Beyond Chueca: limitations of heritage-centred understandings of historical queer spatiality

Más allá de Chueca: limitaciones de las comprensiones patrimoniales de la espacialidad histórica *queer*

Chuecatik harago: *queer* espazialtasun historikoa ondarearen ikuspegietatik ulertzearen mugak

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Abstract
Drawing from both international dynamics and local histories, LGBTQ neighbourhoods have been increasingly studied and experienced as sociocultural heritage. Ranging from internationally well-known areas such as Castro and Greenwich Village to more nationally significant neighbourhoods such as Canal Street or Le Marais, the intersection of LGBTQ tourism circuits, activists (or activism?), scholarly research, and heritagisation has produced a growing understanding of queer spaces as collective heritage sites. This article analyses the case of Chueca in Madrid, the capital of Spain, where defining the area as an LGBTQ heritage site is inexorably intertwined with both gentrification and a selective representation within Madrid and Spain's broader queer histories. Drawing on archival and fieldwork research, along with social reproduction theory and critical queer studies, the article argues that applying heritage-centred perspectives to queer spatiality produces both exclusions and limitations, emphasising leisure spaces or the predominance of male identity over other experiences.

Keywords: heritage; queer studies; Chueca; Madrid; heritagisation.

Summary

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Resumen. Partiendo tanto de dinámicas internacionales como de historias locales, los barrios LGBTQ han sido cada vez más estudiados y experimentados como patrimonio sociocultural. Desde zonas internacionalmente conocidas como Castro y Greenwich Village hasta barrios de mayor relevancia nacional como Canal Street o Le Marais, la intersección de los circuitos turísticos LGBTQ, los activistas (¿o el activismo?), la investigación académica y la patrimonialización ha generado una creciente comprensión de los espacios *queer* como sitios de patrimonio colectivo. Este artículo analiza el caso de Chueca en Madrid, capital de España, donde definir la zona como patrimonio LGBTQ está inexorablemente entrelazado con la gentrificación y una representación selectiva dentro de las historias *queer* más amplias de Madrid y España. Basándose en investigación de archivo y trabajo de campo, junto con la teoría de la reproducción social y los estudios críticos *queer*, el artículo argumenta que la aplicación de perspectivas centradas en el patrimonio a la espacialidad *queer* produce tanto exclusiones como limitaciones, enfatizando los espacios de ocio o el predominio de la identidad masculina sobre otras experiencias.

Palabras clave: patrimonio; estudios *queer*; Chueca; Madrid; patrimonialización.

Laburpena. Berdin nazioarteko dinamiketatik edota historia lokaletatik abiatuz, gero eta gehiago aztertu eta sentitu dira LGBTQ auzoak ondare soziokultural moduan. Nazioartean ezagunak diren guneetatik hasiz, hala nola Castro eta Greenwich Village izenekoetatik, eta garrantzi nazional handiagoko auzoetara iritsi arte, Canal Street edo Le Marais esaterako, *queer* guneak gero eta gehiago ulertzen ari dira ondare kolektiboko gune moduan LGBTQ zirkuitu turistikoen elkarguneei esker, aktibistei esker (edo aktibismoari esker?), ikerketa akademikoei esker eta ondare bihurtzeari esker. Artikulu honek Chueca auzoaren kasua aztertzen du, zeina Madrilen baitago, Espainiako hiriburuan. Leku hori LGBTQ ondare gisa definitzean ezinbestez lotu behar zaio definizioa gentrifikazioari eta irudikapen selektibo bat egiteari Madrilgo eta Espainiako *queer* istorio zabalagoen artean. Artxiboko ikerketan eta landa lanean oinarritzen da artikulua eta, orobat, erreprodukzio sozialaren teorian eta *queer* ikerketa kritikoetan. Argudiatzen duenez, baztertzeak zein mugatzeak dira ondarean zentratzen diren ikuspegiak *queer* espazialtasunari aplikatzearen ondorioak, aplikatze horrek nabarmendu egiten baititu aisialdirako guneak edo identitate maskulinoa beste esperientzia batzuen gainetik.

Gako hitzak: ondarea; *queer* ikerketak; Chueca; Madril; ondare bihurtzea.

1. Introduction

Chueca, in downtown Madrid, has been studied as the main gaybourhood or queer neighbourhood in Spain, and as the main example of these spaces[1]. As part of a process traditionally seen as urban renewal-cum-gentrification-cum-touristification since the late 1980s or early 1990s[2], Chueca is still seen by the main Spain-wide LGBTQ social movements as their main home, and where several Madrid- and Spain-wide LGBTQ NGOs have their headquarters. As a gaybourhood or LGBTQ neighbourhood, we understand Chueca as an urban, downtown space, characterised or understood by its historical association to queer or LGBTQ politics, visibility, and commerce, and drawing from a historical trajectory of similar Western spaces. As such, and for the purposes of this article,

[1] Fernández Salinas, 2007.
[2] Domínguez Ruiz *et al*., 2023.

we will understand Chueca as an imprecise series of squares, streets, businesses, homes, venues, and corners in downtown Madrid, linked to specific memory- and place-building practices significant for Madridian and Spanish LGBTQ social movements, individuals, and cultural products. Since some early research papers by Emilia García Escalona and Gabriel Giorgi[3], among others, Chueca has been the subject of scholarly analysis from the disciplinary gazes of tourism studies, gentrification, economics, anthropology, sociology, or history. Chueca, in particular, has been analysed as having a key metonymic role for LGBTQ spaces in Spain, as a «geographical synecdoche»[4] according to which this neighbourhood is the epitome, measuring tool, and the textbook case of what a Spanish version of a Western LGBTQ space can be[5], as part of a historical and sociocultural process of intertwining and assemblage between international – Western and US-centric – discourses, symbols, and practices, and the specificities of the Madridian and Spanish recent histories and practices. In particular, in spatial terms, Chueca has been understood by activist and commercial actors as a historical necessity due to changing views and realities in the lives of queer individuals, as activists, business owners, or neighbours, and as part of a clear-cut process according to which during the late «1980s the homosexual community established itself in Chueca»[6].

The narrative and genealogy revolving around Chueca in Madrid, however, resonates with common tropes and expectations linked to Western gaybourhoods. For instance, Chueca easily includes the elements listed by Amin Ghaziani[7] as characteristic of these spaces, such as LGBTQ-related symbols, ritual and commemorative events, a significant commercial and residential concentration, and a hub of organisations, particularly linked to mainstream or commoditised circuits and Pride events. Similarly, Chueca has been seen as the hub of queer-related emigration and tourism practices, as a destination for those trying to find a safe haven in dense cities, away from familial pressures and grips[8]. Furthermore, Chueca has been increasingly used as the main locus for heritagisation practices. Spatial heritagisation linked to «racial, ethnic, and sexual groups», while enabling «a sense of permanence amid the inevitable urban realities of migrations and neighborhood change» and protecting «against the temptation or coercion to forget», may also «fossilize the culture of a group in space»[9]. In particular, this heritage-building process must be seen as the product of changing yet related

[3] García Escalona, 2000; Giorgi, 2002.
[4] Ortega Román, 2007, p. 70.
[5] Martinez & Dodge, 2010.
[6] Ferrándo & Córdoba, 2014, p. 15.
[7] Ghaziani, 2014a.
[8] Weston, 1995.
[9] Ghaziani, 2014a, p. 384.

discourses drawing from the actions and relevance of activists, neighbours, and business owners. Edited volumes such as those coordinated by Juan A. Herrero Brasas or J. Nicolás Ferrando and Rocío Córdoba[10], or activists' memoirs such as those by Jordi Petit[11], for instance, consolidate Chueca's role as a common heritage for an imagined Spanish LGBTQ community and that of specific actors. Chueca emerges not only as the quintessential example of queer neighbourhoods in Spain, but also as the aspirational embodiment of an idealised-wannabe-queer space – one reclaimed from a previously hostile urban landscape, providing a tangible framework where queer people might coexist among peers. For instance, in 2004, Alberto Mira published *De Sodoma a Chueca. Una historia cultural de la homosexualidad en España*, a seminal contribution to the historiography of homosexuality in Spain. This conception of Chueca as a conquered horizon – a definitive endpoint in queer history – elevates it to an almost mythical status, one that inevitably falls short of the expectations imposed upon it.

Drawing from this context, this article analyses Chueca in Madrid as a relevant case of LGBTQ heritagisation, particularly by social movements, businesses, and public institutions, within a process inexorably intertwined with both gentrification and a selective representation within Madrid and Spain's broader queer history. Following a theoretical explanation of the trajectory from gaybourhoods to broader queer spaces, we argue the need for a mixed-methods approach that combines archival and ethnographic fieldwork research, informed by social reproduction theory and critical queer studies in order to comprehensively understand the complexity of Chueca's heritagisation. We then present our findings, as well as a discussion that links our research to wider frameworks and current lines of work.

2. From gaybourhoods to queer spaces

Starting with some early research by Manuel Castells; Adler Sy and Johanna Brenner, and Lawrence Knopp[12], gaybourhoods or queer-focused neighbourhoods received growing scholarly attention that echoed a spatial or geographical turn in sexuality studies[13]. Among the first case studies, US cities such as San Francisco, New Orleans, and New York City paved the way for a focus on Western

[10] Herrero Brasas, 2007; Ferrando & Córdoba, 2014.

[11] Petit, 2003.

[12] Castells, 1986; Adler & Brenner, 1992; Knopp, 1990.

[13] The spatial turn in queer studies has been shaped by key works such as Chauncey, 1994; Valentine, 1993, and Bell & Binnie, 2000, which explore the relationship between space, identity, and sexuality in urban contexts.

downtown neighbourhoods with clearly identifiable elements such as those listed by Amin Ghaziani[14]: a relatively clear boundary or name to define the space, visible LGBTQ-related symbols, a circuit of rituals and commemorative events, noticeable commercial and residential concentration, and additional anchoring institutions such as key organisations and businesses seen or lived as community institutions. The first studies into these realities focused on the identification, measurement, and description of queer neighbourhoods, as well as on their links to social movements and urban renewal[15].

The first, gay men-centred perspectives that focused on gaybourhoods, however, sparked early critiques due to the lack of class and material analysis[16] or a gender-informed critique[17]. Among the more recent research, furthermore, a growing number of authors highlighted the necessarily changing nature of queer neighbourhoods, as scholars reflected on recent forms of demise, or as specific neighbourhoods ebb and flow even within a city. For instance, Mattson[18] problematised the symbolic role of the Castro neighbourhood in San Francisco and argued for the simultaneous or even prior role of other spaces, whereas Doan and Higgins[19] or Ghaziani[20], among many authors, have researched the quantitative reduction of clearly defined scenes or queer neighbourhoods, also linked to the loss of queer-related nightlife venues[21]. Similarly, several researchers have developed stage-based models akin to those of products' life cycles to explain the surge and demise of these spaces. One of the most comprehensive models, first developed by Alan Collins[22] and subsequently updated with Stephen Drinkwater[23], focuses on the interplay of availability, desirability, gentrification, and expulsion.

In this and other stage-based models, gentrification plays a significant role. In textbook cases such as Le Marais in Paris[24], Castro in San Francisco[25], or Chueca in Madrid[26], gentrification has been analysed as both the main underlying driver that facilitated the establishment of the neighbourhoods – as by-products of urban flight and decay, but also the cause of their transformations and demises.

[14] Ghaziani, 2014a.
[15] Knopp, 1990.
[16] Knopp, 1990; 1995.
[17] Sy & Brenner, 1992.
[18] Mattson, 2014.
[19] Doan and Higgins, 2011.
[20] Ghaziani, 2014b.
[21] Lin, 2021.
[22] Collins, 2004.
[23] Collins & Drinkwater, 2017.
[24] Boivin, 2011.
[25] Mattson, 2014.
[26] García Pérez, 2014.

Similarly, the popularisation of queer spaces among non-queer tourists and consumers, changes in queer individuals' practices and expectations, and the role of dating and sex apps such as Grindr have also been considered as driving factors[27]. Additional research has focused on the role of public institutions as drivers of heritagisation, fragmentation, or reification of queer neighbourhoods, and on the link between tourist management and the evolution of said spaces[28].

While this recent research has focused on the dynamics beyond traditional, static queer neighbourhoods, a growing body of publications and reports has also surpassed the geographical boundaries of both downtown neighbourhoods and cities. Drawing from concepts such as that of *metronormativity*[29], this varied line of research has focused on two related aspects. First, on the description and analysis of queer lives in other spatial and residential distributions, including rural settings[30], suburbia[31], or «ordinary» cities[32]. A second, related line of work, has been the analytical and empirical research on precisely why non-urban and non-metro queer spaces have been historically ignored by cultural expectations and research alike[33], and has contributed to better understandings of the interconnected nature of spatiality and sexuality and gender. Consequently, recent research into the spatiality of gender and sexuality has further problematised the centrality and role of traditional gaybourhoods such as Chueca, thus producing a wider and more comprehensive view of spatiality and change, as well as a notion of interconnected and ever-changing queer spaces.

3. Methods and materials

According to their most common genealogy, queer studies drew particularly from English-speaking humanities departments, with a complicated relation with empirical data and social research[34]. As both Margot Weiss and Heather Love[35] have highlighted, though, queer studies have an erased history of empirical data and theory that draws particularly from sociological and anthropological research, and some key elements of queer studies cannot be fully understood without their

[27] Ghaziani, 2014b.
[28] Domínguez Ruiz, 2018; Lewis, 2013.
[29] Halberstam, 2005.
[30] Butterfield, 2018.
[31] Podmore & Bain, 2021.
[32] Stone, 2018.
[33] Barreto, 2020.
[34] Love, 2021.
[35] Weiss, 2024; Love, 2021.

original social sciences-related background. Against this complicated history, several approaches in the last decade have sought to bridge the gap between queer studies and empirical research, with significant landmarks such as the edited volumes *Queer Methods and Methodologies*[36], *Other, Please Specify*[37], or *Imagining Queer Methods*[38]. In particular, these recent lines have highlighted the inherently limited scopes of knowledge, with ideas as productive and promising as that of Danilyn Rutherford's «kinky empiricism», as «an empiricism that takes seriously the situated nature of what all thinkers do» while also being «aware of the slipperiness of its grounds and of the difficulty of adequately responding to the ethical demands spawned by its methods»[39].

Against this background, and drawing from this recent line of research, this article embraces the fact that «[q]ueer data is a tension»[40], and that the ethical and political implications of all research makes us acknowledge the need to «gather empirical data about the experiences of people who are politically and socially marginalized without reproducing such marginalization»[41]. From a methodological perspective, our approach argues for the need for mixing and comparing methods, under the dual lights of mixed methods designs and comparative qualitative analysis[42]. Mixed methods are particularly fruitful for queer studies research as, in our view, they match the epistemological tenets of Rutherford's[43] «kinky empiricism», while allowing us to simultaneously «[elevating] the stories of LGBTQ people» while also «[exposing] the constructed structures upon which all minority *and* majority identity characteristics stand»[44]. Similarly, they allow us to productively respond to C. J. Pascoe's provocative question[45]: what to do with actual people.

Drawing from this methodological context, as well as from previous research on the changing spatial, temporal, and discursive nature of Chueca as a gaybourhood[46], we approach the study of this space's heritagisation from a mixed and comparative perspective. Under the light of mixed methods and comparative qualitative analysis, we combine historical and anthropological data and analyses as a way to construct a comprehensive view of how the genealogy and heritag-

[36] Browne & Nash, 2016.
[37] Compton *et al.*, 2018.
[38] Ghaziani & Brim, 2019.
[39] Rutherford, 2012, p. 466.
[40] Guyan, 2022, p. 1.
[41] Schilt *et al.*, 2018, p. 5.
[42] Creamer, 2018; Kahwati & Kane, 2020.
[43] Rutherford, 2012.
[44] Guyan, 2022, p. 4.
[45] Pascoe, 2018.
[46] Domínguez Ruiz, 2018.

isation of Chueca relate to both past experiences and a wider context of gay or queer scenes in 20th century Madrid, on the one hand, and present and recent discursive and material practices that expand and change the confines, imageries, and expectations regarding what Chueca means. In particular, we posit that these dual approaches, as concurrent analyses and with equal priority[47], allow us to combine 1) in-depth historical data that allows us to test the historical accuracy of the mainstream genealogical narrative of Chueca, and 2) in-depth ethnographic data on how said genealogy is used as part of changing heritagisation practices in the midst of gentrification and touristification processes.

The historiographical approach begins with a fundamental question: what is the object we aim to define? Understanding Chueca requires more than projecting its current identity onto a mythical past. While the area existed long before becoming a gaybourhood, its earlier dynamics were shaped by distinct challenges unrelated to its contemporary role. Our contemporary understanding of Chueca is less informed by what historical sources reveal about its past and more by the implicit knowledge of what it has become today. The contextualisation and historicisation of homosexual identity – particularly in relation to the sexual liberation movements of the 1960s and 1970s (Hocquenghem, 2009; Foucault, 1977) – have often situated its emergence within the urban development of major Western cities in the 20th century (Plummer, 1981; Chauncey, 1994; Houlbrook, 2005). These studies have been instrumental in recovering queer subcultures and spatial practices, shedding light on how cities structured dissident spaces, fostered the formation of subcultures, and shaped the evolution of diverse sexual identities. In the Anglo-Saxon context, scholars have highlighted the role of specific consumption patterns and homosexual socialisation spaces in the creation of subgroups within gay leisure cultures, such as bears and twinks (Moser, 2006; O'Brien, 2011). Nevertheless, this body of work risks perpetuating a metronormative narrative – one that frames the emergence of queer neighbourhoods as inherently tied to consumption, leisure, and cultural production – while often overlooking alternative trajectories and contexts that disrupt such linear frameworks.

The historical record of Madrid's recent sexual dissidence remains imprecise and incomplete[48]. The study of non-normative sexualities, gender expressions, and affectivities in twentieth-century Spain often relies on what has been termed «scavenger methodologies»[49], which adopt a «kinky», situated approach to recover elusive information from traditional archives, especially institutional ones. It is only through this scavenger methodology – engaging critically with and decon-

[47] Creamer, 2018.
[48] Fernández-Cano, 2024.
[49] Halberstam, 1998.

structing the historical archive – that it has been possible to recover a narrative focused on the everyday, the material, and the mundane. A re-reading of this archive, however, has illuminated these overlooked practices and deepened our understanding of the city's sexual organisation. These new interpretations have not only revealed the hidden spaces and patterns of Madrid's sexual culture, but they have also provided insight into how this culture evolved throughout the twentieth century, challenging previous binary frameworks and offering a more complex view of its transformations[50].

These analyses, however, are insufficient if our goal is to trace the genealogy of Chueca as a gay district. The historiographical challenge lies not in the sources themselves, but in how the question is framed: we cannot – and should not – attempt to trace a gay or queer neighborhood in twentieth-century Madrid. While the sources reveal various forms of dissidence and the subversion of sexual norms, the concept of a gay/queer identity is a construct that emerges within the Spanish context primarily through the academic and activist reinterpretation of Anglo-Saxon frameworks in the 80s. The twentieth-century judicial archive, during the Francoist era, introduced the concept of homosexuality through an amendment in 1954 to the Vagrants and Miscreants Law (1933). Nevertheless, the notion of homosexuality in this documentation does not correspond to our contemporary understanding of it. Rather, under the label of «sexual inversion» and «homosexuality», there were a wide spectrum of practices and expressions, ranging from male-to-male sex to male sex work involving minors[51]. The emergence of the first homosexual liberation movements in the 1970s, along with early publications targeted at a male homosexual audience during the 1970s and 1980s, marks the beginning of a clearer genealogy for present-day Chueca. It is within these cultural and political shifts that we can begin to trace a clearer connection to the Chueca we recognize today.

This consumption-identity framework is applicable only when considering Chueca through the lens of Drinkwater's model, which correlates the transformation of a marginal neighbourhood to gentrification and specialising in leisure and consumer services. However, a broader, more nuanced perspective reveals that Chueca cannot be reduced to a simplistic trajectory of repression, liberation, gentrification, consumption, and institutionalisation. When framed as a teleological model – one that dictates what the LGBTQ community should be or has inevitably become – a narrative emerges that aligns certain forms of sexual dissidence with the dominant logic of capitalism and consumerism. Yet, another narrative exists – one where sexual dissidence defies neat categorisation and slips through

[50] De Pedro, 2022.
[51] Huard, 2014.

the gaps of traditional historiographical records. This alternative narrative offers a more complex understanding of queer spatiality in the city, highlighting the dynamic interplay between resistance, space, and time. A scavenger-like re-examination of the sources challenges the consumer-driven narrative of Chueca, shifting focus to its dissident spatiality and connecting ethnographic experiences through the materiality of space, practices, origins, and their cultural meanings.

The ethnographic fieldwork used for this research was linked to two different projects by one of the authors, namely to their doctoral dissertation research, from 2016 to 2019, and to a multi-sited ethnographic project focused on several LGBTQ tourist destinations in Spain, from 2019 to 2021. The fact that this author was and had been a local neighbour, and participant in Chueca since 2009, as well as their participation in local and Spain-wide LGBTQ activism, required the research to have a constant reflection and suspicion regarding their positionality as an «intimate insider»[52]. Whereas the first research period focused on tourist promotion and the role of the 2017 World Pride event held in Madrid[53], the second one was centred around the tourist role and imagery around Chueca, and the effects of touristification, gentrification, and the COVID-19 pandemic[54]. Technique-wise, both research periods were conceived of and conducted as participant observation as the involvement of «the ethnographer *in situ* and *in vivo* with the people she is studying», during which «the activity of the body [acts] as a medium to the meaningful representations»[55]. As for the interviews, they followed an open and in-depth orientation, based more on free-flow conversation and dialogue than on scripted interactions[56].

4. Findings

4.1. Bring back my girls: the histories we failed to include

Throughout the 1960s, both the press and academic literature increasingly voiced concerns about Spanish youth, emphasising issues such as rising crime rates and the growing prevalence of drug use, particularly marijuana[57]. In November 1971, the newspaper *Diario Madrid* reported a public controversy surrounding an article by journalist Antonio María Hernández, published in the Catalan magazine

[52] Taylor, 2011.
[53] Domínguez Ruiz, 2021.
[54] Domínguez Ruiz *et al.*, 2023.
[55] Daynes & Williams, 2018, pp. 59, 91-92.
[56] Devillard *et al.*, 2012.
[57] Mora, 2016.

Índice[58]. Hernández, who had spent time in Madrid in 1969 documenting the life of a drug addict, faced accusations two years later from the Madrid public prosecutor of inciting public scandal through his report. Although Hernández's original article remains unavailable, the *Diario Madrid* coverage provides a detailed account indicating that Hernández first met the alleged drug addict, Carlos Guillermo Cinco, in a café on Recoletos Street, near Chueca. After several meetings, Hernández reportedly gained Cinco's trust, leading Cinco to invite him to his home.


Periodista absuelto de un delito de escándalo público

Ante la Sala Segunda del Supremo se ha celebrado vista del recurso interpuesto por el fiscal contra sentencia que absolvió a un periodista

Picture 1. Headline of the November 1971 news article about the case of Antonio María Hernández Ramírez. Source: *Diario Madrid*.

Tracing a historical genealogy of Chueca presents significant challenges, particularly in defining clear chronological and spatial boundaries. The limited availability of documentation, apart from judicial records, often forces us to reconstruct imagined narratives from the sparse testimonial fragments that remain available. Hernández's report indicates that the peripheries of what is now recognized as Chueca were frequented by drug users. Furthermore, both the journalist and the article draw a link between drug addiction and homosexuality. While the roots of modern-day Chueca are often attributed to the area's gradual gentrification in the 1980s and the subsequent establishment of cultural landmarks such as the Berkana bookstore in the 1990s, its connection to sexual dissidence extends much further back. The initiation of a public scandal case against journalist Hernández-Ramírez in 1971 was not primarily driven by the association between

[58] «Periodista absuelto de un delito de escándalo público», in *Diario Madrid*, 8th November 1971.

his article and drug use but rather by the suspicions of the Audiencia Provincial that the journalist might himself be homosexual or was promoting and concealing homosexual activities. Hernández-Ramírez's original article frequently referred to the «homosexual condition» of the alleged drug addict, employing physical descriptions of the interviewee and details from their conversations. However, these correlations are circumstantial and grounded in the presumption that homosexuality results from the moral corruption of the individual, whether induced by drug use or other external factors[59]. In any case, it remains unclear whether Cinco was homosexual or if he simply dressed in a «flamboyant» manner – an expression that, in some ways, might render him even more queer.

Does this suggest that by the late 1960s, Chueca and its surroundings had already become a gathering space for LGBTQ individuals? Unfortunately, the answer is not so straightforward. If we turn to information derived directly from judicial archives, the narrative concerning the spatial dynamics, transformation, and emergence of spaces for queer people points to other locations and chronological frameworks. Since the 1954 amendment to the Law of Vagrants and Miscreants, which included homosexuality, the data reveals a more complex spatial zoning, typically associated with diverse practices and experiences. During archival research in the Vagrants and Miscreants files in Madrid, and after reviewing over 10,000 case files, it was possible to identify more than 500 judicial cases directly linked to sexual inversion, of which just over 30 are located outside the central district of the capital, while the majority occur in public or domestic spaces within this area[60]. Notably, Echegaray Street, in the Las Cortes neighbourhood of the Centro district, alone accounts for more than 30 cases between 1957 and 1966 alone. Additionally, cases related to male sex work across various parts of the city centre – particularly along Gran Vía, Plaza Mayor, and Tirso de Molina – surpass 100 case files[61].

It is important to note that all this data and these figures originate from a judicial archive that not only condemns homosexuality but also seeks to persecute, classify, and quantify certain sexual behaviours and practices as crimes or antisocial acts. While these numbers do not represent an absolute reality, they raise two critical questions that warrant further attention: What events and aspects have we chosen as the foundation for our genealogies? And, if we can answer this, what specific spatialities do we associate with these aspects? When Chueca is described as a gay/LGBTQ neighbourhood, we often refer to its origins as a hub for commerce, leisure, and tourism, but its connection with activism is

[59] Mora, 2016.
[60] Fernández-Cano, 2024.
[61] Fernández-Cano, 2024.

equally significant. However, the process of memorialisation and the recovery of queer narratives has also necessarily focused on repressive processes, particularly during the Francoist era and the early years of the Transition. Spanish legislation was especially proactive in targeting sexual dissidence through both legal measures and social and moral condemnation. Given this, why is there no more direct spatial correlation between studies of repression, resistance, or liberation, and the reclamation of collective heritage spaces? Why is there no more direct spatial connection between contemporary spaces of community celebration and heritage and the places identified by archives and memory as sites of sexual dissidence? This questioning does not suggest that we should solely celebrate or identify spaces of repression. Rather, through a «scavenger» methodology, we should aim to uncover those spaces where repression has erased, obscured, or buried places, experiences, and practices that extend beyond the physical boundaries of what we now recognize as a gaybourhood. The answer lies in the very formation of Chueca as an LGBTQ space, but it is also found in which spaces, practices, and desires have been excluded from Chueca.

4.2. Changing rainbows: ethnographic fieldwork through an expanding landscape

Walking across Chueca, both during the specific dates and confines of its formal and commoditised Pride event, MADO, and during the rest of the year, involves an immersion into the symbolic and material nature of a specific understanding of gaybourhoods. Whereas during the specific set of dates involved in every MADO the neighbourhood is criss-crossed by balloons, flags, banners, and rainbow-themed interventions in both public and private spaces, the rest of the year equally includes a wide range of businesses and private homes proudly heralding the six rainbow-inspired colours defined by Gilbert Baker. The specific key moment of the 2017 World Pride event in Madrid[62] expanded the reach of Chueca to almost every one of the city's ten districts, despite a noticeable concentration in historical downtown Madrid or *Centro*. Within it, Chueca stars in a playful role, as it is included yet it surpasses the bureaucratic boundaries of an administrative neighbourhood, *Justicia*. Within Justicia, but also encroaching towards other neighbourhoods, the present and historical definition of Chueca is an ebb and flow signalled particularly by flags and stickers, colours and toponyms.

This neighbourhood's malleability is not new, and it must be understood from the local actors' perspective, as a dual process of activist expansion and gentrifi-

[62] Domínguez Ruiz, 2021.

cation-led expulsion. In a 2014 edited volume on Chueca with chapters penned by local activists, authors, and businessowners, we may identify conflicting yet related claims to the fact that Chueca's boundaries are both imprecise and expanding. First, activist and politician Pedro Zerolo argued that «Chueca has no perimeter, neither does it have streets that limit it, nor parameters that define it»[63]. In the same volume, activist Federico Armenteros, founder of a local NGO focused on the needs of elderly LGBTQ people, argued that Chueca was simultaneously an exclusionary space and an ideal that expanded its borders: discussing that his NGO's headquarters were in Lavapiés, another neighbourhood in downtown Madrid, he said that they had «created a space for the attention and empowerment of elderly LGBTQ persons outside of Chueca, but we feel it as Chueca»[64]. Against this inclusive and expansive notion of Chueca, the experience of Chueca and the interviews with local businessowners signal towards an opposite, marginalising and limited notion of Chueca. Businessowners Mili, Rafa, and Miren, from two bookshops in the neighbourhood, reflected during several interviews in 2017 through 2020[65] on how Chueca used to be a clearly delineated and othered neighbourhood until it was made fashionable thanks to businesses, residents, and activists.

This gentrification-cum-touristification process, in which both businesses played different yet relevant roles, must be understood from the perspective of changing landscapes in both toponyms and iconography. During the years-long fieldwork, and particularly during the 2017 World Pride event, the extent of rainbow-inspired or explicitly Chueca-related stickers grew beyond the conventional boundaries of Chueca within Justicia, as defined by local businessowners like Mili. Whereas during 2009, for example, we could only find Chueca – and rainbow-related stickers in businesses' doors near Chueca square or neighbouring streets, 2017 saw the expansion towards public and private spaces that were otherwise defined as other neighbourhoods, such as posh and shopping-oriented *Salesas*. Novelty items' and gifts-oriented shops in streets such as Almirante, Conde de Xiquena, or Fernando VI, for instance, began having Chueca – or rainbow-related stickers, proudly stating their relation to Chueca, only around 2017 or 2015 at the most. This marked a shift, as stated by both Chueca pioneers and late comers, related to the neighbourhood's desirability, also marked by the fact that the Madrid city council progressively changed their relation regarding Chue-

[63] Zerolo in Ferrándo & Córdoba, 2014, p. 12.

[64] Armenteros in Ferrándo & Córdoba, 2014, p. 170.

[65] Mili Hernández is a Spanish LGBTQ activist and publisher. Mili's bookshop, Berkana, is Spain's first LGBTQ-focused bookshop, and has been open for almost three decades. Rafa and Miren's bookshop, Nakama, which opened in 2017, closed in 2023 after serious water damage destroyed most of their inventory.

ca in terms of tourist marketing efforts: both Chueca and the MADO event began appearing as private and limited attractions and elements within the city's offer in the official tourism marketing, and they both slowly became heralded as key milestones as an example of the diversity that has typically been the core of its marketing value proposition[66].

If gentrification-cum-touristification is a relevant framework to understand the evolution of Chueca and its role as both a gaybourhood and an element of Madrid's tourism efforts, it is because gentrification can be understood as related processes of displacement, or filling and emptying out places and populations[67]. The role played by Chueca both in regard to the neighbouring space and referring to its definition, boundaries, and public role, is thus explained by processes of filling a space with a queer- and business-led narrative of urban renewal and expansion, its expansion and encroachment towards other spaces and roles, and the emptying out of other narratives and populations, as signalled by the archival research. The gentrification-led history of Chueca makes us reflect on the fact that the genealogical narrative of this neighbourhood erases other queer spaces in downtown Madrid, as well as other social actors that do not fit into a conventional gaybourhood narrative that expands into the present.

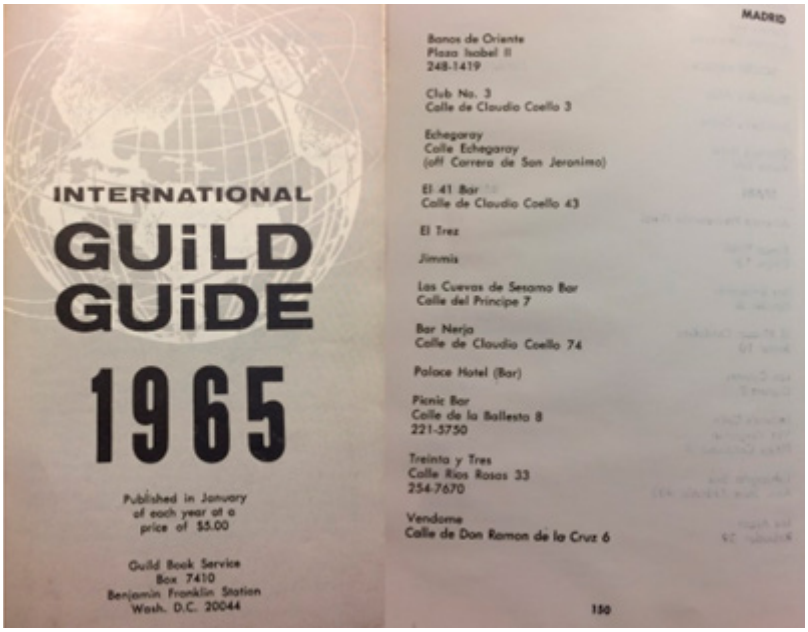
5. Discussion

The combination of archival and ethnographic data highlights the fact that Chueca, similar to other well-known Western gaybourhoods, is only part of larger stories and histories of queer spatiality, whose narratives limit or outright erase other spaces, actors, and possibilities. Understanding Chueca's history as a heritagisation process allows us to see how some actors' voices have been highlighted, as well as some notions of Chueca as an exceptional case, as opposed to wider stories and histories. Similarly, Chueca's history as a progressive element of Madrid's heritage and marketing, signals towards the blurry and flowing nature of toponyms and boundaries. As opposed to a clear-cut series of streets and squares as boundaries, our research shows that what we call Chueca depends on social actors' usage of symbolic elements directly related to the neighbourhood's desirability.

How we define Chueca, or understand its historical trajectory, largely depends on where we direct our focus. Just as the current social boundaries of Chueca extend beyond the administrative limits of the neighbourhood, defining

[66] Domínguez Ruiz, 2021.
[67] Franquesa, 2007.

its historical origins and potential for heritagisation varies based on which aspects we prioritise. The contemporary conception of Chueca is not solely a narrative of successes and struggles but also failures and spatial processes intertwined with specific material, economic, and social factors. The traditional narrative of Chueca presents its challenges, while also clarifying certain uncertainties. In the 1960s, semi-clandestine gay organisations from the United States and Europe began publishing leisure and tourism guides to help the queer community identify safe spaces and venues. The 1965 *International Guild Gay guide* primarily references bars and piano bars near the United States Embassy along the central stretch of Paseo de la Castellana, an area with limited representation in judicial archives. However, it also makes note of the «Echegaray neighbourhood», known for its taverns and meeting spaces frequented by Madrid's working class.



Picture 2. Cover and page 150 of the 1965 of the *International Guild Guide*.

A decade later, the 1975 edition of *The Golden Key for Gay Swingers*, a guide published by *The Gay Guide Committee* for a British and German audience from Copenhagen, continued to highlight venues concentrated around the United States Embassy. However, it also documented the expansion of such spaces toward the vicinity of Paseo de Recoletos, specifically in the area between Cibeles Fountain and Plaza de Colón. While this area does not strictly fall within the

current boundaries of Chueca, it is often recognised as one of its porous limits. Notably, the 1975 guide references three male homosexual leisure venues situated within what are now considered the geographical confines of Chueca in 2024: Oliver's bar at 3 Conde de Xiquena/Almirante Street, the Bocaccio nightclub at 16 Marqués de la Ensenada, and Santa Barbara bar on Hortaleza Street. Does this mean we can, or should, trace the origins of Chueca to these venues? The short answer is no, although with some nuances. While these guides, like the archives, oral testimonies, and other sources, point to various areas (such as Echegaray Street, the vicinity of the U.S. Embassy, and the right side of the Paseo de Recoletos) as locations where numerous meeting spaces, leisure venues, and tourism linked to male homosexual practices were concentrated, it was only Chueca that evolved as a cohesive gaybourhood. Most of these spaces went through a period of decline, either due to the disappearance of certain practices (such as cruising in the Recoletos area or sex work in the Echegaray-Puerta del Sol zone) or as a result of the intersection of other social issues, such as the rise in drug consumption in the 1980s. Consequently, the rise of Chueca, particularly from the 1990s onward, as the undisputed center of LGBTQ life in Madrid, is more a product of the institutionalisation of cultural consumption and production practices that facilitated the gentrification of a deteriorated area of the city, as well as the erasure and relative abandonment of other sites that were relatively significant in the city's queer memory. Thus, the construction of Chueca as a gaybourhood was not a spontaneous phenomenon, but rather the outcome of various social, political, and economic dynamics that favoured its consolidation while marginalising other spaces of historical importance in Madrid's queer history.

This does not mean, however, that Chueca's heritagisation lacks a potential for social change and transformation, on the one hand, or that it depends only on social actors' wills and desires. Chueca is still a significant locale for queer-related matters and discourse, and even within gentrification or touristification processes it is a key element in Madrid's activist and tourist life. Regarding the need for community and cultural memory, for instance, heritagisation practices can be understood, from our perspective, as part of dual dynamics of remembrance-cum-protection, on the one hand, and the spatial fossilisation of groups[68]. As a population group particularly lacking public representation and collective memory due to historical marginalisation and due to past historiographical and heritagisation practices, Chueca does indeed play a part in the construction of Madrid- and Spain-based LGBTQ heritage and memory. On the other hand, our analysis has involved a materialist perspective that focuses on the material nature of the gentrification-led development of Chueca, both in its genealogical or-

[68] Ghaziani, 2014a.

igin story of urban renewal and in its recent touristification and expansion. We argue that we need more explicitly materialist perspectives into queer history, as they allow us to productively question mainstream myths and tropes that, for instance, explain Chueca as an almost natural, predictable event or as a direct «re-adjustment of the ways of living homosexuality»[69]. This perspective, on the other hand, also highlights that seemingly contradictory fact that Chueca was and is both a site for expansive freedom for some individuals, and a source of exclusion for others[70]. The view that Chueca is and was mostly because of economic, business- and resident-led dynamics, and that its history and genealogical myth is related to discursive practices, allows us to argue for the contingent nature of heritagisation practices, and for the need for data-driven, critical enquiries into the history of what we may take for granted.

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[69] Boivin, 2011, p. 177.

[70] Vidarte, 2010; Domínguez Ruiz, 2018.

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