MADRID HISTORICAL DISTRICT: A SPACE BETWEEN MARGINALITY AND REGENERATION

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ABSTRACT

As a result of the globalization process, historical urban centres are undergoing broad social transformations. During recent decades, Spanish urban central districts have been immersed in a trend of demographic decline, fast ageing, residential deterioration, and increasing marginality. In the 1990s, however, some new developments slowed down or even reversed those tendencies, although with contradictory outcomes. A greater global consciousness about the necessity to recover historical centres as symbolic spaces, and their revalorization as cultural axes, has promoted broad rehabilitation processes. The increasing tertiarization and cultural specialization of historical centres has meant the displacement of residential use, resulting in the recovery of degraded places, turning them just into “visit spaces”. At the same time, historical centres have increased their residential attraction for a small segment of population with high socio-economic level. As a result, processes of depopulation coexist with incipient processes of gentrification in previously marginal areas. On the other hand, Spain has shifted very recently from a country of emigration to a country of intense immigration. A large majority of immigrants choose to live in central districts because of their specialization in services and commerce, a greater availability of low-income housing and their social and ethnic networks. Their recent arrival in these districts has contributed to their ethnic-cultural

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diversification as well as to their rejuvenation. However, this concentrated residential pattern also creates ethnic enclaves, and increases the risk of socio-spatial segregation and marginality, as well as an incipient “ghettoization” of urban centres. All these processes can be observed in the central district of Madrid, which at the present time experiences both regeneration and marginality. In this chapter, we study the changes experienced by Madrid historical district during the 1990s and early 21st century. The sources we analyze allow a great level of territorial desegregation –based on electoral tracts– and make it possible to document the processes of marginalization and regeneration that are transforming the heart of the urban centre.

INTRODUCTION

As a result of the globalization process, European urban historical centres are undergoing broad social transformations. Some of these changes have been taking place invisibly in the hearts of our cities. Unfortunately, however, some of the conflicts arising from these processes end up in the newspapers, giving visibility to the process. For example, in the summer of 2005 witnessed intentional fires of a xenophobic nature in the hearts of some European cities. Or Lavapiés, one of the most representative neighbourhoods in the historical district of Madrid, became sadly famous as the place where the Islamic attack of 11-M was conceived¹.

Before arriving at the current setting, the centres and most symbolic areas of our cities underwent several transformation processes. For decades, urban central districts were immersed in a trend of demographic decline, rapid aging, residential deterioration, and increasing marginality. In the 1990s, however, new developments slowed down or even reversed those tendencies, although with contradictory outcomes.

A greater global consciousness of the need to recover historical districts as symbolic spaces, and their revaluation as cultural axes, has promoted broad rehabilitation processes. The increasing tertiarization and cultural specialization of historical centres has meant the displacement of residential use, resulting in the recovery of degraded places, but turning them into merely “visit spaces”. At the same time, historical centres have increased the residential attraction for a small segment of the population with high socio-economic levels. This process permits a partial recovery of central districts for residential use, but with a highly elitist slant. As a result, processes of depopulation coexist with incipient processes of gentrification in previously marginal areas.

On the other hand, Spain has shifted very recently from a country of emigration to a country of intense immigration. Since 2001, Spain is the country of the European Union that receives the largest number of immigrants each year. A large majority of immigrants choose to live in central districts because of their traditional specialization in services and commerce, a greater availability of low-income housing and their social and ethnic networks. Their recent arrival in these districts has contributed to ethnic-cultural diversification, as well as to rejuvenation. However, this concentrated residential pattern also creates ethnic enclaves and increases the risk of marginality, as well as an incipient “ghettoization” of some areas of city
centres. The result at present is a considerable level of socio-spatial segregation in the most central areas of our cities.

**THEORETICAL BACKGROUND**

In the last few decades, European urban areas have been undergoing significant changes that affect different aspects of their demographic, economic and social configuration. The situation in Spain is not much different, as it forms part of economic and social processes on a worldwide scale. The processes that govern changes in central urban areas are a substantial part of what takes place in the urban environment as a whole (Bourne, 1993). Thus, in parallel with suburbanization and multiple-nuclei or dispersed cities, processes of social polarization – a phenomenon known as “Manhattanization” (Smith and Williams, 1986), gentrification (Hamnett, 1991) or even ghettoization or ethnic spatial segregation can be identified in central areas.

A neighbourhood is, simultaneously, a place where a community has formed and a place where households and investors accumulate earnings and interest. A community generates internal relationships and forces that tend to establish norms, a public image and habits that define the neighbourhood. This situation is altered when property values in the neighbourhood change, whether because of devaluation caused by increasing deterioration and marginalization, or an increase in value caused by gentrification, or even prior to such a process, when investors discover the neighbourhood’s development potential and the long-standing residents lose control over it. As a result, not only is the urban landscape modified, but so too is the social fabric of these urban areas.

Different comparative studies published in recent years on urban transformation processes point out the great similarities that exist among the different European countries with regards to their sociodemographic makeup and socioeconomic conditions, at the same time as they emphasize the clearly multidimensional nature of the problems that need to be tackled (Arias, 2000). Most of the new dwellers in European urban areas belong to two well differentiated groups: young urban professionals and immigrants from developing countries (Smith, 1987). On the other hand, most of the traditional residents in these areas are older or even very elderly people who find it difficult to remain in neighbourhoods that are getting increasingly expensive, and who reject or mistrust the transformations taking place in those areas occupied by an immigrant population. In both cases, they have few or no resources that would enable them to change their residence, finding themselves “trapped” in an untenable situation.

Significant groups of immigrants from non-EU countries have swollen the vulnerable populations concentrated in the most disadvantaged areas of cities (Hernández Aja, 2001). These groups of newcomers contribute two new features to the general sociodemographic panorama: a growing ethnic diversity that opens the door to cultural conflicts and xenophobic reactions from the local population, and an increasingly precarious administrative situation linked to restrictive legislation that fosters illegality, thus aggravating exclusionary processes.

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1 The 2004 Madrid train bombings (also known as 11-M) were a series of coordinated bombings against the commuter train system of Madrid on the morning of 11 March 2004, which killed 191 people and wounded over 1700.
In many European countries, disadvantaged neighbourhoods are now synonymous with neighbourhoods populated by non-EU immigrants (Bruquetas, Moreno and Walliser, 2003).

The concept of social exclusion refers to true gaps in a society (Vranken, 1997) and encompasses both the result of these gaps—marginalization—and the processes that lead to them—segregation and discrimination. Some of the basic indicators of this situation in an area are: high concentration of vulnerable socioeconomic groups, including immigrant population; low income levels; informal economy activities; and symbolic stigmatization of the area. Indicative characteristics of the physical space include residential segregation, social fragmentation, environmental deterioration and a lack or scarcity of public services.

The concentration of population groups with an accumulation of vulnerability factors in certain urban areas has a diversity of causes. Real estate prices, relatively lower in these neighbourhoods, are the first adverse selection factor, as they attract a population that cannot afford a higher level of expenditure for housing. Thus, they serve to polarize urban areas (Roch and Guerra, 1981). Added to this is the increasing social and economic precariousness of these neighbourhoods, with its corollaries of insecurity and marginalization, aggravated by the deterioration of the urban environment and of public services.

Despite the seriousness of the problems affecting these neighbourhoods, these types of areas have certain features that make them clearly attractive for public and private interventions. At the same time as their central location gives them potential in terms of the real estate market, their historic nature offers the possibility of reassessing their architectural heritage. This may lead to gentrification. This term refers to the process by which certain centrally-located, but deteriorated neighbourhoods become middle and upper-middle-class residential areas. The term began to be used to define a transformation process in major U.S. cities, in which urban areas that had been abandoned by the new middle classes in the 1940s-50s and had become ghettos were gradually populated, two decades later, by artists, designers and other groups attracted by the abundance of space at relatively low prices (Sampson and Morenoff, 2004). Currently, a great many of these processes form part of what is known as the "knowledge society," characterized by the fact that primary and secondary activities have lost importance, and activities in which "human capital" plays a key role have expanded (Castells, 2000). This phenomenon has also occurred in large European cities like Paris, London and Amsterdam.

The process may begin spontaneously because of the presence of relatively cheap housing in centrally-located neighbourhoods, or may start with an urban renewal programme. When the new population moves in, prices in the real estate market rise, and this gradually causes the displacement of the most vulnerable, traditional residents, who are replaced by medium to high-income qualified professionals. The increase in prices and the transformation of the resident population are usually accompanied by a gradual change in commercial activities and services. The new residents in a neighbourhood generate a "magnet effect," making it appealing to both new inhabitants and a variety of commercial and leisure activities. These change the nature of the neighbourhood, which in turn will attract other investors and more new residents. These processes often give rise to neighbourhoods with a pronounced identity; this is what occurred with the homosexual community in the Castro district in San Francisco (USA), or Soho in London.

However, the coexistence of these two processes has resulted in an increase in spatial segregation in urban areas, caused by the existence of communities with specific characteristics in different parts of the city, giving rise to areas with a very homogeneous
population. These social polarization and spatial segregation processes are characterized by the weakening of the links between different populations residing in nearby areas. The ties between these groups are extremely tenuous or non-existent, which considerably complicates social mobility and facilitates the growing disparity in social behaviours (Maurin, 2004). Some of these groups may even feel that they are socially isolated or excluded from society. With regard to the future of this phenomenon, some authors predict the social “Manhattanization” of European cities, i.e., a growing social polarization process in the centres of urban agglomerations (Smith and Williams, 1986).

**METHODOLOGY**

This paper analyzes the recent demographic evolution at Madrid historical centre. Madrid’s historical district is a good example for observing all these processes, given that it is one of the most extensive in area in Europe. As a result, all these processes can be observed in this area, which at present is experiencing both regeneration and marginality. Figure 1 shows the historical district of Madrid. In accordance with the latest available data, in January of 2005 nearly 148,714 persons lived in this area.

The need for a breakdown by area in analyzing the demographic processes that have taken place in the central district of Madrid restricted the statistical sources used in this study. Demographic change processes in urban areas can arise within a city block, or in a space delimited by a few streets, which means that a very detailed scale of analysis is required. The sources we analyze allow a great degree of territorial desegregation – at the electoral tract level – and permit us to document the marginalization and regeneration processes that are transforming the city centre. Therefore, the information used had to be limited to the variables provided by different statistical sources.

This chapter examines the changes in Madrid’s historical district during the 1980s, 1990s and early 21st century. For the main socio-demographic variables we have data up to 2004, i.e. covering virtually two decades. Indicators referring to the following topics have been calculated for each electoral tract within the district: (a) population distribution and density; (b) age composition; (c) gender composition; (d) educational and economic characteristics; (e) household composition; (d) immigrant rates and ethnic composition.

**DEMOGRAPHIC DECLINE**

Since the mid-1980s, historical districts have undergone a sharp demographic decline which has involved the deterioration of residence and environmental quality, loss of services and commerce, a certain degradation and growing social marginality.

In this period, Madrid’s historical district underwent a fairly considerable drop in population, with some areas virtually abandoned. While the region continued to grow and the city declined moderately, the historical centre lost a significant number of inhabitants (Figure 2).
One segment of the population in particular that has moved away from the centre is precisely the segment that guarantees its future: young people. When a young couple thinks about where to live, there are spaces not considered, avoided spaces and impossible spaces. For young people living elsewhere in the city, the centre tends to be a “space not considered”. For young people in the centre, it is an “avoided space” as regards those areas whose steady abandonment has led to situations of degradation and marginality. But it is also an “impossible space” as regards those areas where this has not occurred and where housing is difficult to find and expensive. These processes come in addition to the great expansion the metropolitan area of Madrid and many young people’s preference for less densely-populated spaces in periurban areas.

If one calculates a simple indicator, namely how many young people move to each neighbourhood for every 100 residents thereof who get married, it is evident that young people are moving out of the central area of Madrid, because they cannot afford to live there (Figure 3).
Figure 2. Evolution of population size, 1975-2000.

Figure 3. Index of place of residence after marriage, 2003.
The loss of young population inevitably brings with it a significant aging of the population in historical districts. Figure 4 shows the map of the proportion of persons aged 65 or older. In 1986, the aging process started with a relatively young population. Only 5 years later, large areas of the central district had already aged. And 10 years on, in most areas of the centre, aged persons accounted for more than one quarter of the population.


Figure 4. Percentage of population aged 65+, 1986, 1991 and 1996.

![Map of percentage of population under age 5 in 1991]


Figure 5. Percentage of population under age 5, 1991.

This aging process is not only the result of young people moving away, but is even more drastic due to the loss of children. Together with the young people, the central areas lose the potential mothers, and so children gradually disappear from the central areas of our cities. If one observes the proportion of children under age 5 in the centre of Madrid in 1991 (Figure 5), one will find that in most of the district, children account for less than 3% of the resident population.
The process of demographic decline in the historical centres is a process that feeds on itself. First, the area ages due to emigration—young people move to other neighbourhoods. The loss of potential mothers brings down birth rates. That, together with an aged structure, prompts an even greater loss in population due to negative natural increase, i.e. more people dying than being born.

Figure 6 shows that, in the mid-1980s, births still outweighed deaths in the city of Madrid. At the beginning of the 1990s, a balance between the two phenomena was reached, leading to a stable population in the absence of migration. Yet things were very different in the historical district during that same period: ever since the mid-1980s, deaths had far exceeded the number of births.

Another consequence of this process is the significant feminization observed in city centres. The gender difference in life expectancy, longer for women, means that there are far more women than men at more advanced ages. Persons populating city centres, or survivors therein, are aged people, but especially aged women.

Figure 7 is a map of the sex ratio in the centre of Madrid in 1991. The index shows the number of men for every 100 women. In no section are there more than 95 men for every 100 women. In most of the central area, there are 75 men to every 100 women. Aging has turned the central areas of our cities into significantly feminized spaces.


Figure 6. Natural increase of population, 1987-1999.

This scenario goes beyond the gender anecdote, as it has major repercussions on the quality of life in those areas, and especially on the needs for social services. What most women find after being widowed is residential solitude: the majority of the people living in city centres do so alone. Residential solitude increases the need for “monitoring” services for the elderly, such as telecare. In Spain, considerable media attention has been paid to the cases of elderly people dying alone, most of them in city centers, often through a lack of assistance. Cases of this kind are unfortunately highest in historical districts populated by women who are already quite old and live mostly alone.

Figure 7. Sex ratio, 1991.


Figure 8. Percentage of population with primary studies or less, 1991.

The consequences of this process of progressive decline have been far-reaching. The loss of young people, generally with a better education and with higher socio-economic levels, has also had an impact on the purchasing power of the neighbourhood’s population and, consequently, on the activities and services offered there.

For example, one can look at the level of schooling of the population in 1991 in Figure 8. In more than half of Madrid’s central areas, the population segment without an education or
only primary education accounted for more than 40% of the total. This socio-economic profile, linked to an aged population, leads to a drop in dynamism in the neighbourhoods, to a loss of commerce, of services and of activity in general.

**NEW NEIGHBOURS**

In the mid-1990s, and especially towards the end of that decade, new demographic trends began to appear. These trends were able to prompt a recovery in a few neighborhoods, but intensified the process of marginality in others, generating a large socio-demographic gap between nearby areas. What has happened in those areas that were able to break free from a vicious circle? The catalyst of change came from outside – outside the neighbourhood and outside the country, but with very different outcomes, which have led to the growing social polarization of the historical district.

The tendency towards change has been brought about by the arrival of new neighbours to the central areas. The most numerous and most visible are the foreign immigrants. In 2004, the foreign population living in the centre of Madrid was already significant. In much of that area, and with considerable spatial continuity, the foreign population represented more than one fourth of all inhabitants (Figure 9). In some sections they made up more than 50% of the population. Foreign immigrants are contributing to the ethnic-cultural diversification of those neighbourhoods, and to a considerable rejuvenation thereof, although at the risk of giving rise to processes of socio-spatial segregation, especially considering their concentration in certain areas. As a result, there is now talk of *ghettoization processes*.

But these are not the only new neighbours in the central areas. In the face of economic growth and expansion-based urban development, arguments emphasizing regeneration and recuperation are gathering strength. There is increased consciousness of the need to recover the historical centre as a symbolic environment, and its revaluation as a cultural axis. This leads to a growing tertiariization and specialization in the culture of leisure. As a result, the area becomes more attractive as a place of residence for certain groups of young adults with considerable purchasing power.

*Gentrification processes* of this type, that is, the recovery of symbolic central spaces by young adult populations with high purchasing power, are taking place in the area of Madrid known as *los Austrias*. It is a highly symbolic area with a varied cultural offering, especially in the space between the Opera House and the Royal Palace and in the area from the south side of the Plaza Mayor to the Cebada market (Figure 10).

If one examines the presence of professionals in the centre of Madrid, it is clear that this segment of the population is concentrated in certain areas where they represent more than 37% of the population (Figure 11). Worth noting is the Austrias neighbourhood, with a classic gentrification process, and the Chueca neighbourhood, with a specialized gentrification process.

Figure 9. Percentage of foreign population, 2004.

Source: *Google Earth* 2005.

Figure 10. Classical gentrification process: Los Austrias neighbourhood.
In the latter one, this phenomenon has occurred because the area has become specialized in a specific kind of leisure and commerce for the gay population. The specialized services that sprang up around this central area, in turn, drove the users of those services to demand housing. In this case, the new residents’ greater purchasing power and growing residential demand prompted the complete rehabilitation of the neighbourhood through private initiative, which saw a business opportunity and applied pressure to drive out the previous residents. As a result, the Chueca neighbourhood (Figure 12) in the historical district of Madrid, which used to have a very elderly population, has been repopulated in barely ten years, completely changing the landscape, the population and the services.

In areas affected by gentrification processes, the process of depopulation has come to an end, but there is no recovery of the volume of population lost during the stage of demographic decline. Due to the loss of residential use of broad areas, “non-residential corridors” have been formed around the main arteries (Figure 13). These corridors start off by emptying the “front line” of residential use, and then expanding progressively, driving residents out of extensive areas of the historical district. These areas are taken over for commercial, leisure, cultural, representative or institutional uses, which act as a magnet for new inhabitants, as do the new lower densities achieved. These areas run the risk of becoming “visit spaces”, empty of life.
Source: Google Earth 2005.

Figure 12. Specialized gentrification process: Chueca neighbourhood.


Figure 13. Population size, 2004.
By contrast, in the areas that foreign immigrants move to, there is a very notable increase in the population in territorially limited spaces, generating highly and even very highly densely populated “islands”. The networks that spring up in the neighbourhood, the growing ethnic specialization of services and commerce, and greater accessibility to housing in formerly degraded areas, explain the reasons for such focussed settlement in certain areas of historical districts. This concentration prompts a “densification” phenomenon in these areas, as compared to the low density phenomena predominating in the neighbourhoods that have recovered more (Figure 14). Foreign immigration contributes to the ethnic-cultural diversification, but such a concentrated settlement which gives rise to phenomena of ethnic enclaves, posing a significant risk of socio-spatial segregation and an incipient ghettoization of certain areas.

These two processes of “new neighbours” also bring about a profound rejuvenation of the central areas. The change in the proportion of elderly people shows that, at the start of the 21st century, certain areas of the centre were already considerably rejuvenated: the rejuvenation process was already evident in Chueca and was starting to become visible in the central sections of the Lavapiés area (Figure 15). According to the most recent data for 2004, practically the entire central district has been rejuvenated, and in much of it, four out of every five residents are under 65 years old. The central district’s population has not been so young since the 1970’s.


Figure 14. Density of population, 1998.
Both the gentrification of and the arrival of immigrants contributes to the rejuvenation of central areas. But they do not do so in the same way. The main drivers in the gentrification phenomena are young adult populations (Figure 16), urban professionals, and most of them live alone or are childless couples. This profile of the new residents, especially the limited presence of family homes with children among the new neighbours, moderates the rejuvenation process however.
The rejuvenation process is far more important in the areas to which foreign immigrants move. The arrival of young people, which in itself rejuvenates the area, combines with the arrival of women of childbearing age, children and even family units. There is a significant upturn in the number of children in the areas where foreign immigrants live (Figure 17). Thanks to their arrival, children can now be seen again in the city centres, not only visiting but living there.

The arrival of young people has also served to slow down the pace of feminization of the central areas of our cities. In 1991, the sex ratio in most of the central district was 75 men for every one hundred women. The arrival of new neighbours has helped to re-establish the gender balance in the historical district (Figure 18). In a classical gentrification phenomena (as in the case of los Austrias), involving similar proportions of men and women, the rebalancing process is more gradual. However, in certain cases of specialized gentrification (as in the case of Chueca) and in areas of foreign immigration (as in the case of Lavapiés), the phenomenon of masculinization is more intense, given the greater presence of male population among the new neighbours.

The majority of foreign immigrants in the city are from Latin America, but in the historical district it is the African and Asian populations that are on the rise. Most African immigrants are from Morocco and, to a lesser degree, from Senegal. In general, this is a population with a young average age and highly masculine; they have led to a rapid masculinization of areas such as Lavapiés. In contrast, the Asian immigrants in the central area are primarily from China or Bangladesh. The Asian population generally immigrates as families, which does not lead to the rapid masculinization seen in areas taking in other flows.

Obviously, the impacts of the arrival of new neighbours in the historical district have not been only demographic. These processes have altered the socio-economic profiles of the areas, although by contradictory ways. In the areas where a gentrification process has taken place, the percentage of the population that has no education or only primary education has dropped significantly in barely a decade (Figure 19). By contrast, the percentage of the population with low levels of education in the areas taking in foreign immigration remains
high (40% or more of the inhabitants). University graduates are distributed in quite the opposite way, clearly underscoring the growing social polarization in the historical centres (Figure 20).

The people involved in gentrification processes come from high socio-economic backgrounds, and there is a significant number of university graduates, most of whom are professionals with relatively high levels of income. The influx of this population, with greater purchasing power than the former residents, can transform the neighbourhood considerably, with old businesses disappearing and new types of activities and services appearing. This leads to a considerable increase in the cost of living in that area.


Figure 18. Sex ratios, 1991 and 1998.


Figure 19. Percentage of population with primary studies or less, 1991 and 1998.
However, the opposite occurs in the areas of foreign immigration. The new neighbours, with a low socio-economic profile, raise the level of activity in the area, but cause average levels of education, professional profiles, and levels of income to stay low. These factors combine with the densification, the progressive degradation of very old housing upon which very little money is spent, and the fact that certain residents reject the high residential concentration of foreign population. This drives out a large amount of traditional commerce – as in the gentrification processes, but due to other factors –, while at the same time creating an ethnic specialization in the services and commerce of the area. These emerging ethnic "enclaves" could represent a significant risk of ghettoization in the historical centres.


Figure 20. Percentage of population by schooling level, 1998.

Figure 21. Social processes in Madrid historical district.
CONCLUSION

The historic district of Madrid has undergone a significant transformation in recent decades as a consequence of the processes described in this paper. As a result, significantly symbolic and representative areas are being “repopulated” by highly different population groups, with scarcely any or no contact between them—even though they live only blocks apart. These processes appear to be fostering strong social polarization in the central areas of our cities.

The main features of the ethnic enclavism that takes place in historical centres are its growing intensity, considerable densification, high degrees of masculinization and very strong rejuvenation, with sharp rises not only in the young and adult populations, but also in birth rates and the infant population. The consequences are a significant and rapid marginalization of the area and the genesis of a ghettoization process.

On the other side of the coin, gentrification phenomena are subject to greater spatial discontinuity, expand slower and less intensely, and are characterized by low densities, improved gender balance and moderate rejuvenation. The consequences of these processes are visible in the intense rehabilitation of the areas involved and in a thorough transformation of activities and services there. These zones rapidly become expensive, giving rise to the phenomenon of elitist socio-spatial segregation.

Both processes, exemplified in the case of the central district of Madrid, end up driving out traditional residents. The zones of historical centres affected by gentrification processes become unaffordable for a good portion of the people who have lived there until then. As real estate agencies apply pressure to free up housing in areas where prices are rising fast, shops and services in the neighbourhood become more expensive and the area changes completely. By contrast, when a neighbourhood is subject to ghettoization, entailing the subsequent ethnic specialization of commerce and services and the transformation of the landscape and the neighbourhood, the traditional residents, most of whom are elderly, often have an attitude of rejection towards the changes in their usual living space, and even leave the neighbourhood if they can afford to.

REFERENCES


