

# Urban Justice and Public Housing Policies in Madrid

## A Review from the Capabilities Approach

This exhibition is part of the R+D+i Project **URBS: *The just city: exclusion, belonging and common goods. An urban perspective of the theories of justice***

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This project examines the concept of justice in urban environments. It considers that addressing the normative issues associated with inequality and social exclusion in urban areas requires a spatial approach to justice that takes into account not only urban structure and distributive conflicts in cities, but also collective agency and the advancement of human capabilities.

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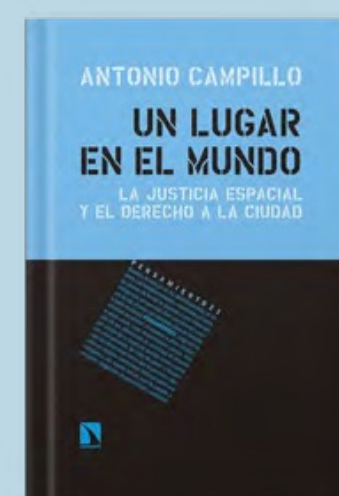
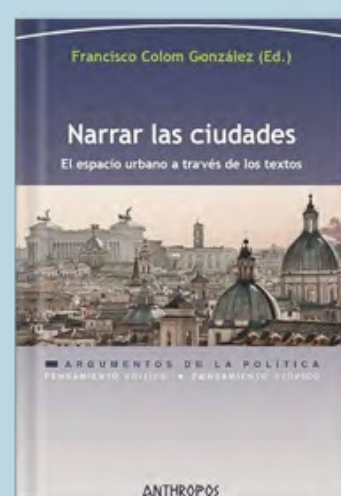
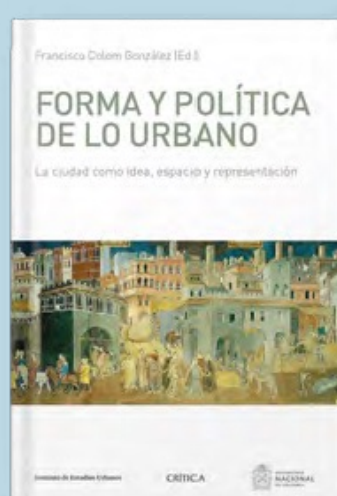
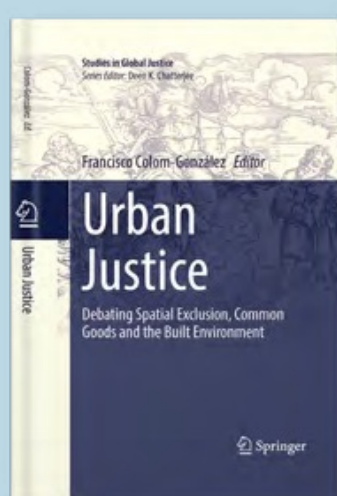
URBS

### Team bio

English version



### Urban Justice Research Team Books





# Urban Inequalities and Housing Policies

The concept of justice in traditional urbanism is based on the idea of an equitable distribution of resources. The capabilities approach, as developed by Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum, considers how these resources can be used to expand people's opportunities to develop autonomous life projects.

The objective of urban justice is to promote and preserve equity in social relations and material conditions in cities by strengthening human capabilities. Having a decent place to live is the foundation for the development of capabilities, and it is the responsibility of public housing policies to ensure universal access to safe and affordable housing.

Housing policies throughout the 20th century have successfully reduced Madrid's housing deficit. However, they have also perpetuated inequalities and exclusions by focusing on the provision of housing rather than on an equitable distribution of opportunities. This has contributed to Madrid becoming one of the European cities with the greatest socio-spatial segregation.

This exhibition sets out to prove this thesis in three parts:

1. An introduction to the basic concepts of urban justice.
2. An overview of public housing policies implemented in Madrid.
3. An analysis of these policies from the capabilities approach, together with an evaluation of their impact on the achievement of urban justice.

**"The capabilities approach focuses on positive freedom: the real freedom that people enjoy to do and be what they have reason to value."**

*Amartya Sen, Development as Freedom, 1999*



Housing under construction, Real Institución Cooperativa para Funcionarios del Estado, Provincia y Municipio, c/ Padilla, 76-82, Madrid. Foto: E. Ferrés y L. Lladó, H. 1920-30, Simurg, Fondo digital del CSIC





# Madrid's Territorial Imbalance

The Madrid region is a thriving economic area, with a GDP per capita that is 117% of the EU27 average. However, there is a disparity in prosperity levels across the region. The space reflects a disparity in income and service levels between northern and southern districts. In recent decades, gentrification and tourism have led to an increase in the number of low-income residents relocating to peripheral areas, which has contributed to the exacerbation of socio-spatial segregation.

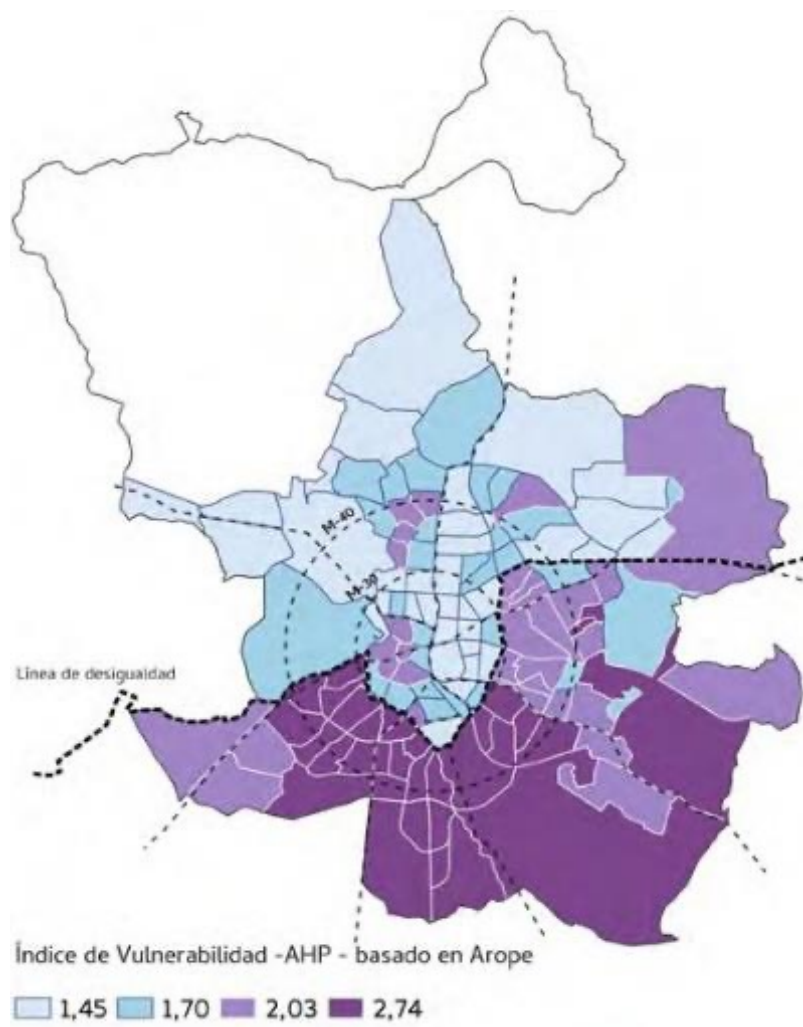
The causes of these imbalances are multiple and have historical roots. This exhibition examines the impact of public housing policies on this situation. While these policies have previously reduced housing shortages and improved living conditions, their design and implementation have resulted in unforeseen challenges.

- **General problems:** real estate speculation, deterioration of the public rental system due to an ownership approach; spatial segregation; inequality of opportunities depending on the availability of facilities and services, among others.

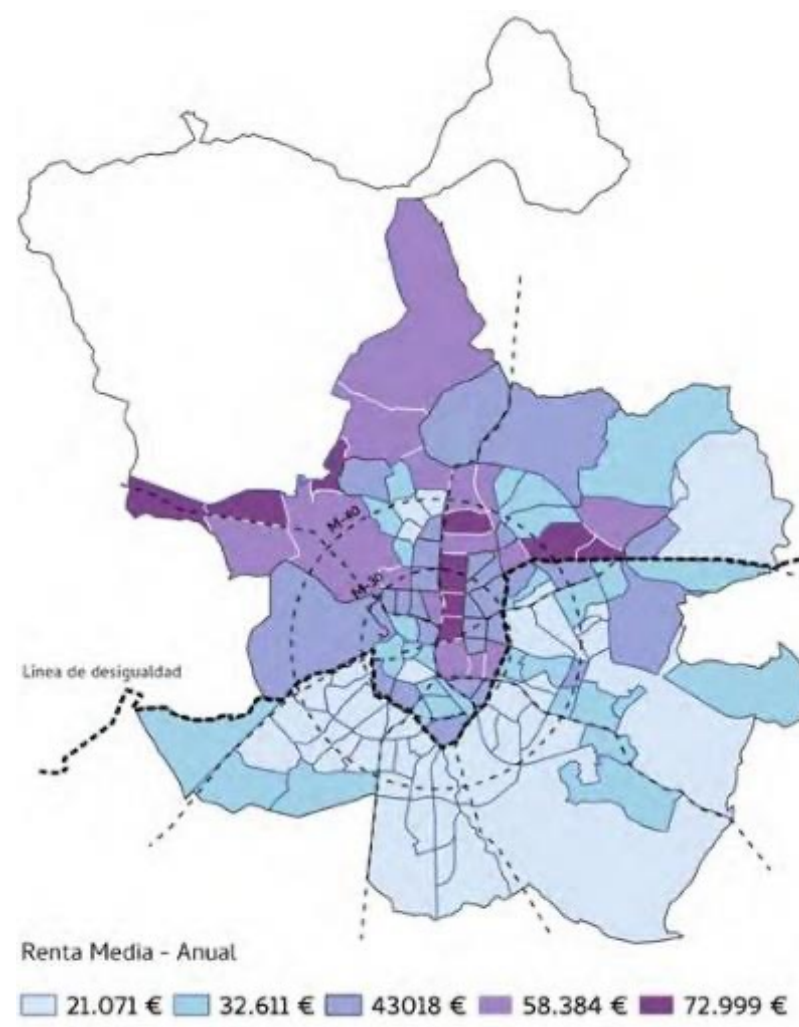
- **Individual problems:** imposition of lifestyles; daily dependence on transport; social stigmatisation; unequal opportunities offered by the city to develop individual capacities.

**"The dearth of social housing in Madrid has resulted in a significant socio-economic divide, with the affluent residing in one area and the less privileged in another. There is no integration. All the positive elements, including major companies, employment opportunities and private universities, are concentrated in the northern region. The sewage treatment plants and incinerators are located in the south."**

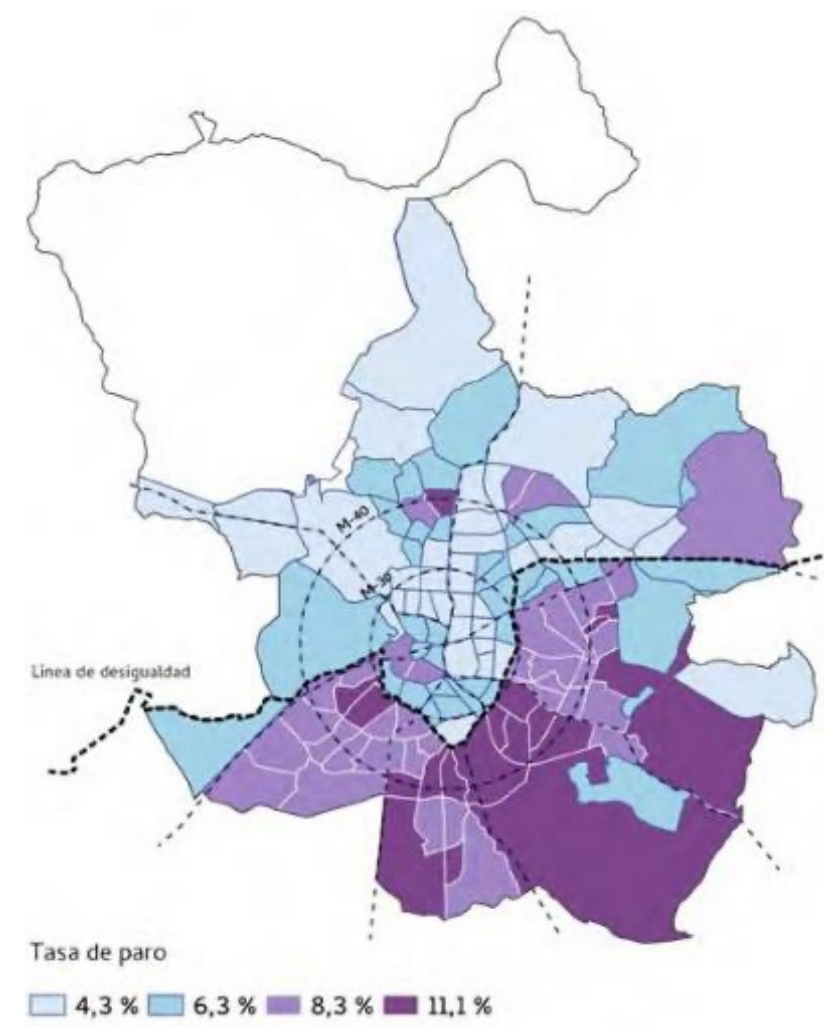
*Daniel Sorando. Rich Madrid, Poor Madrid. 2022*



AROPE is an EU index that measures the risk of individuals, communities and systems falling into poverty, exclusion or suffering harm due to various factors. Significant differences in vulnerability between neighbourhoods in Madrid define a line of socio-spatial inequality. *Map. I. Gutierrez Redondo. Source: AROPE 2022 Report.*



The average annual income in Madrid in 2022 was 20,284 €. In Chamartín, 51% of the population exceeds 200% of that figure; in Usera, 55% fall below 60% (12,170 €), which technically implies a relative poverty risk. This reflects a strong economic segregation between districts. *I. G. Redondo, 2024. Source: INE, Living Conditions Survey, 2022.*



The correlation between districts with elevated vulnerability, reduced income, and diminished employability indicates that redistribution policies have been ineffective in reversing inequalities, increasing the likelihood of social exclusion and socio-spatial segregation. *I. G. Redondo, 2024. Source: INE, Activity Rates, 2023.*



The terrace is situated in a high-income neighbourhood (Ibiza district). It is air-conditioned, soundproofed and decorated. *Photo: R. Goycoolea, 2024.*



Terrace in a middle-income neighbourhood, Arganzuela, in the shade and on a pedestrian street. *Photo: R. Goycoolea, 2024.*



Terrace in a low-income neighbourhood, Usera, unconditioned, narrow and adjacent to the street. *Photo: R. Goycoolea, 2024.*



# I. Urban Justice. A new perspective on the city and its planning

**"Urban planning should aim to be an instrument of spatial redistribution that combats segregation and promotes social inclusion, creating equitable conditions for access to urban resources and services."**

*Susan Fainstein, Planning, Justice and the City, 2017.*



Photo: Huerta de la Salud silo with social housing in the background, ca. 1980. Source: Cort. AAVR, Asociación de Vecinos Villa Rosa, Hortaleza





# I.1. Capabilities Approach

The capabilities approach, proposed by Amartya Sen and developed by Martha Nussbaum, proposes a new way of looking at social welfare. It focuses on people's real abilities and opportunities to carry out life projects freely and autonomously. This approach goes beyond simply looking at income or wealth as indicators of well-being, and asks *What is it that each person can actually do and be?*

According to Susan Fainstein, focusing on capabilities means ensuring that urban environments provide the material and social resources necessary for all residents to fully develop their capabilities. This includes improving livability, sustainability and access to services that promote economic opportunity and social connectedness, as well as fostering community vitality and a sense of belonging. Addressing these issues requires effective public policies.

This exhibition argues that urban justice must take into account the multi-scalar nature of social goods, translating different forms of distribution and recognition into effective resources for human autonomy in urban settings.



Nussbaum's innovation lies in shifting the focus of well-being from the possession of economic resources (GDP) to the real opportunities we have to develop ourselves. She prioritises integral human development, recognising the diversity of needs and conditions in order to achieve social justice. *Outline: P. Núñez, 2024*

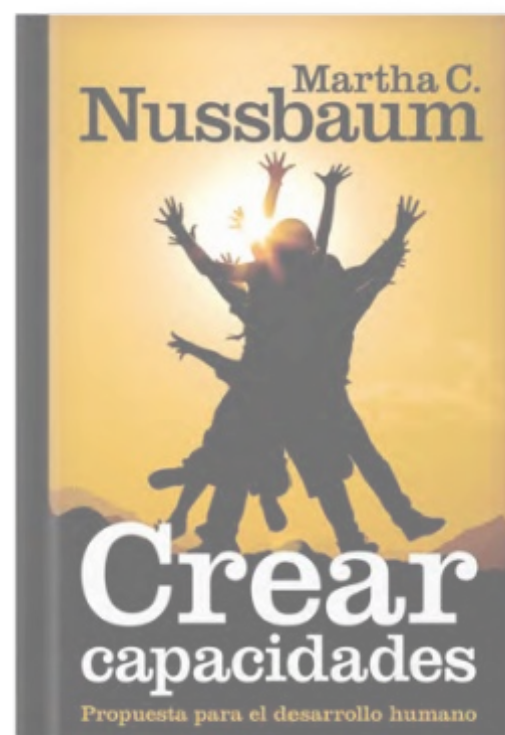
***"Life is about more than earning a living, and if you're not in the habit of thinking about it, you can end up middle-aged or even older and shocked to realize that your life seems empty"***

*Martha C. Nussbaum, 2017*

## Basic texts



Amartya Sen, Indian economist and philosopher. He argues that development should be measured not only by economic growth but also by the expansion of people's freedoms and capabilities. Freedom is both the end and the means of development and includes political, economic and social rights.



Martha C. Nussbaum, American philosopher: development should focus on ensuring that people have the opportunities they need to lead fulfilling lives. She proposes the capabilities approach, which measures well-being in terms of actual freedoms to achieve valued goals.



Susan S. Fainstein, American political theorist and urban planner: urban planning should promote social justice and equity. Cities should therefore be evaluated and designed in terms of how they improve the lives of citizens, with a focus on distributive justice and democratic participation.



Richard Sennett, American sociologist: urban design should focus on creating spaces that foster community and social interaction. He argues that cities should be designed to promote coexistence and social cohesion, not just functional and economic efficiency.



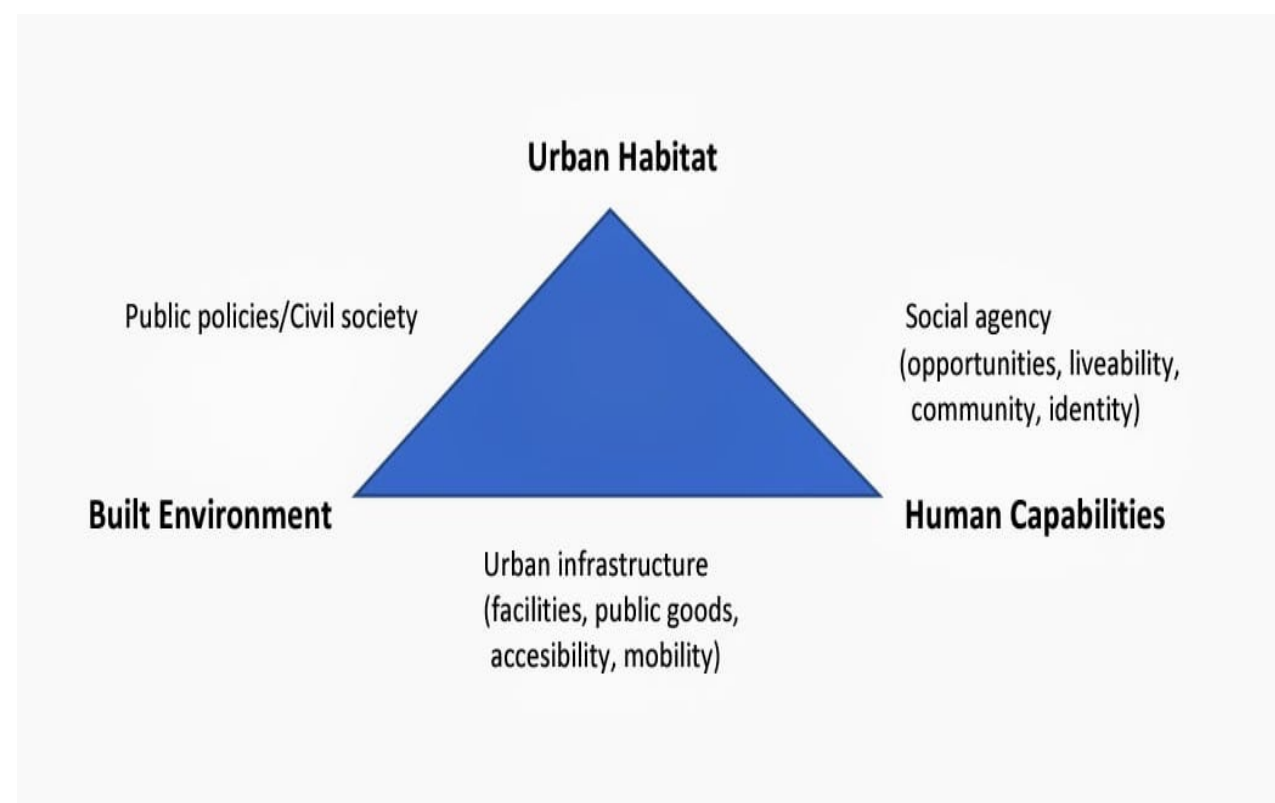


# 1.2. Urban Justice

Urban space is a social construction, embedded in the economic, political and cultural conditions of its time. Urban justice is manifested in the functional relationship between three interrelated dimensions of the urban experience: the socio-spatial functions of the built environment, the ability to take advantage of urban opportunities, and the existence of a habitat in which to live and thrive socially.

Cities are characterised by human agglomeration and the provision of public goods that enable the coexistence of very diverse activities and social interests. Identity links with the built landscape, accessibility, livability and their role in enhancing human capabilities are aspects of urban justice related to the urban commons. The challenge is to understand the city as a commons, showing that social assets and capabilities are inextricably linked to the opportunities the city offers for individual and collective development.

Balanced urban development, environmental and housing policies, building regulations, transport, infrastructure, safety and universal accessibility are all factors that promote quality of life. Urban injustice, on the other hand, increases inequality. Inequalities do not appear randomly in cities; they are generated and reproduced by the urban structure itself and the absence of determinants of quality of life.



The vertices of the urban justice triangle are inextricably linked: the environment has a direct impact on the ability to live a fulfilling life. Inclusive urban design, with access to services, public spaces and adequate housing, enhances capabilities as defined by M. Nussbaum and promotes well-being and social justice in the city. *Diagram: F. Colom, 2023.*

**"There is no single thread that weaves the urban fabric, but rather our streets, buildings and squares are the threads that weave the story of our lives, shaping the way we live, interact and dream."**

*Joaquín Bosque Maurel Lecture at the UAH, 2006*

## Conventions on the Dignity of the Human Habitat



### Human Rights

Article 25: Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services.

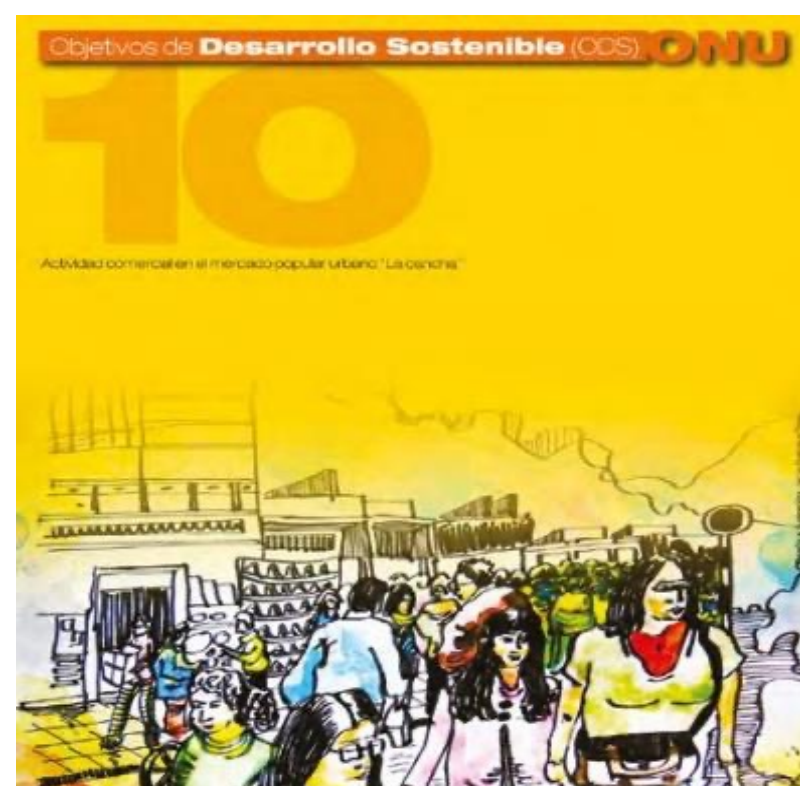
*United Nations, 1948. Photo: Social housing in Vallecas, Madrid. Photo: R. Goycoolea, 2019.*



### World Charter on the Right to the City

Collective right [...] to a sustainable city without discrimination of sex, age, race, health, income [...] as well as to preserve their identity and cultural memory.

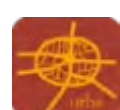
*World Social Forum, Brazil, 2001. Photo: R. Goycoolea, Madrid, Plaza Mayor, 2021.*



### The SDGs and the New Urban Agenda

Urban development must become an engine for economic, social and human development that protects the environment and generates well-being, justice and equity.

*SDG 10. Drawing: Jaime Alzérreca, Views on the SDGs, 2016. Courtesy of the author.*





# 1.3. Housing and Urban Justice

A safe, efficient and sustainable city is important, but not enough. Access to housing is the basis of urban justice because it provides security, a sense of community, intimacy and rootedness, and facilitates access to other resources such as education, health, employment and leisure; but it is also a commodity subject to the market. The tension between the city understood as a space for good living (Aristotle) and its role as a mercantile and financial instrument is a permanent dichotomy that has repercussions on social cohesion and well-being.

The objective of Public Housing Policies is to manage these tensions (right or commodity) by regulating the housing market to ensure affordable and adequate housing, thus providing opportunities to develop human capabilities.

Urban design may or may not contribute to social inclusion and capacity building. *We shape our buildings; then they shape us*, said Sir W. Churchill in 1941. Many flagship social housing projects have failed by focusing (only) on the construction of housing without considering the provision of amenities and the quality of urban space. This, coupled with the concentration of vulnerable populations in them, has led to anti-social behaviour, such as that experienced in Pruitt-Igoe, Saint Louis, in 1973, in Orcasitas, Madrid, in the 1980s and in the Parisian *banlieues* in 2023.



The World Habitat Day slogans address key challenges of urban development, shelter and the well-being of cities. The latter focus on the urgent need to close growing urban inequalities and ensure that all people have access to decent housing and services. *Source: UN-HABITAT, World Habitat Day 2022.*

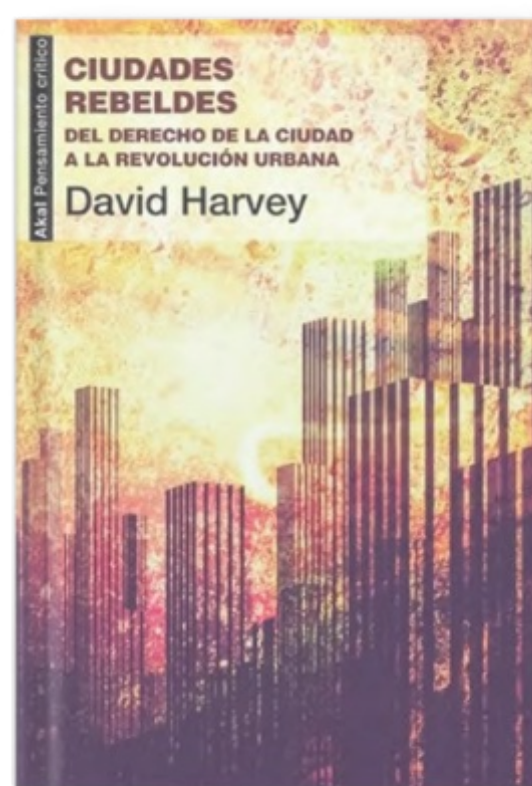
**"Housing is a right, not a commodity. Housing is the foundation of stability and security for individuals and families. It is the centre of our social, emotional and sometimes economic lives and should be a sanctuary in which to live in peace, security and dignity."**

Raquel Rolnik,  
Special Rapporteur on Adequate Housing, UN, 2010

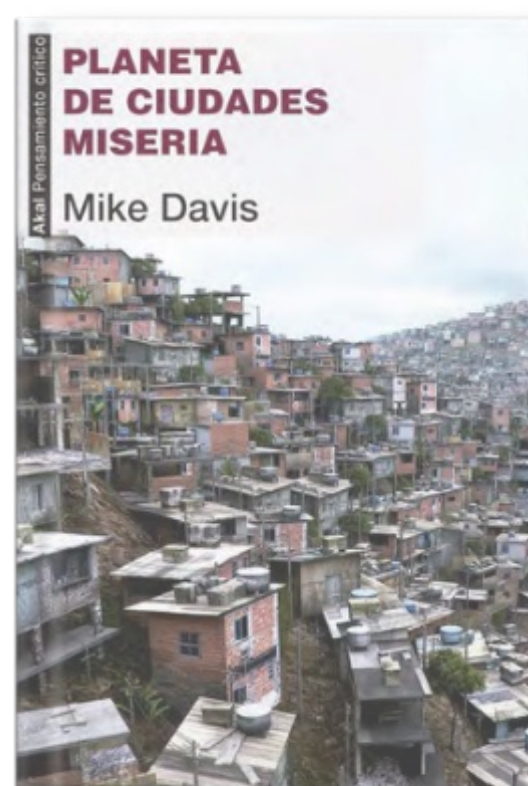
## Basic texts



Henri Lefebvre, French philosopher and sociologist: citizens must have the power to influence the configuration and use of urban spaces. He defends the collective right to transform the city according to social needs, prioritising community life over capitalist logic.



David Harvey, British geographer and social theorist: cities are key arenas of class struggle; their inhabitants have the right to transform urban space according to their needs. He proposes the 'urban revolution' to reclaim citizen control over capitalism.



Mike Davies, American historian and geographer: rapid urban growth, especially in developing countries, has led to a massive expansion of informal settlements. He shows how neoliberalism has exacerbated urban poverty, creating cities marked by inequality and exclusion.



Raquel Rolnik, Brazilian architect and urban planner: neoliberal urban policies have commodified housing, displacing vulnerable communities. She argues that the struggle for territory is essential to guarantee the right to the city and to resist social and spatial exclusion.



# 2. Public Housing Policies in Madrid

Over the past 150 years, there have been six distinct phases in public housing policy (PHP.):

- Charity Act. 1845-1911
- Affordable Housing Act. 1911-1939
- National Reconstruction Programme. 1939-1957
- Social Emergency Plan. 1957-1975
- Neighbourhood Remodelling Plan. 1975-1995
- Urban Action Programmes (PAU). 1995-now



Map of  
Madrid  
Districts

The cartography of this section has been carried out by I. G. Redondo with data obtained from a variety of sources. The age and location of the buildings have been sourced from the Sede Electrónica del Catastro, while the public housing developments have been georeferenced by hand with information from the Atlas de la Vivienda Pública. The data for Madrid from 1940 to 2010 has been sourced from Moya, Fernández and Escamillas (2021). Additionally, the blog Urbanidade has been utilised to map the developments of the Charity and Affordable Housing laws. Please note that data from El Pardo have not been included in any of the maps due to the distortions generated by its administrative and demographic particularities.





# 2.1. Charity and Welfare: 1845-1936

The onset of industrialisation in Madrid resulted in a 30% increase in the city's population from 1800, reaching over 250,000 inhabitants by the mid-19th century. The city was characterised by a striking contrast. The Bourbon reforms created an image of an enlightened city, but the majority of the population lived in overcrowded corridor houses with inadequate services and hygiene standards.

In line with the recommendations set out by European hygienists, significant improvements were made to water and sanitation infrastructure. In 1860, the city council approved a 100-year, 450,000-inhabitant widening project. The project, known as the Castro Plan, proposed the separation of neighbourhoods according to functions and social classes. Despite the lack of a concrete form, these principles have endured.

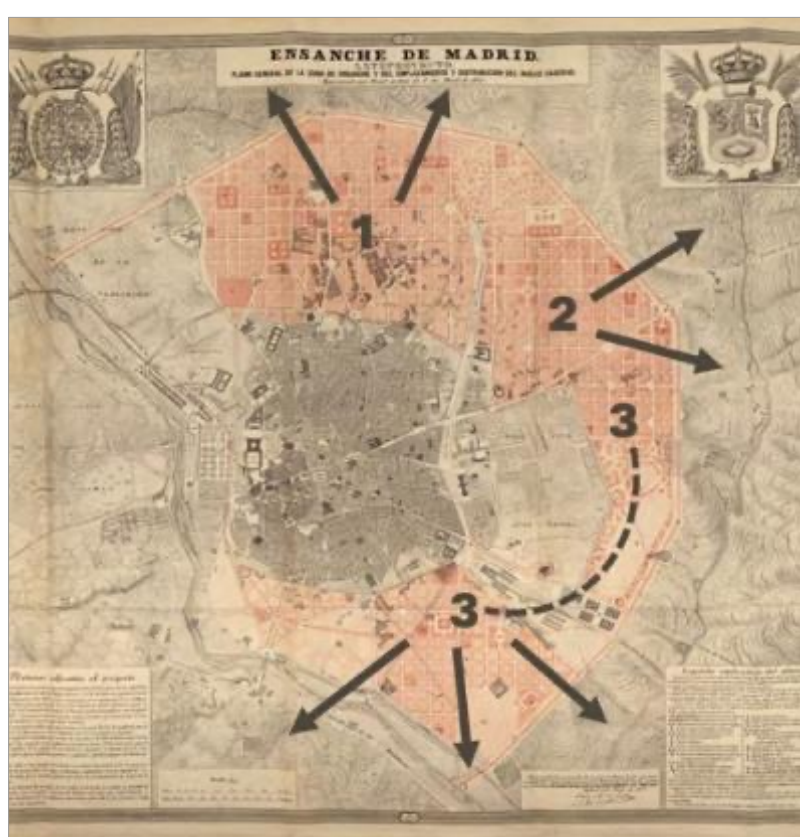
A Royal Order of 1853 highlighted the substandard living conditions of a section of the population and urged 'major contributors' to promote the construction of low-cost housing. In 1875, the Constructora Benéfica was established with the support of the Charity Law of 1849. The construction of minimal housing was carried out on the periphery of the city, without the provision of essential services or urban infrastructure. In the absence of state support, the number of units constructed was limited. However, these developments set a precedent for future housing policies.

*It is widely acknowledged that the provision of assistance to those in need is not a right, but rather a moral obligation of society. This is typically fulfilled through the actions of public administration.*

*Fco. Javier de Bona, Anuario administrativo y estadístico de la provincia de Madrid, 1868*



Map: I. G. Redondo, 2024. Source: see note sheet 2. Public Policies

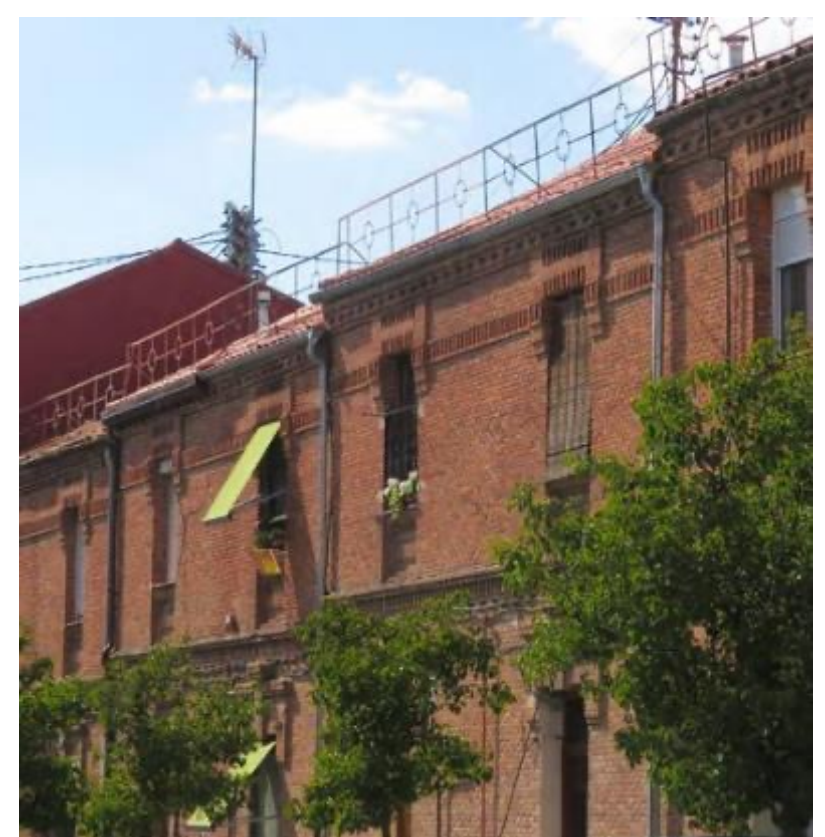


The *Plan de Ensanche de Madrid* (Urban Extension Plan) of 1860 proposed to expand the city into socially homogeneous housing districts: (1) Aristocratic (2) Middle class (3) Workers and artisans. This plan initiated a *modus operandi* of socio-spatial segregation that is still in place.

Scheme: P. Núñez, 2023. Source: *Plan de Ensanche de Madrid de 1861*, Biblioteca Digital Hispánica.



In the 19th century, most of the population lived in overcrowded conditions, especially in working-class neighbourhoods. The dwellings were small, poorly ventilated, poorly lit and lacked basic services. The corridor houses (*corralas*) that still remain bear witness to this precariousness and poverty. *Corrala, Lavapiés (end of 19th century)*. Photo: R. Goycoolea, 2003.



Despite their modest size and simplicity, the *charity housing* offered a relatively dignified solution compared to other options at a time of rapid urban growth and housing shortages in Madrid. The 20-year amortisation option was available, but proved unaffordable for many of the more modest income groups. *Houses of the Constructora de Beneficencia, cl Montero de los Ríos, ca. 1910*. Photo: P. Núñez, 2024.



## 2.2. Affordable Housing Act: 1911-1939

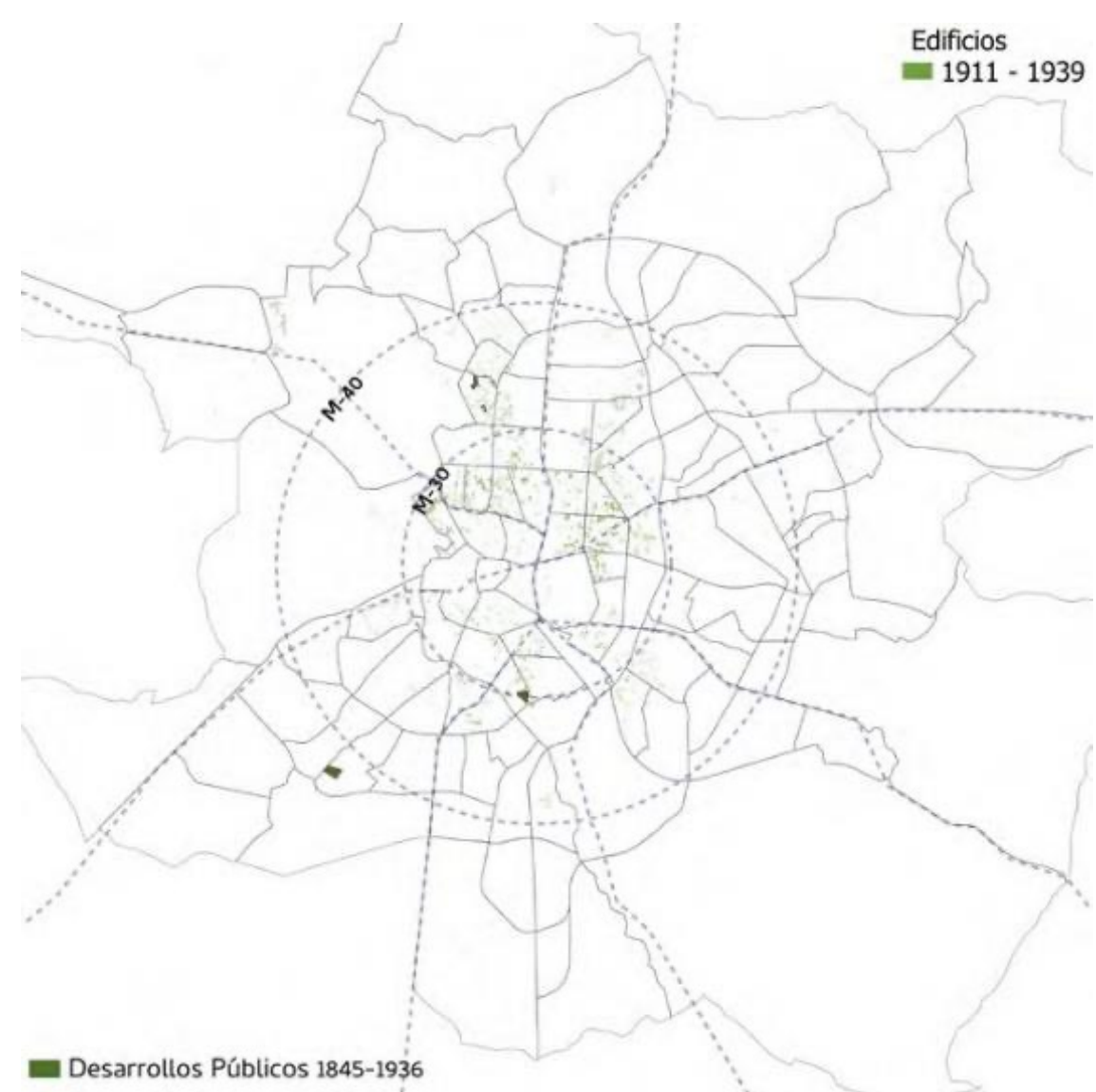
In 1910, Madrid had a population of 590,807 inhabitants. A belt of substandard housing surrounded the capital. In 1911, in response to social demand, the Law on Affordable Housing was passed.

This is the first decisive intervention by the state in housing matters, encouraging the construction of affordable housing through tax exemptions, subsidising builders and establishing minimum conditions of habitability. In Madrid, the City Council and some companies will create housing cooperatives for their workers. Generally built on cheap plots on the outskirts of the city, they were minimalist row houses with communal bathrooms and services and no urbanisation or transport.

Because of the eligibility requirements, it ended up serving the interests of the bourgeoisie and, in particular, land owners and skilled workers' cooperatives. In Madrid there were as many as 52 colonies of this type, with around 5,500 single-family homes for the middle and upper classes, including the exclusive Colonia del Viso. The gradual introduction of the telephone and the private car allowed for peripheral locations based on the ideals of modern architecture. Despite the incentives offered, the number of dwellings built under this law was insufficient to satisfy a growing demand.

**Although they did not fully meet expectations, the Affordable Housing Acts were the first significant attempt at public intervention to improve popular housing.**

*Luis Arias, Las casas baratas, 2011*



Supported by the law, several institutions and cooperatives promoted various *colonias*. Among the few that remain is that of *Salud y Ahorro*, of the Municipal Board for ultra-affordable housing. Built without urbanisation or services, it was renovated in 1985 and, like other 'cheap houses', is in great demand today. *Colonia Salud y Ahorro, Usera. Photo: P. Núñez, 2024.*



One of the innovative projects was the *Colonia del Pico del Pañuelo* (1927), a complex of 74 four-storey blocks with minimal dwellings (less than 45 m<sup>2</sup>), but with the aim of dignifying the lives of the workers and, above all, providing them with accommodation as close as possible to their place of work and to local shops. *Colonia Pico del Pañuelo, Legazpi. Photo: R. Goycoolea, 2024.*



Ambiguities in the legislation and a lack of control over its application allowed various groups of wealthy families to use the Housing Acts to form cooperatives and build houses based on the hygienic ideals of the Garden City and the aesthetic trends of the day. *Colonia Hogar del Ferroviario, Moratalaz, Affordable Houses of the General Union of Workers and Railwaymen of Spain, 1923. Photo: P. Núñez, 2020*

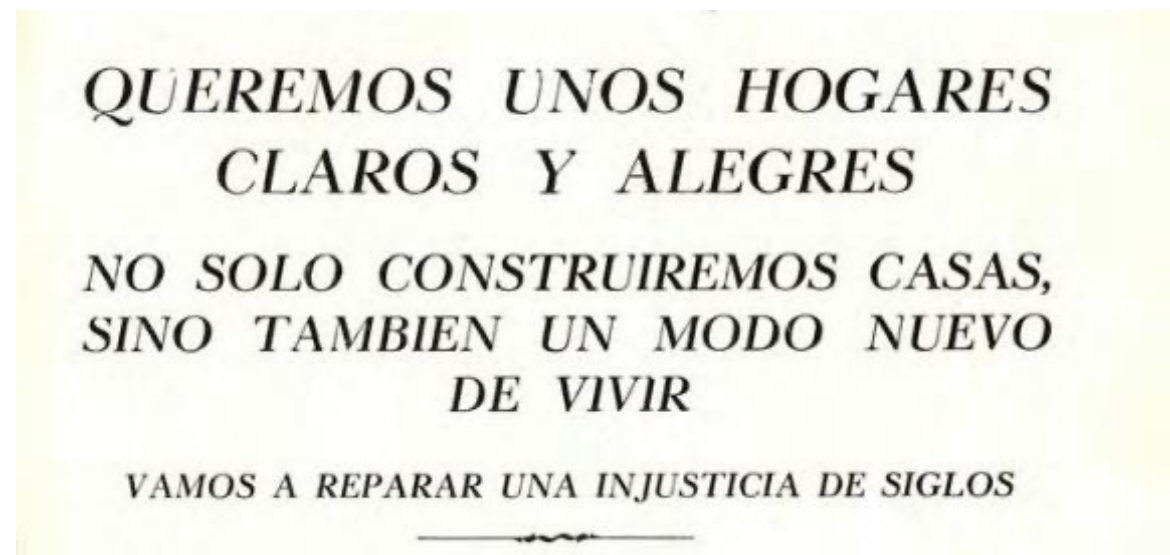


## 2.3 Autarchy, between ideology and scarcity: 1939-1959

After the Civil War (1936-39), Madrid was faced with a desolate housing panorama. In addition to destroyed housing, there was poverty, migration and a housing market that was scarce and inaccessible to the majority. Housing policy focused on reconstruction. In 1939, the National Housing Institute was created to provide differentiated aid for subsidised and rent-controlled housing. In 1945, the *Fuero de los Españoles* (de facto constitutional laws organising the powers of the Francoist regime) recognised home ownership as a right. From 1946, rents were controlled, which led to a collapse in supply, forcing families to go into debt in order to have a place to live.

From the outset, housing policy was subordinated to the ideals of the dictatorship. Proclamations and projects promoted the values of national Catholicism, with the church and Catholic school as central elements of the neighbourhoods. Public spaces were designed to facilitate surveillance and encourage orderly and disciplined community life.

Official propaganda was confronted with reality: the housing achievements of the Autarchy were meagre due to a lack of money and materials, bureaucracy and corruption. Between 1939 and 1950, the National Housing Institute funded less than 10,000 dwellings, a minimal relief for the more than 400,00 substandard dwellings registered in 1950 by the Urban Planning Commission of Madrid and its Region (COUMA).



José L. de Arrese, *Viviendas protegidas, una obra de Falange, 1941*



Map: I. G. Redondo, 2024. Source: see footnote plate 2. *PublicPolicies*



Looking at Madrid's prosperity today, it is hard to imagine the levels of poverty that prevailed well into the 20th century. Franco's autarchy was characterised by food shortages, rationing, unemployment and a lack of basic resources and housing that affected the lives of the majority. *Cave dwellings in Av. Daroca, Ciudad Lineal, ca. 1950.* Photo: Jose Luis Mur V., Archivo de la Comunidad de Madrid.



The *barrios* are conceived as small autonomous villages, where the home is considered the spiritual and material centre of the family, the primary nucleus of the state; an instrument for Christian and social education, based on tradition, the goodwill of the people and respect for the established order. *Subsidised housing for Iberia employees. Barajas, 1949.* Photo: Vuelo americano, 1961, IGN.



Not only was material reconstruction sought, but architecture was deliberately used to promote national Catholic ideological precepts. Evocations of 'Spanishness' replaced the modernist aesthetics of previous decades, such as that of the Gran Vía. *'Plaza mayor' of the Colonia Iberia, Barajas, 1949.* Photo: R. Goycoolea, 2021.



## 2.4 Housing, a social emergency: 1959-1975

In the middle of the last century, the Spanish economy was bankrupt. The Franco regime abandoned the ideal of self-sufficiency and opted for the liberalisation and rationalisation of the economy, which took the form of the Stabilisation Plan (1959), which ushered in a period of development under the supervision of the International Monetary Fund.

The housing shortage in Madrid is enormous. Around 400,000 people live in substandard housing and social tensions are rising. The Ministry of Housing, created in 1957, mainly promotes block housing for homogeneous social groups in specific locations. The private sector was involved, with government support, in the construction of affordable housing for the middle class and the rehousing of vulnerable families. Between 1961 and 1975, 4,080,619 social housing units were built in Spain, alleviating the housing shortage, revitalising the economy and transforming Spain into a country of real and aspiring homeowners.

However, these achievements were marred by a number of problems: many houses were of poor quality, new neighbourhoods lacked infrastructure and services, and policies favoured private ownership over renting without addressing the need for affordable housing for the impoverished classes.

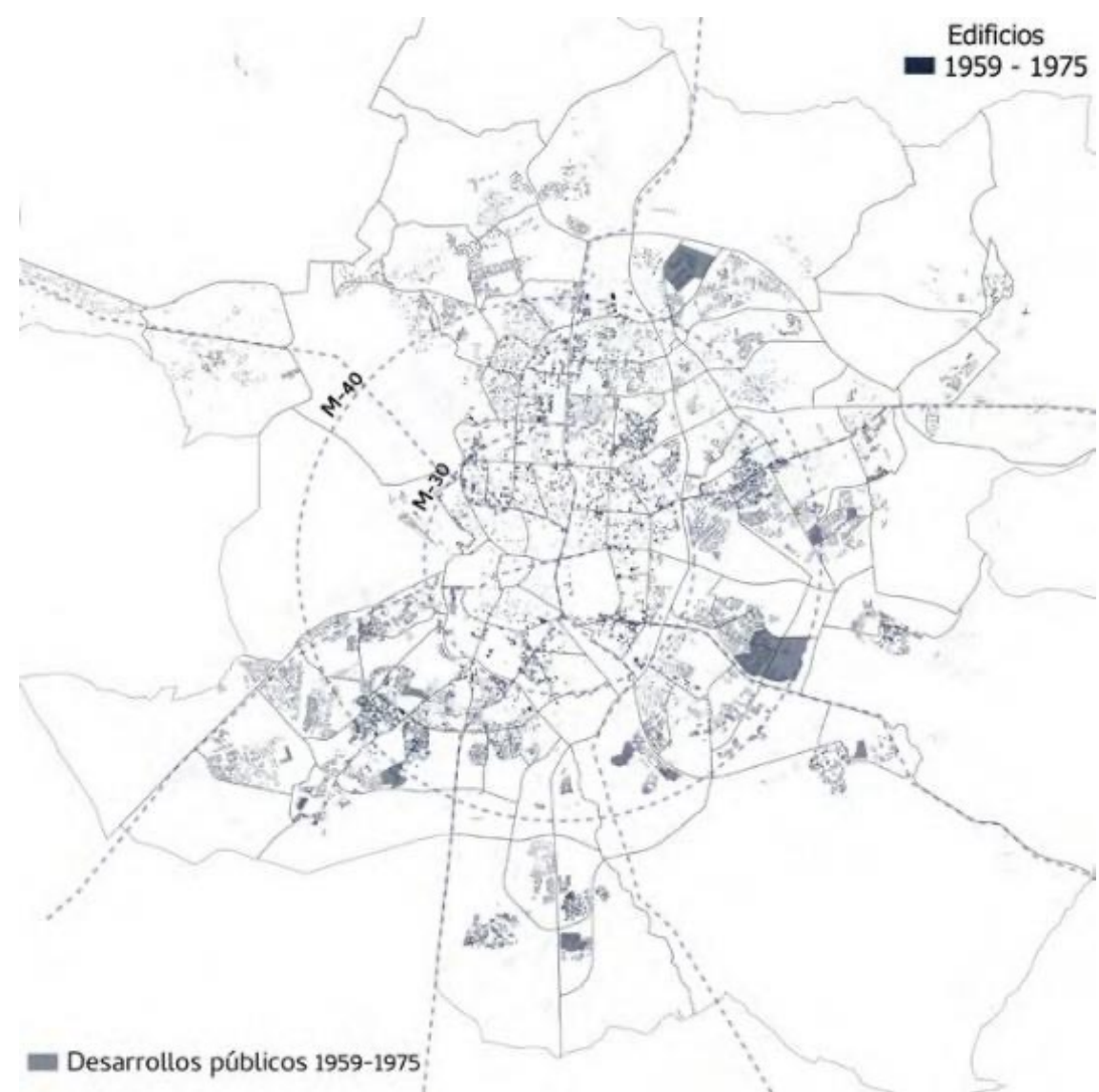
A B C. SABADO 2 DE MAYO DE 1959. EDICION DE LA MAÑANA. PAG. 41

### «NO QUEREMOS UNA ESPAÑA DE PROLETARIOS, SINO DE PROPIETARIOS»

"ASPIRAMOS A QUE LA VIVIENDA SEA DEL QUE LA VIVE Y QUE DE LA "RENTA LIMITADA" PASEMOS AL IDEAL DE LA "VENTA LIMITADA"

Palabras de D. José Luis de Arrese, en el homenaje que le tributaron los agentes de la propiedad inmobiliaria

ABC journal, 1959.



Map: I. G. Redondo, 2024. Source: see footnote 2. Public Policies.



Class A subsidised housing, the largest (110 to 200 m<sup>2</sup>) and highest quality of subsidised homes, was intended for civil servants, public employees and military officers. With a historicist and robust aesthetic, they were located in urbanised and well-connected areas of the city.. Niño Jesús, Retiro, 1954-57. Photo: P. Núñez, 2022.



Class B subsidised housing, of medium size (65 to 150 m<sup>2</sup>) and of lower quality but adequate construction, was intended for workers with a stable average income. With a functionalist aesthetic in isolated blocks, they were located in the second urban belt and were gradually provided with public services and amenities. Moratalaz, 1958-68, "Una ciudad dentro de la ciudad". Photo R. Goycoolea, 2024.



Class C subsidised housing was the most modest in size (50 to 80 m<sup>2</sup>) and of lower quality in materials and construction, intended for people with lower incomes, often precarious workers. With a rationalist aesthetic, they were built in almost undeveloped, remote and marginal areas of the periphery. Poblado Dirigido de Caño Roto, 1957- 1969. Photo: P. Núñez, 2024.





## 2.5 Neighbourhood redevelopment: 1978-1995

Democracy began with two major innovations: the 1978 Constitution, which turned the ideal of home ownership into a right to be guaranteed by the public authorities (art. 47), and the transfer of housing responsibilities to the Autonomous Communities, with the state maintaining general regulation.

This period was characterised by the promotion of social housing (VPO), the improvement of construction quality thanks to the 1987 Construction Management Act and the innovative Neighbourhood Restructuring Programme (1976-1988), which aimed to provide services to Francoist neighbourhoods and to eradicate the 30 informal neighbourhoods not included in the dictatorship's housing plans. This was achieved through the construction of 38,590 new local VPOs. Neighbourhood associations played a crucial role, with a level of participation that remains exceptional.

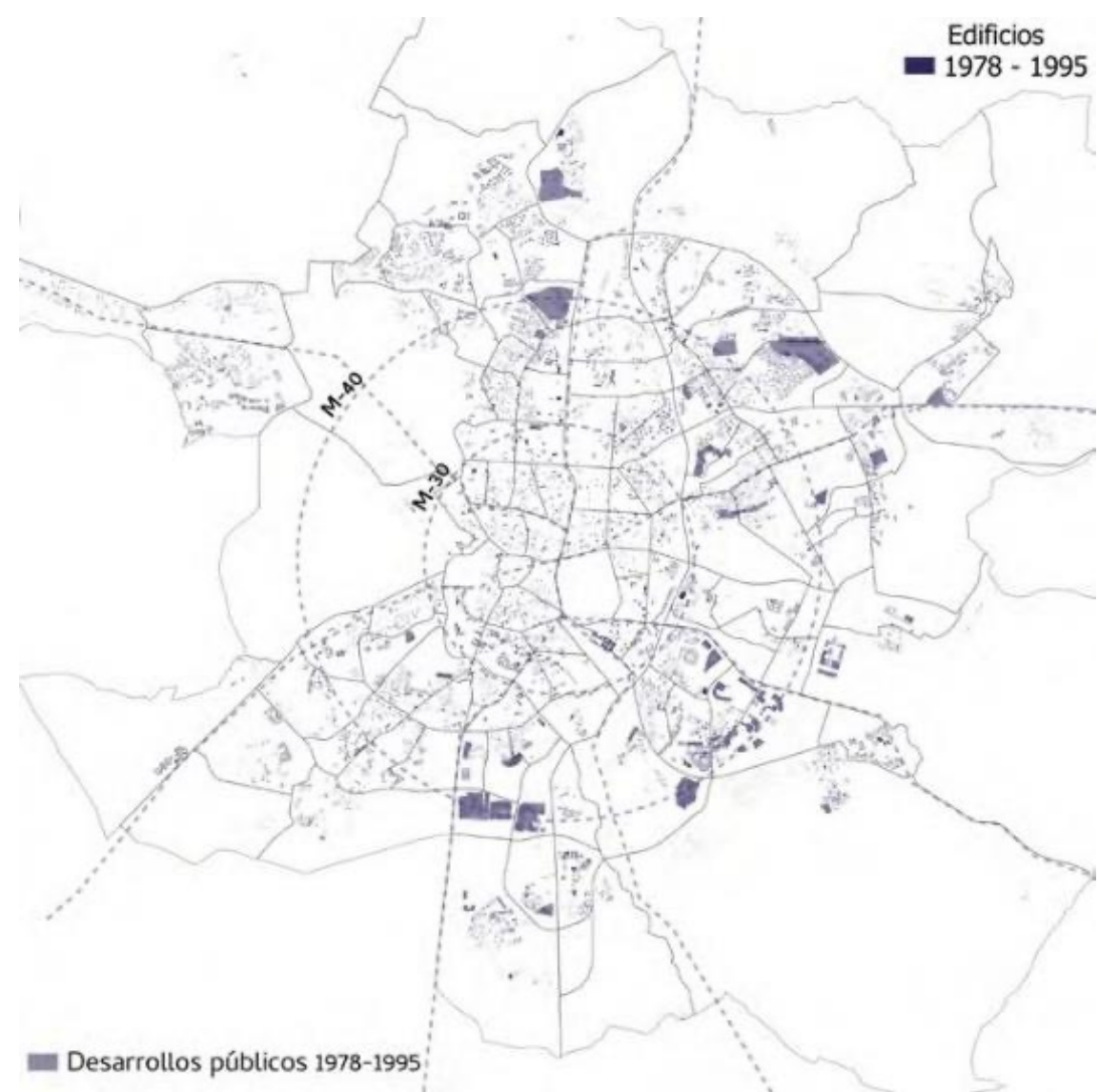
In 1986, there were still 2,700 families living in informal settlements. To help them, the Consortium for the Re-housing of the Marginalised Population was set up, which decided to build eight Special Typology Neighbourhoods (BTE). Despite the quality of the housing, the plan did not work because of their isolated location and social homogeneity; they became focal points of marginalisation and the administration decided to demolish them, feeding the stigma of lack of social inclusion of the impoverished population.

LA REMODELACION DE LA MESETA DE ORCASITAS

### PRIMERA EXPERIENCIA URBANISTICA AUTOGESTIONARIA

Los vecinos, por medio de su asociación, han impuesto todos sus criterios en la confección del Plan Parcial

Cartel vecinal, h. 1990. Cortesía Asociación Vecinal Orcasitas, 2020.



Map: I. G. Redondo, 2024. Source: see footnote 2. Public Policies.



Orcasitas is a good example of the Neighbourhood Redevelopment Plan. Designed in 1957, the *poblado* had an experimental character, praised for its avant-garde conception, but the low quality of the materials, the construction flaws and the lack of geotechnical studies caused serious pathologies in the buildings. *Poblado Dirigido de Orcasitas*, ca. 1960. Source: *Servicios Aéreos Norte*, *Blog Urbanidade*, 46, 2011.



After a long struggle by local residents, Orcasitas was demolished in 1984 and replaced by a new neighbourhood of blocks with better quality housing and improved infrastructure and urban services. It is a remarkable case because it is the first time that effective citizen participation in the design of the environment has taken place. *Plaza de la Asociación de Orcasitas*, *Usera*, 1986. Photo: *Eulalia Portela*, 2020. Courtesy of the author.



The Special Typology Neighbourhoods (BTE) sought to provide decent housing for the most disadvantaged sectors by relocating shanty towns. Despite the quality of the housing, they failed because of their dislocation, socio-cultural homogeneity, lack of services and poor management. *BTE of Plata y Castañar, Villaverde*, shortly before its demolition. Photo: *P. Núñez*.



# 2.6 Programmes for Urban Development: 1995 to date

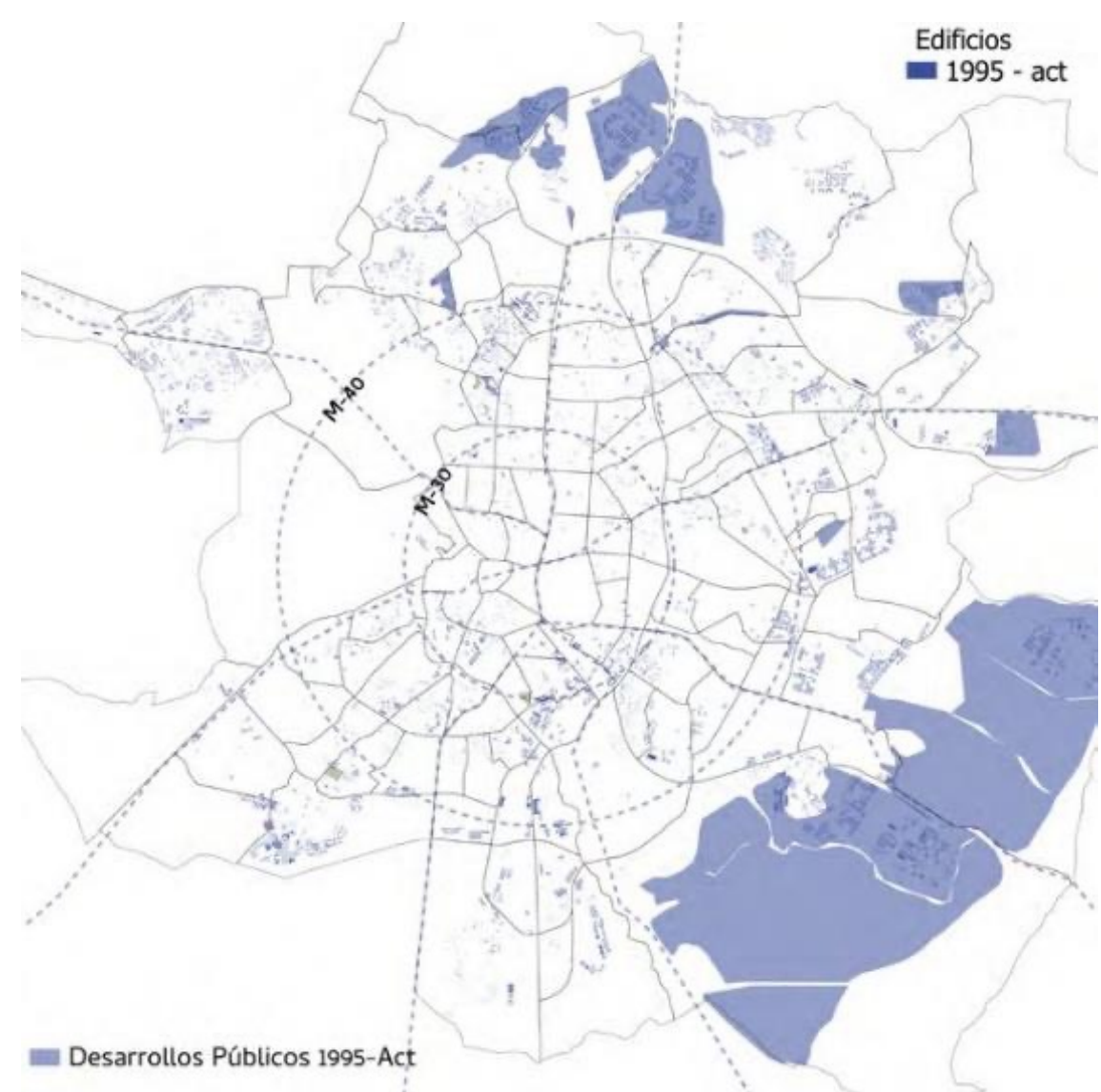
In the last decades of the last century, the population of Madrid fell from 3.18 to 2.93 million. The General Urban Ordinance Plan (1997) responds to this situation. It promotes decentralised growth through the expansion of the transport network, the creation of autonomous growth areas and the rehabilitation of central areas.

**After more than 20 years of PAUs, I can only think of the lack of city life, of neighbourhood life. The dreary, broad and endless avenues where no one walks... It is very disturbing. All this space... but no life.**

*Santiago Durán, El fracaso de los PAU, 2023*

In the field of housing, two key measures have been implemented: the continuation of the policy of public-private cooperation through tax benefits for the purchase and renovation of housing and subsidies for low-cost (VPO) and price-controlled housing (VPT); and the approval of the Urban Development Programmes (PAU), which have enabled the reclassification, planning and development of land for new housing. PAUs are large residential complexes with an introspective design (predominance of closed blocks), private facilities, centralised commerce and dependence on the car. New urban developments, such as the *Sures Plan*, have consolidated this urban model.

The slum eradication policy took a significant turn in 1998 with the transformation of the former Consortium into the Institute for Rehousing and Social Insertion (IRIS), which began relocating families into scattered apartments with social support. This has removed many of the tensions inherent in mass evictions, but has broken the social fabric of the rehoused families.



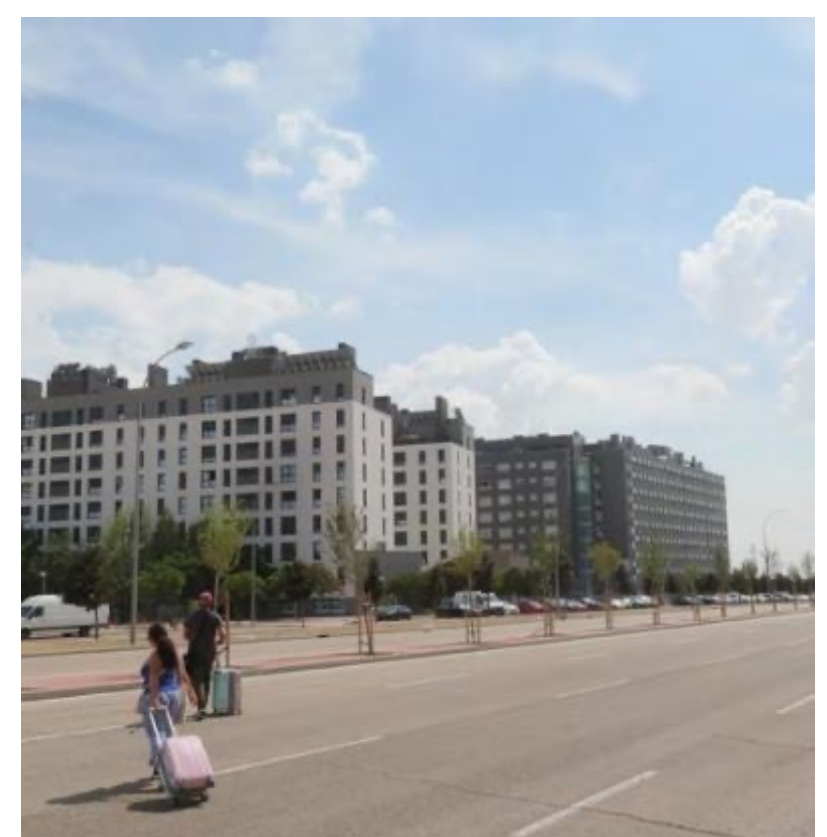
Map: I. G. Redondo, 2024. Source: see footnote plate 2. Public Policies



The PAUs reproduce the strategy of the *Castro Plan*, creating homogeneous neighbourhoods in the periphery, but with better construction quality. In recent decades, a new belt of commuter quarters for different social strata has shaped the contemporary periphery of Madrid. PAU of Arroyo del Fresno, Fuencarral-El Pardo. Source: Publicidad de Construcciones Amenabar, 2022.



PAUs tend to encourage a culture of consumption and the dominance of private life, rather than shared and accessible public spaces. This results in the development of housing estates with shopping centres and enclosed services, which is to the detriment of a more integrated city with common spaces for coexistence. PAU of Sanchinarro, Hortaleza. Photo: R Goycoolea, 2009.



The streets are considerably wider than is required for the actual population density, with some exceeding the width of the Paseo de la Castellana (Madrid's main avenue). This results in long distances between buildings, poor pedestrian accessibility and low social integration, which has a negative impact on quality of life and creates a reliance on cars. PAU of Vallecas. Photo: R Goycoolea, 2024.



# 3. Public housing policies in Madrid and urban justice

*The urban social movements of the 1960s and 1970s rebelled against the high-handedness of the experts who had imposed their vision of a rational and ordered city above them [...] My argument is that justice, defined by democracy, diversity and equity, should be the criterion of evaluation for urban planning and policy .*

*Susan S. Fainstein,  
Planning, Justice and the City, 2013.*



Barrio de Estrella, 1960s, Retiro District, view from the M30 ring road. Photo: R. Goycoolea 2024.





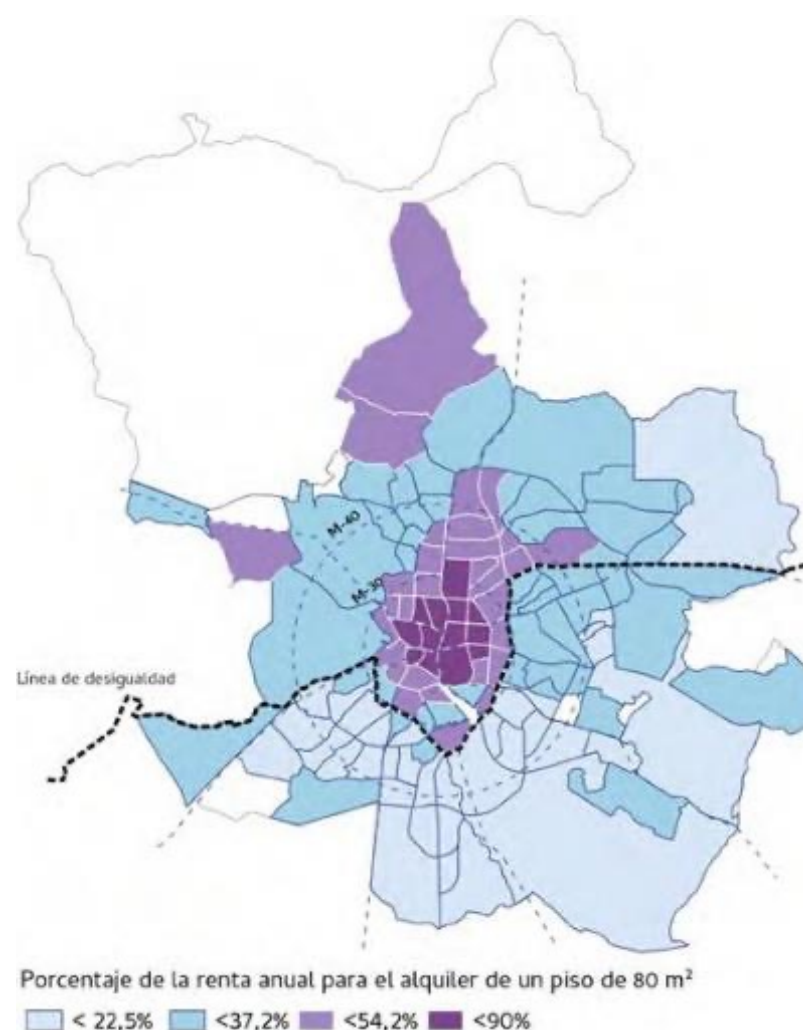
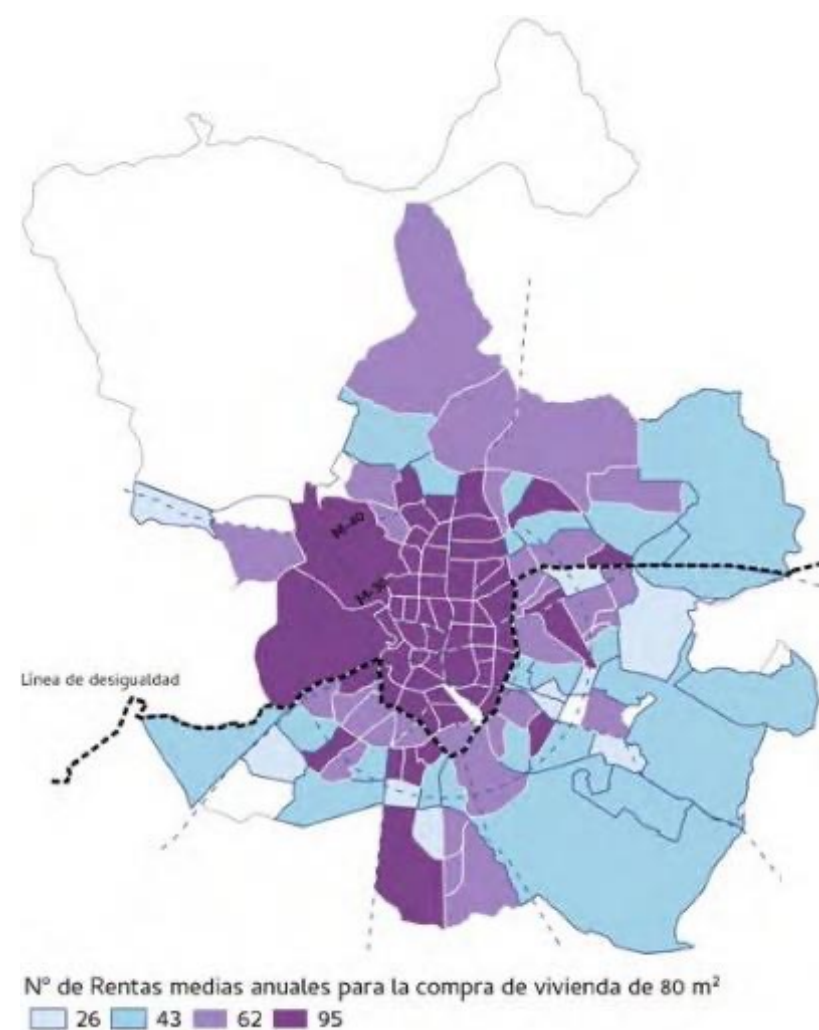
# 3.1. Capability to develop a life project

Objective of urban justice is to provide citizens with the tools and resources to develop their life project. This is in contrast to traditional urbanism, which prioritises technical and economic efficiency. Housing is the foundation upon which a life project can be developed, along with other key capabilities. Without housing, it's impossible to embark on a life project.

Until the Civil War, Madrid (like the rest of Spain) was a city of tenants. The Franco regime established private ownership as the guiding principle of housing policy and as an instrument of social regeneration. Democratic governments have maintained the preference for ownership in both public and subsidised housing.

Rather than a right, housing has become an aspirational consumer good, seen as the main source of savings for families.

In recent years, new lifestyles, tourism and the lack of public housing have accelerated gentrification, pushing neighbourhoods to the periphery and distorting the housing market. The percentage of income that has to be spent on housing significantly reduces the ability of young people in particular to plan their lives autonomously and to take advantage of the opportunities that the city has to offer.



In the last decade, the cost of housing in Madrid has risen by 68% and rents by 103%, while salaries have risen by 16%. Although these figures vary from district to district, the economic burden is widespread and affects the development of other capacities, as reflected in the increase in social vulnerability and the late age of emancipation of young people (30.3 years) and motherhood (32.3 years), among the highest in Europe. *Map: I. G. Redondo, 2024. Source: data based on reports from real estate websites Idealista and Fotocasa, 2024.*

To live without stress, the ideal is to spend 30-35% of one's income on rent or a mortgage. In Madrid, more than half of all households exceed this percentage, sometimes by a wide margin. This generalised economic pressure has made access to housing one of the main difficulties in developing independent life projects, especially for young people. *Map: I. G. Redondo, 2024. Source: data based on reports from real estate websites Idealista and Fotocasa, 2024.*

Only 2.5% of the Spanish housing stock is publicly owned (20th in EU27, from 30% in the Netherlands to 1.5% in Romania). In Madrid, only 0.4% of the 1,533,221 flats (6,600) are managed for social rent by the Municipal Housing and Land Company. The Right to Housing Law (2023) aims, among other things, to reverse this situation, prioritising access for young people and vulnerable groups. *Graphics: P. Núñez, 2024.*



Cover story, *Cinco Días*, 16/01/2024.



Cover story, *Fotocasa BlogPro*, 10/05/2023.



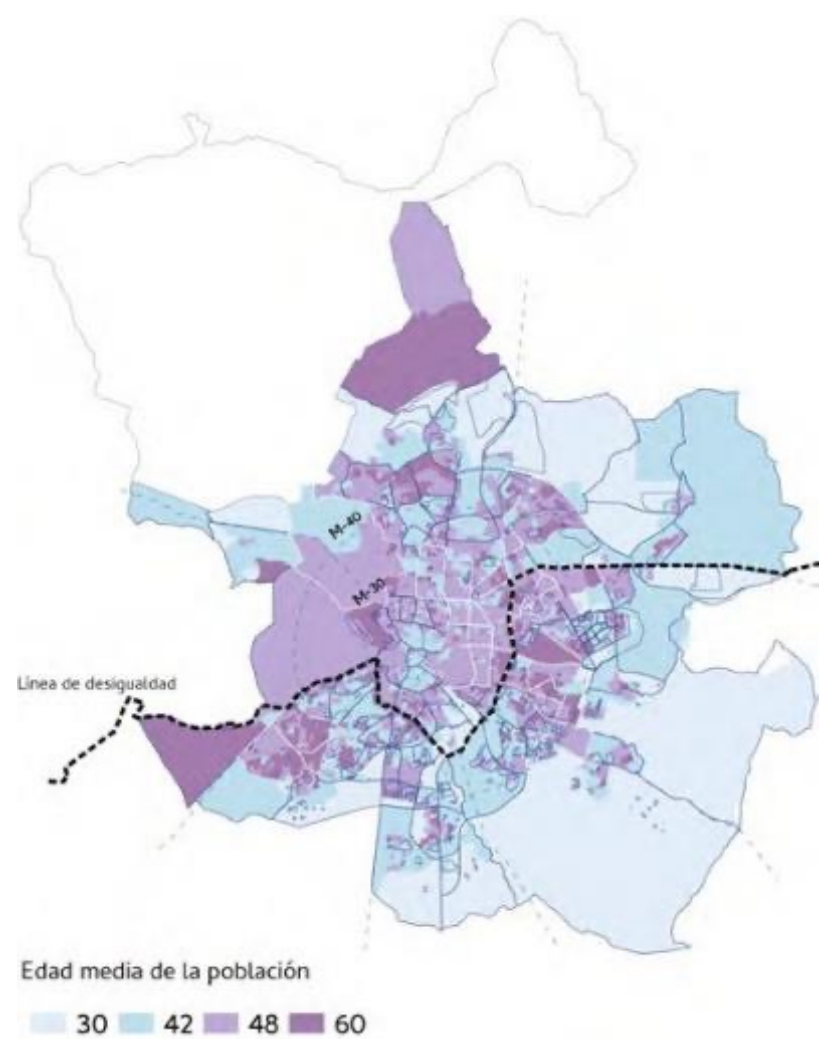
Cover story, *El País*, José L. Arana, 28/04/2021.



# 3.2. Capacity to live in inclusive settings

The social configuration of a neighbourhood has a significant impact on the capabilities of its residents. By fostering inclusive environments, we can ensure that all individuals have equitable access to essential services, opportunities and spaces, which in turn promotes diversity and social inclusion, thereby preventing conflict. UN-Habitat, the United Nations agency for human settlements, has the severe consequences of growing urban inequalities. Since the implementation of the Castro Plan, public housing policies in Madrid have followed a consistent model, irrespective of the prevailing political regime.

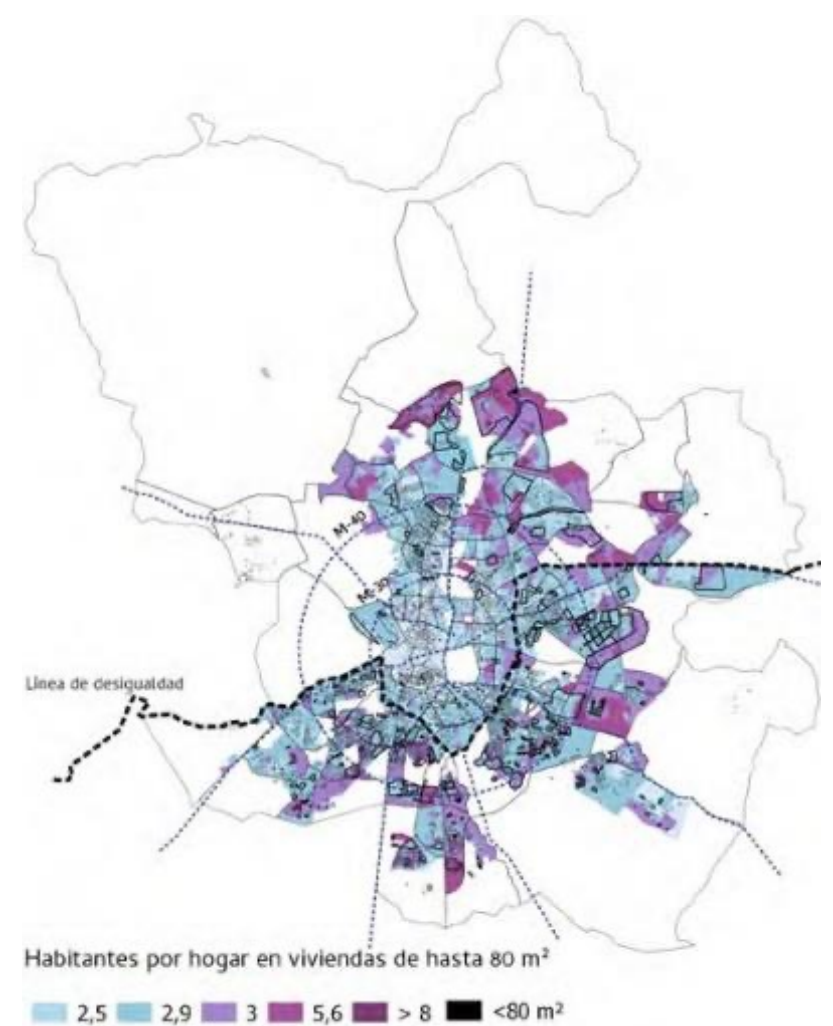
This model is designed to facilitate the formation of neighbourhoods comprising individuals with similar characteristics, including educational background, geographical origin and ethnicity. Therefore, social stigma based on place of residence is an unavoidable consequence. Furthermore, integration is hindered by the fact that these communities are isolated from the urban fabric, situated on the outskirts of the city and separated from it by major roadways. Historically, there has been no appetite for avoiding segregation. Conversely, there is a recognition that neighbourhood stratification serves to reinforce class identity in accordance with place of residence. This has the effect of eliminating the coexistence that fosters social cohesion through mutual knowledge and shared opportunities.



The spatial differences in the ageing population indicate significant inequalities in opportunities. The north's affluent districts offer superior access to healthcare, education and employment, enabling residents to enjoy longer and more fulfilling lives. Conversely, impoverished communities, shaped by socio-economic and migratory influences, contend with a range of constraints that have a detrimental impact on life expectancy. Map: I. G. Redondo, 2024. Source: INE, Encuesta de Indicadores Demográficos Básicos, 2022



The average size of housing is an important indicator for capacity development, as it affects the quality of life and well-being of residents. Larger dwellings provide greater opportunities for privacy and space for different activities, which can enhance personal and social development. Conversely, smaller dwellings limit these opportunities, creating stress and negatively affecting the well-being and capabilities of individuals. Map: I. G. Redondo, 2024. Source: Sede Electrónica del Catastro, definiendo 5 escalas de análisis, 2024



Living in overcrowded conditions has been documented to negatively affect mental health, coexistence and work performance. In Madrid, not only in the most vulnerable neighbourhoods, more and more people are forced to live in cramped or shared flats due to economic and demographic factors and the lack of affordable housing. But in certain neighbourhoods the number of unused rooms per dwelling is increasing. Source: cross-referencing of 2022 from the Cadastre with the number of inhabitants per district from Municipal Census of the Madrid City Council.



Cover story, The Objective, Enrique Morales, 21/05/2024.



Cover story, El Mundo, Daniel Somolinos, 28/04/2021.



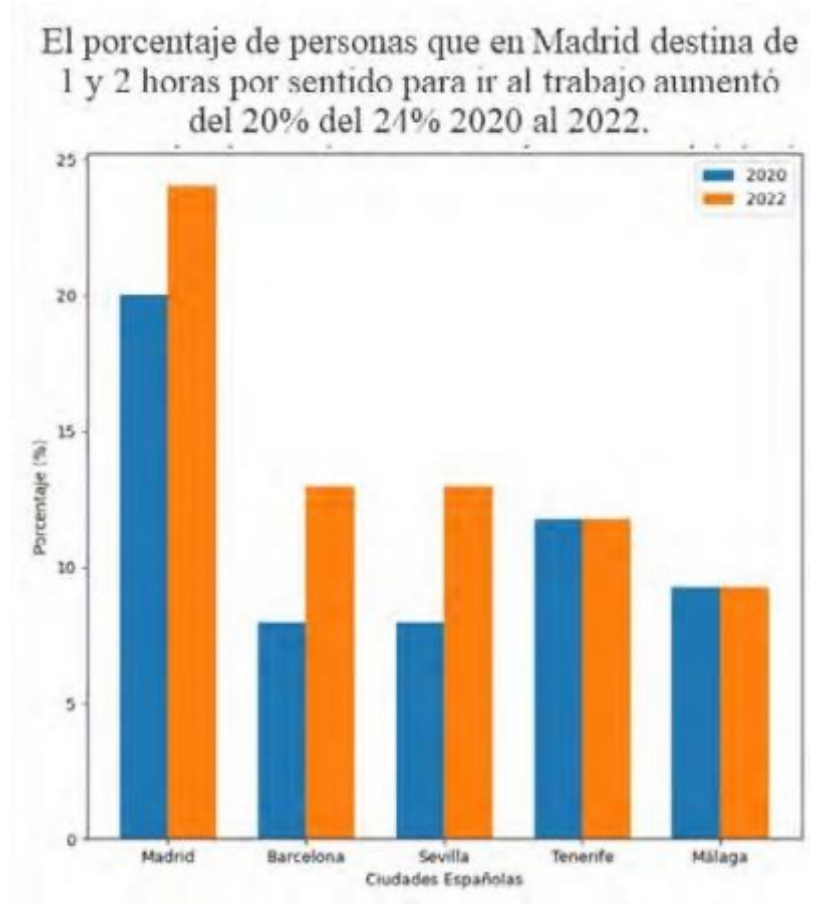
Cover story, La Razón, Europa Press, 19/12/2023.



# 3.3. Capacity to reconcile work and personal life

The transportation sector has become a crucial aspect of capacity development, facilitating the interaction between socio-economic systems. The World Bank (2022) asserts that investing in public transportation can stimulate urban economies. However, the provision of public transportation has historically not been a primary focus in Madrid's housing policies. Many neighborhoods have had to wait decades for efficient public transportation.

The older social neighbourhoods are situated in close proximity to the consolidated core of the city, offering convenient walking distances. Subsequent developments were located outside the current M30 ring road, forming a belt of commuter neighbourhoods that rely on transport for access to work, healthcare, education and cultural amenities. This urban model is car-centric and unsustainable in terms of energy. It also has a negative impact on productivity and mental health due to the time spent commuting. This situation has become accepted as inherent to metropolises rather than the result of urban planning that puts economic efficiency before people.



Accessibility in transport and mobility is crucial for the development of capabilities, enabling people to access educational, employment and social opportunities. It facilitates inclusion and active participation in society, which in turn improves quality of life and well-being. Without accessibility, barriers limit individual and collective potential, perpetuate inequalities and have a negative impact on personal and community development. Map: I. G. Redondo, 2024. Source: Cartographic Consorcio Regional de Transporte of Madrid.

The radial structure of Madrid's public transport system creates congestion and long journey times to the city centre, which has a negative impact on both passengers and the city as a whole. Passengers experience increased stress and less free time, while the city suffers from higher pollution levels and an overcrowded infrastructure. The system also hinders mobility between suburbs, limiting access to job opportunities and essential services. Map: I. G. Redondo, 2024. Source: Idem

Housing policies have exacerbated transport and mobility problems. Urban development in large peripheral areas increases the need for long commutes. According to the Moovit 2022 report, a third of Madrid's residents spend one working day a week commuting to work. Dormitory neighbourhoods have helped to alleviate the housing crisis, but they also limit opportunities and quality of life. Graphics: P.Núñez, 2024. Source: Mobileye, Informe Moovit 2022.



Cover story, Antena 3, Álvaro Perreau, 23/03/2023



Cover story, Xataka Movilidad, Alberto de la Torre, 18/03/2023.



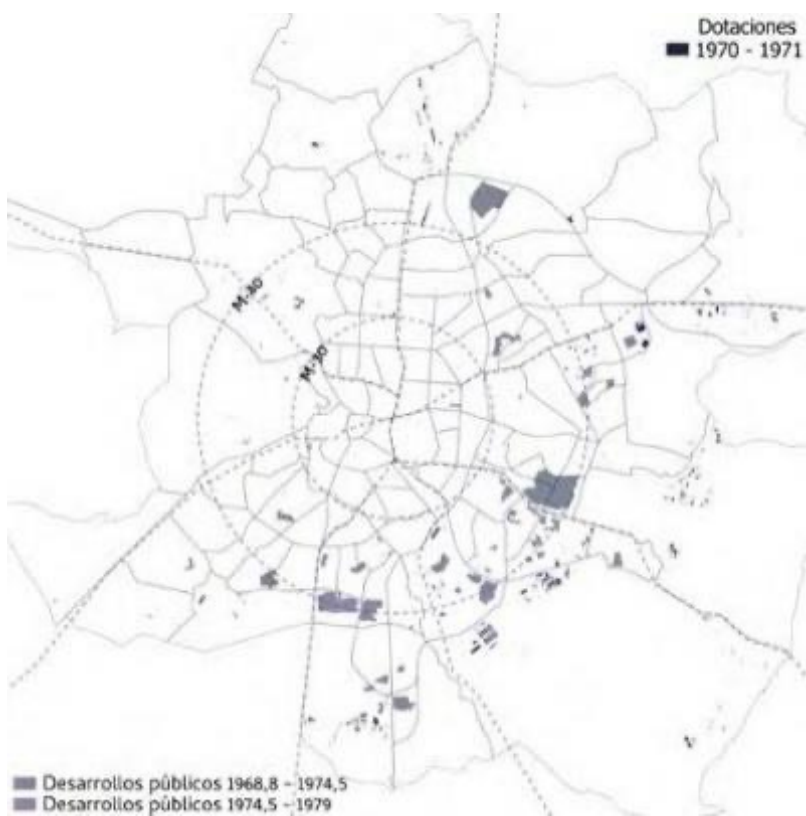
Cover story, La Vanguardia Madrid, 11/03/2023.



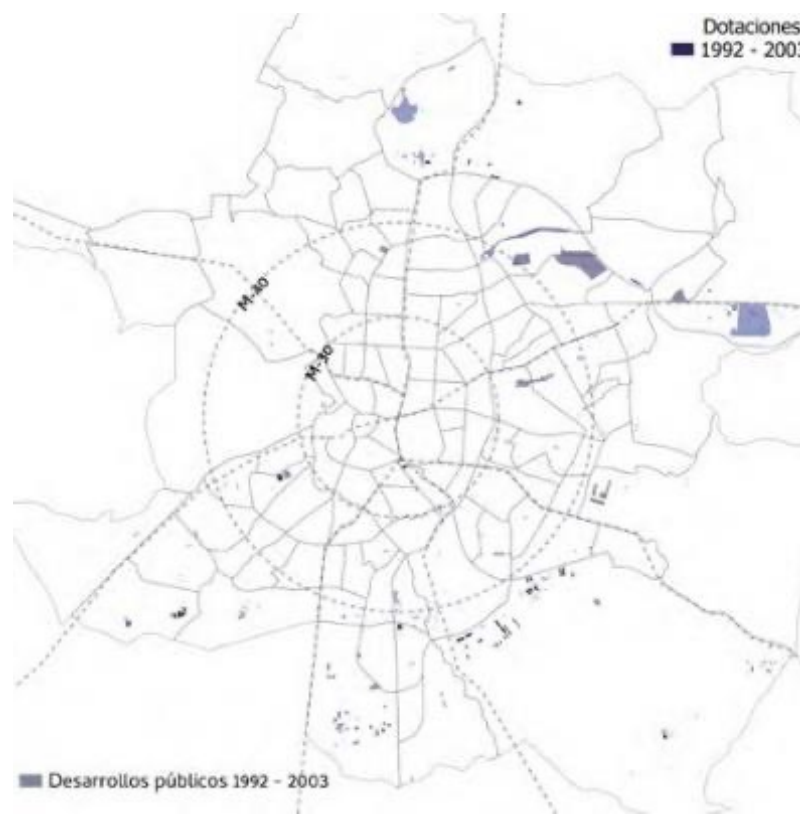
# 3.4. Capacity to live a fulfilling life

A key factor in being able to plan and develop one's life is the type and quality of facilities and services available where you live. In Madrid, public housing policy has relegated the provision of facilities to the future. The Francoist maxim 'housing first, then urban planning' has persisted. Because they are not an integral part of the developments, the facilities do not fulfil the expected function of being the backbone of the urban space, nor do they allow the development of the capacities that they should promote.

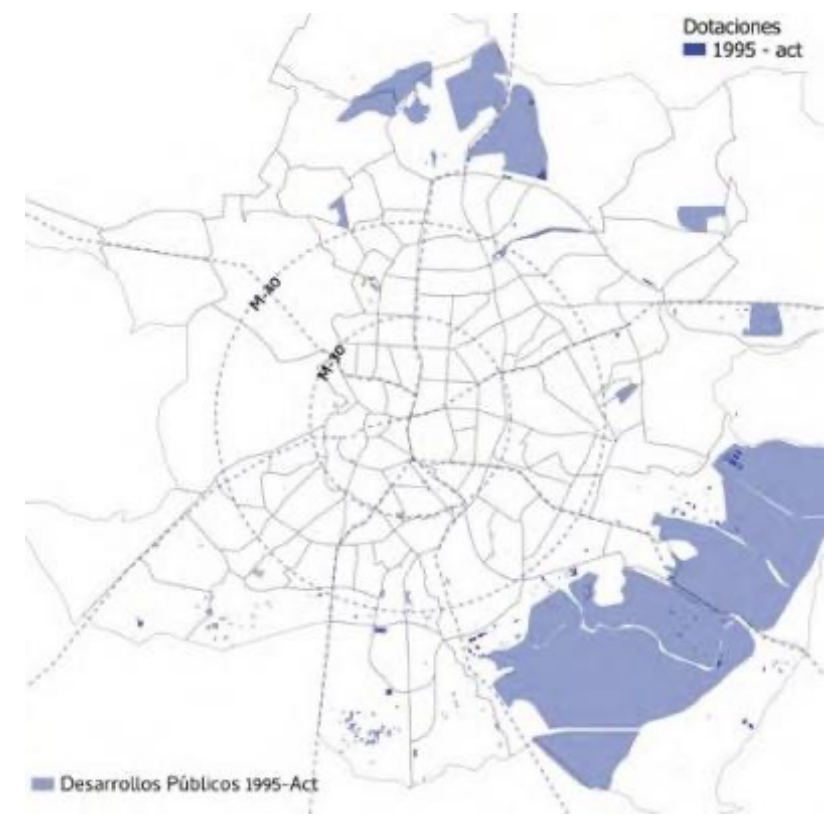
Another aspect that is retained is the quantitative interpretation of urban facilities, without acknowledging that individuals may require varying quantities of resources to achieve the same level of capacity for choice and action, particularly if they originate from disparate social backgrounds. Traditional urban planning determines the provision of facilities based on general criteria, such as the surface area of parks or libraries per number of inhabitants. The capabilities approach assesses their impact on people's development, which is not always aligned. For instance, in Spain, over 95% of the population has access to libraries, yet only 28% utilize them.



During Franco's regime, housing policies were primarily focused on the rapid construction of housing, with the provision of essential services being postponed. This resulted in the creation of densely populated neighbourhoods with insufficient infrastructure, as illustrated in the transport map. This has had a negative impact on the quality of life of residents, leading to the emergence of inequalities and social problems that continue to persist to this day. *Map: I. G. Redondo, 2024. Source: Cadastre data with selection filter and manual geo-referencing of public housing estates.*



The Neighbourhood Redevelopment Plan was instrumental in providing essential facilities to enhance quality of life in disadvantaged neighbourhoods. The plan focused on urban rehabilitation, including the provision of basic services such as schools, health and sports centres. Additionally, actions were taken to improve public space and urban infrastructure, promoting social cohesion and territorial rebalancing. *Map: I. G. Redondo, 2024. Source: Idem.*



The latest data indicates a notable enhancement in the availability of facilities and services in the current neighbourhoods. The 2023 Scoreboard highlights advancements in the provision of educational and health infrastructure, as well as green spaces. However, disparities between higher-income, better-equipped, and better-connected districts and the most vulnerable persist, underscoring the continued importance of urban planning in addressing these inequalities. *Map: I. G. Redondo, 2024. Source: Idem.*



Cover story, SiNC, Eva Rodríguez, 18/10/2021



Cover story, El País Madrid, Andrés Manzano, 09/04/1989



Cover story eldiario.es, Sofía Pérez Mendoza, 03/06/2021



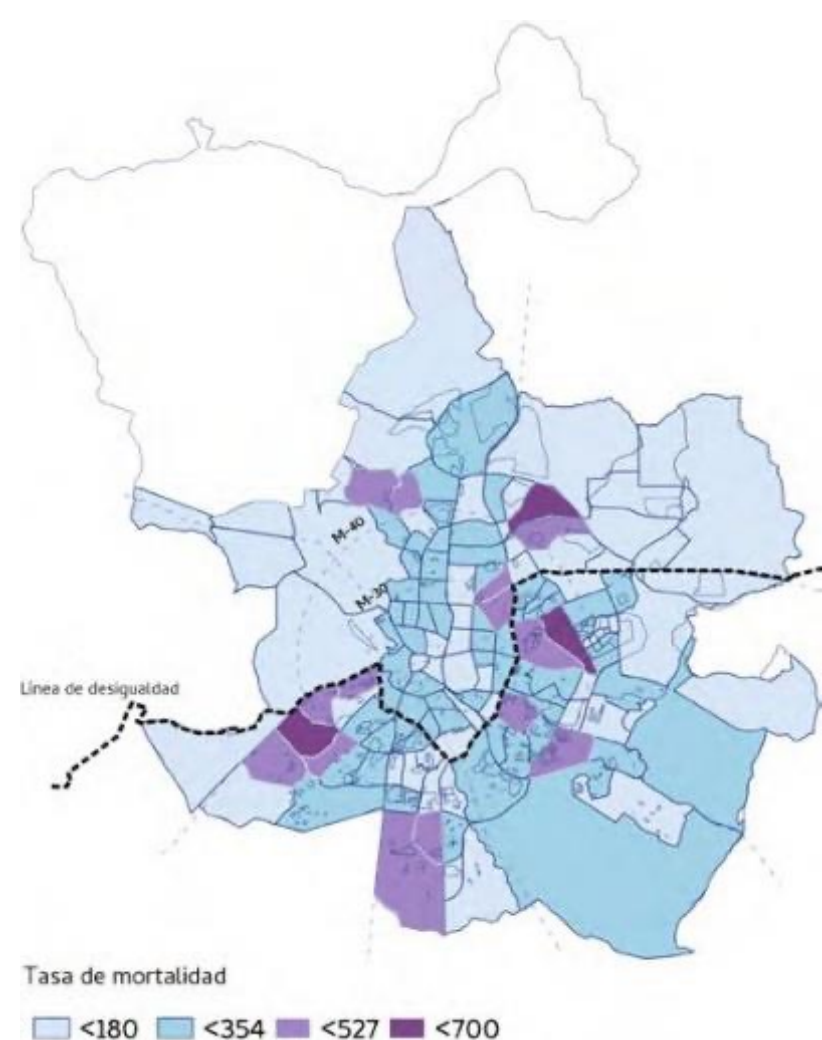
# 3.5. Capacity to lead a healthy life

Martha Nussbaum identifies healthy living and bodily health as fundamental capacities for a dignified and fulfilling life. The impetus for modern urban planning emerged in the 19th century, driven by the need to address the unhealthiness of cities. This led to the progressive integration of hygienists' recommendations, resulting in notable improvements in the healthiness of our cities and dwellings.

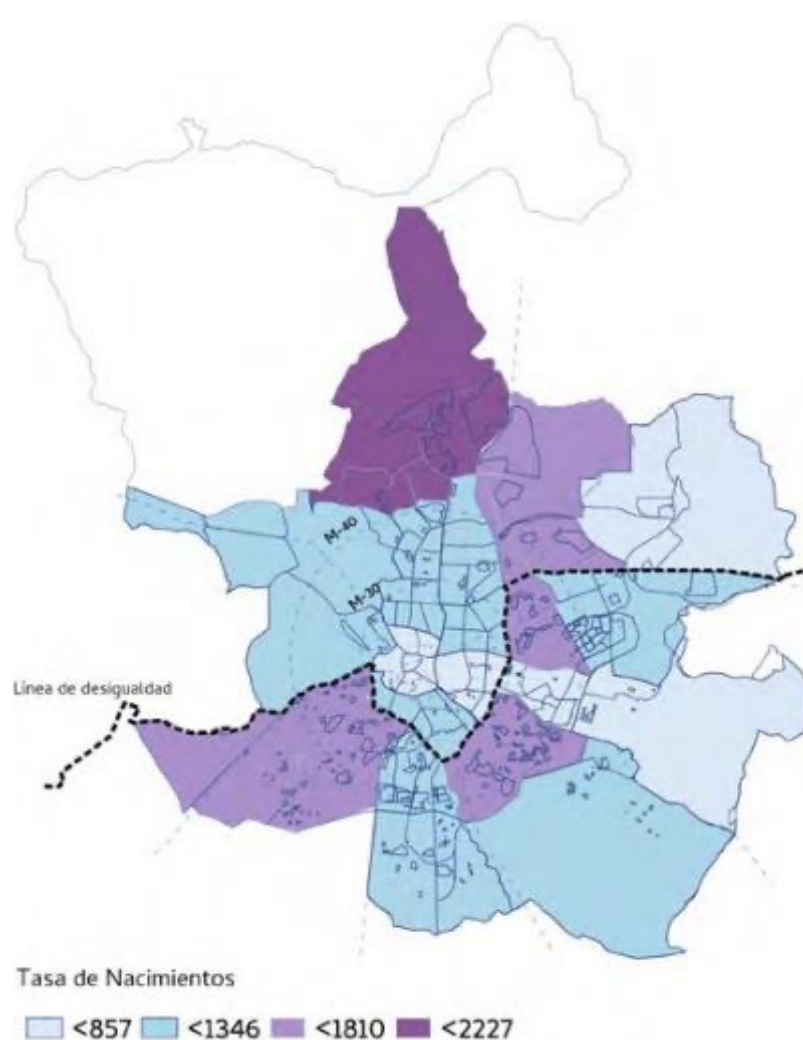
The housing policies analysed have improved the conditions of habitation thanks to technical regulations requiring safety, accessibility, adequate living space, protection against humidity, air quality, indoor air quality, and adequate water and waste disposal systems.

Old housing with unacceptable living conditions has been replaced by safer and healthier construction. However, problems such as disparities in life expectancy between neighbourhoods, the commercialisation of substandard housing and overcrowding persist.

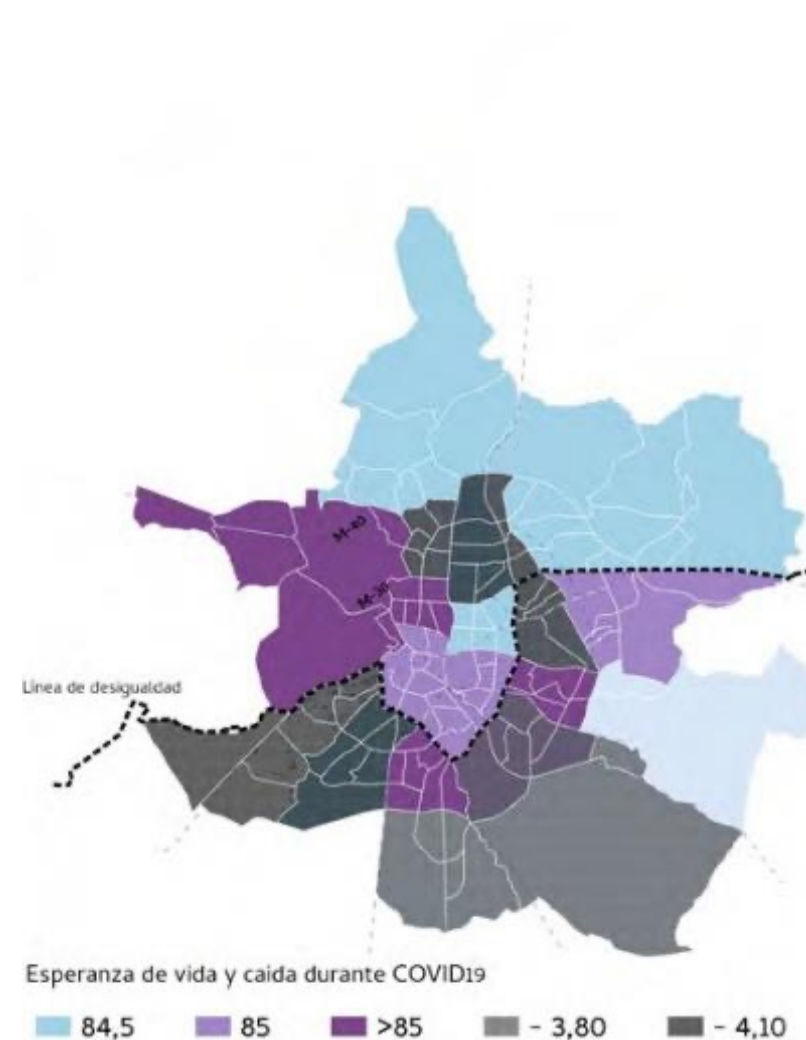
In parallel with the improvement in infrastructure, there has been a social shift towards healthier and more hygienic habits, reflected in a greater awareness of urban cleanliness and civic responsibility, the result of years of campaigns, legislation and improvements in urban amenities such as bins and rubbish containers.



The well-being and illness of neighbourhoods in Madrid are significantly imbalanced. Higher income neighbourhoods, with longer life expectancy and lower incidence of chronic diseases, have worse health indicators than more vulnerable neighbourhoods, with fewer resources and services, due to socio-economic factors such as low income, unemployment and poor housing. These conditions affect quality of life and increase the incidence of chronic diseases and premature mortality. *Map: I. G. R., 2024. Source: Madrid City Council open data portal for 2022.*



The latest data from 2023 reveals that the city's birth rate varies across different locations, remaining low overall. This could have social implications in the medium term if no measures are taken to encourage births or migration. An ageing population could lead to strains on social security systems and a smaller available labour force. Furthermore, the lack of generational replacement affects innovation and economic growth. *Map: I. G. Redondo, 2024. Source: Madrid City Council open data portal for 2022.*



The disparities in health outcomes between neighbourhoods in Madrid are a consequence of urban planning and housing policies. Improved infrastructure and access to health services in higher-income neighbourhoods facilitate the full development of residents' capabilities. Conversely, lower investment in health facilities, lack of resources and a lower quality of habitat impede the ability to live a dignified life. *Map: I. G. Redondo, 2024. Source: Madrid City Council Data 2022 and Gaceta Sanitaria Report. 2021.07.04*



Cover story, *El Economista*, Cristián Gallego, 17/07/2024



Cover story, *El Confidencial*, Sánchez, 11/11/2022



Cover story, *National Geographic*, Sergi Alcalde, 16/05/2022



# 3.6. Capacity to rest and recreate

It is essential that urban areas provide opportunities for their residents to plan for rest and enjoy formal recreation and nature. This is fundamental to urban justice because it ensures healthy living, including mental health. Ensuring equitable access to green and recreational spaces not only promotes physical activity and emotional well-being, but also strengthens social cohesion and reduces socio-economic disparities by providing equal opportunities for recreation and rest in healthy environments.

In traditional cities, there was a restricted range of public recreational facilities. Stadiums, gymnasiums and parks were not universally accessible.

The 19th century saw the emergence of new parks, including Retiro, Casa de Campo and Campo del Moro in Madrid. Since then, there has been a growing recognition of the value of green spaces for rest and recreation, both at the individual and collective level. This has led to the integration of parks into urban life as an essential component.

The capabilities approach maintains that the mere provision of recreational facilities and green spaces is in itself insufficient. It is essential that people have the opportunity to use them, in terms of location, timing, price and safety.



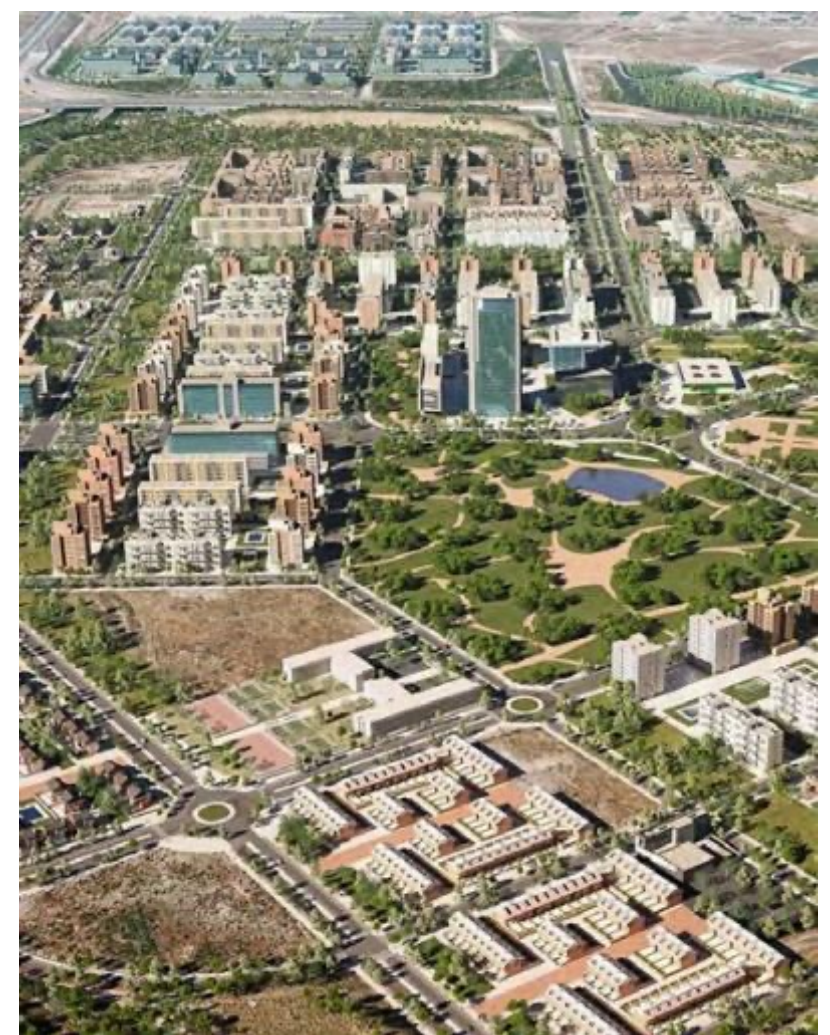
Franco's housing policies were characterised by a focus on quantity over quality, in response to the significant housing shortages caused by the war and the rural exodus. In the housing complexes for high and middle-income families, space was allocated for future amenities and green areas. However, in the more economical settlements, the free space was primarily dedicated to roads.

*Poblado dirigido of Caño Roto, La Latina, 1960. Source: Medio Ambiente y Ordenación del Territorio, Comunidad de Madrid.*



The Neighbourhood Renewal Plan (80s) aimed to enhance the liveability of under-developed areas by rehabilitating housing and infrastructure. However, the treatment of green areas and recreational spaces was limited. In comparison, the 1997 General Urban Development Plan adopted a more comprehensive approach, expanding parks, landscaped areas and recreational facilities in existing areas and new developments.

*Orcasitas Plateau remodelling, 1984. Source: Pérez-Barja.*



The valuation of green and recreational areas in the PAUs differs. The presence of trees in the streets is more prominent than in other neighbourhoods. But, the preponderance of a large 'road' and the concentration of recreational facilities and large parks in specific locations adjacent to major roads, instead of spaces of proximity, hinders accessibility and reduces functionality in the daily life of the neighbourhood.

*PAU of El Cañaveral, Vicálvaro, 2021. Source: El Cañaveral News, 2024.*



*Cover story, BBC Mundo, Redacción, 31/05/2017*



*Cover story, elDiario.es, Luis de la Cruz, 18/09/2023*



*Cover story, vozpópuli, Némesis, 27/03/2018*







# 3.8. Capacity to intervene in the environment

It is crucial to have control over one's living environment in order to meet personal needs and aspirations, and thereby ensure a full and just life.

In Madrid, housing policies are an example of centralised decision-making, where politicians, technicians and developers have determined the location, design and typology of housing. This has resulted in urban justice being compromised, with residents being forced to live in locations and in ways that do not necessarily align with their needs and aspirations.

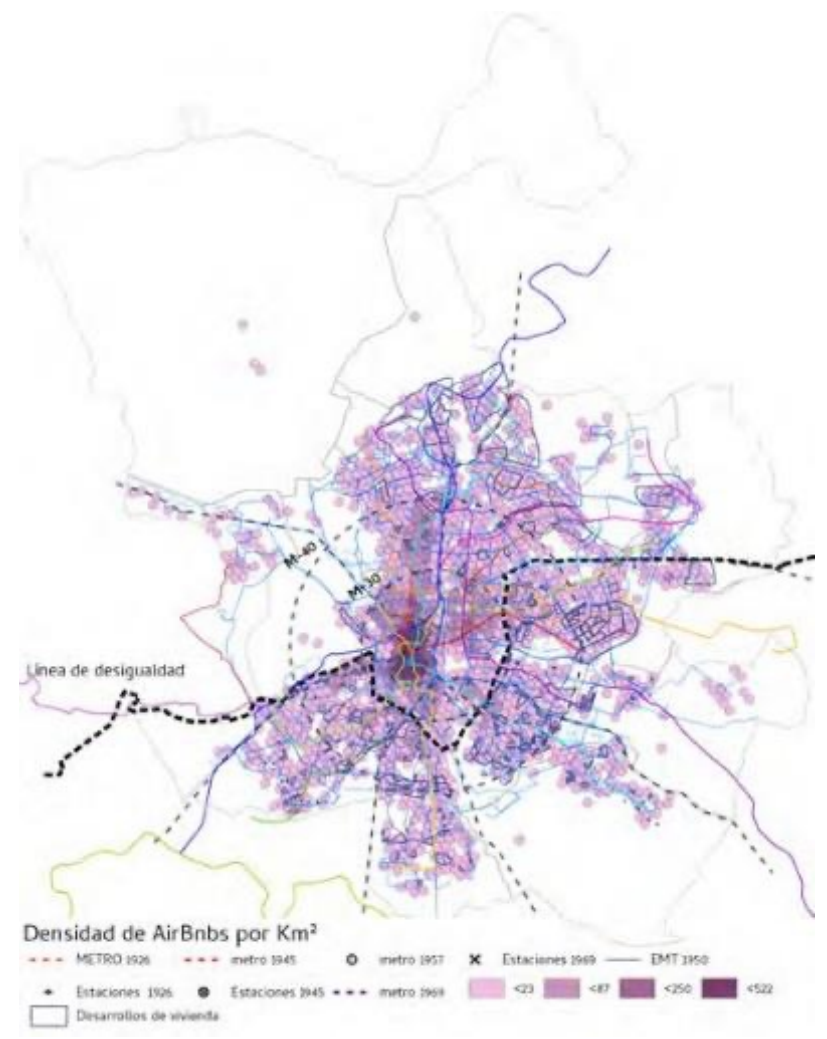
The proximity to the city and the existing facilities in the first public housing developments allowed residents to maintain their usual lifestyle. However, since the third stage was analysed, residential neighbourhoods no longer have the same mix of functions (living, working, recreation), density and vitality as the traditional city. This model is costly in terms of energy consumption and detrimental in terms of efficiency and mental health, as it requires long mandatory commutes. It is surprising that this situation is accepted as inherent to metropolises, rather than being seen as a consequence of the urbanism we have adopted.



The city of Madrid has an active network of neighbourhood associations that undertake a variety of activities. However, studies indicate that these processes are not always effective or inclusive. In particular, they note that urban planning decisions are often dominated by political and economic interests, which can reduce citizen influence on urban planning and management (Urban Live Lab, 2022). Map: Actions for the Madrid Sustainable Development Goals, 2023. Source: FAVM and Red de ONGD de Madrid.



Urban gardens have become a visible element of citizen participation. In Madrid's there are 67 registered, Socio-spatial differences are important: according to a UPM report (ITD, 2021), school gardens in privileged neighbourhoods fulfil a function of environmental education and healthy eating, while in lower income districts, they are oriented to create a motivating environment that improves academic performance. Map: I. G. R., 2024. Source: georef. of the registry of the Madrid Urban Community Gardens portal, Madrid City Council.



Airbnb and the city's inability (or unwillingness) to control the expulsion of residents is spreading to the metro lines as well. 'We only have to look at the Airbnb map to be aware of the scale of the problem of tourist accommodation in Madrid. 25,500 dwellings that are driving up rents (84% in the last decade) and displacing residents from their neighbourhoods' said the minister Reyes Maroto these year. Map: I. G. Redondo, 2024. Source: Airbnb's 2023 open data standardisation to define density per unit areas represented in hexagons.



Cover story, El Salto, Susana Albarrán, 13/05/2020.



Cover story, Unicef Educa, 2021, with an image of the Montemadrid Foundation's vegetable garden .



Cover story, Aquí Madrid, Edición, 04/07/2024.



# 3.9. Capacity to live in uplifting environments

Diversity in urban space encourages a meeting of worldviews, combat of stereotypes, promotion of equity and enhancement of emotional well-being. It also facilitates sustainable economic development and preparation of individuals to become global citizens.

Madrid's housing policies, which are geared towards the creation of socially homogeneous neighbourhoods, have had the unintended consequence of limiting the potential for residents to interact with one another. This lack of interaction between individuals from different socio-economic backgrounds hinders the ability to live in inclusive environments.

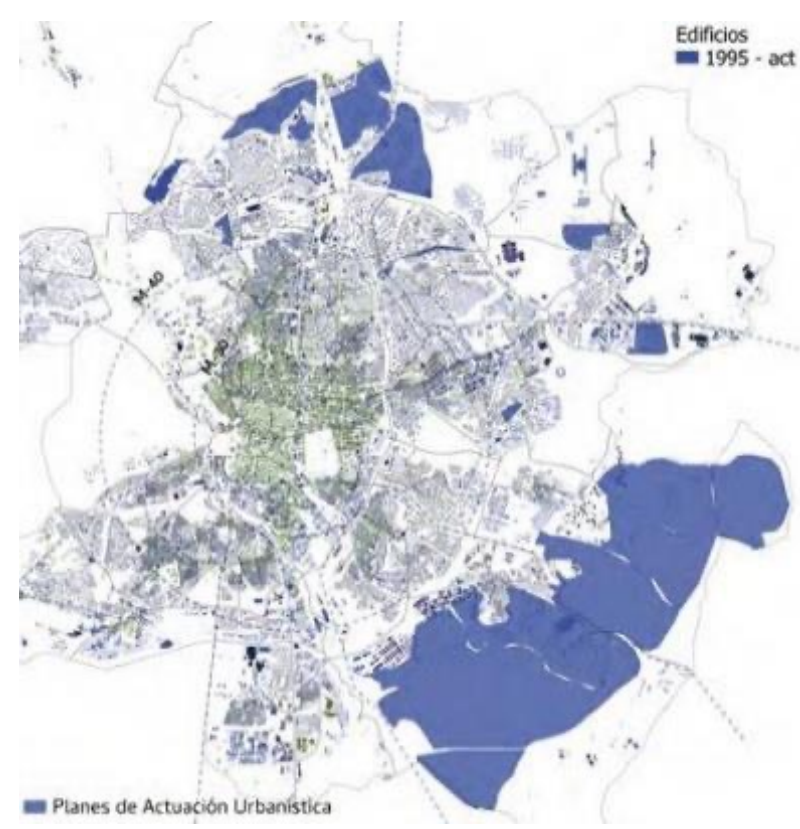
The practice of segregation has led to significant disparities in access to fundamental resources, including education, employment, and health services. This has resulted in many individuals being unable to achieve their full potential. The formation of 'dormitory neighbourhoods', which lack community vitality and opportunities for personal and professional growth, has contributed to the perpetuation of cycles of social exclusion and marginalisation. New developments in Madrid continue to promote a socially and spatially homogeneous city, where the configuration of buildings hinders activities and relationships in the urban space.



The fact that Madrid is a consolidated city with almost no vacant space represents a significant challenge for the construction of uplifting environments. The lack of available land requires the use of creative solutions for the rehabilitation and improvement of existing areas, which must address challenges such as segregation, gentrification and facilitating access to housing in order to maintain neighbourhoods. Map: vacant spaces in Madrid, according to SIGPAC land uses. Source: Madrid Borde Sur, 2024, for Proximity Planning UPM.



Urban planning and housing policies can have very negative effects on the achievement of territorial balance. Paradoxical is the case of the M30 ring road, criticised for being a barrier that divides the city physically and psychologically. In contrast, Madrid Río shows that when barriers are removed and pleasant and safe public spaces are created, interaction and a sense of community are fostered. Map: Madrid-Río, Manzanares Linear Park Research Group, n/data.



The new neighbourhoods under construction represent an unprecedented real estate investment. This huge new periphery of PAUs follows the model of dormitory towns, prioritising massive housing construction over infrastructure, public services and local employment. The public space is unmanageable because of its dimensions designed for road traffic rather than human scale. Map: I. G. Redondo, 2024. Source: see note plate 2. Public housing policies in Madrid.



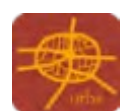
Cover story, TecScience, Inés Gutiérrez, 21/03/2024.



Cover story, EYSMunicipales, Miguel Ángel Ajuriaguerra, 04/05/2021.



Cover about the future PAU of Los Ahijones, El periódico de España, Analía Plaza, 23/04/2023.





# Conclusions

An analysis of urban phenomena from the capabilities approach provides a more profound understanding than quantitative assessments by focusing on the individual. An examination of housing policies and their impact on urban living offers insights into the evolution of cities, demonstrating how each neighbourhood is shaped not only by its urbanism, but also by the society and lifestyle it serves.

Madrid's housing policies have evolved from a basic provision of housing to a more comprehensive approach. However, the study indicates that a housing policy based solely on quantitative criteria may not be the most effective approach from a capabilities perspective. The construction of homogeneous neighbourhoods with few facilities in Madrid has had a significant impact on lifestyles, creating a class-based identity where the neighbourhood of residence is a defining factor.

Against the backdrop of the current housing crisis, there is a renewed focus on mass housing construction in homogenous neighbourhoods, which could potentially replicate past mistakes. To achieve a fairer city, it is essential to move away from the concepts of 'a country of homeowners' and 'housing first, then urbanism'. Instead, there should be a focus on approaches that facilitate access to decent housing at affordable prices and on cities as places of encounter and opportunity.

**"Cities have the capability of providing something for everybody, only because, and only when, they are created by everybody. There is no logic that can be superimposed on the city; people make it, and it is to them, not buildings, that we must fit our plans."**

*Jane Jacobs, The Death and Life of Great American Cities, 1967*



PAU de Vallecas desde Cañada Real. Paz Núñez, 2020

