



# CULTURAL SPACES AND ARTISTIC DYNAMICS IN THE SOUTHERN OUTSKIRTS OF MADRID

## Madrid Río, Carabanchel and Usera

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### KEYWORDS

*Contemporary Art  
Madrid  
Cultural Outskirts  
Carabanchel  
Usera  
Madrid Río  
Artistic Dynamics*

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### ABSTRACT

*For several decades, the southern districts of Madrid have witnessed the establishment of diverse artistic agents as a result of displacement from the city centre to the periphery. The development of Madrid Río facilitated the expansion towards the Carabanchel district and, more recently, towards Usera, which is currently undergoing significant cultural dynamism. Artists and cultural spaces seek consolidation through the construction of identities that foster integration with long-standing residents while simultaneously attracting new audiences, making communication strategies essential. This research is based on an extensive field study aimed at understanding the causes and processes underlying such displacement, as well as providing a snapshot of the current configuration of these areas to serve as a foundation for future studies. In doing so, the study contributes to preventing processes of gentrification and other recurring consequences associated with similar urban and cultural dynamics.*

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Received: 12 / 09 / 2025

Accepted: 20 / 12 / 2025

## 1. Introduction

The revitalisation processes in the southern neighbourhoods of Madrid that have taken place over the last two decades have included the opening of public cultural facilities, artists' workshops and exhibition spaces that have been described in the press as "incredible", according to Manuel Leira, son of Manuela Carmena, the mayor of Madrid and political opponent of the mayor Alberto Ruiz Gallardon, who created Madrid Río (Bianchi, 2015), "a hive of spaces for music, the performing arts and artistic production, dotted with galleries, residences and alternative spaces" (Marco, 2024) in the case of Carabanchel and "the epicentre of art" (Cuesta, 2025) in reference to Usera. Such epithets give an idea of this transformation, which is viewed positively by public opinion and arouses interest not only among cultural agents but also among the general population. They are worthy of in-depth analysis in order to understand the chain of events that have made it possible and the negative effects that may arise.

Although the phenomenon under study is that of Madrid's southern artistic periphery, there is an obvious chronological and territorial division between these three cases, each of which is a consequence of the one immediately preceding it. Firstly, Madrid Río, the major project to reclaim the southern basin of the Manzanares River, which took place between 2006 and 2012 and included the underground relocation of the M-30 motorway, the restoration of monuments and new uses for industrial buildings, the creation of cultural and sports facilities and green spaces, and specifically, in the case that concerns us, the recovery of the industrial space of the old slaughterhouse for its transformation into a leading cultural centre. As it is a public initiative and investment project, there is ample and sufficient documentation and studies, so this study has been approached from the point of view of its relationship with the following two areas of study.

Carabanchel as a peripheral artistic space began its journey as a result of the effects of the property bubble and the financial crisis, with the opening of the first gallery, Benveniste, in 2012, considered a key date. In the case of Carabanchel, the establishment of artists and galleries has been the result of a spontaneous and gradual process that has had nothing to do with public intervention. Therefore, the case study is based on field research and direct contact with the key players, although there are sufficient secondary and primary sources to provide solid support for the research.

The reuse of old industrial spaces and large commercial warehouses has led to an increase in rents, which has slowed down the process and even caused fear among the artistic community that they will be forced to move to other areas.

One of these new areas is Usera, a district adjacent to Carabanchel, historically a run-down, working-class area like Carabanchel, which is currently undergoing a boom with the establishment of artists who, moreover, aware of the previous experience of their neighbouring district, seem to be organising themselves in a more orderly and integrative manner with their surroundings. For this reason, in this case, the fieldwork is, if anything, more laborious and intense than that of Carabanchel, and the data provided in the research is more novel.

It is part of the driving force behind the Madrid Río project, with a large public investment of almost €3.688 billion for the underground relocation of the M-30 motorway, plus another €410 million for the restoration and revitalisation of the riverbank (López, 2011), which has encouraged the establishment of alternative and self-managed spaces in the neighbouring districts to the south. In this regard, it is important to consider the term 'alternative', since these creative spaces have been set up in an unplanned manner, outside institutional promotion strategies, as a result of a specific urban situation which, since the second decade of the century, has been reinforced by factors such as local idiosyncrasies, the architectural heritage of the area and its proximity to the central districts of the Spanish capital.

Peripheral cultural spaces in large cities have attracted growing interest in research, as they are not presented as isolated phenomena but as expressions that respond to converging patterns in terms of their conditions and effects. The experience gained in the consolidation of cultural neighbourhoods and territories, based on their tangible or intangible heritage, shows the

recurrence of gentrification dynamics that lead to the displacement of the original population and even of the agents who promoted the transformations.

Given the predictability of such processes, there is a need to develop alternative models of territorial integration that can counteract these dynamics and prevent the repetition of past mistakes. Paradigmatic examples of gentrification and touristification have been documented, first and foremost, in areas with a high density of heritage, such as the historic centres of Florence and Venice, characterised by processes of 'Disneylandisation' in the terms of Sacco and Ferilli (2018, p. 10). Secondly, they can be observed in areas considered to be benchmarks in terms of human rights, such as Chueca in Madrid or Castro in San Francisco (Treviño, 2023).

### **1.1. Objectives**

The main objective of this research is to analyse the phenomenon of the southern outskirts of Madrid as a creative and artistic space, in order to provide an empirical and theoretical basis to support future studies aimed at understanding the urban and sociocultural transformations resulting from the social recognition of this territory as an artistic and cultural hub.

To achieve this general purpose, the following specific objectives are proposed:

1. To examine the historical trajectory and territorial heritage of the southern part of the city of Madrid, identifying the artistic agents and their process of establishment in the area.
2. To characterise the local cultural ecosystem by compiling an updated register of galleries, artists' studios, cultural spaces and other agents actively involved in the phenomenon.
3. Analyse the dynamics of interaction between the different actors, as well as the mechanisms of cooperation and mutual support that make up the cultural network.

### **1.2. Hypothesis**

In line with the objectives set out, the research is structured around the following hypotheses:

H1. Institutional support is an essential element in ensuring the consolidation and sustainability of the artistic ecosystem in this case study.

H2. Affordable housing prices and the availability of industrial architecture have been determining factors in the movement of artists and galleries to the area.

H3. There is a relationship between the different spaces, each being a consequence of the other.

The relevance of the study lies in the need to deepen the analysis of the new peripheral cultural spaces that are emerging in large contemporary cities. In this case, a comprehensive approach to the Madrid context is proposed, with the aim of generating analytical tools that will allow other developing territories to be examined, critical comparisons to be made, theoretical inferences to be derived and subsequent evaluations to be facilitated.

## **2. Methodology**

The methodology is based on a search of primary sources, working with statistical data and information published by public bodies, as well as press reports that reflect this type of up-to-date information, especially in the case of Madrid Río, but also in the other areas under study.

This primary information includes personal interviews conducted with the protagonists of the Carabanchel and Usera areas, the result of intensive fieldwork and immersion in the areas carried out from 2023 to the present in Carabanchel and between March and September 2025 in Usera (the month in which this article was written).

With regard to the personal interviews, an open coding system was adopted that emphasised the experiences, opinions, interests and aspirations of representatives of the artistic community, taking into account their role as artists, gallery owners and collectives, with particular attention to their relevance for various reasons, such as being pioneers or their influence on the community, in order to carry out an immersion that avoided statistical bias.

Open conversations were held, focusing on the spaces and how they were accessed, as well as the advantages and difficulties encountered. Notable examples of people from Carabanchel

include Marco Zednik from the Casabanchel space, Daniel Silvo, owner of the Obertura gallery, Carlos Garaicoa, an established artist, Carlos Aires, creator of the Mala Fama collective workshop, Sphir, artist and gallery owner, etc. In Usera, given the lower incidence of artists and galleries, it has been possible to access practically all the members of the artist community.

Secondary sources have been used, both from the press with a marked opinion style, as they show the image that is being formed of these spaces by the media, and from the collaboration and efforts of artistic agents to make themselves known (including their social networks).

Likewise, the research is based on previous studies, notably those carried out by the research group Arte, Arquitectura y Comunicación en la Ciudad Contemporánea (Art, Architecture and Communication in the Contemporary City), whose academic texts on artistic neighbourhoods and cultural districts have undergone notable development, with the work edited by Chaves and Tejeda (2018) being particularly relevant, as well as the compilations derived from the various editions of the International Art and City Conferences (biennial since 2007). These works have contributed to consolidating a field of study that articulates urban, social and cultural dimensions around the processes of transformation of peripheral territories.

In this context, the reflections of Pilar Aumente (2021) on collaborative art in the context of cultural districts are of particular interest, as they are relevant for understanding both the concentration of agents in the artistic sector and the processes of spatial integration, social acceptance by the resident population and institutional cooperation. These contributions allow us to place the analysis in a critical perspective on the ways in which creativity is territorialised and institutionalised in urban peripheries.

The research is therefore based on a contextual approach that incorporates historical, geographical, social, economic, and cultural variables, with the aim of offering a holistic interpretative framework that facilitates understanding of the dynamics of the formation and consolidation of the phenomenon under study.

### 3. Brief historical overview

The planning and execution of Madrid's first expansion project, carried out by Carlos María de Castro, took into account the workers' accommodation areas and the largest population growth in the south of Madrid, in the Arganzuela neighbourhood, which was populated by labourers. This constituted the idiosyncrasy of the entire area and determined future developments and expansions in the surrounding area:

The railway, which had burst onto the scene a few years earlier, was a key factor for the future of Madrid. Its location, the size of its facilities and its potential for growth and expansion were issues that were far beyond Castro's decision-making capacity, and he himself was aware of this. For this reason, he did not dare to change even the smallest detail, and the eastern area was therefore shaped into a perfectly homogeneous industrial area, complemented by the docks and warehouses for iron, wood and food, located in the shelter of Atocha station. (Vicente, 2015, p. 39)

Along the Manzanares River, from the early years of the 20th century, "the urban fabric bordering the river grew to the detriment of the washing places and vegetable gardens that still existed," work was carried out to channel the river and create leisure spaces, such as the La Isla swimming pools built by Gutiérrez Soto in 1931, resulting in a city that turned its back on the river from the 1980s onwards.

the filling in of the new neighbourhoods on the right bank of the river, together with the construction of the M-30 ring road with traffic lanes on both banks, radically transformed the historical image of the area on the left bank. (Chaves & Layuno, 2020, p. 94)

This road isolated the former municipalities of Carabanchel Alto and Bajo, which had been annexed to Madrid in 1948, modifying and losing part of their original territory in favour of other districts, as well as Villaverde, a municipality annexed in 1954, from which Usera was segregated in 1987.

In the case of Carabanchel, the intense internal migration recorded between 1920 and 1930, which has been widely documented (Silvestre, 2005), coincided with a notable demographic increase in the municipalities of Carabanchel, particularly in Carabanchel Bajo due to its proximity to the capital. The population grew from 5,291 inhabitants in 1900 to 26,942 in 1930, while in Carabanchel Alto it rose from 2,044 to 9,065 in the same period. From the 1950s onwards, the construction of the ISO industrial estate and the establishment of manufacturing industries—metalworking, printing, textiles and food—consolidated the transformation of the area into an industrial district, with marked population growth and the gradual replacement of agricultural dwellings by high-rise buildings for workers.

Since 1986, the district's population has not fallen below 200,000 residents, reaching 258,927 registered residents in 2022, making it the most populous in the city. The municipal census of commercial premises and activities also reflects a unique productive structure: no agricultural activity, 54 metallurgical industries—the highest number in the city—and 2,874 vehicle and motorcycle repair shops, representing 22.47% of all registered activities (Madrid City Council, 2023).

The relocation of traditional sectors, such as printing and metallurgy, to peripheral municipalities in the 1990s generated a significant number of vacant industrial spaces. These, together with the progressive closure of mechanical workshops, have subsequently been reused as galleries, artists' studios and creative spaces, thus shaping an emerging cultural ecosystem in the district.

At the beginning of the 20th century, the current territory of the Usera district was entirely rural, located on the borders of Villaverde, Carabanchel Bajo and Madrid, with each of these municipalities corresponding to a part of the space that now makes up the district. Around 1900, there were only a few isolated buildings and roads in the area, along with the San Martín de Valdeiglesias railway line at its northern end.

In 1908, Marcelo Usera, a member of a family with a distinguished intellectual and professional reputation during the 19th century, married Carmen del Río Fernández, who belonged to a family of landowners with properties in the south of Madrid, which contributed a large amount of this land as a dowry.

Usera focused his activity on extensive agriculture and livestock farming, gradually concentrating his wife's properties through purchases and exchanges, which allowed him to form an extensive territorial domain in the area that would later take his surname. In 1921, he began to subdivide the land near the Manzanares River, and between 1925 and 1930, the sale of plots was consolidated, accompanied by the layout of streets and the supply of water from the Canal de Isabel II. These processes favoured the urbanisation of the lower part of Usera, known as Valdenarros (still belonging to Villaverde), where around a hundred families of working-class and artisan origin linked to the industries of Carabanchel settled.

After the Civil War, the area was severely affected, which led to the drafting of a development and reconstruction plan in 1941, approved in 1946. Within this framework, modest single-storey houses were built and a bathhouse was constructed. Likewise, on the land between Colonia San Fermín and the San Martín de la Vega road, the San Francisco Absorption Settlement was developed to house families from shanty towns and caves.

The opening of the vehicle factory in 1951, acquired in the 1970s by PSA (which manufactured Peugeot and Citroën cars), employed 1,000 workers, which meant that in the neighbourhoods of Usera (especially San Fermín), a large majority of families shared this workplace.

The annexation of Villaverde, which included most of what is now Usera, to Madrid in 1954 meant the incorporation of 20,766 inhabitants, approximately one third of the population of the Carabancheles at that time. Two decades later, the population tripled, reaching around 60,000

residents in the 1960s. In this process, Usera became a heterogeneous territory, made up of population centres of different origins: neighbourhoods that emerged at the beginning of the century, colonies rebuilt after the Civil War, public and private housing, substandard housing areas and large open spaces with varying degrees of degradation, coexisting with areas of industrial use.

In the early 1980s, the population density reached very high levels: 498.96 inhabitants per hectare in Usera and 446.87 inhabitants per hectare in Almendrales, figures significantly higher than those recorded in other neighbourhoods in the Arganzuela-Villaverde district, such as Moscardó-Zofio (289.50 inhabitants per hectare), which was the next most densely populated. In 1977, Usera had 52,616 inhabitants, while the total for the district, then divided into ten zones, was 118,013.

This population growth, although parallel to that experienced in Carabanchel, consolidated in the following decades. The last administrative division of Madrid, established in 1987 and effective in 1988, shaped the current structure of 21 districts and 128 neighbourhoods, at which point Usera acquired the status of a district in its own right. In 1994, it had over 120,000 inhabitants, although since then it has experienced a gradual decline in population (Pastor, 2003).

From the late 1970s and throughout the 1980s, some areas of Madrid, including Carabanchel, were affected by drugs and insecurity, and their image was intensified by the negativity shown in various artistic expressions and the media (Codesido-Linares & García, 2025).

In the 21st century, families from China began to settle in the area, forming a population of around 11,000 migrants who regenerated the degraded neighbourhood by bringing security and work, as well as integrating their traditions, cuisine and celebrations (Sánchez, 2016).

## 4. Analysis and results

Below is an account of the artistic, creative and cultural resources and experiences of the three case studies, following the chronological implementation that begins with the conversion of the industrial space of the old Madrid slaughterhouse into a cultural centre, followed by the implementation of artistic spaces in Carabanchel and the current snapshot of the artists' workshops and galleries in Usera.

### 4.1. Madrid Río - Matadero Madrid

The Madrid Río project stems from the underground relocation of 7 kilometres of the M-30 ring road carried out during the term of Mayor Alberto Ruiz Gallardón. In addition to improving traffic flow, the main idea was to revitalise the Manzanares River and make it accessible to the public by creating a new leisure space that would end the separation of the districts on either side of the river. Madrid Río was a multidisciplinary project by architect Ginés Garrido in collaboration with the studios Burgos & Garrido Arquitectos, Porras & La Casta, Rubio & Álvarez-Sala, and Dutch landscape architects West 8.

The project included the recovery of species and water quality in the Manzanares River, the restoration of monuments along this route, starting with those in the west, such as the Virgen del Puerto chapel and all the historic bridges along the river, the establishment of footbridges and sports facilities, various viewpoints and, finally, the new use as a cultural centre of the abandoned industrial space that had served as the city's slaughterhouse for practically the entire 20th century. Ricardo Bofill's Linear Park and Madrid Beach were also created.

In addition to its use as a recreational area for citizens, the interest for the subject of this study lies in Matadero Madrid - Contemporary Creation Centre located at the end of Madrid Río at its confluence with Carabanchel and Usera (districts 11 and 12, respectively), as it has become a reference point from which the public authorities intend to establish flows of people interested in art that link this space with the aforementioned districts.

The former Madrid Slaughterhouse and Municipal Livestock Market was a complex of 48 buildings covering an area of 165,415 m<sup>2</sup>, used for the slaughter of animals for the food industry and the marketing of livestock for much of the 20th century.

The decision to build it dates back to the late 19th century, in the context of urban growth and growing hygiene concerns that prompted the municipal authorities to raise the need for a centralised slaughterhouse. The site selected was the Arganzuela pasture, soon absorbed by metropolitan expansion, to carry out the project entrusted to the architect Luis Bellido. Work began in 1911 and was completed with the inauguration of the complex in 1924. The design, inspired by the German model of isolated pavilions connected by a network of roads, included five distinct sectors: production, management and administration, slaughterhouse, food market, labour market and health section. It also had housing for staff, a chapel and its own railway system. The complex was dominated by the administrative building known as the Casa del Reloj (Clock House), located at the central axis of the composition.

Between 1927 and 1930, the architect Fernando de Escondrillas promoted the construction of the Colonia Pico del Pañuelo to house the slaughterhouse workers. Shortly afterwards, in 1935, the Central Fruit and Vegetable Market was inaugurated on the last remaining land of the old Arganzuela pasture, reinforcing the logistical function of the area. During the Defence of Madrid in 1936, the proximity of the slaughterhouse to the war front led to some of its buildings being used as ammunition depots.

The post-war period brought new functions to the site: in 1940, a warehouse was built for storing potatoes, which was later converted into a greenhouse in 1992. With the progressive deterioration of the facilities from the 1970s onwards, work began on reusing the space. In the 1980s, architect Rafael Fernández-Rañada adapted the Casa del Reloj as the headquarters of the Arganzuela Municipal Council and converted the building used for stabling and selling calves into a socio-cultural space. Later, in the 1990s, Antonio Fernández Alba transformed the cattle stables into the headquarters of the Spanish National Ballet and the National Dance Company.

The slaughterhouse was finally closed in 1996, when the site was listed as a protected property in the 1997 General Urban Development Plan. Finally, in September 2005, the modification of the special intervention and architectural adaptation plan was approved, establishing that 75% of the space would be used for cultural activities. This process marked the beginning of its conversion into a centre for contemporary creation.

In 2006, the first call for Creation Grants for alternative spaces, collective works, mobility grants and creators took place. In 2007, Intermediae was launched, a programme focused on creating networks of collaboration, participation and dialogue, and spaces were also made available to the Madrid Designers Association. but it was in 2009 when improvement works began that transformed the appearance of a large part of the facilities and cultural programmes were added to enter the circuits and attract a greater number of visitors, including PhotoEspaña, Music Day, Autumn Festival, Veranos de la Villa and many others, launching into digital communication with the creation of its own website and comprehensive communication campaigns. In 2011, Nave 16 was inaugurated as a large multi-purpose exhibition space, and a new entrance was opened from Plaza de Legazpi. Of particular significance was the opening of the Casa del Lector (Reader's House) in collaboration with the Germán Sánchez Ruipérez Foundation.

Today, Matadero is a centre of attraction that goes beyond the local sphere, constantly evolving with a promising future ahead:

La sua capacità di attrazione ha superato l'ambito locale, diventando quasi immediatamente un condensatore metropolitano. Il suo disegno unitario e completo, che va dalle strategie urbane ai dettagli locali, l'ha dotato di un'immagine riconoscibile e facilmente comprensibile. Per questi motivi, tra gli altri, è già stato incluso nelle guida della città, insieme al Museo del Prado, al Parco del Retiro o ai quartieri storici. In contrasto con questi, Madrid Río si presenta come un vero esponente della città del futuro. (Chaves et al., 2023)

## 4.2. Carabanchel

The first initiatives to open up spaces in Carabanchel were not directly linked to the visual arts. A prime example is CasaBanchel, which emerged in 2016 as a community housing proposal in an industrial building, initially conceived as a housing and cohabitation solution. Subsequently, the project expanded its scope to include artist residencies and various creative activities. Its architectural configuration was centred around an interior courtyard covered by a skylight, around which were distributed studio-apartments with large windows. Located in the old ISO industrial estate, an area with an industrial past in the San Isidro neighbourhood, CasaBanchel became a magnet for craft workshops and creative spaces that transformed this enclave into a cultural hub. However, the continuity of the project was almost cut short by a substantial increase in the rent demanded by the property owner, although it was able to continue by accepting this increase.

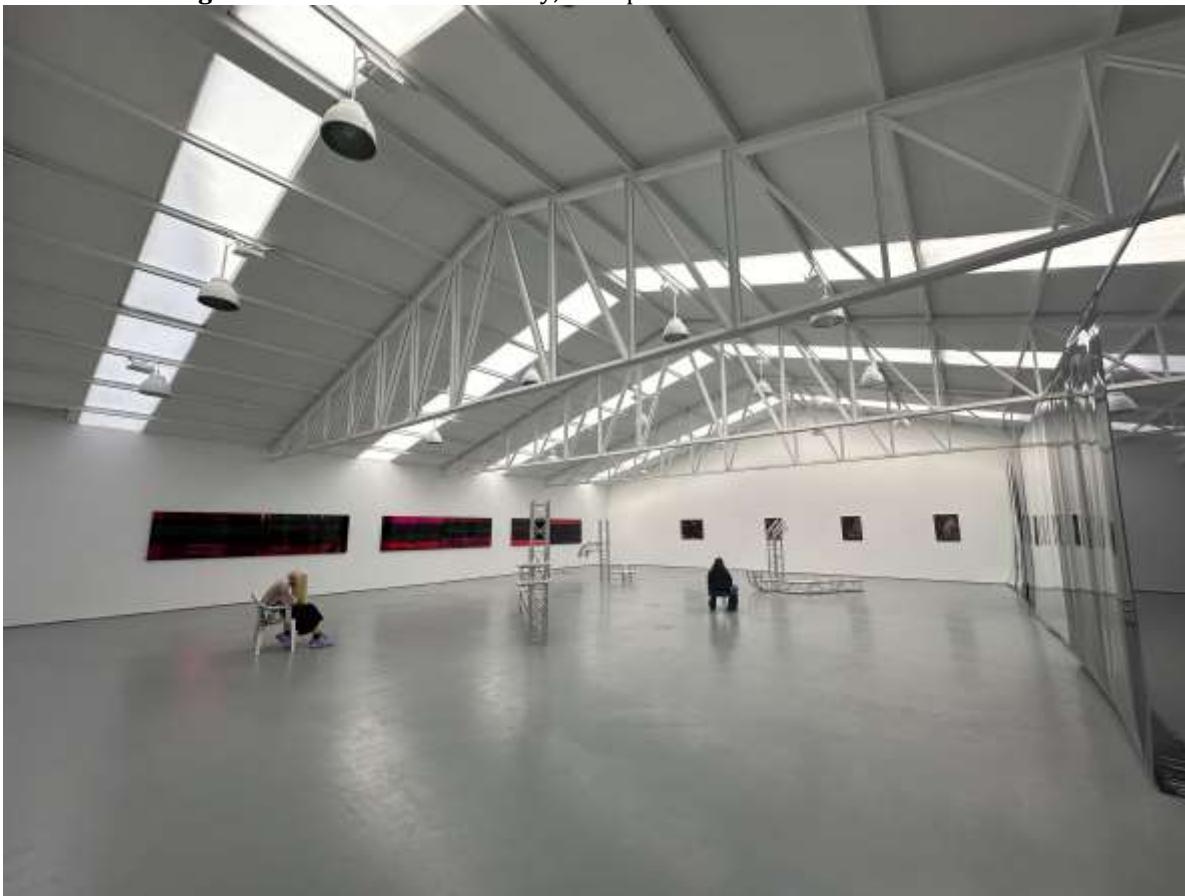
In 2016, Mala Fama was inaugurated in the same industrial estate, a shared space that houses workshops by artists such as Carlos Aires, Hugo Alonso, Alejandro Botubol, Marta Corsini, Rafael Díaz, Jorge García and Ruth Quirce. The venue shares facilities with Nave Oporto, where Irma Álvarez Laviada, Miguel Ángel Tornero, Santiago Giráldez, Fod, Sonia Navarro, Belén Rodríguez, Manuel Saro and Toni Ramón carry out their work, as well as with Nave 6, where Julio Sarramián, Cristina Toledo, Helena Fernández and Carlos Cartaxo work. All these initiatives share the same objective: to create a place for meetings and exchanges between artists and cultural agents, promoting creation, experimentation and artistic dissemination.

These spaces regularly host events related to innovation and cultural production, including *performances*, ephemeral projects, book launches and other contemporary art events. The upper floors house studios belonging to established artists, such as Mala Fama's founder, Carlos Aires, who regularly exhibits at the ARCO International Contemporary Art Fair and has works in prestigious collections and museums such as MACBA, ARTIUM, MAS, CAAC and the Fondazione Benetton. Aires himself has pointed out that, after his return to Madrid in 2010, he noticed the lack of accessible studios for artists, which forced them to develop their work in domestic spaces.

Among his most recent projects is Espacio Amazonas, a self-managed and collaborative space that opened in 2023 in a former prop workshop that closed after its owner retired. The project is managed by artists Natalia Andreoli and Lina Castellanos, with the participation of Juan Cruz Portaceli and Chunchullo. Its programme includes mural painting workshops and *artivism* activities with a feminist focus aimed at community building and the social integration of migrants, especially those from South America.

In terms of galleries, one of the pioneers in moving to Carabanchel was the Danish artist Dan Benveniste, who had run his gallery in the Las Letras neighbourhood between 2006 and 2012. That year, he decided to expand his exhibition space by moving to a former graphic arts premises on Calle Nicolás Morales, where he continues to run an intaglio engraving and publishing workshop. His work not only preserves the tradition of this technique but also keeps alive the legacy of one of the district's main industries during the second half of the 20th century: printing and the production of rubber stamps.

**Figure 1.** Sabrina Amrani Gallery, example of a warehouse in Carabanchel.



Source: Own elaboration, 2024.

In April 2024, Madrid City Council joined the artistic revolution in Carabanchel by creating, through its District Council, a brand image that included 170 art containers from all disciplines, highlighting the recovery of its "abandoned industrial warehouses, textile factories and printing presses" (Madrid City Council, 2024). The figure provided includes a number of public cultural facilities and creative industry spaces that are not the subject of this study, but the list of artists' studios (individual or collective) and galleries in operation exceeds one hundred (Treviño, 2025a).

Although digital communication has facilitated the promotion of these spaces far from the usual circuits (Treviño, 2025b), the ultimate goal, especially for galleries, is personal interaction, which is why face-to-face events are sought.

One of the most successful galleries in terms of visitor numbers is the latest addition to the district's cultural fabric, Art Gallery 95, an initiative promoted by the artist Sfhir, who was awarded the prize for the best mural in the world for *La violonchelista (The Cellist)* at the 1st International Urban Art Competition organised by the *Street Art Cities* platform in February 2024. The space, located in a former garage that underwent a five-year renovation process, integrates architectural and artistic interventions on walls, plaster finishes and lighting innovations. Since its opening, the gallery has established itself as one of the cultural facilities with the highest number of visitors and the most successful turnout on the art scene.

Aware of the appeal of urban art, especially among younger audiences, and its dissemination on networks such as Instagram (Pérez-Asperilla, 2025), a tour of the district has been established that brings visitors to some of the galleries that have been involved in the creation of murals in their surroundings, such as the Veta gallery.

To conclude, following discussions with tenants of some of the oldest spaces who rented commercial premises seven years ago, the period established by law for this type of rental, the

prices of these premises have tripled as landlords are aware of the success of their properties. A new exodus is therefore expected, from which only those who have purchased their own property will be spared over time.

This is why some artists are settling in other places, such as Usera, when they want to remain in the capital, or in other municipalities further away from Madrid.

Solutions are being considered in relation to tax exemptions or greater integration to promote an industry or support services between existing businesses in the district and the needs of creative spaces, as is currently being done by the artist Carlos Garaicoa.

### 4.3. Usera

The district of Usera is becoming a peripheral area for the establishment of artists' studios, which will presumably attract other artistic agents, as has happened in other similar spaces in the past. Espacio Oculto Madrid (Figure 2) was the first of the spaces to open in Usera and had no direct connection with Carabanchel or the gentrification of industrial warehouses. Instead, it opened in this location in September 2013, similar to the opening of some of the studios in Carabanchel that were more closely related to the 2008 financial crisis.

This crisis led to the permanent closure of traditional businesses (mechanical workshops, building material warehouses and others) or their relocation to spaces in municipalities outside Madrid. It is presented as a creative *coworking* space, a cultural agent in the neighbourhood, and a meeting place for artists and art professionals.

**Figure 2.** Espacio Oculto Madrid, an example of an industrial space in Usera.



Source: Own elaboration, 2025.

The 273-square-metre building in which it is located was a warehouse built by Rafael Huidobro, professor at the Madrid School of Architecture, during the 1960s. It is a unique building and an example of the restoration of industrial architecture for cultural purposes, maintaining its

original appearance in terms of spatiality, with high ceilings, brightness and attractive construction details.

A corridor leads to an open-plan central space for meetings or group activities, from which smaller spaces and a first floor on one side open up for artists' creative work. Agreements have been reached with the owners to transfer the space in exchange for its renovation.

Espacio Oculto Madrid is a centre self-managed by an association led by Guillermo de Torres, Nathalia Lasso, Carmen Sánchez and Amaya Hernández, and within its walls artists such as Lupe de la Vallina, Paula Cervera, Irene Gómez Salazar, Babi Bensusan, Ohla Borshchak, Amanda Clis, Verónica Robledo, Nathalia Lasso, Antonio Cano and Guillermo de Torres create their work.

**Table 1.** Art spaces in Usera

	Type of space	Address
<b>Fûdo</b>	Gallery	16 Andrés Arteaga Street
<b>Margarita Gámez</b>	Artist's studio	Juan Español Street, 39
<b>Espacio Oculto Madrid</b>	Collective creative space	Nicolás Usera Street, 27
<b>Latolier</b>	Collective creative space	Calle Rodrigo Uhagón, 23
<b>Merle Studio</b>	Collective creative space	Calle del Amor Hermoso, 68
<b>Rol Art Gallery Studio</b>	Artist's workshop and gallery	Calle Juan Zofio, 18
<b>Simon Edmonson</b>	Artist's studio	15 Silvo Abad Street
<b>Le Bâtiment</b>	Collective creative space	126 A Nicolás Sánchez Street
<b>Chinatown Studios</b>	Collective creative space	Calle Nicolás Sánchez, 126 B
<b>Lara Padilla's Bunker</b>	Artist's workshop	135 Nicolás Sánchez Street
<b>Albarrán and Boudais</b>	Gallery warehouse	Calle de San Máximo, 31

Source: Own elaboration, 2025.

Continuing with the collective workshops included in this category is Le Bâtiment, another former industrial space where the following artists create: Alessia Bayro, Andrés Martí, Astro Escudero, Camilo Delpin, Lucca Domit, Marina Benito and Martina Billi, and in the same building, Estudios Chinatown with artists Gloria Martín, Miguel Náger and Gio. Latolier, opened in 2020, is located in a former mechanical workshop and brings together a dynamic community of local artists and foreign residents around painting: Baptiste Laurent, its founder, together with Pablo Álvarez, Jesús Moreno YES, Fernando Molina, Alberto Matesanz and Israel Larios. Estudio Merle is another collective workshop still in the process of formation, created by Eulogia Merle, which works on the concept of multiple identities.

There are three individual artists' studios that collaborate in the open-door activities organised by the spaces in order to integrate with the population and attract visitors and potential buyers: Lara Padilla's bunker, Margarita Gámez's space and that of the British artist Simon Edmondson (based in Madrid since 1991, with a previous studio in the centre of Madrid and currently in Usera).

In addition to these three individual artist studios, there are two galleries in the district: Fûdo, dedicated to aesthetics and landscape themes in two areas, the exhibition of its collection of Japanese engravings and joint collaboration with active contemporary artists who, whatever their artistic discipline or technique, highlight the gallery's theme. The other gallery, Estudio Rol Art Gallery, is an exhibition and creation space dedicated to graffiti, whose owner, Rol, has created urban art murals throughout Spain.

Artists, galleries and collectives carry out well-organised joint actions that are publicised through social networks, produce printed maps and are relatively well concentrated between the Usera and Almendrales Metro stops. Among the activities, the open days that have been held since at least 2022 are particularly noteworthy.

Finally, it is worth noting that some galleries in the centre of Madrid occasionally rent space in the industrial warehouse building on Calle San Máximo, which can be accessed in two ways: like any residential building, via an interior staircase or lift, or by private vehicle via a garage entrance that circles the entire building, allowing access to any floor or warehouse. In this building, the Albarrán y Bourdais gallery uses space to store its work.

## 5. Conclusions

The research carried out has shown how the phenomenon of the establishment and displacement of creative and artistic spaces is in full swing, although each case study reveals differentiating elements. Matadero attracts visitors through a series of cultural facilities and the dissemination of information by the public institution of Madrid City Council, although the operating licence is private for some of the services. Land, buildings, programming, etc. do not originate from the private sector, therefore the maintenance of the space is assured and the opening of Madrid Río can be considered as the bridge that allowed the city that had turned its back on Carabanchel or Usera through the flow of people who walk through the green spaces every day once the M-30 border was removed.

The historical trajectory of these districts in southern Madrid and the idiosyncrasies of their industrial buildings, which are spacious, open-plan and perfectly lit due to their previous abandonment, either through retirement or relocation to neighbouring municipalities, have turned Carabanchel and Usera into places where the spaces are ideal for the opening of creative and exhibition spaces for the plastic arts.

This is demonstrated by the opening of a large number of spaces (around 65) in the last decade in a place where there were practically none of this nature before the financial crisis. The completion of the Madrid Río works, the inauguration of Matadero and the opening of the first gallery in Carabanchel cannot be considered isolated coincidences, but rather the logical result of the search for new spaces after the financial and real estate crisis, the accessibility of the districts combined with the attraction of Matadero, the new leisure spaces and the suitability of industrial buildings as containers for art spaces.

The study provides a snapshot of the agents that currently form part of the artistic and creative ecosystem and dynamics (more specifically, in the visual arts) in the southern outskirts of the capital, with the location of the spaces where the artistic agents have set up shop serving as a basis for assessing the process that may unfold in the future in order to avoid the gentrification processes that, in principle, already occurring in Carabanchel with the renovation of industrial warehouses and buildings, although this has not significantly affected the price of regular housing (no percentage increases greater than in other areas of Madrid).

In Usera, integration is taking place in a friendly manner with the neighbourhood thanks to joint activities and the opening of doors to the public. In this case, there has been no increase in prices, as the settlement of artists is in its infancy and in full swing, with no need to review rental prices as the renewal deadlines have not yet been met.

In Carabanchel, the dynamics of interaction between artistic actors are well established, with the creation of a brand image for the district through public intervention, the association of galleries, and joint open-door activities in artists' studios. However, the urban layout of car parks and walking routes is not convenient.

It is true that the repetition of activities and permanently established schedules that have been in place for almost a decade have helped to attract visitors and consolidate the image of the neighbourhood as an artistic one.

In Usera, there are fewer agents, but the organisation of activities is impeccable and very much geared towards integration with its surroundings, and it is also managing to arouse the curiosity of the regular Carabanchel public. The layout of the spaces and the urban structure itself encourage interaction with visitors and residents.

As for the hypotheses, in the case of Madrid Río and Matadero, public intervention is evident, since the initial investments and the operation itself depend almost entirely on it. However, institutional collaboration in Carabanchel and Usera is dispensable, and self-managed collaborative spaces and private initiative are gaining ground, with no institutional support detected.

The idiosyncrasy and reuse of industrial architecture is one of the main factors for artists and galleries to set up in these spaces, both because of the configuration of the interiors in terms of size, layout and lighting, and because of the rental price, as these are neighbourhoods that have traditionally been perceived as run-down.

No inter-district relationship has been found, nor is it clear that there is an exodus from Carabanchel to Usera, at least for the moment, although the former has become an example to follow for the latter or, in other words, when prices for warehouses in district 11, Carabanchel, began to rise, artists from other places flocked to district 12, Usera, following the course of the Manzanares River and the Madrid Río waterfront, to replicate, albeit with improvements, the artistic actions and dynamics already consolidated in the Carabanchel "experiment".

## 6. Acknowledgements

This text is part of the results of the project CULTURAL SPACES AND CONTEMPORARY ARTISTIC PRACTICES. ALTERNATIVE STRATEGIES AND DYNAMICS FOR RENEWAL IN URBAN PERIPHERIES (PID2022-140361NB-I00) of the National R&D Plan. Knowledge Generation Projects. Ministry of Science, Innovation and Universities.

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