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RUSSAFA, VALENCIA: THE TRANSFORMATION OF A MARGINAL NEIGHBOURHOOD INTO A FASHIONABLE DISTRICT. CREATIVE INDUSTRIES AS CATALYSTS OF GENTRIFICATION PROCESSES

RESUMEN

El artículo analiza la transformación del barrio de Russafa en Valencia, desde su marginalización hasta los procesos actuales de gentrificación y turistificación. El objetivo principal de la investigación es comprender las dinámicas urbanas que han conducido a los conflictos actuales entre residentes, nuevos habitantes y las fuerzas de mercado, considerando factores como la intervención pública, los cambios demográficos, la economía creativa y el turismo.

Los resultados evidencian que las intervenciones municipales iniciales, como el Plan Integral de Rehabilitación de Russafa (RIVA), impulsaron la regeneración urbana, pero también desencadenaron un aumento en los precios de alquiler y el desplazamiento de residentes tradicionales. Este proceso favoreció la entrada de nuevos residentes con mayor poder adquisitivo, acompañado por la proliferación de apartamentos turísticos y establecimientos orientados al ocio. Además, la presencia de artistas en el barrio contribuyó a su revitalización cultural, pero también actuó como precursor de la gentrificación y la turistificación.

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Entre las principales conclusiones destaca que las medidas de regeneración han beneficiado económicamente al barrio, pero han deteriorado su tejido social, creando conflictos relacionados con la contaminación acústica, la homogenización socioeconómica y la pérdida de negocios tradicionales. La investigación subraya la necesidad de implementar políticas que fomenten la mezcla social, regulen los alquileres turísticos y promuevan una participación ciudadana inclusiva en la planificación urbana para mitigar los efectos negativos de estos procesos.

Palabras clave: economía creativa; gentrificación; turistificación; regeneración urbana; conflictos vecinales.

CONCEPTUAL INTRODUCTION

In today's neoliberal society, governments have become a market agent instead of a regulatory entity (Smith, 2002). In this situation, gentrification has found an ideal environment to thrive, and what was thought to be a sporadic dynamic has ended up affecting the center of medium and large cities around the world. The rise of this phenomenon is linked to i) the role of public administrations as an agent of transformation, ii) the entry of foreign capital, and iii) the population's interest in residing in certain places (Smith, 2002). Gentrification could also not be understood without the abandonment of urban centers that took place throughout the 20th century. In fact, it is the subsequent efforts to regenerate urban spaces that motivate the emergence of speculative processes. The result is the imposition in urban centers of elitist economic and social interests over those of the popular classes.

During the process of searching for activities to revitalize city centers, very diverse proposals often emerge, as they are considered spaces where creativity and innovation emanate easily (Florida, 2003).

Along the same lines, throughout history, it has been observed how companies tended to cluster in environments where they could benefit from the advantages offered by their proximity to other entities. In other words, location was linked to geostrategic motivations. More recently, a new explanation

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has emerged: concentration to take advantage of the abundance of human capital with common traits (Florida, 2003).

Linked to concentration, many studies suggest that those with high education or income are more attracted to inclusive, multicultural environments with low barriers to entry (Florida, 2003). At the end of the 20th century, places with these characteristics were urban centers.

The interest in multiculturalism and the entry of higher income populations tends to occur in parallel with urban regeneration processes. These two dynamics reinforce each other, ultimately leading to the displacement of the resident population.

This population outflow is typically involuntary and mainly driven by rising housing costs that lower-income residents cannot afford. In fact, both rental and purchase prices rise as a result of the increase in demand and speculation linked to the hypothetical arrival of new residents.

In other words, it can be said that the feedback between urban regeneration processes and the growing attraction exerted by urban centers is one of the keys to the rise of gentrification.

In this context, it should be noted that initiatives to rehabilitate city centers are widely accepted by public authorities. They are feasible, easily distinguishable actions in which the local population can observe the changes directly and easily (Peck, 2005). In other words, the potential electoral revenue for those who carry out the actions is very high.

The most recurrent improvements are pedestrianization and the construction of bicycle lanes. These are actions that improve accessibility, reduce noise and air pollution, and can even boost retail sales and social cohesion. In other words, they are expected to improve the quality of life and may even attract new residents (Peck, 2005).

In practice, results vary, and it is precisely this regeneration that can lead to an attractive environment for tourists. The result is a growing expansion of leisure or culinary establishments to the detriment of those essential for the daily life of the resident population, such as markets and other services. In other words, an idealized model of urban space is imposed in the service of tourism that in no case is justified or satisfies the demands of the usual residents (Krätke, 2010).

RUSSAFA AS A CASE STUDY

The Valencian neighborhood of Russafa (also known as Ruzafa) is a place that clearly reflects the appearance and effects of gentrification. Russafa was an independent municipality until it was absorbed by València in the late 19th century. Its demographic and socioeconomic evolution during the 20th century was strongly influenced by its proximity to the North train station, until around the 1970s when its demographic and urban contraction began.

Most leisure activities in Russafa are accompanied by behaviors that are very disruptive to permanent residents, leading many of them to the decision of leaving the neighborhood. Noise is one of the main concerns of the residents, and there has been a considerable increase in rental prices, a phenomenon explained by both the proliferation of tourist rentals and the growing population interested in moving to the neighborhood.

The expulsion of population from the neighborhood is reflected in the gradual replacement of traditional and ethnic businesses with leisure, gourmet, or tourist-oriented establishments. The former close due to the lack of generational succession, while the latter experience a significant decline in sales due to the departure of their compatriots. It is worth noting that, beyond the opening of gourmet establishments, Russafa stands out for the proliferation of art and ceramics workshops (Campos Climent & Del Romero Renau, 2017; Durán & Merín, 2021; Torres Pérez et al., 2015).

The measures adopted by the public administration to address this gentrification context aim to follow a bottom-up approach, emphasizing community involvement, feedback from local entities, and ultimately, the promotion of social cohesion in the neighborhood is considered crucial. Examples of this approach include attempts to redevelop, pedestrianize, and make the neighborhood more accessible, as well as to restrict non-resident parking in favor of residents.

All the aforementioned dynamics make Russafa a neighborhood at the center of many forces that turn it into a hotbed of both positive and negative processes. This case study aims to examine these processes to better understand their role in the conflicts that are seen in the neighborhood today.

DATA SOURCES, METHODS, AND TOOLS

Statistical data and analysis

In this research, a wide range of sources was used to collect quality information that allowed us to carry out a rigorous analysis of the urban processes in Russafa:

- INE (National Statistics Institute): Demographic data at the census section level was used to analyze the population structure of Russafa according to nationality, sex, and age. This dataset also provided the data necessary to extract information on income per household and person, which has subsequently been correlated with other variables in order to create socioeconomic indices.
- Ministry of Transport, Mobility, and Urban Agenda: Through this body, we obtained data on housing rental rates and prices for the different census sections of the Russafa neighborhood. This information was used to identify the levels of housing stress that exist in different sections of the neighborhood.
- Tourism Office of the Valencian Community Government: Through this source, we obtained data on hotels, tourist apartments and travel agencies in the city of Valencia. This data has been analyzed through Geographic Information Systems to identify concentrations of tourist accommodation in the neighborhood.
- Valencia City Council Statistical Data: This database has been essential for obtaining all types of data at the neighborhood level (social, economic, and environmental), as well as provide supplemental data for statistical analysis (base layers, neighborhood boundaries, etc.).
- Office of Commerce and Territory - PATECO: This institution specializing in commercial data of companies in the Valencian Community provided georeferenced data

on the businesses in Russafa, which facilitated the analysis of commercial activity in the neighborhood.

Interviews

Interviews with local entities and associations

In order to obtain the opinions and perceptions of different actors in the Russafa neighborhood, a series of interviews were programmed to gather information from stakeholders and neighborhood residents on i) the consequences of the rehabilitation of the neighborhood infrastructure and equipment, ii) the social regeneration and gentrification of the neighborhood, and iii) the choice of Russafa as a creative and dynamic center for artistic actions.

We used the method of semi-structured interviews based on a script with the topics to be addressed, interviewing:

- Plataforma per Russafa (<https://www.russafo.org/>): Association of neighbors with the mission of fostering a healthy community. Interview with the leader, Hanna Bussef (February 17th, 2023).
- Jarit Civil Association (<https://jarit.org/>): Civil association dedicated to the inclusion of immigrants and development of multiculturalism. Interview with its director Emilio Sánchez (March 2nd, 2023).
- Valencia City Council (<https://www.valencia.es/>): Interview with Isabel Lozano Lázaro, councilwoman in charge of development, cooperation, and immigration (March 8th, 2023).
- Russafart Festival (<https://russafart.com/>): Interview with Arístides Rosell (April 13th, 2023), cultural manager and gallery owner.
- Artists in a workshop:
 - Javier Chapa, painter (April 13th, 2023).
 - José Antonio Picazo, multidisciplinary artist, and Josie McCoy, painter (April 13th, 2023) from the Centro de Cultura Contemporánea Sporting Club Russafa.
 - Elena Martí (April 13th, 2023), multidisciplinary artist.
 - Iris Amaya (May 1st, 2023), artist specialized in illustration.
 - Antonio Gadea (May 1st, 2023), painter.

Interviews with residents

The objective of the interviews with residents was to inquire into their subjective appraisals of the quality of life in the neighborhood as a result of urban rehabilitation and social and cultural regeneration, as well as their perceptions about the effects of touristification, multiculturalism and the extension of nightlife on the neighborhood dynamics.

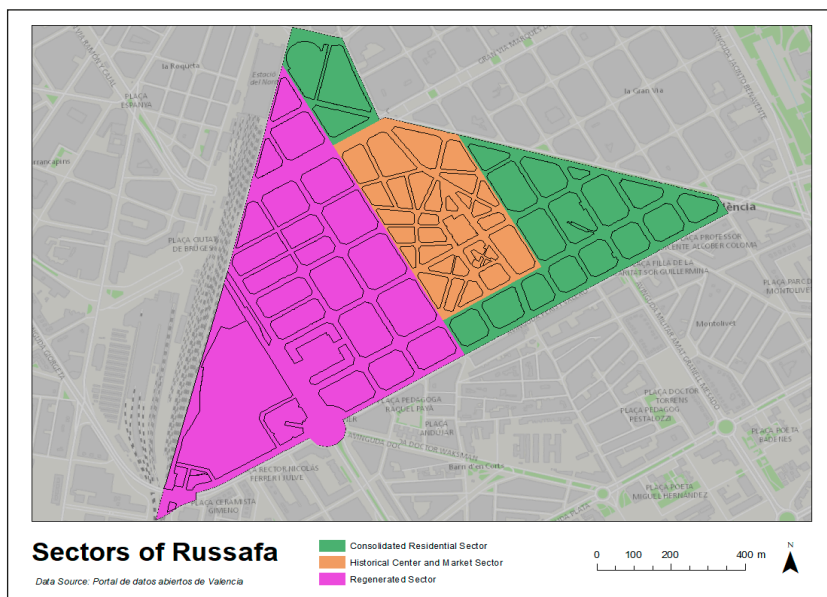
We chose to conduct interviews with a semi-structured pattern in different sectors and streets of the neighborhood at different times of the day. Additionally, through mental mapping technique, the interviewees identified places or sectors where their observations and experiences took place.

Sectors for interviews

Interviews with residents of Russafa were conducted on April 13th, 14th, 15th and 17th either during the morning, afternoon, or evening. Residents were selected according to three zones:

- Consolidated residential sector: This sector borders the historically more affluent neighborhood of Gran Vía. The sector has a relatively large proportion of long-time residents in older buildings that have been well maintained.
- Historical center and market sector: This sector is defined by its irregular city blocks and the market sitting at the center. This sector is demographically and commercially dynamic and has a mix of residents and visitors alike.
- Regenerated sector: This sector has seen public investment in the last decade and a half and commerce has adapted to the changing demographics and vice versa. This is considered the epicenter of change in the neighborhood.

Figure 1. Sectors of Russafa



Mapping and use of Geographical Information Systems

To understand processes at the neighborhood level in Russafa, spatial analysis was carried out using ESRI's ArcGIS suite of GIS software, specifically ArcMAP. Additionally, Microsoft Excel was used to process datasets prior to spatial analysis and, in some cases, to carry out further analysis.

The use of these tools has been of great interest for the realization of statistical analysis of territorial scope, since these tools have allowed the development of socio-economic calculations in the different sections of Russafa. The following functions and methods were used to process data in this case study: Georeferencing of business and tourist facilities by walk; territorial and statistical analysis; data interpolation; calculation of correlation coefficients; statistical analysis representation (from excel data to ArcGIS representation).

Georeferencing of businesses and tourist facilities

Throughout the months of February, March, and April of 2023, multiple trips were made to the neighborhood of Russafa to gather data on cultural heritage, sentiments of residents, business activity, and the distribution of tourist activity.

Locations of businesses in the entire neighborhood were georeferenced between 04/01/2023 and 04/30/2023, during which data related to business type and activity was recorded. Locations of tourist facilities in the regenerated area of the neighborhood were recorded on 29/03/20 and 30/03/23 during the early afternoon, and businesses dedicated to foreign tourists were subjectively recorded.

RESULTS

*Processes in progress**Degradation and public intervention in the public space*

The following paragraphs provide a brief history of the degradation processes in Russafa and highlight the main milestones of the public intervention plans carried out in the neighborhood to reverse these processes.

The process of degradation of the neighborhood began in 1970 with the loss of population and the decline of commerce, in addition to the degradation of services and neighborhood relations. This process continued until 1990 due to the Spanish development model of the 1960s, which encouraged residents of city centers to move to peripheral neighborhoods by offering modern and larger housing developments (Torres & Hernández, 2013).

The degradation of the neighborhood caused a decrease in housing prices, which encouraged, between 1990 and 2000, the arrival of new residents. They were mainly made up of students and foreigners from countries outside the European Union, and they were attracted to the neighborhood because of low housing prices and the proximity to the city center. This arrival of foreigners gave the

neighborhood a multicultural character, which is later considered to be a dynamic that adds value and attracts new social groups related to art and the creative industry (Llorca & Fernandez, 2017).

Despite the arrival of new neighbors, the degradation of the neighborhood continued, and in 2006 MITMA classified the neighborhood as vulnerable.

In order to reverse this degradation and revitalize the neighborhood, the Integral Rehabilitation Plan for Valencia Russafa (RIVA) was announced in 2005. It was understood as a financing and institutional collaboration agreement between the City Council and the Regional Government for the redevelopment of the neighborhood and had the objectives of enhancing integration of the neighborhood with the rest of the city, improving accessibility to public spaces, and renewing infrastructure and urban facilities. The same year as the opening of its office, the first tenders for the redevelopment of Puerto Rico Street were launched.

Meanwhile, in 2005, the Special Plan for the Extension of Russafa Pla del Remei-Russafa Nord (PE 2005) was announced. The objective of this plan is to protect the architectural and urban heritage of the neighborhood, through the application of regulations that take into account the architectural and urbanistic particularities. It seeks to encourage the rehabilitation of buildings in preference to demolition. It also proposes a review of building inventories and their cataloging to define protective norms and guide construction.

Later, in 2008, the City Council announced the PE for the Extension of Russafa-Sur Gran Vía, which has a similar objective: the preservation of the character of the neighborhood through the creation of a regulatory system for private building that considers the architectural values of the neighborhood, the standardization of the rehabilitation of buildings and the revision of the system for the location of non-residential uses.

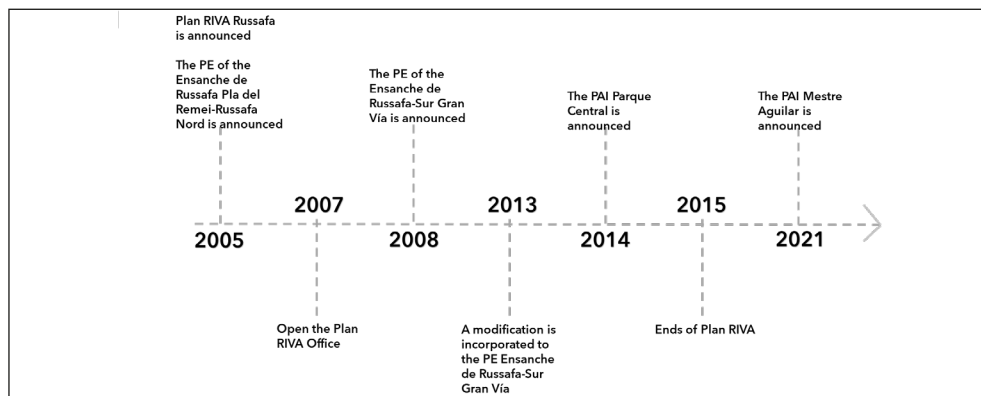
Although this plan was an improvement in the management of urban spaces, it did not regulate recreational activities and leisure businesses. This lack of regulation allowed the proliferation of leisure establishments, a situation that diminished the quality of life of a significant portion of residents. It is for this reason that, in 2013, a modification was made to the Special Plan that included the regulation of public shows and recreational activities, regulating capacity, terraces, and schedules.

On the other hand, in 2014, the Valencia City Council announced the PAI (Integrated Action Program) Parque Central. It is worth mentioning that the PAI's correspond to a legal technical instrument designed to develop urbanization projects. The PAI Parque Central contemplates the construction of a park in an area degraded by the disuse of industrial infrastructures. The construction of this project includes reconfiguration of the city's railway network, as the central park is adjacent to regional train lines.

The RIVA Plan ended in 2015 with most of the interventions not completed and with only 25 % of the total budget used. Although not all the proposed interventions were completed, the ones that were completed started an intense process of gentrification (Del Romero & Lara, 2015).

Finally, the PAI Mestre Aguilar was announced in 2021, which aims to create urban spaces that preserve the historical memory of the sector. The plan proposes the demolition of four buildings for the construction of an Andalusian-inspired square.

Figure 2. Public interventions of public space in the Russafa neighborhood



Creative economy and actors

The city of Valencia and its artistic production destined for the global market is very limited. In turn, the first level of artistic production generated in the Russafa neighborhood is not relevant; however, the heterogeneity and generation of creative initiatives, the wealth, and number of diverse cultural activities for residents and visitors is of great interest and of high social and economic value to the city of Valencia.

The city of Valencia has a long tradition in the visual arts derived from the existence of the School and Royal Academy of Fine Arts of San Carlos, founded in 1753, the Museum of Fine Arts of Valencia. In 1978 the Faculty of Fine Arts of Valencia became part of the Polytechnic University of Valencia (UPV). The school of fine arts meant cultural and artistic enrichment for the city of Valencia and, in turn, the regular generation of graduates in artistic and creative activities who would need to produce their work in its workshops and creative spaces.

The moment and the reasons why the artists moved to Russafa is of great interest, so we are going to explain it succinctly thanks to the in-depth interviews carried out.

Although the creativity and art associated with the Fallas have traditionally had a significant presence in the Russafa neighbourhood, in addition to the area's indigenous artists, the early 2000s saw the arrival of new artists to the neighbourhood. The main reasons why they settled in a neighborhood like Russafa are:

- Economic: the price per square meter in Russafa was very low as it was a run-down neighborhood with a high level of marginalization due to pockets of crime associated with prostitution and drug dealing.
- Spatial: the change of traditional economic activities located in small industrial warehouses, industrial workshops, textile warehouses, boxing gyms, workshops, etc. led to the abandonment of large, sometimes open spaces with considerable heights that were very attractive to artists.

- Centrality: one of the main attractions of the neighborhood is its central location in the city of Valencia, a fact that led market forces to focus on Russafa in search of maximizing profits through transformation processes.
- Proximity: together with its centrality, its proximity to other neighborhoods where some artists had their residence meant that commutes between home and studio were not costly (economic, temporal, and associated with comfort).
- Collectivity: the artistic essence and a certain corporate feeling led a large group of artists to create bonds of friendship closely linked to their creative activity, which made it possible to attract them to a neighborhood which, at the beginning, had low installation costs.

There have been different forms of settlement of the new artists in the Russafa neighbourhood, which we will highlight here. The installation of artists has taken place in different ways depending mainly on aspects related to their economic capacity. Various ways of settling in the neighborhood can be identified:

In the beginning, the arrival of established artists who had the economic capacity due to their ability to generate sufficient income from the sale of their works in exhibitions to collectors and public institutions that served as leverage for artists.

A habitual and traditional form has been the creation of *ateliers*, or workshops, in the artists' own homes, either by locals or by artists who buy an apartment where they set up their residence and production workshop.

Other artists, such as university professors, found it easier as they had two sources of income, the sale of their works and university salaries, which made it possible to access external sources of financing from banks for the purchase of their studios.

Another modality was that of artists who had family financial backing, which facilitated the purchase of workshops in which to produce their work.

The existence of shared spaces has initiated artistic activity in a professional way and reduced the fixed costs that make creative activity possible. It also generates cultural activities and events of various kinds that serve as centrifuges and catalysts for the creative industries in Russafa.

Russafart, a cultural catalyst festival

Russafart, a biennial festival, was launched in 2008. The festival began at a time when the international financial and real estate crises were beginning to hit the Spanish and Valencian economies, both of which had a profound effect on their specialization in real estate tourism. The art market was strongly affected by the crisis and, probably, was the germ of this festival that aims to bring visitors to the artists' studios in search of certain notoriety and sales.

The aim of the project, which was initially to bring artistic and cultural activities closer to the public through the exhibition of workshops and exhibition spaces in the Russafa neighborhood, has given rise to other activities throughout the year, some related to educational spaces, others with

disadvantaged groups, others with older residents... all these activities are mainly associated with culture, through routes and itineraries, and with the environment.

Russafart began with the participation of 69 artists in 30 workshops and exhibition spaces and, at present, there is an offer of around 300 artists in more than 88 workshops and exhibition spaces. In addition to the participation, support, and sponsorship of a number of different businesses. The accumulated annual growth rate in the number of workshops and spaces, close to 8 %, has meant that in just 6 editions the number of places has grown by almost 200 %.

There is almost unanimous agreement among the people interviewed regarding the consequences of the festival in different sub-sections: for the artists, the neighborhood, and the city.

For the artists:

- Greater recognition of the participating artists.
- The expansion of the market, not of the highest category, for art among the participants, mainly through direct sales in ateliers.
- The generation of synergies between the artists.
- The creation of parallel cultural activities.
- Possibilities for new exhibitions for artists.
- Processes of optimization of spaces for artistic creation, in addition to an increase in the number of shared workshops.
- Diversification of the activities carried out by artists, who go from being mere producers of work to being content creators, activity managers, community managers, plastic arts teachers, marketers of work.

For the neighborhood:

- Branding of Russafa as a neighborhood of artists where creativity and tolerance prevail.
- Attraction of new artists to a creative neighborhood with local and international recognition.
- Installation of businesses related to art and creative industries.
- Economic leverage for shops and other types of businesses.
- The creation of spaces to appreciate multidisciplinary art in a neighborhood territory.

For the city:

- Inspiration for other art festivals such as Ruzafa Escénica or Circuito Bucles.
- Diffusion effect, especially among the surrounding neighborhoods.
- Creation of a cultural offer that is valued very positively by the tourism sector, an important part of Valencia's economy.

The main reasons why artists settled in the Russafa neighborhood continue to operate, but in an unequal way. While it is true that economic motives are the most important pillar of artists' installation, it is not the only one that acts. In this sense, the price per square meter in Russafa has risen considerably, so that a priori, it is not currently the main cause of attracting artists. In fact, it seems that

there has been a process of relocation of artists to other neighborhoods due to the increase in the price of rents. Nevertheless, it continues to be an area that attracts new artists of international origin from countries with a high per capita income who establish their residence and studio in the neighborhood because they consider it to be a profitable economic investment.

The creation of large new spaces for artistic creation in warehouses and large workshops, in a context of high real estate prices, is currently unfeasible, so it can be argued that it is no longer an active factor.

As active elements in the attraction of artists, centrality and proximity continue to be very present, representing economic and social value in the cities that do not go unnoticed by the artists' guild.

Another motivation that is currently very present in the attraction of artists in Russafa is the existence of an artists' collective, a guild, which is known and recognized in the streets of the neighborhood, and which favors synergies in a creative neighborhood environment.

Touristification

Tourism in Valencia

As seen in table 1, numbers of tourists in the city of Valencia have been steadily increasing since the beginning of the 21st century. Overnight stays at hotels increased 28.7 % between 2006 and 2015 and by 21.5 % between 2015 and 2019. Overnight stays at touristic apartments increased by 1,167.2 % between 2006 and 2015 and by 91.6 % between 2015 and 2019.

Table 1. Tourist overnight stays in Valencia: 2006, 2015, and 2019

Country of Residence	2019		2015		2006	
	Hotels	Apartments	Hotels	Apartments	Hotels	Apartments
Total	4,352,588	1,022,274	3,582,031	533,553	2,783,356	42,106
Residents of Spain	1,492,520	250,683	1,547,538	168,768	1,645,438	18,627
Non-Residents of Spain	2,860,068	771,592	2,034,493	364,785	1,137,918	23,479

Source: INE Hoteles y Apartamentos Turísticos - Encuesta de ocupación.

As of March 8th, 2023, there were found to be a total of 432 registered tourist apartments, 6 hotels, and 14 travel agencies in the neighborhood of Russafa. Of the 432 tourist apartments, A Kernel Density analysis was conducted, revealing high concentrations in the following areas: Intersection of Carrer Sueca and Carrer Dénia; Carrer Buenos Aires; Carrer del Cleroc.

A comparison of Russafa with Ciutat Vella showed that tourist apartment concentrations in Russafa approach densities seen in Ciutat Vella, which has traditionally been the center of tourist overnight stays.

Table 2. Registered Tourism Services in Russafa and Ciutat Vella: March 2023

	Russafa		Ciutat Vella	
	Total	Density (km ²)	Total	Density (km ²)
Area (km ²)	0.89		1.69	
Tourist apartments	432	485.92	1,332	788.24
Hotels	6	6.75	65	38.47
Travel agencies	14	15.75	39	23.08

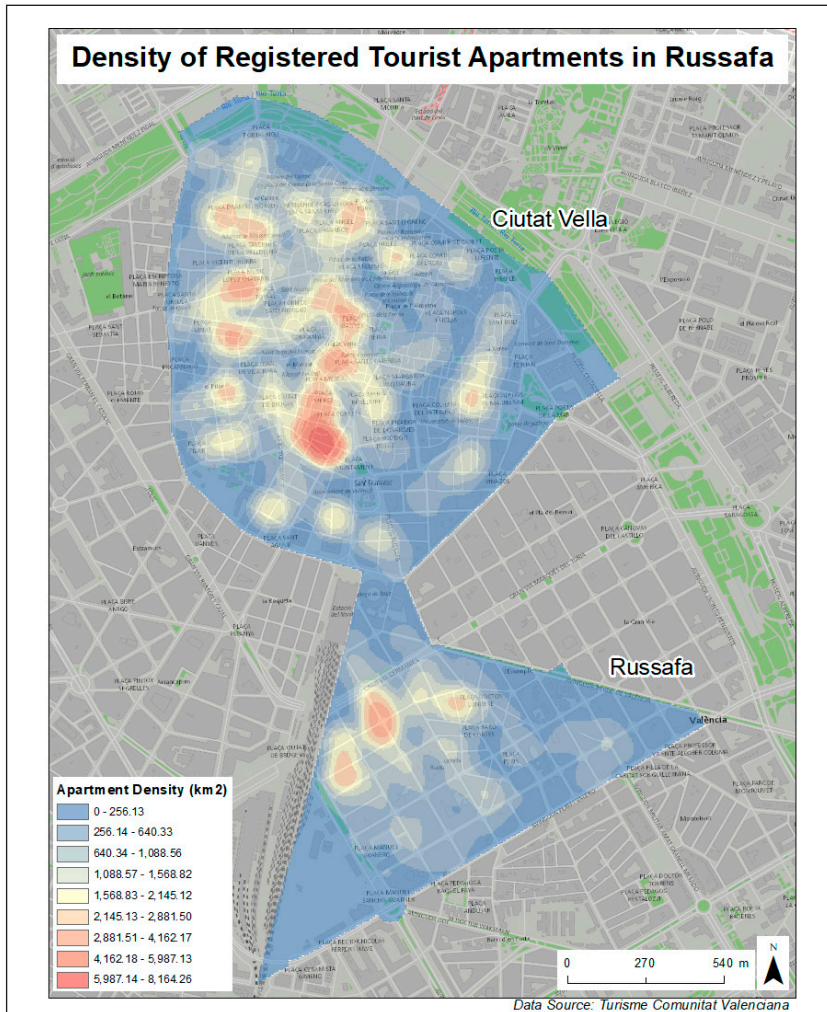
Source: Generalitat Valenciana Oficina de Turismo.

Table 3 shows the evolution of the composition of commerce in the Russafa neighborhood in Valencia between the years 2020 and 2023. Between these years, tourism, nightlife, and apartments and hotels saw increases of 5.6 %, 2.0 %, and 0.4 % respectively, while there was a decrease in the number of food shops.

Table 3. Comparison of Economic Census of Russafa: 2020 and 2023

Sector	2020 (% of total)	2023 (% of total)	Variation 2020-2023
Food shops	33.80	18.10	-5.70
Tourism	16.80	22.40	5.60
Nightlife venues	4.40	6.40	2.00
Apartments and hotels	8.10	8.50	0.40

Figure 3. Density of registered tourism apartments in Russafa: 2023



This data suggests a growing interest in the neighborhood's tourism and nightlife establishments, and, although the increase is not significant, it suggests an upward trend in the tourism and lodging industry in the neighborhood. Additionally, the drop in food shops suggests significant changes in the complexion of day-to-day activities.

Tourism infrastructure

Considering its booming tourism sector, it is no surprise that Valencia, at the municipal level, has invested in tourism infrastructure through projects such as Visit Valencia (<https://www.visitvalencia.com/>),

a website maintained by the Visit Valencia Foundation, which aims to promote tourism in the city. Additionally, the municipality offers platforms like its GeoPortal Agenda SmartCity, which shows WiFi access points, wheelchair accessible areas, locations of special events in the city, and taxi stands with real-time status (<https://geoportal.valencia.es/apps/GeoportalHome/es/inicio/agenda-digital-y-smartcity>).

In Russafa, this increase in tourism was visible during observation walks. A grand majority of restaurants and bars offer menus in English, along with other languages such as German, French, Italian, or Dutch. There is no shortage of tour companies visible from the street, with the majority concentrated along the streets of Carrer Sueca and Carrer Dénia, which lie at the heart of the regenerated sector.

PROBLEMS AND CONFLICTS

Housing market and demographic changes

As observed in the chapter dedicated to the special rehabilitation plan of the Russafa neighborhood, improvements in infrastructure and urban amenities have led to changes and consequences in various urban areas such as public services, transportation, security, and the local economy, resulting in improvements in urban quality of life for residents but triggering speculative effects in the real estate market.

Gentrification is an urban process that is playing out in Russafa. The neighborhood was originally composed of working-class residents, but the neighborhood's improvements and its central location in the city of Valencia have made it very attractive to emerging middle-class individuals, generating dynamics of replacement among the neighborhood residents, and encouraging a series of creative and cultural activities.

The new residents with higher incomes feed back into the real estate market, putting pressure on property prices and rental costs, and by incentivizing private investors to buy land or renovate deteriorated buildings. These dynamics initiate the process of resident renewal.

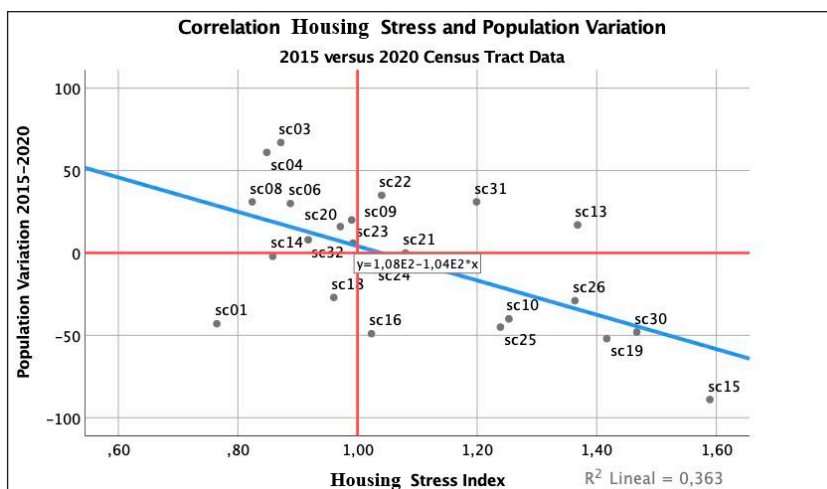
For the analysis of the real estate market, data with high territorial granularity has been considered, including rental prices per square meter and average household income at the census tract level (see rental indices: <https://www.mitma.gob.es/vivienda/alquiler/indice-alquiler>). The housing stress index is a ratio of prices to household incomes relative to the behavior of the same variables at the city level. The index takes a value of 1 or higher when the increase in rent/household income is above the average in the city of Valencia, pressuring households in the neighborhood to seek housing at better prices elsewhere in or outside the city.

This stress index is crucial for household decision-making because it is known that rent is one of the main expenses in the family budget. Therefore, an exhaustive cross-analysis of demographic data has been conducted to detect variables that have statistical significance in the analysis of linear correlations. The demographic data used comes from the municipal registry and represents the evolution during the same analysis period from 2015 to 2020.

Here we address the main findings that confirm and characterize the process of urban gentrification in the Russafa neighborhood. The first observation is the sustained population decline in the Russafa neighborhood over the past 20 years. Between 2006 and 2022 the population fell from 25,500 to 24,000. One possible explanation for this population decrease is real estate speculation and the increase in rental prices. For example, many apartments that were originally intended for residential purposes have been converted for tourism.

The housing stress index is inversely related to population variation during the period from 2015 to 2020. This means that in many sectors of the neighborhood, rent increases are above the city average in Valencia, leading to the expulsion and regeneration of residents.

Figure 4. Housing stress and population



The housing stress index is more closely related to the displacement of native Spanish residents in those sectors of the neighborhood that have been subject to higher real estate speculation, coincidentally aligning with the sectors that have been impacted by urban rehabilitation programs. On the contrary, there is a relationship with European Union foreigners who have been attracted to several sectors of the neighborhood that have increased their rental prices.

Figure 5. Housing stress and Spanish population

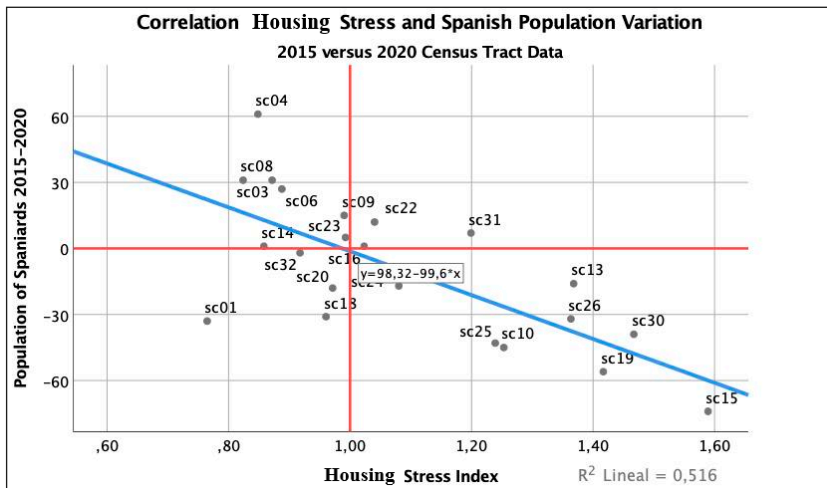
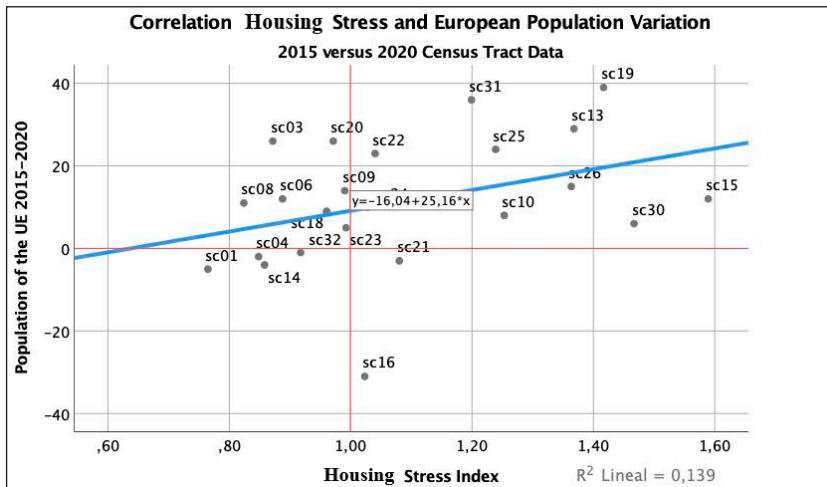
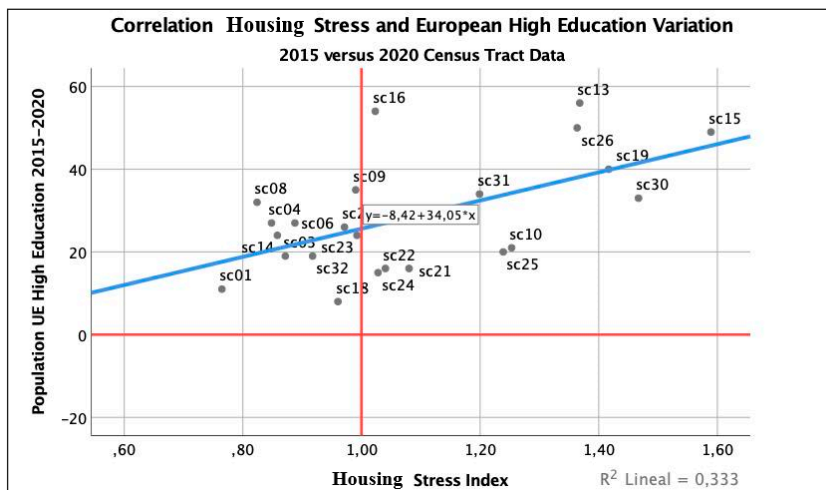


Figure 6. Housing stress and European population



This relationship becomes more evident among European Union foreigners with higher levels of education. This group has a profile of “digital nomads” with high incomes, allowing them to afford higher rental prices.

Figure 7. Housing stress and educated europeans



In conclusion, the neighborhood has undergone increases and demographic gentrification, displacing traditional or native residents due to rent increases, and attracting new types of residents with higher incomes and education levels. The sectors of the neighborhood that have been demographically regenerated coincide with the sectors that have undergone urban rehabilitation, acquiring greater value and real estate dynamism.

Nightlife and noise pollution

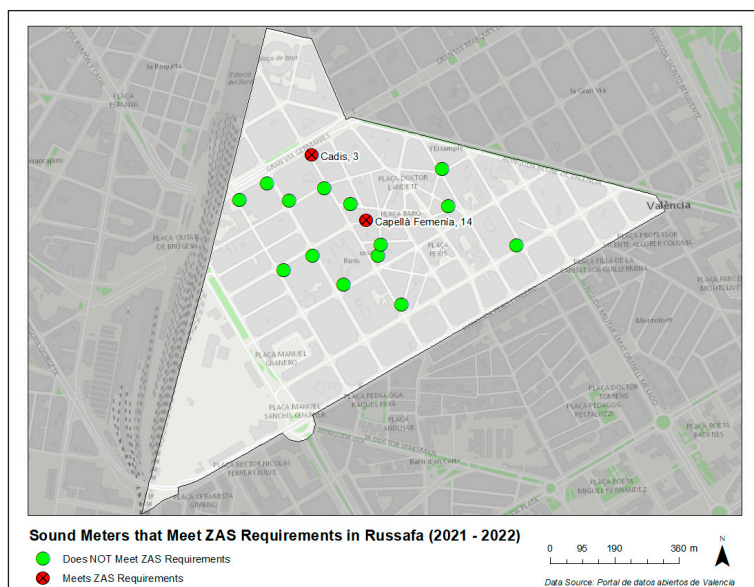
Noise pollution

Noise pollution has become a growing problem in Russafa, with neighborhood groups such as *Russafa Descansa* organizing to pressure the municipality into acting against excessive noise. This has led to the installation by the municipality of Valencia of sound meters in multiple locations around the neighborhood. These sound meters record decibels levels at multiple points throughout the day and night, which can be analyzed to determine if a certain sector meets the necessary requirements to be deemed an *Acoustically Saturated Zone* (^aZAS).

^a Defined in the municipal *Ordenanza Municipal De Protección Contra La Contaminación Acústica* of 2008, Acoustically Saturated Zones are those in which elevated noise levels are produced due to the existence of numerous recreational activities, shows or public establishments, people, traffic, or any other activity that affects the saturation of the noise level in the area. Established levels are exceeded by 20 dB(A) twice a week for three consecutive weeks or three alternate weeks for a period of 35 calendar days. The parameter to consider is LAeq during any hour of the night period (1hr) and LAeq for the entire day period (14hrs). Established baseline levels are 55 dB(A) during the day (08:00 - 22:00 hrs) and 45 dB(A) during the night (22:00 - 08:00 hrs).

Of the 16 sound meters analyzed for the years of 2021 and 2022, two reached ZAS requirements. The meter located at Cadis, 3 reached nighttime decibel readings ranging from 65.2 to 66.2 on six nights between November 25th and December 17th, 2022. The meter located at Capellà Femenia reached ZAS levels during two separate periods: six nights between June 5th and June 25th, 2022, with a range of readings from 65.2 to 80.8 decibels and six nights between September 19th and October 9th, 2021 with readings ranging from 65.1 to 67.7 decibels.

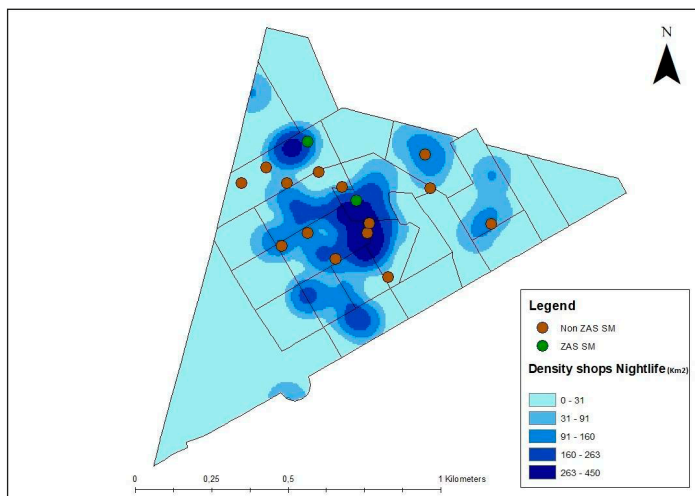
Figure 8. Sound meters in Russafa



Nightlife

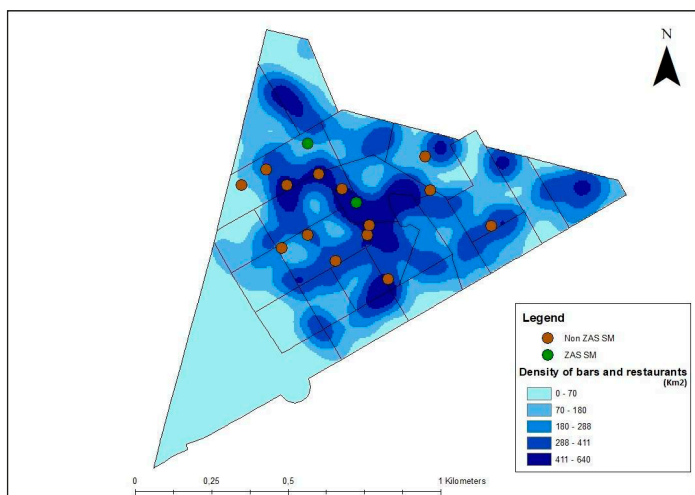
A comparison of the density of nightlife establishments (restaurants, nightclubs, bars, etc.) with the location of sound level meters in the neighborhood was carried out to verify if the perception of the neighborhood residents, neighborhood associations, and some merchants aligns with sound meter readings. This comparison allows us to ask the following questions: *Are the sound level meters properly located? Is there a considerable density of businesses related to nightlife?* Thanks to the commercial censuses of 2020 and 2023, we can answer these questions.

Figure 9. Density of nightlife establishments (2023) and the locations sound level meters (SM)



As we can see in figure 9, the sound level meters that reach ZAS requirements (green circles) are located in areas with the highest density of nightlife venues. Additionally, if we include the sound level meters from non-ZAS areas (brown circles), we can see how the central area, the largest and most intense on the map, is almost entirely covered. It is true that in the southern part of the neighborhood we find areas with high density of nightlife venues that are not covered by these sound level meters. The same happens in the northern extreme, where we see sound level meters located in both areas with low and high density of nightlife.

Figure 10. Density of bars and restaurants in Russafa: Commercial census 2023



Now, looking at figure 10, we can see that virtually the entire neighborhood has a medium-high density of restaurants and bars, which have terraces and usually close around midnight or even a little later. This, as we have observed in the interviews, is one of the complaints of the residents.

Regarding the location of the sound level meters, we can see that the density of businesses is high both inside and outside the ZAS areas, with the area encompassing a high density of businesses being larger than the area covered by the sound level meters. In this case, this distribution does align with the complaints of the residents. Finally, we see that the central area, where the oldest network of streets and the Mercat de Russafa are located, among other businesses, is where we find the highest number of such businesses.

DISCUSSION AND INTERPRETATION OF RESULTS

In this study, we used both qualitative and quantitative research methods to explore the urban dynamics of Russafa, Valencia, with the specific objective of examining the processes behind the neighborhood's evolution over the past decades and how they resulted in the conflicts between stakeholders that can be seen there today.

An investigation of past and present urban processes was carried out to achieve this. The following processes were examined: municipal intervention in public spaces; changing demographics; the role of the creative economy, and tourism. The study of these interconnected processes yielded results that help shed light on conflicts that are regularly associated with gentrification and rapid neighborhood evolution, such as noise pollution and excessive nightlife, a weakening social fabric, and increased housing stress. A better understanding of these processes and conflicts has allowed us to explore what this urban dynamic means for the neighborhood as well as possibilities to mitigate current and future conflicts.

Factors explaining current processes in progress

Looking at the evolution of the neighborhood from a temporal perspective, multiple waves of demographic changes since the 1970s due to out-migration spurred a series of developments that resulted in a neighborhood ripe for real estate speculation and the conflicts that are seen today. Unfortunately, projects carried out by the local government were only partially completed or did not consider how tertiary sector interests could impact quality of life, and they ultimately created conditions that attracted new residents and tourists while doing very little to improve the neighborhood dynamic for current residents.

Russaafa exemplifies how well-intentioned but seemingly minor urban interventions can accumulate over time, resulting in unintended social and economic consequences.

Urban renewal is a common strategy employed by local governments, and Russafa became a focal point of revitalization efforts, including sidewalk expansion and other urban projects. Our findings indicate that these projects only served to attract new businesses, especially those with outdoor seating, and create excessive noise, which contradict the claim that pedestrianization reduces noise pollution, as noise pollution is a primary point of conflict in the neighborhood (Peck, 2005). In fact, the RIVA plan was cited multiple times throughout our study as the true inflection point that led to the neighborhood

conflicts we see today. Future urban renewal projects must consider this factor and develop solutions that do not only speak to the commercial interests of the area.

Beyond this, skyrocketing housing costs are a blight for long-time residents in the neighborhood that has accelerated its demographic changes. What was once a culturally diverse neighborhood where immigrants and locals lived in a close-knit community is now made up of a neighborhood increasingly shaped by tourism and housing speculation, which continues to displace residents and weaken the existing social fabric. Community engagement is seen less and less in the neighborhood, and incorporating new residents into the community associations has proven to be a major hurdle for what were once important neighborhood associations.

The evolution of the neighborhood also created the conditions necessary to attract artists throughout multiple decades. Their role in the neighborhood is felt today, as Russafa is the home to many *ateliers* and galleries. This worked in conjunction with the multicultural aspect of the neighborhood to establish an area known for cultural and creative activities, which is a primary agent in attracting the creative class as well as tourists both short and long term (Florida, 2003). This dynamic, as with the other processes examined in this study, has exacerbated the issues of housing prices and the social fabric of the community.

In summary, our findings clearly indicate that degradation in the neighborhood laid the foundations for demographic shifts, which is an early indicator of gentrification processes. Unfortunately, public regeneration projects in the neighborhood only served to attract further private investment, which accelerated demographic and social change. Faced with the physical inability to increase the housing stock, expected tourism growth, and a likely continuation of demographic shifts, the future of Russafa will undoubtedly be a complex flashpoint of urban dynamics moving forward.

Prospective and possibilities for intervention

During this study, it has become evident that Russafa has undergone considerable changes throughout its history. We have observed how the neighborhood went from being a degraded sector to becoming a trendy neighborhood that presents urban challenges. This process was largely motivated by the arrival of creative industries, mainly artistic, which gave a new face to the neighborhood, making it more attractive not only for the other inhabitants of the city but for a certain type of global population.

Although the arrival of new residents linked to the arts was a relevant element for the revitalization of the neighborhood, so were the different measures and intervention plans promoted and managed by the local administration. Among them, the RIVA Plan stands out, which, despite not fulfilling all its objectives, with the urban rehabilitation carried out in certain streets triggered a process of gentrification.

It can be assumed that if the situation continues without intervention, the process of gentrification will continue, even displacing the actors that form and maintain the creative industry, one of the main attractions of the neighborhood. Similarly, the reduction of traditional stores will continue, being replaced by new stores oriented to the new classes of higher purchasing power.

Likewise, the process of touristification, which has encouraged the proliferation of tourist apartments, increasing the value of rents and homes, could continue to further impact residents by decreasing the number of homes available for local inhabitants and increasing forced displacements of residents.

These two processes can lead to a socioeconomic homogenization of the neighborhood, turning the sector into a segregated area with no social mix, further degrading the social fabric.

In response to the possible problems, a series of intervention possibilities with the potential to reduce the negative effects of the evolution observed in Russafa are presented below.

The local administration must guarantee access to housing for all social classes, promoting social mixing, through the implementation of plans and actions that include the construction or designation of subsidized housing.

Additionally, regulations should be adjusted, and control mechanisms should be improved to regulate tourist apartments in the neighborhood. In this way, housing prices should be kept similar to those of other neighborhoods in the city.

It is worth mentioning that citizen participation in urban planning is a good way to manage gentrified spaces and spaces in the process of gentrification. Incorporating the vision of residents allows the implementation of bottom-up measures, which can be more sustainable than plans imposed by public administrations.

Finally, a proposal of strategic retail plans that focus on keeping both traditional businesses and creative industries in the neighborhood will further strengthen the social fabric and act to preserve the social and commercial mix.

CONCLUSION

The neighborhood of Russafa in Valencia, Spain is one of the city's trendiest areas, but there are several points of conflict that have emerged over the past decade as a result of urban dynamics and public administration. In this study, we set out to better understand the processes behind these conflicts, namely municipal intervention in public spaces; changing demographics; the role of the creative economy, and tourism. Through this investigation, we can make the following conclusions about the neighborhood:

- Russafa has changed in two decades driven by the creative industries associated with visual artists.
- There have been gentrification processes.
- There have been processes of touristification.
- Although there are conflicts, the local population has realized that the neighborhood is better off than before.
- Art and artists have been the precursors of gentrification.
- Art and artists have been catalysts for gentrification and touristification.
- The main drivers of gentrification have been market forces and speculative investment.
- The processes are still underway, and the future of the neighborhood will depend mainly on the rules and regulations of the local administration.

In the context of Russafa, it is very likely that the forces that have actively been pushing long-term residents out of the neighborhood and causing conflicts that place dangerous stress on the social fabric will continue. For this reason, these conclusions and how they were developed should be considered

before any future public works in the neighborhood. Additionally, these conclusions about Russafa can be adapted and applied to other economically and/or socially blighted neighborhoods adjacent to dynamic centers of tourism in an effort to consider all possible outcomes of public and private investment.

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The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest in the development of this research.

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