. Cities are simultaneously major contributors to emissions, vulnerable sites of impact, and central actors in climate governance (Díaz-Pont, 2023). They are also laboratories of imaginaries: spaces where municipalities, NGOs, activists, businesses, and communities struggle to define what sustainable, just, and resilient futures should look like.

Urban imaginaries operate within a field of tension. On the one hand, the concentration and diversity of urban life stimulate encounters and innovation (Bridge & Watson, 2003; Simmel, 1950). On the other hand, power dynamics, planning regimes, and market forces impose “imaginative disciplines” that privilege certain futures while marginalising others (Harvey, 2003; Lefebvre et al., 1996). As Freire (2017) suggests, cities must be seen both as objective, governed spaces and as subjective, lived experiences infused with desires, fears, and practices.

The climate crisis amplifies these tensions. Dominant visual economies saturate imaginaries with catastrophic imagery—burning forests, submerged cities—which risk paralysing imagination rather than expanding it (Demos, 2019). As Cantó-Milà & Seebach (2024) argue, climate imaginaries can simultaneously constrain and expand collective horizons. The struggle over imaginaries is therefore not merely cultural but political: a struggle over whether futures are framed as technical adaptation, behavioural resilience, or structural transformation of development models.

Santiago: Rupture, Projection, and Situated imaginaries

These dynamics become especially visible in Santiago de Chile. In November 2019, the city was set to host COP25, positioning Chile—and South America—at the centre of global climate politics. Yet weeks before, the *Estallido Social* erupted, with millions protesting inequality, exclusion, and the limits of the neoliberal development model. Santiago was paralysed: the metro shut down, curfews were imposed, and the conference was relocated to Madrid.

I remember this moment vividly. At the University of Chile, where I was engaged in climate research, debates at the Center for Climate and Resilience Research (CR2) revolved around whether climate urgency would be eclipsed. Environmental concerns had long been present but marginal in Chile's public debate—acknowledged but rarely prioritised. Citizens' immediate demands centred on pensions, jobs, healthcare, and dignity. Yet climate change was entangled with these very frustrations: inequality, extractivist development, fragile social rights (Aliste & Stamm, 2016).

The uprising triggered a constitutional process that, while ultimately unsuccessful, opened a cycle of contestation that reshaped Chile's political imagination. Santiago became both the stage of rupture and a site of projection, where competing visions of the future collided. However, climate change remained strikingly absent from the heart of these debates—an absence that is both revealing and troubling.

This absence must be understood against the backdrop of a double crisis. On one level, Chile confronted a climate crisis that questioned its development model in relation to planetary limits. On another level, it experienced a local political crisis of meaning, protagonized by youth labelled as “sin futuro” and by historically excluded groups, such as the Mapuche (Jimenez-Yañez, 2020). Both crises converged in Santiago, exposing the fragility of collective imaginaries and intensifying struggles over the future (Aliste & Stamm, 2016; Del Romero Renau & Puig Vázquez, 2021). Far from being a weakness, this double rupture makes Santiago a productive site for analysis: in a context of high politicisation, the conflict over meaning becomes more visible, making imaginaries easier to trace and interrogate.

Santiago's relevance is also material. It concentrates nearly 40% of Chile's population (INE, 2019), functions as the political and economic core, and faces acute environmental vulnerabilities—droughts, heat extremes, water scarcity—intertwined with long-standing social inequalities (Mendes et al., 2020). Peripheral neighbourhoods bear the heaviest burdens while possessing the least adaptive capacity (Aliste & Stamm, 2016). In this way, imaginaries of climate futures in Santiago cannot be disentangled from imaginaries of social transformation (Del Romero Renau & Puig Vázquez, 2021).

Research Scope and Contribution

This thesis builds on these tensions. It contributes to debates on climate imaginaries by focusing on how discourses and imaginaries contend within a specific urban context in the Global South. The research question asks:

How are urban actors in Santiago imagining the future in relation to climate change, and what do these imaginaries reveal about the possibilities and limits of social transformation on the urban scale?

The contributions of this research are varied. Theoretically, it enhances our understanding of how imaginaries are situated within urban contexts in the Global South, illustrating how these imaginaries are constructed and contested in everyday life. Empirically, it documents how NGOs, youth, artists, community organisations, and policymakers in Santiago articulate climate futures in the aftermath of social upheaval. Conceptually, it contributes to the notion of urban archetypes of climate imaginaries by identifying different typologies of future imaginaries and examining how various actors envision these futures, thus enabling future comparative research across cities.

Additionally, by highlighting the unequal strength, aggregation, and legitimacy of different imaginaries, the thesis emphasises the political struggles inherent in future-making processes.

Towards a Situated Understanding of Climate Imaginaries

Despite growing interest in climate governance and anticipatory practices, significant gaps remain in understanding how climate imaginaries emerge, circulate, and are contested within specific urban contexts. Most research has focused on expert-driven scenarios or cultural representations, while less attention has been paid to the multiplicity of imaginaries generated by everyday actors—residents, NGOs, youth, artists, and local policymakers—whose visions of the future are deeply situated in local socio-political and ecological realities (Celermajer et al., 2024; Levy & Spicer, 2013; Stamm & Ulloa Contador, 2023).

Prevailing framings in climate policy are often depoliticised, linear, and universalising, presenting homogenous timelines with limited consideration of spatial, temporal, ecological, and social diversity (Death, 2022). This “presentism” within global climate governance produces an ahistorical narrative that compresses the past, narrows imagination, and fosters a conservative vision of the future (Kumar et al., 2025a). Such framings can reinforce existing power structures, constrain radical transformation, and limit the perceived scope of solutions. Scholars have referred to this as the “impoverishment of dominant socio-climatic imaginaries”, reflecting their lack of diversity along spatial, temporal, ecological, and political dimensions (Death, 2022). In practice, this contributes to a crisis of imagination, making it difficult to conceive of pathways out of climate change that do not reproduce global inequities (Chao & Enari, 2021a; Kumar et al., 2025a).

Moreover, ethical principles regarding responsibilities and benefits in addressing climate change—though recognised in international discourse—are seldom interrogated at the urban scale (Bulkeley et al., 2013). Understanding how these principles are articulated, challenged, or reconfigured in practice is particularly urgent in cities of the Global South, where vulnerabilities, social inequalities, and local governance structures shape distinct climate imaginaries (Heinrichs et al., 2013).

In Santiago, socio-environmental conflicts have often centred on large-scale confrontations—such as hydropower, mining, or forestry projects—but as Stamm & Ulloa Contador (2023) note, the banal dimension of everyday life is equally important. Daily practices, routines, and interactions generate imaginaries of climate futures that are both shaped by and shape urban social dynamics, revealing tensions, exclusions, and possibilities that might otherwise remain invisible.

This thesis thus contributes to the scholarship on climate imaginaries by grounding its analysis in urban imagination in the Global South. It draws on discourse analysis to examine what is articulated, what is silenced, and how imaginaries are mobilised. Methodologically, it combines interviews, discourse mapping, and visualisation techniques to reveal archetypes of climate imaginaries across different urban actors.

Ultimately, it argues that climate change is not only an environmental crisis but also a crisis of imagination. Examining how futures are imagined in Santiago reveals how urban actors constrain and expand the horizons of social transformation.

Literature Review: Approaches to the Study of Climate Change and Future Imaginaries

This literature review examines the discursive and conceptual terrain in which imaginaries of climate change futures emerge in urban contexts. It is not intended to provide an exhaustive account of all scholarship on climate change, but rather to identify the dominant discourses, typologies, and debates that shape how actors in cities can think and speak about climate futures. The review first maps the main climate change discourses in cities, including just transition and climate justice, as well as adaptation and resilience narratives. It then examines how climate change has been studied in the Global South, highlighting the connections to imagination processes and how actors make sense of uncertain futures. Following this, it traces research on climate change imaginaries, connecting these studies to broader understandings of future imaginaries. Finally, it presents how future imaginaries of climate change have been studied, including typologies such as apocalyptic, technological, reformist, and transformative visions. In doing so, the review situates this study within ongoing debates while emphasising the need for critical engagement with imaginaries as they are articulated in specific urban contexts, such as Santiago de Chile.

Climate Change as Discourse in the Cities

Academic and policy research has increasingly focused on the critical role of discourse in shaping how climate change is understood, framed, and responded to across various scales, particularly within urban environments (Bulkeley et al., 2013). While questions of justice have long been central to international climate debates, their application to the urban context has historically been less interrogated. Scholars now examine how these discourses are articulated and contested, influencing the assignment of responsibilities, rights, and opportunities for participation in climate decision-making.

The discussion surrounding climate change creates a complex set of meanings where narratives, framings, and representations play crucial roles in shaping public perception (Weingart et al., 2000). These discourses are constructed and shared through various channels, including media, political rhetoric, and scientific communication (Carvalho & Burgess, 2005; Drieschova, 2023; Hasbún-Mancilla et al., 2017). The way climate change is represented significantly influences public understanding and engagement (Dillon & Craig, 2023).

The study of climate change and urban discourses has been addressed by scrutinising how various articulated and contested narratives, encompassing climate justice, fear, and urban governance frameworks (such as ecological security and vulnerability), shape the understanding, assignment of responsibilities, and practical interventions for climate change within cities (Bulkeley et al., 2013; Díaz-Pont, 2023; Heinrichs et al., 2013; Hulme, 2008).

These discourses are influenced by competing narratives and power dynamics involving financial interests, managerial elites, and marginalised groups (Weingart et al., 2000). They may take various forms, such as neoliberal, ecological modernisation, or transformative approaches (Geels, 2020). Within these dynamics, climate justice has emerged as a contested area where activists, policymakers, NGOs, labour unions, and global institutions promote differing definitions and strategies (Jafry, 2018). Machen (2018) emphasises that translating climate science into policy is not a neutral process; it reflects neoliberal ideologies and entrenched power relations. Similarly, Geels (2020) notes a shift in dominant discourses towards highlighting economic opportunities, innovation, and "win-win" solutions, thereby reinforcing established governance frameworks. These larger dynamics provide the context for specific discursive formations (Bulkeley et al., 2013; Davoudi & Machen, 2022), such as modelling, climate justice, and adaptation, to develop.

Cities increasingly act as critical nodes in global climate governance, advancing localised yet globally relevant responses (Bulkeley, 2010; Bulkeley & Broto, 2012; Díaz-Pont, 2023). Urban discourses involve diverse actors—governments, NGOs, businesses, and communities—producing governance approaches that are experimental yet constrained by resource limits (Newell et al., 2015). Urban discourse integrates justice dimensions into adaptation and mitigation, shifting from emission reduction to holistic approaches that connect climate action with social equity (Bulkeley et al., 2013). This reflects both the opportunities and constraints of cities as “laboratories” for climate governance.

Just Transition and Climate Justice

The initial focus on climate justice in academic and policy discourse was primarily at the international level, often overlooking the urban context (Bulkeley et al., 2013). However, as cities have become more prominent in climate action, research has begun to investigate how justice discourses emerge within urban responses to climate change. Emerging as a counterpoint to technocratic approaches, the discourse of just transition and climate justice centres equity and historical responsibility. It highlights how climate change exacerbates socio-environmental inequalities and colonial legacies (Stark et al., 2023). Rooted in environmental justice, postcolonial critique, and feminist political ecology, climate justice challenges market-based or purely technological solutions (Schlosberg & Collins, 2014).

The concept of a just transition, originating with trade unions, has expanded to encompass Indigenous rights, gender equity, and decolonisation, advocating for systemic change that links decarbonization with democratisation and redistribution (McCauley & Heffron, 2018; Newell & Mulvaney, 2013). Methodologically, this discourse privileges experienced and community-based knowledge, challenging the dominance of universal metrics and technocratic expertise.

Critiques within this discourse target market-driven climate governance, which often perpetuates inequality by displacing burdens onto the Global South (Nixon, 2011). Over time, climate justice has become institutionalised within international negotiations, as evidenced by equity references in the Paris Agreement (Dooley et al., 2021). Alongside justice-oriented approaches, another influential discourse has reoriented attention toward adaptation and resilience as pragmatic strategies for navigating inevitable climate impacts. Studies reveal that while explicit concern for justice is often limited at the urban level, notable differences emerge between urban adaptation and mitigation responses, as well as between cities in the Global North and the Global South (Bulkeley et al., 2013; Bulkeley & Betsill, 2013; Heinrichs et al., 2013).

Adaptation and Resilience

The discourse on adaptation and resilience, promoted by organisations such as the UNFCCC, the World Bank, and the IPCC, emphasises the importance of living with the impacts of climate change rather than focusing on preventing them (Khan & Roberts, 2013). Resilience is framed as the capacity to absorb disturbances, guiding urban planning, risk management, and development policies (Meerow et al., 2016). Scenario frameworks, such as Shared Socioeconomic Pathways (SSPs) and Representative Concentration Pathways (RCPs), formalise this discourse by linking modelled futures to different adaptation needs (O'Neill et al., 2017). These tools reflect a managerial perspective that assumes futures can be planned for and managed through technical interventions. However, critics argue that adaptation and resilience efforts often depoliticise vulnerability, shifting the responsibility onto local actors while obscuring structural inequalities (Khan & Roberts, 2013; Okereke, 2010). Therefore, resilience risks becoming a project of responsabilization rather than a transformative one. Some adaptation discourses tend to emphasise the distribution of "rights" to protection from climate impacts, with cities in the Global South also highlighting the importance of procedural justice (Bulkeley et al., 2013). These responses frequently frame justice in terms of individual rights to protection, although collective rights are also articulated. Cities, as concentrated sites of impact and governance innovation, have become key arenas where these discourses intersect and are rearticulated in practice.

Climate Change in the Global South

The analysis of climate change discourses in the Global South has been examined through various critical lenses, highlighting the distinct challenges and perspectives of these regions. Research examines how discourses of justice emerge within urban responses to climate change, highlighting significant differences between the Global North and the Global South (Borie et al., 2019; Bulkeley et al., 2013; Heinrichs et al., 2013). Specifically, studies reveal that while explicit concern for justice is often limited at the urban level, cities in the Global

South more frequently emphasise procedural justice and collective benefits/risks in their adaptation and mitigation discourses (Bulkeley et al., 2013).

Furthermore, studies from the Global South highlight the pervasive influence of colonial legacies on environmental policies and interventions, which often marginalise Indigenous voices and perspectives (Datta et al., 2024). This has led to an increased focus on decolonising meanings of the climate crisis and land-based adaptations, particularly from Indigenous women's perspectives in regions in the Americas and in the Global South as a whole (Coelho et al., 2025; Datta et al., 2024; Whyte, 2017). Such research emphasises the critical role of Indigenous knowledge, culture, and the environment, advocating for their centrality in climate change discourse and policy-making (Whyte, 2017).

Many of these studies, particularly those from the Global South, have also been deeply reflective of imagination and futures, highlighting that climate change represents a "crisis of imagination" (Chao & Enari, 2021a; Hulme, 2008). The problem, as articulated by scholars from these regions, lies in the "exclusionary scope of voices and beings heeded and represented by current dominant climate imaginaries", which are often embedded in Western worldviews (Chao & Enari, 2021b). These dominant imaginaries tend to be depoliticised, linear, universal, homogenous, and anthropocentric, thereby limiting the potential for radical political action and alternative futures (Death, 2022; Kumar et al., 2025b). There is a critique that an "obsessive focus on a crisis-ridden future" often presents an ahistorical picture, overlooking the root causes of climate change in unequal consumption and colonialism.

While there is a strong critique of Western hegemony in shaping climate narratives and solutions (Coelho et al., 2025; Kumar et al., 2025b), there is a recognised need for more academic studies that specifically leverage decolonial, Indigenous, and non-Western imaginations to construct and assess alternative climate futures within policy and governance contexts in the Global South. However, the active integration of these "situated imaginations" (Death, 2022) into the formal study and planning of climate futures in the Global South, moving beyond mere critique of existing models, remains a pressing area for further investigation. This gap highlights the need to shift from merely identifying the limitations of current imaginaries to actively co-producing and analysing diverse, culturally relevant visions of climate futures that can challenge existing power structures and offer truly transformative pathways.

Climate Change Imaginaries and Future Imaginaries

As interest in the relationship between climate change and its discourses grows, the topic of climate imaginaries has emerged as an intriguing subject. The term "climate imaginaries" broadly refers to the socially shared and often institutionally supported mental pictures of

climate change (Death, 2022). This encompasses how people "imagine" their social surroundings in relation to climate, carried in images, stories, and legends.

Levy & Spicer (2013) argue that climate imaginaries are socio-semiotic systems through which societies envision climate futures and orient institutions, practices, and values. They provide coherence to uncertainty but are shaped by socio-historical contexts and power relations. In the study of climate imaginaries, there is much scholarship that seeks to highlight these imaginaries as contested arenas where meanings and visions are negotiated (Celermajer et al., 2024; Davoudi & Machen, 2022; Paprocki, 2019). Some focus on how representations are shaped in public debates (Davoudi & Machen, 2022; Pearce et al., 2019), while others investigate political contestations (Beuret, 2024). Additionally, some researchers link climate imaginaries to the functional aspects of society like production and the development model (Luke, 2015; Wright et al., 2013).

In this field, the study of climate imaginaries overlaps with the study of future imaginaries (Death, 2022; Paprocki, 2019; Whyte, 2017; Wright et al., 2013). Future imaginaries in the context of climate change refer to collective visions of the future, both positive and negative, shaped by climate change science that can inform present deliberation and decision-making (Death, 2022). In this regard, it can be argued that dominant climate imaginaries are largely future imaginaries, focusing on what the future holds due to climate change (Death, 2022; Kumar et al., 2025b). The "crisis of imagination" in relation to climate change is fundamentally about the restrictive nature of these future visions.

Future imaginaries constitute an emerging field examining how societies conceptualise and relate to possible futures (Bazzani, 2023). As conceptualized by Cantó-Milà, & Seebach (2024) in their recent article, future imaginaries are relational assemblage of images, of contents (the what of the imaginaries), as well as figures and forms (how these contents are shaped and moulded) that reciprocally articulate shared, taken-for-granted assumptions, expectations, anticipations, fears, plans and hopes regarding what the future may hold.

In sociotechnical studies, imaginaries of future climate research are linked to governance and cultural meanings, legitimating technological change and national policies (Sovacool et al., 2020). They are often sites of political contestation where multiple, sometimes conflicting, imaginaries coexist. According to the authors, this field has been studied by focusing on the alternative imaginaries of counter-hegemonic groups, such as social movements and civil society organisations. In political conflicts over technology policy, multiple imaginaries can be at play, representing different actors and interests. When the analysis of imaginaries is connected to actors, political conflict, and coalitions, it begins to overlap with the analysis of storylines and frames (Sovacool et al., 2020).

Academic critiques highlight the reductive political consequences of these dominant socio-climatic imaginaries (Chao & Enari, 2021b; Death, 2022; Whyte, 2017). They limit the potential for political discourse to remain open to radical uncertainty and conflict, reducing politics to mere tactics aimed at achieving a singular, envisioned future. This "deadening of the imagination and evisceration of radical politics" leads to an "impersonal, apolitical, and universal perception of climate change" (Death, 2022).

Regarding this line of scholarship, which focuses on the political conditions of these imaginaries, Wright et al. (2013) argue that capitalist structures limit our temporal imagination, creating a "neutralised future" driven by short-term economic goals. Drawing on Jameson (2002), the authors contend that this market-oriented perspective erodes meaningful long-term horizons, urging the development of more imaginative and justice-oriented approaches to climate change. (Celermajer et al., 2024; Wright et al., 2013) argue that the dominant capitalist imaginary, which frames humans as either the cause or victims of climate change, overlooks the diversity of society's desires and constraints. As a result, responses to climate change often narrow to individual actions, technological fixes, and new markets, all shaped by the belief that capitalism is the unavoidable foundation of our social and economic systems.

To capture this diversity, scholars have developed typologies of climate futures, mapping the range of imaginaries that structure responses to climate change.

Typologies of Future Imaginaries of Climate Change

A growing body of literature identifies recurring imaginaries that shape climate change futures (Beuret, 2024; Celermajer et al., 2024; Davoudi & Machen, 2022; Death, 2022; Levy & Spicer, 2013; Wright et al., 2013).

Celermajer et al. (2024) offer one of the most comprehensive typologies, identifying three dominant imaginaries of the future that currently shape global and national responses to climate change. The first is the business-as-usual imaginary, which resists fundamental transformation and ranges from outright denial to incremental adjustments that preserve existing political, economic, and social structures rooted in capitalist modernity. The second is the technological fix imaginary, which accepts the climate challenge but insists it can be resolved through innovation within existing frameworks, including renewable energy, market mechanisms, geoengineering, or even theological salvation. The third is the apocalypse or doom imaginary, which fully recognises the severity of climate breakdown but concludes that meaningful intervention is futile, thus giving rise to discourses of collapse, deep adaptation, and survivalism.

Other contributions expand this landscape. Wright et al. (2013) describe what can be called a reformist or humanitarian imaginary, one in which climate change is framed as a global challenge to be managed through rational reform and elite coordination. This perspective anticipates a smooth transition toward sustainability, where business and political elites lead adaptive processes that do not disrupt existing governance structures. Levy and Spicer (2013) offer another influential classification in the field of energy politics, where they distinguish between fossil fuels forever, climate apocalypse, techno-market, and sustainable lifestyles imaginaries. Their analysis highlights the struggles among these competing visions, showing how extractivist and techno-market imaginaries remain dominant, while more radical alternatives, such as sustainable lifestyles that emphasise post-consumerist values and systemic transformation, remain marginalised.

Taken together, these typologies of imaginaries of the future regarding climate change reveal recurrent trends across the literature. On one end of the spectrum lie status quo imaginaries, such as "business as usual" or "fossil fuels forever," which reject systemic transformation. Reformist imaginaries, such as those described by Wright et al., envision gradual adjustments through rational governance and elite stewardship. Technological imaginaries, including the techno-market and technological fix, place faith in innovation and growth-oriented solutions. Catastrophic imaginaries, such as the apocalypse or doom perspectives, emphasise collapse, fatalism, and the limits of intervention. Ultimately, transformative imaginaries, exemplified by sustainable lifestyles or climate justice perspectives, aim to radically reconfigure the socio-economic order, shifting away from capitalist logics and toward alternative forms of flourishing.

This spectrum illustrates how imaginaries function as sites of contestation over the future, framing not only what is feared or hoped for, but also what forms of action are deemed possible or legitimate. For the purposes of this research, these typologies provide a valuable analytical framework for understanding how climate futures are constructed, mobilised, and negotiated in urban contexts.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework provides the conceptual tools with which this study analyses how urban actors in Santiago de Chile imagine climate change futures and how these imaginaries intersect with broader processes of urban transformation. Whereas the literature review established the discursive landscape, this framework specifies the lenses through which the material will be interpreted. It draws on theories of discourse, social imaginaries, and urban transformation to examine how collective visions of the future are constructed, rendered visible or invisible, and embedded in power relations. Particular attention is given to the notion of social imagination as a political and temporal capacity, the visibility of imaginaries through the opacity/relevance framework, and the ways imaginaries articulate practices, values, and aspirations for just urban futures. By weaving these strands together, the framework positions Santiago not only as a site of climate governance but also as an arena where imagination, discourse, and social transformation converge.

Understanding Social Imagination

The concept of social imagination is foundational to understanding the complex mechanisms by which societies, nations, and ruling classes construct, perceive, and maintain themselves. While many philosophers and social theorists have explored these dynamics, often without explicitly using the term "imagination," their work sets an important precedent for examining contemporary imaginaries. This theoretical background provides a crucial framework for connecting the imaginative dimensions of social life to broader questions in social sciences, politics, and cultural studies, particularly as they relate to issues such as climate change.

The theoretical lineage of imagination in social thought can be traced to two significant, yet initially divergent, contributions. The first is found in the field of psychoanalysis, where Jacques Lacan, in collaboration with W. Granöf, introduced the concept of the "Imaginary" in their 1956 work, *Fetishism: The Symbolic, The Real, and The Imaginary*. The second, and arguably more influential in social theory, is Benedict Anderson's 1983 book, *Imagined Communities*, which explores the nature of nationalism and the emergence of the nation-state as a political entity. The juxtaposition of these two works establishes a core tension in the conceptualisation of imagination: the former rooted in the individual's subjective fantasy, and the latter in a collective, politically-driven reality (Hendrix, 2019).

The Lacanian Imaginary is one of three core concepts in his psychoanalytic theory, which also includes the "symbolic" and the "real." A proper understanding of the structure of personality requires that all three be considered in relation to one another (Hendrix, 2019). For Lacan, the Imaginary refers to a fantasy in which the subject constructs an "ideal ego" or an "image" of themselves out of what they imagine to be the desires and ideals of others, drawing from social symbols and norms. This process is the initial source of self-alienation, as it is based on

an essentially narcissistic relationship in which the subject's self-image is perpetually lacking, a deficiency that can never be rectified. While constructed from social symbols, the Lacanian imaginary ultimately reflects the fantasy of a specific individual, thus necessitating psychoanalytic tools for its examination.

In stark contrast, Anderson (2006) presents an innovative perspective, arguing that nations are formed not through shared lineage or physical proximity, but through the collective imaginations of individuals who see themselves as part of a community. Although most members of a nation-state may never meet, they create a sense of shared identity and connection through technologies like print media. A key aspect of this conceptualization is the interplay of power, as the nation is defined as being inherently limited and sovereign (Anderson, 2006). It is limited because, even with a billion people, it possesses finite boundaries beyond which other nations exist. It is sovereign because it aspires to be free, with the sovereign state serving as a measure of that freedom. Lastly, the nation is viewed as a community, always conceived of as a deep, horizontal camaraderie among its members, despite the presence of inequality and exploitation.

The dynamic relationship among various social sciences, such as psychology, psychoanalysis, and sociology, has fostered a rich environment for developing the concept of imaginaries. This intellectual tradition has incorporated elements from different theoretical perspectives, preserving the interdisciplinary nature that the concept of imaginaries brings to the forefront. This interconnectedness is particularly evident in the work of intellectuals such as Louis Althusser, Cornelius Castoriadis, and Jacques Derrida, who have all examined the link between the "interiority" and "exteriority" of our personal and social worlds (Gilleard, 2018). It is this dynamic movement that has consistently guided the evolution of the concept.

The Social Imaginary

The work of Cornelius Castoriadis stands as a pivotal development in social theory, fundamentally reconceptualising how societies create and maintain themselves through collective imagination. His ambitious project, culminating in the seminal work *L'institution imaginaire de la société* (1975), transcended disciplinary boundaries by drawing insights from psychoanalysis, biology, and sociology to articulate a comprehensive theory of creative imagination operating at both individual and collective levels. Central to Castoriadis's vision was the conviction that philosophy must actively challenge established social imaginaries—the deep-seated beliefs and institutions that structure social reality—to foster genuine democratic deliberation about societal goals and human possibilities.

In his work, Castoriadis (1987) employs the concept of the imaginary to describe how societies construct mythologies around social orders and means of production. He distinguished between the "social institutions" imaginary—society's collective ability to

create meaning—and the "radical imagination," which he saw as an innate human capacity akin to language. Social imaginaries refer to the socially shared and often institutionally supported mental pictures of a society. They provide the meaning and coherence necessary for a society's functions, constantly defining and redefining its needs through collective significations. However, social imaginaries are not rigid; they are ongoing processes shaped by reciprocal actions and interactions, from fleeting encounters to institutionalised organisations. There are intrinsic limits to the social imaginary, imposed by material realities, the coherence of the symbolic framework (rationality), and historical precedent (Castoriadis, 1987).

In contrast to social imaginaries, radical imagination is the "unceasing and essentially undetermined (social-historical and psychical) creation of figures/forms/images (Castoriadis, 1987). It represents an "unbridled creative force that broadens the boundaries of the conceivable", allowing individuals and collectives to perceive "in a thing what it is not, to see it other than it is". Radical imagination is fundamentally future-oriented and is described as the primary imagination, the faculty for producing images that precede any thought and are essential for thought itself (Cantó-Milà & Seebach, 2024). It has the capacity to create *ex nihilo* (out of nothing), suggesting its profound generative power.

These two forms of imagination work together to create networks of meaning. While the existing social order influences these meanings, they are never entirely controlled by it. The structure of society is thus shaped by a complex set of social imaginary significations that provide the very context in which individuals and objects can exist and be understood (Castoriadis, 1987). These significations give meaning to things and establish a threshold of visibility, operating through both the established and the emerging social imaginary.

This complex framework of imaginaries, which shapes our understanding of potential futures and social realities, functions as a powerful tool for illuminating possible trajectories of human development, technological advancement, and societal transformation. Their significance goes beyond mere discursive constructs, as they are deeply intertwined with the exercise of state power and the management of political dynamics. At their core, imaginaries function as interpretive mechanisms that explain why certain visions of scientific and social order gain prominence while others fade into obscurity (Pintos, 2005a). This selective co-production process reflects the influence of existing power structures and cultural narratives. The concept operates on multiple levels: as background horizons that provide tacit social meanings, as symbolic representations that imbue reality with significance, and as interpretive frameworks that shape our understanding of both the present and the future.

The influence of imaginaries is evident across various domains, ranging from fictional narratives to empirical research (Pintos, 2005a). As emphasised in psychoanalytic theory,

they play a crucial role in forming social identities and ideological frameworks while also contributing to our understanding of subjectivity. Their impact can be observed in various contexts, including scientific projections of climate change, urban planning initiatives, migration patterns, and educational systems (Freire, 2017; Pintos, 2005b; Profumi, 2022). These imaginaries are not formed in isolation; they are products of specific cultural, historical, and socio-political contexts. They reflect collective hopes, fears, and assumptions about the future, while simultaneously shaping how social actors construct discourses around order and disorder in society. This dynamic relationship between imaginaries and social reality makes them essential for understanding how societies envision and work toward certain futures while dismissing others.

Urban Imaginaries

The concept of imaginaries is particularly useful for understanding urban environments. Rennie (2017) defines the urban imaginary as a subset of the geographical imaginary, which can be defined as a "taken-for-granted spatial ordering of the world." Within the urban imaginary, various imaginaries connect space and society, identity and place, constructing representations of reality as effective constructs of reality. This conceptualisation builds upon the theorisations of Lacan, Anderson, and Castoriadis, providing a spatial dimension to the concept of imaginaries. Urban imaginaries are a distinct form of geographical imagination that embodies, shapes, and informs power relations in geographical worldviews, expressing general ideas within local contexts.

The interplay between the global and the urban constitutes an active moment in the realisation and failure of these imaginaries. Rennie (2017) presents three main conceptualisations of the urban imaginary. The first, the **global city imaginary**, centres on cultivating international connections and hosting high-profile global events to integrate cities into emerging networks of business practices and cultural values. This vision serves concrete material interests, as concerns with global reputation become powerful tools for building support for major redevelopment projects. The second, the **profitable city imaginary**, while closely intertwined with global city rhetoric, focuses specifically on restructuring labour, housing, and land markets to maximise profit and reduce business taxes. Under this imaginary, the city government transforms from a redistributive mechanism into an engine for private economic growth. The third, the **livable city**, presents an alternative vision devoted to social needs rather than capital accumulation. This umbrella concept encompasses various approaches that share the goal of enabling ordinary people to lead dignified and creative lives, a vision encapsulated by Henri Lefebvre's foundational concept of the right to the city. These three dimensions of urban imaginaries align with Freire's (2017) assertion that urban space transcends mere physical infrastructure to become a complex, imagined territory where inhabitants project their desires, fears, and daily experiences.

Imagination, Temporality, and Social Transformation

As discussed, Castoriadis's proposal highlights the vital role of imagination in facilitating social transformation. In understanding the world, individuals inherently develop the ability to question and challenge established meanings of society (Castoriadis, 1987). This capacity, referred to as radical imagination, represents the human ability to create new meanings and social symbols. It ensures that symbolic social systems can never completely control meaning, as there is always the potential for reinterpretation and innovation. While social influences shape concepts such as stability or justice, these concepts are never fully fixed because human imagination continually opens new possibilities for their redefinition. Castoriadis (1987) positions the radical imagination as essential for unlocking society's capacity for change, distinguishing it from conventional imaginaries that preserve the status quo. The creative power of the radical imagination can be either enhanced or restrained by societal, cultural, and material contexts. For example, contemporary discussions suggest that "late modernity" might be characterised by a "progressive sedation of the radical imaginary" (Cantó-Milà & Seebach, 2024).

Hawlina et al. (2020) conceptualise imagination as the process by which people temporarily disengage from the present to explore the past, alternative worlds, or the future, a looping dynamic nourished and constrained by cultural resources. This dynamic enables both individuals and collectives to escape the "immutable arrow of time" and to rally around shared visions of what was, what should be, or what should not be. Imagination is a crucial element of social movements. Examining social movements through the lens of imagination enables us to analyse their development over time—understanding why they arise, how they spread, transform, and ultimately dissolve (Hawlina et al., 2020).

From the perspective of Pintos (2005b), this imaginative capacity can also be understood through the lens of the relevance/opacity meta-code. Imagination, in this sense, becomes a mechanism for shifting what is foregrounded (relevant) and what remains unseen (opaque) within dominant social imaginaries. By making the opaque visible—such as underlying political assumptions in future planning or the economic bases behind climate policies—imagination disrupts the taken-for-granted structures of meaning, opening new pathways for transformation.

Temporal Framings

Imagination is profoundly and intrinsically determined by temporal framings, which shape its scope, content, and very possibility (Cantó-Milà & Seebach, 2024; Hawlina et al., 2020; Kumar et al., 2025a). It is not merely a static mental faculty but a "looping dynamic" that actively explores the past, alternative worlds, and the future (Hawlina et al., 2020). This dynamic interaction across different timeframes enables individuals and groups to break away from

current situations and unite around aspirations shaped by envisioning both "what was" and "what should or should not be."

As Cantó-Milà & Seebach (2024) note, the future is an arena heavily influenced by emotions such as hope and fear. Contemporary social and political discourses often operate under competing temporal orientations. These frameworks, which Tavori & Eliasoph (2013) describe as temporal landscapes, are the underlying layers and structural conditions that pre-organise the order of time, the calendar, and all future projections. This concept encompasses the general social time orientation, the temporal embedding of social meaning, and the temporal rhythm of a society. Rosa (2013) argues that modern social life is characterised by a fundamental restructuring of time and a "shrinking of the present" due to self-reinforcing dynamics of technological acceleration, social change, and the subjective pace of life. These processes create a need for constant adaptation and growth, leading to pressure to keep up with rapid societal shifts and demands, making time a central and problematic aspect of modern existence. Arguably, within these temporal landscapes of imagination, there's a **hyperpresent** orientation, which is a temporal condition in which the immediacy of the present dominates, subordinating long-term planning to short-term imperatives. Conversely, **hyperfuture** framings foreground distant and abstract futures that may mobilise urgency but risk disconnecting action from everyday lived realities. A key point of contrast here is the notion of **linear temporality**, a conception of time as a sequential, progressive continuum closely associated with teleological narratives of development and progress. Within modernity, linear temporality has been closely associated with teleological narratives of development and progress, framing the future as a predictable extension of the present (Hunfeld, 2022). Such a framing often underpins dominant climate discourses, where futures are projected through extrapolations, scenarios, and models, reinforcing deterministic understandings of social and environmental change.

Hopkins (2019) extends these perspectives through his concept of **temporal fluidity**, offering a transformative approach to fostering social change by encouraging dynamic and imaginative engagement across temporal dimensions. It refers to the ability to move comfortably between the past, present, and future, fostering imagination and action for positive change. Hopkins's framework emphasises the active shaping of future possibilities through collective imagination, drawing meaningfully on past experiences. It introduces the concept of "pop-up tomorrows"—brief, experiential glimpses of desired futures designed to inspire present action. A key aspect of this proposal is the idea of "uncanceling the future," which involves reclaiming the ability to envision positive outcomes rather than succumbing to paralysis caused by anxieties about what lies ahead (Hopkins, 2019).

Imagination and Social Transformation at the Urban Scale

Processes of social transformation in cities can be identified not only in material or institutional change but also in the collective imaginaries that urban actors produce and circulate. Imagination, understood as a shared and socially embedded capacity, shapes how communities envision futures, assign meaning to urban space, and contest dominant narratives (Castoriadis, 1987; Anderson, 1983). As such, collective imaginaries are both indicators of ongoing transformations and engines that propel them.

Transformation becomes visible in imagination through the re-signification of social categories—for instance, when concepts such as “development” or “progress” are redefined in terms of sustainability or justice (Hawlina et al., 2020). It can also be identified in the emergence of alternative horizons, where marginalised groups, artists, or activists articulate counter-imaginaries that challenge dominant urban futures. These imaginaries may not immediately materialise, but act as anticipatory narratives that expand the realm of the possible (Bazzani, 2023).

The intricate relationship between the city and human imagination is paramount, as the material conditions of urban life simultaneously inspire and constrain our imaginative abilities. Cities act as crucibles for ideas by concentrating diverse populations, which encourages encounters with varied perspectives and knowledge systems (Simmel, 1950). This phenomenon, termed *synekism* by Soja (2003) creates a melting pot of innovative ideas and fosters an “imaginative ecology” where the clash of different worldviews generates novel thought and representation. The rich sensory experiences of urban environments provide raw material for creative thinking, and the coping mechanisms developed by city dwellers in response to sensory overload lay the groundwork for envisioning alternative urban possibilities.

However, urban imagination is not without its constraints. Urban power relations inscribe authority into space through planning, architecture, and market logics, creating “imaginative disciplines” that privilege certain futures while marginalising others (Lefebvre et al., 1996; Purcell, 2002). This material rhetoric enforces social hierarchies, and the dominance of capital accumulation imposes structural limitations, narrowing imagination to visions compatible with economic rationality.

Beyond physical infrastructure, cities are also subjective experiences lived daily by residents who project their desires, fears, and practices onto urban space (Freire, 2017). This inhabited dimension generates meaningful locations where identity and belonging take shape through routine practices and emotional attachments (Freire, 2017). The tension between global processes and local meaning-making becomes a generative source of urban imagination, as residents strive to make abstract forces meaningful at an experiential scale. This subjective

dimension reveals the embodied character of imagination; urban inhabitants don't merely think about the city, but feel it, navigate it, and modify it through countless micro-interventions. Practices such as street art, guerrilla gardening, informal settlements, and everyday appropriations of public space represent forms of imaginative practice that exceed formal planning frameworks, embodying Lefebvre's "right to the city"—the right to participate in creating urban space according to the needs and desires of inhabitants.

For Castoriadis (1987), the diversity within cities is essential for "autonomous collective creation"—the capacity of social groups to question existing institutions and create genuinely new forms of organisation based on their needs and desires, rather than inherited traditions or expert impositions. Urban movements embody this dual character by simultaneously critiquing dominant spatial arrangements while experimenting with alternative ways of organising collective life. These uprisings demonstrate the autonomous capacity of urban populations to challenge existing social meanings surrounding property, democracy, and environmental responsibility, while creating new forms of collective organisation. Such movements represent "moments of social creativity" where societies can break free from heteronomous reproduction and institute genuinely new forms. However, this creative potential is always fragile, threatened by the tendency of new institutions to become rigid and by the reassertion of dominant power structures. Therefore, urban movements must cultivate "reflective autonomy"—the ongoing capacity to question their own creations and remain open to further transformation.

Assessing the Character of Imagination

Understanding the transformative potential of urban imagination requires moving beyond simply identifying the content of visions to analysing what might be called the "character of imagination"—how urban actors perceive the possibility of imagining and realising alternative futures within specific contexts (Hawlina et al., 2020; Canto Milla, 2023; Wright et al., 2013). This approach focuses on the felt possibility of realising collective visions and captures the dynamic interplay between imagination, agency, and institutional constraints.

A collective urban vision is **Possible** when imagination is perceived as a strong, actionable force and the vision feels genuinely achievable within the urban context. This character aligns with Castoriadis's (1987) concept of radical imagination, where actors believe in their capacity to shape the city's future. Conversely, a vision becomes **Constrained** when urban futures are imagined, but their realisation feels blocked or unclear. Here, the radical imagination produces concrete alternatives—such as car-free neighbourhoods, community land trusts, or participatory planning initiatives—but these encounter resistance from entrenched institutional structures, regulatory frameworks, or market forces (Harvey, 2008; Purcell, 2002). The friction between imaginative ambitions and structural realities illustrates

how actors navigate complex governance systems while attempting to realise transformative urban visions. When imagination itself is limited, urban actors struggle even to envision alternatives to current conditions, producing a **Blocked** character. In this state, dominant narratives—such as the inevitability of market-driven development or technocratic management—suppress the capacity to think outside established paradigms (Celermajer et al., 2024; Swyngedouw & Wilson, 2014). Post-political governance, which emphasises technical management over democratic decision-making, and temporal orientations dominated by short-term imperatives, further constrain the emergence of new urban imaginaries. Finally, the **Prefigurative** character describes a form of imagination enacted in the present through material and social practices (Fians, 2022).

This framework for assessing imagination's character proves particularly relevant to urban social movements and community activism, where the act of protest, organising, or building alternative urban economies becomes what Castoriadis would recognise as "explicit self-institution" the conscious creation of new urban social forms that prefigure broader transformation.

Analysing Discourse and Imaginaries

The theoretical and methodological framework for this analysis of discourse and imaginaries is based on the work of Pintos (Pintos, 2005a; Pintos & Marticorena, 2012). The author proposes an analysis of discourse and imaginaries that is structured through two distinct layers of observation, which allow for a comprehensive examination of how social realities are constructed. Drawing on the fields of social constructivism and cybernetics, this perspective employs a distinction that is particularly suitable for its investigative purposes: first-order observation and second-order observation.

First-order Observation

The first layer, or first-order observation, focuses on the direct, empirical data presented by participants. This layer seeks to understand what the participant sees, says, or does, capturing the explicit content of interviews, written documents, or actions (Pintos, 2005a). This provides a direct account of their perspective on a given phenomenon. The First-order observation encompasses three key elements: narratives, practices and values. Narratives refer to the structured accounts and stories that social actors construct to make sense of their experiences and the social reality around them (Somers, 1994). These are the explicit storylines, explanations, and accounts that participants provide when describing events, relationships, or phenomena. Values constitute the explicitly stated principles, beliefs, and normative orientations that guide the judgments and actions of social actors (Mayton et al., 1994). In first-order observation, values manifest as the declared priorities, ethical positions, and ideological commitments that participants openly express pin(Pintos & Marticorena,

2012). Practices encompass the observable behaviours, actions, and routines that social actors engage in within their social contexts (Bourdieu, 1990) cited by (Jain, 2015). These are the concrete, empirically verifiable activities that can be documented through direct observation or participant accounts.

Second-Order Observation

The second layer, or second-order observation, moves beyond the surface to examine the underlying mechanisms that legitimise or constrain the first-order data (Pintos & Marticorena, 2012). This involves observing how and from where the first-order observer sees and accounts for reality. The position assumes that observation, under certain circumstances, is the most reliable procedure for accessing "reality." However, observation can never be external to the system itself. The most synthetic definition of observation is that it is a procedure to generate a difference with the help of a distinction, which leaves nothing distinguishable outside (Luhmann, 1984) cited by (Pintos & Marticorena, 2012). This operation involves a distinction, the construction of a mark (on one side of the difference), and the establishment of the inseparable unity of the mark and the difference.

Pintos (2005b) argues that observing is the elaboration of a distinction. This distinction, which has two parts, creates a boundary that forces the observer to choose one side and not the other. This process of marking one side (what is observed) leaves the other part hidden. The distinction itself becomes the "blind spot" that, as the condition of the observation, cannot be observed. This is why a second-order observation is necessary: it is a procedure for a scientific construction of social reality that involves observing an observer in his capacity as an observer, with respect to the mode and manner in which they observe and the distinction they use to make a mark on one side and not the other.

Second-order observation examines three critical dimensions: discursive logics, absences and silences. Discursive logics refer to the underlying organisational principles and rules that structure discourse and make certain statements possible while rendering others unthinkable (Nwadinihu, 2025). They represent the invisible infrastructure of discourse that shapes the boundaries of intelligibility and determines which interpretations appear natural or legitimate. Silences constitute the systematic exclusions, omissions, and unspoken dimensions of discourse that are as significant as what is explicitly articulated (Slemon, 2025). They represent the "unsaid," the meaning of those shapes through their very absence, pointing to alternative possibilities that have been foreclosed or rendered invisible within dominant discursive formations (Slemon, 2025). Absences refer to the structural gaps, missing elements, and non-appearances that characterise social phenomena and discursive formations (Slemon, 2025). Unlike silences, which may be strategically produced, absences point to the constitutive incompleteness of all social systems and discursive structures. They

represent the necessary limits of any discursive formation, highlighting what cannot be incorporated or articulated within existing frameworks of meaning (von Münchow, 2018).

The Opacity/Relevance Framework for Analysing Imaginaries

To operationalise the analysis of social imaginaries, (Pintos, 2005a; Pintos & Marticorena, 2012) proposes the following points: (1) critically examining “evidence” by identifying what is present (presence) in order to uncover what is missing (the blind spot); (2) differentiating between the perspectives from which the subject of study is observed; (3) establishing levels of distinction—self-reference and external reference—through second-order observation (the observation of the observer); and (4) acknowledging that by tracing relevance (presences), one simultaneously reveals opacity (absences). These two dimensions, relevance and opacity, are inseparable aspects of the same presented reality, together shaping different social imaginaries.

Significantly, the author argues that this is not a binary code limited to a specific subsystem; rather, the relevance/opacity distinction operates as a meta-code that traverses all subsystems of a complex society (Pintos & Marticorena, 2012). This meta-code shapes the domains through which social systems generate forms functional to society. For example, in the climate field, what is foregrounded as relevant are emissions, while the economic and productive bases that sustain them remain opaque; in discussions about the future, what is highlighted is planning, while the political positions rooted in ideas of social transformation remain concealed. In both cases, the meta-code structures can be seen and spoken of, as well as what is systematically backgrounded or rendered unsayable. Ultimately, this perspective provides a more analytical framework for analysing imaginaries to examine the discourse of climate change.

Conceptual Approach

This thesis integrates a multifaceted conceptual approach to explore how urban actors represent and envision climate futures in Santiago, Chile. The analytical framework combines several key dimensions.

- Climate change discourse provides the foundational lens, focusing on how language, narratives, and institutionalised framings shape understandings of climate challenges. The analysis identifies three dominant discourses—climate justice, just transition, and adaptation/resilience—that structure how climate issues are communicated and prioritised.
- Building on discourse, the concept of social imaginaries captures the shared meanings and symbolic frameworks through which actors make sense of climate futures. These imaginaries are further nuanced by typologies of future imaginaries, ranging from

status quo and reformist to apocalyptic and transformative visions, which reflect varying degrees of openness to change.

- The visibility/opacity framework (Pintos) is employed as an analytical tool to critically examine what elements of climate imaginaries are made visible or rendered opaque in discourse. This approach exposes not only what is foregrounded but also the silences and absences that shape collective understanding and political possibilities.
- A central contribution of this thesis lies in examining the character of imagination and its temporal framings as analytical dimensions of radical imagination. Rather than limiting the analysis of social movements and urban actors to their political claims or organisational dynamics, the study emphasises how imagination operates through specific temporal orientations (e.g., presentist, long-term, cyclical) and through distinct imaginative “characters” (e.g., pragmatic, utopian, catastrophic). This deepens the analysis of future imaginaries by capturing *how* actors imagine, not only *what* they imagine.
- By foregrounding temporality and the character of imagination, the thesis highlights the conditions under which radical imagination—the capacity to open new horizons of meaning—can emerge in the urban context. This expands existing theories of social imagination, which often privilege technical or representational aspects, by incorporating dimensions that attend to the lived, situated, and political qualities of imaginative practices.

The interconnected concepts outlined in this thesis inform its methodology, particularly in the coding scheme and the structure of the analysis chapters. This approach allows for a thorough examination of how climate imaginaries are constructed, contested, and mobilized in an urban Latin American context. Ultimately, the thesis argues that the imaginative capacity of urban actors—shaped by discourse, typologies, visibility and opacity, temporality, and character—is crucial for understanding the possibilities and limitations of social transformation in the face of climate change.

Methodology

Epistemological Framework

The study of discourse, future, imaginaries, and climate change represents a challenge not only in a theoretical sense but also in its empirical aspects, which is why this research has an exploratory character. The literature review and the empirical revision reveal that in phenomena as complex as climate change and discourse analysis, it is necessary to apply a flexible and open epistemological approach. For that reason, this research is grounded in a constructivist epistemology, which holds that knowledge and meaning are co-constructed through social interaction and embedded in discourse.

Social constructivism, pioneered by Vygotsky (1978) and later developed by Berger and Luckmann (1991), posits that knowledge emerges through social interaction and cultural mediation rather than individual cognition alone (Olssen, 1995). This theoretical framework fundamentally challenges positivist assumptions by emphasising how individuals and groups actively construct meaning within specific cultural and historical contexts, rather than discovering universal laws or objective truths.

In research practice, constructivist methodology prioritises interpretation, context, and subjective experience over standardised measurement. It acknowledges multiple realities and promotes the co-construction of understanding between researchers and participants (Olssen, 1995). This approach recognises that within every society, social imaginaries exist in constant tension and flux. According to Freire (2017), society should not be viewed as just a simple collection of individuals or their interactions; rather, it is a dynamic network of meanings that influences behaviours and beliefs. This perspective aligns with the fundamental idea presented by Berger & Luckmann (1991) that society is a product of human activity, and humans are simultaneously shaped by this social environment. This highlights the reciprocal nature of social construction, where individuals both create society and are shaped by it.

The constructivist epistemology is applied in this research through the use of the imaginaries analysis framework proposed by Pintos (2005a). This approach, grounded in constructivism and discourse theory, views climate change imaginaries not as fixed representations of the future but as dynamic, contested, and mediated visions constructed through language, symbols, and practice.

To analyse these imaginaries, we employ a metacode framework (Pintos, 2005a). This framework posits that social reality is shaped by what is made visible (relevance) and what

remains hidden or unarticulated (opacity). These analytical categories allow us to examine the possible dualities present in the discourse of the interviewed actors.

Through mechanisms like prioritisation, naturalisation, and narrativization, actors construct meaning around the climate future. Observing these mechanisms at a first-order level (what is said) and a second-order level (how it is said, and from which position) enables the identification of social logics, power asymmetries, and silences in discourse (Pintos, 2005a). This dual lens supports the methodological aim of revealing both the visible (dominant imaginaries) and the concealed (absences, contradictions, ignored subjects) in climate discourse.

Methodological Strategy

In this thesis, the qualitative strategy is framed within the Qualitative Social Research, aiming to explore the symbolic and motivational dimensions of the research subjects. This methodology proposes to delve into lived experiences and contextual elements to understand the meanings and structuring of basic experiences, both individual and communal (Canales, 2006). The qualitative approach is characterised by its openness to the research subject's perspective. Qualitative techniques are effective in this space for observing the observed schema of the research subject. Qualitative research is an attempt to "understand" the other, which implies not measuring them against the researcher's yardstick, but instead using the measure that is proper to them and constitutes them as such (Canales, 2006).

Case Study: Santiago de Chile

Santiago de Chile was selected as the focus of this research because it offers a particularly rich terrain where climate imaginaries intersect with urban struggles and political contestation. As Chile's capital and largest metropolitan area, Santiago is the country's political, economic, and cultural hub, located in the central valley along the Mapocho River. Comprising 43 communes, 28 of which are fully urban, the city and its wider metropolitan area host over 5.2 million residents, making it by far the most populous and densely populated city in the country (INE, 2019). Its scale, density, and political significance make Santiago an exemplary site for studying how climate imaginaries are constructed, contested, and mobilised.

At the urban scale, Santiago embodies the contradictions of a Latin American megacity: rapid economic growth and integration into global markets coexist with entrenched social inequality, spatial fragmentation, environmental vulnerability, and governance challenges (Mendes et al., 2020). The city struggles with air pollution, severe water scarcity due to a prolonged megadrought, and urban segregation that leaves poorer populations

disproportionately exposed to environmental risks. These structural inequalities foreground Santiago as a site where the stakes of climate futures are not abstract but intimately tied to everyday life, resource access, and social justice.

Santiago's significance emerges not only from its environmental and demographic features but also from its history of multidimensional urban conflicts (Aliste & Stamm, 2016; Del Romero Renau & Puig Vázquez, 2021). Over the decades, the city has witnessed student protests over education and economic grievances, housing movements advocating for dignified living conditions, territorial disputes surrounding gentrification and displacement, and conflicts over urban infrastructure, such as waste disposal and water management (Aliste & Stamm, 2016; Del Romero Renau & Puig Vázquez, 2021). These material struggles intersect with symbolic and cultural dimensions, notably through urban Mapuche movements that seek to contest historical marginalisation and reassert spiritual, cultural, and territorial claims within the city. This layering of socio-spatial struggles and cultural contestation provides a dense field in which climate imaginaries are articulated, challenged, and negotiated.

The selection of Santiago as the host city for COP25 was intended to mark a milestone in global climate governance, serving as the launchpad for initiatives such as the Race to Resilience and the Race to Zero (Deutsche Welle, 2019; Jimenez-Yañez, 2020). Local actors and the city as a whole invested high hopes in the event, anticipating that it would catalyse new climate campaigns, attract international attention, and generate long-term urban and policy developments (Lehmann & Irigoyen Rios, 2024). Yet, these projections unfolded against a backdrop of profound social tension: Chilean society was undergoing a crisis of identity and collective sense of belonging, exposing the limits of established imaginaries of progress and development (Jimenez-Yañez, 2020).

The Estallido Social, which erupted just weeks before COP25, vividly highlighted this double crisis. Protesters—predominantly high school students, youth facing an uncertain future, and citizens grappling with immediate socio-economic challenges—took to the streets to demand dignity, social rights, and structural reforms. Root causes of the uprising included widespread inequality, insufficient pensions, precarious housing, low wages, inequitable education, and systemic discrimination, particularly affecting historically marginalised groups such as the Mapuche (Jimenez-Yañez, 2020). While the organisers of COP25 projected a forward-looking agenda focused on climate mitigation and global cooperation, these immediate social demands clashed with—and in some ways complemented—the hopes associated with the conference.

This juxtaposition illustrates a **double crisis** in Santiago. On one level, the city confronted a climate crisis that challenged its development model within planetary limits. On another, it faced a local political crisis of meaning, shaped by youth labelled as “**sin futuro**” and by groups

historically excluded from state-led development narratives (Aliste & Stamm, 2016; Del Romero Renau & Puig Vázquez, 2021). Both crises converged in Santiago, revealing the fragility of collective imaginaries and intensifying struggles over what the city—and its society—might envision as a viable future.

Recent political events further intensified Santiago's role as a site of imaginative reconfiguration. The Estallido Social and subsequent constitutional process, although ultimately unsuccessful, marked profound attempts to reimagine the nation's social contract and urban futures. These developments underscore the relevance of Santiago for examining how imaginaries emerge and circulate in urban settings, particularly in contexts of high political mobilisation.

Santiago is also closely integrated into global networks of climate governance. Chile, as an emerging economy within the OECD, participates in international initiatives such as C40 Cities, promoting collaborative approaches to urban climate change mitigation and adaptation (Lehmann & Irigoyen Rios, 2024). While the city's brief role as host of COP25 symbolised its visibility in international climate politics, local experiences demonstrated that global frameworks are contested, negotiated, and reinterpreted on the ground. This tension between global visibility and local realities highlights Santiago as a city where climate imaginaries are simultaneously projected, resisted, and reconfigured.

By focusing on Santiago, this study proposes the concept of “urban imaginaries archetypes” as a way to synthesise and compare the diverse ways actors envision climate futures. These archetypes offer a conceptual lens for examining patterns, divergences, and tensions in the collective imagination, enabling the tracing of how imaginaries intersect with political contestation, social inequality, and environmental vulnerability. Santiago's combination of high political mobilisation, historical marginalisation of specific groups, and acute environmental challenges makes it uniquely suited to explore these dynamics. It is precisely this convergence of local contestation and global projection that enables a nuanced understanding of how urban actors articulate, negotiate, and contest climate futures, providing insights that are both locally relevant and applicable to comparative research in other urban contexts.

Research Design

The research adopts a qualitative, exploratory design informed by grounded theory and discourse analysis. The main goal is to understand how urban actors envision the future, considering climate change, and to examine the connection between this imaginative process and social transformation.

Main research question: *How are urban actors in Santiago imagining the future in relation to climate change, and what do these imaginaries reveal about the possibilities and limits of social transformation at the urban scale?*

Three guiding questions structured the research design:

- *What characterises the discourses of climate change and how do they shape the semantic field in Santiago?*
- *What types of imaginaries of the future regarding climate change can be identified among urban actors in Santiago?*
- *How do these imaginaries articulate practices, temporal framings, and values that reflect broader processes of collective imagination and urban social transformation?*

To address these questions, the research question was operationalized using the conceptual framework in several steps. First, the main research question was divided into three sub-questions. Next, these sub-questions were analyzed and further divided into analytical dimensions. Finally, these dimensions were linked to categories of group codes and specific codes, which were applied in the qualitative and thematic analysis using Atlas.TI software.

Table n°1: Operationalisation of Research Question, dimensions and categories for coding

Research Question	Sub question	Dimension	Sub-dimension	Category for coding
<i>How are urban actors in Santiago imagining the future in relation to climate change, and what do these imaginaries reveal about the possibilities and limits of social transformation at the urban scale?</i>	<i>What characterises the discourses of climate change and how do they shape the semantic field in Santiago?</i>	Discourse Impact	Observational layers	First-order observation
				Second-order observation
		Social perception	Discourse emphasis	Relevance
				Opacity
		Descriptors	Positionality	Type of actor
			Spatial scale	Scale
	<i>What types of imaginaries of the future regarding climate change can be identified among urban actors in Santiago?</i>	Future Imaginaries	Types of Imaginaries	Status Quo
				Technological
				Catastrophic
				Transformative
				Reformist

	<i>How do these imaginaries articulate practices, temporal framings, and values that reflect broader processes of collective imagination and urban social transformation?</i>	Character of Imagination		Character of Imagination
		Temporal Framing		Temporal Framing
		Social Transformation		Social Transformation

Source: Own elaboration

Actor Selection and Sampling Strategy

The actor selection process followed a purposive and snowball sampling strategy. Initial participants were identified through existing climate action networks, such as the Sociedad Civil por la Acción Climática (SCAC). Key informants were selected based on their expertise in urban studies, environmental sociology, and community organisation to provide contextual understanding. Gender criteria were utilised to compromise equity and inclusive representation,

Four main actor groups were identified: Social Organisations Related to Climate and Urban Action, comprising formal NGOs and civil society groups working within institutional frameworks; Youth Movement, encompassing both traditional climate activism (e.g., Fridays for Future) and non-traditional movements, such as animal rights and vegan collectives. Another group, Artists and Cultural Workers, comprises individuals who use creative and affective tools to envision and communicate alternative futures. And finally, Experts and Academic Researchers related to climate change, urbanism, sustainability, social organisations, sociology and universities.

Participants represented various districts within Santiago, including central areas and peripheral communities, ensuring a diverse perspective on urban climate experiences across socioeconomic contexts.

Table n°2: Sample of interviewees and their affiliations

Type of actor	Secondary type	Affiliation	Gender
Enviromental/ Urban social organisation		ONG FIMA	Male

Enviromental/ Urban social organisation		Fundación Basura	Female
Enviromental/ Urban social organisation	Youth movement	LCOY	Male
Enviromental/ Urban social organisation	Youth movement	LCOY	Female
Enviromental/ Urban social organisation	Youth movement	Fridays for Future	Female
Artists and Cultural workers	Urban social organisations	Asamblea feminista de mujeres de Macul	Female
Artists and Cultural workers		N/A	Male
Experts and Academic Researchers		Sociology Department, University of Chile	Male
Experts and Academic Researchers		Sociology Department, University of Chile	Male
Experts and Academic Researchers	Enviromental social organisation	RedPE (Energy poverty network)	Female
Experts and Academic Researchers	Enviromental Urban social organisation	Red de Campus Sustentables,	Female
Experts and Academic Researchers	Urban social organisation	Cité NGO, NEGEA	Male

Source: Own elaboration

All interviews followed a semi-structured format based on the interview guide presented in Annexe 1, with adaptations made for each participant category. Interviews were audio-recorded with the participants' informed consent and ensured anonymity.

Data Collection

Semi-structured interviews were the primary data collection method used in this research. This approach offers greater flexibility than structured interviews, as it "starts with planned questions that can be adjusted to the interviewees. Its advantage lies in the possibility of adapting to subjects with enormous possibilities to motivate the interlocutor, clarify terms, identify ambiguities and reduce formalities" (Díaz-Bravo, Torruco-García, Martínez-Hernández, & Varela-Ruiz, 2013). The use of semi-structured interviews aligns particularly well with the exploratory nature of this thesis and its research objectives.

The interview protocol evolved iteratively throughout the fieldwork process. As data collection progressed from February to August 2025, the initial question framework was continually refined based on emerging themes and theoretical saturation. Topics within the analytical construct were adapted to research needs by modifying question formulations or adding and removing themes as content saturation was achieved in specific areas.

Data collection encompassed twelve interviews with participants representing three distinct actor categories: environmental organisations (Fundación Basura, Fundación FIMA), youth climate movements (Fridays for Future Santiago, LCOY), independent artists, and academic experts from Universidad de Chile. While the interview protocol was tailored to each group's expertise and perspective, all interviews maintained a core analytical structure exploring participants' personal and professional connections to climate issues, their perceptions of current urban climate challenges in Santiago, their future climate imaginaries through a 30-year and a 50-year temporal projection, and their strategies for climate communication, public engagement, and systemic transformation.

All interviews were conducted in Spanish, audio-recorded with informed consent, and transcribed verbatim to preserve linguistic nuances and cultural specificities essential for subsequent discourse analysis. The coding process was conducted in English to facilitate the presentation of the results.

Analytical Tools and Strategy

The analytical process consisted of systematic coding of interview transcripts using Atlas.ti. The approach combined inductive and deductive coding stages:

1. **Initial Open Coding:** Key fragments were identified and tagged with preliminary codes reflecting emerging patterns. This phase was flexible and exploratory.
2. **Code Refinement and Categorisation:** Codes were organised into hierarchical families based on the imaginary typology, actor types, and discursive features. Ambiguous or overlapping codes were clarified through memo writing and cross-referencing.

The analysis strategy involved following the operationalisation explained earlier. The first step was to analyse the discourse and its characterisation by examining three main dimensions: discourse impact, social perception, and descriptors. These codes capture the primary perceptions of the discourse by considering both first and second-order observations. Next, we evaluated the relevance and opacity of the topics by coding their visibility within the discourse. Finally, it was analysed in terms of general descriptors, such as positionality, the type of actor, and the spatial scale, to provide an in-depth characterisation of the climate change discourse.

Table n°3: Discourse characterisation and Semantic analysis for coding

Dimension	Category	Codes
Discourse Impact	Observational layers	First-order observation
		Second-order observation
Social perception	Discourse emphasis	Relevance
		Opacity
Descriptors	Positionality	Type of actor
	Spatial scale	Scale

Source: Own elaboration

The analysis then examined how these imaginaries were manifested across different actor categories by identifying characteristic language patterns, solution framings, and future projections. Finally, imaginaries were classified into five primary types—Status Quo, Technological, Catastrophic, Transformative, and Reformist—each containing specific subcategories that capture distinct approaches to climate futures, ranging from business-as-usual frameworks to radical systemic transformation narratives.

Table n°4: Future Imaginaries Typology and Semantic analysis for coding

Types of Imaginaries	Subcategory	Indicative Terms / Phrases
Status Quo	Business-as-Usual	"growth", "efficiency", "carbon market", "adaptation without change"
	Fossil Progressivism	"petroleum as essential", "development", "no alternative"
	Corporate Responsibility	"green brands", "sustainability is profitable", "consumer change"
Technological	Techno-Optimism	"solar panels", "innovation", "smart city", "climate tech"
	Technological Fix	"AI will solve it", "geoengineering", "carbon capture"
	Rational Management	"efficiency", "planning", "data-driven decisions"
Catastrophic	Climate Collapse	"there's no future", "ecocide", "societal breakdown"

	Deep Adaptation	"resilience", "collapse-ready", "post-capitalist survival"
	Eco-Miserabilism	"nothing works", "human failure", "too late"
Transformative	Communitarianism	"mutual aid", "local economies", "cooperatives", "food sovereignty"
	Degrowth / Simplicity	"less is more", "voluntary simplicity", "post-consumer"
	Political-Ecological Change	"justice", "redistribution", "post-capitalist transitions"
Reformist	Institutional Reform	"transition plans", "climate governance", "green policies"
	Moral Reform	"education", "raising awareness", "ethical leadership"

Source: Own elaboration

Fragments were matched with these imaginaries using either explicit references or inferred logic from semantic proximity. For example, the phrase “I think green hydrogen will save us” was coded as Technological Solution → Techno-Optimism and assigned a global scale with an affect of hopeful certainty.

To understand how interviewees position their imaginaries within time, an additional layer of temporal framing was applied. These codes capture the perceived continuity, disruption, or feasibility of imagined futures in relation to historical and present conditions.

Table n°5: Temporal Framing Typology and Semantic analysis for coding

Temporal Code	Framing	Description
Linear Temporality		Future imagined as a logical extension of present trends (planning, projection)
Temporal Rupture		Disruption of continuity (e.g., dictatorship, political crisis)

Temporal Fluidity	Past, present, and future blend into one another (blurred or entangled time)
Hyperpresent	Present urgency overrides capacity to imagine or plan long-term
Prefigurative Time	Futures are enacted through present actions and values

Source: Own elaboration

Another layer of analysis assessed the viability, feasibility, or limits of collective envisioning. These codes examine how actors perceive the capacity of society to imagine and realise alternative futures.

Table n°6: Character of Imagination Typology and description

Character of Imagination Code	Description
Possible	Imagination is strong and actionable; collective vision feels achievable
Constrained	Futures are imagined, but realisation feels blocked or unclear
Blocked	Imagination itself is limited; actors struggle to even envision alternatives
Prefigurative	The imagined future is already being enacted in everyday practices

Source: Own elaboration

These simplified but conceptually rich codes enable a nuanced mapping of how imagination operates—whether as inspiration, frustration, or embodied practice—in shaping Santiago’s climate discourse.

Table n°7: Social Transformation and description

Category	Description
Social Transformation	Discourse segments examining how actors project systemic change and envision planning alternative socio-ecological futures. Coded when participants discuss fundamental shifts in power structures, long-term projections of urban transformation, democratic planning processes, and collective agency in shaping change. Examples include

	references to "radical imagination," "right to the city," projections of "alternative socio-ecological orders," "democratic control over urban planning," and visions that bridge "top-down planning and bottom-up change."
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Source: Own elaboration

The final layer of analysis involved a qualitative examination of discourse segments coded as "transformation" to understand how climate imaginaries reflect broader processes of imagination and collective envisioning of social change. This analytical phase moved beyond categorisation to explore the underlying mechanisms through which different actors construct visions of systemic transformation. The analysis examined how transformation narratives embed specific assumptions about transformation itself, transition processes, systemic change, temporality, agency, and scale, revealing the ways in which climate imaginaries serve as vehicles for broader social and political projects. By analysing the language, metaphors, and causal logics within transformation-oriented discourse, this layer illuminated how collective imagination operates as both a constraint and enabler of social change, demonstrating how different groups mobilise imaginative resources to envision and legitimise alternative futures beyond current socio-ecological arrangements.

Methodological Challenges and Emergent Insights

The study of "future imaginaries of climate change" presented significant methodological challenges that became important findings in their own right. The initial research question—identifying urban actors who imagine futures regarding climate change—proved more complex than anticipated, revealing important insights about how climate futures are conceptualised and articulated in urban contexts.

The first significant finding was the inadequacy of desk-based research methods for identifying relevant actors. Preliminary attempts to identify climate future-oriented organisations through traditional research channels (online searches, institutional mapping) yielded a sample that diverged substantially from the network of actors revealed through immersive fieldwork. This discrepancy highlighted the need for an embedded, context-sensitive research approach that extends beyond formal climate change terminology and institutional frameworks.

Through progressive immersion in Santiago's urban context and conversations with initial contacts, it became evident that the climate change discourse extends well beyond explicit terminology and formal environmental organisations. The snowball sampling method proved essential in uncovering this hidden landscape of actors engaged in climate future imaginaries without necessarily employing conventional climate change language.

A notable example was the emergence of veganism and animal rights groups as significant actors in climate future imaginaries. These groups did not appear in initial searches using climate change terminology yet featured prominently in interview references and demonstrated substantial engagement with alternative future visions that have profound climate implications. Their absence from traditional climate discourse despite their relevance to future environmental scenarios underscores the limitations of keyword-based approaches to studying climate imaginaries.

The research initially sought to engage with established climate action organisations, specifically the Sociedad Civil por la Acción Climática (SCAC). However, fieldwork revealed significant organisational fatigue within Chilean civil society, largely attributed to the sociopolitical context of constitutional reform attempts and the 2019 social uprising. This necessitated a methodological recalibration to capture a more comprehensive picture of social imaginaries beyond institutionalised organisations. The adjusted approach incorporated interviews with key informants and experts in organisational and youth dynamics, and implementation of snowball sampling to identify relevant actors and lastly, the development of a consistent interview structure adapted for different stakeholder groups

This methodological insight holds theoretical significance for the broader study of climate imaginaries. It suggests that climate futures are being imagined and constructed through diverse conceptual frameworks and vocabularies that may not align with dominant scientific and policy discourse. Therefore, understanding the full spectrum of climate future imaginaries requires attentiveness to alternative framings and varied entry points into discussions of environmental futures.

Ethical Considerations

All participants were informed about the research objectives, their right to withdraw from the study, and the confidential handling of their data. To protect identities, interviews were anonymised using alphanumeric codes. Both verbal and written consent were obtained before recording the interviews. An important ethical consideration related to this thesis is that it is written in English, which is my second language; my native language is Spanish. To assist with grammar corrections, I utilised AI tools, specifically Grammarly for Students¹.

Methodological Limitations

The research process was shaped by several limitations. First, while the sample of actors was diverse, it was limited in size and may not fully represent the wide range of urban imaginaries in Santiago. Additionally, snowball sampling can lead to homogeneity within the sample

¹ For more information: <https://www.grammarly.com/students>

network. Discourse-based analysis also cannot capture all of the performative or material dimensions of climate action. Emotional expressions were coded interpretively, which introduces a degree of subjectivity.

Despite these limitations, the combination of interview data, contextual observations, and discourse analysis provides a solid foundation for understanding the various climate futures envisioned in Santiago de Chile. By treating Santiago as the complete empirical focus and concentrating solely on its actors and discourses, this methodology chapter offers a comprehensive framework for analysing climate imaginaries as socially constructed, situated, and contested visions of urban futures.

Empirical Insights: Urban Actors and Climate Imaginaries in Santiago

This section presents the empirical findings from qualitative interviews with a range of urban actors in Santiago de Chile, including NGOs, youth activists, and artists. The analysis addresses the main research question:

How are urban actors in Santiago imagining the future in relation to climate change, and what do these imaginaries reveal about the possibilities and limits of social transformation at the urban scale?

The findings are organised based on the research sub-questions outlined in the methodology section. The main research question was broken down into three sub-questions, each with its respective dimensions, categories, and group codes. The results are structured around three analytical questions.

The first section addresses the question, *“What characterises the discourses of climate change and how do they shape the semantic field in Santiago?”* It begins by presenting an overview of the main topics discussed in the interviews regarding climate change as a discourse. This is followed by contextualising the spatial scale in which the interviewed actors approach the discourse. A deeper understanding is then provided through the use of first-order and second-order analytical categories. Finally, it discusses topics related to opacity and relevance within the discourse.

The second section focuses on the question, *“What types of imaginaries of the future regarding climate change can be identified among urban actors in Santiago?”* It offers a brief overview of the semantics associated with these imaginaries, categorises them by actor types, and describes how participants interpret each type of imaginary.

The third section examines the question, *“How do these imaginaries articulate practices, temporal framings, and values that reflect broader processes of collective imagination and urban social transformation?”* It includes a brief description of how actors envision imagination in their practices and discourse, categorised by actor type. Furthermore, it examines how temporal framing is presented by each type of actor and offers an overall perspective on how social transformation is collectively addressed by all actors.

The chapter concludes with a synthesis of the main trends identified in each section and in the dataset, explicitly linking these findings back to the main research question. The analysis is supported by semantic mapping and typological visualisations generated in Atlas.ti, which help illustrate the relationships between categories and the distribution of imaginaries across actor types.

Section 1 – Characterisation of Climate Change Discourse

Research sub-question: *What topics and silences characterise climate change discourses among urban actors in Santiago?*

The analysis of climate change discourse among Santiago's urban actors reveals a complex landscape of competing narratives and framings. Following the analytical framework, this section presents findings that move from broad discourse characterisation to a detailed examination of transformative visions. Word cloud analysis provided the first glimpse into the most prominent concepts and terminology within the discourse, revealing key thematic clusters and linguistic patterns that characterise how different actors frame climate challenges and solutions. The analysis then contextualises these findings through spatial scale coding, examining how actors position climate issues across local, national, and global dimensions. The analysis proceeds to examine climate change discourses through first-order observations of practices, narratives, and values across different actor types, followed by second-order observations that uncovered discursive logics, notable absences, and significant silences within each organisational category. Finally, the analysis evaluates topics of relevance and opacity, coding their visibility and prominence within participant narratives.

Figure n°1: Climate Change discourse wordcloud



Source: Own elaboration using Atlas.ti views feature

The word cloud visualisation reveals that climate discourse in Santiago is fundamentally oriented around transformation and organisational change. The most prominent concepts centre on "transformación" (transformation), "organización" (organisation), "territorio" (territory), "formar" (create), "cambiar" (change), "futuro" (future), "gente" (people), "ciudad" (city), and "Chile", indicating that Santiago's climate actors conceptualise their work as inherently transformative and deeply rooted in territorial and urban contexts specific to the Chilean experience.

The semantic landscape demonstrates that climate discourse is not merely technical or policy-oriented but rather embedded within broader frameworks of social and organisational transformation. The prominence of "gente" (people) and "ciudad" (city) suggests a fundamentally urban and social approach to climate issues, while the centrality of "Chile" indicates a strong national identification in framing climate challenges and responses.

Secondary conceptual clusters around "activismo" (activism), "juventud" (youth), "sustentabilidad" (sustainability), "urgencia" (urgency), "naturaleza" (nature), and "responsabilidad" (responsibility) reveal the multi-dimensional character of climate discourse. These terms suggest that Santiago's climate actors integrate activist practices, generational perspectives, environmental concerns, and ethical considerations into their understanding of climate issues, rather than treating them as separate domains.

Spatial Scale Analysis

The spatial scale analysis reveals a distinctly urban-centred approach to climate discourse among Santiago's actors, with urban-level engagement dominating across all actor types. The urban scale was the most relevant semantic for most of the actors. The first interesting finding is characterising Santiago, the city, as something unique, like a space for experimentation, with possible and impossible scenarios.

"Something super unique is happening in Santiago" (Youth movement/Environmental org)

"Santiago will never be affected" (Youth movement/Environmental org)

"All these things happen in Santiago" (Urban NGO)

Claims about the condition of the urban area and its territory were identified as creating a specific narrative. In this regard, connections with the city were made to make a point, from a position of belonging to or not belonging to this space; it was very much mentioned. Additionally, another point is the scale within the city, with numerous mentions of the neighbourhood as an element of identification.

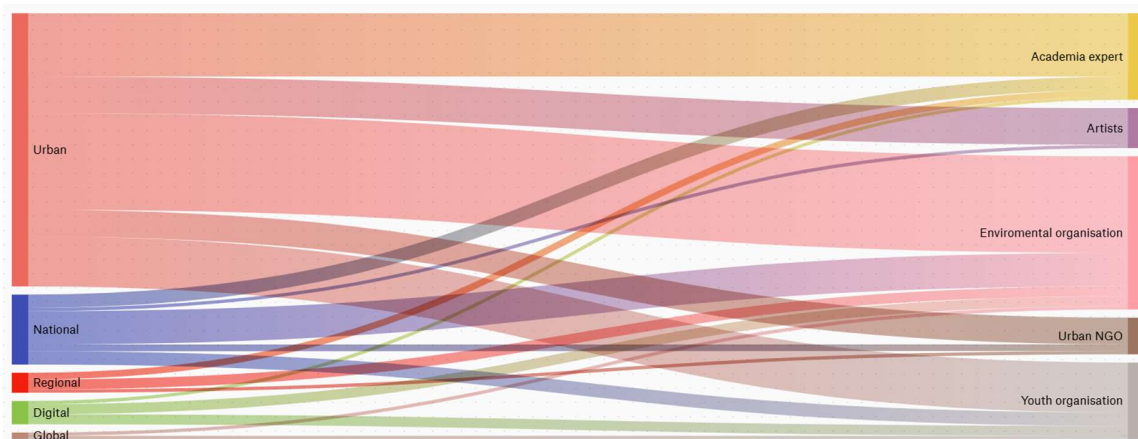
*“In the disconnected city, I seem to reclaim that feeling that the territory is mine”
(Youth movement/Environmental org)*

“The neighbourhood in urban areas is also a form of territory” (Urban NGO)

“Activism in the urban area is super diverse, as if a little bit of everything happens. I also have colleagues and friends who give their all in their neighbourhood and continue with the community garden and the organisation of the neighbours and now that the fires are coming, we make firebreaks and now that the rains are coming” (Expert)

Regarding the engagement with the spatial scale and its reflection, environmental organisations emerge as the most spatially engaged actors, showing the highest activity at urban levels while also maintaining significant national-level engagement. This pattern suggests that environmental organisations serve as bridges between local urban realities and broader national climate politics.

Figure n°2: Sankey chart of Spatial scale and Types of actors



Source: Own elaboration using Atlas.ti views feature.

Academia experts demonstrate strong urban engagement combined with notable national-level activity, reflecting their role in connecting place-based research with broader policy and academic networks. Youth organisations show concentrated urban engagement with some national reach, suggesting their activism is primarily locally grounded but connects to national movements and concerns.

Urban NGOs, despite their organisational focus on urban issues, show moderate urban engagement, possibly reflecting resource constraints or more specialised organisational mandates. Artists demonstrate primarily urban-focused discourse, consistent with their embedded cultural and community practices within Santiago's urban context.

The regional scale receives limited attention across actor types, with only environmental organisations, academia experts, and urban NGOs showing moderate engagement. This pattern suggests that regional governance and regional environmental issues are less central to climate discourse in Santiago, possibly reflecting the centralised nature of Chilean governance or the immediate urgency of urban-level concerns.

Digital and global scales receive minimal attention across all actor types, indicating that Santiago's climate discourse and its attention remain primarily preoccupied by local and national contexts rather than global climate governance or digital climate solutions.

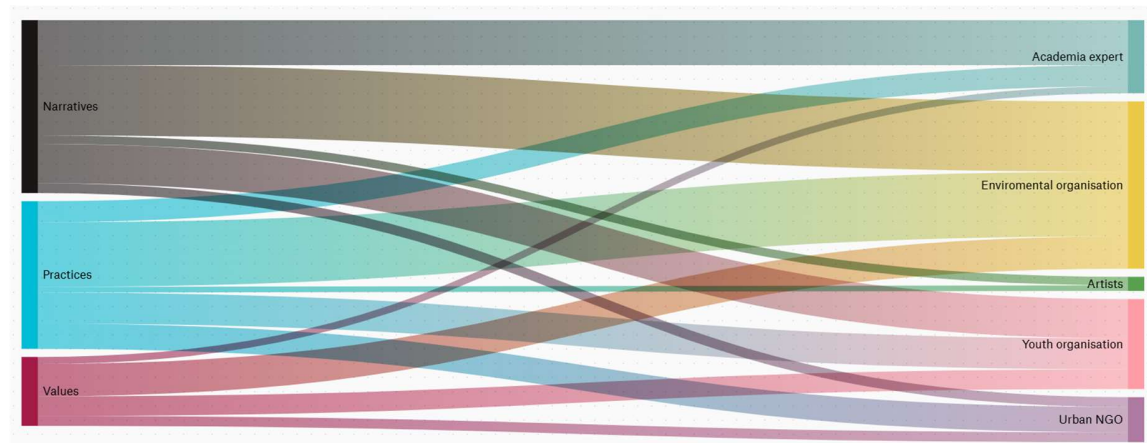
First-order observations: Narratives, Practices and Values

The first-order analysis reveals that climate change discourse among urban actors is articulated through three main dimensions: narratives, practices, and values. While narratives and practices emerge as highly visible and widely mobilised, values tend to appear more indirectly, often expressed as political positioning or through deeper epistemological or cosmological stances. For instance, some actors frame climate change within holistic worldviews that place society as an integral part of a socio-ecological system.

Across actor types, narratives display a high degree of polysemy, reflecting the coexistence of multiple, sometimes competing, storylines. Practices are also polysemic, though more straightforward to trace: through action, actors find accessible ways to articulate their climate engagement, as seen in the strategies of youth groups or urban NGOs. By contrast, values tend to surface less frequently in explicit discourse, but when they do, they ground climate imaginaries in political, ethical, and ontological orientations.

Environmental organisations demonstrate the most comprehensive engagement across practices, narratives, and values. Their discourse encompasses detailed storytelling about climate challenges and solutions, extensive description of practical interventions, and explicit articulation of environmental and social values, suggesting a holistic approach to climate engagement that integrates multiple dimensions of action and meaning-making.

Figure n°3: Sankey chart of First Order observations (narratives, practices and values) and Type of Actor



Source: Own elaboration using Atlas.ti views feature.

Academic experts employ a narrative-heavy approach to climate discourse, emphasising analytical frameworks, research findings, and theoretical perspectives, while maintaining a more limited engagement with practical implementation and explicit value articulation. This pattern reflects their institutional role as knowledge producers and interpreters rather than direct implementers of climate action. In this sense, they present elaborate ideas about the discourse of climate change as a whole.

"There is no intensity in the speech." (Academia Expert)

"The climate change discourse doesn't stick, in general." (Academia Expert)

"The subject's narrative is exhausted because that relationship inhibited questions, for example, my body. How does my body relate to the world? My breathing, my touches. What was inhibited in modern discourse was a further question about cognition". (Academia Expert)

"The speeches are there, it depends a little on what is observed, on knowing how to read them." (Academia Expert)

Youth organisations demonstrate strong engagement with both narrative construction and practical action, combined with moderate articulation of value. Their discourse suggests an approach that balances storytelling about climate urgency and generational responsibility with concrete organising and action strategies, while maintaining explicit political positioning on climate justice and social transformation.

"Climate change narratives have been hijacked into a language that is super technocratic, even technical." (Youth movement/Environmental org)

"With these actions, with climate change, with change in general, when people no longer consider young people." (Youth movement/Environmental org)

"Climate change, we are clear, exists because of the economic development system, patriarchy and capitalism." (Youth movement/Environmental org)

"Climate activism is super elitist." (Youth movement/Environmental org)

"Climate change is not an environmental problem; it is a development problem."

Urban NGO and environmental NGOs show a balanced yet moderate engagement across all three dimensions, suggesting a pragmatic approach that integrates narrative, practice, and values without an intensive focus on any single dimension. This pattern may reflect their role as intermediary organisations that must balance multiple constituencies and practical constraints at many levels, also showing that they acknowledge the need for dialogue in different sectors.

"I think we should adjust towards that to reach a more ideal society on issues of climate change and how we can address it in our daily lives." (Urban NGO/Environmental NGO)

What is missing is that part of giving it the respective urgency and personal responsibility of each person, of each actor in this situation." (Urban NGO/Environmental NGO)

"Dialogue in general is always very helpful in how we can work together to move forward." (Urban NGO/Environmental NGO)

Artists show the most limited engagement across these analytical categories, which likely reflects different modes of expression and communication that may not translate directly into verbal articulation of practices, narratives, and values during interviews. This finding is particularly interesting, as the first-order observation reveals less engagement, accompanied by more absences and silences, all of which are categories from the second-order observational layer. Their climate engagement operates more through aesthetic, symbolic, and experiential dimensions that require alternative analytical approaches.

"We see nature as natural resources but we have a hard time seeing it as intellectual resources." (Artist)

"Here in Macul in particular, or closer to the city, there is not much talk about climate change." (Artist)

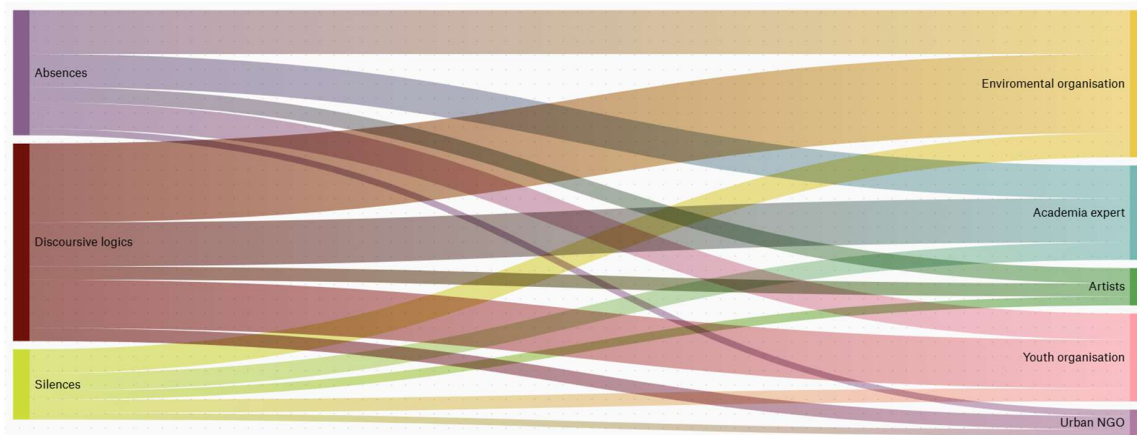
“There is a type of space that seems not to be in use, as if it is not an active use, but rather passive and that is like the space of contemplation, which seems to make minds that are constantly seeking productivity, believe that this space is in disuse.”
(Artist)

Overall, the first-order observations reveal a rich and complex landscape of climate engagement in Santiago, where narratives and practices are highly visible and interwoven, while values tend to appear more implicitly, reflecting political, ethical, or epistemological orientations. Actors articulate climate change through multiple strategies, storytelling, practical action, and, in some cases, aesthetic or symbolic expression—highlighting how engagement is shaped both by what is explicitly said and done. Practices provide accessible entry points to the discourse, whereas narratives remain polysemic and more open to interpretation. These patterns underscore that understanding urban climate imaginaries requires attending not only to explicit articulations but also to the subtler, underlying dimensions of meaning that guide perception and action. This sets the stage for the second-order observations, where we turn to these less explicit semantic layers, examining silences, absences, and tacit structures that shape the climate discourse beyond what actors directly express.

Second-order observations: Discursive logics, absences, and silences

The second-order analysis uncovers subtler patterns of engagement, avoidance, and omission in climate change discourse among Santiago’s urban actors. In this layer, discursive logics—how actors explain, justify, and structure their discourse—emerge most prominently, followed by absences, and finally silences. Discursive logics reveal the reasoning and frameworks behind what actors express, while absences point to topics that are acknowledged yet underexplored, and silences indicate elements that, according to the literature, should appear but are not mentioned, often related to political power dynamics or structural constraints.

Figure n°4: Sankey chart of Second order observations (discursive logics, absences and silences) and Type of Actor



Source: Own elaboration using Atlas.ti views feature.

Environmental organisations and Urban NGOs demonstrate the most intensive engagement with underlying discursive logics, while simultaneously exhibiting the highest levels of discursive absences. Regarding the discourse logics, elements of responsibility, urgency and practices came into the discussion.

“There are these two ideas, of how politics and local, municipal decisions, for example, define a time horizon of how things are going to turn out in the long term, and the more territorial experience on these different, more physical scales, which consolidate that, finally.” (Urban NGO)

“The speeches are there, it depends a little on what is observed, on knowing how to read them.” (Environmental NGO)

When discussing absences, it's important to consider societal processes like social belonging, identity, and the constraints posed by funding and institutional barriers. This indicates that their holistic approach to climate discourse reveals both the depth of their engagement and the complexity of the issues they are trying to address comprehensively.

“Since the constituent process itself, this lack of Chilean collective identity.” (Environmental NGO)

“The challenge of making this new sustainability plan, the first thing we thought about was how do we do it for two years, for three years, for how long?” (Environmental NGO)

The high level of discursive logic among environmental organisations indicates their sophisticated understanding of strategic frameworks for understanding climate challenges. However, their equally high level of absences suggests that even the most engaged climate

actors identify limits in addressing all relevant dimensions of climate issues, possibly due to strategic focus, resource constraints, or the inherent complexity of climate challenges.

Youth organisations demonstrate substantial engagement with discursive logics, indicating their development of a strong discourse about what they believe is possible regarding climate change. They tend to be more direct in describing the logics of climate change discourse. Their moderate levels of absences and silences suggest a more direct political approach than environmental organisations, possibly reflecting their particular focus on generational justice and transformative politics. Emergent topics arise, such as their discursive differentiation from other organisations, or the link with practices and values, including the commitment to veganism and animal rights as a way to relate to climate change struggles.

“Imagining a possible future is a perverted act at this time, especially with the rise of fascism and the far right that want to take us back to the times of a year ago and repeat a world war like never before.” (Youth organisation/Environmental organisation)

“Other organisations that have a different political tone or perhaps do not approach climate change from a political perspective, but rather from a technical perspective.” (Youth organisation/Environmental organisation)

“I tend to be a little more radical about some things and less radical about others compared to my peers, but I can assure you that it is not a collective feeling among youth or young climate activists.” (Youth organisation/Environmental organisation)

“In itself, I think it is inconsistent to talk about veganism without being a climate defender.” (Youth organisation/Environmental organisation)

Another significant finding is the way emotional involvement is expressed within climate change discourse and activism. There is an indirect reference to the sense of belonging and social identity that young people experience as part of a collective movement to combat climate change.

“I needed to transform anger, anxiety, anguish, and nothing, like activism is a very good way”. (Youth organisation/Environmental organisation)

“The feeling of Fridays (for Future) was like friends fighting something” (Youth organisation/Environmental organisation)

Academia experts display significant development in discursive logic, alongside notable absences that reflect their role as observers. This group shows a profound understanding of the topic from an intellectual standpoint. Their insights may illustrate the number of

statements present in both theoretical and empirical reflections on climate change discourse, with a notable focus on the absences and silences.

“The processes of industrialisation had affected the environment. Therefore, there was a break in the way we as a society related to our surroundings, to the environment.” (Academia Expert)

“There is a loss of ontological security” (Academia Expert)

Historical processes, elements of social identity, and the sociopolitical configurations of Chilean society, youth, and social organisations were brought to the table for discussion. There are questions regarding the roots of discursive expression, the current ontological statements, and the role of individuals in this specific historical context, both in Chile and globally, within humanity.

“So there we began to look for descriptors of that absence, as I see it as an absence.” (Academia Expert)

“The subject's narrative is exhausted because that relationship inhibited questions, for example, about my body. How does my body relate to the world? My breathing, my touches. What was inhibited in modern discourse was a further question about cognition.” (Academia Expert)

“It's not that there's a narrative on the right, a narrative on the left, or a narrative in the centre. Rather, it's a very fragmented thing, with a lot of narrative polysemy, a lot of narrative polysemy, which, more than a poetic act, you could say from the perspective that different fragments are appearing with different images of the future—I would say that it's experienced as if in the grassroots, like in the grass of the stage. And the structures try to channel all that energy, that narrative energy about the future.” (Academia Expert)

This reflection on climate change discourse also serves as a contemplation of modernity, the decline of historical subjects, and an exploration of time and identity. Overall, this perspective highlights a concern for the fragmentation of significant discourses into something more fluid. While these ideas remain traceable, they raise pressing questions about perception and epistemology, often presented rapidly. There is a call for reflection and an update among urban actors.

Artists show limited engagement with discursive logics and fewer absences, suggesting either more focused organisational mandates or different approaches to climate engagement that do not require extensive theoretical framework development.

"(Climate change) is something I see in my practice, but it's not something I've addressed as much, or addressed in such depth." (Artist)

"Here in Macul in particular, or closer to the city, there is not much talk about climate change." (Artist)

"The threat depended on the observer." (Artist)

"There is a type of space that seems not to be in use, as if it is not an active use, but rather passive and that is like the space of contemplation, which seems to make minds that are constantly seeking productivity, believe that this space is in disuse." (Artist)

Their silence might suggest that climate change is not a topic of concern for them, or at least not a key element in their imaginations and artistic practices. When contemplation is used to explore environmental discourse, it reveals different narratives about climate change when applied to specific territories or urban areas. In this context, climate change appears as part of the same process as urbanisation, highlighting the consequences of rapid construction on the landscape.

Overall, the combined insights from first- and second-order observations reveal a nuanced and heterogeneous discourse on climate change among Santiago's urban actors. The first-order layer shows that actors engage with climate change in highly differentiated ways: environmental organisations integrate narratives, practices, and values in a holistic manner; youth organisations balance narrative and practice with politically charged values; urban NGOs adopt a pragmatic mix across all dimensions; academics emphasize narratives and analytical frameworks while offering a profound critique of social thinking and society as a whole, highlighting a disconnect between expected outcomes and the inability to interpret what is actually happening; and artists communicate indirectly through aesthetic and experiential modes.

At the second-order layer, discursive logics, absences, and silences reveal deeper patterns behind these expressions. Discursive logics across actors often assign responsibility and agency for climate change in distinct ways: youth question who is responsible for damage and for change, and they frame the responsibility in capitalism and institutionality; NGOs frame responsibility as shared, negotiating between outsourced obligations and their own agency; and environmental organisations articulate urgency and actionable responsibility within broader systemic frameworks. Absences reflect structural and institutional constraints, particularly gaps in governance, policy, and funding that limit actors' ability to enact change. Silences, most notably among artists and contemplative actors, reveal topics—such as

climate urgency—that are not explicitly addressed, suggesting that certain perspectives remain latent or experiential rather than verbalised.

Taken together, these layers show that climate discourse is simultaneously polysemic, practice-oriented, and value-laden, yet unevenly articulated across actor types. The interplay between what is articulated, partially omitted, and entirely silent generates both clarity and opacity, highlighting areas of contested responsibility, hidden constraints, and unexpressed urgencies. This sets the stage for a detailed examination of the topics that actors consider most relevant, those that are neglected, and where ambiguities persist in their representations of climate futures—a core focus of the next section on topics of relevance and opacity.

Topics of Relevance and Opacity

The analysis of topics reveals a stark distinction between what receives intensive attention in climate discourse and what remains underdeveloped or opaque. Agency emerges as the overwhelmingly dominant topic of relevance, receiving significantly more attention than all other themes. This suggests that questions of who can act, how action happens, and what forms of agency are possible in relation to climate change constitute the central preoccupation of Santiago's urban actors.

“The challenge is also how to expand this agency” (Youth organisation/Environmental organisation)

“We need to empower ourselves.” (Environmental Organisation)

Following this analysis, the findings reveal that agency manifests as a distinct thematic cluster intrinsically linked to age and youth dynamics within Santiago's climate discourse. The interviews expose a temporal paradox of agency where participants simultaneously acknowledge the diminishing capacity for action with age while recognising the transformative potential of youth voices that remain marginalised by systemic adult-centrism. This tension generates an urgent call for action that centres on empowerment and structural change, as participants explicitly demand the need to expand existing forms of agency and empower themselves.

“That kind of agency you don’t have it.” (Youth organisation /Environmental organisation)

“Adult-centrism makes us lose sight of giving these transformative young voices that space so they can have a more powerful voice.” (Academia Expert)

“Kids, even at 8, 10, 12 years old, can mobilise their surroundings to make certain things happen.” (Youth organisation/Environmental organisation)

“What you will find there is a reproduction of adult-centric logic, possibly also patriarchal, within the organisation that conditions the development of its imaginary.” (Academia Expert)

The discourse reveals a critical awareness of how traditional power structures, characterised by adult-centric and potentially patriarchal logic, reproduce even within climate organisations, thereby constraining the very agency they seek to cultivate. Yet this recognition is coupled with an inspiring acknowledgement of youth's mobilising capacity, where even young children can mobilise their surroundings to create change, pointing toward a reimagining of climate action that disrupts conventional hierarchies and amplifies previously silenced voices.

Following agency, common discourse and territory appear as equally prominent topics, indicating that actors are intensively engaged with questions of how to build shared understanding and how to conceptualise climate issues in relation to specific places and spaces. The prominence of these three topics suggests that Santiago's climate discourse is fundamentally concerned with the intersection of individual and collective capacity for action, the construction of shared meanings, and the territorial dimensions of climate challenges.

“When you feel that the territory is part of you, you are part of the territory, there is another dynamic, there is another commotion, another episteme happening, you feel like part of the chain.” (Youth organisation/Environmental organisation)

“We can build a common ideal.” (Urban NGO)

“The challenge is quite common.” (Environmental NGO)

Sense of belonging and social organisation represent the next tier of relevant topics, both of which receive substantial attention. This pattern indicates significant engagement with questions of identity, community membership, and the organisational forms through which climate action can be coordinated. The emphasis on belonging suggests that climate discourse in Santiago is deeply connected to questions of social identity and community formation.

Political struggle, political stance, social exclusion, time, and transformation all receive moderate but consistent attention, forming a cluster of topics that connect climate issues to broader questions of power, temporality, and social change. Balanced attention to these themes suggests that Santiago's climate actors understand climate issues as inherently political and transformational.

However, the topics of opacity reveal significant blind spots and underdeveloped areas in climate discourse. Agency, paradoxically, also leads the opacity chart, suggesting that while agency receives intensive attention, the way it is approached reveals an acknowledgement of the outsourcing of responsibility. This pattern suggests that, despite extensive discussion of agency, fundamental questions about climate agency remain unresolved or contested, as illustrated in the second-order observation section.

“This process is about outsourcing the responsibility.” (Urban NGO)

“It is difficult to generate that progress and that urgency.” (Urban NGO)

“Is being able to take responsibility for this.” (Environmental NGO)

“It is very common for us to outsource responsibility regardless of the sector in which we are.” (Urban NGO)

Common discourse and territory also appear prominently among opaque topics, suggesting that while these themes receive substantial attention, they remain sites of confusion, fragmentation, or inadequate development. This paradox indicates that intensive engagement does not necessarily lead to clarity or coherent understanding.

“You have no concept, you have no technique, you have no methodology, you have no way of seeing the world.” (Artist)

“Even within academia and science, which is very activist regarding climate change, these issues, such as the alliance with the private sector or the market, tend to be overlooked.” (Academia Expert/Environmental NGO)

“There is no collective imagination as a country in Chile.” (Youth organisation/Environmental organisation)

Sense of belonging and political struggle emerge as both relevant and opaque topics, suggesting that these are sites of active contestation where significant attention coexists with fundamental disagreements or conceptual confusion. The presence of political stance, social exclusion, time, and transformation among opaque topics indicates that while these themes are discussed, they remain poorly theorised or understood.

“When we talk about climate change, about the climate crisis, it is usually a concept that is a little far away from us.” (Academia Expert/Environmental NGO)

The development model emerges as a unique topic among opaque areas, suggesting that this represents a significant blind spot in Santiago's climate discourse—an area that receives little attention despite its potential relevance to climate issues and social transformation.

Taken together, the analysis of topics by relevance and opacity reinforces the patterns observed in the first- and second-order observations. First-order insights revealed that actors' engagement with climate change is differentiated by type: youth emphasise empowerment and transformative potential, NGOs negotiate between outsourced responsibility and their own agency, academics critique societal assumptions, and artists communicate through aesthetic or indirect means. The relevance and opacity analysis confirms these patterns, showing that agency, common discourse, and territory dominate attention but remain partially unresolved, reflecting the contested and heterogeneous ways in which actors conceive responsibility and action. Second-order observations clarify why these ambiguities persist: discursive logics distribute responsibility unevenly across actors and the system, absences in institutional frameworks limit the ability to act, and silences—particularly among artists—mask urgency and direct engagement with climate change. The interplay between what is said, partially omitted, and entirely silent produces a climate discourse that is simultaneously vivid and opaque, revealing both the priorities actors consider most pressing and the blind spots that shape ongoing uncertainty and debate about Santiago's climate futures.

Section 2 – Types of Future Imaginaries in Discourse

Research sub-question: *What types of future imaginaries are embedded in these discourses?*

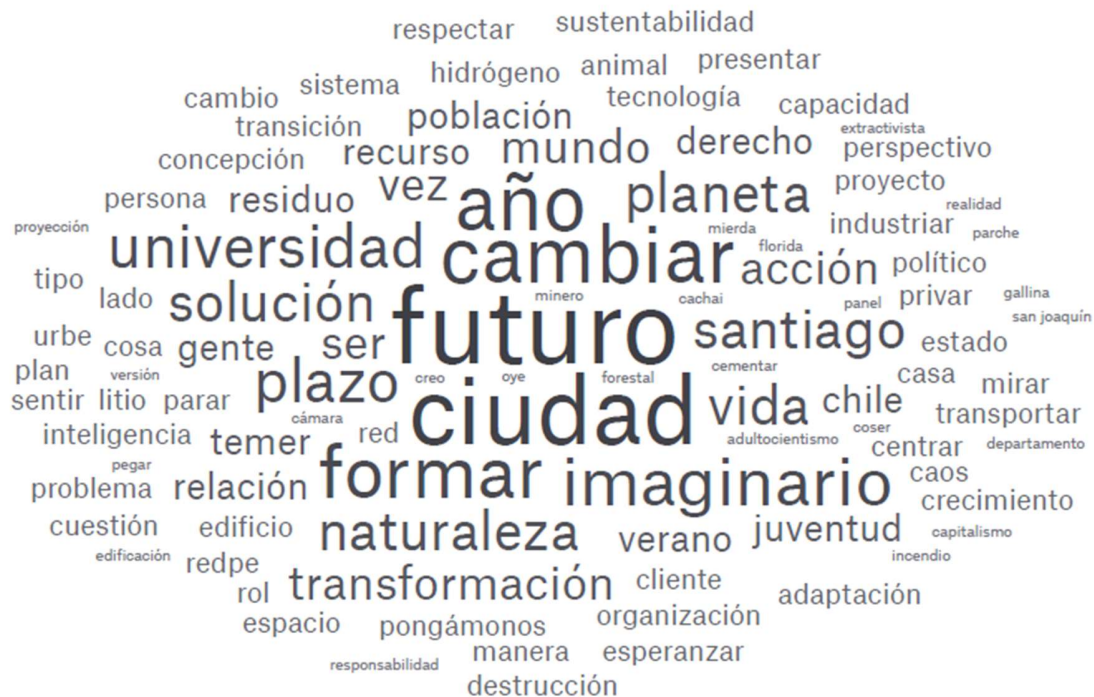
To explore the types of future imaginaries in Santiago's climate change discourse, the analysis proceeds in three steps. First, we provide a quick glimpse of the main topics and themes that structure actors' reflections on the future. Second, we examine the distribution of future imaginaries across different actor types, highlighting how NGOs, youth groups, academics, and artists diverge or converge in their projections. Finally, we describe each type of imaginary in detail, linking thematic patterns to the underlying values, assumptions, and emotional investments they reveal.

A key finding emerges consistently across interviews: when asked about anticipated future scenarios, almost all participants differentiate between what they think will happen and what they wish would happen. While projections of the likely future often vary, there is a near-universal desire for transformative change. However, this transformative imaginary is highly heterogeneous, reflecting diverse interpretations of what transformation entails.

The thematic analysis reveals that Santiago's climate discourse is fundamentally oriented toward imagining and transforming the future. The prominence of terms such as *futuro* (future), *cambiar* (change), and *imaginario* (imaginary) signals a collective preoccupation with envisioning alternative scenarios and possibilities, rather than solely reacting to present challenges. Equally significant are concerns *andudad* (city), *naturaleza* (nature), and *transformación* (transformation), highlighting that imaginaries are grounded in urban

contexts and ecological concerns, and often emphasise systemic change rather than incremental or isolated interventions.

Figure n°5: Future Imaginaries wordcloud



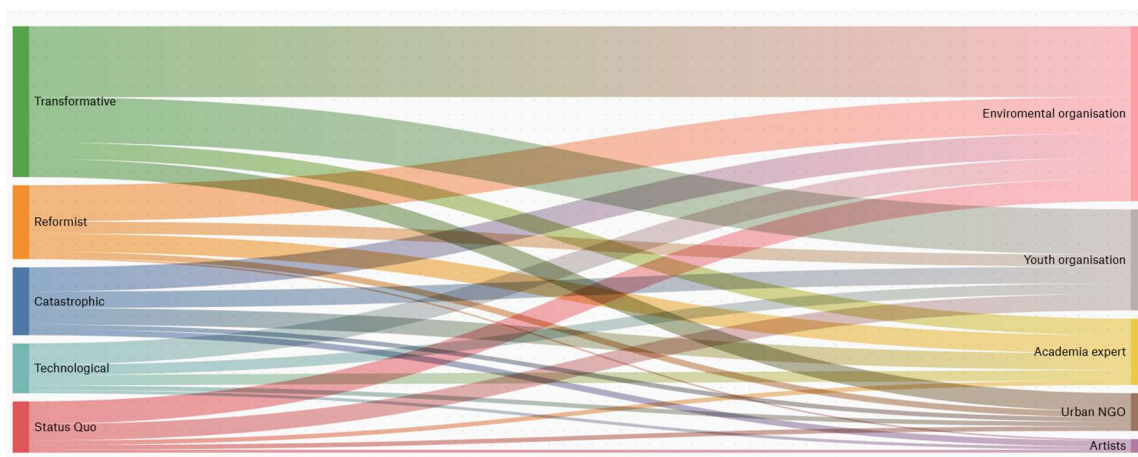
Source: Own elaboration using Atlas.ti views feature.

The discourse also reflects the active role of youth and emergent actors: terms like *juventud* (youth), *solución* (solution), and *acción* (action) suggest that younger generations are not only framing the conversation but are also envisioned as key agents in driving tangible change. Overall, these patterns suggest that future imaginaries within Santiago's climate discourse are simultaneously aspirational, action-oriented, and grounded in both social and ecological dimensions, highlighting a vision of urban futures that intertwine systemic transformation, generational agency, and the pursuit of practical solutions.

Distribution of Imaginaries by Actor Type

Moving from this general overview to a more detailed analysis, the data reveals a distinct distribution of imaginaries across different types of actors. The chart offers crucial insight into which actors are shaping specific future visions, enabling a nuanced understanding of the discourse.

Figure n°5: Types of Future Imaginaries and Types of Actors



Source: Own elaboration using Atlas.ti views feature.

The distribution of imaginaries across different actor types reveals a distinct and nuanced landscape, providing crucial insight into which groups are shaping specific future visions. The most striking finding is the co-dominance of the Transformative and Catastrophic imaginaries, which emerge as the most prevalent narratives in the dataset. This suggests that the articulation of crisis and the envisioning of a new paradigm are deeply intertwined.

The Transformative imaginary is particularly strong among Environmental Organisations and Youth Organisations, where it represents the most frequently discussed vision. This indicates a primary focus on fundamental, systemic change in the discourse of these groups.

The Catastrophic imaginary also holds significant weight, particularly among Artists, where it is the most common narrative, and is highly prominent in the discourse of both Environmental and Youth Organisations. This suggests that an urgent, crisis-driven narrative is a critical component of their discourse.

The Reformist imaginary has a significant presence overall, serving as a powerful and competing narrative. It is most prominent in the discourse of Academic Experts and Environmental Organisations, highlighting a focus on incremental, within-system change.

The Technological and Status Quo imaginaries are the least common in the dataset, though their presence is notable. The Technological imaginary is most often articulated by Academic Experts and Environmental Organisations, while the Status Quo imaginary is primarily present among Environmental Organisations and Youth Organisations, often as a point of contrast or critique.

Future Imaginaries: an applied description

The **transformative** imaginary is the most prominent in the discourse, serving as a powerful, collective vision for fundamental change. This imaginary is characterised by a radical departure from current models, focusing on systemic change, alternative economies, and community-led futures. The high frequency of this imaginary across almost all actor types, especially youth and environmental groups, signals a strong desire for a new social and ecological paradigm.

This imaginary is not a single, monolithic vision, but rather a collection of interconnected ideas. The exercise of imagining futures also carries a strong affective dimension, as participants express hope, concern, frustration, or aspiration. As mentioned in the introduction to this section, the main result is that when asked about imaginaries of the future, actors tended to have a dual vision: the scenario they wanted and the scenario they expected. As a result, the transformative imaginary is both the most present and the most contested, serving as a central yet emotionally charged anchor in Santiago's climate discourse.

"I imagine it as a much friendlier city, much more interconnected in the sense of understanding that even the building has an ecosystemic role." (Academia Expert/Environmental NGO)

"In this scenario, there is a loving perspective, an empathetic perspective with the other living being who inhabits the planet with you." (Youth organisation/Environmental organisation)

"I wish all of that were distributed. For me, the ideal world is like with mini centers like semi-urban, semi-rural, where everything is distributed." (Academia Expert/Urban NGO)

"More community gardens, fewer cars, more shared spaces with other living beings, not just humans." (Academia Expert/Urban NGO)

"A city with ecological justice." (Academia Expert/Urban NGO)

"The proposal perhaps of that possible world is to build this relational space where we can coexist in an environment respecting otherness, respecting the other."
(Academia Expert/ Urban NGO)

Digging into the sub-codes, the ones that are more present are Political-Ecological Change, which links political action directly to ecological outcomes, and Communitarianism, which emphasises local, community-driven solutions. Other important sub-codes, although less frequent, include Degrowth/Simplicity, which envisions a future of reduced consumption and material well-being.

"The only thing I think about is consuming less, consuming less, living in the cooperative movement, in the assembly." (Youth organisation/ Environmental organisation)

The **catastrophic** imaginary is also present in the discourse of all the actors. This imaginary is characterised by narratives of crisis and urgency, which frame a future of collapse and disaster. While it might seem pessimistic, it functions as a critical rhetorical tool to highlight the severity of the challenges and justify the need for urgent action. The analysis of sub-codes reveals that this imaginary is primarily articulated through the sub-code of Climate Collapse. This sub-code is the most prominent within the imaginary, emphasising the perceived inevitable breakdown of climate systems. Other significant themes include Eco-Miserabilism, which reflects a sense of despair over ecological decline, and Socioeconomical collapse, which broadens the scope of the crisis to include social and economic systems.

"These imaginary images of the future tend to be catastrophic." (Academia Expert)

"Some scientists are very catastrophic." (Academia Expert)

"An imaginary half-apocalyptic and catastrophic future." (Urban NGO)

"By 2050, I think Santiago will be a very uninhabitable city." (Academia Expert/ Environmental Organisation)

"It's going to be very hot, there's going to be a lot of pollution, it's going to be a very big city with serious access problems." (Academia Expert/ Environmental Organisation)

At the same time, this imaginary is often attributed to others, most notably scientists or external actors, rather than being directly assumed by participants themselves. In this way, the catastrophic stance is recognised as a powerful narrative circulating in public discourse, but one that interviewees often distance themselves from. Yet, when it is grounded in specific contexts, the city of Santiago consistently emerges as the imagined epicentre of the climate collapse. The city is envisioned as uninhabitable, with rising temperatures, worsening

pollution, infrastructure breakdowns, and profound inequalities in access. These localised projections reveal how climate breakdown and urban fragility converge, amplifying perceptions of vulnerability and decline, as well as strong emotional responses to it.

The **reformist** imaginary is also present in the discourse; this imaginary is centred on incremental changes and gradual improvements within existing social, political, and economic frameworks. It contrasts with the proposals of the transformative imaginary by suggesting a path of evolution that resembles current trends. The sub-codes within this category include Institutional Reform and Moral Reform, with the first with a slightly higher presence than the second. This underscores a focus on modifying policies and regulations within established organisations, as well as the dependence of many NGOs on the institutional framework shaped by policy and government agendas.

“What we want to do has to be framed in some public policy.” (Academia Expert/ Enviromental Organisation)

“Climate change is something that I feel is already established in the university. It is not an emerging issue, but will it still be present in 2030? Yes.” (Academia Expert/ Enviromental Organisation)

“Our plan has some relation to the changes in the structures of the university, the changes in government.” (Academia Expert/ Enviromental Organisation)

While technology is often seen as a key component of climate change solutions, the **technological** imaginary appears with a lower frequency compared to the others. This suggests that although technological innovation is discussed, it is rarely presented as the sole or primary solution. Additionally, this reflects a bias in the research, as the selected sample did not include participants from the entrepreneurial and technical science sectors. The sub-codes are dominated by Techno-Optimism, reflecting a belief that technology will ultimately solve the challenges ahead. Rational Management is a secondary sub-code, indicating a discourse that frames technology as a tool for efficient, data-driven governance.

“Startups talk about smart cities, they are always in a world that they idealize, that they come forward with all their technological imagery.” (Academia Expert)

“I believe that artificial intelligence can help us replace boring things and connect us with what we do have and that we have perhaps forgotten, which is the connection with nature.” (Artist)

“New technologies emerge that postpone deadlines.” (Urban NGO)

The **status quo** imaginary, representing a vision of continuity and the perpetuation of existing systems, is also present in the discourse, but with a slightly lower representation. Its presence

signals a broad consensus that change is inevitable, but not in all areas. The few instances of this imaginary are primarily articulated through its main sub-code, 'Business-as-usual,' which is characterised by a firm belief that existing systems will persist and do not require fundamental disruption of the socioeconomical model. This perspective frames stability as a central value and is often implicitly, or explicitly, complemented by the expectations of other imaginaries, such as the technological one, and this trust in science and technology.

“Human beings will always find technologies to patch up solutions instead of changing their way of life.” (Youth Organisation/ Environmental Organisation)

The imaginary is further supported by sub-codes like 'Fossil Progressivism' and 'Corporate Responsibility,' which suggest that solutions can be found through minor adjustments within the current economic framework, rather than through a systemic overhaul. This demonstrates that visions of maintaining existing systems are a huge part of the conversation, either as a legitimate path forward or as a point of contention.

“It is left there to the private sector, and the private sector, in reality, its conception of the future, let's put it this way, is a developmentalist conception, let's put it this way, super short-term or medium-term.” (Academia Expert)

“The issue of climate change isn't just about... Hey, let's stop the forestry industry, let's stop the mining industry, let's stop the... I think there's a huge responsibility... I mean, we have to think that all these industries exist because there are customers. You know? We're the customers, and I include myself.” (Artist)

An intriguing observation is that in this scenario, the city symbolises stability. Its image serves as a metaphor for a system that will find ways to endure. The city is portrayed as the centre where the socioeconomic system continues to produce, despite facing very difficult conditions and extreme weather.

“The shape of the city will not change much.” (Academia Expert/ Urban NGO)

“It's still Santiago, though.” (Youth Organisation / Environmental Organisation)

“Santiago is a giant shopping mall with apartments on top.” (Youth Organisation / Environmental Organisation)

“I imagine Santiago as a city with buildings facing upwards, like the centre of Santiago.” (Youth Organisation / Environmental Organisation)

In sum, all five types of imaginaries—transformative, catastrophic, reformist, technological, and status quo—are present within Santiago's climate change discourse, with varying degrees

of prominence. Rather than existing as isolated categories, they frequently overlap, with actors drawing on elements from multiple imaginaries to articulate their visions of the future.

A central pattern that emerges is the widespread conviction that climate change will inevitably reshape environmental and urban conditions, while the permanence of the socio-economic system remains far more contested. Across imaginaries, the city consistently appears as the stage where these futures unfold: sometimes as the site of collapse and inequality, other times as a hub of resilience or modest technological fixes such as solar panels and greener infrastructures. What differs is whether Santiago is imagined as eroded by crisis or reinvented through adaptation and justice. At times, this endurance takes the form of hopeful adaptations and small fixes that capture the tension between continuity and change: *“The same houses in Florida or San Joaquín, but with solar panels and rescued chickens.”*

Thus, the discourse suggests that for most urban actors, the future is not a question of if change will come, but of how the city will be transformed—whether toward deeper inequalities or toward more hopeful, community-driven and ecologically attuned ways of living in 2030 and 2050.

Section 3 – Imagination and Social Transformation

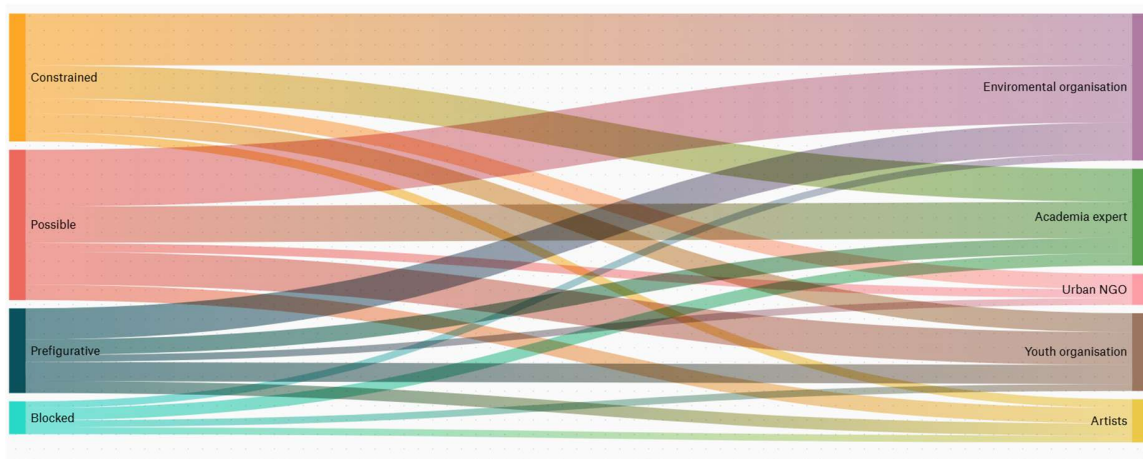
Research sub-question: *How do these imaginaries reflect broader processes of imagination and collective envisioning of social transformation?*

The findings reveal that the imaginaries discussed previously are not static visions but are actively shaped by, and in turn shape, dynamic processes of imagination and temporal framing. This analysis moves beyond the "what" of the imaginaries to explore the "how" and "why" of their creation and function within the discourse.

The Character of Imagination

The analysis of the character of imagination reveals a nuanced and often contradictory landscape. The discourse is primarily defined by a tension between imagination that is *Constrained* by existing realities and that which is perceived as *Possible*. As shown in the graph, *Possible* imagination is highly prevalent across all groups, particularly among Environmental Organisations and Academic Experts, indicating a widespread belief in the potential for change. However, *Constrained* imagination is also a significant finding, suggesting that visions for the future are often limited by economic, political, and social barriers.

Figure n°6: Character of Imagination and Types of Actors



Source: Own elaboration using Atlas.ti views feature.

The category of the *Possible* character of imagination reflects how urban actors conceptualise imagination not as a passive exercise, but as a condition of possibility for change itself. Across the discourse, imagination is framed as both a personal and collective resource that enables participation in shaping futures otherwise monopolised by institutions or elites.

"We have begun to talk about the imaginary as a much more democratic issue as well, because it is not only planners who define the future, it is not only businessmen who define the future, it is not only the political class that defines the future, but we are also seeing that populations perceive, in some way anticipate, and live with these processes as anticipation." (Youth Organisation / Environmental Organisation)

"The plan is an effort to advance this more institutional transformation" (Academia Expert/ Environmental Organisation)

For some, imagining is directly tied to individual agency—projecting oneself into a role within emerging industries or envisioning how their own future could unfold. For others, it is tied to collective processes of transformation, where imagination precedes and legitimises institutional change. Particularly among youth, imagination acquires a liberating quality: despite being excluded from traditional structures of authority and dismissed as inexperienced, they claim a space where imagination is possible and crucial.

"This is my future, this is my imagination, I'm going to participate in this industry." (Youth Organisation / Environmental Organisation)

"As for imagining, since we are young and no one is betting on youth or children because they don't work yet, or what would they know if they don't have experience, you can talk and imagine whatever you want." (Youth Organisation / Environmental Organisation)

This reveals an important affective and political dimension: imagination is not only about what could happen, but also about who has the right to articulate futures. In this sense, discourse presents imagination as performative—it makes futures possible by proposing them, debating them, and distributing the authority to imagine beyond experts, policymakers, and entrepreneurs. What emerges is a view of the future as a democratised terrain, where imagining itself becomes an act of participation and anticipation.

"First you have to imagine it for it to be real" (Youth Organisation / Environmental Organisation)

"It is essential to propose alternative futures, that is, to make the future... to bring proposals for good futures" (Academia Expert/ Urban NGO)

This is the part in which the Possible and the Constrained character of imagination meet, precisely where imagination becomes anchored in place. While interviewees affirm the openness of imagining alternative futures, these visions are never detached from their social and territorial realities. What can be imagined depends on geography, segregation, and lived experience.

"I could tell you that today the interest of the territorial organisations most linked to thinking about possible worlds varies its theme depending on the geographical context." (Academia Expert/ Urban NGO)

"That deep segregation, the people who live it and above all those people who live it and think politically that there is the possibility of a possible world, make it present." (Academia Expert/ Urban NGO)

"That contrast is brutal, I think that's why Santiago can be the one who perhaps dominates the scene of the construction of these narratives that are different." (Academia Expert/ Urban NGO)

Territorial organisations, for instance, adapt their visions of possible worlds according to local contexts, showing how imaginaries are shaped and bounded by uneven urban conditions. In Santiago, the depth of segregation not only structures life chances but also defines the horizons of imagination itself. This grounded, place-based dynamic explains why Santiago repeatedly emerges as both the epicentre of crisis and a fertile ground for new imaginaries. Imagination, then, is possible but always constrained—anchored in territory and context, which simultaneously limit and intensify the construction of future narratives.

The **Constrained** character of imagination reflects the barriers, limits, and conditions that restrict how futures can be envisioned. Unlike the openness of possible imaginaries, here imagination is curtailed by structural, temporal, and institutional forces that narrow the scope of what actors believe can realistically be imagined or achieved. A recurring theme is the tension between collective aspirations and the lack of clarity or tools to materialise them. While alternative futures can be envisioned, participants repeatedly pointed to the difficulties of making them actionable within the confines of current systems.

"Some things we collectively imagine we don't know how to achieve." (Urban NGO)

A central barrier identified is temporal. Interviewees described how present urgency, whether linked to climate, social, or political crises, absorbs energy and attention, leaving little room to dwell on long-term futures. In this sense, imagination is not only limited by what can be envisioned, but also by how time is experienced: compressed by urgency, dominated by crisis, or stolen by the structures of capitalism that confine thought to survival in the present.

"One of the most complex barriers is to position it within these pillars of current urgency." (Urban NGO)

"There is a kind of barrier to thinking about the present." (Youth Organisation/Environmental Organisation)

Institutional and generational dynamics also emerged as significant constraints. Formal structures, such as state institutions or private organisations, are often portrayed as impermeable to new ways of thinking, bound by rigid frameworks that resist alternative imaginings. Similarly, adult-centric logics that dominate social and political discourse leave younger generations with little space to contribute, reinforcing hierarchies that disempower alternative voices. In this way, both institutional inertia and generational inequality impose ceilings on what futures can be imagined.

“The time horizon of what the network can do directly is highly conditioned by having money.” (Environmental Organisation)

“If these discourses are brought by adults and imposed as truths, what chance do new generations have of saying anything else?” (Academia Expert)

“This adult-centric logic of putting you in the future only takes you out of the present.” (Youth Organisation/Environmental Organisation)

“I believe that the most critical thing is that the public and private officials who manage the institution and are in the institution cannot think about other things; they are very impervious to the structure.” (Academia Expert/ Urban NGO)

Finally, the constrained character is also territorial. Displacement and dispossession not only remove people from their physical spaces but also erode the symbolic and expressive capacity to imagine differently. This intertwining of material and imaginative dispossession highlights how systemic inequalities shape not only the realities of the present but also the horizons of what futures can be conceived. Imagination, then, is marked by limits that are structural, temporal, institutional, and territorial, shaping the very conditions under which urban actors can think about climate and social futures.

“In this process of taking away your present, they take away your territory but also your space for expression in every way.” (Youth Organisation/Environmental Organisation)

Beyond these two dominant modes, the imagination is also expressed as Prefigurative, where future visions are enacted in the present, and less commonly, as Blocked, where a lack of alternatives is perceived.

The **Prefigurative** character of imagination emerges as a crucial bridge between the present and the future, one that refuses to treat them as separate realms. Rather than seeing the future as a distant horizon to be anticipated, the prefigurative stance embodies it in present practices, gestures, and intentions. This character of imagination is deeply intertwined with the possible and with the transformative imaginary, as it is grounded in the conviction that

systemic change is both imaginable and already underway in the small-scale actions and choices of today.

“What you are doing now is part of the future, not because it has a direct consequence and not a consequence, it is part, like a more holistic vision of time, like what young people can generally do.” (Youth Organisation/Environmental Organisation)

“It is not a future issue, that is, as it is a present issue.” (Youth Organisation/Environmental Organisation)

“There is a search or an intention to at least project or imagine something that cannot yet be realized, but the intentionality is there.” (Academia Expert/Environmental Organisation)

A defining trait of this dimension is its temporal framing, which resonates strongly with the concept of temporal fluidity. Actors describe the present as already part of the future, collapsing the linear divide between “now” and “later.” Imagination here becomes less about distant projection and more about enacting the desired future in the present moment, even if only in tentative or symbolic forms. This creates a holistic sense of time in which intentionality itself — what one chooses to do or embody now — carries future significance.

The **Blocked** dimension of imagination appears less frequently in the discourse, but its presence is nonetheless significant. It reflects moments when the capacity to envision alternative futures is stifled, either by institutional rigidity or by generational hierarchies. In these cases, imagination is not simply constrained by external conditions, it is actively dismissed or rendered invisible.

“The organisations, not all of them obviously, but there was a significant one, and even the public officials of the institutions do not see another possible world.” (Academia Expert/Urban NGO)

A co-occurrence analysis² further illuminates these dynamics, as seen in the table. A strong co-occurrence between Possible and Prefigurative imagination suggests that the belief in a viable future is often linked to the practical, real-world act of beginning to build it. Conversely, the co-occurrence of Constrained and Blocked imagination highlights a more pessimistic outlook where limitations are seen as insurmountable.

² The Code-Cooccurrence Table showcases which codes frequently appear together in the dataset. Analysis made in Atlas.TI software.

Table n°: Co-occurrence character of imagination/character of imagination

	Blocked	Constrained	Possible	Prefigurative
Blocked				
Constrained	7		5	1
Possible	1	5		10
Prefigurative	1	1	10	

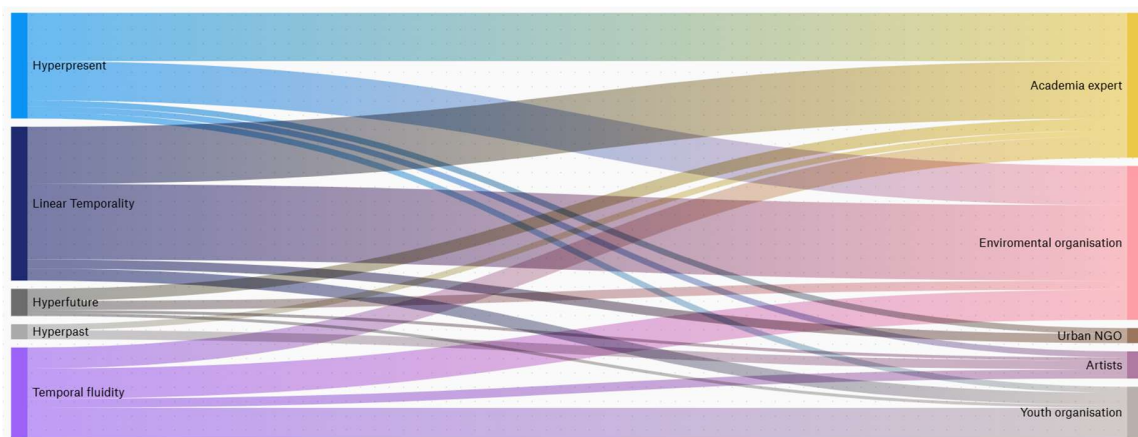
Source: Own elaboration using Atlas.ti views feature.

This variation is also reflected across different types of actors. The discourse of Environmental and Youth Organisations is particularly rich in both Prefigurative and Possible imagination, directly linking their narratives of transformation to a sense of agency and action. Meanwhile, the discourse of Academic Experts shows a near-equal balance between Constrained and Possible imagination, suggesting a tension between academic rigour (which identifies limitations) and a forward-looking orientation.

Temporal Framing

The imaginaries within the discourse also employ distinct temporal frames, connecting visions of the future to understandings of the past and present. The analysis reveals that the discourse is overwhelmingly grounded in *Linear Temporality* and the *Hyperpresent*, as shown in the graph. ***Linear Temporality***, the traditional view of time as a continuous progression from past to future, is a dominant code, particularly for Environmental Organisations and Academic Experts, indicating a focus on long-term goals and step-by-step progress.

Figure n°7: Temporal Framing and Types of Actors



Source: Own elaboration using Atlas.ti views feature.

The ***Hyperpresent*** is especially prominent, reflecting discourses that emphasise the impossibility of planning long-term due to institutional barriers and the pressing immediacy

of current challenges. It is strongly linked to linear temporality across most discourses, highlighting how actors are caught in the urgent demands of the present moment. At the same time, *Temporal Fluidity*, as discussed in relation to the prefigurative character of imagination, emerges primarily in Youth Organisations and Artists' narratives. This frame enables actors to envision futures in a holistic, non-linear manner, connecting present actions to future possibilities and transformative imaginings, and demonstrating a temporal flexibility absent in Hyperpresent-oriented discourses.

Hyperfuture, in contrast, is scarcely represented and rarely associated with notions of hyperacceleration; when it does appear, it often conveys depoliticised or speculative projections rather than actionable or transformative visions. Meanwhile, *Hyperpast* is the least represented frame, tied to nostalgic or symbolic recollections of the past. It appears most frequently in artistic discourses, where it can subtly constrain imagination by anchoring actors' visions in familiar historical reference points rather than enabling the creation of radically new possibilities.

Taken together, these temporal framings highlight how the capacity to imagine alternative futures is unevenly distributed across actor types, with urgency and immediacy dominating in institutional and expert discourses, while temporal fluidity fosters prefigurative and transformative thinking among younger or more experimental actors.

Transformation in the Discourse

The concept of *Transformation* functions as a central, unifying code that connects the diverse imaginaries to broader narratives of social change. It bridges abstract visions of the future with concrete processes of imagination, shaping how actors perceive what is possible, desirable, or urgent. Transformation in the discourse is not merely descriptive; it is generative, framing change as both necessary and attainable.

While Transformative imaginaries explicitly centre transformation as a core goal, the concept is also present, albeit in distinct forms, across other imaginaries. In *Reformist*, *Technological*, and *Catastrophic* imaginaries, transformation emerges as a targeted or instrumental process, often oriented toward specific systems, technologies, or urgent crises, rather than a holistic reconfiguration of social structures. Even within *Status Quo* imaginaries, transformation is recognised—but framed in an incremental or “evolutive” manner, reflecting expectations of change within existing structures rather than radical shifts. This particular perspective aligns closely with *Linear Temporality*, emphasising sequential, stepwise processes of change over sudden or disruptive shifts.

The relationship between transformation and the character of imagination is similarly differentiated. It is most clearly expressed in Prefigurative and Possible ways of imagination,

where actors actively envision and enact new possibilities. In the other expressions of imagination, transformation is present but often deflected, *Constrained*, or even *Blocked*—limited by structural, institutional, or cognitive barriers. Nevertheless, its persistent presence across all imaginaries underscores that transformation remains a central, organising element in the discourse of climate change, shaping both aspirations and constraints across actors and temporal frames.

The concept of transformation in the discourse is understood as a complex, ongoing process rather than a single event. Change is framed as gradual, iterative, and dynamic, emphasising that social and cultural shifts unfold over time and require sustained effort. Transformation is rarely fixed or instantaneous; rather, it is described as a state of “becoming,” where actors must engage continuously in processes that reshape institutions, practices, and societal norms. This framing highlights the notion that meaningful change is inherently slow and cumulative, involving multiple layers of action, reflection, and adaptation.

“We are in a stage of transformation... all social and cultural change is something slow.” (Environmental Organisation)

“It is a transformation, it is not a single action, like, you have to do things.” (Academia Expert/ Environmental Organisation)

A central dimension of transformation is its connection to intentional action and purposeful creation. It is not perceived as something that occurs automatically or by chance but as a result of deliberate planning, coordination, and strategic effort. Actors articulate the need for concrete steps and measurable processes to achieve broader goals, such as sustainability or social justice, highlighting that transformation is an active pursuit. Institutions, organisations, and individuals are all positioned as agents in this process, tasked with enacting change and aligning practices with shared principles.

“The sustainability plan is specifically a roadmap for the coming years to be able to move towards this, towards transformation.” (Academia Expert/ Environmental Organisation)

“At the beginning, it seemed like national transformation and sustainable society were taking place here.” (Academia Expert/ Environmental Organisation)

Transformation is also described as holistic and socially embedded, encompassing both material and normative dimensions. It touches on governance, environmental sustainability, education, equity, and collective well-being, linking structural changes to cultural and ethical values. In this sense, transformation is not merely technical or administrative; it is deeply relational, shaped through collaborative practices and collective decision-making. This

underscores the idea that social transformation requires integrating multiple perspectives, from professional actors to communities, to bring long-term visions into the present.

“The declaration states that our principles as spiritual leaders are just transition, climate justice, general well-being, intersectional feminism, and governance.” (Youth Organisation / Environmental Organisation)

“The energy transition has an impact on biodiversity, but energy poverty itself is closely associated with climate change and pollution.” (Academia Expert / Urban NGO)

Finally, transformation is linked to temporality and future-oriented action. While it is anchored in present efforts, it is understood as a projection toward long-term objectives, such as national sustainability, climate justice, or energy transition. The discourse situates transformation as a roadmap for the future, bridging current interventions with broader societal goals. Actors are framed as “agents of change,” whose training, engagement, and everyday decisions contribute to ongoing societal evolution, reinforcing the idea that transformation is both a practical and aspirational process.

“What you are doing is to train new professionals, agents of change, people who will somehow govern, transform, for better or worse, the country.” (Academia Expert/Environmental Organisation)

Transformation in Practices

The discourse shows that transformation is not only a conceptual horizon but is actively enacted through concrete practices in everyday social, political, and environmental life. Actors demonstrate that change is already underway, taking shape in multiple domains—from territorial interventions to individual consumption choices, indicating that transformation is both imagined and enacted simultaneously. Efforts such as decentralisation and initiatives like LCOY are being implemented in local territories, illustrating that structural transformation is being translated into localised action. Similarly, neighbourhood councils and urban activism showcase the tangible ways in which people enact change in their immediate environments.

“So we start with decentralization as we already have to take LCOY to the territories.” (Youth Organisation / Environmental Organisation)

“Environmental activism also has to do with what happens in the territory, more in rural areas or in the most natural areas when this neighbourhood thing happens, but I also think it has turned a lot to the digital.” (Youth Organisation / Environmental Organisation)

“But that we can be impacting, for example, in a territory by making changes with the neighbourhood councils.” (Urban NGO)

“Activism in the urban area is super diverse, as if a little bit of everything happens. I also have colleagues and friends who give their all in their neighbourhood and continue with the community garden and the organisation of the neighbours, and now that the fires are coming, we make firebreaks, and now that the rains are coming.” (Youth Organisation / Environmental Organisation)

Transformation is also reflected in individual and collective consumption practices, where choices are framed as small but cumulative acts of change. The growing prominence of vegan products illustrates how lifestyle choices intersect with environmental and social change. These practices reveal that transformation is not confined to abstract policy proposals but is embedded in everyday decisions that collectively shape societal trajectories.

“When we understand that each person, when they buy something or when they consume something, it is a decision, it is a vote.” (Urban NGO)

“The vegan industry, like vegan food, has also skyrocketed in recent years and it is simply because there is consumption of these products.” (Urban NGO)

“In itself, I think it is inconsistent to talk about veganism without being a climate defender.” (Youth Organisation / Environmental Organisation)

“In squares where there are meetings or sales of vegan products.” (Academia Expert/ Urban NGO)

Furthermore, transformation unfolds through political and institutional engagement, highlighting the interplay between grassroots action and systemic change. Direct political participation demonstrates that transformation is enacted not only in local communities but also in broader decision-making arenas. Across all these practices, transformation emerges as a dynamic, ongoing process, simultaneously prefigurative, participatory, and embedded in tangible actions, illustrating that change is already in motion rather than simply an aspirational future.

“Where politics is used as a practice, it probably takes on another tone.” (Youth Organisation / Environmental Organisation)

“Santiago has that mix with the consumption of veganism but also the practice as a policy.” (Academia Expert/ Urban NGO)

“Go every Friday to the government house of the countries, that is, in this case we went to La Moneda, on Fridays.” (Youth Organisation / Environmental Organisation)

“The energy transition is necessary and we agree on that, but for us the methods are equally important.” (Environmental Organisation)

Transformation emerges in the discourse not only as an abstract aspiration but as a lived, ongoing process actively pursued by urban actors. It is understood as slow, cumulative, and multifaceted, unfolding over time through intentional action rather than a single, discrete event. This perspective is mirrored in the practices of these actors, who engage across multiple scales, from individual lifestyle choices and consumption patterns to neighbourhood initiatives and broader political interventions. They perceive transformation as already occurring in their daily activities, whether through the creation of community gardens, participation in local councils, promoting sustainable consumption, or enacting policy-oriented initiatives. By linking discourse to practice, these actors envision a transformation that is embedded in both social and territorial realities, emphasising the co-creation of change and the importance of agency, method, and context. Transformation, therefore, is not merely a goal to be achieved in the future; it is a dynamic process in which actors are actively shaping the pathways, possibilities, and territories of a more sustainable and just urban world.

Discussion

The Discursive Landscape: Imagination, City, and the Paradox of Agency

The findings of this research reveal a discursive field that is at once polyphonic, fragmented, and paradoxical. Climate change discourse in Santiago cannot be reduced to a singular narrative, nor does it appear as the smooth translation of global frameworks into local contexts. Instead, it manifests as a complex web of imaginaries, silences, and contested claims to agency, shaped by political conditions, territorial experiences, and lived practices. To ask actors about the future was, as became increasingly evident, to provoke an analysis of the present. In their responses, imaginings of the future were articulated in relation to the constraints and possibilities of the present. Politics, territory, and practice formed the indispensable context within which visions of transformation were made intelligible.

This discursive landscape is also marked by a deeper epistemological concern. Reflections on climate change often became meditations on modernity itself—on the decline of historical subjects, the shifting meanings of time, and the fragility of collective identities. What emerged was a sense that the “grand discourses” of transformation had fragmented into more fluid and uncertain expressions. These fragments were not devoid of meaning, but they raised pressing questions about perception, authority, and epistemology. Several actors have called for reflection and renewal in the way climate change is framed, interpreted, and addressed, signalling that climate discourse is as much about reinventing political language as it is about mitigating material risks.

A key contribution of this thesis is the integration of Castoriadis’ notion of social imaginaries with the concept of radical imagination, operationalised through three analytical layers: (1) typologies of climate future imaginaries, (2) temporal framings of transformation, and (3) the character of imagination, understood as the affective and performative texture of actors’ envisioning. This framework foregrounds not only what is articulated but also what remains absent or silenced, revealing the blind spots of collective imagination and opening new avenues for critical observation and intervention.

These additions respond directly to an identified research gap: while there is growing work on studies of the politics of anticipation, future imaginaries and social representations of climate change (Cantó-Milà & Seebach, 2024; Machen, 2018; Wright et al., 2013), relatively few studies examine how climate imaginaries emerge, circulate, and are contested within specific urban contexts, particularly in the Global South (Celermajer et al., 2024; Chao & Enari, 2021a; Coelho et al., 2025; Stamm & Ulloa Contador, 2023). Even fewer approaches analyse these imaginaries as dynamic, politically situated, and performative, through the lens of radical imagination (Castoriadis, 1997), which highlights both what is articulated and what remains absent or opaque in local discourse.

A notable innovation of this research is its attempt to map both relevance and absence, identifying the categories, topics, and silences that constitute the imaginary. By treating the imaginary itself as a blind spot, it becomes a starting point for systematic observation, analysis, and critique. In Santiago, this approach illuminates the tensions between locally emergent imaginaries and internationally projected climate frameworks, showing how certain narratives gain traction while others remain marginal. Applying Pintos & Marticorena (2012) relevance/opacity framework enabled the analysis of both expressed and absent narratives. Categories most discussed—such as agency, transformation, and territory—were also the most contested and unstable in meaning. Meanwhile, silences surrounding Chile's development model, capitalist structures, and the role of digital platforms highlighted the implicit limits of discourse and the political stakes involved in shaping urban climate imaginaries.

This section discusses these dynamics through six interrelated dimensions: (1) imagination as political practice, (2) typologies and the multifaceted character of imaginaries, (3) the city as a locus of climate futures, (4) the temporal framings through which transformation is understood, (5) agency, relevance, and opacity, and (6) practices of imagination and prefiguration. The paradox of agency and the centrality of practice will be addressed in the following section, before moving to a reflection on the theoretical contributions and concluding remarks.

Imagination as Political Practice

The foundational premise of this research is that imagination transcends its often-perceived role as a mere decorative element in climate discourse; rather, it is unequivocally a constitutive part of how the future becomes thinkable and in turn how present action is legitimised. This perspective is deeply informed by Cornelius Castoriadis's distinction between social imaginaries and radical imagination. Social imaginaries, in this framework, represent the more stable, institutionalised meanings or the most stable state of the imagination. In contrast, radical imagination signifies the inherent capacity to subvert all these institutionalised meanings and conceive alternatives beyond the immediate strictures of the present.

A pivotal empirical finding from Santiago's context illustrates this interplay: when actors were prompted to envision future climate scenarios, they consistently articulated two distinct futures—one they expected to occur and one they desired. The expected future was largely framed through social imaginaries, reflecting institutionalised, often constrained, perspectives. Conversely, the future they envisioned frequently emerged from radical imagination, showcasing a capacity to conceive possibilities beyond current systemic limitations. This dynamic is not one of opposition but of deep intertwining; one cannot exist

without the other. This framework is crucial because it not only elucidates *what* is articulated in climate discourse but also foregrounds not only what is articulated but also what remains absent or silenced, revealing the blind spots in the collective imagination. The difficulty actors experienced in choosing a single scenario underscores the inherent barriers and limits of collective imagination, even as it strives for transformation. The research thus demonstrates that imagination is not limited to objects but extends to the very structures of temporality and how society institutes meaning across various temporal modes.

Thus, imagination in Santiago is characterised by both expansiveness and constraint. It generates diverse figurations of transformation yet struggles to articulate systemic alternatives to the socio-economic order. This tension is not a failure of imagination but its condition: imaginaries are always situated, entangled with both desire and power.

Typologies and the Multifaceted Character of Imagination

The discursive landscape of climate futures in Santiago is characterised by a plurality of "typologies of climate future imaginaries". All the proposed typologies were identified: Transformative, Catastrophic, Reformist, Technological, and Status Quo. The Transformative imaginary, advocating for fundamental, systemic change, was particularly pronounced among environmental and youth organisations. This often involved seeking greater recognition for children and young people, as well as indigenous movements, or a shift in consumption patterns and the overall development model. The Catastrophic imaginary, marked by expressions of urgency and collapse, was notably strong among artists. The Reformist imaginary, prevalent in academic discourse and NGOs, envisioned incremental change within existing systems, often imbued with a lot of hope in slow change through institutional change. While less common, Technological imaginaries were linked to expert discourses, and Status Quo imaginaries emerged primarily as objects of critique.

Crucially, these typologies are not mutually exclusive; they frequently overlap between actors and between the same person. This fluidity highlights that the forces of constrained imagination and possible imagination are deeply intertwined. The Character of Imagination itself further unpacks this complexity, revealing a constant tension between Possible imagination—characterised by hope, openness, and experimentation—and Constrained imagination, which is limited by prevailing political, social, and economic realities. Actors, such as youth organisations, often oscillate between envisioning new realities and experiencing profound frustration with institutional inertia. Similarly, academics might articulate the possibility of long-term change alongside the constraints imposed by entrenched structures. These oscillations are not indicative of incoherence but rather signify the multiplicity inherent in imagination and the ongoing negotiation of who has the right to articulate futures, and under what conditions.

Imagination should be seen as performative; it not only describes potential futures but actively enacts them by proposing, debating, and distributing the authority to envision. This perspective expands on Castoriadis's (1987) concept of radical imagination by illustrating how society's capacity to create is demonstrated not only through the generation of new meanings but also through their emotional impact and temporal context. In Santiago, imagination plays a crucial role by producing various visions of transformation while simultaneously striving to articulate systemic alternatives to the socio-economic order. This indicates that imaginaries are always contextual and intertwined with both desire and power.

The City as a Locus of Imagination

The urban environment of Santiago serves as both a material and symbolic foundation for these imaginaries and a significant constraint on their articulation. Actors consistently frame the city as a duality: both a problem and a possibility. It is seen as a site of vulnerability, inequality, and extractivism, yet concurrently, a laboratory for experimentation and transformation. Climate change discourses are profoundly rooted in territorial narratives, with actors invoking specific neighbourhoods, rivers, air pollution, transportation, and housing inequalities to situate climate change within the lived urban textures. The neighbourhood emerges as a potent key element of identification and a discursive resource that grounded imaginaries in embodied experience, whether as a symbol of exclusion, segregation, or neglect, or of "solidarity, experimentation, or grassroots empowerment.

The localised nature of discourse carries significant political implications. It enables individuals and groups to assert authority over the discussion by positioning themselves as co-authors of local futures rather than mere observers of global dynamics. This relates to the claims of decolonising the imagination of climate change (Chao & Enari, 2021a; Death, 2022; Whyte, 2017). Although youth movements heavily utilise digital platforms and acknowledge the global aspects of climate change, their engagement with digital or transnational perspectives is limited. Instead, climate change is primarily framed as an urban-national issue.

This gap between lived experiences—where people inhabit global and digital spaces—and the way climate change is discussed—restricted by immediate urban contexts—highlights a tension and creates a notable "silence." The city serves both as a canvas for imagining futures and as a constraint that limits possibilities by making other scales less communicable. Santiago stands out as a unique case in the Global South due to its distinct political history, segregation, and current practices. While it can restrict political imagination, it also fosters an environment for contested practices, narratives, and politics. This emphasises that imaginaries are not merely abstract ideas but are grounded in specific places and practices of meaning-making. Moreover, the process of imagination is selective, allowing some futures to be articulated while obscuring others.

Temporal Framings of Climate Futures

Imagination is inherently temporal, with futures narrated through specific relations to the present and the past (Cantó-Milà & Seebach, 2024). This research employed four categories of temporal framing: Hyperpast, Hyperfuture, Linear Temporality and Temporal Fulidity. Through the analysis, it became clear that these categories overlapped with each other and were present in the discourse of the same actor, even within the same sentence. In the results, there's a dominance of linear temporality followed by Hyperpresent. Since these categories are intertwined, after an analytical reflection, it can be argued that the research identifies three dominant temporal framings of climate futures in Santiago, related to the initial categories of analysis. These are: Long-term Transformation, Present Urgency, and Cyclical Time.

Long-term Transformation, predominantly articulated by NGOs and academics, speaks of gradual change, multi-decade projects, or the intergenerational dimensions of sustainability. This framing reflects institutional planning logics and a belief in the continuity of processes, with the future unfolding through long, often institutionally mediated, changes. This approach, while legitimising structural strategies, risks deferring change indefinitely.

In stark contrast, the concept of **Present Urgency** was most clearly articulated by youth movements and artists, for whom climate change was not a distant scenario but an existential crisis that demanded immediate action. Their imaginaries were framed less around distant horizons and more around immediate rupture, with the future intruding into the present, collapsing temporal distance. This framing mobilises energy and disrupts inertia but can lead to frustration if transformation does not materialise quickly.

Finally, **Cyclical Time** emerged primarily among artists, who drew upon cultural and historical references to emphasise the recurrence of collapse, loss, and renewal. This temporal framing disrupted linear narratives of progress or decline, offering a cosmological sensibility that transcended managerial or activist timeframes, and provided a different ontological grounding for imagination. While it destabilises modernist assumptions of linear progress, it may underplay the unprecedented scale of anthropogenic climate change.

The coexistence of these framings reveals the temporal heterogeneity of climate imaginaries in Santiago, meaning actors inhabit multiple temporalities simultaneously, which involves an intricate interplay between different temporal modes, influencing actions, decisions, and interpretations of the past and present (Cantó-Milà & Seebach, 2024). This heterogeneity complicates collective action, requiring negotiation. However, it also enriches the imaginative field by providing diverse resources for articulating transformation, demonstrating how

societies institute meaning through time. The challenge, therefore, is not to force these diverse temporalities into a single narrative, but to acknowledge their coexistence as part of the plural condition of imagination.

Agency, Relevance, and Opacity

Agency was identified as one of the most unstable categories in the discursive field. Actors frequently invoked empowerment, participation, and transformation, yet these claims were often undermined by narratives of constraint, inertia, or external imposition, revealing a "paradox of agency". Youth movements, for instance, articulated agency through direct action and lifestyle changes but simultaneously voiced profound frustration with political institutions. NGOs positioned themselves as mediators but found their agency undercut by dependence on funding structures and policy frameworks. Academics enacted agency through critical knowledge production, while artists used aesthetic interventions. Across all actors, agency was paradoxically both asserted and denied, spoken and silenced.

The "relevance/opacity framework" by Pintos & Marticorena (2012) is particularly valuable in this context. The discourse on agency was highly relevant—frequently invoked and emphasised—yet simultaneously riddled with opacity, meaning its meaning was elusive, contested, and unstable. This duality highlights that imagination is not merely about envisioning futures but also about negotiating the terms under which agency is made thinkable.

This finding prompts us to consider a significant absence: the space for agency. How do individuals access the ability to effect change? Who is responsible for initiating that change? Additionally, why does the topic of climate change remain unimportant to many actors? In our analysis, we identified categories such as institutional and financial barriers as triggers for this inertia. Furthermore, a deeper reflection can be made regarding the lack of a strong epistemic critique. As Chao & Enari (2021a) argue radical imagination demands a transdisciplinary and reflexive approach to knowledge generation, inviting respectful cross-pollination across Indigenous epistemologies, secular scientific paradigms, and transdisciplinary methodologies. Perhaps the issue with this paradox of agency lies in how we address climate change, the future, and the concept of transformation. This epistemological and ontological question remains unclear in this discussion.

Furthermore, the research highlights critical opacities, or silences, in the discourse. As Pintos (2005b) argues, "opacity structures discourse by delineating what can and cannot be said". In Santiago, these opacities reveal the boundaries within which climate imaginaries are instituted, demonstrating that imagination, while generating possibilities, simultaneously forecloses others.

Practices of Imagination and Prefiguration

Crucially, imagination in Santiago is not solely a discursive or cognitive process; it is profoundly practical. Futures are actively enacted through everyday practices, lifestyle choices, and forms of activism. For youth movements, practices such as veganism, recycling, and alternative consumption are not merely instrumental but symbolic, embodying the futures they sought to realise. Protest, in this context, functions as both a political claim and a performative enactment of transformation. An example is the vegan activists in Santiago, who bring their imagined future into their daily lives through their practices, challenging the normal consumption model and creating spaces for alternative economies within the city. This is prefigurative imagination (Fians, 2022) taking place in the city.

For NGOs, practices centred on projects, workshops, and community engagement materialised imaginaries of resilience, adaptation, or justice. Academics contributed through research, teaching, and public debate, enacting critical knowledge. Artists used performances, exhibitions, and installations to materialise imaginaries of loss, belonging, and collapse. These diverse practices underscore that imagination is not detached from action, but rather becomes real through its enactment, which both prefigures and reinforces them. As Fians (2022) suggest, these practices of prefiguration are central to radical politics: they embody in the present the futures that actors wish to create.

However, these practices are not without their contradictions and limitations. Youth consumption practices can be constrained by class and economic realities. NGO practices are often limited by institutional dependencies. Academic practices may remain confined to elite spaces, and artistic practices, while being affectively powerful, struggled to translate into broader political mobilisation. These inherent contradictions reveal that imagination is not a linear pathway to transformation but a contested field of enactment.

In summation, this comprehensive analysis reveals that climate discourse in Santiago is a dynamic, polyphonic, fragmented, and paradoxical discursive field. It resists reduction to a singular narrative, instead manifesting as a complex web of imaginaries, silences, and contested claims to agency, profoundly shaped by political conditions, territorial experiences, and lived practices. The act of probing actors' visions of the future inevitably provokes an analysis of the present," demonstrating that imaginings of transformation are intelligible only within the constraints and possibilities of the present. Santiago, thus, serves as a vital laboratory for understanding how climate imaginaries are generated, circulated, and challenged, especially within a Global South urban context, offering critical insights into the dynamic, politically situated, and performative nature of imagination in times of crisis.

Conclusion: Imagining Transformation in Santiago

This research asked: *How are urban actors in Santiago imagining the future in relation to climate change, and what do these imaginaries reveal about the possibilities and limits of social transformation at the urban scale?*

The analysis shows that actors imagine the future through two intertwined processes: the future they expect and the future they desire. The expected future is shaped by slow reformist transformations, worsening climatic conditions, continued urbanisation, and persistent inequalities. The desired future, by contrast, evokes imaginaries of equity, polycentric governance, decentralisation of the human, holistic relations with the environment, and technologies serving collective well-being. These two processes highlight that imagination is performative: it is not merely a projection of scenarios but an active practice of meaning-making, where actors negotiate between resignation and aspiration.

Seen through this lens, the imaginaries identified—transformative, reformist, technological, catastrophic, and status quo—do not stand apart but circulate and intersect, forming a heterogeneous field of climate futures. What emerges is what Castoriadis described as the tension between the social imaginary, which stabilises dominant meanings, and the radical imagination, which challenges and reconfigures them. In Santiago, the exercise of imagining climate futures reveals this tension in action: actors simultaneously reproduce reformist visions while also opening spaces for more radical re-significations of the urban and the collective.

Possibilities and Limits of Social Transformation

The findings show that transformation is not envisioned solely as a future goal, but rather as an ongoing, cumulative, and multifaceted process. Actors articulate transformation in daily practices—community gardens, neighbourhood initiatives, sustainable consumption, cultural interventions, and policy-oriented projects. Transformation thus emerges not only in discourse but also in practice, as a lived process unfolding across scales.

Importantly, this transformation does not necessarily entail a rupture with the structural model of development. Instead, it often materialises as a shift in **how actors claim access to imagination itself: the power to think otherwise, to articulate alternative meanings, and to make these visible in the urban arena**. As youth interviewees put it, “first you have to imagine it to make it real.” Here, imagination becomes the condition for transformation, rather than simply its representation.

At the urban scale, these imaginaries illuminate both the possibilities and the limits of social transformation. On one hand, the multiplicity of imaginaries demonstrates that actors are actively re-signifying climate change in relation to justice, belonging, resilience, and equity. They are enacting prefigurative practices that embed transformation in their daily lives and collective actions. On the other hand, imaginaries remain constrained by opacity surrounding structural drivers such as capitalism, institutional dependencies, and the fragility of agency in unequal urban contexts.

Transformation in Santiago thus appears as a contested, partial, and situated process—rich in creative potential yet limited by broader social and political structures. What is transformed most visibly in this exercise of collective imagination is not the development model itself, but the very horizon of what can be imagined and claimed as possible.

Theoretical Contributions

This research makes three key contributions to the study of climate imaginaries:

- It expands the study of imaginaries by showing how urban actors in the Global South articulate heterogeneous, plural, and politically ambivalent climate futures.
- It develops Castoriadis' notion of radical imagination by combining it with typologies of futures, temporal framings, and practices, offering a richer account of how imaginaries operate in practice.
- It highlights the dynamics of relevance and opacity in imaginaries, showing how what remains unsaid—capitalism, planetary processes, digitality—is constitutive of the discursive field itself.

Further Research and Limitations

This study focused on youth movements, NGOs, academics, and artists in Santiago. While this scope allowed a deep dive into emergent imaginaries, it also leaves other key collectives unexplored. Future research could apply the typologies of discourses and imaginaries developed here to other groups, such as the middle class, the media, the private sector, and startups, and across other cities and case studies. This would allow comparative insights into how climate imaginaries circulate, vary, and evolve, from a Global South perspective, but also to the Global North, as the initial idea was to compare Santiago and Madrid. There is an interest in pursuing these comparative studies.

Equally, studies that concentrate exclusively on artists or youth movements could provide valuable insights into their roles as “second-order observers” of climate futures, whose symbolic interventions or radical imaginaries open windows into broader social debates. As a first attempt to study this evolving field, this project has been both eye-opening and inspiring, revealing the central role of imagination in urban climate politics.

Final Remarks

In conclusion, urban actors in Santiago imagine climate futures in ways that are heterogeneous, situated, and deeply political. Their imaginaries expose the contradictions of transformation: at once gradual and radical, embedded in daily practices yet limited by broader structures. Ultimately, this research reaffirms that climate change is not only a material crisis but also a crisis of meaning. Addressing it requires not only technical solutions but also the capacity to imagine otherwise. Santiago's urban actors embody this capacity, demonstrating that cities are not just sites of vulnerability but also laboratories where the futures of the Anthropocene are imagined, contested, and performed.

At the same time, the political context in which this research was conducted—marked by upheaval, contestation, and debate in Santiago—shaped the very imaginaries that emerged. Yet, as global politics enter a phase of uncertainty, polarisation, and renewed authoritarian tendencies, the question of how to approach social transformation becomes even more urgent. In this shifting terrain, imagination and future-oriented inquiry gain renewed relevance, offering a fertile space for rethinking politics, cultivating prefigurative practices, and resisting through the realms of academia, science, and civil society. From Santiago to the wider world, the work of imagination signals not only alternative futures but also new ways of inhabiting the present, insisting that transformation remains possible—even if contested and fragile.

Appendix A: References

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Appendix B: Interview Guide

Participant Information

- Name:
- Organization / Movement / Institution / Artistic Collective:
- Position / Role / Function:
- Years of experience in the field / movement / artistic practice:
- Main area of work or interest:
- Location:
- Territorial scope:

Introduction Script:

Thank you for participating in this research on future imaginaries of climate change in urban contexts. Your perspective is crucial for understanding how various urban actors—artists, youth movements, NGOs, and academics—envision and work toward sustainable urban futures. This interview will last approximately 60–90 minutes.

1. Organisational Context and Current Situation

Organisational Context (15 minutes)

1. Could you describe the main work of your organization in [Santiago/Madrid]?
2. What are the main projects or initiatives you are currently developing?
3. With which urban actors do you primarily collaborate (communities, government, private sector)?

Current Situation and Diagnosis (15–20 minutes)

1. From your on-the-ground experience, how does climate change manifest in the city?
 - Follow-up: What specific impacts do you observe in the communities you work with?
2. What are the main barriers to urban climate action?
 - Follow-up: How do these barriers affect different social groups?
3. Which initiatives or projects have been most effective in your experience?

- Follow-up: What factors contributed to their success?

2. Trajectory and Experience

(For artists, youth movements, NGOs, and academics)

1. How did you get involved with your organisation, movement, artistic practice, or area of work related to climate change?
2. What motivated you to engage with this issue?
3. What has been your experience so far working on this cause, movement, or artistic project?
4. How has your organisation / movement / artistic practice / area of work evolved since its beginnings?

3. Future Imaginaries and Planning

Vision and Transformation

1. How do you imagine Santiago in 2030 and 2050?
2. What changes do you think are necessary in the city to address climate change?
3. What urban, social, or cultural transformations do you consider priorities to achieve a sustainable future?
4. How do you think community dynamics and interactions between different urban actors—including artists, youth movements, NGOs, and academics—will change?

Governance and Participation

1. What role do you envision for your type of actor (movement, NGO, artist, academic) in future urban climate governance?
2. How do you expect citizen participation on climate issues to evolve?
3. What new models of collaboration between urban actors will be necessary?

Climate Justice and Equity

1. How does your organisation / movement / artistic work / research address socio-environmental inequalities?
2. Which communities or groups do you identify as most vulnerable to future climate impacts?
3. What strategies do you propose to ensure a just and inclusive transition?

4. Closing

1. Is there anything else you would like to share about your experience or vision of the future?
2. What main message would you like to convey about the future of urban climate action?
3. Which other individuals, organisations, or artistic collectives do you consider key to interview?

Appendix C: Informed Consent Form

"Opacity, Imagination, and Futures: Exploring Climate Change Discourses and Social Imaginaries in Santiago de Chile"

Information about the Research

You have been invited to participate in a research study that aims to understand the future imaginings of climate change through an analysis of urban discourse in Santiago, Chile.

The information you provide in the semi-structured interview will be recorded in audio format (or corresponding recording method) and will be analysed under complete confidentiality. It will not be disclosed to anyone outside the responsible researcher and their supervising professors. The semi-structured interview consists of a series of questions related to the research topic that are structured according to your responses.

The information produced in this research will be kept strictly confidential. Once participation consent is signed, each person will be assigned a pseudonym. Only if the interviewee specifically requests it will the data be kept unmodified. When analysing the information, a final report will be produced in which the anonymity of participants will be fully maintained.

Participation in this research is entirely voluntary. You have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without any consequences. The only benefits you may receive are updates on the study's progress and results, as well as a copy of the final document. Additionally, if you wish, you may request a copy of the written interview or the audio recording. You are under no obligation to participate, and you are welcome to ask any questions now or during your participation, as well as to contact the Research Coordinator at any time.

This document ensures that your participation involves no financial cost, as mobility and transfer expenses will be covered by the study. No risks or direct benefits are anticipated for participants.

Thank you very much for your contribution.

Contact Information

Master's Student Researcher

Name: María Paz Cárdenas Briones

Program: 4CITIES Erasmus Mundus Master Programme

Institutions: Vrije Universiteit Brussel (VUB), Université Libre de Bruxelles (ULB), University of Copenhagen (UCPH), Universidad Complutense de Madrid, Universidad Autónoma de Madrid, University of Vienna (U Wien)

Email: maria.paz.cardenas.briones@vub.be

Research Supervisor
Name: Rosa de la Fuente
Email: rdelafuente@cps.ucm.es

Participant Consent

I declare that I have read the information described and that my questions about the master's research have been satisfactorily answered. By signing this document, I indicate that I have been informed of the research:

"Opacity, Imagination, and Futures: Exploring Climate Change Discourses and Social Imaginaries in Santiago de Chile"

and that I voluntarily consent to participate by providing my opinions in an interview. I understand that I have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without any consequences.

Participant's Name: _____

Signature: _____

City and Date: _____

Informed Consent Coordination

I confirm that I have explained the nature and purpose of the master's research to the participant and that they have given their consent freely. I have provided them with a complete copy of this Informed Consent document.

Coordinator's Name: _____

Signature: _____

City and Date: _____