

# The interplay between gentrification and touristification as the main driver of the suburbanization of poverty in contemporary Madrid

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## Abstract

This article examines how the processes of gentrification and touristification associated with the globalization of Madrid's economy have increased the existing socio-spatial inequalities in the city. Focusing on Lavapiés neighborhood, which is one of the most iconic historical neighborhoods of the Spanish capital, this article presents a mixed methods research based on both data extraction from official sources and conducting 22 semi-structured interviews. Findings show how the interplay between gentrification and touristification in Lavapiés has reinforced the process of expulsion of neighbors while local institutions promoted the neighborhood as the most cosmopolitan in Madrid. The final part of the article concludes that Madrid has moved in recent years towards a dual city model where the interplay between the gentrification and touristification of the historic center is the main driver of the suburbanization of poverty in contemporary Madrid.

**Keywords:** Madrid, Lavapiés, globalization, gentrification, touristification, suburbanization of poverty

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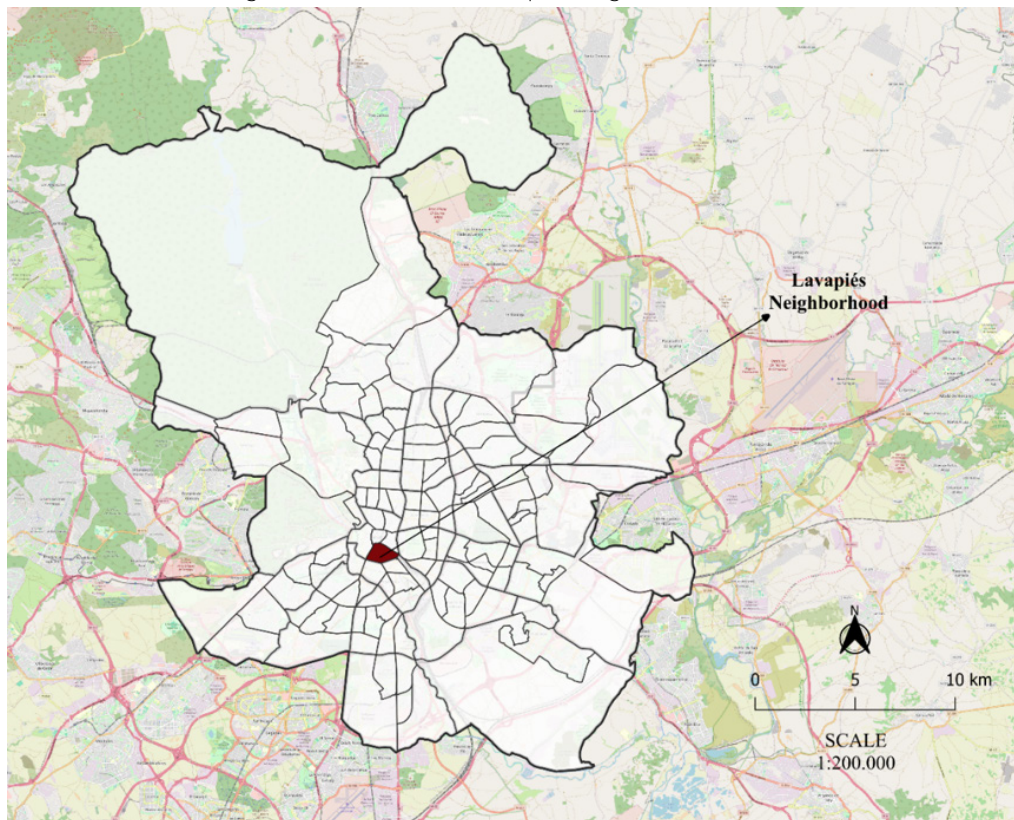
## 1. Introduction

Over the last few years, an extensive literature tradition has developed around a growing phenomenon in many European cities, namely the suburbanization of poverty and disadvantaged groups resulting from the emergence of gentrification of central urban areas (Howell & Timberlake, 2014; Randolph & Tice, 2014; Cooke & Denton, 2015; Bailey & Minton, 2018; Hochstenbach & Musterd, 2018; Bailey *et al.*, 2025).

This process is also growing in major Spanish cities, encouraged by the gentrification of centers (Sorando & Ardura, 2016), as well as by the emergence of new and apparently independent urban processes such as touristification (Crespi-Vallbona & Domínguez, 2021; Jover & Díaz-Parra, 2020; Gil & Sequera, 2018; Sequera, 2020; Sequera & Nofre, 2020). In this sense, the increase in social inequality and socioeconomic residential segregation defines the current urban dynamics of major Spanish cities (Mazorra, 2024; Porcel & Antón, 2020; Sorando, 2022; Sorando & Leal, 2019; Torrado *et al.*, 2021). The case of Madrid is of great scientific interest because recent studies highlight that the city has become one of the most segregated metropolises in Europe (Benassi *et al.*, 2023, Tammaru *et al.*, 2016, 2021), but continues to be little addressed at the academic level compared to other European case studies, such as London (Cooper *et al.*, 2020; Hamnett, 2024; Manley, 2021; Rozena & Lees, 2023; Van Ham *et al.*, 2020; Zhang *et al.*, 2020), Lisbon (Cocola-Gant & Gago, 2021; Daly *et al.*, 2021; Estevens *et al.*, 2023; Mendes, 2021; Sequera & Nofre, 2020; Tulumello & Allegretti, 2021) or Barcelona (Cocola-Gant, 2018, 2023; Cocola-Gant & López-Gay, 2020; García-López *et al.*, 2020; López-Gay *et al.*, 2021a; Mansilla & Milano, 2022; Porfido *et al.*, 2023).

Based on a four-year mixed methods research (2020-2024), this article examines how the interplay between gentrification and touristification in the Embajadores-Lavapiés<sup>1</sup> neighborhood over the past ten years (2014-2024) has (i) reinforced the process of expulsion of neighbors, and (ii) has given way to an increasing suburbanization of poverty while local institutions promoted the neighborhood as the most cosmopolitan in Madrid.

Figure 1. Location of the Lavapiés neighborhood in Madrid



Source: own elaboration using QGIS and cartography from the Madrid City Council and OpenStreetMaps.

<sup>1</sup> Popularly known as Lavapiés, the area was named Embajadores in the administrative division of Madrid in the 19th century. Throughout this research, the toponym *Lavapiés* will be used to refer to the entire neighborhood.

After introducing a detailed explanation of methods and materials used for the purposes of this article, the text provides an updated literature review on gentrification, touristification and socioeconomic residential segregation. After that, the article presents the empirical findings of this mixed methods research by analyzing the negative sociodemographic impact of both gentrification and touristification in the neighborhood of Lavapiés. Following this, the article discusses to what extent gentrification and touristification have contributed to making Madrid one of the most unequal and segregated cities in Europe. The article concludes by arguing that the interplay between gentrification and touristification of Lavapiés is the main driver of the suburbanization of poverty in contemporary Madrid.

## 2. Gentrification, touristification and socioeconomic residential segregation: the end of social mixing

Since Glass' (1964) foundational analysis, gentrification has been used by different social science perspectives to describe some of the most relevant urban changes in times of global neoliberal urbanism. Although the concept has been mainly developed by the Anglo-Saxon scholarly community from the fields of sociology and geography, the first studies on gentrification in Spain date back to the late 1990s and early 2000s (e.g. García Herrera, 2001; Martínez Rigol, 2000; Rodríguez Rodríguez *et al.* 2001; Vázquez Varela, 1996; Vilagrasa, 1997).

It is worth noting at this point that local spatial, social, economic, cultural and political contexts may lead to specific (and different) developments of gentrification across the urban world (Janoschka *et al.*, 2014; Lees *et al.*, 2016; Lees & Phillips, 2018; Liu *et al.*, 2019). In Spain, until the 2008 crisis, gentrification processes had been limited especially to historical old neighborhoods of largest Spanish cities, which experienced a rapid degradation over the last decades of the 20th century (Sorando & Ardura, 2016). With the economic recovery after the Great Recession (2008-2014), the historical old neighborhoods of many Spanish province capitals (regardless of their size) have experienced gentrification processes such as, for instance, Seville, Pontevedra or Valencia (Iturrino *et al.*, 2025; Jover & Díaz-Parra, 2020; Torres-Outón, 2020). Meanwhile, in the largest cities such as Madrid and Barcelona, gentrification has reached neighborhoods that had remained relatively unaffected by these processes despite having a relatively high centrality (Crespí-Vallbona & Mascarilla-Miró, 2018; López-Gay *et al.*, 2021b, 2022). In this dynamic, some studies have highlighted the growing influence of large housing investors linked to global capital (García Pérez & Janoschka, 2016; Gil & Martínez, 2023; Martínez & Gil, 2022), as well as the continuous increase of qualified immigrants of international origin (Cocola-Gant & López-Gay, 2020; Jover & Díaz-Parra, 2020; Mazorra & López-Gay, 2024).

In parallel and since the beginning of the last decade, gentrification processes have been juxtaposed – or even substituted (e.g., Sequera & Nofre, 2020) – by processes of touristification, especially in historic neighborhoods of southern European cities. For an explanation of the causes of this process, see Estevens *et al.* (2023) for the case of Portugal, extensible to the rest of the Euro-Mediterranean countries. In this regard, the rapid expansion of the extractivist tourism industry in the historic districts of southern European cities – in the form of the accelerated expansion of tourist apartments and hotels whose development operations entail the massive expulsion of local residents – has a significant impact in social, spatial and economic terms (e.g., Barrero-Rescalvo & Jover, 2021; Cocola-Gant, 2023; Cocola-Gant & Gago, 2021; Crespí-Vallbona & Domínguez, 2021; Gil & Sequera, 2020; Jover *et al.*, 2023; Singh & Azevedo, 2022). Interestingly, the term *touristification* has been gaining relevance within the scholarly community in urban studies, generating debates and discussions about its specificity and relevance (Jover & Díaz-Parra, 2020; Ojeda & Kieffer, 2020; Sequera & Nofre, 2018; 2020; Sequera, 2020). On the other hand, this phenomenon has been approached fundamentally from a critical stance regarding the socio-spatial effects of tourism, which gives the concept a negative symbolic charge, as documented by San Martín (2019).

In summary, touristification can be defined, following Sequera (2020, p.83), as “the process of socio-spatial transformation derived from the monofunctionality of places, directly linked to the tourism economy”. As the authors also note, gentrification and touristification can be complementary to each other, at other times they can become antagonistic, to the extent that touristification implies

the deterioration of living conditions in gentrified neighborhoods. This can, in turn, encourage gentrification in other urban areas, because of the emergence of new movements of the middle classes that previously lived there (Jover & Díaz-Parra, 2020; Sequera, 2020; Sequera & Nofre, 2018; 2020). Interestingly, recent studies have observed that the most relevant socio-spatial consequence of this interplay between gentrification and touristification that (i) urban central areas tend to transform into spaces of concentration of skilled workers, transitory populations and tourists (Brollo & Celata, 2022; Sánchez-Moral et al., 2022), and (ii) some of the peripheral areas increase the statistical representation of the worst positioned groups in the social structure (Hernández Aja et al., 2018). In the context of Spanish cities, this twofold (and simultaneous) process is reflected in a gradual increase in social inequality and socioeconomic residential segregation (Mazorra, 2024), while mixed residential spaces featured by different socioeconomic groups are in decline (Sorando & Leal, 2019).

### 3. A short overview on Lavapiés' gentrification

The area under study is the Lavapiés neighborhood, one of the most emblematic zones in the historic center of Madrid (Figure 1). This neighborhood is located in the Centro district, the historic center of the city of Madrid, with an estimated population of 140,000 inhabitants in 2024. As for the Lavapiés district, the area had a census population of around 46,000 inhabitants in that year, an area of 134.9 hectares and a population density of 446.9 inhabitants per hectare, a value more than eight times higher than that of the city of Madrid (55.9 inhabitants/ha).

Figure 2. Urban landscape of Lavapiés



Source: own elaboration.

Like other central areas of large metropolises, Lavapiés has undergone socio-demographic, urban and symbolic transformations especially over the second half of the twentieth century. However, and similarly to other European capitals, gentrification processes emerged intensely in Madrid's historical old neighborhoods since the beginning of the 21st century (Ardura et al., 2021; García

Pérez, 2014; Leal & Domínguez, 2008; López-Gay et al., 2021b; Sequera, 2013). As Leal & Domínguez (2008) indicate, the transformation of Madrid's historic center was driven by a metropolitan demand for cultural and leisure centers for both residents and the broader metropolitan population, as well as for visitors and tourists, which imparted new value to the area. Additionally, González-Leonardo & López-Gay (2021) note the central role of the arrival of a significant number of highly qualified migrants from other regions of Spain.

Within a context of economic growth, globalization, urbanization and a new neoliberal political cycle, the 1997 Madrid's Master Plan for Urban Development (PGOUM hereinafter) opted for large-scale urban growth, the creation of new high-capacity road infrastructures and the regeneration of the historic center. The PGOUM projected a differentiated treatment for the historic center of the city, with the threefold objective of safeguarding its heritage values, of fostering public space upgrading, and of revitalizing the socioeconomic fabric of Lavapiés (Madrid City Council, 1997).

The PGOUM's main purpose was to enhance the residential character of the district, restricting the tendencies of extreme tertiarization to specific areas that historically maintained this vocation and were capable of accommodating it without undesirable interference for the neighborhood. Importantly, the 1997 PGOUM proposed the installation of new cultural facilities and institutions in the neighborhood to enhance the symbolic and emblematic character of Lavapiés, without interfering with its residential vocation. The Plan sought to recover environmental quality by improving the urban image, adapting the morphology, taking the human scale as a reference, and reducing the intensity of the building to improve its habitability. Almost thirty years after the launch of 1997 PGOUM, Lavapiés has become one of the most visited and well-known places in the city of Madrid (Time Out, 2024), while the collective memory about Lavapiés as one of the most deteriorated and stigmatized areas of the city (García Pérez, 2014; Pérez Quintana, 2010; Ruiz Chasco, 2019) is fading away as the interplay between gentrification and touristification gallops forward and residents are driven to the city's suburbs, as the second half of this article shows.

## 4. Methods and materials

The comprehensive study of the interplay between gentrification and touristification in the neighborhood of Lavapiés presented in this article draws on data extracted from official sources, data collected from conducting semi-structured interviews with Lavapiés' residents, a synthesis of the urban history of Lavapiés from its origins until the end of the 1990s. In doing so, our research focused on collecting population data and housing dynamics, alongside qualitative investigation into the impacts of displacement on affected groups.

Regarding data population, we conducted data extraction from the Spanish National Statistics Institute aimed at examining socioeconomic and demographic variables, namely population origin, age, education level, professional category, and income level. Regarding housing dynamics, we retrieved official data on rental price evolution over the period (2015-2019). This data was extracted from Madrid City Council's databases, and the Inside Airbnb database. All this data allowed to quantify the extent and distribution of tourist apartments at the neighborhood level<sup>2</sup>. Finally, our quantitative analysis was completed with the study of socioeconomic residential segregation (Duncan & Duncan, 1955; Massey & Denton, 1988) to measure the distribution of a given population group in the different spatial units of the urban space – here in this article, at district level. Such a socioeconomic residential segregation is based on a quantitative index ranging from 0 to 1, representing complete equality and maximum segregation, respectively (Jakubs, 1981). In the context of socioeconomic segregation, values above 0.4 are considered indicative of high segregation (Tammaru et al., 2016). This segregation index enabled insightful findings on how gentrification and touristification influence the social and spatial organization of the neighborhood of Lavapiés.

In addition, and with the aim of complementing the segregation analysis while gaining deeper insights into socio-spatial patterns in the neighborhood of Lavapiés, the article uses Moran's Index

<sup>2</sup> To estimate the distribution of tourist apartments at the neighborhood level, this study relies on data from the Inside Airbnb database, which is obtained through web scraping techniques. While this source provides valuable insights into the short-term rental market, it is important to acknowledge that the data represents an approximation and may not capture the full scope of listings in the city.

(Moran, 1950) to measure the degree of spatial autocorrelation. Moran's Index ranges from -1 to 1, where values close to 1 indicate perfect positive correlation, 0 indicates no correlation, and values near -1 suggest perfect dispersion. This statistic tests whether the spatial distribution of the groups analyzed is random – values near 0 –, or if there are tendencies toward either dispersion – values near -1 – or clustering – values near 1. While the Global Moran's Index illustrates overall spatial dependence, it does not capture local variations. In this context, the use of the Local Moran's Index (Anselin, 1995) and its representation in the LISA Map, have enabled the identification of spatial clusters in socioeconomic variables for the years 2001 and 2021. This indicator is particularly useful to show whether a spatial unit exhibits high or low values and is surrounded by units with similar values, identified as high-high or low-low clusters (Sánchez Rivero, 2008). Additionally, it facilitates the identification of spatial outliers, i.e., cases where a unit with a high value is surrounded by units with lower values, and vice versa, known as high-low or low-high situations. In this context, Moran's LISA indexes were used to examine the differences between high and low socio-labor categories across all districts in the Madrid Urban Area, using the GeoDa software with a Queen 1 contiguity matrix, which is particularly suited for the study of socioeconomic variables (Acevedo-Blanco *et al.*, 2023).

On the other hand, the study employed qualitative methodology techniques aimed at gaining a deeper understanding of the interplay between gentrification and touristification in the neighborhood of Lavapiés. Our main focus during the qualitative research was to collect data on the effects, experiences, and discourses generated by stakeholders following the neighborhood's transformation. Our qualitative approach involved observation and participation in some assemblies and meetings held by neighborhood and social associations and collectives, as well as the conduction of 22 semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders in Lavapiés. The sociodemographic profiles of interviewees were varied (something that was *a priori* expressly designed by the authors of this article) including residents, academics, political actors, and business and touristic apartments owners. The interviews focused on issues related to the interviewees' personal trajectory, their degree of connection to the neighborhood, their assessment of environmental changes in recent years, and their perceptions of the expansion of tourism apartments in Lavapiés.

The study's interview questions centered on four key areas: (i) understanding how participants' personal experiences reflect broader social and economic trends in Lavapiés; (ii) exploring participants' level of connection to the neighborhood, including how long-term and newer residents perceive their relationship to the community; (iii) assessing the effects of urban changes on daily life; and (iv) examining perceptions of the expansion of tourism apartments and how gentrification and the growth of short-term rentals and tourism-related businesses impact participants' lifestyles and sense of belonging. All interviews lasted approximately one hour and were recorded, transcribed, and coded using qualitative data analysis software (Atlas.ti). The interviews were originally conducted in Spanish and subsequently translated into English. Due to length constraints, only the most representative interviews are cited in this article. Last but not least, the research presented in this article has followed ethical and confidentiality procedures as recommended in the European Commission Ethics Guide on Ethnographic Research and requested by the ethical principles and the highest standards of research integrity gathered in the European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity in accordance with EU, Spanish and Portuguese national laws.

The article is structured into the following sections. It begins with a review of theories on the processes of gentrification, touristification and socioeconomic residential segregation in contemporary global cities. Next, it details the methodology employed and presents the sources consulted. Subsequently, it presents and discusses the research findings. Finally, the conclusions highlight that the advancement of gentrification and touristification trends in the historic center, alongside the suburbanization of poverty and disadvantaged groups, have promoted the development of a dual urban model that replicates some of the most polarizing trends in social structure within urban space.

## 5. Findings

### 5.1 Urban regeneration and gentrification in Lavapiés neighborhood

A representative example of the urban regeneration processes that have taken place in Madrid since the 1990s is the case of Lavapiés. Located in the southeastern part of the Centro district, Lavapiés was then declared a Preferential Rehabilitation Area (ARP) in 1997 by the Department of Public Works, Urban Planning and Transport of the Community of Madrid, due to the severe deterioration of its housing and infrastructure, its scarce commercial activity, the absence of urban facilities and public services, and the marked ageing of its population (Hernández Aja *et al.*, 2018). The rehabilitation was aimed at regenerating the neighborhood as a historic enclave in the center of Madrid, by consolidating its residential character, emphasizing its cultural component and recovering its urban quality and image. It was considered that public investment should focus on interventions that would generate new socioeconomic activities and encourage the entry of new young households (Madrid City Council, 1997).

The Rehabilitation Plan emerged as a mixed project, with public investment aimed at improving infrastructure and equipment, providing services and subsidies for rehabilitation, as well as private investment by owners in the rehabilitation of their properties (Pérez-Quintana, 2010). Besides, the regeneration of Lavapiés was characterized by the promotion of economic activities related to culture and knowledge, in order to consolidate Lavapiés as a strategic enclave of the historic center of the city of Madrid (Sequera, 2013). However, the rehabilitation failed to significantly increase the basic public facilities or eradicate substandard housing (Mazorra, 2023), one of the key objectives of the Rehabilitation Plan. The persistence of significant social issues and the marginalization of proposals put forth by technicians and civil society led to widespread dissatisfaction with the neighborhood regeneration process (Díaz Orueta, 2007). Thus, some of the agents interviewed expressed frustration with how the process unfolded:

“When the Rehabilitation Plan began, they started to remodel the houses and that is when the gentrification of Lavapiés began. There were communities of neighbors that could not assume the expenses and they sold those houses at a very cheap price. Who bought it? The speculators. Because that’s what gentrification is. Gentrification is that I devalue a neighborhood, I buy it cheap and then revalue it. That is what the Madrid City Council did” (Lavapiés resident, female, 44 years old, personal interview).

As regeneration progressed, some of the indicators of vulnerability disappeared (Hernández Aja, 2018). Population growth, the entry of new young households, the general improvement in the educational level of the new residents and the improvements in the areas of employment and housing were signs of social change in Lavapiés (García Pérez, 2014). In parallel, the increase in housing prices of the city during the following years encouraged the displacement of the working classes to the peripheral areas in the south of Madrid (Mazorra, 2024). As a result, the main outcome of the urban regeneration process in Lavapiés was the gentrification of the area during the first two decades of the 21st century (Mazorra, 2023).

The social change that has taken place can be seen in the changes observed in the educational and labor spaces (Tables 1 and 2). According to data from the 2001 and 2021 Censuses, the socioeconomic progress of the residents of Lavapiés is reflected, in the first place, in the advance of higher education graduates, a group that has advanced more than twenty percentage points over the first two decades of the 21st century, almost twice as much as in the city of Madrid as a whole. Meanwhile, the uneducated population has been reduced by less than half over this period.

Table 1. Education level (%) of the population aged 25 years and older in Lavapiés, Centro district, Madrid and Spain 2001-2021 and Variation (%) 2001-2021

| Educational Level        | 2001  |       |       |       | 2021  |       |       |       | Variation % 2001 – 2021 |        |        |        |
|--------------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------------------------|--------|--------|--------|
|                          | LVP   | CEN   | MAD   | ESP   | LVP   | CEN   | MAD   | ESP   | LVP                     | CEN    | MAD    | ESP    |
| <b>Illiterate</b>        | 9.6   | 9.18  | 12.32 | 8.3   | 0.39  | 0.27  | 0.47  | 0.33  | -9.21                   | -8.91  | -11.85 | -7.97  |
| <b>No Studies</b>        | 20.66 | 20.11 | 21.23 | 15    | 3.35  | 2.25  | 3.76  | 16.66 | -17.31                  | -17.86 | -17.47 | 1.66   |
| <b>Primary Studies</b>   | 28.44 | 28.31 | 24.35 | 24.79 | 8.84  | 6.74  | 10.53 | 30.08 | -19.6                   | -21.57 | -13.82 | 5.29   |
| <b>Secondary Studies</b> | 19.82 | 21.18 | 22.81 | 40.49 | 41.92 | 38.57 | 47.55 | 21.56 | 22.1                    | 17.39  | 24.74  | -18.93 |
| <b>Higher Education</b>  | 21.48 | 21.22 | 19.29 | 11.42 | 45.5  | 52.17 | 37.69 | 31.37 | 24.02                   | 30.95  | 18.4   | 19.95  |

Source: own elaboration based on the Censuses of 2001 and 2021 (Spanish National Statistics Institute).

The outcomes in the educational domain are also observed in the labor field<sup>3</sup> (Table 2). The highly skilled workers group represented 41.03% of the employed population in 2021 and represents the largest segment of the working population of the area. At the same time, the proportion of unskilled workers has declined steadily over the first decades of the century, with these jobs being filled mainly by impoverished immigrant groups from the area (Mazorra, 2023).

Table 2. Socio-labor categories (%) of the population aged 16 years and older in Lavapiés, Centro, Madrid and Spain in 2001 and 2021 and Variation (%) 2001-2021

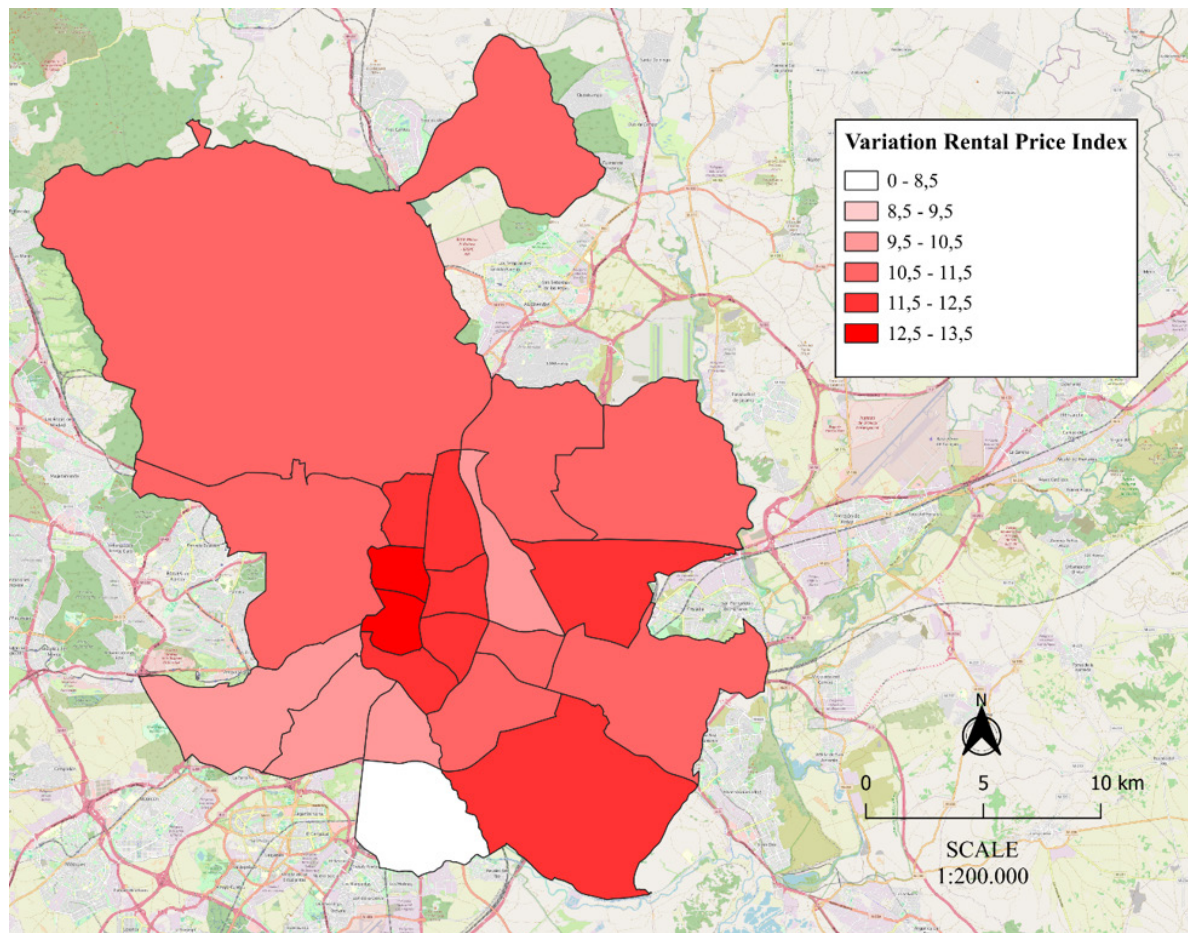
| Socio-labor category         | 2001  |       |       |       | 2021  |       |       |       | Variation % 2001 - 2021 |       |       |        |
|------------------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------------------------|-------|-------|--------|
|                              | LVP   | CEN   | MAD   | ESP   | LVP   | CEN   | MAD   | ESP   | LVP                     | CEN   | MAD   | ESP    |
| <b>High</b>                  | 27.26 | 33.3  | 29.67 | 20,37 | 41.03 | 45.84 | 35.52 | 23,2  | 13.77                   | 12.54 | 5.85  | 2,83   |
| <b>Intermediate</b>          | 24.17 | 28.65 | 20.75 | 20,68 | 23.38 | 23.89 | 25.55 | 20,74 | -0.79                   | -4.76 | 4.8   | 0,06   |
| <b>Services</b>              |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |                         |       |       |        |
| <b>Intermediate Industry</b> | 13.22 | 10.67 | 15.21 | 31,68 | 5.16  | 4.24  | 9.03  | 19,16 | -8.06                   | -6.43 | -6.18 | -12,52 |
| <b>Low</b>                   | 34.99 | 30.56 | 25.77 | 27,27 | 30.43 | 26.04 | 29.9  | 36,9  | -4.56                   | -4.52 | 4.13  | 9,63   |

Source: own elaboration based on the Censuses of 2001 and 2021 (Spanish National Statistics Institute).

In this context, the emergence of a speculative dynamic in the Spanish real estate market and the gentrification of the city center led to exponential growth in housing prices across the city until 2007. This process was interrupted in 2008 due to the onset of the economic crisis, but it quickly revived in 2015, triggering a new upward phase that intensified particularly in rental housing in the city center (Figure 3).

<sup>3</sup> The High Categories include managers and professionals. Intermediate Service Categories incorporate workers employed as technicians and support professionals and accounting clerks, clerical and office clerks. The Industrial Intermediate Categories add skilled workers in agriculture, livestock, forestry and fishing, skilled workers in manufacturing and construction, and plant and machinery operators. The Low Categories include unskilled workers in services and other elementary occupations.

Figure 3. Variation of the Rental Property Price Index in districts of the city of Madrid 2015-2019



Source: own elaboration using QGIS based on data from the Rental Housing Price Index (Spanish National Statistics Institute) and cartography from the Madrid City Council and OpenStreetMap.

This trend was encouraged by a combination of factors, including increased demand, limited supply, the expansion of short-term rentals, and the entry of new players, notably international capital and investment funds (Alexandri & Janoschka, 2020). As a result, an inflationary trend is imposed, affecting not only the middle and upper classes in the city center, but also households surviving in depressed and vulnerable contexts, often marked by issues of overcrowding, substandard housing, labor precarity, etc. (Sorando *et al.*, 2023).

## 5.2 End of the crisis, economic growth, and new trends of touristification

In a January 2014 interview, Ana Botella, then Mayor of Madrid, emphasized Madrid's potential in terms of cultural, leisure, and shopping tourism. During her remarks, the Mayor explained that initiatives were being implemented to enhance Madrid's global brand image, highlighting that through the promotion of cultural and urban tourism, the city was destined for "great success" (ABC, 2014). In this regard, one of the objectives of the Strategic Tourism Plan 2012-2015 was to expand Madrid's tourism footprint by increasing offerings and encouraging longer stays (Madrid City Council, 2012).

As in many cities across Europe, a significant portion of Madrid's tourist offerings is located in the historic city center<sup>4</sup>. Within this context, the advancement of touristification in Madrid has been primarily due to the rapid growth of tourist rental accommodations, a trend that has escalated

<sup>4</sup> According to data from the Registry of Tourist Establishments of the Community of Madrid, 64.1% of tourist accommodations in the city, including hotels, hostels, and guesthouses, were located in the Centro district in 2023. For tourist apartments, this figure reaches 58.38%, although this value is more uncertain due to the widespread presence of unregistered tourist rentals.

significantly in recent years. This trend has had a significant social, spatial, and economic impact on the city, prompting the increase in housing prices, the displacement of local population and the disappearance of local businesses (Gil & Sequera, 2020). In fact, urban regeneration policies have transformed the historically stigmatized neighborhood of Lavapiés (Hernández Aja et al., 2018) into one of the most relevant cultural and leisure hub of the city, while also exacerbating socio-spatial inequalities in the area (Crespí-Vallbona & Domínguez, 2021; Martín Palomo, 2023). The growing popularity of Lavapiés as a tourist destination in Madrid, as of May 2024, is evident in the existence of 3,051 tourist apartments in Lavapiés and 22,564 residents, according to the 2021 Population Census. This amounts to one tourist apartment for every seven households. This proportion positions Lavapiés as a heavily airbnbized neighborhood, similar to the areas of Alfama in Lisbon (Cocola- & Gago, 2021) and La Barceloneta in Barcelona (Lagonigro et al., 2020).

According to data from Inside Airbnb, these 3,051 tourist apartments account for 11.7% of the total number of tourist apartments in Madrid (26,024). The majority (2,852; 93.5%) is intended for short-term vacation rentals, while only 199 (6.5%) are available for medium-term rentals of several weeks or months. Additionally, 2,257 (74.0%) are entire homes or apartments, 681 (22.3%) are private rooms, 80 (2.6%) are shared rooms, and 33 (1.1%) are hotel rooms. Furthermore, 1,950 (63.9%) of the tourist apartments belong to multiple-property hosts, who controlled several listings on the Airbnb platform. Therefore, it can be argued that professional hosts and investors, who operate for commercial purposes and do not adhere to the principles of the sharing economy, control the majority of the tourist accommodations units listed on Airbnb that are located in the neighborhood of Lavapiés.

Thus, the recent emergence of the extractive tourism industry (Pahissa, 2014; Córdoba Azcárate, 2020) in Lavapiés has led to the displacement of the gentrifiers who arrived in the neighborhood in the late 1990s, as their distinctive lifestyles and consumption practices are increasingly hindered. As a result, the neighborhood is becoming an exclusive (and exclusionary) enclave, characterized by the simultaneous transformation of the traditional commercial landscape into a new *disneyfied* tourist shopping urban resort (Shouter, 2007; Zhang et al., 2021), and the conversion of family homes, both rented and owned, into high-yield financial assets (Gil, 2024). Regarding this, qualitative work findings combined with data extraction from Madrid's Residential Mobility Survey for the period 2014-2024 reveal the displacement of many former residents to more impoverished, peripheral neighborhoods in the districts of Arganzuela, Latina, Carabanchel, and Puente de Vallecas. Crucially, the current touristification of their home neighborhood appears as their most relevant for the interviewed residents, whom also emphasize that the touristification of Lavapiés has deteriorated the living conditions in the area:

“Over time, there has been a shift in what are considered the main issues affecting Lavapiés. From the poor housing conditions of the 1990s, we have moved to the current scenario, marked by a significant increase in commercial use, primarily driven by the touristification of the area.” (Lavapiés resident, female, 47 years old, personal interview).

“Renting out a flat has always been allowed. Under the framework of the rental law, there's no issue with it. The situation is different, however, when it comes to renting out either the entire apartment or just a room to tourists. Tourists come for a day or two, and they don't know the neighborhood or the neighbors... In other words, there's a process of social harmony breaking down in that building, or in that neighborhood, which is the real issue. This is what's happening right now in Lavapiés.” (Lavapiés resident, male, 57 years old, personal interview)

What residents note are the existing differences between the processes of gentrification and touristification. The touristification has not only triggered a series of emerging social problems but has also radically changed the social dynamics and practices, as well as the traditionally popular and familiar character of the neighborhood. Beyond official statistics, the testimonies of residents emphasize how this transformation has tangibly and emotionally impacted their lives. Gentrification may have been the prelude, but it is touristification that now stands as the most immediate threat to the identity cohesion of an area historically defined by its strong social and community fabric.

“Your daily life changed radically. Parties started happening every night, and we begin to lose our right to rest. Dirt, fights, drug trafficking, prostitution... And then the small local businesses began to transform to meet the demands of that new crowd... As a result, the commercial and neighborhood fabric of the residents started to fade away because many people were leaving” (Lavapiés resident, female, 62 years old, personal interview).

In Madrid’s Centro district, the interplay between gentrification and touristification has led to a significant decline in three specific population groups: local youngsters (< 25 y.o.) elderly people (> 65 y.o.) and precarious migrants from poor countries (Mazorra, 2023). According to García Pérez (2014), both groups share a residential pattern focused on the rental market and exhibit high residential mobility driven by economic factors, alongside elevated rates of unemployment and precarious employment compared to the average Spanish population (Garrido, 2010; Méndez, 2019; Sassano, 2023; Aramayona, 2024). Additionally, older adults also experience adverse effects from these processes, facing high housing and maintenance costs, as well as the loss of social and community networks in socially and commercially transformed environments.

Lavapiés exemplifies these demographic trends. The neighborhood has seen a notable decline in both younger and older age groups, while the proportion of middle-aged residents has risen, a typical pattern in gentrifying areas (e.g., López-Gay et al., 2021b; Moos et al., 2019). Additionally, this demographic shift aligns with a new social dynamic: the arrival of skilled professionals from advanced economies such as Italy, France, the UK, and the US. The displacement of lower-income groups and their replacement by foreign professionals reinforces the hypothesis of an ongoing, increasingly transnational gentrification process, a trend also observed in other urban settings across Spain (Cocola-Gant & López-Gay, 2020; Jover & Díaz-Parra, 2020; Mazorra & López-Gay, 2024).

### 5.3 Towards a dual city model. Gentrification and suburbanization of poverty in the Madrid Urban Area

The values obtained from the Moran and Segregation Index provide a clear picture of the evolution of socioeconomic segregation in the Madrid Urban Area (Table 3). It is observed that the segregation of all socioeconomic groups has tended to increase over the period from 2001 to 2021, consolidating the shift toward a dual city model characterized by heightened levels of socio-spatial inequality. In this context, highly skilled workers, the most segregated group, were concentrated in the northern part of the city of Madrid throughout the period from 2001 to 2021, while remaining insignificant in the districts and municipalities of the south during the same period (Figure 4).

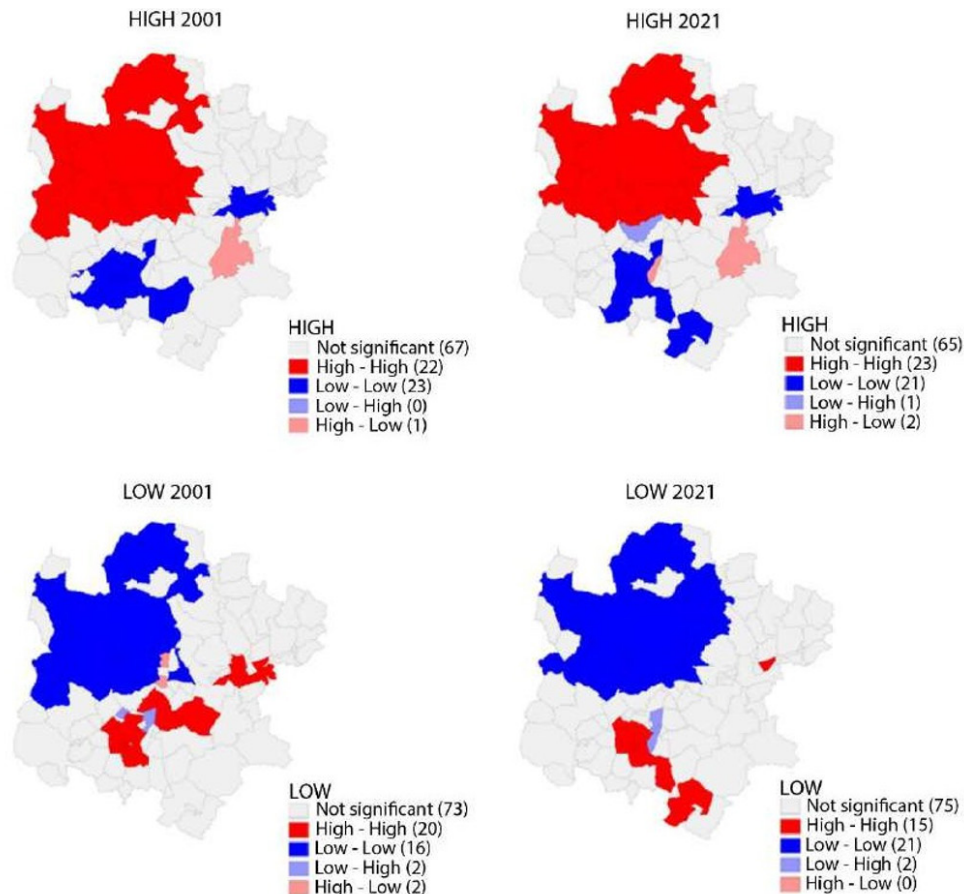
Table 3. Moran and Segregation Index by socio-occupational category in the Madrid Urban Area in 2001, 2011, and 2021

| Segregation Index                        | 2001  | 2011  | 2021  |
|------------------------------------------|-------|-------|-------|
| <b>Moran High Categories</b>             | 0.537 | 0.673 | 0.693 |
| <b>Moran Intermediate Services</b>       | 0.072 | 0.215 | 0.296 |
| <b>Moran Intermediate Industry</b>       | 0.617 | 0.684 | 0.719 |
| <b>Moran Low Categories</b>              | 0.379 | 0.400 | 0.505 |
| <b>Segregation High Categories</b>       | 0.227 | 0.297 | 0.275 |
| <b>Segregation Intermediate Services</b> | 0.049 | 0.047 | 0.06  |
| <b>Segregation Intermediate Industry</b> | 0.209 | 0.209 | 0.243 |
| <b>Segregation Low Categories</b>        | 0.091 | 0.115 | 0.181 |

Source: own elaboration based on the 2001, 2011 and 2021 Censuses (Spanish National Statistics Institute).

In 2021, the outliers in the Moran Index for upper classes in the city of Madrid are found in La Latina district, which borders Lavapiés at its eastern edge. This district emerges as a socially mixed area where gradually gentrified and touristified zones, such as Puerta del Ángel (Ardura et al., 2021; López-Gay et al., 2021), coexist with impoverished areas that have shown high vulnerability indicators over the past decades, such as the Caño-Roto – Los Cármenes areas (Hernández Aja et al., 2018). In this case, data from the 2021 Census and the Atlas of Income Distribution confirm that these are highly impoverished census tracts, which, for now, remain unaffected by the global processes occurring in the surrounding areas.

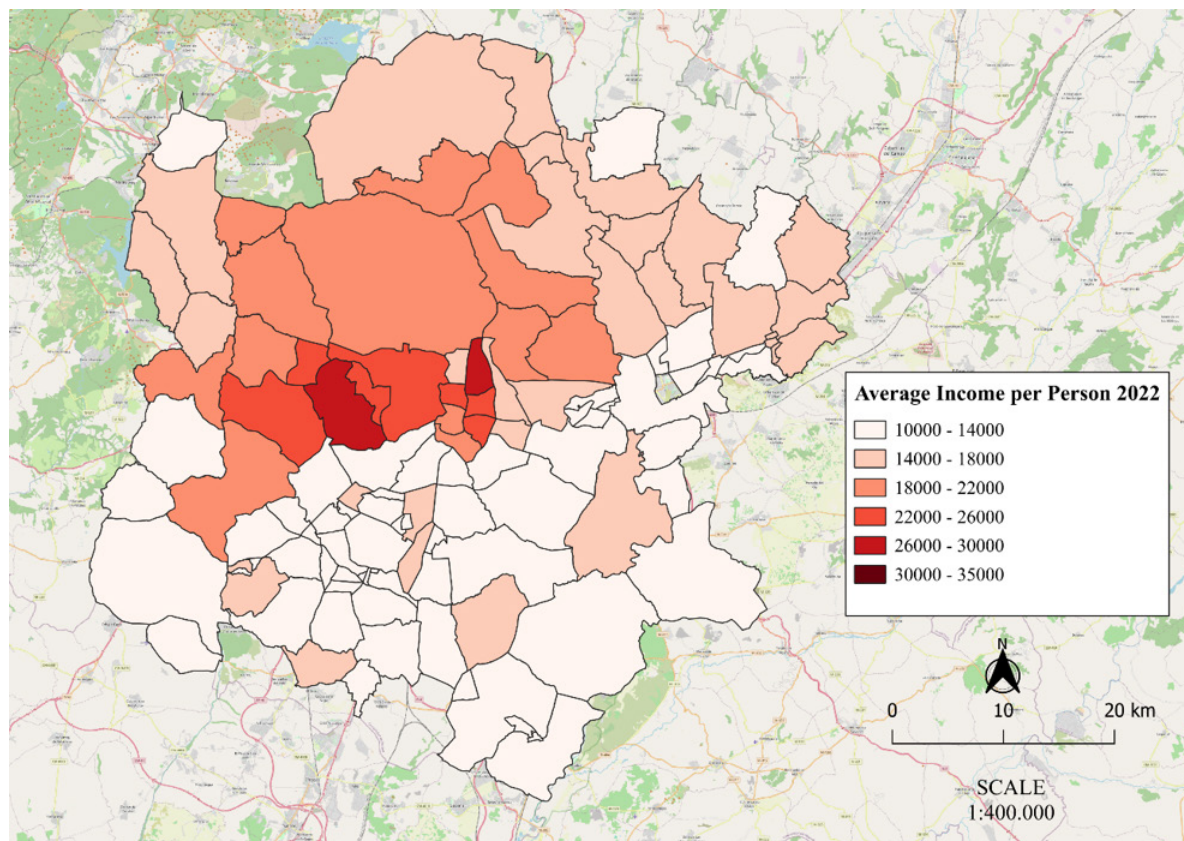
Figure 4. Local Moran Index and High and Low Socio-labor Class Clusters by District in the Madrid Urban Area, 2001 and 2021



Source: own elaboration based on the Censuses of 2001 and 2021 (Spanish National Statistics Institute) using QGIS and cartography from the Madrid City Council and OpenStreetMap.

In parallel, low-skilled workers tend to concentrate over time in the southern part of the Madrid Urban Area. This trend, combined with the relative absence of these groups in the northern part of the central city, indicates the consolidation of a residential segregation model that displaces the most precarious groups to suburban working-class neighborhoods located in the southern side of the city (Figure 5). As a result, residents of the disadvantaged areas often find themselves confined to their own territory, perpetuating a dynamic with significant implications for the increase and entrenchment of social inequalities (Nel-lo, 2021). In addition, it is plausible that the population flows displaced from gentrified and touristified areas of the central city are exerting increasing pressure on these groups, as the effects of these processes increasingly transcend the boundaries of the central city (Mazorra, 2023; 2024).

Figure 5. Average income per person in the districts of the Urban Area of Madrid 2022



Source: own elaboration based on data from the Atlas of Household Income Distribution (Spanish National Statistics Institute) using QGIS and cartography from the Madrid City Council and OpenStreetMap.

The increase in socioeconomic inequality is also reflected in other indicators, such as those related to health, education, and access to social services. Regarding health, data from the Madrid City Council in 2023 reveal that the life expectancy at birth for residents of the suburban working-class district of Puente de Vallecas in eastern Madrid is the lowest in the city, with a gap of over two years compared to residents from the affluent districts located in the northern half of the municipality such as, for instance, Barajas, Chamartín, or Moncloa. Moreover, the recent health crisis triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 highlighted the severe vulnerability of the suburban working-class districts located in the southern side of the city. In fact and over the early months of the pandemic, Puente de Vallecas, Villaverde, and Usera districts recorded the highest cumulative incidence rates in the city of Madrid (Mateo *et al.*, 2020).

In the field of education, the privatization of public services has exacerbated initial inequalities, segmenting the educational system between an increasingly precarious public sector and private or semi-private schools. In this context, students from vulnerable areas in the southern part of the Madrid Urban Area are concentrated in public schools, while those from the northern and western areas predominantly attend private schools, systematically achieving better educational outcomes than their peers in the southern and eastern districts (Cortázar, 2020; Echaves *et al.*, 2023).

Lastly, in terms of social services, data on the coverage and assistance provided to the most impoverished populations of the capital reveal stark differences between various areas of Madrid. For instance, data related to the Minimum Insertion Income in 2022 shows that 1,623 residents in the suburban working-class district of Puente de Vallecas benefited from this subsidy (0.67% of the population), while only 54 residents did in the very affluent district of Retiro in the urban central area of Madrid (0.04%). This comparison indicates that the proportion of households living below the poverty line in Puente de Vallecas was sixteen times higher than in the affluent district of Retiro.

## 6. Discussion and conclusions

The mixed methods research shown in this article provides evidence of how social transformations in the neighborhood of Lavapiés are unfolding, including the expulsion of the most vulnerable groups to other areas within the metropolitan area. Similar processes observed in other central neighborhoods of Madrid affected by gentrification and touristification highlight the influence of global processes on social dynamics and practices of residents, underscoring the need for inclusive and equitable social policies to safeguard the rights and quality of life of all inhabitants. More particularly, the combination of quantitative and qualitative research has allowed to confirm that institutionally-led urban regeneration in Lavapiés has primarily focused on the physical transformation of the neighborhood, including public space upgrading, housing rehabilitation, and significant improvements in facilities and infrastructure, while delaying attention to the degradation of social relationships and residents' life conditions. As shown in the findings section, an assessment of such a spatial, social and economic process makes clear that middle-class residents, along with well-organized commercial actors, have once again shaped the dominant narrative. In fact, the diversity of observations and analyses from media and academic and scientific literature underscores Lavapiés' immense complexity and ambivalence, oscillating between its portrayal as Madrid's trendiest and most cosmopolitan neighborhood, and its stigmatization as a "conflict-ridden" or "unsafe" district in the city center. Currently, there appears to be little basis for the latter diagnosis. Moreover, the celebratory perceptions of neighborhood regeneration do not seem to acknowledge the ongoing heterogeneity of social situations and problems that continue to characterize daily life in Lavapiés. Nor do they seem to consider the human costs resulting from the displacement of numerous individuals and families over time.

Findings shown in this article have specifically shown how the interplay between gentrification and touristification of Lavapiés neighborhood in Madrid's historical center appears as the main driver of the suburbanization of poverty and disadvantaged groups in the Spanish capital. Consequently, the result of Madrid's political and economic drive to fuel extractive urban processes such as gentrification and touristification has been the formation of one of the most unequal and segregated cities in Europe (Benassi et al., 2023; Tammaru et al., 2016; 2021). In other words, our findings unveil how the processes of gentrification and touristification in the Lavapiés neighborhood associated with the globalization of Madrid's economy have resulted in the forced spatial displacement of vulnerable residents to the working-class suburbs of the city. In this sense, our findings allow us to present the interplay between gentrification and touristification of Lavapiés as the main driver of the suburbanization of the poverty in contemporary Madrid. In addition, this interplay between gentrification and touristification has encouraged the rapid increase in housing prices, the dissolution of local commerce, the exponential growth of tourist and temporary rental housing, the privatization of public space and the deterioration of the living conditions of Lavapiés' residents. As a result of these dynamics, downtown neighborhoods live increasingly at the expense of the needs of a tourist and transient population, which leads to the weakening of social cohesion as well as the dismemberment of pre-existing community and support networks similar to downtown areas of other European cities (Meier & Frank, 2016; Cocola-Gant, 2018; 2023; Tulumello & Allegretti, 2021; Brollo & Celata, 2022).

The case of Lavapiés shows indeed the double-edged sword of globalization, where economic dynamism has not been accompanied by equitable social progress. As Madrid continues to grapple with the consequences of gentrification, touristification, and socioeconomic residential segregation, there is a pressing need for holistic urban policies that prioritize social inclusion and community resilience. The design and implementation of new institutionally-led initiatives focusing on affordable housing, sustainable tourism management, and strengthened social services could mitigate the displacement of vulnerable populations to non-central areas of the city and might foster more inclusive economic growth of the city center. By addressing these challenges proactively, Madrid has the opportunity to redefine its urban landscape towards a more socially inclusive, egalitarian, just, economically sustainable city, in line with the 2019 Declaration of EU ministers "Towards a common framework for urban development in the European Union".

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