Poverty and related concepts have been widely researched, with various authors and perspectives contributing to the discourse. Additionally, there are many subtle distinctions and layers of analysis to consider. Thus, a helpful approach is to differentiate between the areas involved and provide more specific descriptions within each location. We understand the risk of creating artificial boundaries in complex issues where the same concept may be expressed differently in another context. However, we believe that taking this risk is necessary.

We propose to differentiate between the concepts and definitions of poverty. We will then explore different understandings of the causes of poverty, followed by a discussion of public policies implemented to address it. The seven articles that make up this dossier can be categorized into these three major poverty debate areas.

Ruth Lister (2021) has made an interesting differentiation between “concepts” and “definitions” of poverty. The former refers to understanding what it means to be in poverty, how it is perceived, and the discussions around it. In contrast, the latter refers to the distinction between poor and nonpoor individuals. Therefore, the measurement of poverty is a part of the definition debate. In other words, poverty con-
cepts form the framework within which the definition and measurements of poverty are developed (Lister, 2021, p. 4).

Different Approaches to Definitions
A critical aspect of the poverty debate is how to differentiate between those classified as poor and those who are not. The relevance of this debate lies in the sense of urgency that the very notion of poverty brings with it, or what Piachaud argued, poverty as a moral judgment, is an unacceptable misery. The concept “carries with it a judgment and a moral imperative that something should be done about it” (Spicker, 2009, p. 299). Therefore, it becomes crucial to correctly differentiate who would be part of such an intervention from those who would not.

Until recently, the discussion was marked by the distinction between absolute and relative poverty (Feres & Mancero, 2001; Sen, 1985, 1995, 2000; Townsend, 1985, 2007). This debate has been overcome (Boltvinik, 2009; Spicker, 2009). However, Sen’s and Townsend’s approaches to poverty remain relevant, as they provide information on different ways of understanding deprivation and measuring poverty multi-dimensionally.

Amartya Sen (1999, 2000) proposes that poverty should be seen as a deprivation of basic capabilities, understanding capabilities as those that enable people to lead the kind of life they have reason to value, linking capabilities with the idea of freedom. Unfortunately, Sen does not specify which capabilities should be considered primary, which makes it difficult to derive an indicator of poverty from the conceptualization of capabilities, although the efforts of Nussbaum (2002) and later Alkire (2007) to address this issue are well known, a question that remains open.

In our view, what is crucial in Sen’s conceptualization is that capabilities allow us to find a common criterion to account for the differences between human beings. Some of these differences will result from individual consideration of what they have reason to value, but other differences result from how the opportunity structure of societies is configured (Sen, 1988, 1999, 2000).

Peter Townsend (1979) argues that poverty and the very notion of needs must be seen concerning the prevailing standards in a society; poverty is due to the lack of economic resources, and individuals are in a situation of deprivation due to poverty. Now, how is the criterion for
a definition of poverty constructed? Townsend argues that, due to this lack of resources, poor people need access to the diets, activities, and living conditions that are common and accepted in the society in which they live. By highlighting this social standard of participation in everyday activities, these approaches propose belonging to that society as a criterion. Nevertheless, it is not only related to belonging in terms of voting in elections, being a subject of state policies (as a beneficiary or being consulted), or even participating in the labor market; it goes beyond that. It is to relate poverty to daily integration with the rest of the community.

Both perspectives show the limitations of two significant policy proposals to address poverty: increasing income and inclusion through public services. Sen (1988, 2000) and his capabilities perspective show that, given the diversity of individuals, only some need the same resources, whether income or essential goods, as Rawls proposed. For his part, Townsend (1979) shows that it is not enough to approach poverty from the point of view of access to services, even if these are as important as health, education, or housing. The lack of resources entails a distancing, an exclusion from daily activities that are a crucial part of community life, and efforts must be made to include this in the measurement. It is necessary to insist that this does not mean that redistributing resources is irrelevant, nor that access to services should not be a priority in anti-poverty policies; only that poverty is more complex, and in this regard, the contributions of Sen and Townsend are still valid.

Currently, the primary debate regarding poverty definitions focuses on multidimensional poverty; it no longer gravitates toward the need to have a multidimensional measure but on how to implement measurements that, along with accounting for the concept, are also applicable and allow international comparison (Consejo Nacional de Evaluación de la Política de Desarrollo Social [CONEVAL], 2019; Nájera & Gordon, 2020; Santos et al., 2015; Villatoro & Santos, 2019).

On the causes of poverty
The relevance of the discussion on the causes of poverty is beyond doubt. However, in general, empirical research on causes falls into what

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1 See the debates about social exclusion regarding these and other issues (Dean, 2016; Leyton y Muñoz, 2016; Silver, 1994).
Brady (2009) has called the conventional approach to poverty studies, that is, “comparing the characteristics of poor people with those of the non-poor” (p. 5); here, usually using statistical models (sophisticated and not so sophisticated), the aim is to show on which characteristics there are the most significant differences between these two groups. In general, this way of investigating the causes of poverty leads to approaches that root them in individuals and their characteristics. Shaffer (2015) identifies two approaches to poverty causality. To the one already mentioned, he adds a second approach highlighting the processes that produce poverty, such as economic underdevelopment, market malfunctioning, or discrimination based on race or ethnicity.

Now, both approaches account for the logic with which the causes of poverty are interpreted. A different and complementary exercise is to distinguish according to the content of the causes. Michael Katz (2015) argued that there would be six distinguishable ways of understanding them to construct ideal types. The first, closely related to the conventional approach described above, groups interpretations that see poverty as a problem or failure of individuals and/or their families, such as lack of education or work ethic, among other aspects. The second locates the cause of poverty in the place or territory, arguing, for example, that the area where poor people live reinforces or reproduces their poverty. The third cause identified by Katz is the lack of money insofar as it results from human capital, education, or employability of people in poverty.

The fourth cause for Katz (2015) is related to political economy; in a sentence, poverty is produced by capitalism. Here, we consider approaches that relate poverty to processes of unequal modernization, productive segmentation, the feminization of poverty and the care economy, ethnicity, internal colonialism (e.g., African Americans in the United States), and, finally, the effects of neoliberalism. The fifth cause is related to power, i.e., here we group interpretations that understand that poverty occurs because trade unions or other social movements are no longer influential, because there is insufficient redistribution of resources via taxes, or because of changes in welfare states. Finally, the sixth cause groups together interpretations that conceive poverty as a result of markets, either because there are difficulties for entrepreneurship in microfinance or imbalances in human capital.
The categorizations described above are coarse and may need to do more justice to the wealth of research on the causes of poverty in the literature. Still, they allow us to take a schematic look and show how there is room to discuss poverty and inequality from approaches beyond showing statistical differences between people experiencing poverty and the non-poor and looking at poverty not only at the individual or family level.

**Issues for further exploration**

There are three areas with interesting approaches to highlight and continue exploring in the discussions on poverty. The first relates to looking for causes of poverty by comparing poor and non-poor individuals or families. With this approach, the explanation of poverty is anchored in individuals and their characteristics, and people experiencing poverty tend to be blamed for their situation. It is essential to account for how this victim-blaming process is developed. In this direction, critiques of the notion of underclass and research questioning the role of the media in the configuration of the poor as undeserving have been crucial (Álvarez et al., 2018; Levitas et al., 2007; Macnicol, 1987; O’Hara, 2020; Wacquant, 2022).

A second area with interesting contributions, but where there should also be more research, is the relationship between the effects of climate change and poverty. The notion of the Anthropocene, as the dominant narrative, places the responsibility for global warming on all humans. The idea has been questioned because it is observed that capitalism and global inequality have played a relevant role in this sense; therefore, we are not all equally responsible (Capitalocene). The dominant narrative also states that we all are and will be affected by climate change in circumstances where poor populations are most vulnerable to its pernicious effects (Moyer et al., 2023; Rascón & Cervantes, 2023).

A third area for further research is the different links between poverty and inequality, which go beyond the monetary expression of both. Here, it is necessary to analyze intersectionality in poverty-related deprivations, which are accentuated in specific population groups such as women, indigenous populations, or inhabitants of rural territories, where structural inequality is revealed as a common denominator in
Latin America (Leyton & Muñoz, 2016; Pérez Sainz, 2020; Verón & Leguizamón, 2020).

Public Policies
Undoubtedly, these debates on the conceptions of poverty and the definitions for its measurement are central, as they directly impact how societies and their States understand and define public policies to address poverty and, potentially, inequality. As Bacchi (2012) argues, how the social phenomenon being addressed is understood is crucial, not only in the design of policies but also in their execution, in how they are translated into concrete professional actions in implementation.

The orientations of these policies for overcoming poverty have been consistent with the logic of subsidiary States and a somewhat weakened public and social institutional framework. In this framework, the social policies of the States in the so-called “developing” countries are far from being “social,” even though they bear the adjective “social”; they do not aim to intervene in society but rather to intervene in poverty, and specifically, in the poor (Leyton & Muñoz, 2020).

In Latin American social policy, extreme targeting is observed since the supply of social programs is oriented mainly to the poor and/or extremely poor population (Leyton & Muñoz, 2020). This “focopolicy,” as Sonia Álvarez Leguizamón (2011) calls it, is an expression of the subsidiary nature of the State, which acts only when the market does not meet the needs of part of the population. This has resulted in the creation of “institutions for the poor” and the institutionalization of the assistance component in public policy (Barba & Valencia, 2013; Hernández et al., 2018; Midaglia, 2013). For Barba et al. (2009), these neoconservative policies tend to reduce the new social issue to the issue of poverty and leave aside those aspirations of the 1960s and 1970s of the last century to configure a welfare state that guarantees citizenship rights in our region, where the fragility of welfare systems and the limitations for the guarantee and universal exercise of rights result in citizens not effectively enjoying the ownership of these rights (Cecchini & Martínez, 2011; Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean [ECLAC], 2007; Fleury, 2014; Leyton & Muñoz, 2016).
In Latin America, the rights associated with citizenship have followed a very different logic from the sequence of civil, political, and social rights described by T.H. Marshall (Heater, 2007) on the emerging European welfare states. Civil rights still need to be fully guaranteed in our region, political rights are practically universal, and social rights are limited due to the recessive adjustment in social policy (Fleury, 2004). However, as Leyton and Muñoz (2020) point out, some authors recognize that in the first fifteen years of the 21st century, there have been political forces in Latin America in favor of certain levels of redistribution and repositioning of the State with an active role in various arenas of social policies (Midaglia et al., 2018), or other researchers who observe a segmented expansion in social policy (Arza et al., 2022), in general in Latin American states, targeted policies for the poorest have prevailed; those population groups that can afford it, privately access welfare (Sojo, 2012). A clear example of this “focopolitical” logic has been the emergence and rapid expansion of conditional cash transfer programs (Álvarez Leguizamón, 2011).

The articles in this issue of *Temas Sociológicos*

It combines articles based on empirical research and literature reviews that broaden the conversation about Latin American poverty, inequality, and social policy. Each can be read as an informed and rigorous contribution to the central aspects of these debates. As suggested above, the seven articles in this dossier are ordered according to their contribution to the concepts and definitions of poverty, the causes of poverty, and policies to combat poverty.

The first two articles mainly focus on poverty concepts and definitions. In the opening article of the dossier titled “Measuring poverty in Latin America: A comparative study,” Fernando Cortés and Héctor Nájera discuss the various methods used to measure poverty in the region. They explain the challenges of adopting these methods and argue that the relative deprivation approach is more advantageous than others. Their argument is backed by solid evidence. Latin America has a significant history of measuring poverty, but the relative deprivation approach is not commonly used in the region. The study’s authors criticize the monetary approach of ECLAC’s cost of basic needs, the Unsatisfied Basic Needs (UBN), and recent efforts to measure multi-
dimensional poverty from the OPHI perspective. According to Cortés and Nájera, these measurements have theoretical and methodological problems. For example, the multidimensional perspective of the OPHI fails to argue theoretically which dimensions should be considered, and its empirical efforts are satisfied with including indicators for which data exist, even if these indicators are not correlated with each other, i.e., indicators that do not account for a latent concept such as poverty are included. The authors argue that the relative deprivation perspective has a solid conceptual foundation and a proven methodological scaffolding (the consensual method) that would make it possible to construct a representative measurement of current living conditions in Latin America.

In their article titled “Social Exclusion: Definition and Its Difference with Poverty,” María Ibáñez Martín and Milena Poggiese aim to bring clarity to a commonly used term in discussions related to social policies and welfare. Despite its frequent use, there is no consensus on the specific meaning of social exclusion concerning other related concepts, such as poverty or vulnerability. Discussions around social exclusion and its various definitions have been crucial in addressing issues related to welfare, quality of life, and State policies for improving the lives of the most disadvantaged groups. Ibáñez Martín and Poggiese have extensively reviewed the concept’s different interpretations and definitions. They have highlighted the differences between social exclusion and poverty, efforts made to define its dimensions, and the challenges faced while constructing measurements to quantify social exclusion. According to the article, social exclusion is the ongoing experience of being deprived of certain aspects of life. The authors believe that what makes social exclusion unique is how it happens over time and how it contributes to the ongoing discussion about the issue. The third article, by Tabaré Fernández, Sofía Vanoli, and Andrés Wilkins, discusses both the concepts and definitions of poverty and the causes of poverty. The text seeks to describe the evolution of urban poverty in Uruguay between 1963 and 2011 and explore some associated factors. Considering the temporal breadth of the effort and the complexity and historicity of the poverty construct itself, the authors engage in an informed and interesting discussion on the contours of the concept of poverty, the various notions of relativity that have been part of this discussion, and the efforts to conceptualize and define the multidimensionality of poverty.
To describe urban poverty, they present two Unsatisfied Basic Needs (UBN) methodologies that draw on data from three population censuses in Uruguay. The authors carry out the description of urban poverty in that country from both methodologies, which allows them to ensure, on the one hand, comparability and, on the other hand, the adequacy of the estimator to the socially current standards of living standards, which have a historical character. With the data produced, Fernández, Vanoli, and Wilkins show firstly that poverty decreased in urban localities in Uruguay between 1963 and 2011 and that this decrease has been more pronounced from 1985 to the present. Second, they confirm that the regional distribution has remained relatively stable. Third, they indicate that the collective determinants of poverty have become increasingly less necessary in explaining variations in poverty in urban localities in Uruguay.

The article by Natalia Guinsburg, Julio César Gaiada, and Ernesto Lespada addresses a crucial issue for studying poverty: the influence of the labor market. Although it seems evident that poverty has unemployment and/or low wages among its causes, relatively few studies in the specialized literature address this relationship with a solid empirical basis. This article contributes directly to this since it hypothesizes that the growing increases in poverty in Argentina, in the context of employment growth, are related to a high degree of precariousness in the labor market (self-employment and employment plans), all in the context of high inflation. To this end, the authors qualify the regressions through a threshold analysis, i.e., they not only look at the regression for the whole period or population group but also explore possible unexpected changes (nonlinearities). In particular, Guinsburg, Gaiada, and Lespada show that in Argentina, increases in unemployment lead to increases in poverty, only with specific informality rates. Still, when informality is in a particular range, the data show an inverse relationship between unemployment and poverty. This is due to a segmentation of the labor market and the high heterogeneity of Argentina’s productive structure, relevant issues to consider and which contribute, together with inflation, to the increase in poverty in the country.

The fifth article of our dossier corresponds to María Mercedes Di Virgilio and María Agustina Frisch and deals with the processes of
habitat commodification in Buenos Aires. To this end, the authors discuss conceptually how housing has become a commodity, particularly a financial instrument of accumulation denominated in dollars, in a context of distrust in other savings instruments. The effect of this on the territorial configuration of the population’s habitat is analyzed; in particular, the authors study the City of Buenos Aires (CABA) and the municipality of Pilar.

In the first case, they analyze two public spaces in the CABA, which, in reality, respond to a private logic. Rather than community spaces, they are spaces whose use by the population was designed in favor of profitability through the sale of services. The case of the municipality of Pilar is different, although with a similar logic. Due to its proximity to the capital has experienced significant population growth, including residential real estate developments for high-income segments of the population (private neighborhoods, condominiums, and the so-called countries). The urban infrastructure provides services to the real estate developments without planning or concern for the rest of the population living in Pilar or the low-income sectors arriving to provide services to the high-income segments. Among other aspects, the relevance of this study by Di Virgilio and Frisch is that it clearly shows how territorial mercantile mechanisms produce and reproduce inequality in the face of the state’s regulatory inaction and the lack of housing policies.

The last two articles address issues related to policies to combat poverty. Ximena Baraibar’s article focuses on managing the pandemic by the Ministry of Social Development of Uruguay, focusing its actions on labor insertion without concern for its quality and as an opposite or even questioning the role of social assistance in state action. Baraivar focuses the analysis on the Cupo MIDES and Programa Accesos programs, emphasizing the media coverage of their incorporation into the public scene and a discourse promoting autonomy and link with the private world. This analysis evidences a government view emphasizing personal dignity in labor insertion in contrast to state benefits conceived as generating dependency.

The seventh and final article of our dossier on Poverty and Public Policies in Latin America has been written by Daniela Giambruno. In this article, the author examines the social protection available in Latin
America to address the issues of poverty and labor informality, which have worsened in the post-pandemic era. Giambruno analyzes the extent of access, coverage, and poverty reduction achieved by social protection strategies in the region, with a particular focus on conditional cash transfer programs. The text emphasizes the importance of “second-generation” programs that aim to facilitate the inclusion of the adult population in the labor market, specifically in the context of Chile’s “Subsistema de Seguridads y Oportunidades.” However, it also demonstrates that these programs have a limited impact on improving income levels and increasing employment opportunities. This raises questions about the effectiveness of such programs in fulfilling their primary objective.

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