



caring matter

collective performative acts of maintenance as forms of urban care

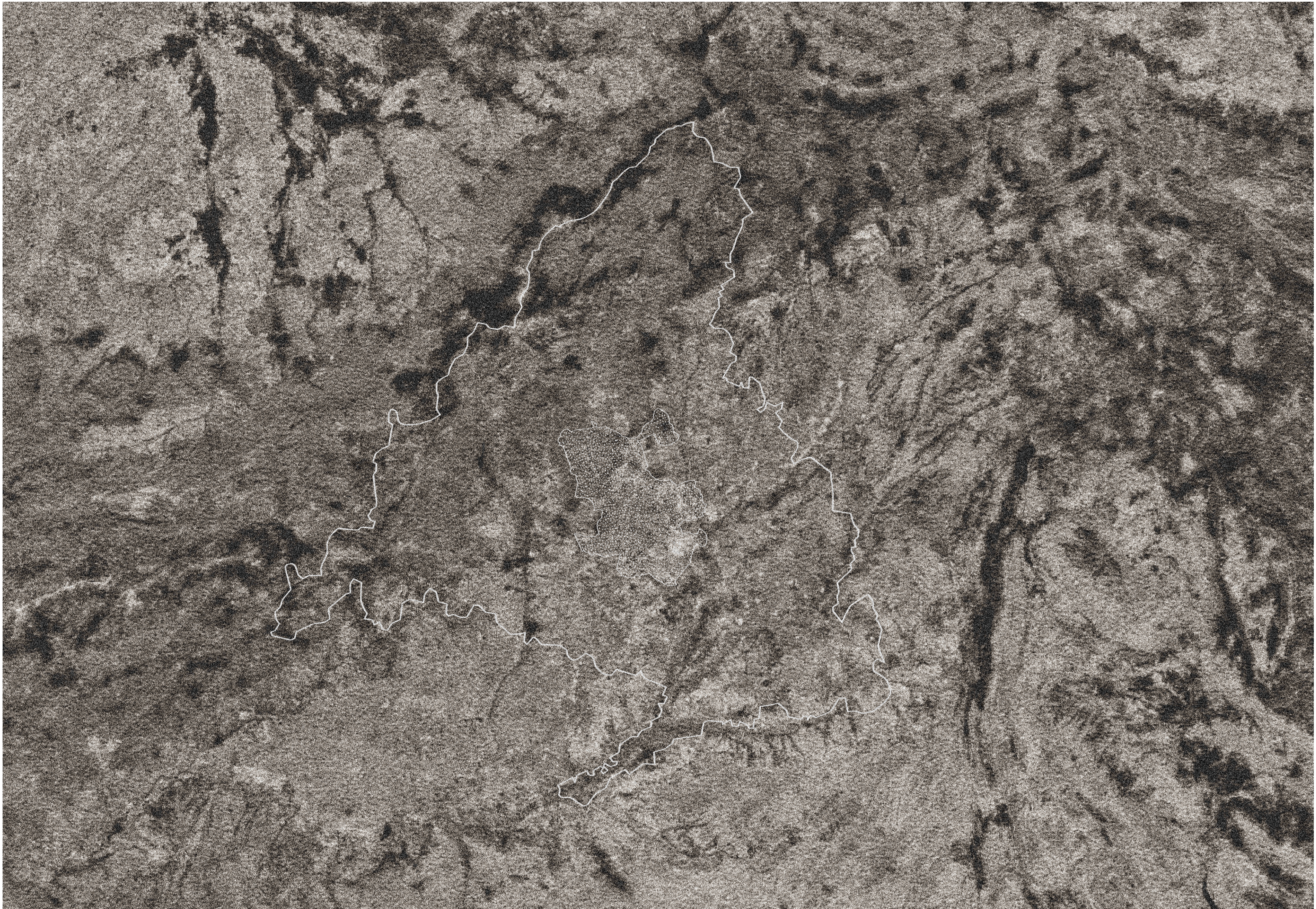
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Madrid's name is linked to several legends, one of which suggests it comes from the Latin *matre*, meaning mother. This theory portrays Madrid as a nurturing figure, an adoptive home for people from diverse nations and cultures.¹ As I am personally interested in **collectivity and gathering practices**, especially in **multi-cultural social groups**, this legend is the one that resonates with me the most and the one that will guide my research forward. Therefore, in the view of this paper, Madrid becomes the **caring character** of its human and non-human inhabitants.

The coexistence of various cultures in the city means these groups share the same spaces in their daily lives. Yet, because they come from diverse backgrounds and have different interests, each group follows its own set of social rules, rhythms, and rituals. But what happens when these groups meet? Who or what are the supporting entities for collective life and gathering in Madrid? What relationships form between privileged and underprivileged subjects and objects? Madrid is a complex system where many cultures theoretically coexist, but how does this integration play out physically and socially? Can these groups come together to form heterogeneous, equitable social structures?

In this context the concept of **care** becomes central to the discussion. I see care as a **mutual concern** between two or more human or non-human actors. This extends beyond its clinical, conventional understanding as *cura* — attention focused on safety and protection — to a more empathic meaning, which derives from the Old English *caru*, signifying sorrow, grief, anxiety, and concern, and reflects the reaction aimed at alleviating such feelings.

However, as argued in *Maintenance and Care*², care encompasses more than this and, specifically, it implies a **power dynamic**. It establishes a relationship of **vulnerability and privilege** between the actors of care, often creating a rigid dichotomy between the **caregiver, subject of care** (usually privileged and non-vulnerable) and the **care-receiver, object of care** (often vulnerable and disadvantaged). Furthermore, care in architecture is traditionally associated with healing and rehabilitation, relating both to **human healthcare** and to the **maintenance and repair** of material culture, social structures, urban fabric, and infrastructure. These are typically aspects of daily life translated into services performed by specific groups of people who are often themselves part of more vulnerable demographics (such as minorities, immigrants, and lower-income individuals). But what if these caring practices became part of the daily rituals of the collective? The reciprocity that could emerge from the care and maintenance

1 (de Covarrubias Horozco and Sánchez 1611, 532)

2 (Mattern 2018)

of common urban spaces might be essential for fostering collective responsibility and integrating diverse social groups into a more balanced social structure.

This paper aims to challenge the notion of care as a political structure of power and social division. By introducing empathy and equity into this framework, I hope to propose new forms of interaction between human and non-human actors on the stage of life of the city, inspiring more inclusive and cooperative urban life.

Figure 1. The owner of a tavern sitting with one of his regular guests



Research questions

What if notions of critical care could be addressed in the formation of equitable common spatial infrastructures?

How can these accommodate performative acts of maintenance as a form of collective engagement/ responsibility?

Operational questions:

How can maintenance be formulated as a performative act that could foster collective engagement?

What if maintenance priorities might shift in Madrid to balance out the human and non-human infrastructures?

How can one define equitable common spatial infrastructures and where can these be found in Madrid?

Who are the actors that take care of the common spatial infrastructures in Madrid?

When does the maintenance performance act take place in Madrid?

How often does this act of maintenance take place?

How does the physical space support its caring actors?

What are the scales of maintenance encountered in Madrid?

Who and what is being taken care of in Madrid?

What are the elements/ structures/ systems that have the privilege of being cared for in Madrid?

How can physical spatial systems become agents of care rather than objects of care?

How can non-human actors reciprocate care in a mutual relationship?

How can non-human actors spatially reflect care?



Figure 2. Celebratory decorative elements on a street in Madrid

In this section the theoretical study of this research is outlined, addressing the plurality of notions of care and their further relationship with maintenance and repair. Several sources have been investigated to consolidate the conceptual ground that informs the progress of this project. In the following paragraphs I will name the primary three and I will give a brief overview of the main findings.

First, *Extending the Architecture of Collective Housing: Towards Common Worlds of Care*¹ synthesizes a conceptual framework that explores the **integration between care and the commons**, thus forming the starting point of this research. Here the concept of care is extended upon from the usual care giver-care receiver dichotomy to a notion of **mutual care** which is strongly connected to **empathy** and **sense of belonging**. The paper also highlights the relevance of the latter in the way that actors inhabit their environment. However, I think that, by reducing its focus area to (collective) housing as such, this research loses the opportunity to investigate the implications of mutual care in the context of the urban complexities of a city. It also seems to remain stuck on the issue of **vulnerability**. Even though it proposes the mixing of programs of housing and health- or daycare structures, it does not go beyond the clinical, anxious aspect of care that was criticized in their theoretical framework. I think that human and non-human actors can form networks of care in a city that are not per se related to first or second spaces like housing or working place but more perhaps to third places which can foster leisure, belonging and inclusivity. I think that in this context care becomes a notion that encompasses social, economical, political and environmental issues which can inform the creation of collective gathering places in the (semi-) public realm of a city.

The idea of caring architecture is given an even further dimension in *Critical Care: Architecture and Urbanism for a Broken Planet*². The book addresses the intersection between **care and labour, economy and ecology**. Thirteen essays are brought together tackling the locally driven care practices as productive **forms of repair** in the context of contemporary social and ecological crises. The book also showcases an extensive list of case studies as examples that prioritize human and environmental well-being and challenge capitalist driven architecture. As Meike Schalk, Sara Brolund de Carvalho and Helena Mattsson discuss in their essay *The Changing Ways of Being in Common: From Collective to Common Spaces in Welfare Housing*, **common spaces** are socio-spatial constructs, based on the concept of commons, which need **constant maintenance and care** to be able to adapt to the **changing needs** of their actors in **fostering collective life**. The common spaces

1 (Gutiérrez-Mozo, Parra-Martínez, and Gilsanz-Díaz 2021)
2 (Fitz et al. 2019)

mutual care

- involving a relationship of mutual respect and equity

- related to the healthcare ethical practice of Person-Centred Care

(Tomaselli et al. 2020)

commons

- resources with a shared form of *ownership*, collectively managed by a community who follow collective rules and share responsibilities

(Ostrom 1990)

critical care

- advocates for architecture to embrace mutual care, integrating human and environmental needs to create ethical, sustainable urban spaces and resource practices

sampled in this essay were designed for inhabitants to meet and engage in political and social activities with the aim of shaping them as responsible citizens through **shared governance and interaction**. However, the text argues that, with the rise of neoliberal policies in the 1990s, the role and function of these spaces began to diminish. **Strict laws and regulations** were introduced to facilitate interactions and to provide care for the users of the space, but they instead became **disabling and limiting factors in the communal life**. Nowadays, these common spaces can be the laboratories which house the reimagination of gathering and caring for one another and the environment.

Finally, I want to outline Shannon Mattern’s *Maintenance and Care*³ which connects **material culture** to care in the form of **maintenance and repair**. As compared to the previous discourses, this essay brings to the fore the importance of **cooperation and shared responsibility** in the creation and maintenance of resilient communities and places of care. It addresses the **inequalities** formed in the upkeep systems in our current cities and offers refreshing insights on reimagining this form of material and ecological care in the cities of tomorrow with a focus that goes **beyond the human – into the non-human realms**. She argues that care is essentially a power structure and this aspect should not be overlooked when taking it as “a framework of analysis and imagination” for designing our “material world”⁴.

This research aims to use the concept of critical care as an activator in the relationship between human and non-human actors exploring innovative ways in which they can support each other. This can then inform the formation of creative forms of collective engagement in the common spaces of a city, eventually strengthening citizen responsibility and integration between different social groups. Maybe if our spatial systems could accommodate different forms of maintenance involving collective engagement there would be more equitable common spaces and activities in the city.

maintenance and repair

- sustaining urban life through fixing, so-to-say, problematic socio-material infrastructures;
- neglect as a form of urban inequality and evidence of social injustice

(Graham and Thrift 2007)

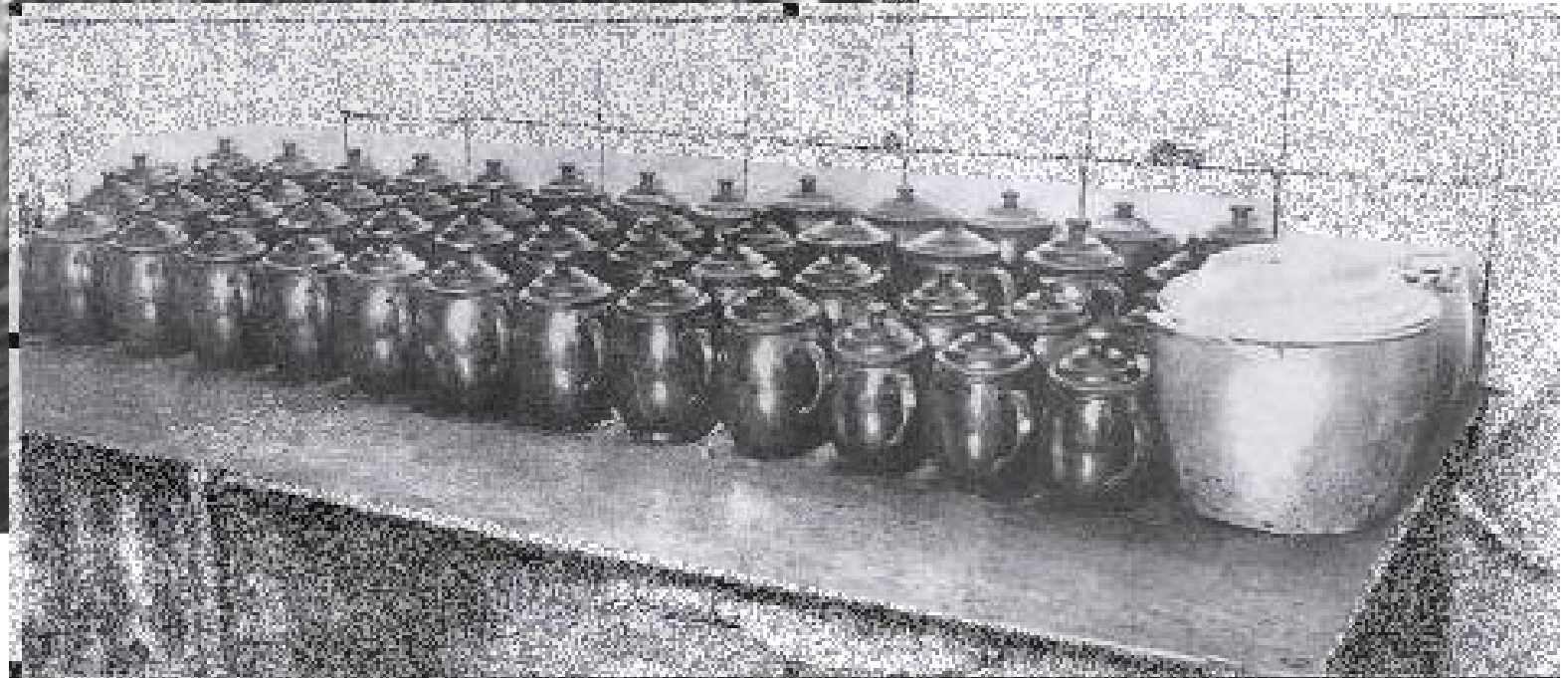
- nurturing form of care for resilient social and physical infrastructures
- celebratory act of labour and craft

(Mattern 2018)

3 (Mattern 2018)
4 (Mattern 2018, *p.12*)

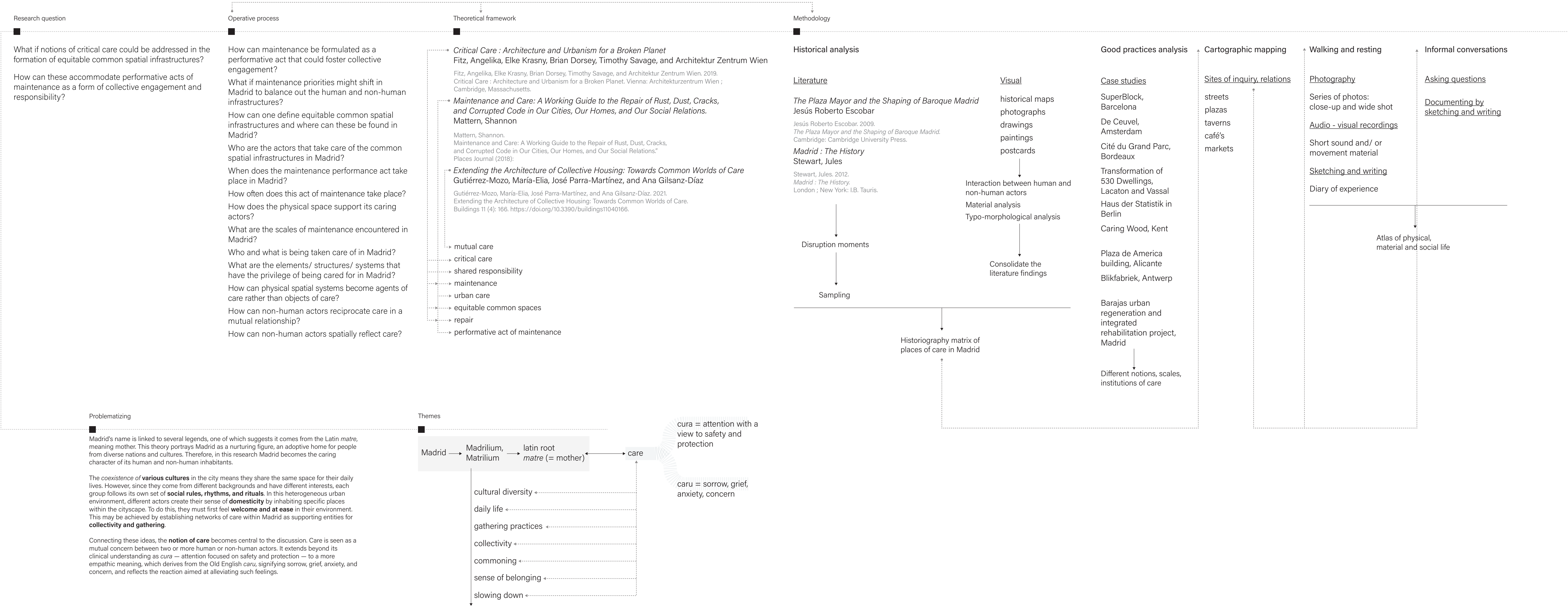


Figure 3. Ornamented entrance of a tavern in Madrid
 Figure 4. Elegant counter in a tavern
 Figure 5. Prepared food to be served in a tavern (in each pot a portion)



let's unwind together!

matters of gathering and belonging



Problematizing

Themes

Madrid's name is linked to several legends, one of which suggests it comes from the Latin *matre*, meaning mother. This theory portrays Madrid as a nurturing figure, an adoptive home for people from diverse nations and cultures. Therefore, in this research Madrid becomes the caring character of its human and non-human inhabitants.

The *coexistence* of **various cultures** in the city means they share the same space for their daily lives. However, since they come from different backgrounds and have different interests, each group follows its own set of **social rules, rhythms, and rituals**. In this heterogeneous urban environment, different actors create their sense of **domesticity** by inhabiting specific places within the cityscape. To do this, they must first feel **welcome and at ease** in their environment. This may be achieved by establishing networks of care within Madrid as supporting entities for **collectivity and gathering**.

Connecting these ideas, the **notion of care** becomes central to the discussion. Care is seen as a mutual concern between two or more human or non-human actors. It extends beyond its clinical understanding as *cura* — attention focused on safety and protection — to a more empathic meaning, which derives from the Old English *caru*, signifying sorrow, grief, anxiety, and concern, and reflects the reaction aimed at alleviating such feelings.

Madrid → Madrilium, Matrilium → latin root *matre* (= mother) ↔ care

cultural diversity ←

daily life ←

gathering practices ←

collectivity ←

commoning ←

sense of belonging ←

slowing down ←

cura = attention with a view to safety and protection

caru = sorrow, grief, anxiety, concern

Figure 6. Research Diagram

The topic of care extends over multiple scales and networks. To get a grip on the complexity involved in this in Madrid it is essential for this research to study the historiography of care in its specific context. Therefore, an actor network analysis as described by Bruno Latour¹ and John Law² will be performed in which the relations between physical and non-physical, human and non-human are investigated in the context of the changing institutions, places or elements of care in Madrid. In the context of my research the non-human actors are spaces where actions take place, materials, objects and animals. They can be further arranged in a **matrix** of care elements to ease comparison, deepening and extension. (see Figure 6)

Method 1. Historical analysis

- Literature study
 - Primary sources:
Jesús Roberto Escobar, *The Plaza Mayor and the Shaping of Baroque Madrid*³;
Jules Stewart, *Madrid: The History*⁴.
 - Secondary sources:
Antonio Pasies Monfort, *Tabernas Antiguas de Madrid*⁵;
Enrique Fidel, *Mercados de Madrid, cuestión de supervivencia*⁶;
Carlos Osorio, *Las Tertulias de Madrid*⁷
Titinet, *Los Mentideros de la Villa y Corte de Madrid*⁸.

This will help in **selecting and sampling** specific turning or **disruption moments** in history to ease the identification of forms and directions of care throughout time. The aim is for them to clarify the prioritization of certain elements over others in different times, showcasing the change in interest in

1 (Latour 2005)
2 (Law 2009)
3 (Jesús Roberto Escobar 2009)
4 (Stewart 2012)
5 This is a blog with different articles published in the period 2013-2016 in which information about many historical taverns of Madrid is provided. The author of this blog uses many archival and literary references as well as knowledge from people that really used, owned or interacted in some way with these places. Thus, the articles of this blog help in understanding what taverns meant in the evolution of the life of Madrid, both formally and informally.
6 (Fidel 2007)
7 (Osorio 2023)
8 (Titinet 2014)

the evolution of the city. It can lead to the research being reductive to specific topics which may be not representative of the overall complexities occurring at a certain point in time. This can be double checked by looking at different sources of information and puzzling them together to form a clearer image of the networks at play. For instance, tertulias were identified as important points on cultural, literary, artistic and political levels in Madrid specifically due to their role in generating stages for free expression in key political and war contexts. This information has been first found in literature but paintings and historical photography have confirmed the importance of tertulias in the history of the city and provided a better understanding of their actors and physical typologies.

- Visual study
 - Historical maps
 - Photographs
 - Drawings
 - Paintings
 - Postcards

Informed by the sampling done through the literature study, the aim of the visual analysis is to **consolidate the findings** regarding the different notions and institutions of care that existed in Madrid historically. The focus is laid on the **interaction between the human and non-human actors, material analysis and typo-morphological analysis**.

Method 2. Good practices analysis

Investigating certain architectural and urban projects that tackle care critically will extend the understanding of notions of care in our actual built and lived form. The projects will be mainly selected from the book *Critical Care: Architecture and Urbanism for a Broken Planet*⁹ which provides an extensive list of insightful case studies that work with care in relation to labour, economy and social structures. A typo-morphological, material and relational analysis of these projects will be performed to form an understanding of the methods addressed by them and the resulted outcomes. This can create a good starting point for connecting the theoretical issues discussed with physical spatial representation and learning about how to translate the concepts at play in spatial terms.

9 (Fitz et al. 2019)



Calle de Bravo Murillo

Chamberí and Tetuán,
*no interruption, seamless
continuation
non-physical edge*



Calle de Alcalá

Centro, Retiro, Salamanca, Ciudad Lineal and San Blas
*mild interruption, bridge continuation
physical and non-physical edge*



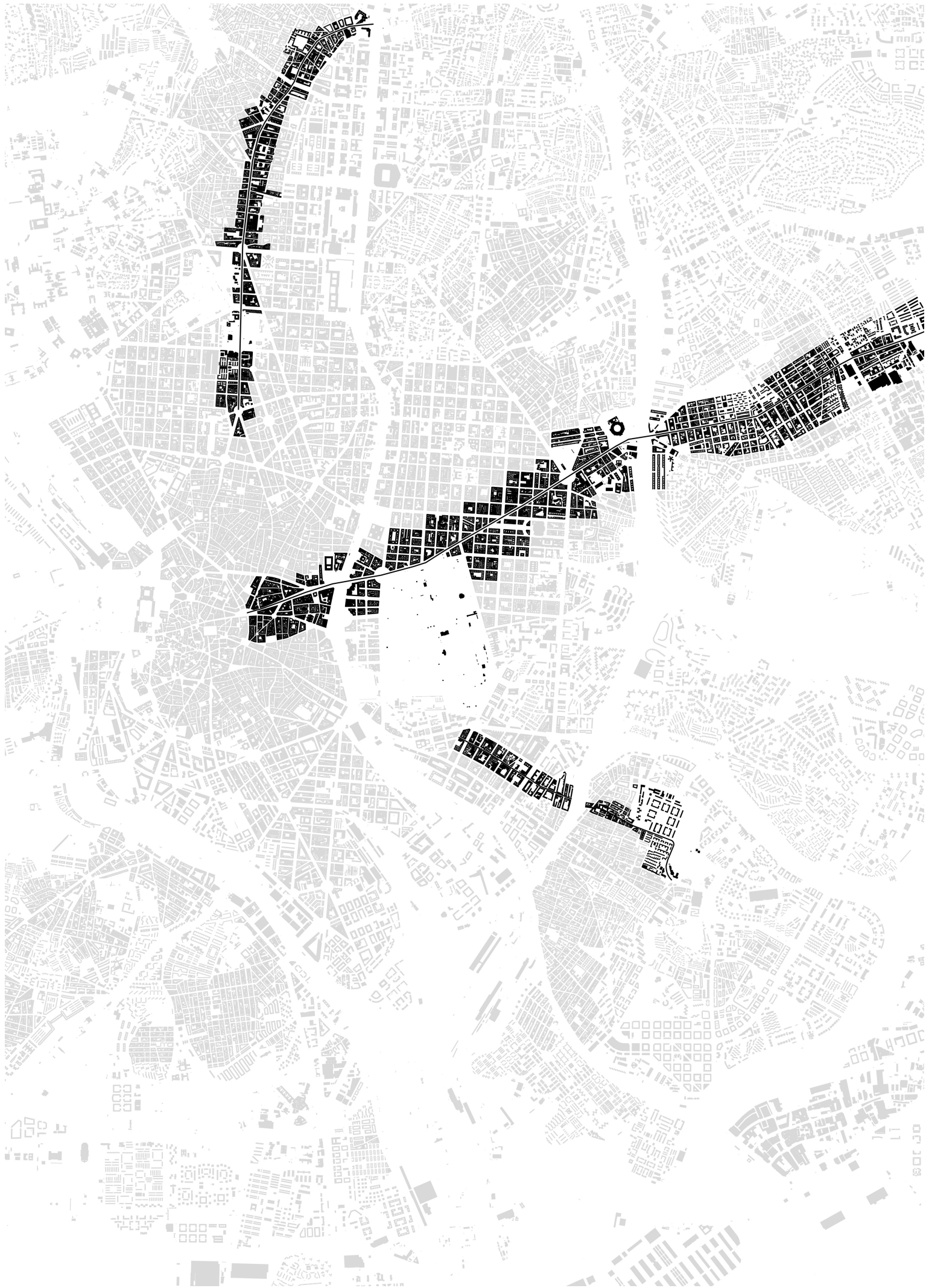
Calle de Valderribas

Camino de Valderribas

Retiro and Puente de Vallecas
*strong interruption, division
physical and non-physical edge*



Figure 8. Map of linear elements of interest in Madrid



For this research specific sites of inquiry were chosen in the city of Madrid to be able to dive deeper into the processes of care, maintenance and collectivity present. Through **demographic inquiry and cartographies, reading journal articles** and looking at **satellite data from Google Maps** three streets were chosen that (used to) bridge two or more districts with different socio-demographical, economical and political qualities. This first caught my attention through an article from El Confidencial¹⁰ talking about de Calle/ Camino de Valderribas and the huge contrasts between its two sides: one West from the M-30 motorway and the other on its East side. Further, two other streets (Calle de Alcalá and Calle de Bravo Murillo) were chosen by exploring the satellite and street view of Google Maps, having different kinds of interruptions and continuities. A comparison between their characteristics can be insightful for further analysis. The areas around those streets (Figure 8) will also be considered part of the inquiry since I believe one street cannot alone represent fully the character of its surroundigs.

Method 3. Cartographic mapping

This method is used to find **intensity nodes and relations from a bird’s eye perspective**. Using **filters** discovered in the historical study and finding their **translation into contemporary Madrid** will be aiding this part of my research, making it possible to find specific points of interest that can be visited during the on-site inquiry.

Method 4. Exploration through walking and resting

Walking routes will be designed according to the inquiry sites discussed in the previous paragraphs, taking them as a base for planning specific routes. In this way the **scale and characteristic details** of the chosen contexts will become clear, but the focus will fall mainly on **capturing traces of maintenance and care** in space. The idea is to visit the **same places at different times** of the day (morning, afternoon and evening). Other than the walking aspect, an essential part of this method is taking **moments of rest**. Those are represented by **prolonged periods of time** spent in a specific place so as to **observe and chart** the changes, routines that happen during the day, what stays and what disappears, who is present and when, what kinds of relationships are forming.

This process would be ideally repeated in the same place at least twice to form a better understanding of the habitual nature of life in that context. The planned outcome of this exploration is an **atlas of physical, material and social life of the chosen areas**.

10 (Pascual, Esser, and Ley 2024)

Figure 9. Map of areas of inquiry around the streets of interest

- Photography
 - Details
Series of (close-up) photos of certain elements in space such as materials, textures, ornaments, street furniture, waste and other non-human actors that represent traces of life on the street.
 - Overall setting of city life
Series of (full shot) photos depicting the presence and interaction of non-human and human actors in a specific context.

Making series of photos at the different visiting times will show sequences and layers of the same space, but those will be limited to the time constraints of the site visit (one week).

- Audio-visual recordings

Moreover, I would like to record short video and audio material to capture sounds and movements, giving an additional dimension to the photography inquiry of place.

- Sketching and writing

Last but not least, sketching and writing place will be employed to strengthen the understanding of how life is lived and maintained in Madrid and to record more directly information that cannot be easily captured by the previous means.

Method 5. Informal conversations

Finally, during the site visit, I would like to have **informal conversations with locals** on the street and in the points of inquiry identified, talking about their everyday life and experience. I will prioritize talking to **workers: owners, vendors, cleaners that support the (social and material) interactions in the city**. Secondary to that, talking to the **users** would give a better understanding of the different sides and understandings of the same place, thus creating a more complete representation of it.

- Asking questions
- Documenting
 - Sketching
 - Writing

Not speaking Spanish will make it more difficult to initiate and maintain these informal conversations, but some alternatives could be using Google Translate as a means to overcome the language gap if needed or finding locals that (also) speak English, Romanian or Italian.



Figure 10. Baldosas de Madrid, the unique stone and cement pavement of Madrid

I began this project with a personal affinity for topics like immigration, sense of belonging, and gathering practices within diverse social groups. This is deeply connected to my own experience as an immigrant in different countries, where I have taken on varied roles—first as a child in a working family and later as a student. These experiences have given me a firsthand understanding of privilege, segregation, community, and the feelings of loneliness and love that shape urban life. They also made me realize how shared, common spaces and their social practices could potentially foster a collective life and a sense of warmth and integration, especially amid the often-isolating pace of city life.

Madrid, in particular, has become a focal point in this research as an adoptive home to people from diverse backgrounds, making it a powerful case for exploring how spaces can nurture community. However, social infrastructure cannot exist in isolation, it is intrinsically tied to the material, economic, labor, and political structures of the city. All these structures demand constant care and maintenance to meet the evolving needs of their inhabitants, whether human or non-human. Here, I see maintenance as a binding agent, a form of urban care that could support resilient spaces and communities.

My exploration has also led me to question traditional ideas of care, especially when it is framed as a one-way dynamic where a “privileged” group provides care for a “vulnerable” one. Care, often administered as a power structure, can unintentionally uphold social inequities, privileging certain groups while neglecting others. Urban systems, too, tend to rely on workers to upkeep shared spaces in the background. What would happen if maintenance were seen as a cooperative act of care? Could maintenance become a shared ritual of daily life in the city, a performance of the collective for the collective?

This vision of care and maintenance extends beyond traditional concepts, envisioning maintenance as a reciprocal act. I am interested in how materials, objects, and spaces could not only be cared for but also play an active role in nurturing their surroundings. Could they, perhaps, stimulate new ways of engaging and maintaining shared spaces, encouraging residents to collectively look after their environment? I believe these non-human elements could be reimagined to inspire creativity and cooperation in the rituals of urban life.

Through this research, I hope to contribute to a broader understanding of urban care that considers not only the social but also the material, economic, and ecological relationships at play. By challenging conventional ideas about care as a hierarchical power structure, I aim to explore more equitable and empathetic ways of interacting with and within shared spaces. This shift could pave the way for communal practices that integrate and empower people across social divides, supporting collective responsibility in urban environments.

To achieve these aims, I recognize that I still need to deepen my theoretical understanding of the topics explored. I also need to refine my methodology to create a realistic framework that aligns with the constraints of the site visit. While I have already studied Madrid from a historical and bird-eye, distanced perspective, my next steps involve immersing myself in the city’s current, lived reality. The idea is to experience Madrid on a human level, grounding my research in the daily rhythms and interactions that shape its social fabric. This step feels essential for connecting the theoretical framework of this research with the physical, sensory, and social complexities of the city.

History

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Movies

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Perfect Days. Directed by Wim Wenders. Japan: Mastermind Limited and Office Kitano, 2023

Figure 1. El propietario Juan y un castizo cliente en 1984 (Foto Cecilia-Pasies)
Source: *Tabernas Antiguas de Madrid*, July 2014,
<https://tabernasantiguasmadrid.blogspot.com/2014/07/calle-concepcion-jeronima-el-meson-de.html>.

Figure 2. Fiestas en la Calle del Oso, Lavapies, Madrid, Spain. Photo by Carlos Cuerda, August 12, 2014.
Source: *Flickr*, June 15, 2018,
<https://www.flickr.com/photos/17675923@N07/40994528150/in/photolist-25sxEZu-Aiad7b-2obiZpo-drwYlg-5qvghP-UNFyvc-26ZCuch-2jxX1oj-2obyzz8-cmFzgh-2hG4tAq-XCmDzN-2aEvp6w-AkEkgk-zoWeAY-zUK8u-2p4f12J-2o8ioDa-61ZHB5-2pfkwwv-bqMgVi-2oaPcaY-8f9MhL-6L8V25-Ct3UU-bCK9QQ-WatoqV-8f6uuT-2kyufrz-8f9LzU-H7oJPQ-66jeSU-h8Kq6A-A2J3eF-5mZrQh-BtPXTH-Ct3UT-4zskTA-4zo32B-2oGRueL-nqRHTU-2pJmHcB-4zsh3E-4zo3EH-4zskmd-4zshwL-24b4oMc-pv5DT8-4zsj4o-R28bWV>

Figure 3. Encantadora fachada de “Casa Paco” con un rótulo poco afortunado (Foto: Cecila-Pasies, 1985).
Source: *Tabernas Antiguas de Madrid*, November 2014,
<https://tabernasantiguasmadrid.blogspot.com/2014/11/recuerdo-de-dos-tabernitas-en-tirso-de.html>.

Figure 4. Vista de elegante mostrador (Foto Cecilia-Pasies, 1985).
Source: *Tabernas Antiguas de Madrid*, December 2014,
<https://tabernasantiguasmadrid.blogspot.com/2014/12/humanes-saga-de-taberneros-madrilenos.html>.

Figure 5. En Próculo cocidos a 60 céntimos. En cada puchero una ración.
Source: *Tabernas Antiguas de Madrid*, May 2014,
<https://tabernasantiguasmadrid.blogspot.com/2014/05/taberna-de-proculo-anteriores-entradas.html>.

Figure 6. Research Diagram. Produced by author.

Figure 7. Historiography matrix of places of care in Madrid and their diagrammatic analysis. Produced by author.

Figure 8. Map of linear elements of interest in Madrid. Produced by author.

Figure 9. Map of areas of inquiry around the streets of interest. Produced by author.

Figure 10. Baldosas de Madrid, the unique stone and cement pavement of Madrid.
Source: *The Making of Madrid*, April 24, 2024,
<https://www.themakingofmadrid.com/2024/04/24/what-is-madrid-made-of/>.