Figure 1: Life-long learning in social settings

Education in Contestation.

Navigating Urban Neoliberal Challenges in Madrid

Keywords.

education | public institutions | non-formal learning | contestation | neo-liberalism | socio-spatial fragmentation

Abstract.

This research explores the contestation surrounding learning environments in the City of Madrid. In the aftermath of the 2007/2008 mortgage crisis, Madrid underwent a profound urban transformation, laying bare stark socio-economic disparities. While wealthier families moved northward, disadvantaged districts suffered increasing unemployment. Madrid's southern districts have ever since been characterized by lower-income communities with limited job prospects. To counteract the governmental financial challenges, neoliberal planning initiatives were implemented, affecting the local education landscape. This led to an imbalanced distribution of public and private schools, reflecting wider educational disparities, hence it shows the spatial and social implications of these pressures on urban social life.

Index.

Fascination.

My journey of studying architecture has frequently converged at the crossroads of urban planning and architecture, driven by my desire to comprehend the broader context of the design and to make design choices with lasting social relevance. I perceive the practice of architecture as a tool to influence the built environment, which directly informs the users experience and well-being. Thus, this influence underscores the unique responsibility that comes with an architect's design decisions. Urban design, in this context, emerges as a mediator, navigating the complex interplay of social dynamics, economic interests, and political forces, towards a design proposal rooted in both the practice of architecture and urban planning. Using this understanding of urban design, I want to emphasise the important role of public spaces, including squares and public institutions, in designing for a better built environment, that ultimately reflects our inner daily lives.

Introduction.

After the great mortgage crisis of 2007/2008, Madrid experienced a dramatic urban transformation that exposed severe socio-economic divisions. The crisis exacerbated unemployment in already disadvantaged areas, while wealthier local families continued to establish in the north of Madrid. In stark contrast, the southern outskirts, historically characterized by industrialization and rapid urbanization, were home to lower-income neighbourhoods with poorer labour market opportunities. In the following course of **neoliberal** planning initiatives, an urban development agenda was pushed forwards to counteract and outbalance governmental financial shortcomings (Ocaña, 2020). The local education market reflects these governmental saving measures strongly through the uneven distribution of public and private schools. Whilst many private schools are located in wealthier neighbourhoods, run-down public schools provide a reduced number of opportunities for the children, which becomes clear through e.g. the availability of only non-bilingual schools. This complex scenario created spatial asymmetries and educational disparities, contributing to the greater problem of Madrid's socioeconomic and spatial division (De La Guardia Bueno & Bonal 2023). In Madrid, states Isabel Galvín "La educación en Madrid es una máquina de producir desigualdad social" [Education in Madrid is a machine for producing social inequality], rather than a means to give the young generation equal opportunities in life (Acosta, 2019).

Public spaces, public institutions and their connecting infrastructure are integral parts of a city's social and cultural infrastructure and contribute significantly to the quality of life of its residents. Public spaces serve as important places for fostering social relationships, much like education within public facilities plays a central role in promoting children's independence and imparting knowledge. Consequently, both public spaces and public institutions can be classified as **public goods** in the social life of a city. However, the pressures placed on them are multi-faceted, ranging from physical changes in the urban fabric of a neighbourhood to intangible socio-economic and political influences. A tangible example may be the transformation of a public park to residential or commercial property due to scarcity of land in an ever-growing city like Madrid. Another less visible example would be a government's decision to allocate more funds for the development and maintenance of public spaces in affluent neighbourhoods. This could have the effect of exacerbating spatial inequalities within the city.

These contemporary pressures on urban public life and a city's social infrastructure have already been predicted over 50 years ago by the French philosopher and sociologist Henri Lefebvre (1970). In his book *The Urban Revolution* he states that the urbanisation will increasingly determine all major aspects of social existence across the world, and thus the future of urban social life will depend on the discontinuous dynamics and uneven trajectories of urbanisation. He concludes with his estimation that through the establishment of a planetary web of urbanized spaces, capitalist urbanisation processes will be applied universally. These predictions are undermined by contemporary discourses among critical urban researchers, such as Neil Brenner

Neoliberalism
is a political approach that favours free-market capitalism, deregulation, and reductions in government spending. It seeks to minimize state intervention in the economy, promote global market liberalisation, and emphasizes principles like privatisation, financial deregulation, free markets, and free trade
(Oxford University Press, 2023)

Public good
"a commodity or service that is made available to all members of society, typically administered by governments and paid for collectively through taxation"
(Fernando, 2022)

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and Roger Keil. For them, the before mentioned is the "global urban reality", that becomes manifest in **socio-spatial polarisation**, **territorial inequality**, and an uneven spatial development (Brenner & Keil, 2014).

Pablo Sendra frames in the book *Designing Disorder* several key points of departure for this research. These include recognizing the ongoing socio-political shifts within cities and acknowledging the persistent imposition of order through urban planning and design. Disorder, in this context, signifies the contestation of imposed orders. Hence, contested grounds, manifest themselves in areas of the city where contradictory forces, interests and orders converge (Sennett & Sendra, 2022).

By selecting one subject of contestation to investigate, I can shed light on the broader context that informs the influences bringing contestation to other physical and metaphysical areas in a city. I state that education - that is formal, in-formal and non-formal, constitutes a **contested ground**, as it exists within the intersection of conflicting spatial, social, economic, and political interests, evident in global cities like Madrid. This research is to also contribute to a comprehensive understanding of contestations in global cities and recognizes that education represents a system within a system, influenced by the same set of parameters as other contested grounds may reveal.

Socio-spatial polarisation
"refers to the expression in a city's residential patterns of the divergence over time of the life chances and socioeconomic circumstances of its inhabitants"
(Waitt & Furrer, 2000, p.174)

Contested ground
Physical space located in-between contrasting spatial, social, economic, and political interests, hence the contestation is not necessarily visible
(own definition)

Figure 2: The Tetuán district in Madrid with the Cuatro Torres Business Area in the background

Research Question.

The following research question and its sub-questions serve as a starting point for further investigation into the complex dynamics of Madrid's urban transformation and educational disparities:

What if the neoliberalist impact on urban planning has led to an uneven socio-spatial distribution of educational supply, thus resulting in social inequality in Madrid?

> What is the impact of reduced accessibility and quality of education on a children's personal and academical development?

> How does governance and public policy affect non-formal forms of learning in the education of children?

> Why can non-formal education serve as potential complement for formal education in the case of limited accessibility and quality?

> What are potential synergies and challenges that arise from the different forms of learning within the educational system of Madrid?

> How can the institutional and the self-organized participation in non-formal education co-exist or complement each other?

Theoretical Framework.

The research is driven by the convergence of two primary fields of study: the study of the society through **human geography**, which focuses on the interrelationships between people, place, and the environment, and the study of political sciences through the trajectory of **governance** and **public policy**. These two disciplines converge beneath the same analytical lens when urban planners and designers seek to comprehend the interrelations between spatial, social, economic, and political dynamics in cities. Throughout the process of analysing the overlapping systems and networks, the relations and influences between a city's human geography and its governance and public policy structures can be made tangible. Urban planners and designers may then be able to propose solutions to counterbalance the evolving imbalances. These imbalances may e.g. concern the city's focus on its economic competitiveness and its disregard of urbanity, street life and civic culture (Castells, 2020).

In the book *Non-formal education and basic education reform*, Hoppers (2006) explains the interconnectedness of the different forms of learning rooted in the field of education. **Formal learning** operates in an institutionalised setting like schools and is regulated and shaped by the governance and public policy of a city. **Informal learning** happens within homes and communities, whereas **non-formal learning** takes place at the interface zone between the two. The diagram below shows these interrelationships. Potential pressures from the side of the state arise regarding the shape and substance of non-formal forms of education. From side of the civil society, pressures arise towards re-shaping the formal system. The terrain of non-formal learning has formal characteristics because it is mostly organized. However, it is voluntarily and depends on the participation of the community. Its location in between the state and the community is an area of contestation, but it also makes place for "dialogue and initiatives for collaborative action" (Hoppers, 2006, p.37).

Human geography
"is centrally concerned with the ways in which place, space and environment are both the condition and in part the consequence of human activities"
(Gregory, 2009, p.350)

Governance
"the activity of governing a country [...]; the way in which a country is governed [...]"
(Oxford University Press, 2023)

Public policy
"the broad area of government laws, regulations, court decisions, and local ordinances"
(Mackinac Center for Public Policy, 2023)

Informal learning
"Acquisition of knowledge, know-how, information, values, skills and competences in the framework of daily activities – work, family or leisure – which are not explicitly designated as learning activities in terms of objectives, time or learning support."
(Cedefop, 2023)

Formal learning
"Acquisition of knowledge, know-how, information, values, skills and competences in an organised and structured environment in terms of learning objectives, time or resources."
(Cedefop, 2023)

Non-formal learning
"Acquisition of knowledge, know-how, information, values, skills and competences in the framework of planned activities – in terms of learning objectives, time or resources – where some form of learning support is present."
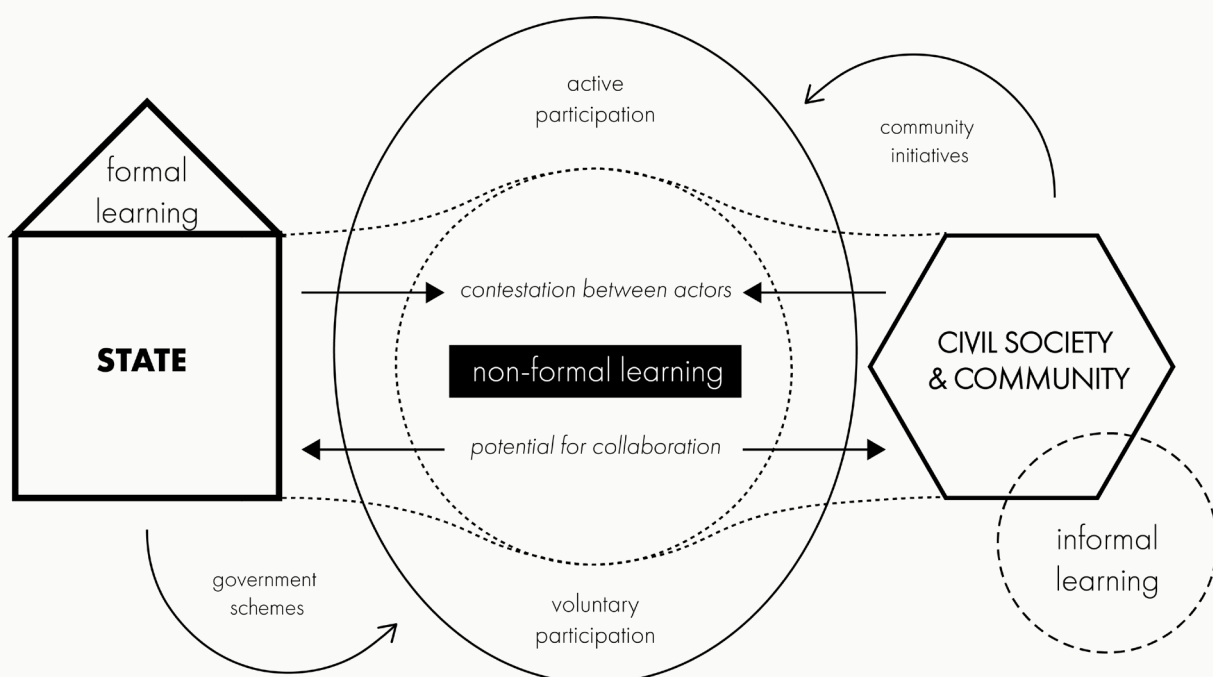(Cedefop, 2023)

Figure 3: The educational field of formal, informal and non-formal learning
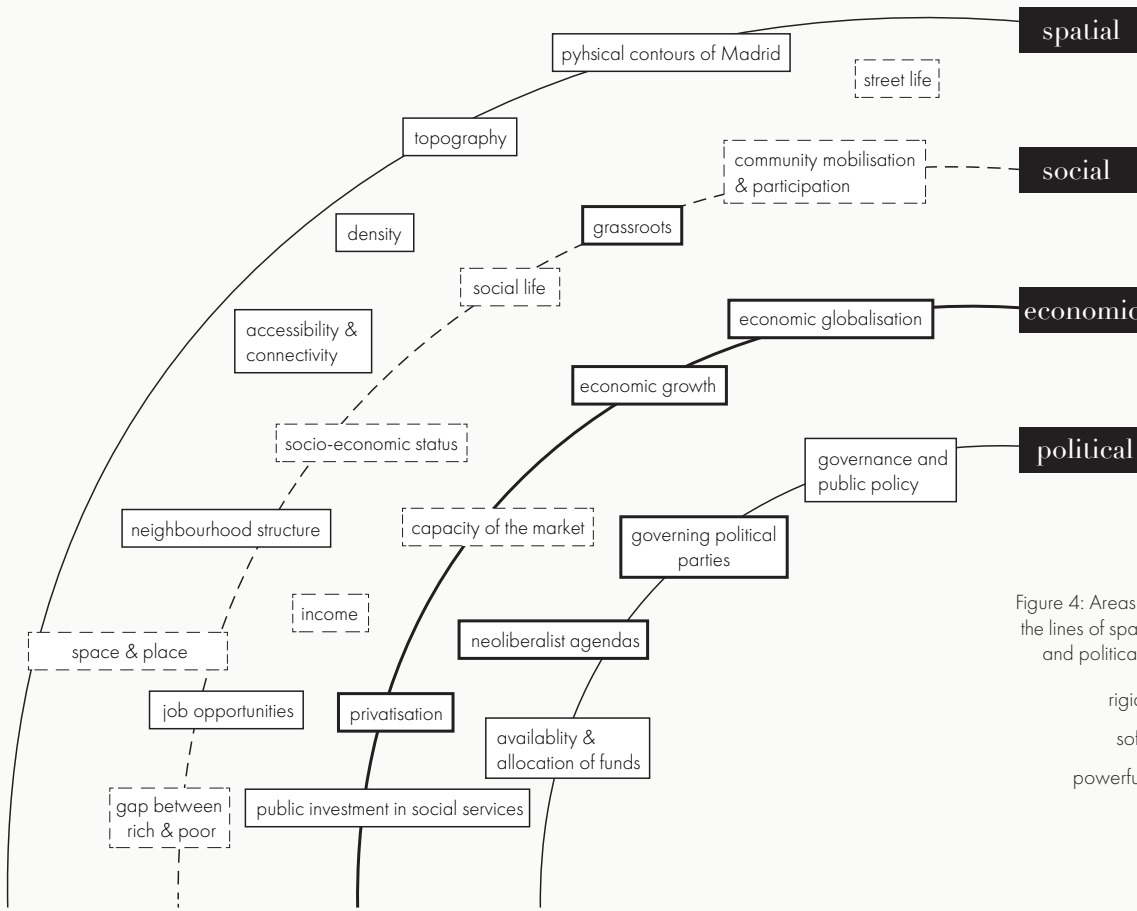
Figure 4: Areas of investigation along the lines of spatial, social, economic and political dynamics in cities

rigid ———
soft – – – –
powerful ———

Regarding education from the political point of view, the system behind formal learning may reveal certain drawbacks. Madrid, as many other cities has been subject to neoliberalist urban planning policies since for over 40 years (Ban, 2016). Morales-Gomes and Torres explain in the reader *Transnational Social Policies* the development of neoliberal ideologies in the end of the 20th century and its implications for the governmental spending on social services. An agenda of a new way of thinking was pushed forward, including a change in delivery of social services as well as the importance of market mechanisms, decentralization, and privatisation (Morales-Gomez, 1999).

This ties directly into what Neil Smith calls **uneven development** in cities. He explains in his book *Uneven Development: Nature, Capital, and the Production of Space* the capital's influence on the profound transformation of geographical space in cities over the last two decades. He points out the contradictory nature of capital, which invests in the built environment to create surplus value, whilst at the same time withdrawing from places to seek higher profit elsewhere (Smith, 2010).

Uneven development
"uneven development derives specifically from the opposed tendencies, inherent in capital, toward the differentiation but simultaneous equalization of the levels and conditions of production" leading to "development at one pole and underdevelopment at the other"

(Smith, 2010, p. 6)

The social and spatial implications of uneven development in a city are profound and influence also the area of children education. Despite claims of improved access and quality of social services such as education, socio-spatial disparities in the formal education system are increasing. Moreover, low income or poverty may often lead to reduced participation in formal education, placing greater pressure on non-formal education to act as a substitute (Morales-Gomez, 1999).

Methodological Framework.

For this research various research methods are employed to examine the influence of neoliberal planning on the learning environment of children in Madrid. The critical notion of the interconnectedness of politics, economy, society and physical space is presented in the theoretical framework and informs the assemblage of research methods explained below.

Step 1: Quantitative demographic analysis of numerical data from censuses through demographic mapping

The study of demographical data gives insight into current processes of population growth, income, age distribution and share of school sector. From this data an overview can be developed that presents the different indicators within dot maps and choropleth maps.

Step 2: Qualitative research on transects of learning through transect walks

The diagram in Figure 5 represents the idea of the educational condition in a city. The educational condition describes the quality, accessibility and availability of children's education that is informed by the interpretation of the data collected during the first step. The tool at hand are simply graphs that measure according to a set of parameters and predefined threshold the condition of education in the different zones of a city: ranging from the centre to the periphery of Madrid. Each districts, neighbourhoods, or blocks are located in a educational condition, that becomes more complex as spatial, social, political, and economic changes emerge. The educational condition represents a snapshot of the condition at the time of documentation and is constantly influenced by a city's underlying, changing, and complex dynamics.

On another note, the implications derived from the concentric model of city development represent an isolated perspective of a city as a self-contained entity enclosed within distinct islands. It is therefore is no longer applicable when considering the intricate networks of economic, political, social and spatial relationships that encompass urban areas. In research a significant disparity between the model and the actual condition of a city become apparent. Nevertheless, the concept of the concentric model remains a valuable point of departure for exploring the various layers of a city and understanding their impact on development from a simplified point of view. Each layer unveils a unique facet of a city's characteristics, leading to a visual representation that no longer portrays a city as a symmetrical composition but rather as a fragmented and uneven landscape of development and growth.

The transect walks are deployed along corridors in the city that show contracting conditions. The tools employed on those walks are observation, interviews and maps. Using this method, sites of contestation and disruptions in the educational field can be identified and put into perspective in relation to the city.
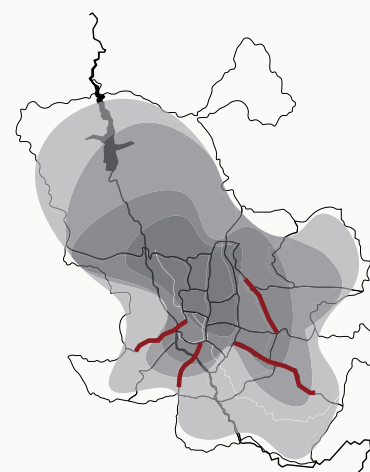

Figure 5: Potential representation of the educational condition in Madrid and corridors along contrasting conditions

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Step 3: Qualitative research on local characteristics through visual surveys

Complementing the research on transects from centre to periphery, the focus here lays on the 360° exploration of the sub-conditions that influence the educational field of the selected site. An extensive on-site exploration reveals a better insight into the physical manifestation of contestation in education and it's immediate surrounding. Digital collage is used to re-frame the findings in a visual summary. The in-depth analysis of the selected sites can lead to an overall conclusive pattern of educational contestation within the city's boundaries: each site with their own individual challenges and potentials.
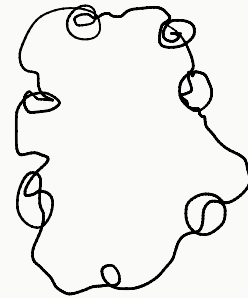

Figure 6: Pattern of educational contestation

Step 4: Qualitative research on networks based on ANT

After selecting a site that poses challenges that are relevant in the educational landscape of Madrid, the field of education needs to be uncovered in its tangible and intangible entity. Actors and agency play an important role in a comprehensive understanding of learning environments. Latour's **Actor-Network-Theory** provides a way to trace back and anticipate influences and actions. Visualizing them in a actor-network-diagrams with nodes and connections, reveal errors, disorders, and opportunities (Latour, 2005).

Actor-Network-Theory
ANT is concerned with the structure of actor-networks and the involvement of different materials in these networks. The actions of each agent (human and non-human) has implications and effects on one or more agents in the network and makes it therefore dynamic.
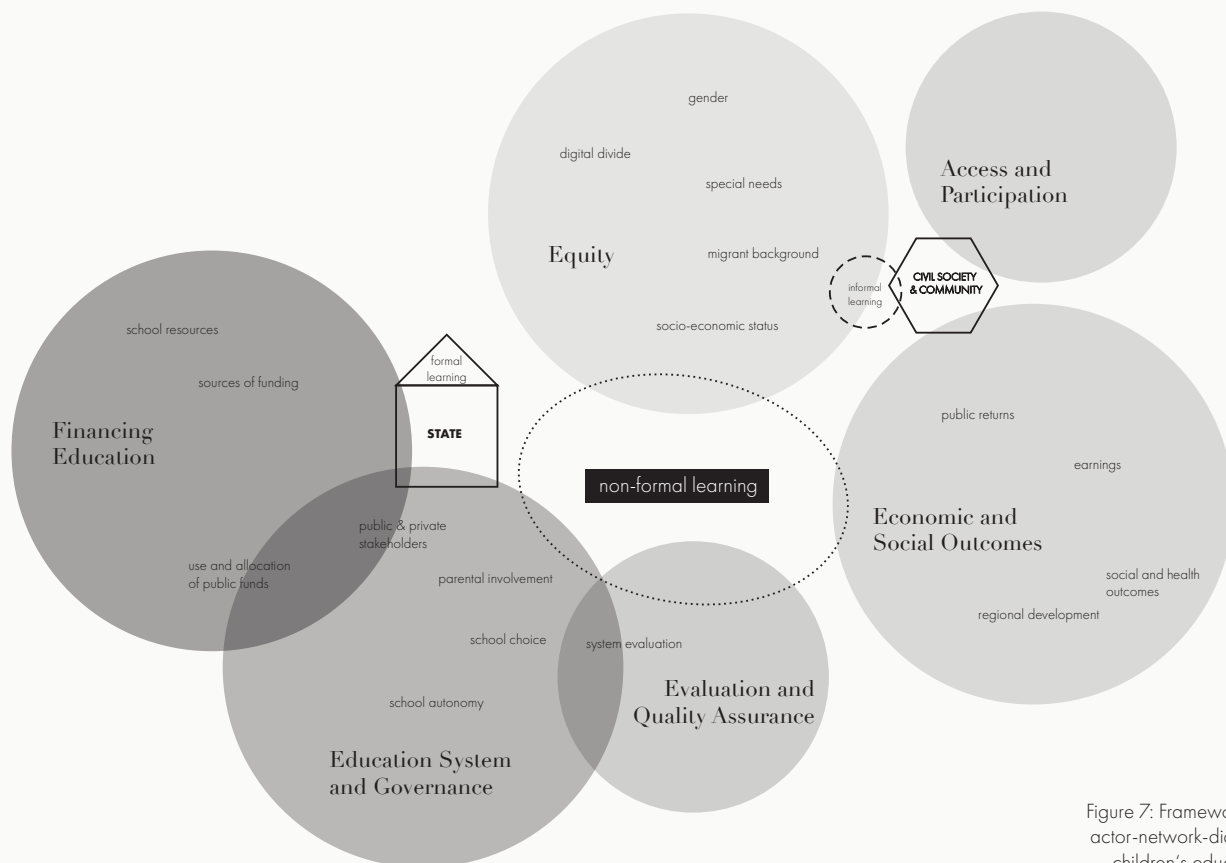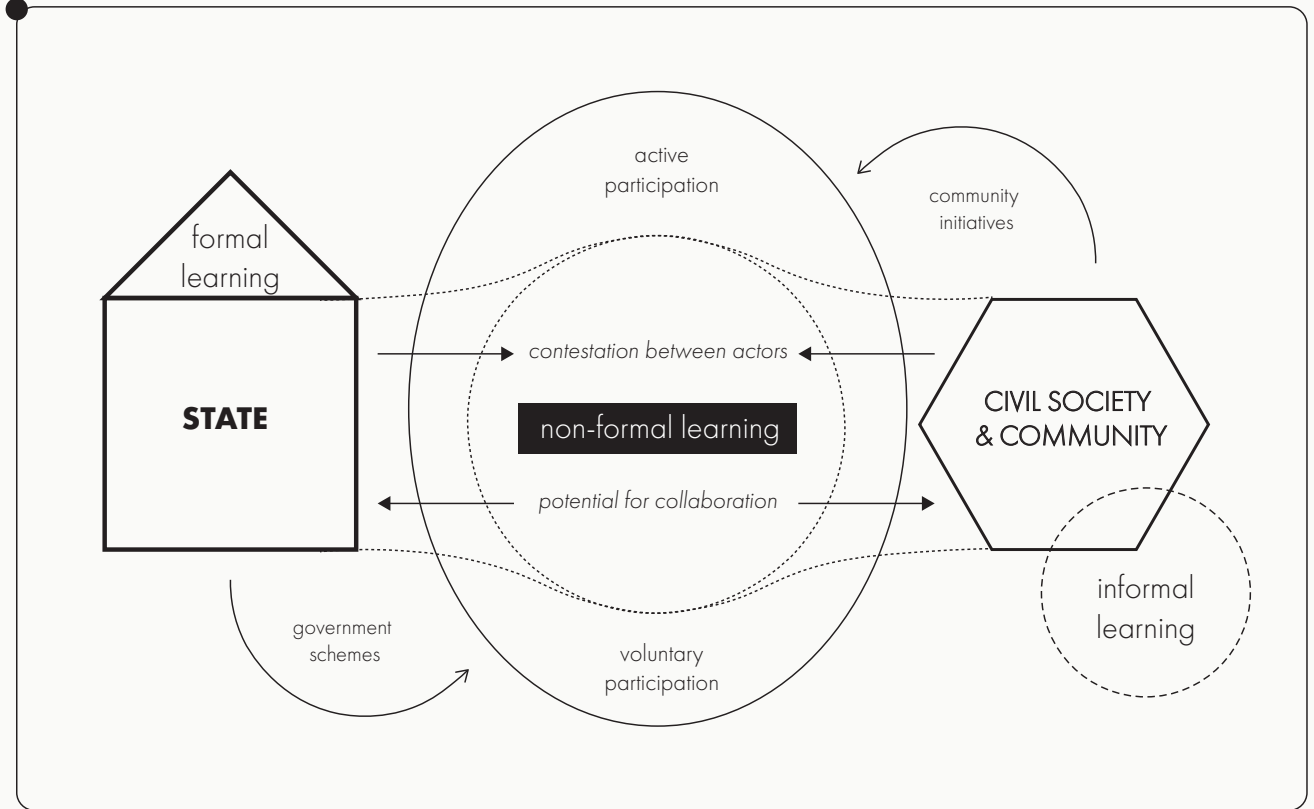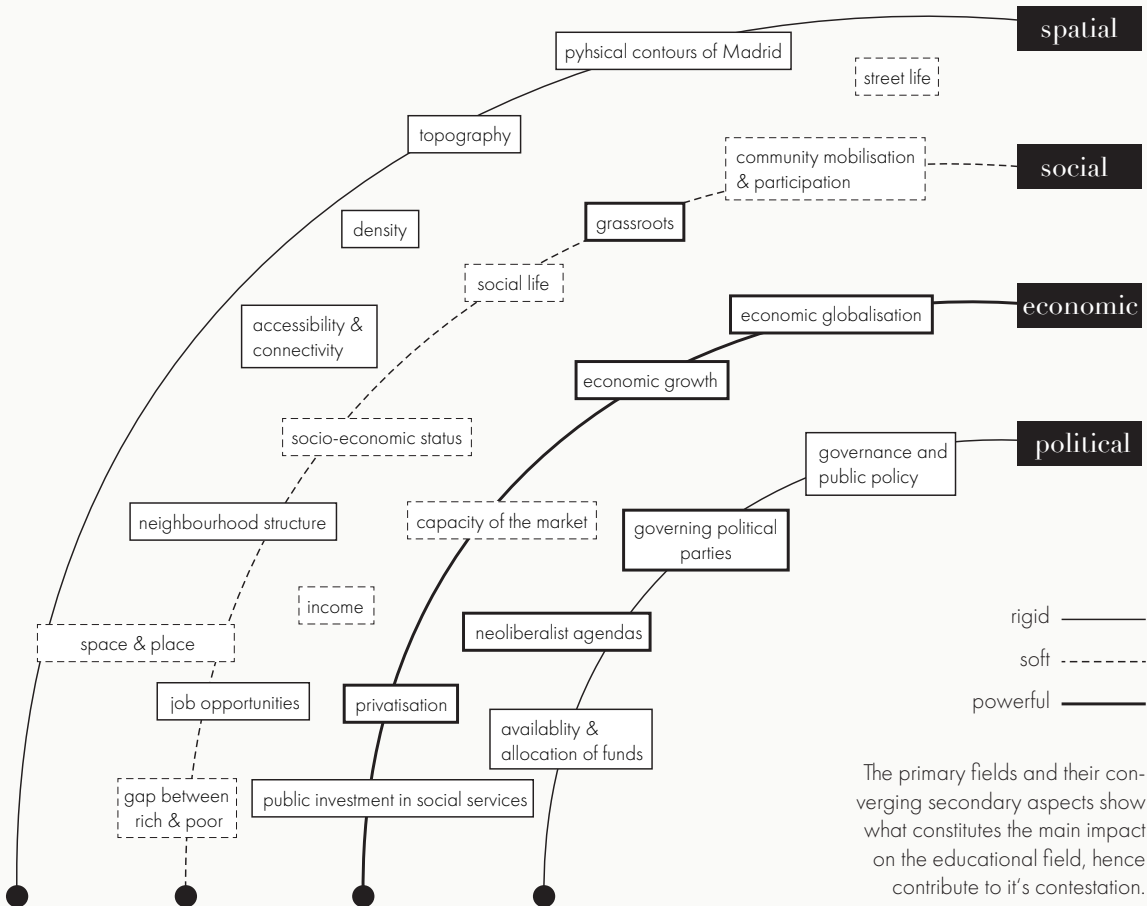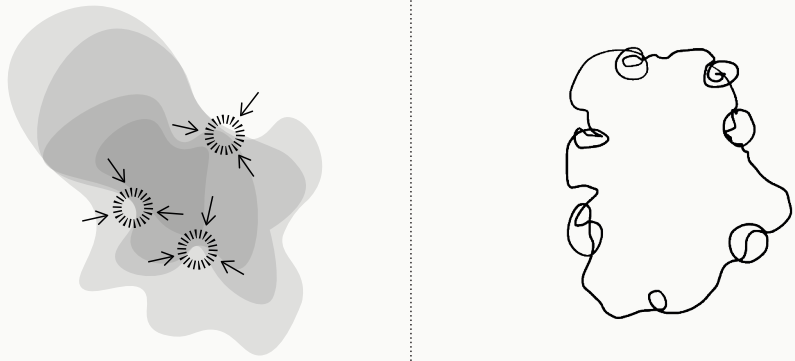
(Latour, 2005)

Figure 7: Framework for an actor-network-diagram in children's education

spatial

pyhsical contours of Madrid

street life

topography

community mobilisation & participation

social

density

grassroots

social life

accessibility & connectivity

economic globalisation

economic

economic growth

socio-economic status

governance and public policy

political

neighbourhood structure

capacity of the market

governing political parties

income

space & place

neoliberalist agendas

job opportunities

privatisation

availablity & allocation of funds

gap between rich & poor

public investment in social services

rigid ———
soft ------
powerful ━━━

The primary fields and their converging secondary aspects show what constitutes the main impact on the educational field, hence contribute to it's contestation.

active participation

community initiatives

formal learning

contestation between actors

STATE

non-formal learning

CIVIL SOCIETY & COMMUNITY

potential for collaboration

government schemes

informal learning

voluntary participation

Method ▮1

Quantitative demographic analysis of numerical data from censuses through demographic mapping

Technique
Dot maps and choropleth maps

Aim
Overview

visualising data: unemployment rate, annual average income and density

Method ▮2

Qualitative research on transects of learning by transect walks

Technique
observation, interviews, maps

Aim
identifying sites of contestation and disruptions in the educational field

y= unemployment rate

y= school drop-out rate

y= density

y= annual net houshold income

starting point: concentric model

parameters and tresholds to define educational condition

educational condition of Madrid revelas corriodors for transect walks

Method ▮3

Qualitative research on local characteristics through visual surveys

Technique
digital collage, selective mapping

Aim
understand the physical manifestation of contestation in education

sites of contestation within a mosaic of sub-conditions

pattern of educational contestation

Method ▮4

Qualitative research on networks based on ANT

Technique
Actor-Network-Diagram

Aim
Understand stakeholder relations, influences and identify pitfalls and potentials

framework for an actor-network-diagram in children's education

Statement of Relevance.

This research paper is relevant for the context of contemporary urban planning. By examining the complex interplay of interests, pressures, and policies that impact educational accessibility and equality within Madrid, this study offers valuable insights into a global problem. It informs urban planners and policymakers about the consequences of decisions and actions in shaping the urban educational landscape. The research not only addresses critical issues of social equity but promotes interdisciplinary understanding. By focusing on children's education, the emphasis is placed on the significance to invest in the younger generation, while acknowledging the vulnerability of those in our society who are not able to speak for themselves.

With the research I do not only want to contribute to the existing studies on education in urban settings, but I want to bridge the gap between the different forms of learning, while emphasising the importance to promote each of them individually.

Outline of Potential.

The steps as presented in the methodological framework show a research design to identify and understand the issues stated and to subsequently propose an architectural and spatial solution. However, its execution may pose new challenges, as the field of children's education is in a vulnerable setting, hence participative research like interviews and questionnaires may be more difficult to perform.

I believe that education can have a great and positive impact if it is understood and implemented in its holistic meaning. By going beyond the conventional frameworks of formal learning, children's education can experience a renaissance through an alternative architectural conception and formulation.

Source: https://pixabay.com/de/photos/kinder-geige-straße-instrumente-2685070/

Figure 9: Children playing a condert in public space

Annotated Bibliography.

Uneven Development: Nature, Capital, and the Production of Space
(Smith, 2010)

In this book, Neil Smith attempts to bridge the gap between geographical and political traditions and introduces the concept of Uneven Development as a key factor in understanding the specific geography of capitalism. Over the last two decades, geographical space has been going through a profound transformation, primarily driven by capital. In the book he discusses the contradictory nature of capital, that invests in the built environment to create surplus value, whereas at the same time withdraws from places to seek higher profit elsewhere.
Neil Smith further delves into the conflict between use-value and exchange-value and highlights the interconnectedness of space and social processes across various levels. It suggests that space can be regarded as a reflection of society itself.
The theory from this book helps evaluating the rote of capital with regards to the built environment and cities. It unravels many dependencies and ongoing processes. It helps defining the lens, through which to see capital influences in a city, understanding its power as well as benefits.

geography of capital, investment in built environment, production of space

Designing disorder: Experiments and Disruptions in the City
(Sennett & Sendra 2022)

Pablo Sendra emphasizes that instead of a nostalgic return to past neighbourhood life, Richard proposed the exploration of new urban conditions for the future. He advocates for people to learn how to embrace disorder as an integral part of the urban experience. Sendra contextualizes this by highlighting the 1960s, during which the restrictions in city life identified by Richard were imposed within a specific political framework. This era witnessed urban renewal schemes that brought about major changes, including the mass construction of housing and urban motorways, along with the suburbanization of affluent communities. He further notes that although the socio-political context has evolved, the drive to impose order through urban planning and design persists.
The text underlines the decades of contestation and activism against imposed order, social control, and urban developments that exacerbate inequalities and produce alienation, both in the 1960s and the 2010s. Sendra defines "disorder" as a means to contest imposed orders and highlights the unique opportunity to challenge a failing system, particularly exemplified by the 15-M movement in Madrid and subsequent political initiatives.

new urban condition, embracing disorders, contestation, grassroot activism

Fragmented spaces in the urban landscape: A socio-spatial analysis of educational supply in the city of Madrid (De La Guardia Bueno & Bonal, 2023)

In this article the authors explore how the geography of school choice significantly impacts families' educational opportunities. It highlights the complex interactions between residential segregation, social inequalities, and the educational marketplace, which create spatialised educational opportunities for families. The paper focuses on the city of Madrid and analyses how these factors structure families' educational choices using various administrative datasets. The findings reveal an unequal distribution of school modalities in Madrid, with advantaged families and neighbourhoods having more diverse and socio-economically homogeneous schooling options nearby. The paper also emphasizes the spatial division of the city into areas with privileged residential and educational assets. It raises concerns about the regional government's reforms aimed at expanding school choice, suggesting that they may have exacerbated the link between residential and school segregation.

education policy, educational supply, school choice, socio-spatial inequalities

Desigualdad de oportunidades educativas por barrios en la ciudad de Madrid: evidencias empíricas y mediciones
(Echaves García, C., Echaves García, A. Río Ruiz, 2023)

This contribution focuses on the sociology of education in Spain and the paradox of educational expansion. While there has been a general increase in educational opportunities in recent decades, this expansion coexists with contradictory trends. To illustrate this, the paper employs urban sociology methods to create an indicator based on school failure rates in Madrid neighbourhoods from 2001 to 2011.

The findings reveal a concerning pattern: virtually all vulnerable neighbourhoods in Madrid experience persistent educational inequalities and the perpetuation of school failure over the study period. This highlights Madrid's fragmented nature, marked by structural imbalances in educational opportunities. Despite the broader trend of educational expansion, the social sectors with the most potential for educational improvement have made minimal progress over the decade.

This research underscores the complex and multifaceted nature of educational disparities within an apparently expanding educational system. It adds to the discussion on educational inequality and social fragmentation, emphasizing the need for a more nuanced understanding of the challenges faced by different segments of society in Madrid and, by extension, in similar urban contexts.

school failure,
urban distribution of
schools in Madrid

Non-formal education and basic education reform: A Conceptual Review.
(Hoppers, 2006)

This booklet provides a conceptual and strategic exploration of non-formal education within the broader perspective of basic education. It introduces a differentiated approach to non-formal education, recognizing specific types and allowing for different applications depending on life situations, philosophies, purposes, and relationships with the formal education system. This approach also accommodates varied policy responses and forms of state intervention.

The author delves into the complex connections between formal and non-formal education and emphasizes the value of certain types of non-formal education in enhancing the quality and relevance of basic education. The text challenges the reader to consider how policy, planning, and action-oriented research can be harnessed to

promote integration, equity, and diversity in education.

basic education,
non-formal education,
policy analysis,
agenda for action

Non-formal education, personhood and the corrosive power of neoliberalism.
(Batlle, 2018)

This contribution explores the complex relationship between non-formal education and its potential alignment with neoliberal values. Non-formal education encompasses various educational settings beyond formal education, emphasizing voluntary participation, intrinsic motivation, and often taking place in non-evaluative spaces. While formal education operates within neoliberal performance-oriented frameworks, non-formal education stands out for its less hierarchical and caring relationships, making it a potential alternative to the limitations of formal education.

The paper suggests that non-formal education is not insulated from the socio-political landscape. Some authors argue that non-formal education providers, including charities and NGOs, are increasingly influenced by neoliberal values. As non-formal education programs increasingly focus on instilling notions of citizenship and personhood in young people, it is essential to examine the extent to which NFE is being reshaped or influenced by neoliberal values.

non-formal education,
neoliberalism,
youth

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Figure 2   La ciudad segregada (n.d.) *Madrid, barrio de Tetuán, con las Torres Bussines Área al fondo.* [Photograph]. Madrid Sindical. https://madridsindical.es/2019/07/18/fotos-la-ciudad-segregada/

Figure 3   own elaboration

Figure 4   own elaboration

Figure 5   own elaboration

Figure 6   own elaboration

Figure 7   own elaboration

Figure 8   own elaboration

Figure 9   Mochilazo Cultural (2017, Aug. 27). *no title.* [Photograph]. pixabay. https://pixabay.com/de/photos/kinder-geige-straße-instrumente-2685070/