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# URBAN PERIPHERIES IN TRANSFORMATION
## Evolution, Processes, and Challenges in Spanish Cities

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*Urban Regeneration*
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*Territorial Cohesion*

**ABSTRACT**

*Urban peripheries have undergone substantial transformations over time, evolving from marginal and functional spaces to complex territories integrated into metropolitan dynamics. This article analyses the evolution, urban processes, and current challenges that characterise the outskirts of three major Spanish capitals: Madrid, Valencia, and Zaragoza. Using a comparative approach, it identifies the common elements and local specificities that have determined the peripheral configuration of each city. The study draws upon the analysis of historical sources, urban planning documents, statistical data, and direct territorial observation, with the aim of contributing to a critical and up to date understanding of the role of urban peripheries within the contemporary metropolitan structure.*

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## 1. Introduction

The concept of the urban periphery has evolved considerably since its earliest formulations, which were grounded in the centre–periphery dichotomy. Contemporary scholarship now emphasises the diversity of forms, functions and dynamics that shape these spaces, where processes of social exclusion coexist with opportunities for urban renewal. In the Spanish context, large cities display distinct peripheral models shaped by historical, political, economic and territorial conditions. This article examines three paradigmatic cases, Madrid, Valencia and Zaragoza, in order to analyse how their peripheries have transformed and to evaluate the implications of these changes for contemporary urban planning.

Far from constituting a residual phenomenon, the peripheries have emerged as urban laboratories in which new ways of living, working and engaging with public space are actively tested and negotiated. From the perspective of critical urban theory, the periphery may be understood as a space that concentrates the central tensions of contemporary urbanisation: the demand for accessibility and connectivity in tension with territorial fragmentation; the search for community identity alongside processes of landscape homogenisation; and the coexistence of formal and informal economic practices. For these reasons, the peripheries function as strategic vantage points from which to analyse broader urban dynamics.

The examination of the peripheries of Madrid, Valencia, and Zaragoza is particularly pertinent given its comparative scope. Each city has experienced processes of growth and transformation shaped by distinct structural conditions. Madrid operates as a global capital and a centre of political and economic power. Valencia is characterised by the interaction between its agricultural hinterland and its maritime façade. Zaragoza has consolidated its role as a logistics hub and intermediate urban centre. This diversity enables the identification of shared patterns of peripheral development while also revealing specific configurations that deepen our understanding of the phenomenon.

More broadly, this study seeks to contribute to academic and professional debates that extend beyond the Spanish context. In contemporary urban discourse, the peripheries occupy a contested position between competing models of the city: one oriented towards global competitiveness and the commodification of space, and another prioritising social cohesion, environmental sustainability, and spatial justice. Within this analytical framework, the research critically examines the processes through which peripheries are produced and transformed, as well as their role in shaping the structure and governance of the twenty-first-century city.

## 2. Cities, Metropolises, and Peripheries: Transformations of the Urban Territory

The traditional territorial structure has undergone significant transformation in recent decades, shifting from an urban model characterised by compact areas with clearly defined, autonomous centres to a dispersed, discontinuous, and fragmented form of city. This transformation is driven by multiple factors such as communication, technology, transport, and social dynamics, which particularly affect the territorial organisation of peripheral areas. Contemporary polycentric cities extend across the territory, manifesting as new peripheries oriented towards housing (residential complexes), commerce (business hubs and financial centres), or industry (industrial estates). These differ markedly from the peripheries of the Fordist model, which were shaped by continuous processes of social degradation and industrial restructuring.

The study of urban peripheries forms part of a broad field of critical urban theory. In 1968, Henri Lefebvre (2024) introduced the concept of the *right to the city*, challenging spatial marginalisation and advocating equitable access to urban resources. He argued that the commodification of the city in service of capital interests had negatively affected large urban centres, proposing that citizens could reclaim social space in response to the privatisation of urban areas and neoliberal policies predominantly focused on industrial and commercial priorities. This perspective emphasised the recovery of a sense of city, the appropriation of space, and the fostering of vital urban experience, thereby paving the way for the humanisation of the contemporary metropolis. Manuel Castells (1974) highlighted the role of urban social movements

in shaping peripheries as spaces of resistance and contestation, while David Harvey (2007), from the standpoint of critical geography, emphasised the link between capitalist accumulation and the production of space, identifying peripheries as territories of expansion and speculation.

Recent processes of reticular diffusion, the dispersed city (Monclús, 1998), and the *diffuse city*, defined by Francesco Indovina (1990) and later generalised by Bernardo Secchi (2002) as the "icon of the 21st century", have substantially altered the configuration of urban peripheries as previously shaped by the industrial metropolis from the Industrial Revolution until the 1960s. Changes in territorial structures, such as de-urbanisation and counter-urbanisation, alongside advances in information and communication technologies, have produced shifts in social organisation and regulatory practices. Since the mid-1990s, this duality between the traditional compact city and the sprawling city has been joined by polycentric urban regions, which reflect processes of concentrated decentralisation and establish synergies between emerging centralities, as exemplified by land use planning policies in the Community of Madrid in recent years.

A polycentric city model with a grid structure is characterised by nodes that preserve and emphasise their identity through innovative processes of competition and cooperation. These new peripheries therefore appear destined to become the true metropolis (Monclús, 1998), a development reflected in the evolving perception of the peripheries themselves: from the negative view of degraded areas typical of the Fordist city to the positive perspective associated with the diffuse post-Fordist city. Debates and models of regeneration remain open, yet the workspace has shifted from the centres of traditional cities to the various metropolitan crowns of the new peripheries, extending even to less urbanised areas. This transformation has prompted changes in urban management and planning, involving both public and private actors within this network, in which cultural activities, artistic practices, urban art, interventions and uses of public space, and new spaces for contemporary creation, whether institutional, privately initiated or self-managed, play a decisive role.

The peripheries of cities thus constitute a complex and constantly evolving territorial reality. Giancarlo de Carlo (1992) described them as "the city of our time, for which we are all responsible, in one way or another, and therefore it would be good to begin to study it with commitment and, possibly, with tolerance" (p. 4). Developing the capacity to read peripheral areas, he asserts, allows their full potential and possibilities to be realised, transforming them into laboratories for innovative projects that integrate different disciplines and develop social space.

> If the peripheries are to support daily human life in this third millennium, the study of the pathologies and deficiencies of the human landscape will focus on their diversification and analysis. This perspective permits the conception of the *Periphery Laboratory*, that is, the consideration of the periphery as a space still open to discovering its own identity. (Arias Sierra, 2003, p. 76)

Spread across the territory, the new peripheries also signify a shift in the relationship with the traditional urban centre. In contrast to the centre's historical dominance over suburban areas, contemporary phenomena of decentralisation and emerging new centralities are altering the traditional centre periphery imbalances. This process is linked to the growing extent of industrial zones, residential complexes, technology and financial parks, sports facilities, shopping centres, educational environments, and, notably, diverse cultural spaces. Josep Lluís Sert's observation in 1941 in Cambridge that suburban areas are now larger than cities has been confirmed and generalised in today's urban landscape.

In Spain, innovative and critical approaches by authors such as Oriol Nel·lo (2015) and Francesc Muñoz (2008) have explored urbanisation and metropolitan fragmentation as essential frameworks for understanding peripheral dynamics, thereby enriching the body of critical theory on these processes. According to Muñoz, the contemporary urban landscape is characterised by the development of major transport arteries, with disconnected housing estates, residential neighbourhoods, and commercial and logistics parks emerging around the most populous urban centres. Cities increasingly lose their cultural roots, becoming spaces primarily oriented towards

commerce, consumption, and distribution. Tourism also assumes a prominent role, transforming urban spaces into centres of entertainment and attraction, often at the expense of their cultural, social, or historical identity. Urbanisation, in this sense, represents the trivialisation of urban space, a process of thematisation in which cloned, generic landscapes are repeated from city to city as objects of consumption.

> This gives rise to a new category of landscapes defined by their aterritoriality, which are landscapes detached from place, which neither reflect nor result from their physical, social, or cultural characteristics, but are reduced to one superficial layer, the image itself. (Muñoz, 2008, p. 61)

This multifaceted and constantly evolving panorama underscores how the peripheries are configured as heterogeneous spaces, shaped by social and territorial tensions, morphological transformations, and typological diversity. This theoretical framework informs the present research, guiding a critical analysis that integrates historical, sociological, and territorial perspectives.

### *2.1. Culture, Artistic Practices, and Urban Art as Drivers of Regeneration in Peripheral Areas*

Culture has become a central consideration in the management and revitalisation of urban areas. Cultural institutions, creative companies and industries, centres of creation, and contemporary artistic practices are increasingly linked to projects for the transformation, renovation, and regeneration of urban spaces, often in contexts of evident degradation. Such initiatives are frequently promoted by public administrations from perspectives that are not solely cultural but also, increasingly, aimed at generating social and economic resources. In some instances, the recovery of these areas entails factors of gentrification and tourist impact that conflict with processes of participation, self-management, and citizen use, delineating the consistently challenging boundary between the success and failure of these cultural policies.

The shift towards the peripheries has prompted changes in urban management and planning, involving both public and private actors within this network. Cultural activities, artistic practices, urban art, the intervention and use of public space, and new sites for contemporary creation, whether institutional, private initiatives, or self-managed models, play a decisive role in these processes. In this context, we propose an analysis of how urban peripheries and their extensions are currently being addressed, with culture positioned as a necessary and open agent of new social development.

The state of the art thus explores the complexity of terms such as peripheries and contemporary culture. With respect to the former, this territory is not understood solely as that immediately adjacent to the outer rings of the principal urban developments. Contemporary metropolises encompass multiple gradations of periphery, as exemplified in Madrid. Successive belts of periphery have emerged, incorporating relevant cultural sites. Tabacalera Lavapiés, Latina, and Carabanchel may be considered inner peripheries owing to their location and prior socio-economic structures. Madrid Río exemplifies an infrastructural periphery, while the recently closed Museum for the 21st Century in the Zapadores warehouse was ultimately absorbed by the Madrid Nuevo Norte macro-project. These multiple territorial strips compel consideration of the city-region as a whole, encompassing additional peripheries and, by extension, satellite towns beyond political boundaries, though not beyond the condition of distance and time. Ávila, Segovia, and Toledo form part of this supra-regional periphery yet remain dependent on the large population of the central city.

These developments are being replicated in smaller cities that are reconfiguring themselves as new regional and provincial centres by applying protocols similar to those followed in global cities, such as Zaragoza and Valencia, which serve as models of large intermediate cities and form part of the focus of this analysis. To contextualise the realities under study, cases such as the C3A in Córdoba (Andalusia Contemporary Creation Centre) have undergone various stages since their inception as urban regeneration initiatives outside heritage sites. Other examples, such as the

Cerezales Foundation in León, illustrate new realities in which contemporary art projects are linked to small capitals and rural areas, functioning as peripheral bridges connecting diverse contexts. These examples extend even further, placing us before what might be termed supra-peripheries, such as Casa Quindós in Vilela, Lugo, and the Montenmedio Contemporánea Foundation in Vejer de la Frontera, Cádiz, which provide relevant models of urban art and sculpture in public spaces. These complexes offer insight into what it is like to inhabit places that feel almost like islands while remaining inseparable from the preceding urban and social realities. Collectively, they reveal the emergence of peripheral cultural hubs and the debates that arise within and between them, ranging from complete dependence to distant critique.

The dynamics producing this new universe have diverged from those in which, repeatedly and even excessively, different public administrations were the sole drivers of action. Today, a spectrum exists, ranging from direct neighbourhood participation to private developments in which various cooperative systems, whether aligned with local, regional, or national governments or not, structure projects and realities capable of deploying a more participatory culture that is closer to citizens while maintaining an international perspective. Economic, health, and political upheavals, almost all of which may be characterised as global, have created circumstances that have afforded citizens a more prominent role as activists and direct agents in the construction of these peripheries, which respond to specific needs rather than uniform or inertial dynamics.

It is these processes, centred on the role of art, including the hybridisation and transversality of all its contemporary forms, architecture, and heritage, in shaping strategies and dynamics of renewal in the urban peripheries of Spanish cities, that form the focus of this article. These are nodes of diverse origin that can only be fully understood through a multidisciplinary analysis of spaces and practices, which are essential for comprehending our contemporary reality.

## 3. Objectives

The general objective of this work is to analyse the evolution, typologies and processes that characterise the outskirts of Madrid, Valencia and Zaragoza, identifying common patterns and local particularities. The specific objectives are:

- To examine the historical evolution of the urban peripheries in the three selected cities, from their origins to the present day.
- To classify and compare peripheral typologies according to their morphology, land use and social dynamics.
- To analyse recent processes affecting these peripheries, including gentrification, segregation and regeneration.
- To evaluate the implications of these processes for urban planning and territorial cohesion.

## 4. Methodology

The methodological approach adopted is qualitative-comparative, supported by source triangulation techniques to ensure the validity of the results. The following were used:

- Documentary analysis: review of general urban development plans, urban planning legislation, academic studies, and specialised literature.
- Cartographic and spatial analysis: use of historical and current cartography, as well as satellite images, to identify morphological patterns and expansion dynamics.
- Direct observation: urban tours and visits to selected peripheral areas in order to contrast documentary and cartographic interpretations.
- Statistical data: use of official sources such as the National Institute of Statistics (INE), the Land Registry and municipal records to contextualise demographic, economic and social trends.

The selection of Madrid, Valencia, and Zaragoza is based on criteria of urban relevance and diversity of peripheral experiences. Madrid is an example of a global metropolis with highly differentiated peripheries; Valencia represents the interaction between agricultural tradition and coastal renewal processes; and Zaragoza embodies a model of an intermediate city with strong logistical and residential development.

## 5. Approach to the Historical Configuration of Urban Peripheries

The study of urban peripheries is central to understanding the evolution of contemporary cities, as they constitute particularly visible concentrations of the processes of growth, segregation, and socio-spatial transformation that characterise modern urbanisation. In the Spanish context, the peripheries of cities such as Madrid, Valencia, and Zaragoza provide paradigmatic examples of how historical, economic, and political factors have shaped territories initially conceived as marginal spaces, which over time have assumed central roles within the urban structure.

In Madrid, peripheral expansion accelerated in the mid-twentieth century, driven by internal migration and industrial development, resulting in a mosaic of working-class neighbourhoods, housing estates, and areas of irregular urbanisation that continue to define much of the metropolitan landscape. Valencia, by contrast, demonstrates a process in which the periphery has been shaped by the duality between the continuity of agricultural centres and the progressive implementation of large infrastructures and planned residential neighbourhoods, reflecting a persistent tension between agricultural tradition and urban modernisation. In Zaragoza, peripheries have developed in relation both to the city's role as a logistics and communications hub and to its function as an intermediate regional capital, producing areas that have alternated between accommodating immigrant populations and consolidating industrial estates and large facilities.

Although these three cases follow distinct trajectories, they share common processes, including the demographic pressures of the developmentalist period, the action, and at times inaction, of urban policies, and the progressive integration of peripheries into the economic and cultural life of the cities. Significant differences are also evident: in Madrid, the periphery has tended to reproduce strong socio-spatial inequalities; in Valencia, the proximity of the *huerta,* which is the historic irrigated agricultural plain surrounding the city**,** has produced a more fragmented pattern of urbanisation; and in Zaragoza, the smaller scale of the city has facilitated relatively faster integration processes. Analysing the historical configuration of these suburbs therefore allows us not only to trace the patterns of urban expansion but also to illuminate contemporary challenges regarding social cohesion, sustainability, and metropolitan governance. In this respect, Madrid, Valencia, and Zaragoza constitute ideal settings for exploring how peripheries, far from representing mere edges of the city, have become dynamic spaces in which the principal challenges of the present and the urban future are concentrated.

### *5.1. Madrid*

The study of Madrid's suburbs is essential for understanding the urban dynamics of the Spanish capital. Over time, these areas have reflected demographic pressures, housing policies, and changes in mobility patterns, the economy, and forms of sociability. Following the nineteenth-century expansion and the informal growth of Madrid's suburbs in the early decades of the twentieth century, it was primarily from the post-war period under the Franco regime to the current Urban Development Programmes (*PAU*) that the suburbs of Madrid became an urban laboratory. Here, different models of urbanisation were tested, and the contradictions of the modern city were condensed, encompassing marginalisation and prestige, popular self-construction and technocratic planning, as well as social cohesion and spatial segregation.

Until the mid-nineteenth century, the city of Madrid remained constrained by Philip IV's fence, which limited its urban growth. It was then that the Madrid Expansion Plan, drawn up by Carlos María de Castro in 1859, was presented, following contemporary European models such as Haussmann's Paris, the new Viennese belt around the Ringstrasse, and Ildefonso Cerdá's Expansion Project for Barcelona. This plan shaped neighbourhoods such as Chamberí, Salamanca, and Arganzuela, where bourgeois typologies were combined with lower-quality housing for the working classes, industrial areas, and workers' housing (Sambricio, 2002, 2004; Santos Preciado, 2000). Beyond this planned expansion, an informal outskirt also emerged, resulting from illegal land subdivisions and self-construction. These neighbourhoods, lacking adequate infrastructure and services, constituted the first *historic suburbs* of the capital (Tomé Fernández, 2003). From

their inception, therefore, the periphery was divided between spaces planned by the administration and those generated spontaneously in response to housing pressures.

During the first decades of the twentieth century, the massive influx of internal migrants from rural areas intensified the demand for housing, consolidating new working-class neighbourhoods on the periphery. Although official planning was present, it proved insufficient to accommodate the pace of growth, producing settlements with precarious infrastructure. Despite the implementation of the first public social housing policies, including cooperative initiatives and limited official promotion, these measures failed to curb the expansion of peripheral neighbourhoods lacking sewerage, drinking water, or adequate transport. This process consolidated the image of the periphery as a space of relative marginality compared with the established city centre.

After the Civil War, Madrid became one of the principal centres of attraction for internal migration. The incipient industrialisation and centralism of the Franco regime encouraged the rural population to move to the capital. Between 1940 and 1960, Madrid absorbed hundreds of thousands of new inhabitants, which overwhelmed the accommodation capacity of the consolidated city and led to extensive peripheral shanty towns, particularly in areas such as Vallecas, Orcasitas, Pan Bendito, and Entrevías. The shacks, constructed with precarious materials and lacking basic services, became a dominant form of housing on the outskirts. Self-construction represented the only alternative for many newly arrived migrants, given the limited social housing stock and the high cost of rent.

The Franco regime responded with centralised urban planning policies, including the creation of the National Housing Institute and the Trade Union Housing Organisation, which promoted the so-called absorption settlements. These neighbourhoods were designed as temporary solutions to rehouse the inhabitants of shanty towns, providing minimal, low-cost housing, with paradigmatic examples including Caño Roto and Pan Bendito. By the mid-1950s, managed settlements such as Fuencarral, Almendrales, Orcasitas, and Canillas had emerged, seeking to combine a degree of urban planning with resident participation in the construction process. Although these projects improved living conditions compared with the shanty towns, they maintained high densities and, in many cases, lacked sufficient community services.

Peripheral growth was further consolidated through the annexation of neighbouring municipalities. Between 1948 and 1954, Madrid incorporated Carabanchel, Vallecas, Chamartín, Hortaleza, Canillas, Barajas, Vicálvaro, Fuencarral, and other towns, transforming the capital into a large municipality capable of absorbing residential and industrial expansion. The periphery ceased to form a clearly differentiated ring separate from the urban centre and became formally integrated into the municipality of Madrid, although the urban deficiencies of these areas remained unresolved.

During the 1960s and 1970s, as part of economic development, the outskirts of Madrid were transformed by the construction of large housing estates. These residential complexes, including Orcasitas, San Blas, Moratalaz, and Pozo del Tío Raimundo, were designed to accommodate tens of thousands of working-class families at low cost. Despite their regular layouts and block housing, the quality of construction was often poor and the urbanisation incomplete. Many neighbourhoods lacked educational centres, adequate transport, or social facilities, which fostered a strong neighbourhood movement that, during the transition to democracy, became a driving force for urban improvements.

The concentration of working-class populations in these estates accentuated socio-spatial segregation, consolidating the image of the suburbs as working-class territory in contrast with the bourgeois centre. Long commutes to work transformed these neighbourhoods into *dormitory towns*, dependent on public transport, which gradually extended its network to reach the suburbs. In this context, neighbourhood associations played a decisive role, and their demands led to the paving of streets, installation of sewers, improvements in infrastructure and street furniture, and the creation of health centres and schools. Their prominence during the 1970s and 1980s transformed the suburbs into spaces characterised not only by precariousness, but also by active citizen participation.

During the 1980s, Madrid underwent a metropolitan reconfiguration characterised by three key processes. The first was urban planning: the 1985 General Urban Development Plan consolidated the urban structure and proposed a more controlled expansion. The second was investment in infrastructure, which enabled a significant extension of the Metro network and the development of the M-30 and M-40 ring roads, thereby improving road access. The third process was typological diversification, which led to the construction of new middle- and upper-middle-class housing developments in peripheral municipalities such as Pozuelo, Boadilla del Monte, and Alcobendas alongside existing working-class neighbourhoods. The suburbs were no longer homogeneously working class; they began to differentiate according to income and urban quality, with the northern and north-western suburbs emerging as prestigious residential areas, while the southern and south-eastern suburbs concentrated the most densely populated working-class neighbourhoods.

With the liberalisation of land in the 1990s and the property boom, Madrid's suburbs expanded through the Urban Development Programmes (PAU). Expansion occurred both to the north, with Las Tablas and Sanchinarro designed as middle-class residential areas and headquarters for large technology companies, and to the south-east, with the Ensanche de Vallecas, which maintained a strong presence of social housing, as well as to the north-western area of Montecarmelo and Arroyo del Fresno, characterised by gated communities and single-family homes. Applying new urban planning criteria, these developments incorporated wide avenues, planned green areas, and educational and health facilities; however, the implementation of these amenities was often delayed, generating criticism from local residents.

The PAU programmes introduced a qualitative change: the suburbs were no longer associated solely with working-class populations, but also with middle and upper social classes. The 2008 financial crisis abruptly halted the development of several projects, leaving empty lots and half-built constructions. Neighbourhoods such as Valdebebas experienced delays in consolidation, while other PAU developments saw falling property prices and rising numbers of vacant homes.

The historical evolution of Madrid's suburbs reveals a complex process characterised by the tension between planning and spontaneity, integration and marginalisation. From the informal suburbs of the nineteenth century to the contemporary Urban Development Programmes (PAU), these areas have reflected the social and economic dynamics of each era. Today, Madrid's suburbs combine historic neighbourhoods with a strong working-class identity, such as Usera, Carabanchel, and Villaverde, alongside new developments that prioritise prestige and quality of life, including Las Tablas and Valdebebas. Paradigm shifts, gentrification, tourism, and cultural uses are also driving processes of change and revitalisation in some areas, notably Carabanchel, generating new dynamics for integrating multiculturalism, addressing social inequalities, reducing spatial segregation, and improving access to services and sustainability. The current challenge lies in overcoming social and spatial fragmentation, ensuring connectivity and adequate facilities to consolidate a more cohesive, sustainable, and inclusive periphery capable of transcending historical divisions and offering a balanced urban model within the metropolitan context.

### *5.2. Valencia*

The city of Valencia, the third largest in Spain in terms of population and economic significance, provides a privileged laboratory for the study of the urban periphery. Its location on flat, fertile land, organised around the Valencian orchards, has historically conditioned the patterns of urban expansion and transformation. The relationship between the urban centre and its outskirts has been shaped by processes of village annexation, pressure on agricultural land, the implementation of infrastructure, and the creation of neighbourhoods for working-class populations or, more recently, for middle- and upper-class residents.

Until the mid-nineteenth century, Valencia maintained a compact urban layout, bounded by walls and surrounded by extensive farmland irrigated by channels derived from the Turia River. The outskirts, strictly speaking, were identified with the suburbs beyond the walls, such as Ruzafa, Campanar, Patraix, and El Cabanyal, which were settlements linked to agricultural, fishing, or craft

activities. The demolition of the walls in 1865 and the approval of the Expansion Plan in 1867 marked a turning point. The city began to expand outwards, gradually incorporating these settlements, although the orchards continued to function as a protective belt and productive space that constrained urban growth. The industrial and port boom of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries led to the emergence of working-class neighbourhoods on the periphery, close to factories and the Grau de Valencia. The annexation of municipalities such as Ruzafa (1877) and Cabanyal-Canyamelar (1897) further expanded the urban area, producing a periphery characterised by modest, self-built dwellings near industries or workshops. Inequalities in infrastructure were evident between the bourgeois expansion, which was well equipped with modern services, and the working-class areas, which lacked sanitation and basic facilities. This socio-spatial fragmentation reinforced the contrast between the bourgeois centre and the working-class periphery, which remained dense and in close proximity to the city core.

The most significant transformation of the Valencian peripheries occurred between the 1950s and 1970s, when the city received a substantial inflow of rural migrants, both from within the Valencian Community and from inland regions of Spain. Blocks of officially promoted housing were constructed by the Obra Sindical del Hogar (Trade Union Housing Association) and the municipal board in peripheral areas such as Orriols, Torrefiel, La Fontsanta, and La Coma. These working-class neighbourhoods accommodated the population under modest conditions and suffered from limited transport and public facilities. Alongside public housing initiatives, informal self-built settlements, including substandard dwellings and shanty towns, also proliferated. Concurrently, urban expansion encroached significantly upon agricultural land, reducing the farmland surrounding Ruzafa, Benimaclet, and other nearby towns, which were absorbed into the expanding city. The Turia flood of 1957 represented a pivotal moment; the river was subsequently diverted southwards under the Plan Sur (1966), creating space for road infrastructure and new areas of urban expansion, while the former riverbed was transformed into the Turia Gardens, a green corridor delimiting part of the central periphery.

During the 1970s and 1980s, the periphery of Valencia consolidated, marked by significant functional diversification. Industrial activity was concentrated in estates such as Paterna, Quart de Poblet, and Fuente del Jarro. New medium-density private residential developments emerged in neighbourhoods including Benicalap and Nou Moles, while persistent deficiencies and forms of marginalisation remained in working-class areas such as La Coma, Malvarrosa, and parts of Cabanyal. Metropolitan expansion also extended into neighbouring municipalities, creating a conurbation with Mislata, Xirivella, Alboraya, and Burjassot. Urban planning, notably the 1988 General Urban Development Plan, sought to regulate this growth, which continued into the 1990s and was accompanied by modernisation of infrastructure and the creation of new centres that transformed the suburbs, now incorporating prestigious areas of high urban value, alongside large cultural, health, educational, commercial, and transport facilities.

The evolution of Valencia's outskirts illustrates the transition from suburbs linked to the orchards to the contemporary sprawling metropolitan city. Each historical stage has left visible traces: annexed villages, working-class neighbourhoods from the developmental era, private housing estates of recent decades, and coastal and agricultural peri-urban areas subject to ongoing tensions. Today, the Valencian periphery is characterised by its heterogeneity and the challenges it presents, including social equity, environmental sustainability, metropolitan mobility, and the preservation of the orchards.

### *5.3. Zaragoza*

Over the centuries, the capital of Aragon has undergone a process of urban growth that has significantly transformed its periphery. Its location adjacent to the Ebro River, industrial expansion, the development of transport infrastructure, and urban planning have been key factors in shaping a periphery that encompasses working-class neighbourhoods, bourgeois suburbs, residential estates, new central areas, and contemporary urban models. Until the nineteenth century, the city was largely contained within its walls, with suburbs located beyond them. Orchards and extensive agricultural land gradually receded as the city expanded. The arrival of

the railway in the second half of the nineteenth century acted as a catalyst for growth, prompting the construction of stations, factories, workshops, and workers' housing, while the expansion of the city opened large avenues connecting with the emerging peri-urban environment.

After the Civil War, during the years of autarchy and the post-war period, Zaragoza experienced significant internal migration, particularly from rural areas of Aragon and other inland regions of Spain, attracted by the modest industrial sector. This led to the consolidation of neighbourhoods such as Las Fuentes and Barriada Rusiñol, initially composed of small blocks with minimal living space and large open areas, characterised by a notable lack of services. Over the following decades, these were replaced by larger, denser blocks. These were years of disorderly growth, with homes constructed in unfinished developments, poor lighting, unpaved streets, and limited public transport. By the end of the 1960s, neighbourhood associations continued to protest against the absence of essential facilities such as schools, clinics, and other basic services.

Between the 1970s and 1990s, as in many other cities, Zaragoza's suburbs underwent consolidation and functional diversification. The city continued to expand primarily towards the periphery, improving existing neighbourhoods with new amenities while introducing new residential complexes of higher construction quality, designed for the affluent middle classes in areas adjacent to main access routes or at the margins of urban growth. The General Urban Development Plans of 1996 and 2001 (consolidated text 2007) defined new urban land reserves, expansion sectors, and neighbourhoods, establishing growth poles such as Arcosur, designed to accommodate thousands of homes with a target population of 70,000 by 2040, as well as Miralbueno and Parque Venecia. These ambitious projects, with broad temporal and territorial scope, combine consolidated areas with good construction and facilities alongside large undeveloped spaces lacking infrastructure and basic public amenities. Physical barriers, including major traffic routes, railways, and motorways, limit interconnection, creating isolated urban fragments that currently represent the principal challenges for future development.

## 6. Urban Processes and Contemporary Challenges in the Peripheries

The contemporary city is undergoing processes of transformation that are radically reconfiguring the role of the peripheries. Whereas in the second half of the twentieth century these areas were primarily understood as zones of residential expansion, they are now arenas of urban experimentation in which global and local dynamics converge. In this context, urban margins are no longer defined solely by their dependence on the city centre, but by their capacity to generate new forms of centrality, cultural consumption, and property value, while simultaneously concentrating the most visible manifestations of social inequality. From this perspective, recent processes in the peripheries, including urban renewal, gentrification, and segregation, should not be interpreted as isolated phenomena, but as complementary expressions of a broader pattern of metropolitan restructuring, in which tourism and culture play a central role.

### *6.1. Urban Renewal and Emerging Centralities*

Recent transformations in urban peripheries must be understood within the broader framework of metropolitan restructuring, in which the logic of global competitiveness and the pursuit of new forms of territorial attractiveness have played a central role. In this context, urban renewal is not limited to improving habitability or the quality of the built environment; it is also directed towards generating emerging centralities capable of redistributing functions and attracting investment. This phenomenon challenges the traditional dichotomy between centre and periphery, as regeneration initiatives explicitly aim to create nodes of cultural, economic, or symbolic activity in historically marginal areas. In this way, the peripheries are incorporated into a polycentric logic, in which value derives not only from proximity to the historic centre, but also from the capacity of spaces to reinvent themselves as strategic enclaves. However, such initiatives often reproduce the tensions between urban marketing objectives and social needs. The pursuit of international visibility, real estate profitability, or formal innovation can conflict with local demands for affordable housing, social cohesion, and the preservation of the community fabric.

Urban renewal in the peripheries thus oscillates between the promise of metropolitan integration and the risk of functioning as an instrument of social fragmentation.

This process of urban renewal cannot be fully understood without recognising the central role of culture and tourism as drivers of transformation. In a context of growing interurban competition, the regeneration of peripheral areas has aimed not only to improve urban conditions, but also to produce images of modernity, creativity, and global openness, intended both for domestic audiences and to attract visitors and external capital. Initiatives to create new centralities have tended to provide the peripheries with cultural facilities, large leisure spaces, and recreational areas linked to urban tourism. In this way, the periphery's role is increasingly inserted into the dynamics of the cultural and experience economy, where spaces are valued not solely for their residential or productive functions, but as settings for symbolic practices and cultural consumption. Yet such interventions often prioritise visibility and profitability over the social needs of residents. The centrality constructed is frequently more functional for visitors than for inhabitants, generating tensions between lived space and represented space. Consequently, there is a risk that the periphery becomes a mere support for city branding and tourism strategies, rather than an area of genuine urban integration and cohesion.

### *6.2. Gentrification*

Gentrification, traditionally associated with historic central neighbourhoods, has increasingly shifted to the peripheries situated close to the city centre or in strategic locations. Under pressure from the property market, which is driving the middle classes towards areas formerly perceived as devalued, these territories, distinguished by their accessibility, built heritage or cultural potential, are becoming sites of revaluation. From a theoretical perspective, the phenomenon illustrates how the contemporary city produces new forms of spatial inequality under the guise of revitalisation. Real estate capital identifies opportunities in the peripheries to generate income, displacing lower-income populations and reshaping collective neighbourhood identities. Peripheral gentrification is therefore not merely a by-product of urban growth, but a structural strategy of accumulation through space in which the physical and symbolic renewal of neighbourhoods functions as a mechanism for extracting value.

The intensity of peripheral gentrification is particularly pronounced when two factors converge, namely real estate pressure arising from urban tourism and symbolic revaluation through culture. In this context, the periphery becomes a space of opportunity for both real estate capital and emerging cultural industries, which utilise lower-income neighbourhoods to develop creative projects, galleries, social centres or festivals.

This process generates a paradox. Cultural interventions, often promoted to revitalise local communities, can inadvertently act as vectors of displacement by increasing land values and attracting new social groups. Culture functions here as an ambivalent instrument, as it can reinforce collective identities and foster community ties, but it can also be deployed as a tool for the commodification of space. Tourism amplifies these dynamics by generating external demand that drives up rents, encourages the proliferation of temporary accommodation and reshapes commercial structures towards visitor-oriented uses. Consequently, cultural regeneration may operate as a covert form of expulsion, with original inhabitants replaced by flows of temporary consumers and middle-class residents in search of "authentic" urban lifestyles.

The principal risk lies in the loss of social diversity and the replacement of community lifestyles with standardised consumption patterns. What is presented as revitalisation can therefore engender processes of covert exclusion, displacing inequality to even more peripheral areas and contributing to a spiral of territorial segregation.

### *6.3. Segregation and Vulnerability*

In parallel with these dynamics of revaluation, processes of socio-spatial segregation persist and, in some areas, intensify across the periphery. These result from the interaction between an increasingly exclusionary housing market, the inadequacy of redistributive public policies, and the concentration of populations experiencing economic or social vulnerability.

Peripheral segregation should not be understood solely as a question of physical distance from the centre, but as a multidimensional phenomenon that encompasses job insecurity, weak urban infrastructure, territorial stigmatisation, and barriers to social mobility. In this sense, the periphery becomes a spatialisation of inequality, where the limitations preventing full participation in urban life accumulate.

Critical literature on the contemporary city emphasises that peripheral vulnerability is inseparable from the urban development models adopted in recent decades. The subordination of planning to market forces, the fragmentation of sectoral policies, and the prioritisation of flagship projects over comprehensive territorial cohesion strategies have fostered a dynamic in which the peripheries absorb the social costs of urban restructuring while remaining on the margins of its benefits.

In this context, culture and tourism operate as selective mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion. Where cultural and symbolic capital can be mobilised, peripheral neighbourhoods are incorporated into market dynamics and transformed into enclaves of attraction. Where urban and social deficits are most pronounced, culture is absent, and lack of visibility translates into persistent marginalisation. Peripheral vulnerability is therefore reinforced by the fragmentation of the city model. In contrast to "winning" peripheries, which integrate into the economy of culture and tourism, there are "losing" peripheries that bear the brunt of job insecurity, the concentration of impoverished migrants, and the absence of public cohesion policies. This duality demonstrates that global dynamics of cultural valorisation do not eliminate segregation, but rather displace and deepen it.

## 7. Conclusions

The study of recent processes in the peripheries allows us to understand these areas as spaces in tension, where dynamics of valorisation and exclusion, innovation and inequality converge. The creation of new centralities redefines their role within the metropolis, but does not in itself guarantee greater social integration. Gentrification, meanwhile, demonstrates how capital uses urban space to reproduce inequalities under the rhetoric of revitalisation. The persistence of segregation and vulnerability indicates that the promise of inclusion remains, to a large extent, an unfinished task. The peripheries cannot be understood as mere spatial residue or as a homogeneous category, but rather as dynamic and multifunctional territories in which the major challenges of the contemporary city crystallise: equity, sustainability and cohesion. Recognising this complexity requires moving beyond a sectoral vision of planning and adopting an integrative approach that combines housing, mobility, public space and social development policies. Only in this way can the periphery cease to function as a space for the displacement of inequalities and advance towards fairer and more sustainable urban models.

The role of tourism and culture in the reconfiguration of the peripheries is central to understanding these urban processes. Culture operates as an instrument of centrality, capable of transforming peripheral areas into strategic enclaves within the global metropolis, but also as a vector of gentrification, insofar as it drives up property values and promotes social displacement. Tourism, in turn, amplifies these dynamics by introducing exogenous pressures on housing and public space, which often conflict with the daily needs of residents. These processes reveal the ambivalence of cultural and tourism policies in the contemporary city. While they promise integration and revitalisation, they can also generate exclusion and polarisation. Far from being secondary spaces, the peripheries are now the settings in which the main urban dilemmas are played out: the tension between the city as a place to live and the city as a place to consume, between the right to housing and the right to entertainment, and between social cohesion and global competitiveness. Urban planning aimed at equity must therefore recognise that culture and tourism are forces capable of both transformation and expulsion. The challenge is to articulate policies that reinforce culture as a common good and tourism as a regulated and sustainable activity, preventing the peripheries from continuing to serve as laboratories in which the most extreme effects of urban commodification are tested without mediation.

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