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Research Article

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Madrid Beyond Capitality
From the Concentration of Power to the Architecture of Shared Futures

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Abstract

Madrid's position as Spain's political capital, economic centre, transport hub, and international gateway provides substantial opportunities for urban and territorial development. However, the concentration of institutional authority, investment, infrastructure, and economic activity does not necessarily translate into inclusive prosperity, balanced metropolitan development, or shared public value. This study examines how Madrid can redefine its capitality by moving beyond concentration towards a model of metropolitan connectivity, institutional coordination, and shared value. It investigates the relationships between metropolitan governance, spatial and social equity, research and innovation, infrastructure development, environmental resilience, and international cooperation, asking how these dimensions can be integrated into a coherent development framework. The study adopts a qualitative, document-based research design, using the provided document as its primary analytical source and drawing on relevant policy, planning, and institutional literature to contextualise its proposals. The analysis is structured around five interrelated dimensions: metropolitan governance and intermunicipal coordination; the distribution of housing, employment, transport, and public services; the translation of research and innovation into productive activity and public benefit; the social and environmental consequences of infrastructure and urban transformation; and Madrid's capacity to establish sustained partnerships across European, Iberian, and Ibero-American networks. Particular attention is given to the institutional fragmentation between municipalities and levels of government, the uneven geography of opportunity, and the mechanisms required to translate strategic ambitions into measurable outcomes. The articles's central argument is that Madrid's existing assets are necessary but insufficient conditions for inclusive development and effective international leadership. Their broader value depends on institutional capacity, coordinated investment, equitable access to opportunity, and accountability for social and environmental outcomes. Metropolitan development must therefore be assessed not solely through aggregate economic growth, infrastructure expansion, or international visibility, but through its effects on housing affordability, accessibility, employment quality, public services, environmental resilience, and territorial cohesion. Because the available document does not establish empirical outcomes for these dimensions, the study treats them as analytical priorities requiring further assessment rather than as demonstrated results. The study advances the concept of ***"capitality beyond concentration"*** *as a framework for evaluating Madrid's future development. It proposes that Madrid's success should be measured by its capacity to connect institutions, communities, and territories; distribute the benefits of growth more equitably; and strengthen cooperation beyond its administrative and economic core. By reframing capitality as a relational and shared capacity rather than merely a concentration of functions, the study offers a basis for developing a more inclusive, resilient, and territorially balanced metropolitan future.*

Keywords: Madrid, Capitality Beyond Concentration, Metropolitan Governance, Spatial Equity, Urban Development, Innovation, Environmental Resilience, Territorial Cohesion

Every tradition tells a meaningful story,
Heritage teaches us where we come from,
Creativity strengthens human connection,
And art keeps memory alive.
-Infanta Sofia B. Ortiz

1. The Question after Success

Madrid has spent centuries becoming the capital of Spain. Its next historical challenge is to discover what it means to be a capital in a Europe and in a World that no longer needs capitals to perform quite the same functions.

The distinction matters. A capital can concentrate political authority, corporate headquarters, financial resources, transport connections and international attention. Madrid has become exceptionally successful at doing so. Its regional economy grew by 3.3% in 2024, according to the regional government's published figures, continuing a period of strong economic performance. Yet economic growth alone cannot determine the purpose of the metropolis that Madrid is becoming. Source: Comunidad de Madrid, 2025.

The decisive question is no longer simply how Madrid can become more competitive, attract more investment or acquire greater international influence. It is whether the city can transform its accumulated centrality into something more valuable: the capacity to connect territories, produce knowledge, manage shared risks and expand opportunities beyond its own boundaries.

This is the proposition of *Madrid Beyond Capitality:* a new theory of metropolitan development in which the capital's legitimacy derives not primarily from the functions it concentrates, but from the value it creates for the networks of which it forms part.

Madrid should not seek to become another Paris, London or Frankfurt. Nor should it imitate a generic model of the global city, measured by skyscrapers, investment flows, international rankings and the density of corporate headquarters.

Its opportunity is more distinctive. Madrid could become a democratic Atlantic metropolis: a European centre for cooperation between Europe and the Ibero-American world, a laboratory for the challenges of southern European urbanism, and a coordinating force within a more balanced Spanish territorial system.

This would require more than a new international brand. It would require a different conception of urbanism, institutional development, public investment and political responsibility.

1.1. The Inheritance of Capitality

Madrid's present position reflects several historical layers.
The first is administrative. The city became the political centre of the Spanish monarchy and subsequently the state, accumulating institutions, infrastructure and economic activities associated with government.

The second is metropolitan. Industrialisation, migration, transport investment and post-war housing production transformed Madrid into a much larger urban region. Its expansion was neither socially uniform nor architecturally coherent. Working-class settlements, planned housing estates, peripheral industrial areas and new residential developments emerged under different political and economic conditions.

The third is corporate and financial. During the democratic period and particularly as Spain became more integrated into European and global markets, Madrid consolidated its position as a centre for corporate decision-making, professional services, finance, telecommunications and national administration.

These layers reinforce one another. Political institutions attract professional services; professional services attract headquarters; headquarters increase demand for transport and office space; connectivity strengthens the attraction of further investment.

The resulting agglomeration can generate real economic advantages. But it can also produce cumulative territorial imbalances. When a capital attracts a disproportionate share of high-value functions, other regions may lose headquarters, specialised employment, investment and decision-making capacity.

This is not an argument against Madrid's success. It is an argument for asking what that success should accomplish.

Madrid is divided into 21 districts and 131 barrios, each with its own local identity and needs.
The city is governed by Madrid City Council (Ayuntamiento de Madrid), led by the Mayor and elected councillors. The council manages public services, transport, urban planning, housing, safety and environmental policies.

Each district has a Municipal District Board that coordinates local services and represents neighbourhood interests. Governance is supported by municipal programmes, budgets, development plans and citizen participation initiatives.

To strengthen governance, Madrid can encourage citizen participation through neighbourhood meetings, public consultations and participatory budgeting, which allows residents to propose and vote on local projects such as improving parks, repairing streets and creating cycling lanes.

Transparency can be improved through open data, clear public spending reports and stronger accountability mechanisms. Finally, greater investment in local services, affordable housing, green spaces and digital tools can promote inclusive, effective and sustainable governance.

A mature capital should be judged not only by its own productivity, but also by whether it strengthens the productive capacities of the wider country. It should help regions access markets, knowledge, finance and international networks without requiring them to

surrender their own institutional and economic vitality.

The strategic transition is therefore from centrality as a privilege to centrality as a responsibility.

1.2. From the Global City to the Intermediary Metropolis

The familiar global-city model rewards the concentration of financial capital, talent, headquarters and international connectivity. These functions will remain important to Madrid. The problem is treating them as a sufficient vision of the future.

The emerging challenges of the twenty-first century are increasingly networked and interdependent. Climate adaptation requires cooperation across river basins and energy systems. Scientific progress depends on international research networks. Housing pressures extend across municipal boundaries. Democratic resilience depends on public institutions, trusted information and civic participation. Strategic autonomy requires not only access to global markets but also the capacity to sustain essential knowledge, infrastructure and productive capabilities.

These challenges suggest a different metropolitan role: the intermediary metropolis.

An intermediary metropolis does not merely receive global flows. It translates them into shared capabilities. It connects research to industry, finance to long-term investment, infrastructure to territorial development, and international cooperation to practical institutional learning.

Madrid possesses several advantages for this role. It combines national political institutions, a substantial university and research ecosystem, extensive transport connections, a Spanish-speaking international environment and established relationships across Europe and Latin America.

However, these advantages should not be confused with an accomplished mission. Madrid's international position does not automatically make it a leading centre for scientific cooperation, climate adaptation or transatlantic governance. Those functions require institutions, funding, partnerships and measurable results.

The task is to build them deliberately.

This distinction also changes how Madrid should understand its relationship with Europe. The city need not compete to reproduce the specific functions of Brussels, Frankfurt or Paris. It can develop complementary specialisations in urban resilience, Iberian cooperation, Ibero-American research networks and the governance of metropolitan transformation.

The objective is not to claim that Madrid is uniquely qualified to lead every one of these fields. It is to identify where its geographical, linguistic, institutional and economic advantages could support a distinctive contribution.

1.3. Urban Development of Madrid

Madrid's urban development is shaped by a complex relationship between regional authority, municipal autonomy and metropolitan interdependence. Navarro highlights the distinctive evolution of Spanish metropolitan areas and the particular governance challenges faced by Madrid. Unlike metropolitan regions governed by a dedicated metropolitan authority, Madrid relies heavily on the Community of Madrid to coordinate policies across its territory. However, regional authority does not automatically ensure integrated metropolitan planning. Ahrend et al. demonstrate the importance of metropolitan governance arrangements in coordinating policies across fragmented administrative boundaries. In Madrid, the absence of a single, comprehensive metropolitan government creates challenges for aligning land use, housing, transport and infrastructure investment.

The Community of Madrid encompasses 179 municipalities, each with its own local planning responsibilities and development priorities. These municipalities are nevertheless interconnected through commuting, housing markets, economic activity and shared environmental resources. Consequently, decisions taken by one municipality can generate infrastructure costs and transport pressures in neighbouring jurisdictions. The OECD's territorial review of Madrid provides an important foundation for understanding the region's institutional arrangements and development challenges. Huerta Melchor and Cañamás Catalá further identify administrative fragmentation as an obstacle to coordinating transport planning and improving accessibility across the Community of Madrid. Their analysis highlights the importance of connecting regional mobility strategies with urban development and land-use decisions. Weak coordination can encourage dispersed development, increase commuting distances and make public transport provision less efficient. It can also complicate efforts to deliver affordable housing, protect green spaces and reduce socioeconomic inequalities between municipalities.

The OECD argues that effective city governance requires coordination across policy sectors and administrative boundaries. This is particularly relevant to Madrid, where housing, transport, environmental management and economic development are distributed across different institutional responsibilities. Similarly, the OECD emphasises that decentralisation must be accompanied by adequate administrative, technical and financial capacity. Municipal governments need sufficient expertise and resources to fulfil their planning responsibilities effectively. Smaller municipalities may face particular difficulties maintaining specialised planning teams and managing complex development projects. The OECD's analysis of inter-municipal cooperation suggests that shared services, joint planning arrangements and collaborative investment can help overcome such capacity constraints. For Madrid, these approaches could improve coordination without requiring the abolition of municipal autonomy. Practical reforms could include a stronger regional spatial-development strategy, integrated housing and transport planning, shared geographic information systems and formal agreements between neighbouring municipalities. A systematic review of

municipal planning departments could also identify staffing shortages, procedural delays, overlapping responsibilities and gaps in technical expertise. Performance indicators could then be used to monitor planning efficiency, infrastructure delivery and cross-municipal coordination. Ultimately, Madrid's central challenge is not simply excessive decentralisation or insufficient regional authority, but the difficulty of translating existing institutional powers into coherent metropolitan development. Strengthening administrative capacity and inter-municipal cooperation would help align local planning decisions with regional priorities. This would support more coordinated, accessible, environmentally sustainable and socially inclusive urban development across the Community of Madrid.

A public library is often described as a place where books are kept and borrowed, as though its purpose could be exhausted by the movement of objects from shelves to readers and back again. Yet this description overlooks something more important: the library is one of those public institutions whose value becomes most apparent to people who have the fewest alternatives. It offers a place to study when home is too crowded, to use the internet when access to technology cannot be taken for granted, to learn a language, to attend a workshop, or simply to remain somewhere without being expected to purchase anything. Its quietness, which might appear to be a minor architectural quality, is itself a public service. For children, older residents, migrants, students, and people whose access to education and culture is limited by circumstance, the library can provide not merely information but a form of participation in the life of the city. Madrid should therefore understand its libraries as a connected civic network, with neighbourhood branches offering everyday services and larger institutions providing specialist collections, exhibitions, lecture spaces, makerspaces, and partnerships with universities and research centres. The important question is not whether a library is impressive to look at, but whether people can reach it, afford to use its services, find it open when they need it, and recognize that it belongs to them.

Something similar might be said of the trees, parks, and open spaces that cities sometimes treat as embellishments, as if nature were an agreeable addition to urban life rather than one of the conditions that make it bearable. In Madrid, where summer heat can make the distance between a shaded street and an exposed one more consequential than a map would suggest, the distribution of green infrastructure is also a question of social justice. Investment should begin by identifying the neighbourhoods in which environmental disadvantage and social vulnerability coincide: those with insufficient tree cover, high temperatures, limited access to parks, poor air quality, or inadequate protection against flooding. The response might involve planting trees, creating shaded pedestrian routes, restoring ecological corridors, improving soils, introducing permeable surfaces, and designing public spaces suited to the city's increasingly demanding climatic conditions. But planting a tree is only the beginning of a responsibility, not its conclusion; species must be appropriate, water must be managed carefully, and maintenance must continue long after the inauguration photographs have been taken. Nor should a newly attractive public space be considered an unquestionable success if rising property values eventually force the people it was intended to benefit to move elsewhere. Green investment must therefore be accompanied by affordable housing measures, community participation, and sustained evaluation of its environmental and social effects. Otherwise, a policy designed to correct inequality may simply give it a more attractive appearance.

The same caution applies to modernization itself, a word that is usually spoken as though it contained its own justification. Cities must change, of course, because their inhabitants change, their needs change, and the buildings and institutions that once served them adequately may cease to do so. But it does not follow that whatever is new is necessarily better, or that whatever is old has outlived its usefulness. Before Madrid replaces a building, transforms a public space, or undertakes a major redevelopment, it should establish what is failing, what can be repaired, and what possesses a cultural, architectural, or social value that cannot readily be recovered once destroyed. Retrofitting an existing building may improve energy efficiency and accessibility while preserving a continuity that demolition would interrupt; protecting a historic street may retain not only its physical form but also the accumulated associations through which residents recognize their city as their own. Each intervention should consequently be judged by the public purpose it serves and by its effects on housing, mobility, services, environmental performance, and neighbourhood life. Its success should be monitored after completion, when the promises made during planning can finally be compared with the conditions people actually experience.

Madrid's challenge, then, is not to choose between progress and preservation, as though the two were opposing camps from which it must select a permanent allegiance. It is to distinguish necessary change from change undertaken merely because it is possible, and genuine improvement from the appearance of improvement. Libraries should expand people's access to knowledge; green spaces should make neighbourhoods healthier and more habitable; modernization should repair what is inadequate without destroying what is irreplaceable. These objectives belong to the same conception of the city: one in which public investment is justified not by the novelty of what it produces, but by the lasting value it creates for the people who live there.

1.4. Scientific Argument

Madrid's development has been shaped by the concentration of political power, public investment, infrastructure and economic activity in Spain's capital. This concentration has strengthened Madrid's economic performance and international profile, but it has also raised questions about unequal access to housing, employment, public services and opportunities across the metropolitan area and the wider country. This research argues that Madrid's long-term competitiveness and legitimacy depend not only on attracting investment and expanding infrastructure, but also on its ability to translate these advantages into shared economic, social and environmental value.

The study introduces the concept of **"capitality beyond concentration"** to examine how Madrid can move from a model based on the centralisation of resources and functions towards one based on connectivity, cooperation and shared development. This approach considers four interrelated dimensions: institutional coordination, knowledge and innovation, social and spatial equity, and environmental resilience. These dimensions influence one another. Innovation creates greater public value when it connects research institutions with businesses, workers and education systems. Transport investment is more equitable when it is coordinated with housing, employment and public services. Similarly, international partnerships become more effective when they produce lasting institutional relationships, shared knowledge and measurable outcomes.

The research will investigate how Madrid can use its existing strengths, including universities, research organisations, businesses, cultural institutions, transport networks and public authorities, to support more inclusive metropolitan development. It will also examine how stronger coordination between municipal, regional and national institutions could improve planning and implementation. The objective is to identify the conditions under which Madrid can reinforce its international role while reducing spatial inequalities and contributing to greater territorial cohesion across Spain.

1.5. Scope of the Research

The research will examine Madrid as a metropolitan system whose development depends on relationships between the capital, surrounding municipalities and wider territorial networks. It will focus on metropolitan governance, the distribution of opportunities and resources, innovation and productivity, infrastructure and urban transformation, environmental resilience, and international cooperation.

Particular attention will be given to the relationship between central and southern areas of Madrid, where differences in employment opportunities, housing conditions, accessibility and public amenities can reveal important spatial inequalities. The study will also examine how planning decisions affect the distribution of investment and the relationship between urban development and environmental quality.

A further focus will be the institutional capacity to coordinate policies across administrative boundaries. This includes the responsibilities of Madrid City Council, the Community of Madrid, the Spanish national government and neighbouring municipalities. The research will consider how fragmented responsibilities, differences in technical capacity and weak coordination may affect the implementation of urban strategies.

The study will also investigate the relationship between Madrid's innovation ecosystem and its wider economic and social development. It will assess whether research, business activity and public investment generate quality employment, improve productivity and expand opportunities beyond established economic centres. International cooperation, particularly within European, Iberian and Ibero-American networks, will be examined in terms of its practical contributions to knowledge exchange, institutional learning and shared development.

The analysis will distinguish between policy ambitions, existing institutional capabilities, implementation mechanisms and measurable results. It will not assume that Madrid's economic strength, geographical position or existing infrastructure automatically translate into inclusive development or international leadership. Instead, these outcomes will be assessed against available evidence.

1.6. Research Objectives

1.6.1. General Objective

To develop and evaluate an evidence-based framework for understanding how Madrid can transform its position as Spain's capital into a model of connected, inclusive and sustainable metropolitan development that generates shared economic, social, environmental and institutional value.

1.6.2. Specific Objectives

- Analyse the historical, political and economic processes that have shaped the concentration of power, investment and infrastructure in Madrid.
- Examine the distribution of employment, housing, public services, transport accessibility and investment across the metropolitan area, identifying persistent spatial inequalities.
- Assess how Madrid's universities, research organisations, businesses and public institutions connect innovation with productivity, employment and public value.
- Evaluate how administrative capacity and coordination between municipal, regional and national authorities influence urban planning and the implementation of metropolitan strategies.
- Investigate how housing, transport, urban regeneration and public amenities can be planned together to improve accessibility and reduce inequality.
- Examine how biodiversity protection, green infrastructure and climate adaptation can contribute to environmental resilience and more equitable neighbourhoods.
- Identify the institutional conditions needed to establish effective and reciprocal cooperation between Madrid and European, Iberian and Ibero-American partners.
- Develop indicators for evaluating whether metropolitan development improves residents' quality of life, strengthens territorial cohesion and supports long-term economic and environmental sustainability.

Research Questions

Main Research Question

How can Madrid move beyond a model of capitality based on the concentration of power and resources towards a metropolitan model that generates shared economic, social, environmental and institutional value?

Sub-questions

- How have historical, political and economic processes shaped Madrid's concentration of political authority, investment, infrastructure and economic opportunities?
- How are employment, housing, public services, transport accessibility and public investment distributed across Madrid's metropolitan area?
- Which institutional and economic factors determine whether research and innovation generate productivity, quality employment and wider public benefits?
- How do administrative fragmentation and differences in institutional capacity affect coordination between Madrid's municipalities and between local, regional and national governments?
- Under what conditions can infrastructure investment and urban regeneration improve connectivity without reinforcing spatial inequality or housing unaffordability?
- How can biodiversity protection, green infrastructure and climate adaptation be integrated into urban planning to improve environmental resilience and access to public amenities?
- Which institutional mechanisms can support sustained, reciprocal cooperation between Madrid and European, Iberian and Ibero-American partners?
- Which indicators can establish whether Madrid's economic growth and international development improve residents' quality of life and contribute to territorial cohesion?

1.6.3. Significance of the Research

The research connects urban governance, political economy, spatial planning and innovation policy to explain how the concentration of resources shapes metropolitan development. By examining institutional arrangements alongside economic, social and environmental outcomes, it seeks to provide a more integrated understanding of Madrid's development model. The concept of capitality beyond concentration offers a framework for investigating whether a capital can strengthen its international position while distributing the benefits of growth more widely.

The study will help assess urban and regional strategies according to their institutional feasibility, implementation capacity and measurable outcomes. It will examine how clearer responsibilities, stronger intergovernmental coordination and improved administrative capabilities can support more effective planning. The proposed framework will emphasise baseline indicators, transparent targets and regular evaluation, enabling policymakers to distinguish between announced ambitions and demonstrated results.

The research places the distribution of opportunities at the centre of metropolitan performance. It examines how housing affordability, access to employment, transport connectivity, public services, green spaces and participation vary across neighbourhoods and municipalities. This approach makes it possible to evaluate whether economic growth translates into tangible improvements in residents' daily lives, particularly in areas facing persistent disadvantages.

The study investigates how Madrid can connect its research institutions, businesses, workforce, education systems and public administration more effectively. Rather than treating investment attraction or the development of innovation districts as sufficient indicators of success, it examines whether these assets contribute to productivity, quality employment, knowledge transfer and wider economic participation. It also considers how metropolitan coordination can improve the relationship between infrastructure investment, labour markets and housing development.

Environmental resilience is treated as a fundamental dimension of urban competitiveness and social well-being. The research examines how urban planning can respond to heat, water scarcity, biodiversity loss and habitat fragmentation through green infrastructure, ecological connectivity and climate adaptation. It also considers whether environmental improvements are distributed equitably across neighbourhoods and municipalities.

The study evaluates Madrid's role within Spain and its potential to strengthen cooperation across European, Iberian and Ibero-American networks. It considers international influence not simply as an outcome of economic concentration or historical connections, but as a capacity to build lasting partnerships, exchange knowledge and develop solutions to shared challenges. Within Spain, it examines whether Madrid's central position can support stronger territorial connections and more balanced development rather than deepen existing disparities.

Ultimately, the research seeks to establish whether Madrid can combine economic dynamism and international visibility with effective governance, social inclusion, environmental resilience and territorial cohesion. Its contribution will be to identify the institutional conditions, policy mechanisms and measurable outcomes required to make this transition credible and achievable. This is an Ai analysis and a desk job.

The structure follows its practical purpose and is action-oriented in this innovative solution-oriented long essay.

2. Madrid's Urbanism: Planning, Political Economy and the Unequal Production of Metropolitan Space

Madrid constitutes a particularly revealing case through which to examine the relationship between urban planning, political power, economic restructuring and socio-spatial inequality. As Spain's political capital and one of Southern Europe's principal metropolitan centres, the city has undergone successive transformations shaped by authoritarian modernisation, post-war urban expansion, democratic decentralisation, European integration and the increasing influence of international real-estate markets. These processes have produced a complex urban landscape in which historic central districts, working-class neighbourhoods, planned housing estates, peripheral residential developments and emerging business districts coexist within an increasingly interconnected metropolitan region.

The significance of Madrid lies not merely in the scale of its urban expansion, but in the uneven social and spatial consequences of

that transformation. Although successive planning regimes have contributed to the provision of housing, the expansion of transport infrastructure and the physical modernisation of the city, these achievements have not necessarily translated into an equitable distribution of housing opportunities, employment, environmental quality or access to public space. Madrid therefore presents a fundamental question for contemporary urban studies: to what extent can urban planning reconcile economic competitiveness and metropolitan growth with social inclusion, environmental sustainability and territorial cohesion?

This review argues that Madrid's urban development is best understood through the interaction of three analytical dimensions: the political and institutional production of urban space, the political economy of land and housing, and the morphological and social performance of the built environment. Although each perspective has generated important insights, their separation limits the explanatory power of the existing literature. Historical studies illuminate the political origins of particular urban forms; political-economic analyses explain the influence of land markets and investment; and morphological research identifies relationships between urban structure, density and public life. Nevertheless, a more integrated account is required to explain how these forces interact over time and how their effects are distributed among different social groups. The central proposition is that Madrid's urban challenges cannot be understood solely as problems of physical design or market regulation, but must be examined as questions concerning the production, governance and distribution of metropolitan space.

2.1. The Historical and Political Production of Urban Space

Madrid's urban form is the cumulative outcome of successive political projects rather than the expression of a coherent and uninterrupted planning tradition. The expansion of the city during the twentieth century was shaped by demographic growth, rural-to-urban migration, industrial development, housing shortages and changing conceptions of state responsibility. These processes were mediated by political institutions whose priorities influenced the location, design and social composition of new residential areas.

Research on housing and urban policy under Francoism demonstrates that interventions in Madrid's informal settlements and peripheral districts cannot be interpreted exclusively as technical responses to overcrowding or inadequate infrastructure. The study by López Díaz and Martínez Aranda, for example, situates the treatment of shantytowns within a broader framework of urban planning and social control. Such research reveals how the governance of housing was connected to political authority, the regulation of urban populations and the state's attempt to reorganise the rapidly expanding capital. Urban planning consequently operated not only as an instrument for producing buildings and infrastructure, but also as a means of determining where particular populations could reside and under what conditions.

The development of planned residential settlements, including the poblados dirigidos, further complicates conventional distinctions between authoritarian governance and architectural innovation. These settlements emerged within restrictive political and institutional circumstances, yet some incorporated significant experimentation in housing typology, construction methods and urban morphology. Their architectural qualities cannot therefore be dismissed simply because they were produced under an authoritarian regime. Equally, design innovation should not be taken as evidence that the wider housing system was socially equitable.

The critical contribution of this historical literature is to demonstrate that urban form embodies political and institutional choices. Street networks, residential densities, building types and public spaces are material expressions of decisions concerning land, investment, housing provision and the organisation of everyday life. Their subsequent performance, however, cannot be inferred directly from their original design intentions. The long-term trajectories of residential neighbourhoods are also influenced by maintenance, tenure arrangements, demographic change, public investment and residents' capacity to adapt their environments.

A limitation of historically oriented accounts is that they may privilege planning intentions and institutional decisions over the subsequent social life of the built environment. Conversely, accounts that celebrate architectural experimentation risk detaching design quality from the conditions under which housing was produced and inhabited. A more comprehensive interpretation must therefore connect the historical circumstances of urban development with the differentiated experiences of residents over time. This would allow Madrid's housing

2.1.1. The First Test: The City must Work for its Inhabitants

Any international vision for Madrid will lack credibility if the everyday experience of the city deteriorates.

Housing is central to this problem. A metropolis can attract companies and skilled workers while becoming progressively less accessible to the people who sustain its hospitals, schools, shops, restaurants, transport systems and cultural life. The OECD has repeatedly identified housing affordability as a challenge to urban opportunity, economic security and social cohesion. Its research also shows why housing and transport must be considered together: a cheaper home in a poorly connected location may impose substantial additional costs in time and mobility. OECD, *Regions and Cities at a Glance 2022.*

For Madrid, this means that housing policy cannot be reduced to maximising the number of units authorised or constructed. Supply matters, but so do tenure, affordability, location, public transport, social infrastructure and the distribution of land-value gains.

The same principle applies to public space. Madrid's plazas, streets, parks, cafés and neighbourhood centres are not merely amenities supporting the urban economy. They are infrastructure for civic life: places where people encounter one another outside the formal structures of employment, consumption and administration.

Their future importance may increase as more activities become mediated by digital platforms and private environments. The ability to sustain accessible, comfortable and socially diverse public spaces could become a defining advantage of successful cities.

Climate adaptation is equally fundamental. Madrid's exposure to extreme heat and water stress makes resilience a matter of public health, economic productivity and urban justice. The city's own climate-adaptation programme identifies cooling, biodiversity, water management, municipal services and socially inclusive adaptation among its objectives. Madrid City Council, *Climate Adaptation Action Plan.*

The next generation of Madrid's urbanism should therefore be evaluated through three simultaneous questions:

- Does it improve the environmental performance of the city?
- Does it expand access to housing, services, mobility and economic opportunity?
- Does it strengthen the public realm and the ability of residents to shape their surroundings?

International ambition and local quality should not be competing priorities. Local quality is part of the foundation on which durable international influence must rest.

2.2. Madrid Nuevo Norte: A Test of the New Model

Madrid Nuevo Norte illustrates both the potential and the risks of Madrid's next phase of urban development.

The project covers approximately 3.4 million square metres and is planned to deliver nearly 10,500 homes and 400,000 square metres of green space. It is also intended to reconnect areas separated by railway infrastructure and to create a major new business and transport district. These are substantial urban ambitions, although the planned outcomes should not be confused with completed development. Madrid City Council, project update, July 2026.

The project raises a question that should guide all future metropolitan regeneration: how can major investments generate benefits beyond the immediate development area?

A new business district can strengthen Madrid's economy. A new station can improve connectivity. New homes and parks can improve urban life. But the wider consequences depend on the affordability of the housing, the accessibility of the public spaces, the quality of transport connections, the distribution of economic opportunities and the relationship between the development and surrounding neighbourhoods.

The answer is not to reject large-scale urban projects. It is to require them to meet a broader public purpose.

Madrid Nuevo Norte could become an experiment in a more integrated form of metropolitan planning, linking land-value capture, affordable housing, orbital mobility, climate performance and neighbourhood regeneration. Its success should be assessed not only through investment attracted or square metres delivered, but through measurable improvements in accessibility, housing opportunity and urban continuity across Madrid.

The same test should apply to future developments in the south and east of the metropolitan area. If the north continues to attract a disproportionate share of high-value employment and new investment, the city risks reproducing the spatial hierarchy that a genuinely forward-looking strategy should seek to overcome.

The alternative is a polycentric metropolis: one in which multiple districts possess substantial employment, research, cultural and civic functions, connected by public transport and supported by high-quality local services.

Polycentricity is not simply a matter of distributing buildings across a map. It requires the deliberate distribution of institutional capacity, investment and opportunity.

2.3. Spain as a Network of Complementary Metropolitan Regions

Madrid's future cannot be separated from the future of Spain.

The temptation for a successful capital is to interpret national competitiveness as an extension of metropolitan concentration. Yet a country with several strong urban regions can draw on a wider range of industrial specialisations, cultural traditions, research capacities and international relationships.

Spain should develop its metropolitan system as a network of complementary strengths rather than a hierarchy in which every strategic function gravitates towards Madrid.

Barcelona and Catalonia can continue to strengthen advanced manufacturing, design, biotechnology and Mediterranean connectivity. Bilbao and the Basque Country offer important experience in industrial transformation, specialised production and vocational training. Valencia can combine logistics, maritime connections, manufacturing and urban liveability. Seville and Andalusia have opportunities in aerospace, agricultural technologies, renewable energy and cooperation with North Africa. Galicia, Asturias and Cantabria can contribute to marine technologies, offshore wind, advanced industry and ecological restoration.

These are strategic possibilities, not exclusive assignments. Every region requires the freedom to diversify and develop new strengths.

Madrid's role should be to connect these capabilities through research partnerships, infrastructure, investment and international representation.

A Madrid–Barcelona innovation corridor could connect universities, advanced industries and research institutions. Iberian energy and transport cooperation could strengthen links with

Lisbon and Portuguese regions. National research programmes could encourage scientific institutions to collaborate across several metropolitan centres rather than reinforcing a single dominant cluster.

The principle is **functional federalism**: strategic functions should be distributed according to capability, democratic legitimacy and long-term public value, while remaining connected through national and European networks.

This would require institutional reform as much as infrastructure. Regional and municipal governments need meaningful participation in decisions whose effects extend beyond their territories. National investment strategies should evaluate their contribution to the wider urban system, not only their immediate contribution to growth in the capital.

Madrid would remain a major coordinator and international gateway. Its success would be measured partly by whether other Spanish cities become more capable of succeeding on their own terms.

3. The Atlantic and Ibero-American Opportunity

Madrid has a distinctive opportunity to deepen cooperation between Europe and the Spanish- and Portuguese-speaking worlds.

Yet the concept of an Atlantic metropolis should be treated as an institutional project, not a geographical destiny. Language, historical connections and aviation links create opportunities, but they do not guarantee scientific leadership, diplomatic influence or equitable international relationships.

Madrid's role should be one of convening rather than commanding.

The objective would be to build durable platforms for research, cultural production, public administration, climate policy and technological cooperation. Such platforms would need partners with genuine decision-making power in Latin America, Portugal and Lusophone Africa. They should support exchanges in both directions and avoid reproducing historical hierarchies in which European institutions define the agenda and other regions supply talent, markets or cultural content.

Four areas offer particularly promising starting points.

First, Scientific Cooperation A permanent network linking universities and research institutions across Europe and the Ibero-American world could support joint doctoral programmes, shared laboratories, research mobility and collaborative funding. Priority fields could include urbanisation, public health, water systems, renewable energy, artificial intelligence and democratic governance.

Second, Cultural Production Madrid could strengthen its role as a meeting place for Spanish- and Portuguese-language publishing, cinema, audiovisual production, music, digital culture and the creative industries. The goal should be co-production and shared intellectual property, rather than simply attracting cultural activity to Spain.

Third, Public Administration A network of schools of government could support practical exchanges between municipalities, public agencies and universities. The most valuable outcome would be transferable knowledge about service delivery, fiscal capacity, urban planning and democratic accountability.

Fourth, Urban Cooperation Madrid could establish partnerships among metropolitan authorities facing related challenges, including housing affordability, informal settlement, transport integration, extreme heat and water scarcity. Such collaboration should recognise that Latin American cities possess extensive knowledge and experience of their own, not merely problems for European institutions to solve.

The resulting institution could be called the **Atlantic–Ibero-American Forum**. Its purpose would be to host permanent programmes, research partnerships and policy exchanges rather than merely an annual summit.

Madrid would be its location, not the owner of its intellectual or political agenda.

3.1. Strategic Autonomy without Financial Nationalism

A further question concerns the relationship between international capital and European economic autonomy.

Foreign investment provides liquidity, diversifies risk and connects firms to global markets. It should not be treated as inherently undesirable. The relevant issue is whether Europe possesses sufficient long-term investment capacity to sustain essential infrastructure, research, energy systems and productive innovation.

The latest available figures illustrate the scale of international participation in Spain's listed equity market. In September 2026, BME reported that international investors held 50.4% of Spanish listed shares, using year-end 2025 ownership data. This is a measure of ownership in the listed equity market, not a measure of control over the entire Spanish economy. BME, 22 September 2026.

The appropriate response is not to discourage international ownership or to presume that every foreign shareholder undermines national interests. It is to strengthen Europe's capacity to mobilise long-term capital for shared priorities.

Madrid could support Iberian investment platforms, European infrastructure funds, research-commercialisation vehicles and pension-investment partnerships designed to finance projects whose returns emerge over decades rather than quarters.

Such initiatives would need robust governance, transparent risk

assessment and clear public-interest criteria. Public investment should not be used to shield favoured firms from competition or to socialise private losses.

Strategic autonomy should mean the ability to choose, innovate and withstand disruption—not economic isolation.

4. Municipal Reform and Intra-Madrilian Equity

Municipal reform constitutes a critical, yet insufficiently developed, dimension of debates concerning Madrid's urban future. While the literature on Madrid's urbanism has extensively examined land liberalisation, housing production, metropolitan expansion and the morphology of peripheral neighbourhoods, comparatively less attention has been devoted to the institutional mechanisms through which urban resources, public investment and decision-making powers are distributed within the municipality itself. This omission is significant because spatial inequality is not merely an outcome of market forces or historical patterns of urban development; it is also shaped by the fiscal capacities, administrative priorities and political arrangements through which municipal government allocates resources across different districts. Intra-Madrilian equity should therefore be understood as a central criterion for evaluating the legitimacy and effectiveness of urban governance.

Madrid's internal geography encompasses substantial differences in income, housing conditions, environmental quality, accessibility and the availability of public facilities. The contrast between the historic and central districts, established working-class neighbourhoods, peripheral housing estates and areas undergoing large-scale redevelopment illustrates how the benefits of metropolitan growth may be unevenly distributed across the municipal territory. These disparities cannot be attributed exclusively to contemporary planning decisions. They reflect the cumulative effects of historical housing policies, uneven infrastructure provision, differences in land values, residential segregation and the spatial concentration of economic activity. Nevertheless, municipal institutions possess considerable capacity to influence how these inherited inequalities evolve through decisions concerning public services, neighbourhood regeneration, social housing, transport, green infrastructure and the distribution of capital expenditure.

The central institutional question is whether Madrid's municipal governance arrangements adequately recognise the differentiated needs of its districts. A uniform allocation of resources may appear administratively neutral, yet it can reproduce existing inequalities when neighbourhoods differ substantially in deprivation, infrastructure deficits, demographic pressures and environmental vulnerability. Conversely, an exclusively needs-based model may fail to recognise the importance of maintaining high-quality public services throughout the city or supporting areas experiencing rapid population growth. A more equitable approach would combine universal minimum standards of service provision with differentiated investment according to clearly defined social, spatial and environmental indicators. Under such a framework, municipal equality would not mean allocating identical resources everywhere, but ensuring that residents enjoy comparable opportunities to access essential services, participate in civic life and benefit from public investment.

This distinction has direct implications for municipal budgeting and institutional reform. Capital expenditure could be assessed not only according to project completion, economic return or political visibility, but also according to its contribution to reducing measurable disparities between districts. Relevant indicators would include access to affordable housing, public transport journey times, proximity to healthcare and educational facilities, tree canopy coverage, exposure to extreme heat, air quality, the condition of public space and the availability of cultural and recreational infrastructure. Such indicators should be disaggregated geographically and, where reliable data permit, by income, age, disability and housing tenure. Their purpose would be to identify not only where investment is concentrated, but whether it improves the relative position of underserved communities.

However, redistributive investment alone would be insufficient without corresponding reforms to municipal accountability and participation. Residents should be able to understand how priorities are established, how expenditure is distributed and how the effectiveness of interventions is evaluated. Strengthened district-level participation, transparent budget reporting and systematic consultation could help bring local knowledge into municipal decision-making. Participatory budgeting may contribute to this process, provided that it complements rather than substitutes for representative government, professional planning and adequate funding. Participation must also be designed to avoid reproducing existing inequalities: neighbourhoods with greater organisational resources and political influence may otherwise be better positioned to shape decisions than communities facing greater social and economic constraints.

The institutional challenge is particularly evident in the relationship between Madrid's municipality and its wider metropolitan region. Housing markets, labour mobility, transport systems, water management and ecological networks extend beyond municipal boundaries, yet their costs and benefits are not necessarily distributed evenly among the municipalities concerned. Madrid's central position generates substantial employment and economic opportunities, but it also contributes to commuting pressures, infrastructure demands and the concentration of services. Municipal reform must therefore operate at two interconnected scales. Within the city, it should address disparities between districts and neighbourhoods; at the metropolitan scale, it should improve coordination between Madrid and surrounding municipalities in areas where fragmented governance undermines equitable and efficient provision. Such coordination should not weaken municipal accountability, but establish clearer mechanisms for sharing costs, investment and benefits across functional urban boundaries.

A further consideration concerns the relationship between

regeneration and distributive justice. Investment in disadvantaged neighbourhoods can improve the quality of housing, public spaces and local infrastructure, yet it may also increase property values and place additional pressure on existing residents. Municipal policy should therefore integrate regeneration with housing affordability, tenant protection, the provision of social and affordable housing, and the monitoring of residential displacement. Without such safeguards, neighbourhood improvement risks becoming a process through which public investment enhances land values while the residents whose needs justified the intervention are progressively excluded from its benefits. The relevant measure of success is consequently not simply the physical transformation of an area, but the extent to which existing residents can remain and benefit from that transformation.

Intra-Madrilian equity also has an environmental dimension. Differences in tree cover, access to parks, building efficiency, exposure to heat and proximity to major traffic corridors can produce unequal health and wellbeing outcomes. Climate adaptation should therefore be treated as a distributive responsibility of municipal government rather than as a collection of isolated environmental projects. Investment in shade, green corridors, energy-efficient housing and accessible public spaces should prioritise areas where social vulnerability intersects with high environmental exposure. This would connect Madrid's climate objectives with its obligations concerning public health and social justice, while establishing a more explicit relationship between environmental policy and the distribution of municipal resources.

The principal research gap concerns the extent to which Madrid's institutional arrangements translate formal commitments to social cohesion into geographically differentiated outcomes. Existing research on planning history, housing markets and urban morphology provides a basis for understanding the origins of spatial inequality, but a more systematic evaluation of municipal governance is required to establish how contemporary budgeting, district administration and public-service provision reproduce or reduce those inequalities. Future research should combine district-level fiscal data, spatial accessibility measures, housing indicators and environmental statistics with interviews involving residents, municipal officials and community organisations. Longitudinal analysis would be particularly valuable in determining whether successive investment programmes reduce disparities over time or merely improve conditions in absolute terms while leaving relative inequalities largely unchanged.

Ultimately, municipal reform should be understood not as an administrative objective in isolation, but as a means of strengthening the social legitimacy of Madrid's urban development model. The municipality's success should be measured not only by its ability to attract investment, deliver infrastructure or enhance international competitiveness, but also by its capacity to ensure that the benefits of urban prosperity are accessible across its territory. A more equitable Madrid would combine universal service guarantees, needs-based investment, transparent budgeting, meaningful participation and effective metropolitan coordination. Through these mechanisms, municipal governance could move beyond the management of spatial differences towards the deliberate reduction of unjust inequalities.

In the broader context of **Madrid Beyond Capitality,** intra-Madrilian equity provides the necessary internal foundation for the city's wider national and international ambitions. A metropolis that seeks to facilitate territorial cohesion across Spain and strengthen cooperation between Europe and the Ibero-American world must first demonstrate its capacity to govern its own territory fairly. Madrid's credibility as an intermediary metropolis therefore depends not simply on its external connections, but on the quality of the social and institutional relationships it sustains within its own boundaries. The ultimate objective of municipal reform is to ensure that Madrid's centrality becomes a source of shared opportunity rather than a mechanism through which economic, political and spatial advantages remain concentrated in particular districts and social groups.

5. Connective Tissues: Metropolitan Reform and the Reorganisation of Madrid's 179 Municipalities

The concept of connective tissues offers a useful framework for rethinking Madrid's metropolitan future. Just as connective tissue binds distinct parts of a living organism into a functioning whole, metropolitan governance must connect municipalities through shared infrastructure, coordinated planning, ecological systems, housing policy and public institutions. The objective is not to erase local identities or impose administrative uniformity, but to ensure that the metropolitan region functions as an integrated territory rather than a collection of fragmented jurisdictions.

For Madrid, this raises a fundamental institutional question: could a metropolitan region organised around approximately 75 municipalities govern its territory more effectively than the existing configuration of more than 170 municipalities? Such a proposal should be treated as a scenario for investigation rather than an established solution. Its merits depend on the geography of the territory being considered, the distribution of population and employment, the existing legal framework, and the distinction between municipal amalgamation and metropolitan coordination.

A critical starting point is to distinguish the Comunidad de Madrid, the autonomous community, from the municipio de Madrid, the capital municipality, and from the wider functional metropolitan area. These are three different territorial scales. The autonomous community has 179 municipalities, whereas the capital municipality is a single local authority within it. A proposal to reduce the autonomous community's municipal count to approximately 75 would therefore be a much broader reform than consolidating the capital's districts or creating a metropolitan authority. It would affect local representation, public administration, municipal finances and the relationship between the capital and its surrounding towns.

The central argument developed here is that Madrid should investigate a model of metropolitan integration through selective municipal consolidation, shared-service institutions and polycentric

territorial governance. Reducing the number of municipalities may form part of that model, but the more important objective is to create connective institutions capable of aligning decisions across housing, transport, employment, water, energy, climate adaptation and ecological protection.

5.1. Three Institutional Options for Madrid

The proposal to move from 179 municipalities to approximately 75 can be assessed against three alternative models. They represent different balances between administrative efficiency, democratic proximity and metropolitan coordination.



Option A — A Metropolitan Authority without Municipal Mergers

Least Disruptive

Existing municipalities remain intact but delegate specific strategic functions to a metropolitan institution. Transport integration, regional housing coordination, major infrastructure, water management and ecological networks would be planned at the functional metropolitan scale.

Advantage: improves coordination while preserving local identities and elected councils.

Limitation: requires meaningful powers, stable financing and enforceable agreements; otherwise it risks becoming another layer of bureaucracy.



Option B — Consolidation into Approximately 75 Municipalities

Most Structurally Ambitious

Selected municipalities would merge into larger local authorities, with boundaries based on commuting patterns, continuity of settlement, shared services, fiscal capacity and local consultation.

Advantage: could strengthen administrative capacity, coordinate land-use decisions and reduce duplicated back-office functions.

Limitation: mergers do not automatically generate savings or better services. They can weaken local representation, increase administrative distance and create new inequalities between consolidated urban centres and smaller settlements. OECD analysis cautions that municipal mergers have mixed economic results and can face substantial political resistance.



Option C — A Federated System of Metropolitan and Territorial Groupings

Balanced Approach

The 179 municipalities remain legally constituted, but approximately 75 intermunicipal groupings or service territories coordinate selected functions. Larger metropolitan centres and rural clusters would have different responsibilities according to their needs and capacities.

Advantage: combines shared administration with local democratic identity and allows different arrangements for dense urban areas, small towns and rural communities.

Limitation: overlapping responsibilities must be carefully defined, with transparent budgets and clear accountability for decisions.

The most defensible starting point is Option C, with Option A providing the metropolitan strategic framework. Selective mergers under Option B could then be considered where evidence demonstrates clear advantages. This sequencing would avoid treating the reduction of municipal numbers as an end in itself.

What would a 75-municipality model look like?

A credible reform would not divide the region into 75 equally sized administrative units. Madrid's geography is too diverse for a uniform model. The dense southern metropolitan belt, the northern employment corridor, the eastern growth areas, the western residential municipalities and the Sierra's rural settlements have different economic functions, environmental constraints and service requirements.

Instead, the proposed 75 municipalities should emerge from a territorial analysis of functional relationships. The following framework illustrates how a reorganisation could be structured without prematurely fixing boundaries or assigning municipalities to groups.

An indicative territorial architecture

Conceptual framework, not an adopted administrative map.

- **Central Madrid and the Inner Metropolitan Ring**
  Integrate strategic planning for housing, employment, public transport and major infrastructure across the capital and its closely connected neighbouring municipalities.
- **Northern metropolitan corridor**
  Coordinate employment centres, rail connections, research and business districts, housing provision and transport across the northern urban corridor.
- **Eastern metropolitan corridor**
  Align growth, logistics, employment and housing with public transport and the protection of river systems and ecological connections.
- **Southern metropolitan corridor**
  Prioritise housing affordability, industrial transition, access to employment, public-space investment and improved orbital connectivity.
- **Western metropolitan corridor**
  Coordinate residential development, public transport, employment access and landscape protection across established towns and growing settlements.

5.2. Sierra and Rural Territories

Strengthen shared services, healthcare access, water management, forest resilience, rural mobility and the economic viability of smaller settlements.

These six categories are a proposed planning framework, not a claim that the 179 municipalities already divide neatly into six functional units. Nor should each category be allocated an arbitrary share of the 75 proposed municipalities. The final geography would need to be derived from demographic data, commuting flows, transport connections, service catchments, environmental systems and consultation with residents.

The distinction between administrative municipalities and functional territories is essential. Employment and commuting relationships do not always follow municipal boundaries, while ecological systems and rural service networks require a different geographical logic. A successful reform would reconcile these overlapping geographies rather than assume that a single map can resolve every planning problem.

5.2.1. Connective Tissues: What Should be Integrated?

The real purpose of metropolitan reform is to create institutional connections that make the region function more coherently. Five policy systems are particularly important.

Transport and accessibility. A metropolitan transport framework should integrate rail, metro, buses, cycling infrastructure and interchanges, with particular attention to cross-suburban journeys that do not require travelling through the centre of Madrid. Transport investment should be coordinated with housing and employment planning so that new development does not generate avoidable car dependence.

Housing and territorial equity. Municipalities should coordinate housing supply, affordable housing provision and regeneration. A regional framework could establish common affordability indicators, monitor displacement and encourage housing development near public transport and existing services. Fiscal arrangements would need to prevent individual municipalities from benefiting disproportionately from high-value development while exporting housing pressures to neighbouring areas.

Ecological infrastructure. Rivers, forests, agricultural landscapes and green corridors extend across administrative boundaries. A coordinated framework could protect connected ecological networks, manage water resources, support biodiversity and establish consistent approaches to heat adaptation. The Sierra should be treated as a strategic environmental asset rather than simply as the hinterland of metropolitan growth.

Economic development and scientific capacity. Municipalities should coordinate industrial land, research facilities, universities,

logistics infrastructure and employment programmes. The aim would not be to decentralise every activity mechanically, but to connect existing centres of expertise and production so that the benefits of metropolitan growth are more widely accessible.

Public services and administrative capacity. Shared procurement, digital infrastructure, technical expertise, waste management and selected social services could reduce duplication and help smaller municipalities maintain service quality. However, cooperation should be evaluated through actual costs and outcomes rather than the assumption that larger administrative units are inherently more efficient.

These connective systems should be supported by common data standards, transparent budgets and a metropolitan investment programme. Without such mechanisms, a reduction in the number of municipalities could change administrative boundaries while leaving the underlying patterns of fragmentation largely intact.

5.3. The Principal Trade-Off: Efficiency Versus Democratic Proximity

Municipal consolidation is often presented as a straightforward response to fragmented administration. Yet municipal boundaries also structure democratic representation, local identity and residents' ability to influence decisions. A small municipality may have limited technical capacity but strong local accountability; a larger authority may possess greater resources while becoming less responsive to individual communities.

This tension is especially important in Madrid because the region contains both densely populated metropolitan centres and small rural settlements. The regional government's official register confirms that the Comunidad de Madrid comprises 179 municipalities, while its demographic data show substantial differences in population between them.

A single consolidation formula would therefore be inappropriate. In some places, a merger may create a coherent local authority with sufficient administrative and financial capacity. In others, especially rural territories, shared services and intermunicipal cooperation may provide greater benefits without eliminating local government.

Spain already has legal mechanisms for intermunicipal cooperation, including mancomunidades, through which municipalities can jointly deliver services. The OECD identifies cooperation as a flexible response to fragmented administrative capacity, while noting that the institutional arrangements and results vary across regions.

For Madrid, the implication is clear: reform should begin by identifying which functions need to be integrated, which municipalities would benefit from consolidation and which communities require stronger protection of local autonomy. The institutional structure should follow the functional problem rather than the reverse.

5.4. How Should the Reform be Implemented?

The transition towards a more integrated Madrid should proceed through a sequence of evidence-based decisions rather than a single administrative decree.

The first stage would establish a metropolitan observatory bringing together demographic, fiscal, housing, transport, environmental and service-access data. This would identify where fragmented governance creates measurable inefficiencies or inequities and where cooperation is already working.

The second stage would establish or strengthen metropolitan institutions with clearly defined responsibilities, stable funding and public accountability. Priority functions should include strategic transport planning, housing coordination, ecological infrastructure and major cross-boundary investment. Existing municipalities would retain responsibility for neighbourhood-scale services and local democratic representation unless a specific case for consolidation could be demonstrated.

The third stage would evaluate selective mergers and shared-service arrangements. Proposals should be assessed against common criteria, including administrative costs, service accessibility, fiscal sustainability, representation, territorial equity and public support. Residents should have access to clear impact assessments and meaningful consultation before boundaries are changed.

The fourth stage would establish a transparent metropolitan equalisation mechanism. Resources could be allocated using a formula that considers population, social deprivation, infrastructure deficits, environmental vulnerability and the additional costs of serving dispersed rural populations. Such a mechanism would help ensure that administrative reform does not simply strengthen already prosperous municipalities or concentrate investment in the largest urban centres.

Finally, the reform should be subject to periodic independent evaluation. Its success should be measured by improved accessibility, service quality, housing affordability, environmental performance and administrative capacity—not simply by the number of municipalities eliminated.

The legal design would require detailed analysis of Spanish local-government law and the powers of the Comunidad de Madrid. The OECD's review of Spanish intermunicipal cooperation highlights the role of both national legislation and regional autonomy in shaping the available institutional arrangements.

Summary: from Administrative Fragmentation to Metropolitan Solidarity

The proposal to move from 179 municipalities to approximately 75 raises a question that extends beyond administrative efficiency. It concerns the kind of metropolitan society Madrid intends to become. If municipal reform is understood merely as a reduction in the number of councils, it risks confusing institutional simplification with substantive improvement. If it is conceived

instead as a means of connecting housing, transport, employment, ecological systems and public services, it offers an opportunity to address some of the structural inequalities that shape the region.

The strongest approach would combine a metropolitan authority capable of coordinating strategic functions, a network of shared-service territories, selective municipal mergers where demonstrably beneficial, and safeguards for local representation. This arrangement would recognise that the most appropriate scale of government differs according to the task: neighbourhood services require proximity, transport requires metropolitan coordination, and ecological resilience requires cooperation across entire landscapes.

The figure of 75 should therefore be treated as a hypothesis to test, not a predetermined target. The appropriate number and configuration of municipalities must emerge from an assessment of functional geography, democratic legitimacy, fiscal capacity and distributive consequences. A smaller number of municipalities is not inherently more equitable; a better-connected system of government may be.

Within the broader vision of Madrid Beyond Capitality, connective tissues provide the institutional foundation for a genuinely polycentric metropolis. Madrid's success should not depend on concentrating every decision, resource and opportunity in the capital. It should depend on creating durable connections between urban centres, suburban communities and rural territories, allowing each to contribute to and benefit from regional prosperity. The ultimate objective is to transform metropolitan governance from a collection of adjacent jurisdictions into a system of shared responsibilities and reciprocal advantage.

6. Madrid's Metropolitan Transformation: An Integrated Framework for Spatial Planning, Water Resilience and Secure Digital Governance

Madrid's strategic development requires a transition from sectorally organised urban management towards an integrated model of metropolitan systems governance. The underlying challenge is not simply to accommodate demographic growth, economic investment or territorial expansion, but to reconcile these processes with the ecological limits, infrastructural capacities and institutional arrangements upon which the long-term viability of the metropolitan region depends. Housing, mobility, water, energy, public services, ecological infrastructure and digital connectivity constitute interdependent dimensions of a common territorial system. Their governance therefore requires an analytical and institutional framework capable of identifying the interactions between individual policy interventions, anticipating cumulative consequences and translating strategic objectives into coordinated programmes of investment and implementation.

The proposed framework rests on the integration of a Metropolitan Spatial Plan, a Water-Resilience Framework and a Secure Digital Planning System. These instruments should not be conceived as separate policy initiatives, but as mutually reinforcing components of a metropolitan planning architecture. The spatial plan would establish the territorial organisation of development and the conditions under which urban transformation could proceed. The water-resilience framework would determine whether proposed patterns of development were compatible with hydrological availability, infrastructure capacity and projected climatic conditions. The digital planning system would integrate the relevant evidence, simulate alternative development trajectories, identify conflicts between policy objectives and connect planning decisions to budgets, institutional responsibilities and measurable outcomes. Their interaction would establish a continuous process through which metropolitan development could be evaluated, implemented and revised in response to changing conditions.

Such an approach presupposes a clear distinction between the functional geography of metropolitan Madrid and the distribution of statutory authority. The economic, hydrological, ecological and commuting systems of the region extend beyond the administrative boundaries of the municipality, whereas planning permissions, water management, transport provision and infrastructure investment remain distributed across municipal, regional and national institutions. Metropolitan integration must therefore be achieved through institutional coordination rather than through the assumption that a single authority possesses comprehensive jurisdiction. Madrid City Council, the Community of Madrid, neighbouring municipalities, Canal de Isabel II, the competent river-basin authority and the relevant transport and infrastructure operators would need to establish common analytical standards, compatible investment programmes and procedures for resolving conflicts between territorial priorities.

7. The Metropolitan Spatial Plan as the Organising Framework

The Metropolitan Spatial Plan should establish a coherent territorial structure within which housing, employment, mobility, ecological protection and infrastructure investment are mutually coordinated. Its primary purpose would be to determine where development should be concentrated, which landscapes and environmental systems require protection, where existing urban fabric should be transformed and under what conditions new development could be accommodated. Rather than treating land availability as the principal determinant of urban expansion, the plan would assess territorial suitability in relation to accessibility, water availability, ecological sensitivity, climate exposure and the capacity of existing infrastructure to accommodate additional demand.

This approach would require the integration of land-use planning with transport investment, housing policy and the spatial distribution of employment. New residential development should be directed towards established urban areas, suitable brownfield sites and locations served by high-capacity public transport wherever this is environmentally and economically justified. Such a strategy could reduce the costs associated with dispersed development, improve access to employment and public services, and limit the expansion of car-dependent settlement patterns. Densification, however, should not be pursued as an objective in isolation. Its appropriateness would depend on the availability of

social infrastructure, the quality of public space, the preservation of ecological functions and the capacity of local networks to accommodate additional population.

The plan should consequently establish a metropolitan structure composed of interconnected development centres, transport corridors, residential districts, economic clusters and ecological networks. Existing employment concentrations in central Madrid would remain important, but their relationship with suburban centres, universities, research institutions, industrial locations and logistics facilities should be reconsidered in terms of metropolitan accessibility and economic complementarity. The objective would not be to disperse economic activity indiscriminately, but to improve the relationship between the geography of employment and the geography of housing, thereby reducing unnecessary commuting and widening access to economic opportunity.

The ecological dimension of this territorial structure is equally fundamental. River corridors, floodplains, parks, woodland, agricultural landscapes and areas of ecological significance should be treated as components of metropolitan infrastructure rather than as residual spaces awaiting development. Their functions extend beyond biodiversity conservation to include stormwater retention, groundwater protection, urban cooling, recreational access and the maintenance of ecological connectivity.

The Manzanares corridor and the wider network of green spaces should therefore be considered in conjunction with the region's natural drainage systems, landscape structure and patterns of urbanisation. Development decisions should be assessed against their effects on the continuity and performance of these systems, including the cumulative consequences of land sealing, habitat fragmentation and the displacement of natural drainage.

The spatial plan should also introduce a development-readiness principle under which major projects would be assessed against the capacity of essential infrastructure to support them. A proposal would not be considered territorially viable merely because land had been designated for development or because a projected housing requirement had been demonstrated. It would also need to establish that drinking-water supply, wastewater treatment, stormwater management, transport, energy, schools, healthcare and other essential services could be delivered within a credible timetable and financing framework. Where infrastructure capacity was insufficient, development would need to be phased, redesigned or deferred until the relevant constraints had been addressed. Where residual environmental or safety risks remained unacceptable, the competent authority would need to consider whether development should be refused under the applicable legal framework.

This principle would connect spatial planning to the sequencing of public investment. It would also strengthen the relationship between development permissions and the actual delivery of infrastructure, reducing the risk that housing expansion proceeds ahead of the systems required to sustain it. The Metropolitan Spatial Plan would thereby become an instrument for governing the temporal as well as the geographical dimensions of urban development.

7.1. The Water-Resilience Framework as a Condition of Territorial Viability

Water resilience should be treated as a constitutive element of metropolitan planning rather than as a specialised utility function operating independently of land-use decisions. Madrid's inland location, climatic exposure and dependence on managed water resources make the relationship between urban growth and hydrological capacity strategically significant. Future development must be considered in relation not only to average annual supply and demand, but also to drought duration, extreme temperatures, seasonal fluctuations, infrastructure failures and the cumulative demand generated by population and economic growth.

The proposed Water-Resilience Framework would establish a metropolitan water balance integrating drinking-water supply, groundwater, wastewater generation, reclaimed-water capacity, stormwater management and projected demand. Its purpose would be to determine whether alternative patterns of development remained viable under different climatic and demographic scenarios. This assessment should distinguish between water that is theoretically available within a regional system and water that can be supplied reliably, sustainably and at the required quality under conditions of stress. It should also account for the environmental requirements of river basins and the legal responsibilities of the competent water authorities.

The resulting water balance would become a formal input into the assessment of major development proposals. Each project would be required to demonstrate its projected potable-water demand, wastewater output, non-potable requirements, seasonal irrigation needs and contribution to stormwater runoff. The assessment would also identify opportunities for demand reduction, water reuse and rainwater management, while accounting for the technical, environmental and economic limitations of these measures. Where additional infrastructure was required, the project would need to demonstrate how that infrastructure would be financed, authorised and delivered.

A resilient water system would combine supply security with demand management. Improvements in network efficiency and leakage reduction would need to be accompanied by measures encouraging efficient consumption in buildings, public spaces and industrial facilities. Reclaimed wastewater could support appropriate non-potable uses, including the irrigation of parks and certain industrial processes, where treatment standards, infrastructure and public-health safeguards permitted. Rainwater capture and sustainable drainage could reduce runoff and support local water management, although their effectiveness would depend on soil conditions, groundwater characteristics, rainfall patterns and the quality of the captured water. Such measures should therefore be selected according to local circumstances rather than applied uniformly across the metropolitan region.

The relationship between water management and urban form is particularly important. Impermeable surfaces, the removal of vegetation and the interruption of natural drainage pathways can increase runoff, intensify local flood exposure and reduce the capacity of landscapes to regulate water flows. Conversely, appropriately designed green infrastructure can contribute to stormwater retention, soil restoration, urban cooling and the improvement of public space. The Water-Resilience Framework should consequently inform the design of streets, parks, housing developments and transport corridors, ensuring that drainage and water-sensitive design are incorporated into urban development from the outset rather than added retrospectively.

Climate adaptation would require the integration of water management with heat-risk reduction. Neighbourhoods experiencing high temperatures, limited tree canopy, extensive paved surfaces and concentrations of vulnerable residents should receive particular attention. Drought-tolerant planting, shade structures, soil restoration and carefully designed green spaces could reduce heat exposure while limiting additional demand for potable water. Investment priorities should be determined by the combination of environmental exposure, social vulnerability and the capacity of interventions to deliver multiple benefits.

Resilience must also encompass the continuity of essential services under conditions of disruption. Water treatment and distribution depend on electricity, communications, digital control systems and the reliable operation of physical infrastructure. The framework should therefore assess how prolonged drought, extreme rainfall, power failure, cyber incidents or equipment breakdown could affect supply and treatment. Contingency arrangements, emergency coordination, alternative operating procedures and recovery plans should be developed in cooperation with water operators and the competent public authorities.

The governing principle is that water availability should become a demonstrable condition of development, rather than an assumption embedded within growth projections. Where water capacity is adequate under credible scenarios, development may proceed subject to ordinary safeguards. Where capacity is constrained but can be secured through funded and enforceable infrastructure measures, development should be conditional on their timely delivery. Where essential capacity cannot be demonstrated or residual risks remain unacceptable, the proposal should be redesigned, deferred or refused in accordance with the applicable statutory procedures.

7.2. The Secure Digital Planning System as an Instrument of Metropolitan Intelligence

The integration of spatial planning and water resilience requires a common information environment capable of connecting evidence, modelling, institutional decisions and implementation. Madrid's emerging Strategic Municipal Plan and its digital diagnostic infrastructure provide a potential starting point for this development. The proposed extension would create a secure metropolitan planning system that connects municipal datasets with relevant regional and infrastructure information, subject to the necessary legal agreements, technical standards and security safeguards.

The system should be understood as a digital representation of the metropolitan region that supports the analysis of relationships between land use, population, housing, transport, water, energy, climate exposure and public services. Its purpose would not be to create a visually impressive three-dimensional model for its own sake, but to improve the capacity of public institutions to evaluate the consequences of decisions before they are implemented. A digital twin becomes strategically useful when its data and analytical functions are linked to concrete questions of public policy, including the location of housing, the sequencing of infrastructure investment, the management of drought risk and the protection of critical urban systems.

The first requirement would be the establishment of a trusted metropolitan data architecture. Relevant datasets would need to be documented according to their provenance, spatial resolution, update frequency, quality and permitted uses. Common geographic references and interoperable standards would enable different authorities to exchange information while retaining responsibility for their own records and statutory functions. The system should distinguish between authoritative administrative data, modelled estimates, scenario assumptions and uncertain projections. Without this distinction, the apparent precision of digital representations could obscure the limitations of the evidence upon which decisions depend.

The analytical core would consist of scenario modelling capable of testing alternative development trajectories against shared territorial and resource constraints. A proposed housing district, for example, could be assessed in relation to transport accessibility, projected water demand, wastewater capacity, heat exposure, ecological connectivity and the availability of schools and healthcare. The system would identify dependencies between these variables, expose potential conflicts and estimate the consequences of alternative development sequences. Its outputs would inform the responsible authorities, but would not replace statutory decision-making, environmental assessment or political deliberation.

The same analytical framework could be applied to prolonged drought, extreme rainfall and infrastructure disruption. A drought scenario would combine projected demand, water availability, reclaimed-water capacity and the spatial distribution of vulnerable populations. An extreme-rainfall scenario would examine drainage capacity, flood pathways, transport disruption and the exposure of essential infrastructure. A growth scenario would test whether housing, employment, transport and utility investment could accommodate alternative demographic trajectories without producing unacceptable environmental pressures or widening territorial inequalities. The digital system should also connect planning analysis to implementation. Approved projects would be linked to their responsible authorities, financing arrangements,

procurement schedules, infrastructure dependencies and delivery milestones. The system would record the evidence supporting major decisions, the conditions attached to approvals and the outcomes expected from public investment. This would make it possible to compare projected performance with observed results and identify where implementation had diverged from the original assumptions. Significant deviations could trigger a formal review, subject to established governance procedures and the legal responsibilities of the competent institutions.

Security must be incorporated into the system's architecture from the beginning. A metropolitan planning platform would potentially bring together sensitive information about water distribution, transport infrastructure, energy systems, public facilities and emergency dependencies. The indiscriminate aggregation of such information would create risks if access controls were weak or operational systems were insufficiently protected. The platform should therefore apply least-privilege access, strong identity management, multifactor authentication, encryption, auditable records and clear separation between public planning information and sensitive operational data.

Critical infrastructure operators should retain control over detailed operational information, providing planning authorities with the information necessary for legitimate decisions through appropriately governed interfaces. The planning platform should not become an unrestricted gateway into water-control systems, transport operations or other essential services. Independent security testing, protected backups, incident-response arrangements and recovery exercises should address the possibility of ransomware, compromised credentials, manipulated datasets, supplier failures and interruptions to digital services.

Artificial intelligence could assist with the identification of planning conflicts, the analysis of large datasets and the comparison of alternative scenarios. Its use should nevertheless remain bounded by transparent methods, validation requirements and human accountability. It should not autonomously approve development proposals, allocate water resources or determine the acceptability of environmental risks. Public decisions must remain attributable to the competent authority, supported by evidence that can be scrutinised and subject to the applicable procedures for administrative and judicial review.

The system would also require a differentiated model of public access. Residents and civil-society organisations should be able to examine relevant planning proposals, aggregate indicators, environmental assessments and explanations of public decisions. Professional users would receive access to more detailed information according to their responsibilities, while sensitive personal, commercial and infrastructure data would remain protected. This arrangement would allow digital planning to strengthen public accountability without compromising privacy, security or legitimate confidentiality.

7.3. Interconnecting the Instruments through Systemic Governance

The principal contribution of the proposed architecture lies in the feedback relationships between its three components. The Metropolitan Spatial Plan would determine the proposed distribution of growth, but its assumptions would be tested against the water and infrastructure constraints established by the Water-Resilience Framework. The Secure Digital Planning System would integrate these assessments, compare alternatives and connect the resulting decisions to budgets and delivery responsibilities. Subsequent monitoring would reveal whether the assumptions underpinning the plan remained valid, allowing the responsible authorities to revise priorities through the appropriate statutory procedures.

Consider a proposed residential development on the metropolitan fringe. Its contribution to housing supply might support its initial inclusion within a growth scenario, but the integrated assessment could reveal that additional water demand would exceed currently secured capacity, that public-transport provision would remain inadequate for several years, or that the development would fragment an ecological corridor. The digital system would enable the authorities to compare alternative configurations, including higher-density development around an existing transport interchange, phased construction following infrastructure investment, or the relocation of development to a more suitable area.

The resulting decision would need to consider housing delivery, infrastructure costs, water security, accessibility, emissions, ecological impacts and distributional consequences. These criteria should not be collapsed into a single composite score that conceals political choices or trade-offs. The system should instead make the consequences of each alternative explicit, identify uncertainties and clarify which considerations are legally binding, which represent policy objectives and which require political judgement. The competent authorities would then make an informed decision within their respective mandates.

The feedback relationship should operate in both directions. If monitoring reveals recurring water shortages, excessive heat exposure or failures in drainage infrastructure, those findings should inform revisions to investment priorities and, where necessary, the spatial allocation or phasing of development. If transport improvements change the accessibility of a district, the implications for housing density and economic activity could likewise be reassessed. The planning system would thereby become adaptive without sacrificing the predictability, legal certainty and public accountability required of statutory planning.

7.4. Institutional Coordination, Investment and Accountability

The success of this model would depend on a clear institutional settlement. The Metropolitan Spatial Plan would require cooperation between Madrid City Council, the Community of Madrid and participating municipalities, alongside coordination with the relevant national authorities. Water planning would

involve Canal de Isabel II, other relevant service operators and the competent river-basin authority, each acting within its legal responsibilities. Transport planning would require coordination between the authorities and operators responsible for municipal, regional and national networks. Digital governance would require agreed data standards, security protocols, access arrangements and mechanisms for independent evaluation.

A metropolitan compact should establish how shared objectives are translated into binding decisions, how conflicts between participating institutions are resolved and how the costs of infrastructure are distributed. It should distinguish decisions requiring intergovernmental agreement from those that remain within the competence of individual authorities. It should also define the relationship between strategic planning, statutory development plans, environmental assessment, capital budgeting and infrastructure procurement. Without such a settlement, the digital system could improve the visibility of metropolitan problems without providing the institutional mechanisms needed to resolve them.

Implementation should begin with a common evidence base and an audit of existing plans, datasets, infrastructure commitments and institutional responsibilities. This would be followed by the development of alternative spatial scenarios and a metropolitan water balance, together with the identification of priority regeneration areas, ecological constraints and infrastructure investment requirements. A digital pilot could then test the framework in contrasting territorial settings, including an established urban district, a regeneration area and a new growth location. Its performance should be independently evaluated before its analytical and operational scope is expanded.

The resulting plans should be connected to a common investment pipeline in which every major intervention has an identified financing source, responsible authority, delivery timetable and set of performance conditions. The timetable would need to reflect statutory procedures, environmental assessment, procurement requirements and the practical constraints of intergovernmental coordination. Digital monitoring would then compare planned and actual delivery, identify emerging capacity constraints and provide the evidence for formal review.

Performance assessment should encompass spatial efficiency, housing affordability, accessibility, water security, climate resilience, ecological connectivity, infrastructure reliability and administrative accountability. Metropolitan averages should be supplemented by neighbourhood-level analysis so that improvements in aggregate performance do not conceal the persistence of local deprivation or unequal exposure to environmental risks. Targets should be established after a baseline has been validated and the participating authorities have agreed on definitions, data ownership and feasible implementation trajectories.



The infographic presents a coherent strategy for improving Madrid's international standing by integrating urban well-being, metropolitan competitiveness and institutional performance. Its principal strength is the recognition that international rankings should be treated as diagnostic instruments rather than independent policy objectives. The proposed relationship between the Ayuntamiento's indicators, the OECD Regional Well-Being framework and the Mori Memorial Foundation's Global Power City Index provides a useful analytical foundation for this approach. However, these three measurement systems have different purposes, geographical scales and methodologies, and their indicators cannot automatically be treated as interchangeable. The Ayuntamiento's system should therefore remain the operational basis for local planning, while OECD and Mori indicators provide complementary assessments of well-being and international attractiveness. Housing affordability is correctly identified as a central intervention because rising housing costs can undermine social inclusion, workforce retention and the attractiveness of Madrid to internationally mobile professionals. Nevertheless, housing policy must be coordinated with land availability, construction capacity, transport investment and the provision of essential public services. The emphasis on metropolitan mobility is equally important because Madrid's functional economy extends beyond its municipal boundaries, making intergovernmental coordination indispensable. Accessibility should consequently be measured not only through transport infrastructure and journey times but also through access to employment, education, healthcare and cultural facilities. The proposed water and climate-resilience programme introduces an essential long-term dimension by connecting environmental adaptation with spatial planning and neighbourhood inequality. Its effectiveness will depend on identifying vulnerable locations, establishing measurable baselines and prioritising investments according to exposure, social need and expected benefits. The innovation agenda appropriately connects research institutions with business development, but it should distinguish research excellence from the successful commercialisation of knowledge and the creation of productive employment. Cultural interaction likewise requires a broader understanding than tourism growth, encompassing international research partnerships, cultural participation, creative industries and sustained exchange between institutions.

The proposed digital performance dashboard could strengthen accountability by linking planning decisions, investment expenditure and measurable outcomes within a common information system. Yet digital integration will have limited value unless the underlying datasets are reliable, regularly updated, interoperable and governed by clear privacy and cybersecurity safeguards. The infographic's investment mechanism is particularly important because ambitious spatial strategies often fail through fragmented budgets, unclear institutional responsibilities and discontinuity between political priorities and project delivery. Madrid should therefore establish a prioritised investment pipeline with identified funding sources, delivery milestones and transparent criteria for continuing, modifying or terminating individual interventions. Quarterly implementation reviews should be complemented by annual assessments of social, environmental and economic outcomes. International benchmarking should then investigate whether observed changes reflect municipal interventions, wider economic conditions or improvements and setbacks in competing cities. A further refinement would be to establish explicit distributional measures so that improvements in aggregate performance do not conceal deteriorating conditions in disadvantaged neighbourhoods. The overall strategy would be strongest if it treated housing, accessibility, resilience, innovation and cultural exchange as mutually reinforcing components of a single metropolitan development model. The ultimate measure of success should be whether Madrid becomes more affordable, accessible, resilient and productive for its residents while strengthening its capacity to attract international talent, investment and cultural exchange.

Summary

On a final note, Madrid's strategic challenge is to transform metropolitan growth from a collection of sectoral objectives into a coordinated process of territorial development, resource management and institutional learning. The Metropolitan Spatial Plan would establish where growth should occur and under what conditions. The Water-Resilience Framework would determine whether that growth could be sustained within credible hydrological and climatic constraints. The Secure Digital Planning System would connect these decisions through shared evidence, scenario analysis, implementation monitoring and transparent accountability.

The essential change is conceptual as well as administrative. A housing project should no longer be evaluated solely in terms of the number of dwellings it delivers, but also in terms of its implications for water demand, transport accessibility, energy requirements, public services and ecological capacity. A water investment should be assessed not merely by its engineering performance, but by its contribution to the long-term viability of housing, economic activity, public space and essential services. Digitalisation should be judged not by the sophistication of its visualisations, but by its capacity to improve the quality, traceability and resilience of public decisions.

The resulting framework would position metropolitan planning as a continuous process of coordinating territorial development with resource constraints, infrastructure provision and democratic accountability. Its ultimate criterion of success would be Madrid's ability to accommodate economic and demographic change without undermining the environmental systems, social cohesion and institutional capacities upon which its long-term prosperity depends.

The principal indicators should cover housing affordability and delivery, accessibility to employment and essential services, public-transport performance, potable-water consumption, leakage and reuse, flood and heat exposure, green-space accessibility,

infrastructure delivery, and neighbourhood-level inequality. The existing Ayuntamiento indicator framework should provide the baseline, with additional measures introduced only where a material metropolitan governance gap has been identified.

Financially, the programme should distinguish the cost of planning, data integration and institutional coordination from the much larger capital expenditure required for water networks, transport, housing and ecological restoration. Madrid's approved 2026 municipal budget provides an existing financial context: the city reported a total budget of €6.578 billion, with €751 million in municipal investment and €1.011 billion when investments by municipal companies were included. These figures establish fiscal context, not an appropriation for the proposed metropolitan programme.

The initial expenditure estimate should therefore be developed through a costed feasibility study, identifying staffing, technical consultancy, data integration, cybersecurity, modelling, maintenance and infrastructure investment separately. Funding should combine existing departmental appropriations, reprioritised capital expenditure, eligible regional and national contributions, and European funding where the relevant programme conditions are satisfied. Momentum should be maintained through an annually updated investment pipeline, a designated intergovernmental delivery office, quarterly milestone reviews and public reporting of expenditure against physical outcomes. Each phase should have a defined budget ceiling, a responsible institution and explicit criteria for continuation or redesign. Procurement should favour interoperable standards and modular systems to limit vendor dependence and recurrent operating costs. Independent evaluation should test whether digital investment improves planning decisions and reduces avoidable expenditure rather than merely increasing administrative capacity. The central fiscal principle is to protect continuity of delivery while releasing subsequent funding only when evidence demonstrates progress, affordability and measurable public value.

The most immediate intervention should concern housing, because it exposes the difference between a city's international attractiveness and the affordability of participation in its success. The Ayuntamiento's 2025 Quality of Life and Satisfaction with Public Services survey, published in January 2026, records satisfaction with living in Madrid at 7.7 out of 10, while the overall assessment of quality of life stands at 6.9; housing remains the principal concern, and concern about the cost of living has increased. The relative stability of the headline satisfaction score therefore should not be interpreted as evidence that all underlying conditions are improving.

Madrid should respond by connecting land-use planning, affordable housing provision, public transport investment and employment geography within a single metropolitan delivery programme. This would require identifying publicly controlled and underused land suitable for housing, accelerating the conversion of appropriate sites, expanding affordable rental and social housing, and coordinating new residential development with transport capacity, schools, health facilities and green infrastructure. The relevant Ayuntamiento indicators would track housing affordability, perceived housing pressure, residential delivery and district-level satisfaction; OECD comparisons would establish whether housing outcomes are improving relative to comparable territories, while Mori's livability indicators would help establish whether Madrid is becoming more attractive to residents and internationally mobile talent. The intervention should be evaluated not by the volume of construction alone, but by the affordability of the resulting homes, their accessibility to employment and services, and the distribution of benefits across districts.

The second priority should be to convert the existing municipal approach to mobility and public space into an integrated metropolitan accessibility programme. Rather than treating transport congestion, neighbourhood renewal and land development as separate policy domains, Madrid should prioritise areas in which improved public transport, safer walking and cycling routes, public-space regeneration and mixed-use development can jointly reduce travel burdens and improve access to employment. Municipal indicators concerning traffic, transport services, environmental quality and public satisfaction would provide the operational baseline; OECD measures would test the consequences for access to services and territorial well-being; Mori's accessibility function would assess the wider implications for international connectivity and urban efficiency. This requires particular attention to the relationship between the municipality and the wider metropolitan commuting area, since a substantial part of Madrid's functional economy extends beyond the city's administrative limits.

A third intervention should integrate climate adaptation, water security and urban morphology. Madrid's spatial planning should identify heat-vulnerable neighbourhoods, areas with inadequate tree cover, locations exposed to pluvial flooding and districts where access to parks and shaded public space is deficient. These spatial diagnoses should guide investment in urban greening, permeable surfaces, shaded pedestrian networks, water reuse and the restoration of ecological corridors. The Ayuntamiento's environmental and neighbourhood indicators would make it possible to locate interventions and monitor implementation, while OECD well-being measures and Mori's environment and livability functions would provide external tests of their wider significance. The critical requirement is to assess environmental improvements in relation to social distribution: additional green space should improve the everyday conditions of neighbourhoods with the greatest deficits, rather than merely enhance already attractive urban districts.

Madrid should also strengthen the relationship between research capacity, economic productivity and international cultural exchange. Its universities, research organisations, hospitals, cultural institutions and business services constitute assets that can be more systematically connected through innovation districts, technology-transfer partnerships, international research programmes and improved links between graduates and local employers. Municipal

economic indicators should monitor the creation and survival of innovative enterprises, skilled employment and the spatial distribution of economic opportunity; OECD measures should test whether economic development translates into improved jobs and income; and Mori's economy, research and development, and cultural interaction functions should indicate whether the city is consolidating its international reach. The appropriate intervention is not a general attempt to attract more investment regardless of its character, but the deliberate strengthening of activities that generate high-value employment, research collaboration and durable international connections.

The comparison among the three measurement systems should ultimately be institutionalised through an intervention-oriented performance architecture. The Ayuntamiento's indicators should serve as the primary instrument for assigning responsibility, establishing local baselines and monitoring implementation. OECD measures should provide the framework for assessing whether these interventions improve well-being, reduce disparities and strengthen resilience. Mori's GPCI should function as an external diagnostic of international competitiveness and attractiveness, using the published definitions and results for its six functions and constituent indicators rather than a locally reconstructed proxy. The GPCI's 2025 documentation, released in January 2026, provides city profiles and indicator definitions that can support this more granular diagnosis.

This architecture should be accompanied by a rigorous distinction between outputs, outcomes and external ranking effects. The number of homes delivered, kilometres of transport infrastructure completed or trees planted represents an output; improved affordability, shorter journeys, reduced heat exposure or greater satisfaction represents an outcome; and a change in Madrid's international ranking is a comparative result affected by both local performance and the progress of other cities. Consequently, each major intervention should have a defined baseline, an accountable public authority, a funding envelope, a delivery timetable and an evaluation method. Quarterly reviews should examine implementation and expenditure, while an annual assessment should test whether measurable local improvements are reflected in the relevant OECD and Mori indicators.

The strategic implication is that Madrid should not establish a separate bureaucracy devoted to rankings. It should reorganise existing planning, statistical and investment capacities around a common set of urban problems, with the Ayuntamiento's indicator system providing the operational foundation and the OECD and Mori frameworks supplying complementary tests of public value and international performance. The intended result is a city in which improved housing access, metropolitan mobility, environmental resilience, research-led productivity and cultural interaction reinforce one another. Such a strategy would make any subsequent improvement in Madrid's international standing more substantively meaningful, because it would rest on observable changes in the conditions of urban life rather than on reputation management alone.

8. Everyday Civic Infrastructure: Multifunctional Libraries, Public Baths, Gardens and the Architecture of Shared Life

The connective tissues of a metropolitan region are not confined to the roads along which its inhabitants travel, the administrative boundaries within which they are counted, or the ecological corridors through which the natural world, despite our persistent efforts to discipline it, continues to make its way. There are other connections, less visible perhaps, but no less indispensable, which are formed wherever people encounter one another in the ordinary course of their lives, wherever a child discovers the pleasure of reading, an elderly person finds a place to walk without fear, a young swimmer learns to trust the water, or a stranger enters a public building and discovers, to their surprise, that nothing is required of them except that they belong to the community that has built it. Libraries, swimming pools, gardens, sports facilities, playgrounds, public squares, community workshops and neighbourhood cultural centres should therefore not be regarded as the decorative accessories of metropolitan life, to be provided when the budget permits and withdrawn when it does not, but as infrastructure in the fullest sense of the word, for they determine whether the prosperity celebrated in economic reports eventually finds its way into the lives of ordinary people.

Madrid already practices the construction of cultural centers at district-level but may also benefit from multifonctional libraries and the application of Professor Morenos 15-minute city, a compact ensuring daily necessities and what make us human are within reach at barrios-level, especially for our multi tasking womenfolk.

For Madrid, the challenge is to create a coherent system of civic infrastructure capable of serving a metropolitan population whose needs do not stop at municipal boundaries, although administrative responsibilities often do. Such a system would connect the capital with its surrounding towns and neighbourhoods through a network of accessible, multifunctional public facilities, organised not according to the prestige of particular locations but according to the needs of those who inhabit them. It would be neither necessary nor sensible for every municipality to reproduce independently the entire range of services available elsewhere, as though cooperation were a form of institutional weakness, when a more rational approach could coordinate provision according to population, age structure, existing facilities, transport accessibility and social need. What matters is not that every locality should possess identical buildings, identical budgets or identical programmes, but that every resident should enjoy a reasonable minimum of civic provision, adapted to the particular circumstances of the place in which they live. Equality, after all, does not require that everything be the same, only that differences should not determine who is entitled to a decent public life.

8.1. The Multifunctional Library as a Metropolitan Civic Institution

Let us begin with the library, an institution that has suffered, in recent years, from the peculiar injustice of being considered obsolete precisely when the need for knowledge has become more urgent than ever. It is true that books can now be summoned through

electronic devices, that information travels at extraordinary speed, and that an answer to almost any question may appear on a screen before the question itself has been properly formulated, but none of this abolishes the need for a place in which knowledge can be approached without haste, where concentration is possible, where assistance is available, and where people may remain for hours without being expected to purchase anything. The contemporary public library must consequently be understood as more than a repository of books. It can serve as a neighbourhood learning centre, a point of access to digital technologies, a place of study and language instruction, a venue for cultural activities and a meeting ground for residents whose paths might otherwise never cross.

In districts where educational opportunities are limited or cultural resources are difficult to reach, the library may become one of the few institutions capable of offering something that neither the market nor the private household can reliably provide, namely, an open door through which people can enter the world of learning without first having to demonstrate that they can afford admission. Children can discover books, adults can acquire new skills, migrants can learn the language of their adopted home, older residents can remain connected to an increasingly digital society, and people who have no suitable space in which to work or study can find an environment that recognises their need for silence. These benefits are not incidental to the institution's purpose. They are the very reasons for which public libraries deserve to exist.



Figure 1: Leonor of Asturias Staring into the Future Pondering what is the Wiser Course of Action

Madrid could therefore develop a tiered network of multifunctional libraries, combining modest neighbourhood facilities with larger metropolitan institutions. The former would offer reading rooms, children's areas, digital services, community meeting rooms and spaces for informal learning, while the latter could accommodate specialist collections, exhibitions, lecture halls, makerspaces, professional training and partnerships with universities and research centres. The arrangement would permit local accessibility without sacrificing the advantages of concentration and specialisation, and it would allow the metropolitan region to distribute its resources according to a common strategy rather than leaving each municipality to discover, independently and often at considerable expense, what its neighbours have already learned.

Architecture would play an important role in this undertaking, although the architect should remember that a library is built for the people who use it and not for the photographs that will eventually be taken of its façade. Long opening hours, adaptable rooms, natural light, acoustic comfort and low energy consumption should be treated as essential requirements rather than optional refinements. Ground floors could contribute to the life of the surrounding streets, while the interior would need to reconcile activities that appear contradictory but are, in fact, complementary, such as silent study and collective discussion, individual concentration and public encounter. Where circumstances permit, libraries

might share buildings with adult education, cultural programming, social support and local administrative services, thus reducing duplication while making it easier for residents to meet several needs in a single journey.

The purpose would be to make access to knowledge a practical expression of territorial cohesion. A resident of a small municipality should not have to travel to the centre of Madrid to obtain basic digital assistance, educational support or a welcoming place in which to learn. If knowledge is regarded as a public good, its availability cannot depend entirely on the address at which a person happens to live, nor can the advantages of the metropolitan region be reserved for those who are sufficiently mobile to pursue them.

8.2. Swimming Pools, Public Baths and Everyday Health

The same principle applies to public swimming pools, which are too often classified as recreational facilities, as though recreation were a luxury rather than one of the ordinary conditions of a healthy life. A swimming pool provides exercise, instruction, rehabilitation and opportunities for social interaction, but it also performs a quieter service whose importance becomes apparent whenever the weather turns severe. As Madrid experiences increasingly hot summers, accessible aquatic facilities may offer opportunities for physical activity and relief from the heat, particularly to children, older people and households whose homes provide little protection against high temperatures. The pool thus belongs not only to the world of sport but also to the wider infrastructure of public health.

For children, swimming instruction can provide a practical life skill and a source of confidence; for older residents, regular aquatic exercise may support mobility and rehabilitation; for people recovering from injury, it can offer forms of physical activity that are difficult to sustain elsewhere. And for families, schools and neighbourhood associations, the pool can become a shared environment in which social differences temporarily lose some of their force, because the water, indifferent to income and professional status, imposes its own conditions upon everyone who enters it.

A metropolitan strategy should consequently assess swimming pools and public baths according to their accessibility, capacity, condition, operating costs and contribution to local health, rather than treating each facility as an isolated municipal responsibility. This would not mean constructing a pool in every neighbourhood regardless of cost, nor assuming that every existing installation must be preserved indefinitely. It would mean identifying where provision is inadequate, where facilities can be shared across municipal boundaries, where refurbishment is preferable to replacement, and where new construction can be justified by population needs and long-term operating conditions.

Here, as in the case of libraries, the central question is not how many facilities a city can display as evidence of its ambition, but whether the facilities it provides are available to those who need them, maintained with care and designed to remain useful over time. A public institution fulfils its purpose not when the ribbon is cut, but on all the unremarkable days that follow, when people enter through its doors and discover that the promises made in its name have become part of their daily lives.

8.3. Aquatic Infrastructure: The Civic Value of Water

A metropolitan strategy for swimming should begin with a deceptively simple question: how far must a resident travel before water becomes accessible? The answer will vary across Madrid, but the principle should remain constant. Neighbourhood pools, district aquatic centres and larger facilities serving several municipalities should form a coherent network, each responding to a different scale of need. The smaller establishments would offer proximity and familiarity, places where children learn to swim and adults maintain the quiet rituals of exercise. The larger centres could bring together indoor and outdoor pools, teaching facilities, sporting provision and therapeutic services. Seasonal outdoor pools, meanwhile, could offer relief from the summer heat, provided that their climatic advantages justify their operational costs.

There is something worth recovering, too, from the older idea of the public bath. Not the nineteenth century itself, with its inequalities and paternalistic assumptions, but the recognition that access to water, cleanliness and bodily comfort belongs to the infrastructure of collective life. A city reveals something of its moral imagination in the facilities it makes available to those who possess neither private gardens nor spacious bathrooms nor the means to escape the heat. In contemporary Madrid, this inheritance might find expression in carefully designed changing rooms, showers where a genuine need exists, accessible sanitary facilities and opportunities for water-based recreation connected to parks and sports grounds. The ambition would be modest in appearance but considerable in consequence: to make certain forms of comfort less dependent on private means.

Yet water, like every apparent abundance, imposes its own reckoning. Swimming facilities consume energy and water, and a programme conceived without regard for these costs may eventually undermine the public purpose it seeks to serve. Efficient filtration, heat recovery, solar energy where viable, water recirculation, appropriate pool covers and rigorous lifecycle assessment must therefore belong to the original design rather than appear as corrections after the event. The measure of success is not the number of pools that can be announced, photographed or inaugurated. It is whether residents enjoy reasonable access to affordable facilities without leaving future administrations an inheritance of unsustainable expenditure.

8.4. Gardens, Productive Landscapes and the Metropolitan Imagination

Gardens possess a different kind of civic importance. They do not merely occupy land; they alter the experience of inhabiting it. In a city such as Madrid, where summer heat can transform an ordinary walk into an endurance test, shade and vegetation are not ornamental luxuries. They help determine which public

spaces remain usable, which neighbourhoods offer respite and how comfortably daily life can be conducted. Community gardens, allotments, botanical collections, shaded courtyards, public parks and ecological corridors should consequently be understood as complementary elements of metropolitan infrastructure.

The opportunity lies in connecting these elements without depriving them of their distinct purposes. Small community gardens could bring cultivation into residential neighbourhoods, giving local associations a tangible role in their management. Larger productive landscapes might support urban agriculture, composting, environmental education and the transmission of agricultural knowledge that might otherwise disappear from urban memory. Parks and metropolitan green corridors could connect these spaces, allowing ecological continuity to emerge from what might otherwise remain a collection of isolated projects.

Such places offer benefits that are difficult to express in the language of immediate financial return. A garden may provide habitat for pollinators, moderate local temperatures, encourage physical activity and create opportunities for encounters between people who might otherwise remain strangers. It may also offer something less easily measured: the satisfaction of tending a living thing, the patience required to cultivate it and the recognition that not every worthwhile result can be accelerated.

But sentiment alone will not sustain a garden. Public greenery is easily promised and less easily maintained. Secure access, suitable soils, dependable water supplies, clear management responsibilities and long-term budgets are indispensable. Without them, the language of ecological renewal risks concealing a landscape of neglected beds, failing irrigation systems and disappointed expectations. Nor can the same planting assumptions be applied indiscriminately across a region where water is increasingly precious. Climate-adapted species, healthy soils, efficient irrigation and the careful capture of rainwater where feasible should guide both design and maintenance.

The broader ambition should be to regard gardens not as decorative compensation for the pressures of metropolitan life, but as part of the infrastructure through which that life becomes more tolerable, resilient and humane. Madrid does not need greenery merely to resemble an idealised image of the sustainable city. It needs landscapes capable of surviving its actual climate, serving its actual communities and remaining valuable long after the ceremony that announced their creation has been forgotten.

In both aquatic facilities and green spaces, the same principle applies. The public value of infrastructure resides neither in its novelty nor in its abundance, but in the quality of the life it enables. A well-placed pool, a shaded public garden or a productive landscape may accomplish more than a grander project conceived without sufficient attention to everyday use. Metropolitan ambition should therefore be measured not simply by what Madrid builds, but by what its inhabitants are able to do, experience and share because those places exist.



Figure 2: Speedy Gonzales

The distributional dimension is equally important. Green investment should prioritise neighbourhoods with limited tree cover, high heat exposure and inadequate access to quality open space. Otherwise, environmental improvements risk reinforcing existing differences in urban comfort rather than reducing them.

8.5. A Metropolitan Catalogue of Civic Furniture And Equipment

The proposal should extend beyond buildings to include the smaller physical elements that determine whether public spaces are genuinely usable. Benches, drinking fountains, shaded seating, public toilets, bicycle stands, playground equipment, outdoor exercise stations, tables, lighting, wayfinding systems, waste and recycling facilities, and accessible paths may appear modest individually. Collectively, they establish the practical conditions for public life.

Madrid could develop a Metropolitan Civic Furniture Catalogue, establishing a shared set of technical, environmental and accessibility standards for public-space equipment across participating municipalities. The catalogue would define performance requirements rather than impose identical visual solutions everywhere. It could include durable, repairable and replaceable components; accessible seating; drinking fountains; shade structures; modular play equipment; bicycle parking; and clearly designed public information systems.

A common catalogue could enable joint procurement, reduce unnecessary duplication, improve maintenance and facilitate the replacement of damaged components. It could also establish principles for material selection, repairability, embodied carbon, heat resistance, water efficiency and compatibility with local architectural contexts.

Standardisation should not be confused with visual uniformity. A historic town square, a modern residential estate and a metropolitan park require different forms of furniture and spatial organisation. The objective is to standardise quality, safety, accessibility and maintenance while preserving the distinctive identity of each place.

Maintenance must be treated as an essential municipal service rather than a residual expenditure. A well-designed bench that cannot be repaired, a drinking fountain that remains out of service or a playground that is not maintained represents a failure of civic infrastructure, regardless of the quality of the original design. Procurement should therefore consider whole-life costs, spare-parts availability, local repair capacity and the responsibilities of the institution managing each facility.

8.6. Madrid and its Biodiversity

Madrid's biodiversity is shaped by the interaction between urban development, regional ecosystems and climate conditions. The city combines densely built neighbourhoods with parks, gardens, river corridors and extensive green spaces. Beyond the capital, the Community of Madrid contains forests, mountains, wetlands and protected habitats that support diverse plant and animal species. The Sierra de Guadarrama National Park and the Jarama and Manzanares river systems are particularly important components of the region's ecological network. Within the city, parks such as Casa de Campo and El Retiro provide habitats for birds, insects and other wildlife.



Source: https://www.comunidad.madrid/medio-ambiente/espacios-naturales-especies-protegidas

Madrid's Green Infrastructure and Biodiversity Plan 2018–2030 recognises the importance of connecting green spaces and improving their ecological quality. However, urban expansion, transport infrastructure and fragmented land use can isolate habitats and weaken ecological connectivity. Rising temperatures, drought and water scarcity also place pressure on urban vegetation and wildlife. Furthermore, access to high-quality green spaces is uneven across neighbourhoods and municipalities. These challenges demonstrate that biodiversity should be treated as an essential component of urban planning rather than as a separate environmental concern. Improving biodiversity outcomes requires stronger coordination between Madrid City Council, the Community of Madrid and neighbouring municipalities. Planning departments should protect existing habitats, restore degraded ecosystems and establish ecological corridors between parks, rivers and surrounding natural areas. Native and climate-adapted vegetation should be prioritised to reduce water consumption and improve habitat suitability. Green roofs, vegetated walls, street trees and pocket parks can increase ecological value within densely built neighbourhoods. River restoration and sustainable water management can further strengthen ecosystem resilience. Biodiversity considerations should also be integrated into housing

development, transport planning and major regeneration projects.

These interventions can contribute directly to several United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). SDG 11, Sustainable Cities and Communities, can be advanced through accessible green spaces, resilient urban development and improved environmental planning. SDG 13, Climate Action, can benefit from urban greening, heat mitigation and ecosystem-based adaptation. SDG 15, Life on Land, can be supported through habitat protection, restoration and improved ecological connectivity. SDG 6, Clean Water and Sanitation, is relevant to wetland protection, river restoration and sustainable water management. SDG 3, Good Health and Well-being, can benefit from accessible parks, recreational opportunities and reduced exposure to extreme urban heat. To improve SDG scoring, Madrid should establish measurable baseline indicators and monitor progress consistently across districts and municipalities. Relevant indicators include green space per resident, tree-canopy coverage, habitat connectivity, native-species abundance, ecological restoration areas and public access to parks. These indicators should be disaggregated geographically to identify inequalities and prioritise underserved neighbourhoods. Biodiversity monitoring should combine municipal spatial data, ecological surveys, satellite imagery and citizen-science observations.

The city should also publish regular progress reports linking individual projects to specific SDG targets and indicators. Importantly, scoring improvements should reflect verified environmental and social outcomes rather than simply the number of trees planted or projects completed. By combining ecological restoration, equitable access to green space, stronger metropolitan coordination and transparent performance measurement, Madrid can improve its biodiversity while strengthening its overall SDG performance.

9. From Isolated Amenities to Multifunctional Civic Hubs

The greatest opportunity lies in combining complementary services where doing so improves accessibility and operating efficiency. A single civic hub might integrate a library, community rooms, childcare, a sports hall, a swimming pool, a garden, a café, adult education and local administrative services. Such combinations can support activity throughout the day, allow facilities to share certain spaces and services, and make public investment more visible in residents' everyday lives.

Nevertheless, multifunctionality should be guided by careful programming rather than pursued as an architectural fashion. Swimming pools require specialised plant and maintenance systems; libraries need acoustic separation and quiet areas; childcare requires appropriate safeguarding; and community rooms may require independent access outside normal building hours. Co-location is beneficial only where operational compatibility, accessibility and lifecycle costs have been properly assessed.

A useful model would combine three scales of provision. The neighbourhood scale would prioritise libraries, play areas, small gardens, shaded public spaces and accessible community rooms. The district or intermunicipal scale would support swimming pools, sports halls, cultural centres, larger libraries and specialist services. The metropolitan scale would accommodate major botanical institutions, specialist cultural facilities, research partnerships and larger recreational landscapes.

This hierarchy would allow municipalities to share facilities without requiring every town to maintain expensive specialist infrastructure independently. It would also reduce the risk of concentrating all high-quality facilities in central Madrid.

Equity, accessibility and the distribution of investment

The principal test of such a programme should be whether it reduces inequalities in access to civic life. Facility provision should therefore be assessed through travel times, opening hours, affordability, physical accessibility, service quality and actual usage. Counting buildings alone would be inadequate: a library may exist but remain inaccessible to residents with limited mobility, while a swimming pool may be geographically close but financially prohibitive.

A metropolitan civic-infrastructure observatory could map existing facilities, identify underserved neighbourhoods and estimate the needs of different population groups. Priority would be given to areas where social disadvantage coincides with poor access to libraries, sports facilities, green space or comfortable public environments. Investment decisions would be reviewed periodically to reflect demographic change, new housing development and shifts in patterns of use.

This approach would connect municipal reform directly to everyday experience. Rather than measuring the success of consolidation through the number of administrative units eliminated, Madrid could assess whether residents gain better access to learning, recreation, nature and public services.

9.1. Governance, Finance and Implementation

The programme would require cooperation between the Comunidad de Madrid, municipal governments, transport authorities, cultural institutions and relevant public-service providers. Responsibilities should be allocated according to the scale at which each service can be delivered most effectively. Local authorities would retain responsibility for neighbourhood spaces and day-to-day community needs, while shared-service arrangements could support joint procurement, specialist maintenance and the operation of facilities serving several municipalities.

Funding should combine capital investment with predictable operating and maintenance budgets. The construction of new facilities without adequate provision for staffing, energy, repairs and programming would create liabilities rather than lasting public value. Funding criteria should therefore evaluate whole-life costs

and prioritise projects that address documented service gaps. Implementation could begin with a metropolitan audit of existing civic infrastructure, followed by pilot projects in contrasting urban and rural settings. These pilots would test shared operation, common procurement standards, multifunctional programming and the distribution of costs between municipalities. Independent evaluation would then determine which arrangements should be expanded.

The guiding principle is straightforward: the value of civic infrastructure lies not in the number of facilities inaugurated, but in their sustained capacity to support everyday life.

9.2. Sumamry Civic Infrastructure as the Connective Tissue of Metropolitan Solidarity

Madrid's future should be shaped not only by major transport projects, economic districts and strategic institutions, but also by the ordinary facilities through which people learn, exercise, meet, play and experience their neighbourhoods. Multifunctional libraries, accessible swimming pools, productive gardens, well-maintained public spaces and durable civic furniture are fundamental components of a metropolitan region committed to social cohesion.

A coordinated programme would allow Madrid to move from fragmented provision towards a more equitable system of shared facilities. It would connect municipal reform with public health, education, climate adaptation, accessibility and civic participation. Above all, it would provide a practical expression of the principle that territorial cohesion must be experienced in everyday life rather than articulated only through regional strategies.

Within the wider vision of *Madrid Beyond Capitality,* these facilities constitute the connective tissue between institutional ambition and social reality. They make metropolitan cooperation visible at the scale of the street, the neighbourhood and the daily routine. The ultimate measure of Madrid's urban success would therefore include not only the strength of its economy or the reach of its international connections, but whether every resident can access the physical and social infrastructure necessary for a dignified, healthy and fulfilling life.

10. The Governance Model Underpinning the Modernisation of the Ayuntamiento de Madrid

Let us take a closer look at what the Madrid Ayuntamiento is up to and what it could accomplish once the push ups on addressing shared challenges and reducing vulnerabilities have been raised to in leading the city of the Madrillenas up to its maximum yield.

We thank Leonor Ortiz-Bourbon for inspiration to adding this section to the long essay, as we recovered from a sub-psychotic episode in the parting days from the living hell that is Sønder ---jylland, Denmark and Bruxelles Zuid.

The modernisation initiatives of the *Ayuntamiento de Madrid* reflect a broader transformation in urban governance, characterised by the integration of digital technologies, administrative efficiency, citizen participation and performance-oriented management. Rather than representing a purely technological reform, this transformation implies an evolving governance model in which municipal authority seeks to enhance institutional capacity, improve public service delivery and strengthen responsiveness to the differentiated needs of the urban population.

First, the model incorporates principles associated with **New Public Management (NPM),** particularly through its emphasis on administrative efficiency, performance measurement, managerial accountability and the rationalisation of public services. The adoption of monitoring systems, performance indicators and streamlined administrative procedures reflects an effort to orient municipal management towards measurable outcomes and improved service quality. Nevertheless, the extent to which these reforms represent a comprehensive NPM model depends on their implementation and the degree to which performance targets influence resource allocation and institutional decision-making.

Second, Madrid's modernisation agenda demonstrates characteristics of **digital-era governance**, whereby digital infrastructure, integrated information systems and online public services are used to reorganise administrative processes and improve interactions between citizens and public institutions. Digitalisation has the potential to reduce bureaucratic barriers, facilitate access to municipal services and strengthen coordination across administrative departments. However, its effectiveness depends on institutional interoperability, data governance, digital accessibility and the capacity to prevent technological inequalities from reproducing existing social disadvantages.

Third, the model incorporates elements of **participatory and networked governance**. Citizen engagement mechanisms, transparency initiatives and collaboration between municipal departments, district administrations and civil society suggest an understanding of urban governance that extends beyond hierarchical decision-making. These arrangements can strengthen democratic legitimacy by incorporating local knowledge into policymaking and improving the alignment between public expenditure and neighbourhood priorities. Their substantive value, however, depends on whether participation influences actual decisions rather than functioning primarily as a consultative exercise.

Finally, the model retains an important **territorial and decentralised dimension**. Madrid's 21 districts and 131 barrios constitute differentiated urban spaces characterised by varying socioeconomic conditions, housing pressures and levels of access to public services. Effective modernisation therefore requires coordination between city-wide strategic priorities and district-level implementation. This territorial perspective is particularly important for addressing spatial inequality, as improvements in administrative efficiency do not automatically translate into equitable outcomes across neighbourhoods.

Taken together, the modernisation of the *Ayuntamiento de Madrid* can be interpreted as an emerging hybrid governance model combining managerial efficiency, digital transformation, participatory mechanisms and multilevel administrative coordination. Its success should therefore be assessed not only in terms of technological innovation or service-delivery performance, but also through its capacity to promote transparency, democratic accountability and territorial equity. In particular, the relationship between administrative modernisation and substantive urban outcomes—including housing affordability, neighbourhood regeneration and access to essential services—provides a critical basis for evaluating whether institutional reform contributes to a more inclusive and socially sustainable city.



This infographic articulates a sophisticated vision of metropolitan development in which culture and governance are treated not as separate policy domains but as mutually reinforcing systems. Madrid is presented as a city seeking to strengthen both its international attractiveness and its institutional capacity at the same time. The left side of the framework focuses on cultural interaction, while the right side concentrates on digital planning and governance capability. Together they form a comprehensive model of urban competitiveness in the twenty-first century.

The cultural dimension is framed as a driver of international reach, social vitality and economic dynamism. Museums and heritage institutions provide historical continuity and reinforce the city's identity within the global cultural landscape. Performing arts contribute to urban vibrancy by generating continuous activity and public engagement throughout the year. Gastronomy is portrayed as a strategic asset that links local traditions with tourism, innovation and place branding. Universities and research institutions are positioned as engines of knowledge creation and talent development. Conferences and international events strengthen Madrid's role as a meeting place for business, science and diplomacy. International partnerships further expand the city's global networks and influence.

An important feature of the cultural strategy is its emphasis on outcomes rather than assets alone. The framework is concerned not only with the existence of cultural institutions but also with how effectively they generate participation and exchange. Visitor dispersion is highlighted as an indicator of whether economic benefits extend beyond central districts. Cultural participation reflects the degree to which residents themselves engage with cultural life. Length of stay is treated as a measure of deeper visitor engagement rather than mass tourism. Diversity of cultural provision recognizes that resilient cities require multiple cultural venues, programs and access points. The approach therefore prioritizes quality, inclusion and territorial balance over simple visitor numbers.

The governance dimension introduces a parallel vision of institutional modernization. The central premise is that better information enables better decisions. Urban complexity can no longer be managed effectively through fragmented administrative structures and isolated datasets. The proposed system aims to create a shared metropolitan platform that integrates information, planning and implementation. Governance is therefore presented as a process of continuous learning rather than periodic intervention.

The first layer of the digital model focuses on trusted metropolitan data. Reliable and interoperable datasets establish a common factual foundation across public institutions. Without shared information, different departments often operate according to competing assumptions and incompatible priorities. The second layer introduces a shared geospatial model that allows urban systems to be visualized spatially. Housing, mobility, infrastructure and environmental conditions become visible within a common analytical framework. Decision makers gain a more comprehensive understanding of metropolitan dynamics.

Scenario simulation represents one of the most advanced aspects of the model. Rather than relying solely on forecasts or political intuition, planners can explore alternative futures before making investments. Urban development becomes more anticipatory and less reactive. Different policy choices can be assessed for their consequences before implementation. This strengthens resilience and reduces uncertainty.

Security and access control acknowledge that digital transformation requires trust. Data systems cannot function effectively without adequate safeguards for privacy, cybersecurity and accountability. Public confidence becomes as important as technical capability. The framework therefore combines innovation with institutional responsibility. Digital governance is not presented as technological experimentation but as structured public stewardship.

The planning and investment workflow layer addresses a frequent weakness of public administration. Strategic plans often fail because they are disconnected from financial decisions and implementation mechanisms. The proposed system seeks to connect planning priorities directly with budgets, projects and delivery processes. This integration increases transparency and reduces institutional fragmentation. Continuous evaluation then closes the feedback loop by allowing outcomes to be monitored and policies adjusted. Governance becomes adaptive rather than static.

Underlying the entire infographic is a shift from traditional government to networked governance. Authority is distributed across institutions, stakeholders and data systems rather than concentrated within isolated bureaucratic structures. The city is envisioned as a platform for collaboration among public agencies, universities, businesses and citizens. Knowledge sharing becomes a central governance function. Evidence replaces assumption as the basis for decision making.

The repeated use of the term metropolitan is particularly significant. The framework recognizes that housing markets, commuting patterns, innovation ecosystems and environmental systems extend beyond municipal boundaries. Effective governance requires coordination at the scale of the urban region rather than the administrative city alone. This metropolitan perspective aligns with contemporary theories of urban competitiveness and regional development. Cities increasingly succeed not because of their municipal governments alone but because of the effectiveness of their wider metropolitan systems.

The concluding vision is therefore not merely about improving cultural facilities or deploying digital tools. It is about creating a city capable of understanding itself, coordinating its resources and projecting influence internationally. Culture generates attraction, identity and openness. Governance provides intelligence, accountability and strategic direction. Together they produce a metropolitan ecosystem that is more connected, resilient and globally engaged. Madrid is presented not simply as a capital city but as an emerging node within international networks of knowledge, culture and innovation. The ultimate ambition is to develop a metropolitan model in which creativity, evidence and collaboration reinforce one another to generate long-term prosperity, social cohesion and global relevance.

So long as you bear in mind that the meshes in the network do not become too large and efficiency gains work best when effective and stakeholder based policy combines to deliver better performance in urban governance and meaningful progresses in social development.

11. Ten *Grands Œuvres for* Madrid's Next Century

A city cannot transform its role through a manifesto alone. It requires a portfolio of institutions, infrastructures and urban interventions that embody the proposed change. Great architecture, characterised by innovative forms and spatial experimentation, emerges within a particular social, cultural, historical, and urban context. However, as urban and regional studies suggest, architectural innovation can become decontextualised when regulatory frameworks, planning decisions, or development strategies prioritise formal autonomy over the relationship between buildings and their surroundings. The central theoretical tension is between architectural innovation as an autonomous creative expression and architecture as a context-dependent practice shaped by its urban, social, and regulatory environment.

Decontextualization in urban studies means understanding or planning urban spaces without considering their local context. This context includes historical, social, cultural, political, and economic factors. It occurs when urban policies are applied without adapting them to local conditions. For example, a city may copy a foreign urban development model without considering residents' needs. This can lead to inappropriate planning decisions. It may also contribute to social exclusion and gentrification. Decontextualization can weaken local identity and cultural

heritage. It often prioritizes expert knowledge over residents' experiences.

Legitimacy concerns whether urban decisions are considered justified, fair, and acceptable. It examines who has the authority to make decisions about urban spaces. It also questions whose interests are represented in urban planning. Residents should have meaningful opportunities to participate in decisions affecting them. A project can be legally approved but still lack social legitimacy. For example, luxury housing may displace residents despite receiving official approval. This raises questions about fairness and democratic representation.

Decontextualized planning can undermine the legitimacy of urban policies. This happens when decisions ignore local needs and social inequalities. Legitimate urban governance requires transparency, participation, and accountability. Urban planners should combine international knowledge with local knowledge and experiences. Ultimately, context-sensitive planning and democratic participation are essential for creating legitimate and socially just cities.

This raises an important question: Can architecture be considered great if its innovative form disregards the context in which it is situated?
Madrid provides a particularly interesting case for examining the relationship between innova-tive architecture and its urban context. The city is neither a coherent historical environment nor a collection of isolated contemporary interventions. Rather, it is a layered urban landscape in which historic architecture, nineteenth-century expansion, twentieth-century modernism, large-scale infrastructure and contemporary urban regeneration coexist.

The central question is whether innovative architecture in Madrid becomes disconnected from its surroundings, or whether it can reinterpret the existing urban fabric through a contemporary architectural language. In many cases, the answer is not simply that a building lacks context. It may instead be that the building responds to a different layer of context than the one immediately visible around it.

Madrid offers a compelling case study for examining the relationship between architectural innovation, contextuality and urban transformation. Its built environment reflects a complex interaction between historical continuity, modernisation and contemporary architectural experimentation. The historic centre is characterised by narrow streets, irregular urban blocks, traditional façades and interconnected public spaces. These elements establish a distinctive urban identity that continues to influence the city's architectural development. In contrast, the nineteenth-century Ensanche introduced a more systematic urban structure through its regular street grid and ordered blocks. This expansion demonstrates how urban planning can establish a coherent framework within which architectural diversity can emerge.

Contemporary Madrid, however, presents increasingly complex challenges concerning the relationship between buildings and their surroundings. Innovative architectural forms frequently introduce new materials, geometries and spatial configurations into established urban environments. Such interventions can enrich the city by challenging conventional design principles and creating new architectural experiences. Nevertheless, formal innovation does not automatically guarantee a meaningful relationship with the surrounding context. When architectural expression prioritises visual distinction over urban integration, buildings risk becoming isolated objects within the city. This condition may be described as architectural decontextualisation, particularly when existing spatial, cultural and social relationships are overlooked. However, contextuality should not be reduced to stylistic imitation or the preservation of historical appearances. A contemporary building can contrast with its surroundings while remaining sensitive to urban scale, public space and local identity. CaixaForum Madrid illustrates how adaptive reuse and contemporary intervention can establish a dialogue between industrial heritage and new cultural functions.



Figure 3: The Caja is an Exemple of Good Architecture

Its architectural identity emerges through the transformation of an existing structure rather than the reproduction of historical forms. Large-scale developments, such as Madrid Nuevo Norte, raise a different set of questions concerning urban connectivity and integration. Here, contextuality involves more than individual buildings; it includes transport infrastructure, neighbourhood relationships and the continuity of public spaces. The challenge is to prevent new developments from functioning as isolated districts disconnected from the wider urban fabric.

Environmental conditions also play an important role in Madrid's architectural context. Intense summer sunlight, high temperatures and the need for shade influence decisions concerning orientation, materials, façades and outdoor spaces. Responding to these conditions can strengthen the relationship between architectural form and its physical environment. Social context is equally important, particularly regarding accessibility, housing affordability and the preservation of neighbourhood identity. Architecture that disregards these dimensions may achieve formal distinction while contributing little to the everyday life of the city. Madrid therefore does not necessarily require a return to traditional architectural styles, but a more integrated approach to contemporary design. Such an approach would interpret context as a dynamic condition shaped by history, climate, urban morphology and social change. Architectural innovation could then emerge through critical engagement with existing conditions rather than through their rejection. The objective should not be stylistic uniformity, but a productive balance between architectural autonomy and urban continuity. Ultimately, Madrid demonstrates that contextuality is not an obstacle to innovation, but a framework through which innovation can acquire greater meaning. The city's future architectural quality will depend on how effectively new interventions connect individual expression with the collective life of the urban environment. Madrid's next generation of grands œuvres should be judged not by their monumentality but by the capabilities they create.

11.1. Madrid 2050: 13 Grand Projects for a New Metropolitan Capitality

Madrid's future should not be defined solely by its position as Spain's political and administrative capital, nor by the accumulation of spectacular buildings and large-scale developments. Its next stage of transformation could establish a broader form of capitality: one grounded in international cooperation, scientific excellence, territorial cohesion, ecological resilience and cultural exchange.
The following ten projects propose an institutional and spatial framework for that ambition. Each addresses a distinct metropolitan challenge while contributing to a larger vision of Madrid as a European capital with deep Atlantic and Ibero-American connections. Their success, however, should be measured not by their names, architectural prominence or institutional scale, but by their capacity to deliver lasting public value.

11.1.1. The Atlantic–Ibero-American Forum

Madrid as a permanent platform for transatlantic cooperation
Establish a permanent institution connecting research centres, diplomatic organisations, foundations, cultural producers and public agencies from Europe and the Ibero-American world. Its purpose would be to turn Madrid's international relationships into a continuous programme of cooperation rather than a succession of high-profile conferences.

The Forum should support joint research, policy dialogue, cultural production, professional exchanges and long-term institutional

partnerships. Its work could focus on shared challenges such as democratic resilience, technological transformation, migration, climate adaptation and the future of cities.

Its distinguishing feature must be continuity. Rather than duplicating existing diplomatic or cultural organisations, it should connect them through common programmes, shared resources and measurable objectives. Governance should be international and reciprocal, allowing participating institutions to shape priorities rather than treating Ibero-American partners merely as recipients of European initiatives.

Madrid's advantage would lie in its capacity to act as a meeting point between institutions that might otherwise operate through fragmented bilateral relationships.



Figure 4: The Current Ibero-American House Appears old Fashioned

The Palacio de Linares is one of Madrid's most distinguished nineteenth-century palaces, situated on Plaza de Cibeles. Construction began in 1877 at the request of José María Murga, Marquis of Linares, and his wife, Raimunda Osorio. The couple began living there in 1884, although the elaborate interior decoration was not completed until 1900. The palace combines French and Italian architectural influences with richly decorated salons, marble staircases, paintings, mosaics and ornate furnishings.

In 1992, after restoration, the palace became the headquarters of Casa de América. Established through cooperation between Spain's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Community of Madrid and Madrid City Council, Casa de América serves as a cultural and diplomatic meeting place connecting Spain with Latin America and the wider Americas.

Its functions include:

- Diplomacy and dialogue: hosting discussions involving diplomats, policymakers and public figures.
- Culture and the arts: organising exhibitions, film screenings, concerts and literary events.
- Political and intellectual exchange: convening conferences and debates on international affairs, democracy, economics and relations between Europe and the Americas.
- Public engagement: helping audiences discover the diversity of Latin American societies and their connections with Spain and Europe.

The palace thus has a dual identity: it preserves the architectural heritage of Madrid's aristocratic past while serving a contemporary public purpose. Casa de América uses the historic setting not merely as a venue, but as a symbolic space for cultural diplomacy and transatlantic exchange.

Spain hardly suffers from a shortage of Casas de América. Perhaps, then, the time has come for the Palacio de Linares to abandon that familiar identity and reclaim a more singular destiny: one worthy of its architectural splendour, historical significance and extraordinary potential as a setting for cultural diplomacy, intellectual exchange and European–American dialogue.

11.1.2. The European–Ibero-American University Alliance

Building a transatlantic knowledge system

Develop a networked academic platform linking existing universities around climate adaptation, democratic governance, public health, energy transitions and urban transformation. The ambition should be to strengthen the research capacity of participating institutions while enabling them to address problems that exceed national boundaries.

The Alliance could coordinate joint doctoral programmes, shared laboratories, research fellowships, collaborative grant applications and cross-university teaching. A common framework for research infrastructure and knowledge exchange would allow smaller institutions to participate without having to reproduce the resources of larger universities.

Its institutional model should remain distributed. Rather than establishing a new university with substantial administrative costs, the Alliance would use existing campuses, laboratories and academic networks, creating a shared identity through research programmes and long-term partnerships.

Success should be assessed through research quality, doctoral training, scientific collaboration, public impact and the durability of partnerships—not through enrolment figures or institutional prestige alone.

Madrid could thereby strengthen its role as a coordinating centre within a wider European–Ibero-American knowledge network without claiming exclusive ownership of that network.

11.1.3. Madrid Sur 2050

Rebalancing the metropolitan geography of opportunity
Make the transformation of southern Madrid and the wider southern metropolitan area a central project of economic and social policy. The objective should be to develop a productive, culturally distinctive and socially inclusive metropolitan geography, rather than treating the south as a peripheral extension of the established centre.

The programme should integrate advanced manufacturing, applied research, technical education, cultural infrastructure, affordable housing, industrial regeneration and high-quality public transport. Existing industrial areas could be adapted for new productive activities, while universities, vocational institutions and research organisations could establish stronger connections with local businesses and communities.

Regeneration must also address the everyday conditions that determine urban opportunity: access to employment, reliable transport, green space, public services and high-quality housing. Residents should participate in defining priorities, with safeguards against displacement and the loss of established community networks.

The ambition is not to make the south a smaller version of northern Madrid. It is to cultivate its own economic strengths, social institutions and cultural identity.

By coordinating investment across municipal boundaries, Madrid Sur 2050 could become a model for metropolitan development in which territorial cohesion is treated as a productive asset rather than a redistributive afterthought.

11.1.4. The Great Atlantic Station

Transforming Chamartín into an integrated metropolitan gateway
Madrid should renew Chamartín station and improve connections between high-speed rail, metro, buses, and other transport networks. A modern, accessible transport hub would improve international connectivity, facilitate business travel, and reinforce Madrid's role as a gateway between Europe and Latin America.

It should reconceive Chamartín and its surrounding development as a strategic interchange between national rail, metropolitan mobility, employment, housing and public space. The project should be understood as a piece of city-building as much as a transport intervention.

Its central objective would be to improve connections between long-distance rail services, commuter networks, local public transport and surrounding neighbourhoods. Equally important would be the integration of railway infrastructure into the urban fabric through accessible pedestrian routes, connected public spaces and active ground-floor uses.

The station and its surroundings should support a wider metropolitan district rather than operate as an isolated transport and business enclave. Housing, employment and public amenities must be planned alongside transport capacity, with careful attention to accessibility and the consequences of redevelopment.

International ambition must remain grounded in operational reality. Madrid's geographical position does not automatically make it a substitute for Europe's established Atlantic ports or aviation hubs. Its more credible advantage lies in the integration of Spain's rail network with a productive, accessible and internationally connected capital.

The achievement would be a metropolitan gateway that improves everyday mobility while reinforcing Madrid's position within Spain and the wider European transport system.



Figure 5: Tubal Railway Station

11.1.5. The European Institute for Heat, Water and Urban Resilience

Making climate adaptation a metropolitan capability

Establish a major research and implementation centre connecting universities, public agencies, engineering firms, healthcare institutions and municipalities. Its mission would be to translate climate science into practical interventions capable of improving urban life.

Research priorities should include extreme heat, drought, water reuse, urban forestry, building retrofits, cooling infrastructure, resilient public spaces and the health consequences of climate change. Madrid's neighbourhoods could serve as living laboratories in which new solutions are tested, evaluated and adapted before being applied elsewhere.

The Institute should combine scientific research with implementation. Demonstration projects could test shaded streets, passive cooling, heat-resilient housing, water-sensitive landscapes and strategies for reducing energy demand in existing buildings. Results should be independently evaluated and made available to other cities.

The initiative could connect with existing European climate-policy frameworks, including the European Union's Climate-Neutral and Smart Cities Mission, which supports cities in developing and demonstrating pathways towards climate neutrality.

Its purpose would extend beyond research prestige. The Institute should help municipalities, residents and businesses make better decisions about infrastructure, health, energy and the long-term resilience of the built environment.

11.1.6. The Ibero-American Cultural Commons

From cultural representation to shared cultural production

Develop a collaborative network of archives, digital collections, creative-industry partnerships, artist residencies and shared production programmes connecting Madrid with institutions throughout Ibero-America.

The objective should be to create durable relationships between cultural organisations rather than simply increase the visibility of international cultural events. Joint exhibitions, publishing initiatives, digital preservation projects, performing-arts collaborations and shared research could form the basis of a continuous programme.

Reciprocity must be central to its governance. Participating institutions should jointly establish priorities and share responsibility for funding, intellectual property, access and the interpretation of cultural collections. The network should also address inequalities in resources and visibility between institutions.

Madrid could contribute its existing cultural infrastructure and international connections while supporting the independent development of partner organisations.

The Cultural Commons would thus represent a different model of cultural diplomacy: one in which exchange is sustained through shared production, institutional cooperation and mutual recognition rather than unilateral representation.

11.1.7. The Metropolitan Ecological Ring

Establishing green infrastructure as an organising principle of metropolitan development

Connect existing parks, river corridors, peri-urban landscapes and biodiversity areas through a coordinated system of ecological infrastructure wherever feasible. The project should be conceived as a functional landscape network rather than a symbolic green circle around the city.

Its objectives would include improving biodiversity, increasing shade, managing stormwater, supporting active mobility and expanding equitable access to nature. Ecological corridors could also help mitigate urban heat and strengthen connections between the built environment and surrounding landscapes.

Implementation should begin with ecological mapping, hydrological analysis and an assessment of existing barriers. Routes and connections must respond to habitat continuity, water systems, land ownership and the needs of surrounding communities. Where a continuous corridor is impossible, strategically located links and stepping-stone habitats could provide meaningful alternatives.

The Ring should be coordinated with regional planning authorities and neighbouring municipalities, ensuring that environmental benefits extend beyond Madrid's administrative boundaries.

Its value would lie not in the visual completeness of a mapped route, but in measurable improvements to ecological connectivity, environmental quality and everyday access to green space.

11.1.8. The Global Institute for Civic Life

Making public space and democratic participation central to urban policy

Create an interdisciplinary centre focused on public space, democratic participation, neighbourhood governance, urban sociology and the design of inclusive streets and squares.

Madrid's everyday public life could become a source of international research and policy exchange. The Institute would investigate how streets, parks, libraries, markets and civic institutions influence social interaction, belonging, safety and democratic participation.

Its work should combine academic research with direct collaboration with residents, neighbourhood associations, designers and public authorities. Participatory research, neighbourhood observatories and experimental public-space projects could generate evidence about how urban environments affect different groups.

The Institute should also examine the relationship between spatial design and social inequality, including accessibility, gender, age, housing pressures and the distribution of public amenities.

Its institutional structure should remain open and interdisciplinary, linking urban design with social science, public administration and civic practice.

By treating residents' experiences as a legitimate source of knowledge, Madrid could strengthen the connection between urban policy and democratic life. The Institute's contribution would be to make public space not merely a design concern, but a central component of social infrastructure.

11.1.9. The Iberian Strategic Partnership

Turning Madrid–Lisbon cooperation into practical institutional capacity

Develop a structured partnership between Madrid and Lisbon spanning research, transport, energy, public administration, culture and investment. Its purpose should be to establish a sustained framework for cooperation between the two metropolitan areas and the institutions around them.

The initial programme should concentrate on deliverable projects: research partnerships, coordinated cultural programmes, exchanges between public administrations, cooperation on energy and climate adaptation, and improvements in transport connectivity where feasible.

A joint coordination office could monitor progress, identify funding opportunities and publish annual assessments of agreed objectives. Projects should be selected according to their practical value rather than their symbolic appeal.

The partnership should also recognise the distinct economic structures, governance systems and geographical conditions of the two cities. It should not depend on a speculative claim that Madrid and Lisbon will become a single continuous urban corridor.

Improved connectivity and institutional cooperation would create value even without a new geopolitical label. The strategic ambition is to strengthen the relationship between two important Iberian metropolitan centres while contributing to wider European cooperation.

11.1.10. The House of Territorial Cohesion

Making the territorial consequences of national decisions visible

Establish a permanent, independent platform bringing together Spain's regions, metropolitan authorities, universities and public institutions to monitor territorial disparities and evaluate the geographical effects of public policy.

Its responsibilities could include publishing comparable regional indicators, assessing infrastructure investment, examining access to public services, monitoring economic concentration and convening negotiations over cross-regional projects.

The House should focus on evidence and institutional coordination rather than becoming another general-purpose administrative body. Its initial mandate could be limited to a small number of measurable priorities, supported by transparent evaluation procedures, public reporting obligations and independent scrutiny.

Its work should distinguish between regional inequalities, metropolitan disparities and differences in access to essential services. This would allow policymakers to understand not only where investment is concentrated, but also how its benefits and costs are distributed.

The institution should provide a common evidence base for national and regional decision-making without replacing the constitutional responsibilities of existing authorities.

Its fundamental purpose would be to ensure that the territorial

consequences of national decisions remain visible, comparable and open to public debate.

11.1.11. Develop an International Business District

Madrid could develop the Madrid Nuevo Norte area into a major international business district with modern office towers, conference facilities, and innovative workspaces. This would attract multinational companies, foreign investment, and skilled workers, strengthening Madrid's position as a global economic hub.

11.1.12. Create a World-Class Cultural and Innovation Hub

Madrid should renovate historic and industrial buildings and transform them into cultural centres, research facilities, and technology hubs. By combining cultural heritage with innovation, the city could attract international talent, researchers, creative industries, and tourists while preserving its local identity.

11.1.13. Build a Sustainable and Inclusive Urban District

Madrid should prioritize energy-efficient buildings, green public spaces, affordable housing, and sustainable mobility in major urban redevelopment projects. This would improve residents' quality of life while strengthening Madrid's environmental performance and international attractiveness.

11.2. A Coherent Institutional Architecture for Madrid 2050

Together, these ten projects would provide an institutional architecture for a broader conception of Madrid's capitality. They would connect the city's physical transformation with its scientific capacity, social responsibilities, environmental resilience and international relationships.

Their value would depend on how effectively they reinforce one another. The Atlantic–Ibero-American Forum and University Alliance could create shared research and cultural programmes. Madrid Sur 2050 could translate those capabilities into more balanced metropolitan development. The Great Atlantic Station could improve physical connectivity, while the Climate Resilience Institute and Metropolitan Ecological Ring would strengthen environmental performance. The Institute for Civic Life and House of Territorial Cohesion would provide mechanisms for participation, accountability and evidence-based decision-making. The Madrid–Lisbon partnership would extend this framework into the wider Iberian context.

Three principles should guide implementation.

First, institutional function must precede architectural form. Not every initiative requires a new building. Several could be developed through existing universities, public agencies, cultural institutions and research centres. New facilities should be justified by demonstrable operational needs.

Second, metropolitan integration must take precedence over isolated prestige projects. Investment should strengthen relationships between neighbourhoods, municipalities, transport systems and institutions. Architectural distinction is valuable when it contributes to a wider urban purpose.

Third, public value must remain the principal measure of success. Research quality, environmental performance, accessibility, social inclusion, institutional cooperation and demonstrable outcomes should determine whether each project merits continuation or expansion.

The objective is not to construct ten monuments to Madrid's ambition. It is to establish a durable network of institutions, infrastructure and public spaces capable of addressing challenges that no single building, municipality or organisation could resolve independently.

Madrid 2050 would therefore represent a shift from capitality defined by concentration towards capitality defined by connectivity: the capacity to connect knowledge, territories, cultures and institutions in ways that generate lasting value for the city, Spain and its international partners.

11.3. Which Projects Deserve Iconic Architecture?

My proposed distinction is to reserve the most ambitious architectural expressions for three projects:

i. The Atlantic House — a recognisable civic and international institution.
ii. Madrid Gateway — a major piece of transport infrastructure whose architecture must improve the experience of the entire city.
iii. The Madrid Climate Resilience Institute — a demonstrator of climate-responsive architecture that performs as well as it looks.

The other projects may achieve greater long-term value through adaptive reuse, distributed campuses, landscape infrastructure or strengthening existing institutions.

The guiding principle is simple: the building should express the public purpose of the institution, and the institution should improve the city around it. Madrid's international standing would be strengthened not by the number of monuments it builds, but by the quality of the networks, research, public spaces and social opportunities those projects create.

We vouch for four design principles to hook up with the buildings:

- A quieter, cleaner centre: expand walkable streets, cycling routes, public transport and low-emission mobility.
- A healthier south: invest in green corridors, shaded public spaces and cleaner transport connections in southern districts.
- A metropolitan mobility network: improve connections between rail, metro, buses and regional transport so that daily journeys rely less on private cars.
- An urban climate and health institute: monitor air quality, traffic noise, heat and public-health outcomes, and use the findings to guide planning.

The central idea: Madrid 2050 should not only create new

institutions and landmarks; it should also make everyday life quieter, healthier and easier to navigate.

12.The SDG Urban Index

This has to be compared to several broader patterns that are relevant to Madrid's development strategy as derived from the SDG Index Urban that Madrid only has achieved its goals in clean water and sanitation and affordable energy and with mediocre scoring on the reduction of inequalities, industry, innovation and infratructure, sustainable cities and communities, life on land, peace, justice and strong institutions. Madrid dropped out on climate action . To sum up, Madrid is underperforming the national average and has fallen behind most of its peers in the Eu.

We observe
First, sustainability requires more than environmental management. Cities must integrate public health, housing, economic opportunity, infrsatructure, consumption and ecological protection.

Second, climate action needs to be connected to urban planning. Transport, lands use, building renovation, green infrastructure and energy systems must work together.

Third, innovation and infrastructure are essential to long-term performance. Sustainable development depends on the ability to translate research, technological capabilities and public investment into better urban outcomes.

Fourth, progress must be socially inclusive. Improvements in environmental quality and economic competitiveness should benefit residents across the metropolitan area, not merely its most prosperous districts.

The implications are of the grands d'oevres and manipulation of public space could then be harnessed to: First, for Madrid to connect universities, research institutes, technology firms, start-ups and public authorities through innovation districts and knowledge hubs. Measure commercialisation, technology transfer, research collaboration and the creation of skilled employment.

Second, to establish a metropolitan performance framework that links planning, infrastructure invstment, environmental monitoring and service delivery. Indicators should be comparable across Madrid's districts and surrounding municipalities.

Thrid, coordinate public transport, housing, urban regeneration, green corridors and building efficiency. Measure not only emissions but also accessibility, heat exposure, air quality and residents' access to public space.

Fourth, use neighbourhood-level data to identity differenecs in housing affordability, public services, educational opportunity, employment and environmental quality. Target investment where several disadvantages overlap.

Fifth use Madrid's universities, international connections, cultural institutions and bussinesss services to develop higher-value activities. The objective should be to translate existing assets into innovation, enterpreneuship and better quality employment.

13. The Architecture Of Delivery: from Vision to Public Value

The danger of visionary urbanism is that it can become a catalogue of attractive projects without a credible account of who pays, who governs and who benefits.

Madrid Beyond Capitality therefore requires a delivery framework.

The first phase, through 2030, should concentrate on institutional foundations and measurable improvements to everyday life. Priorities would include a metropolitan housing and accessibility observatory, stronger cross-regional research partnerships, neighbourhood-scale heat adaptation, and a public assessment framework for major urban regeneration projects.

The second phase, from 2030 to 2040, could consolidate the Atlantic–Ibero-American Forum, expand the university alliance, implement major elements of the ecological network and develop coordinated programmes for southern metropolitan regeneration.

The third phase, from 2040 to 2050, should be determined by evidence from the earlier stages. Successful initiatives could be expanded; unsuccessful ones should be redesigned or discontinued. The vision should remain ambitious without treating every proposal as immutable.

Funding would need to combine municipal, regi onal and national resources with European programmes, research funding, philanthropic support and private investment where appropriate.

Every major project should publish a financing plan, governance structure, distributional assessment and long-term operating costs before substantial commitments are made.
Five tests should govern the portfolio:

1. **Additionality:** does the project create a capability that would not otherwise exist?
2. **Distribution:** who benefits, who pays and which neighbourhoods or regions might lose?
3. **Resilience:** does it strengthen the city's capacity to withstand climate, economic and geopolitical shocks?
4. **Democratic legitimacy:** can affected communities scrutinise, influence and challenge its implementation?
5. **Measurable public value:** what observable outcomes would justify continuing the investment?

This framework is essential because the new theory of capitality must be demonstrated through practice. Without it, the language of cooperation risks concealing the continuation of familiar patterns of concentration.

14. International best Practice in Innovation, Knowledge and Technology Hubs: Lessons for Madrid – An Evaluation

14.1. Strategic Proposition

Madrid should develop an integrated innovation ecosystem that connects universities, research institutions, technology companies, industrial enterprises, investors, public administration and civil society. The objective should not simply be to attract technology firms or construct innovation districts, but to create an urban economy in which knowledge is systematically transformed into commercial applications, industrial productivity, better public services and social value.

International experience suggests that successful innovation ecosystems depend on more than research expenditure, venture capital or the concentration of technology companies. They require effective knowledge transfer, collaboration between institutions, access to talent and finance, strong connections between research and industry, and an urban environment that encourages interaction. The World Economic Forum's 2025 framework highlights collaborative governance, human-centred placemaking and digital infrastructure as three essential dimensions of innovation districts.

Madrid already possesses important foundations. The Community of Madrid identifies a substantial university and research system, technology-transfer organisations, business incubators and a diverse start-up community. The city also has an industrial strategy for 2025–2027, supported by a budget of €196.2 million, and a municipal Govtech programme designed to connect public-sector challenges with innovative companies.

The central strategic question is therefore how Madrid can connect these existing assets into a more productive, internationally connected and geographically inclusive innovation system.

The following comparison identifies practices from Europe, the United States and Asia that Madrid could adapt to its own economic structure.

14.2. European Innovation Ecosystems

14.2.1. Barcelona: 22@ and the Integration of Innovation with Urban Regeneration 22@ Barcelona

Barcelona's 22@ district offers lessons in transforming an established industrial area into a knowledge-intensive urban district. Its development has combined technology companies, universities, research facilities, business services and new urban activities.

The important principle is that an innovation district should form part of the city rather than operate as an isolated research campus.

What Madrid can learn

Madrid could develop selected innovation districts around existing economic strengths and research institutions, combining laboratories, offices, start-ups, housing, public spaces, cultural facilities and public transport.

Instead of concentrating every activity in one flagship development, Madrid could connect several specialised districts through a common innovation strategy.

Possible areas of specialisation include artificial intelligence, digital government, health technologies, mobility, energy systems and advanced industrial production.

Madrid should also learn from the tensions associated with Barcelona's transformation. Rising property values and changes in the local economic structure demonstrate why innovation-led regeneration needs affordable workspaces, support for smaller firms and protections against the displacement of established businesses and communities.

The lesson is to integrate innovation policy with urban planning, housing policy and local economic development.

14.2.2. Eindhoven: Connecting Research to Industrial Production

High Tech Campus Eindhoven

Eindhoven demonstrates the value of linking technological research with industrial capabilities, specialised suppliers and companies that can commercialise new knowledge.

Its ecosystem is associated with advanced manufacturing, precision engineering, semiconductor-related technologies and complex technological supply chains.

The wider Eindhoven region illustrates how an innovation system can develop around relationships between large technology companies, research institutions, smaller suppliers and specialised engineering businesses.

What Madrid can learn

Madrid should make industrial innovation an integral component of its knowledge economy.

Research institutions and start-ups need access to companies capable of testing, manufacturing, integrating and commercialising their technologies. Equally, established businesses need opportunities to collaborate with universities and technology providers.

Madrid could establish collaborative industrial laboratories in areas such as semiconductor design, robotics, advanced materials, energy efficiency and industrial digitalisation.

These facilities should be accessible to small and medium-sized enterprises as well as larger companies.

A particularly valuable lesson is that innovation policy must address the entire process from research to production. Scientific excellence alone does not guarantee that discoveries will generate industrial competitiveness.

14.2.3. Berlin: Entrepreneurship, Research and International Talent

Berlin Adlershof Science and Technology Park

Berlin Adlershof offers a model of a specialised scientific and technological location connecting research institutes, universities and technology-oriented businesses.

Berlin's broader entrepreneurial environment also demonstrates the importance of combining research capacity with start-up finance, international recruitment, business services and networks connecting entrepreneurs to established companies.

What Madrid can learn

Madrid should connect its research infrastructure with a more comprehensive system of entrepreneurial support.

This could include shared laboratories, business-development services, international recruitment, mentoring, intellectual-property advice and access to investors.

Support should not end when a start-up leaves an incubator. Many promising companies need assistance with procurement, regulatory compliance, industrial partnerships and international expansion.

Madrid could also establish a structured international talent programme connecting universities, research institutions, companies and municipal services.

The objective would be to attract skilled people while ensuring that they can find housing, employment opportunities and professional networks.

14.2.4. Paris: Reducing Barriers between Entrepreneurs, Investors and Corporations

Station F

Paris's Station F illustrates the value of bringing entrepreneurs, investors, technology companies and business-support organisations into a shared environment.

Its relevance lies not merely in the physical scale of the campus but in the opportunities it creates for entrepreneurs to meet potential investors, customers, partners and advisers.

What Madrid can learn

Madrid could develop a connected network of entrepreneurial facilities rather than rely on a single flagship campus.

The network should provide different services according to the maturity of businesses: initial incubation, technological validation, commercialisation, growth capital and international expansion.

Large companies could sponsor innovation programmes in which start-ups develop solutions to defined technological or operational problems.

Madrid's universities and research institutions could participate through shared entrepreneurship programmes and technology-transfer arrangements.

However, Madrid should avoid measuring success primarily through the number of incubated companies, events or available desks. The more meaningful outcomes are business survival, productivity, patent commercialisation, export growth, private investment and high-quality employment.

14.3. Innovation ecosystems in the United States

14.3.1. Kendall Square: University Research and Commercialisation

Kendall Square

Kendall Square, in Cambridge, Massachusetts, illustrates the concentration of research, technology companies, laboratories, investors and entrepreneurial networks around major academic institutions, particularly the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

The ecosystem benefits from proximity between researchers, entrepreneurs, investors and established technology and biotechnology companies.

This proximity facilitates informal exchanges, recruitment, collaboration and the movement of knowledge between institutions and firms.

What Madrid can learn

Madrid should strengthen the practical connections between its universities and the businesses that can use their research.

It could establish joint research programmes with industry, shared laboratory facilities, entrepreneurial fellowships and technology-transfer partnerships.

Universities should have incentives to develop relationships with companies beyond the conventional research contract. Researchers and students should be able to participate in entrepreneurial projects, subject to appropriate academic, ethical and intellectual-property safeguards.

Madrid could also establish translational research programmes that finance the difficult intermediate stage between a scientific discovery and a commercially viable product.

This would be especially relevant for biotechnology, medical technologies, artificial intelligence and advanced materials.

The fundamental lesson is that knowledge becomes economically valuable when institutions create reliable mechanisms for transferring, adapting and applying it.

14.3.2. Silicon Valley: Entrepreneurial Networks and Risk Capital

Silicon Valley

Silicon Valley demonstrates the interaction between research institutions, specialised labour markets, experienced entrepreneurs, venture capital, technology companies and global markets.

Its development cannot be reduced to a particular planning model or public subsidy. It reflects decades of institutional development, accumulated expertise, entrepreneurial experience and relationships between companies and investors.

An important characteristic is the circulation of knowledge. People move between established companies and start-ups, entrepreneurs establish new businesses, and investors often bring commercial experience as well as finance.

What Madrid can Learn
Madrid should concentrate on improving the conditions under which innovative businesses can grow.

This requires more than encouraging the formation of start-ups. It requires access to growth capital, experienced management, international customers, skilled employees and established firms capable of becoming strategic partners.

Madrid could create a scale-up programme connecting Spanish and European investors with promising businesses in areas such as enterprise software, artificial intelligence, financial technology, health technology and industrial digitalisation.

It should also develop international networks connecting Madrid-based entrepreneurs with investors and commercial partners in Europe, North America, Latin America and Asia.

Nevertheless, Silicon Valley should not be copied mechanically. Its high costs, competitive labour market and concentration of investment demonstrate the risks of allowing innovation to become geographically and socially exclusive.

Madrid should seek entrepreneurial dynamism without making access to the innovation economy dependent on exceptional personal wealth or the ability to pay very high housing costs.

14.3.3. Research Triangle Park: Regional Coordination And Specialised Research

Research Triangle Park
Research Triangle Park illustrates the role of coordination between universities, research institutions, companies and regional development organisations.

Its broader regional ecosystem connects major universities and research capabilities with business investment and employment.

What Madrid can learn
Madrid should approach innovation as a metropolitan and regional system rather than a collection of unrelated urban projects.

Its innovation strategy should connect the central city with universities, research facilities, industrial areas and municipalities throughout the Community of Madrid.

A metropolitan innovation council could coordinate investment priorities, shared infrastructure, research partnerships, skills development and international promotion.

It could also identify gaps in the regional innovation system. For example, Madrid may have strong research in a particular field but insufficient specialised suppliers, testing facilities or growth-stage finance to translate that knowledge into production.
This would allow public investment to address identifiable bottlenecks instead of distributing support indiscriminately.

14.3.4. Brooklyn Navy Yard: Advanced Manufacturing and Urban Production

Brooklyn Navy Yard
The Brooklyn Navy Yard illustrates how established urban industrial land can support manufacturing, design, technological development and smaller enterprises.

Its relevance is particularly important because innovation is often associated exclusively with software, biotechnology and research laboratories.

What Madrid can learn
Madrid should retain and modernise appropriate industrial areas rather than assume that economic development requires replacing industrial activity with offices and residential development.

Shared production facilities, prototyping workshops, advanced manufacturing equipment and technical training could help smaller companies develop new products without bearing the full cost of specialised infrastructure.

The city could connect these facilities to engineering schools, vocational education, design institutions and industrial suppliers.

This would broaden Madrid's innovation economy beyond high-growth digital companies and support productivity improvements in established industries.

14.4. Asian Innovation Ecosystems

14.4.1. Singapore: Coordinated Governance and Translational Research

One-North
Singapore's one-north development connects research, technology businesses, entrepreneurship and specialised facilities within a planned innovation district.

Its wider innovation system benefits from sustained public investment, coordination between research and economic development institutions, international talent recruitment and support for commercialising research.

What Madrid can learn
Madrid should establish a clear institutional framework connecting its research, industrial, digital and economic development policies.

Public authorities could coordinate shared laboratories, technology-

transfer programmes, international partnerships and innovation-related infrastructure.

However, coordination should not mean that public authorities attempt to control every aspect of innovation. Universities, entrepreneurs and companies need sufficient autonomy to pursue emerging opportunities.
Madrid could adopt a common framework for identifying strategic research areas, funding collaborative projects and evaluating results, while allowing individual institutions to develop their own capabilities.

Singapore also demonstrates the importance of translational research: scientific knowledge must be supported by the infrastructure, skills, financing and partnerships necessary to turn it into usable technologies.

14.4.2. Shenzhen: Rapid Prototyping and Manufacturing Ecosystems

Shenzhen
Shenzhen illustrates the importance of connecting product development with suppliers, component manufacturers, engineering expertise and production capabilities.

Its electronics and hardware ecosystem allows firms to interact with specialised suppliers and develop successive product versions without treating manufacturing as an entirely separate stage of innovation.

This is a different model from ecosystems that focus primarily on academic research or software entrepreneurship.

What Madrid can learn
Madrid could develop rapid-prototyping and product-development facilities connecting designers, engineers, technology firms and industrial manufacturers.

These facilities could support robotics, medical devices, smart mobility, energy-management systems and industrial equipment.

Businesses should be able to test designs, build prototypes, validate performance and identify suitable production partners.

Madrid could also strengthen collaboration between research-intensive companies and traditional manufacturers, helping the latter adopt digital technologies and develop new products.

The lesson is to reduce the distance between invention and production.

Madrid would not need to reproduce Shenzhen's industrial scale or business environment. It could instead adapt the underlying principle of close coordination between engineering, suppliers, product development and manufacturing.

14.4.3. Seoul: Digital Infrastructure and Technology-Enabled Urban Development

Digital Media City
Seoul's Digital Media City illustrates the development of a specialised district around digital media, information technology and related creative industries.

Its significance lies in the concentration of related businesses, technological infrastructure and supporting urban functions.

What Madrid can learn
Madrid could connect digital innovation with its cultural, creative and media industries.

Potential areas include digital entertainment, audiovisual production, immersive technologies, creative software, digital heritage and the application of artificial intelligence to cultural production.

This could create connections between technology companies, universities, cultural institutions and creative professionals.

Madrid should also use digital infrastructure to support the operation of innovation districts themselves, including mobility, energy management, environmental monitoring and access to public services.

Digitalisation should serve identifiable economic and urban objectives rather than become a separate technological showcase.

14.4.4. Hsinchu: Research Institutions and Specialised Industrial Supply Chains

Hsinchu Science Park
Hsinchu Science Park illustrates the relationship between research institutions, specialist engineering, skilled workers and the semiconductor industry.

Its development is associated with the accumulation of technical expertise and the interaction between research and highly specialised manufacturing.

What Madrid can learn
Madrid should identify technological areas where its existing research and industrial capabilities could support internationally competitive specialisation.

Semiconductor design, electronic systems, advanced computing and specialised industrial technologies could be considered where there is a credible combination of research capacity, business demand, talent and investment.

Rather than trying to reproduce an entire semiconductor manufacturing ecosystem, Madrid could focus on selected stages of the value chain where its institutions and companies have realistic opportunities.

These might include chip design, electronic-system integration, specialised software, industrial applications and research services.

The general lesson is that successful technological specialisation requires a coherent network of complementary capabilities, not simply a science park bearing the name of a strategic industry.

14.5. Comparative Lessons for Madrid

The international examples suggest that innovation ecosystems perform different functions. Madrid should therefore combine complementary approaches rather than select one foreign model as a complete template.

Innovation model	Illustrative location	Principal mechanism	Potential lesson for Madrid
Urban innovation district	Barcelona 22@	Integration of knowledge industries and urban regeneration	Connect innovation, land use, housing and public space
Research-to-industry ecosystem	Eindhoven	Collaboration between research, engineering and manufacturing	Strengthen industrial technology transfer
Science and technology park	Berlin Adlershof	Proximity between research institutions and technology companies	Connect research facilities with entrepreneurs and businesses
Entrepreneurship campus	Paris Station F	Concentration of start-ups, investors and business services	Build a connected network of entrepreneurial support
University-centred innovation	Kendall Square	Interaction between academic research and commercialisation	Fund translational research and university–industry collaboration
Venture-capital ecosystem	Silicon Valley	Risk capital, entrepreneurial experience and global markets	Help promising companies scale internationally
Regional research network	Research Triangle Park	Coordination between universities, research and business	Develop metropolitan innovation governance
Urban manufacturing	Brooklyn Navy Yard	Integration of production, prototyping and enterprise	Modernise industrial areas and support smaller manufacturers
Coordinated research district	Singapore one-north	Strategic planning, research and commercialisation	Coordinate investment while preserving institutional autonomy
Manufacturing-led innovation	Shenzhen	Close links between design, suppliers and production	Reduce the time and cost of prototyping
Digital and creative industries	Seoul Digital Media City	Concentration of digital, media and creative activities	Connect technological innovation with Madrid's cultural economy
Specialised technology cluster	Hsinchu	Accumulation of technical expertise and complementary suppliers	Select realistic niches in strategic technology value chains

These are illustrative institutional models, not a ranking of overall performance. Their results depend on local economic structures, governance arrangements, investment and historical development.

The comparative evidence supports a further distinction: an innovation district is a place, a hub is an organisation or network that connects actors and activities, and an ecosystem is the wider set of institutions, relationships, skills, finance and markets that sustains innovation. Madrid needs all three.

The OECD similarly argues that innovation policies should build on existing regional capabilities, engage businesses, universities, government and civil society, and strengthen the diffusion of knowledge beyond the most technologically advanced firms.

14.6. Six Strategic Priorities for Madrid

Priority 1. Establish a Metropolitan Innovation Governance Framework

Madrid should create a permanent mechanism for coordinating the innovation activities of the city, the Community of Madrid, universities, research organisations, technology companies, industrial associations and investors.

The framework should identify shared priorities, coordinate relevant infrastructure investment, facilitate partnerships and publish performance assessments.

It should distinguish clearly between the responsibilities of the municipal government, the regional administration, national

authorities, universities and private institutions.
The purpose would be to reduce fragmentation without centralising all innovation activity within a single organisation.

A metropolitan innovation observatory could map research capabilities, technology-transfer relationships, start-ups, industrial specialisations, funding opportunities and gaps in the innovation system.

Priority 2. Connect Research to Commercialisation and Industrial Adoption
Madrid should establish a structured pathway connecting scientific discovery to practical application.

The pathway could include collaborative research, intellectual-property support, proof-of-concept funding, shared laboratories, prototype development, pilot testing, commercial partnerships and access to growth capital.

Universities and research institutions should be encouraged to collaborate with established businesses and start-ups.

Equally important, the programme should help smaller companies adopt technologies developed elsewhere. Innovation policy should not focus exclusively on creating new inventions; it should also improve the capacity of existing firms to use knowledge and technology.

Priority 3. Develop A Network of Specialised Innovation Districts
Madrid should avoid the assumption that every district needs to become a general-purpose technology hub.

Instead, it could develop a network of complementary locations based on existing capabilities, available infrastructure and realistic commercial opportunities.

Potential areas of specialisation include:
- Artificial intelligence and digital public services.
- Biotechnology, health research and medical technologies.
- Advanced manufacturing, robotics and industrial digitalisation.
- Energy systems, resource efficiency and urban sustainability.
- Digital media, creative industries and cultural technologies.
- Semiconductor design and specialised electronic systems.

These should be treated as candidate areas for assessment, not predetermined investment commitments.

The selection process should examine existing research strengths, business demand, talent availability, access to finance, infrastructure requirements and the potential for international collaboration.

Priority 4. Use Public Procurement to Stimulate Innovation
Madrid's municipal Govtech programme provides a starting point for connecting public-sector needs with technology companies. The city's published strategy explicitly identifies collaboration with start-ups, scale-ups and technology SMEs as a means of developing technological solutions for public services.

The city could expand this approach through carefully designed innovation challenges addressing issues such as public transport, energy efficiency, waste management, accessibility, environmental monitoring and municipal service delivery.

Where legally and operationally appropriate, procurement processes could allow companies to test innovative solutions through defined pilot projects before larger purchasing decisions are made.

The city would act not merely as a regulator or grant provider but also as a demanding first customer.

This approach requires transparent selection criteria, fair access for smaller firms, appropriate data protection, cybersecurity safeguards and evaluation of whether pilot projects deliver measurable public benefits.

Successful pilots should have a clear route towards wider implementation, while unsuccessful projects should generate documented lessons rather than be repeated indefinitely.

Priority 5. Build a Scale-Up and Internationalisation Programme
Madrid should complement start-up incubation with targeted support for businesses seeking to expand.

The programme could connect promising companies with investors, established industrial firms, international customers, export support and experienced business leaders.

It should also strengthen links between Madrid and other European innovation ecosystems, as well as selected partners in North America, Latin America and Asia.

Madrid's international position gives it an opportunity to develop commercial and research networks linking Europe with Spanish-speaking markets. That potential, however, must be translated into specific partnerships, export opportunities and investment relationships. Performance should be assessed through company survival, productivity, employment quality, export growth, private investment and the successful commercialisation of research.

Priority 6. Make innovation districts accessible, sustainable and socially productive
Innovation policy should be integrated with housing, transport, public space, skills development and environmental management.

Innovation districts need reliable public transport, walking and cycling connections, high-quality digital infrastructure, shared facilities and places where people can meet across professional boundaries.

They also need a sufficient diversity of businesses, institutions and

activities to avoid becoming isolated corporate enclaves. Affordable workspaces, vocational education, access for smaller firms and opportunities for residents to acquire relevant skills should form part of the development model.

The OECD's research on regional innovation policy stresses that technological progress can reinforce territorial inequalities if the capacity to innovate and adopt new technologies remains concentrated among leading firms and already-advanced regions. Madrid should therefore assess not only the economic performance of its innovation districts but also their effects on local employment, business diversity, accessibility and the wider metropolitan economy.

14.7. An Implementation Framework for 2027–2030

Madrid could organise implementation into three phases.

Diagnosis and coordination	Period	Main activities
Pilot programmes	2027	Map existing research, industrial capabilities, business networks, infrastructure and financing gaps; establish governance arrangements and baseline indicators
Expansion and evaluation	2028	Launch selected university–industry partnerships, innovation procurement challenges, shared technical facilities and scale-up support
	2029–2030	Expand successful programmes, improve connections between districts and publish independent evaluations

These dates are a proposed planning framework, not an announcement of existing municipal commitments.

Madrid should establish a baseline before setting quantitative targets. Otherwise, headline targets risk becoming detached from actual economic conditions.

Suggested performance indicators

The metropolitan innovation observatory should monitor six dimensions.

Knowledge production: collaborative research projects, research expenditure, publications and patents, interpreted in relation to the characteristics of the sectors concerned.

Knowledge transfer: research licences, university spin-offs, industry-funded research, technology adoption by smaller firms and the proportion of research projects progressing to practical application.

Business development: start-up survival, scale-up formation, productivity growth, private investment, export performance and employment quality.

Industrial modernisation: adoption of advanced technologies, investment in production equipment, the use of shared technical facilities and improvements in resource and energy efficiency.

Urban integration: public transport accessibility, affordable workspaces, pedestrian connectivity, access to training and the participation of established neighbourhood businesses.

Public value: measurable improvements in municipal services, environmental performance, accessibility and the cost-effectiveness of publicly supported innovation.

Indicators should be disaggregated by district, business size and sector wherever reliable data permit. This would help determine whether innovation benefits are spreading through the metropolitan economy or remaining concentrated in a limited number of institutions and companies.

14.8. Final Recommendation: Madrid as an Integrated Knowledge and Innovation Metropolis

Madrid's international strategy should not be built around the imitation of Silicon Valley, Singapore or any other single innovation ecosystem. Each developed through a particular combination of research institutions, industrial capabilities, investment, governance and historical circumstances.

Instead, Madrid should combine complementary elements from several models.

From Barcelona, it can draw lessons about integrating innovation with urban regeneration. From Eindhoven, it can learn to connect research with industrial production. From Kendall Square, it can strengthen the relationships between universities and commercialisation. From Silicon Valley, it can study entrepreneurial networks and access to risk capital. From Singapore, it can examine coordinated governance and translational research. From Shenzhen, it can learn how to shorten the distance between product design and manufacturing. From Seoul, it can explore connections between digital technologies and creative industries.

These lessons should be adapted to Madrid's existing institutional and economic capabilities rather than applied as a standardised blueprint.

The strategic objective should be to create a metropolitan system in which universities generate knowledge, companies turn knowledge into products and services, public authorities create

opportunities for experimentation and adoption, investors support viable businesses, and urban planning provides the infrastructure and public spaces necessary for collaboration.

The defining measure of success should not be how many innovation hubs Madrid builds, but how effectively its institutions, businesses and communities convert knowledge into productivity, technological capability, quality employment and public value.

15. The Capital Must also Learn to Renovate

The future of Madrid should not be imagined exclusively through new districts, institutions and monumental infrastructure. Some of its greatest opportunities lie in the intelligent transformation of what already exists.

Europe's cities are entering an era in which the renovation of existing buildings, streets, transport systems and public institutions may be as consequential as new construction. Madrid should therefore treat its inherited urban fabric as strategic infrastructure.

This means retrofitting buildings for heat, improving insulation, reducing energy demand, converting obsolete office space where feasible, upgrading schools and health facilities, improving the accessibility of public transport and reclaiming streets from excessive traffic. It also means protecting architectural heritage without turning historic neighbourhoods into environments designed primarily for visitors and property investors.

Noise and air pollution should be treated as questions of urban design, public health and social equality. Exposure depends on traffic, building configuration, land use, transport alternatives and the location of homes, schools and workplaces. Measures to reduce it should combine cleaner transport, quieter streets, improved building performance and accessible alternatives to private-car use. Congestion, similarly, cannot be solved through road expansion alone. Increasing road capacity may induce additional traffic, while reducing travel demand requires better public transport, mixed-use neighbourhoods, reliable orbital connections, safe walking and cycling, and the location of jobs closer to residential areas.

The relevant measure is not simply the speed of vehicles. It is the time and cost required for people to reach work, education, healthcare, culture and one another.

Madrid should aim to become a city where access improves even as dependence on private cars declines.

Renovation also has a social dimension. Improvements to streets and buildings can raise property values and displace the very residents they were intended to benefit. Housing protections, affordable-tenure policies and community participation must therefore accompany physical improvements.

The most sophisticated urbanism of the coming decades may be neither monumental nor spectacular. It may consist of thousands of carefully coordinated interventions that make existing neighbourhoods cooler, quieter, healthier, more accessible and more socially resilient.

16. A New Political Philosophy of Capitality

The deepest transformation proposed here is conceptual.

Traditional capitality is hierarchical. Institutions, resources and authority flow towards a centre, which then governs or coordinates the territories around it. This model can be efficient, particularly when national systems require common standards, large-scale investment and clear accountability. But when concentration becomes an end in itself, it can weaken the wider system on which the capital depends.

The alternative is not to abolish the capital's coordinating function. It is to redefine its purpose.
A capital beyond capitality would operate through four principles.

Connection Rather than Absorption Madrid would connect regional economies and institutions without seeking to reproduce every strategic function within its own boundaries.

Stewardship Rather than Dominance The city would recognise that its prosperity depends partly on the health of Spain's wider territorial system, its European partners and its international networks.

Public Value Rather than Prestige Investments would be judged by their contribution to knowledge, accessibility, resilience, civic life and productive capacity—not simply by their visibility.

Reciprocity Rather than Hierarchy International cooperation would be organised around shared objectives, distributed expertise and mutual benefit.

This is not an argument for a weaker Madrid. It is an argument for a more sophisticated form of strength.

A metropolis that can coordinate research across borders, help regions develop complementary industries, share climate-adaptation knowledge and sustain a high quality of everyday life may possess a more durable form of influence than one that simply accumulates additional offices, investment and political functions.

Its power would derive from the reliability of its relationships and the usefulness of its institutions.

16.1. The Constitutional and Civic Dimension

There is also a question of political legitimacy.

Madrid is not only an economic region. It is the capital of a country with diverse regional identities, languages, histories and political traditions. Any attempt to give the city a new national or international mission must therefore remain compatible with democratic pluralism.
A future role for the Crown, if considered within this vision, should

be carefully distinguished from the responsibilities of elected governments and municipal authorities. A constitutional monarch might be able to convene universities, cultural institutions, international partners and civil-society organisations around long-term themes. But public investment, planning regulation, housing policy and institutional reform must remain subject to the appropriate democratic processes.

The symbolic power of a capital should not become a substitute for democratic authorisation.

The same principle applies to the proposed international institutions. Their legitimacy would depend on transparent governance, meaningful participation and a clear account of whose interests they serve.

The most valuable contribution of a national capital may be its ability to create spaces where different constituencies can meet without being required to surrender their identities. In a politically diverse country, this is not a minor civic function. It is part of the infrastructure of national cohesion.

16.2. How should Success be Measured in 2050?

A strategy that cannot be evaluated is a narrative rather than a policy.

Madrid Beyond Capitality should establish a public dashboard that measures progress across several dimensions.

Dimension	Indicators of success
Housing and social cohesion	Housing-cost burdens, affordable housing access, displacement and access to essential services
Metropolitan integration	Public-transport accessibility, orbital connectivity and journey times to employment
Territorial cohesion	Regional distribution of high-value employment, research investment and infrastructure
Climate resilience	Heat exposure, tree canopy, water efficiency, building energy performance and pollution
Scientific capacity	Research investment, international collaborations, doctoral training and knowledge transfer
Civic life	Access to public space, neighbourhood participation, perceived safety and public-space quality
International cooperation	Sustained joint programmes, reciprocal research partnerships and measurable outcomes
Economic resilience	Productive diversification, innovation, productivity and exposure to external shocks

Table

The indicators should be disaggregated by neighbourhood, income and other relevant characteristics so that citywide improvements do not conceal worsening conditions for particular groups.

Baseline measurements should be published before major programmes begin. Targets should be established through consultation, with independent evaluation at regular intervals.

The ultimate question is whether Madrid's growing international importance translates into more accessible opportunities, stronger public institutions and a more resilient urban environment.

GDP, investment and employment remain important. They are necessary indicators of economic performance, but they cannot by themselves establish whether a city is succeeding as a political community.

17. The Challenges of the Latin American City

Socio-spatial inequality and urban segregation: Addressing entrenched socioeconomic disparities and spatial fragmentation that perpetuate unequal access to housing, public services, infrastructure and economic opportunities across urban territories.

Informal settlements and affordable housing: Overcoming persistent housing deficits, insecure land tenure and inadequate access to essential services through inclusive housing policies, settlement-upgrading programmes and equitable urban development strategies.

Urban sprawl and metropolitan expansion: Managing the spatial and demographic expansion of metropolitan areas through integrated land-use planning, compact urban development and effective coordination across administrative boundaries.

Sustainable mobility and transport infrastructure: Developing accessible, efficient and environmentally sustainable transport systems that reduce congestion, mitigate air pollution and improve connectivity between urban centres, peripheral neighbourhoods and metropolitan employment hubs.

Environmental sustainability and climate resilience: Strengthening urban resilience to climate change and environmental hazards through sustainable resource management, ecosystem protection, climate-adaptive infrastructure and integrated strategies to mitigate flooding, heat stress and water scarcity.

Urban governance and institutional coordination: Overcoming institutional fragmentation and administrative inefficiencies by strengthening governance capacity, enhancing intergovernmental coordination and establishing coherent, long-term urban planning frameworks.

Economic competitiveness and inclusive development: Enhancing urban productivity, innovation and economic diversification while

addressing structural poverty, labour-market informality and inequalities in access to employment and economic resources.
Participatory planning and social inclusion: Institutionalising meaningful citizen participation, strengthening democratic accountability and incorporating community perspectives into urban decision-making to ensure that development policies respond equitably to diverse social needs and local priorities.

The execution of these strategic priorities requires a coherent and integrated approach to urban governance; one capable of transforming the city from a territory of fragmented interventions into a collective project of social, economic and environmental transformation.

Socio-spatial inequality must be addressed through redistributive urban policies, the provision of affordable housing, and the equitable distribution of public services and infrastructure; informal settlements must be upgraded through participatory programmes that secure land tenure, improve living conditions and protect communities from displacement.

Urban expansion must be guided by integrated metropolitan planning, compact development and the coordinated management of land use; sustainable mobility must be advanced through investment in public transport, active mobility networks and accessible connections between peripheral neighbourhoods and employment centres.

Environmental sustainability requires the integration of climate adaptation into urban planning, the restoration of ecosystems, the expansion of green infrastructure and the development of resilient water and drainage systems; these interventions must prioritise vulnerable populations, who bear a disproportionate share of environmental risks.

Institutional fragmentation must be overcome through stronger metropolitan governance, intergovernmental cooperation and stable mechanisms for financing and implementing long-term urban strategies; transparent decision-making, measurable performance indicators and continuous evaluation are essential to ensure institutional accountability.

Economic development must be connected to social inclusion through support for local enterprises, productive innovation, skills development and the formalisation of employment; participatory planning must, in turn, establish meaningful mechanisms through which citizens and communities can influence public investment and urban transformation.

Ultimately, the execution of these priorities depends on the capacity to translate strategic vision into coordinated action; aligning public institutions, financial resources, private investment and community participation within a long-term framework that places social justice, environmental resilience and the quality of urban life at the centre of Latin American urban development.

Latin American cities are delivering tangible progress, but unevenly; the strongest results have emerged in public transport, urban regeneration, disaster-risk planning and the gradual integration of climate objectives into city development. Yet the broader picture remains one of advances constrained by persistent inequality, fragmented governance and insufficient investment.

The UN Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean's 2024 urban report identifies housing access, basic services, sustainable mobility and environmental conditions as central areas for continued action.

17.1. What have Cities Delivered so Far?

Socio-spatial inequality and urban segregation: Progress has been made through neighbourhood upgrading, social-housing programmes and the expansion of essential services; nevertheless, unequal access to adequate housing, public space and urban opportunities remains a structural feature of the region's cities.

Informal settlements and affordable housing: Public investment and housing-improvement initiatives have helped improve living conditions in some urban areas; however, affordability, insecure tenure and uneven access to basic services continue to limit the impact of these interventions.

Urban sprawl and metropolitan expansion: Integrated planning initiatives have strengthened the recognition of land-use and transport interdependencies; nonetheless, fragmented metropolitan governance and the difficulty of coordinating development across municipal boundaries continue to undermine coherent territorial management.

Sustainable mobility and transport infrastructure: Several cities have advanced public transport modernisation and active mobility. Bogotá, for example, has introduced nearly 1,500 electric buses and developed more than 630 kilometres of cycling infrastructure; these investments demonstrate progress towards lower-emission mobility, although accessibility and connectivity remain uneven.
Environmental sustainability and climate resilience: Climate-risk assessments, hazard mapping and urban greening have become increasingly prominent. In a study of 124 Latin American cities, 47% reported hazard mapping or modelling and 45% reported increasing vegetation or green-space coverage; however, 23% reported taking no climate-vulnerability reduction actions.

Urban governance and institutional coordination: Regional initiatives have strengthened knowledge exchange, integrated planning and collaboration between local authorities and international partners. An assessment of 23 cities across Latin America, Asia and Africa found that 20 improved their overall sustainable urban development scores between 2021 and 2025; institutional fragmentation, data limitations and financing gaps nevertheless persisted.

Economic competitiveness and inclusive development: Cities continue to invest in sustainable infrastructure, urban innovation

and economic development; however, the benefits remain unevenly distributed, while poverty, informal employment and unequal access to economic opportunities continue to challenge inclusive urban transformation.

Participatory planning and social inclusion: Participatory approaches and community-oriented urban programmes have gained recognition within sustainable development agendas; nevertheless, the extent to which citizens can influence investment priorities and hold institutions accountable varies considerably between cities.

17.2. Overall Assessment

Latin American cities have moved beyond purely aspirational urban strategies in several areas, particularly sustainable mobility, climate-risk assessment and integrated urban development. The evidence, however, suggests that progress in policy adoption and individual projects has not yet translated into comprehensive, equitable and region-wide urban transformation. The central task is now to scale up successful interventions, secure sustained financing and strengthen institutional coordination so that measurable improvements in infrastructure, resilience and economic opportunity reach the populations most affected by urban inequality.

LAIF City Life has opened a space in which the Latin American city may begin to imagine itself beyond the ruins of fragmented development. Through technical assistance, it has helped local authorities transform urban aspirations into projects capable of entering the difficult passage towards investment. It has brought planning closer to the places where inequality has settled like dust upon the thresholds of everyday life. It has supported the preparation of interventions that seek to restore public spaces, reconnect divided territories and recover the relationship between the city and its natural environment. In this work, green infrastructure emerges not merely as decoration, but as a possible language of resilience against the advancing pressure of climate change. Urban mobility becomes a question of access, of who may cross the city and who remains stranded at its margins. The revitalisation of historic centres offers another form of resistance to abandonment, seeking to return public life to places threatened by economic decline and physical deterioration. Through project preparation, LAIF City Life has helped municipalities approach the technical and institutional conditions required to turn proposals into investable undertakings. Its contribution lies partly in making visible the distance between a political promise and a project capable of being financed. Technical cooperation has also created opportunities for local institutions to strengthen their planning capacities and refine their understanding of sustainable urban development. Exchanges between cities have encouraged the circulation of knowledge across territories whose difficulties are different, yet whose questions often echo one another. Participatory approaches have sought to bring citizens closer to decisions that determine the future shape of their neighbourhoods. In this sense, the programme has contributed to a conception of urban development in which infrastructure and social inclusion cannot be entirely separated. Its work has also helped bring environmental considerations into the preparation of urban interventions, where ecological concerns might otherwise remain at the margins of investment decisions. Yet the passage from preparation to implementation remains uncertain, and the existence of a project does not guarantee its financing, construction or lasting social benefit. The full extent of LAIF City Life's contribution must therefore be measured not only through studies completed and capacities strengthened, but through the projects that ultimately reach the streets and public spaces of participating cities. Its achievements so far are best understood as the construction of conditions for transformation rather than proof that transformation has already been completed. The challenge ahead is to secure the resources, institutional continuity and political commitment necessary to carry these proposals beyond the documents in which their possibilities first took shape. Only then can the promise of sustainable urban development become a material improvement in the lives of those who inhabit the city. Until that moment, LAIF City Life remains a bridge between the urban future imagined and the urban future made real, suspended above the distance that still separates ambition from delivery.

17.3. Spain and the Latinamerican City

Spain could therefore re-engage with LAIF City Life, not as one returns to a finished enterprise, but as one resumes a conversation whose most consequential arguments have yet to be settled. For in urban development, as in politics, the distance between conceiving an undertaking and bringing it to completion is precisely where intentions are tested. The programme has helped Latin American cities prepare interventions, strengthen technical capacities and imagine different relationships between infrastructure, territory and public life. Yet preparation, however indispensable, remains a promise until finance arrives, institutions endure and construction begins. Spain would be well placed to recognise this distinction, having long understood that cooperation is measured not simply by what is announced, but by what survives the announcement. Its renewed engagement could therefore concentrate on moving viable projects towards financing and implementation, rather than multiplying preliminary exercises whose conclusions risk remaining in the files. There would be a certain Roman wisdom in this approach, for Cicero knew that the credibility of public action rests upon the correspondence between words and deeds. Caesar, by contrast, understood that opportunity belongs to those who can convert a favourable moment into an accomplished fact. Seneca might have added that patience is a virtue only when it serves a purpose, and that delay, when mistaken for prudence, becomes another form of failure. Spain need not choose among these lessons, since effective urban cooperation requires vision, decisiveness and the discipline to see an undertaking through. It could use its renewed participation to strengthen the connection between technical assistance, investment preparation and the institutions responsible for delivery. It could also help participating municipalities mobilise European financing and private capital where these are appropriate, without losing sight of the public interest that gives such investments their justification.

Climate resilience, social inclusion and metropolitan governance

would remain central, not as fashionable expressions in a policy document, but as tests against which projects should be judged. A transport intervention, for instance, should be assessed not only by the infrastructure it provides, but by the people whose access to employment and services it improves. An urban regeneration project should be judged not merely by the spaces it beautifies, but by whether the communities who inhabit them can continue to belong there. Such criteria would give renewed Spanish engagement a more tangible purpose and make its contribution easier to evaluate. They would also allow Spain to build upon relationships already established, rather than begin anew each time political priorities change or institutional memory fades. The opportunity is therefore not simply to restore a programme, but to strengthen the passage from cooperation to delivery and from delivery to measurable public benefit. Naturally, no government can guarantee that every project will succeed, any more than any consul can persuade fortune to become an obedient servant of the republic. But governments can choose which risks to assume, which institutions to support and which commitments they are prepared to sustain beyond the ceremonial moment. Spain could therefore re-engage with LAIF City Life on a simple principle, classical in its formulation and practical in its consequences: that the worth of an undertaking is ultimately determined not by the nobility of its intentions, but by what it leaves behind in the lives of those for whom it was conceived.

18. Madrid Action-Oriented to Nowhere?

An imaginative reconstruction inspired by the publicly known architectural philosophies of Bjarke Ingels and Norman Foster, and the Ivorypress conversation on "Utopian Pragmatism." This is a fictional dialogue, not a transcript of their actual discussion.

Madrid. A quiet room, late afternoon. Architectural books lie open across a long table. Beyond the windows, the city continues its ancient negotiation between history and modernity, infrastructure and ambition, the permanence of stone and the impermanence of human life.

Bjarke Ingels: Norman, I have always been intrigued by the apparent contradiction between utopia and pragmatism. Utopia belongs to the realm of what does not yet exist; pragmatism concerns what can be achieved within the world as it is. My proposition is that architecture should refuse to choose between them. We should make the ideal possible by learning how to build it.

Norman Foster: Provided that we begin by understanding what building actually entails. Architecture is not an abstraction suspended above reality. It consumes resources, transforms landscapes, influences behaviour and leaves consequences that may endure for centuries. An idea that disregards climate, economics, technology or human needs may be intellectually seductive, but it remains an idea.

Ingels: Yet reality can become a remarkably convenient excuse for accepting the unacceptable. We are told that housing must be affordable, so we abandon architectural quality. We are told that cities must accommodate cars, so we sacrifice public space. We are told that sustainability is expensive, so we postpone the investments that might save us money in the future. What if we regarded every constraint as an invitation to invent something better?

Foster: Then we would be approaching the problem as architects should. But invention must be judged by the performance of the whole, not by the originality of its parts. A building does not become sustainable simply because it possesses a green roof or an impressive energy certificate. We must consider its materials, its energy consumption, its adaptability, its relationship to transport and, above all, its contribution to the life of the city.

Ingels: Precisely. Sustainability should not mean asking people to accept less. It should mean discovering how to give them more with less. Imagine a building that combines housing, workplaces, gardens, schools and public facilities. Functions that were once separated can be interwoven; the building becomes a landscape, the landscape becomes infrastructure, and infrastructure becomes a place in which people actually want to spend their time.

Foster: Mixed-use development can be enormously effective, but density alone does not produce a good city. Density without daylight becomes oppressive; density without mobility becomes congestion; density without public space becomes little more than accumulation. A successful urban environment requires schools, clean air, accessible transport, greenery and places where people can encounter one another without being expected to purchase something.

Ingels: Which brings us to the question of who gets to participate in this imagined future. Too often, the architect assumes the privilege of designing a world for people who have little influence over its construction. I would like architecture to become a platform for collective possibility, rather than a monument to the imagination of a privileged few.

Foster: Participation is indispensable, but it must be accompanied by responsibility. Citizens should help determine what their neighbourhoods need; planners must reconcile competing interests; engineers must ensure that proposals work; and elected representatives must remain accountable for the decisions they make. Consultation without the capacity to deliver is merely theatre.

Ingels: Then perhaps utopian pragmatism is not a finished blueprint but a continuous process through which a city learns to improve itself.

Foster: A process sustained by institutions, long-term planning and measurable results. The most consequential urban transformations rarely emerge from a single building. They depend upon the coordination of housing, transport, energy, water, public space and economic development. The challenge is to make these systems work together.

Ingels: Consider water. In a city confronted by drought, we might treat a riverbed as an engineering problem, a drainage channel or an obstacle to development. But we could also imagine it as a linear park, a sequence of shaded public spaces, ecological corridors and pedestrian routes reconnecting neighbourhoods that have grown apart.

Foster: Provided that hydrology comes first. Flood risk, seasonal flows, water quality and maintenance must establish the parameters within which the design operates. A beautiful landscape that fails during a flood is not utopian pragmatism; it is bad engineering.

Ingels: Naturally. But engineering should not terminate the imagination. It should make the landscape possible. The objective is to transform technical necessity into a civic asset, to give infrastructure a social purpose beyond the fulfilment of its immediate function.

Foster: That distinction matters. Infrastructure can become part of a city's identity. Bridges, stations, parks and energy systems can enrich public life when their design responds to genuine needs. The question is not whether infrastructure should be beautiful, but whether beauty can emerge from making it perform exceptionally well.

Ingels: Which raises a more uncomfortable question: should cities compete to become iconic, or should they compete to become more liveable?

Foster: The two are not mutually exclusive, although the priorities must be clear. An iconic building can attract investment, visitors and international attention. But a city is ultimately experienced through ordinary life: the availability of housing, the reliability of public transport, access to education, the quality of its streets and the possibility of growing old with dignity. The spectacular must never displace the essential.

Ingels: I would go further. The essential itself can be spectacular. A school can be a magnificent civic building; social housing can be architecturally ambitious; a wastewater treatment plant can become part of an accessible public landscape. We must abandon the assumption that beauty belongs exclusively to prestigious commissions and expensive addresses.

Foster: There is also a compelling economic argument. Poor design generates costs that accumulate over decades: inefficient energy consumption, difficult maintenance, inaccessible spaces and premature obsolescence. The cheapest building at the moment of construction may prove the most expensive over its lifetime. Good design should therefore be understood as an investment in long-term performance.

Ingels: Which suggests that we need to reconsider how public investment is evaluated. We should look beyond the initial construction cost and consider the value a project creates over time: improved health, greater productivity, environmental quality, social cohesion and the ability to adapt to circumstances that we cannot yet anticipate.

Foster: Agreed, but those benefits must be assessed rigorously. We need a baseline, clearly defined objectives and evidence of what happens after completion. Otherwise, innovation becomes a language through which ambition exempts itself from scrutiny.

Ingels: You want architecture to become more accountable.

Foster: I want ambition to become accountable. The more transformative the proposal, the greater the obligation to demonstrate that it works.

Ingels: And I want accountability to leave room for the unforeseen. If we finance only what has already been proven, we condemn ourselves to reproducing the present. The future rarely announces itself in the form of a familiar solution.

Foster: Then perhaps the answer lies in experimentation at a manageable scale. Cities can test new housing models, renewable-energy systems, transport arrangements and street designs; they can measure the results, learn from failure and extend successful interventions. Experimentation becomes valuable when it generates knowledge that others can use.

Ingels: A city that learns, rather than a city that merely grows. One in which each intervention contributes to a broader intelligence about how people live, move, work and coexist.

Foster: And one that remains adaptable. No generation can predict every demographic, technological or environmental change that will follow. Buildings and urban systems must therefore accommodate new uses and unforeseen conditions without requiring their wholesale destruction.

Ingels: So our utopia is not perfection. It is the capacity to become better without destroying what already makes a place meaningful.

Foster: And pragmatism is not the passive acceptance of limitations. It is the disciplined process of understanding them, testing them and, where possible, overcoming them.

Ingels: Perhaps that is the synthesis we have been searching for. Imagination establishes the horizon; engineering identifies what can be achieved; economics tests its viability; democratic institutions establish its legitimacy; and evaluation determines whether we have genuinely advanced.

Foster: With one final qualification: the city must remain a place for people, not a monument to the ambitions of its designers.

Ingels: Agreed. The best architecture does not simply give form to an idea. It expands the possibilities of living.

Foster: Then utopian pragmatism is not the art of making impossible dreams appear realistic.

Ingels: It is the art of making a better reality imaginable, buildable and worth inhabiting. Outside, Madrid continues to change, sometimes deliberately, sometimes by accident, and often through the uneasy compromise between what its inhabitants desire and what its institutions can deliver. The conversation ends, but the city remains the unfinished argument.

Fire in the Heritage,Water in the demeanor

Full liberalisation of cultural and creative industries (CCIs) within the EU Single Market could create a genuinely integrated European creative economy, enabling businesses, artists, investors and cultural institutions to operate more freely across national borders.

It could generate larger markets, attract investment, stimulate innovation, facilitate professional mobility and strengthen European competitiveness in audiovisual production, design, fashion, architecture, gaming and digital media.

It would also encourage cross-border partnerships between creative hubs such as Paris, Berlin, Milan, Madrid and Barcelona, connecting cultural production with universities, technology companies and industrial research.

However, liberalisation could also accelerate market concentration, strengthen dominant digital platforms, increase pressure on independent creators and widen disparities between metropolitan centres and smaller regions. Commercial competition alone cannot guarantee cultural diversity, artistic independence or equal access to cultural production.

The EU should therefore combine internal-market liberalisation with coordinated industrial policy, fair competition, intellectual property protection, professional mobility, regional investment and cultural safeguards.

Articles 56 and 49 TFEU provide important foundations for the free movement of services and freedom of establishment, while Article 167 requires the Union to respect and promote cultural diversity.

The strategic objective should be to liberalise the European creative economy without commodifying European culture. The result should be a competitive European creative-industrial ecosystem in which economic integration reinforces, rather than undermines, cultural diversity.

The development of creative and cultural industries (CCIs) in Paris, Berlin, Manchester and Milan offers valuable lessons for European cities seeking to transform cultural assets into sustainable economic, social and urban development. Each city has developed a distinctive institutional model, shaped by its industrial history, cultural identity, public administration and relationship between the creative sector and the wider economy.

Paris demonstrates the importance of embedding creative entrepreneurship within an established cultural infrastructure. Institutions such as CENTQUATRE-PARIS combine artistic production, public access, experimentation and professional development. Its 104factory initiative illustrates how an established cultural institution can provide an environment for emerging creative businesses to test ideas, develop partnerships and access professional networks. Paris also benefits from municipal initiatives supporting crafts, design and creative professions, including the Bureau du Design, de la Mode et des Métiers d'Art. The principal lesson is that cultural infrastructure should not merely host exhibitions and performances but also facilitate the transition from creative experimentation to viable economic activity.

Berlin offers a different model, characterised by a relatively distributed ecosystem and strong connections between independent cultural actors, public institutions and specialised support organisations. Kreativ Kultur Berlin provides guidance and information to creative professionals, helping them navigate financing, business development and institutional support. Initiatives such as MotionLab.Berlin demonstrate the value of combining creative production with prototyping, technology and collaborative working environments. Berlin's experience suggests that a successful creative ecosystem does not necessarily require one dominant institution, but rather a network of accessible organisations with complementary functions. Its broader lesson is the importance of maintaining affordable spaces, professional advice and a degree of institutional flexibility for independent creators.

Manchester provides particularly relevant lessons concerning the relationship between cultural production, technological innovation and regional economic development. MediaCity has helped establish a concentration of media, broadcasting, digital production and related businesses. The wider Greater Manchester approach connects creative-sector development with skills, investment, infrastructure and regional economic planning. Factory International adds an important dimension by connecting ambitious cultural production with international visibility and new forms of artistic collaboration. Manchester demonstrates that creative industries can become a component of a wider regional industrial strategy rather than remaining an isolated cultural-policy domain. Its experience also highlights the importance of linking cultural institutions to universities, technology companies, training providers and international markets.

Milan, meanwhile, illustrates the potential of design, fashion, architecture and industrial heritage as foundations for creative-sector development. BASE Milano combines cultural production, experimentation, entrepreneurship and urban regeneration

in a former industrial setting. Fabbrica del Vapore provides another example of how former industrial infrastructure can be repurposed for artistic and cultural activity. Institutions such as PoliHub strengthen the connection between academic research, entrepreneurship and technological innovation. Milan's distinctive contribution is its capacity to connect cultural identity and design excellence with commercial applications, international markets and the regeneration of urban districts.

For a Spanish interlocutor based in Paris, the comparison should also consider how these approaches might translate into the Spanish institutional and urban context. Madrid, Barcelona and Bilbao offer different experiences in cultural infrastructure, creative entrepreneurship, internationalisation and urban transformation. The objective should not be to reproduce the institutional arrangements of another city, but to identify the governance mechanisms that make them effective. In particular, it would be useful to examine how municipalities, regional authorities, universities, cultural institutions, investors and creative businesses divide responsibilities and coordinate their activities.

Barcelona XRLAB at Palo Alto provides an example of the convergence between immersive technologies, extended reality and creative production. Its connection to the EIT Culture & Creativity South-West Regional Hub makes it relevant to European-level cooperation and innovation networks.
Barcelona's wider economic strategy also places creative and innovation activities within a broader spatial development framework, including 22@ and other knowledge and innovation districts. This is useful for assessing how cultural and creative industries can contribute to urban regeneration and economic diversification.

A central question concerns the institutional architecture of a creative hub. Should it be managed by a municipality, an independent foundation, a public-private partnership or a specialised development agency? Its mandate should extend beyond providing workspace to include incubation, access to finance, research collaboration, skills development, internationalisation and the commercialisation of creative products. Public authorities should provide strategic direction and ensure accessibility, while private and philanthropic partners can contribute investment, expertise and market connections. Universities should participate not simply as educational institutions but as partners in research, experimentation, technology transfer and the development of new creative applications.

Financing is equally important because creative enterprises often face difficulties moving from an initial artistic or entrepreneurial concept to a sustainable business. A balanced model could combine municipal and regional funding, national cultural programmes, European instruments, private investment, sponsorship and revenues generated by commercial activities. European programmes such as Creative Europe and the European Institute of Innovation and Technology's Culture and Creativity initiative could support international cooperation and innovation. However, funding should not become dependent exclusively on short-term projects or the ability to attract visitors. Long-term operating resources are necessary if hubs are to retain professional staff, maintain infrastructure and support emerging businesses through different stages of development.

The economic and social performance of creative hubs should also be evaluated through a broader set of indicators. These should include enterprise survival, employment, investment mobilised, intellectual property, exports, research partnerships and the internationalisation of creative businesses. Equally important are affordable access to cultural production spaces, participation by different social groups, opportunities for young creators and the contribution of hubs to neighbourhood regeneration. The most successful model would therefore combine economic performance with cultural independence, social accessibility and urban value.

The ultimate question is whether European cities could establish a more systematic network of creative hubs, enabling exchanges between Paris, Berlin, Manchester, Milan and Spanish cities. Such a network could facilitate artist residencies, joint incubators, collaborative research, professional exchanges and access to international markets. It could also help smaller cities benefit from the experience and infrastructure of larger creative centres. The strategic opportunity is to move from isolated cultural projects towards a coordinated European creative economy, in which cultural identity, technological innovation, entrepreneurship and public value reinforce one another.

On balance, the drive towards unity through competition will lead to the emergence of a more integrated and internationally competitive European creative economy. By removing unnecessary national barriers, it can expand markets, stimulate investment, encourage innovation and enable creative enterprises to benefit from economies of scale.

However, unity through competition will not necessarily produce equality between regions, businesses or cultural traditions. Without common safeguards and targeted investment, market concentration could favour established metropolitan centres and commercially dominant operators.

The ultimate outcome will therefore depend on whether the EU treats competition as an instrument of integration rather than an end in itself. The objective should be competitive convergence: one European creative market, multiple cultural identities, shared opportunities and a stronger collective capacity to compete globally.

Stravinsky taught us that music needs both discipline and a little revolution. The Muses, meanwhile, have always resisted harmonisation: nine voices, no common budget, and absolutely no intention of accepting the Commission's compromise text. Perhaps that is precisely why European culture still works.

Madrid-based initiatives

Matadero Madrid is perhaps the most comprehensive example of an integrated creative and cultural hub in Madrid. Managed by the Madrid City Council, it combines contemporary artistic production, exhibitions, residencies, audiovisual activities, design and interdisciplinary collaboration. Its institutional structure brings together public programmes and independent cultural partners, making it particularly relevant to the governance of creative ecosystems. Matadero Madrid +1

Medialab Matadero provides a more specialised model, connecting artistic experimentation, digital innovation, science, design and participatory research. Its role as an experimental platform and incubator makes it especially relevant to discussions about the convergence of cultural production and technological innovation. Matadero Madrid

LaZona Hub Audiovisual represents a more commercially oriented approach, bringing audiovisual creation, post-production, training and digital production into a shared environment. Its public-private structure offers an interesting case for examining how public investment can support the development of a specialised creative industry. SETT

Disseny Hub Barcelona (DHub) is a central institutional reference for the city's design and creative industries. It combines the promotion of design, heritage, exhibitions, education, research and cooperation with professional and business organisations. Its relationship with universities and the private sector makes it relevant to the development of a design-led innovation ecosystem. Disseny Hub Barcelona

Barcelona Activa's Creative and Cultural Industries programme offers a municipal economic-development perspective. It seeks to strengthen creative businesses and entrepreneurship, with DHub serving as an important focal point for the sector. This is particularly relevant to understanding how municipal economic-development agencies can complement cultural institutions. Companies +1

Barcelona XRLAB at Palo Alto provides an example of the convergence between immersive technologies, extended reality and creative production. Its connection to the EIT Culture & Creativity South-West Regional Hub makes it relevant to European-level cooperation and innovation networks. Barcelona XRLAB Palo Alto +1

Barcelona's wider economic strategy also places creative and innovation activities within a broader spatial development framework, including 22@ and other knowledge and innovation districts. This is useful for assessing how cultural and creative industries can contribute to urban regeneration and economic diversification.

Comparative significance: Madrid offers particularly useful examples of municipal cultural infrastructure, experimental production and audiovisual development. Barcelona demonstrates a stronger integration of design policy, creative entrepreneurship, technology and spatial economic development. Together, they provide two complementary Spanish models for examining how cultural policy can evolve into a more comprehensive creative-industrial strategy.

Comparative significance: Madrid offers particularly useful examples of municipal cultural infrastructure, experimental production and audiovisual development. Barcelona demonstrates a stronger integration of design policy, creative entrepreneurship, technology and spatial economic development. Together, they provide two complementary Spanish models for examining how cultural policy can evolve into a more comprehensive creative-industrial strategy.

18.1. From Architectural Philosophy to Urban Policy

The dialogue suggests five principles for cities such as Brussels, Madrid, Amman and Kolding.

Design beyond conventional constraints. Housing shortages, climate pressures, mobility problems and fragmented public space should be treated as interconnected design challenges rather than isolated sectoral problems.

Make infrastructure a civic asset. Transport, water management, energy systems and ecological restoration should be integrated into accessible, attractive public environments that serve both technical and social purposes.

Combine experimentation with accountability. Pilot projects should establish measurable objectives, evaluate outcomes and generate evidence that informs subsequent investment and wider implementation.

Democratise architectural ambition. High-quality design should extend beyond flagship developments to schools, social housing, public facilities and disadvantaged neighbourhoods, ensuring that architectural excellence is not determined exclusively by purchasing power.

Measure long-term public value. Projects should be evaluated according to their whole-life costs and their contributions to liveability, resilience, accessibility, social cohesion and economic productivity.

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The central proposition is that utopian pragmatism is a method of governing transformation. It combines the courage to imagine a fundamentally better city with the institutional capacity, technical competence, financial discipline and democratic accountability required to build it.

There is something wonderfully reassuring about architects who promise to reconcile utopia with pragmatism; one is almost tempted to believe that humanity may yet be saved by a sufficiently intelligent arrangement of concrete, glass and good intentions. Mr

Ingels wishes us to dream, whilst Sir Norman reminds us that the roof must not leak; between these two necessities, civilisation appears to have found its proper proportions.

I confess, however, that I remain somewhat suspicious of perfection, particularly when it arrives accompanied by diagrams, performance indicators and the assurance that everything has been carefully considered. The world has survived many grand designs, though seldom without requiring the poor to inhabit their imperfections. It is therefore pleasing to hear that beauty should not be reserved for the wealthy, nor architectural ambition confined to those who can afford a celebrated address. Whether this admirable principle will survive its encounter with the property market is, naturally, another matter.

I am especially charmed by the notion that infrastructure might become poetry; a river restored, a station transformed, a school rendered beautiful. There is something almost revolutionary in the suggestion that ordinary life deserves elegance. Yet I would remind our ingenious gentlemen that a public space is not made hospitable by its appearance alone, any more than a society becomes just by commissioning a handsome monument to its aspirations.

And then comes accountability, that most unwelcome guest at every gathering of visionaries. We are told that the future must be measured, evaluated and, where necessary, corrected. Admirable, certainly; although I should be curious to discover who will measure the happiness of a city, and by what instrument one might calculate the dignity of its inhabitants.

Still, I prefer these ambitions to the complacency of those who mistake existing arrangements for the limits of possibility. If utopia is the art of imagining what might be, and pragmatism the discipline of discovering what can be done, perhaps their marriage is worth encouraging, provided neither partner is permitted to tyrannise the other.

Let us therefore build our better cities, by all means; only let us remember that the inhabitants are not there to admire the genius of their architects, but to live their lives. And if, in the process, we contrive to make those lives a little less tedious, a little more beautiful and considerably more just, we may congratulate ourselves on having achieved something rarer than a masterpiece.

We shall have made progress.

And, as you know, my dear friend, progress is a virtue I admire considerably more when it has the good taste not to boast of itself.

RENVOI -Madrid's Capitality: From Institutional Presence to International Influence

Madrid's capitality represents far more than an institutional distinction. It is a strategic asset through which Spain can strengthen its international presence, attract investment, cultivate partnerships and shape the conversations defining Europe's economic, political and urban future. In an increasingly competitive international environment, capital cities derive their influence not simply from the institutions they host, but from their capacity to convene decision-makers, connect markets, attract talent and transform their geographical and political position into tangible opportunities.

Madrid possesses many of the attributes required to assume this role. Its political institutions, economic dynamism, cultural reach, international connectivity and growing attractiveness to businesses and talent provide a strong foundation upon which to build a more ambitious international proposition. Yet capitality should not be understood as an advantage that operates automatically. Its true value emerges when institutional standing is translated into strategic direction, when visibility generates relationships, and when relationships lead to concrete initiatives capable of producing lasting economic and societal benefits.

The opportunity, therefore, is to position Madrid not merely as the administrative centre of Spain, but as an increasingly influential European capital: a place where public institutions, private investment, international organisations and intellectual leadership converge to address shared challenges and develop new opportunities. Such a positioning would strengthen Madrid's international profile while reinforcing Spain's capacity to participate in, and contribute to, the wider European and global agenda.

Achieving this ambition requires a clear sense of purpose. International visibility, however valuable, is not an end in itself. Madrid's proposition must be sufficiently distinctive to explain why international partners should engage with the city, why investors should consider it a strategic destination, and why institutions should choose it as a platform for dialogue and cooperation. The answer lies in the capacity to combine political stability, economic opportunity, institutional proximity and quality of life within a coherent and credible vision of the future.

Madrid's capitality can also serve as a bridge between different geographical and institutional spheres. Its historical, cultural and economic relationships with Latin America offer a particularly important opportunity to strengthen dialogue, encourage investment and facilitate cooperation between European and Latin American institutions, businesses and cities. At a time when international partnerships are increasingly important to economic resilience and strategic autonomy, Madrid can leverage these connections to reinforce its role as a meeting point between regions, ideas and interests.

This international dimension should be approached with ambition but also with pragmatism. It is not enough to invoke Madrid's geographical position or historical relationships; these advantages must be activated through carefully selected partnerships, targeted initiatives and measurable outcomes. Whether through investment promotion, urban innovation, sustainable development, cultural diplomacy or institutional cooperation, the objective should be to create mechanisms through which Madrid's capitality generates

value beyond its own administrative boundaries.

Equally important is the relationship between international positioning and the lived experience of the city. A capital's credibility ultimately depends on its ability to reconcile global ambition with local prosperity. Competitiveness, accessibility, environmental quality, affordable housing, public space and social cohesion are not peripheral concerns; they are essential components of Madrid's attractiveness and long-term resilience. An internationally influential capital must also remain a city in which people can live, work, invest and build their futures with confidence.

The strategic task is therefore to connect Madrid's external projection with its internal development. By aligning international partnerships with urban priorities, the city can demonstrate that capitality is not simply a question of prestige, but an instrument for improving economic performance, institutional effectiveness and quality of life. This approach would also give Madrid a more substantive voice in European discussions about the future of cities, the competitiveness of metropolitan regions and the relationship between public investment and sustainable growth.

Ultimately, the ambition is not simply to affirm Madrid's position as Spain's capital, but to demonstrate what that position makes possible. Capitality becomes meaningful when it creates opportunities that would otherwise remain beyond reach; when it brings together actors who might not otherwise collaborate; and when it enables local capabilities to contribute to wider European and international objectives.

Madrid should therefore approach its capitality as a platform for strategic influence: converting institutional presence into international partnerships, visibility into credibility, and ambition into measurable results. The objective is not to compete for attention alone, but to establish a distinctive and lasting role in the networks through which Europe and the wider world organise their economic, political and urban futures. In doing so, Madrid can strengthen its standing as a European capital with both the confidence to articulate its own vision and the capacity to make that vision relevant to others.

Madrid's Capitality in the Network Society: From Self-Projection to Relational Influence

In the network society, the international significance of a capital city can no longer be determined exclusively by its institutional status, historical legacy or capacity to project a carefully constructed image of itself. Influence emerges increasingly from the ability to occupy strategic positions within networks of economic exchange, political decision-making, knowledge production and cultural circulation. For Madrid, the challenge is therefore not simply to communicate what the city believes itself to be, but to understand how it is perceived, connected and valued by the actors with whom its future is intertwined.

Capitality, in this sense, is not a quality that a city can proclaim into existence. It is a relational condition, continuously produced through interactions between institutions, businesses, citizens, investors, universities, international organisations and other urban centres. Madrid's international standing will depend not only on its capacity to articulate a compelling vision, but also on its ability to become relevant to the agendas, interests and expectations of others.

This distinction is fundamental. Cities frequently approach international positioning as an exercise in self-representation, projecting their historical achievements, cultural identity and economic ambitions onto an external audience. Yet a narrative, however sophisticated, cannot substitute for a meaningful position within the networks through which influence is exercised. In an interconnected world, visibility may attract attention, but it is connectivity, credibility and the capacity to generate value for others that sustain relevance.

Madrid should therefore resist the temptation to project its internal understanding of its own importance onto the international arena. Its capitality must instead be developed through engagement with the world beyond itself: by identifying where its capabilities meet emerging needs, where its institutions can connect otherwise fragmented interests, and where its economic, cultural and political resources can contribute to wider processes of cooperation and transformation.

The strategic objective is not to impose a narrative of Madrid upon the international community, but to create the conditions under which Madrid acquires meaning within it. This requires a shift from promotion to participation, from image-making to relationship-building, and from the assertion of status to the demonstration of relevance.

Such an approach also changes the way international partnerships should be understood. Cooperation with European institutions, Latin American cities, international investors and knowledge networks should not be treated merely as instruments for enhancing Madrid's visibility. These relationships are themselves productive spaces in which the city's role can be defined, tested and strengthened. Their value lies not simply in the recognition they confer, but in the opportunities, capabilities and shared outcomes they make possible.

The same principle applies to Madrid's domestic development. A capital's international credibility cannot be separated from the realities experienced by its inhabitants. Its attractiveness to global talent and investment is connected to the quality of its public spaces, the accessibility of housing, the performance of its infrastructure, the vitality of its cultural life and the inclusiveness of its economic model. International positioning that is disconnected from these realities risks becoming an exercise in representation rather than a reflection of substantive urban capacity.

Madrid's capitality should therefore be understood as an open and evolving project, shaped through the interaction between local identity and external relationships. Its ambition should

be to become a node through which people, ideas, capital and institutions connect productively; a place that does not simply seek recognition within existing networks, but contributes to their development and helps create new possibilities for collaboration.

The decisive question is not how Madrid can persuade the world to see it as an influential capital, but how Madrid can become indispensable to the relationships through which influence is created.
In the network society, the strongest international position is rarely achieved by projecting the self most forcefully. It emerges when others find value in connecting with you, when your contribution becomes embedded in their own strategies, and when your presence makes the network itself more capable of achieving its objectives.

Madrid's capitality will acquire its fullest meaning when it moves beyond the representation of status and becomes a source of relational power: the capacity to connect interests, mobilise resources, create shared value and participate in shaping the future. Its international ambition should not be to make the world reflect an image of Madrid, but to make Madrid a meaningful part of the world's evolving networks.

That is the difference between projecting presence and building influence.

Conclusion: Madrid as a Bridge between Worlds

Madrid, like those great characters whose fortunes are inseparable from the society that has raised them, has accumulated power, wealth, and influence until these advantages have come to seem almost natural, as though the capital had acquired them by virtue of its existence rather than through centuries of political decisions, economic interests, and institutional arrangements. Ministries, financial institutions, transport networks, research centres, and corporate headquarters converge upon it, each reinforcing the importance of the others, while the territories surrounding the capital participate in its prosperity to unequal degrees. Yet a city, like a wealthy household, may possess an abundance of resources without ensuring that those resources improve the circumstances of everyone who depends upon them. Madrid's challenge is therefore not simply to increase its wealth or extend its influence, but to transform the very conditions under which these advantages are produced and distributed.

To move beyond a model of capitality founded upon concentration, Madrid must begin to regard its metropolitan territory not as a collection of subordinate municipalities but as an interconnected system whose economic fortunes, social conditions, and environmental future are inseparable. This requires institutions capable of coordinating housing, transport, employment, public services, and land use across administrative boundaries; investment directed towards neighbourhoods and municipalities where opportunities remain limited; and an innovation economy whose discoveries generate productive employment and public benefits beyond the institutions in which they originate. Infrastructure must connect people to opportunity without making the places in which they live unaffordable, while green spaces, biodiversity, and climate adaptation must be treated as essential components of urban prosperity rather than ornamental additions to it.

Such a transformation also depends upon a different understanding of Madrid's international position. Its relationships with European, Iberian, and Ibero-American partners should create reciprocal networks of knowledge, research, and institutional cooperation, allowing the capital to extend its influence through what it shares as much as through what it attracts. The decisive measure of its success would consequently lie not in the volume of wealth accumulated within its boundaries, the scale of its infrastructure, or the prestige of its institutions, but in the extent to which these assets improve everyday life across the metropolitan area and strengthen the territories connected to it. Madrid must learn to measure the greatness of its capitality not merely by the power it gathers, but by the opportunities, capabilities, and common prosperity it enables others to create.

Madrid did not become the centre of Spain in a single day. Power arrived, settled in, and gradually made itself at home. Since Philip II established the royal court there in 1561, the city has accumulated the institutions, resources, and privileges that accompany political authority. Ministries, financial institutions, transport networks, universities, and corporate headquarters followed different historical paths, but their presence reinforced the same underlying reality: decisions made in Madrid could shape lives far beyond it. The city grew, attracted workers, absorbed investment, and expanded its influence. Other territories watched this process with varying degrees of admiration, dependence, and resentment.

The twentieth century strengthened this concentration. Industrialization and rural migration transformed Madrid into a major urban centre, while the centralized state reinforced its administrative importance. The democratic transition after 1978 redistributed political authority among national, regional, and local institutions, but it did not erase the advantages accumulated over centuries. Madrid remained the seat of national government and an increasingly important centre of finance, services, research, and international business. Its transport infrastructure connected it to the rest of Spain and the wider world. Yet connection, as residents know, is not always the same as equality. A railway may bring a distant city closer to the capital without bringing its inhabitants closer to the opportunities concentrated there.

Within the metropolitan area, the same contradiction becomes visible at a smaller scale. Some neighbourhoods benefit from high-value employment, excellent transport links, and extensive public amenities. Others face greater difficulties with housing affordability, access to services, and the quality of their surrounding environment. Municipal boundaries rarely correspond neatly to the realities of everyday life. People live in one municipality, work in another, travel through a third, and depend on decisions made by several levels of government. When responsibilities are divided and coordination is weak, the costs are often borne by residents who have little influence over the decisions affecting them.

Economic growth and innovation offer no automatic solution. Universities, research centres, and businesses may generate knowledge and wealth, but the wider public benefit depends on how those resources are connected to employment, education, housing, and local development. Infrastructure and urban regeneration can improve accessibility, yet they can also increase property values and push existing residents away from the improvements intended for their neighbourhoods. Green investment presents a similar challenge: parks, trees, and climate adaptation should first address environmental disadvantages, rather than simply make already attractive areas more desirable.

Madrid's international position offers another possibility. Its European, Iberian, and Ibero-American relationships could become channels for reciprocal cooperation, research, and institutional learning, rather than instruments of prestige alone. Their value would lie in what they enable people and institutions to accomplish together.

The question, therefore, is not whether Madrid should continue to grow. It is what its growth should mean. Economic performance, international visibility, and infrastructure are important, but insufficient measures of success. Housing affordability, employment quality, access to public services, environmental resilience, and territorial cohesion must also count. Madrid's future depends on whether the advantages accumulated by the capital can become opportunities shared beyond its centre. This is the meaning of capitality beyond concentration: a city that measures its strength not only by what it gathers within its boundaries, but also by what it enables elsewhere.
That is the deeper meaning of Madrid Beyond Capitality.

The Capital of the Future will not be Defined only by what it Contains. It will be Defined by what it Enables Elsewhere
Further Research
Further inquiry into Madrid, that venerable city where the stones remember what the inhabitants have long since forgotten, might take many roads, and not all of them would lead to the same destination. One could begin with its cultural and intellectual life, proceed through the labyrinth of its historical inheritance, and arrive, after many digressions, at its place among the capitals of Europe. For Madrid is a city obliged to negotiate continually with its own reflection: it must preserve the image bequeathed to it by centuries of history while accommodating the restless demands of a present that seems determined to remake everything in its own likeness.

There would be much to discover in the part Madrid has played in European political thought, in the arts and in those disputes of the intellect that have occasionally altered the course of nations. Its museums, universities, foundations and cultural institutions might be examined not merely as repositories of treasures or instruments of prestige, but as living establishments in which ideas are preserved, contested and sent forth into the world. A comparison with other European capitals would reveal the different fortunes of cities that compete, sometimes openly and sometimes with the discreet courtesy of old rivals, to become centres of diplomacy, artistic creation and intellectual exchange.

Nor could such an undertaking neglect Madrid's enduring connections with Latin America, where the histories of two continents have been interwoven in a fabric too intricate to be unravelled by the simple gestures of diplomacy. These relations might be studied through the language of cultural exchange, the movement of ideas and the institutions that give political meaning to a shared, if often troubled, inheritance. Architecture would provide another avenue of inquiry, for the old buildings of Madrid are witnesses whose testimony is written in stone, and whose significance lies as much in the memories they awaken as in the purposes for which they were first constructed.

The changing composition of the city's population would offer further revelations. Migration, urban integration and the coexistence of different traditions raise questions about the nature of belonging, a subject on which governments have issued many declarations but few final answers. The literary cafés, salons and intellectual circles of Madrid might also be revisited, for in such places, over cups of coffee and amid the smoke of innumerable cigarettes, ideas have travelled farther than their authors could have imagined. One might investigate how public institutions, private foundations and civil society sustain this circulation of thought, and how Madrid continues to attract international conferences, scholarly encounters and artistic collaborations.

Finally, comparative research into cultural policy, institutional governance and urban strategy could illuminate the means by which Madrid might strengthen its distinctive position within Europe. Yet here the investigator would encounter a question more troublesome than any catalogue of institutions or monuments. If a city has already secured an adequate foundation of essential services, by what measure should it judge the need for further modernisation? The answer cannot be found merely by invoking the virtues of novelty, as though every reform carried within it an unquestionable blessing. Each proposal must instead be examined in the light of its purpose, its cost and the benefits it promises to deliver.

For it is one thing to declare that a city must advance, and quite another to establish that the particular road chosen will take it somewhere worth going. When the essential machinery of public life is already functioning and improvements are under way, the burden of proof must shift. The question is no longer whether institutions ought to modernise in the abstract, but whether each additional reform will produce benefits commensurate with the resources, disruption and opportunities it consumes. Thus the study of Madrid becomes, in the end, an inquiry into prudence itself: that difficult art of distinguishing between the changes that serve a city and those that merely persuade it, for a season, that it is moving forward.

Ten Counterarguments to Modernisation
The law of diminishing returns. Once essential services function

adequately, further modernisation may deliver progressively smaller improvements at disproportionately greater cost.

The diversion of resources. Investment in new systems, technologies and organisational structures may divert funding from maintaining existing services, improving working conditions or addressing unmet needs.

The illusion of progress. Modernisation can become an objective in itself, allowing institutions to demonstrate activity and innovation without necessarily improving the quality of their outcomes.

The erosion of institutional memory. Repeated restructuring can weaken established practices, destroy accumulated expertise and undermine the informal relationships on which effective public services often depend.

The costs of disruption. Reforms may interrupt service delivery, impose additional administrative burdens and create uncertainty for both employees and users.

The tyranny of technological solutions. Digitalisation and automation may be presented as inevitable improvements even when personal contact, professional judgement and established procedures remain more effective.

The standardisation of difference. Modernisation programmes frequently impose uniform models on institutions whose circumstances, histories and responsibilities differ considerably.

The neglect of maintenance. Political and managerial incentives often favour visible innovation over the less glamorous work of preserving what already functions well.

The weakening of public trust. Repeated promises of transformation can generate scepticism when improvements remain difficult to perceive or fail to meet expectations.

The confusion between efficiency and value. Faster, cheaper or more measurable services are not necessarily better services, particularly where accessibility, fairness, continuity and human dignity matter.

The strongest counterargument is not that modernisation should be rejected, but that modernisation must justify itself against the performance of the existing system.

Once a satisfactory baseline of services has been established, the burden of proof should shift towards those proposing further reform. They should demonstrate what specific problem remains unresolved, what additional benefit is expected, what risks may arise and whether less disruptive alternatives are available.

The fundamental distinction is between modernisation that addresses a genuine deficiency and modernisation pursued principally because change has acquired an unquestioned virtue of its own.

As a guiding principle: the purpose of public services is not to remain perpetually modern, but to serve the public reliably, fairly and well. In my opinion, only an overhaul as outlined will make public service and a robust Spanish Army worthwhile in continuity and rupture.

Scenarios

As the Ayuntamiento is already improving the quality and accessibility of its services in response to the strategic challenges of Madrid combined with building performance based governance, , the decision not to pursue further modernisation need not imply stagnation. It may instead represent a deliberate choice to consolidate recent gains, preserve institutional continuity and ensure that existing improvements deliver lasting value.

Three scenarios merit consideration:

i. **Consolidation and Continuity** The Ayuntamiento maintains its current trajectory, concentrating on the effective delivery of upgraded services, staff training, maintenance and the resolution of remaining operational weaknesses. Rather than pursuing innovation for its own sake, it allows recent investments to mature and demonstrates their practical value.
ii. **Gradual Relative Decline Although services** continue to function satisfactorily, the absence of further adaptation may eventually leave the Ayuntamiento less responsive to changing public expectations, technological developments or the practices of comparable institutions. The risk is not necessarily immediate deterioration, but the gradual erosion of relative performance.
iii. **Deferred Transformation** If emerging needs are not addressed in time, the Ayuntamiento may eventually face a more costly and disruptive programme of change. What could have been achieved through incremental adjustments might instead require urgent investment, compressed implementation schedules and greater organisational disruption.

The strategic challenge, therefore, is to distinguish between modernisation that produces demonstrable public value and change pursued primarily for its own sake. Where service levels are already improving, the priority may be to consolidate those improvements, identify measurable shortcomings and introduce further changes selectively.

The central question is not whether the Ayuntamiento should modernise indefinitely, but at what point further modernisation ceases to be an end in itself and becomes justified only by a clearly evidenced need.

It takes strength to renew to preserve and by addressing the challenges the Government demon-strates a more politically mature attitude combined with a bold plan for the modernisation of Madrid, and this also implies building up strength in the provinces to move the Madrillenos' pride to engage in healthy and loyal competition.

Policy Recommendations

Nine recommendations for Madrid to improve its international ranking through targeted urban interventions

i. Establish an integrated urban performance framework. Madrid should align the Ayuntamiento's existing indicators with the OECD Regional Well-Being framework and the Mori Memorial Foundation's Global Power City Index (GPCI). The municipal system should identify local problems and monitor implementation, the OECD framework should assess well-being and territorial disparities, and Mori's indicators should diagnose Madrid's international competitiveness and attractiveness. This alignment should preserve the methodological integrity of each system rather than collapse them into a single composite score.

ii. Make housing affordability the principal social and spatial intervention in relevant barrios such as Centro, Puente de Valleca and Usera and in Carabancel. Madrid should accelerate affordable housing provision, mobilise suitable publicly controlled land, bring appropriate underused properties into productive use and coordinate residential development with public transport and essential services. Progress should be assessed through housing costs relative to household incomes, affordable housing delivery, access to employment and residents' perceptions of housing pressure. Improving affordability would address a central local concern while strengthening the city's capacity to retain skilled workers and attract international talent.

iii. Integrate metropolitan mobility and land-use planning. The Ayuntamiento should coordinate transport, housing, employment and service provision across Madrid's functional metropolitan area. Investment should prioritise public transport connections, interchange quality, walking and cycling infrastructure, and development around accessible transport nodes. Indicators should measure journey times, service reliability, access to employment and essential facilities, and the distribution of accessibility gains across neighbourhoods. The objective is to improve both everyday mobility and Madrid's international accessibility. Make sure the visualisation technologies are in place, so that decision-makers get the information they ask for and are in need of to make enlightened decisions on urban interventions.

iv. Implement a spatially targeted water and climate-resilience programme. Madrid should integrate water security, urban cooling, flood-risk reduction, green infrastructure and biodiversity into its metropolitan spatial plan. Heat-vulnerable neighbourhoods and areas with limited green space should receive priority for tree planting, shaded public spaces, permeable surfaces and ecological corridors. Municipal environmental indicators should track water consumption, leakage, reuse, heat exposure, air quality and access to green space, connecting local delivery to the OECD's environmental and well-being dimensions and Mori's environment and livability functions.

v. Convert research capacity into internationally competitive economic activity. Madrid should strengthen collaboration among universities, research institutions, hospitals, technology companies and investors through innovation districts, research partnerships and technology-transfer programmes. Municipal interventions should facilitate access to suitable premises, support business formation and improve connections between research and industrial application. Performance should be measured through research employment, innovative enterprise creation, technology transfer, skilled-job creation and the retention of graduates, alongside the relevant OECD economic measures and Mori indicators for economy and research and development.

vi. Expand international cultural interaction beyond visitor growth. Madrid should connect its museums, heritage, performing arts, gastronomy, universities and conference infrastructure through a coherent international cultural strategy. The emphasis should be on year-round cultural activity, international collaboration, wider participation and the distribution of visitor activity across the metropolitan area. Relevant indicators should measure cultural participation, international events, research and cultural partnerships, and visitor dispersal. This would strengthen Madrid's cultural interaction function without making visitor volume the principal measure of success.

vii. Make the Ayuntamiento's indicator system the operational centre of implementation. The municipality should use its existing statistical and digital resources to establish a shared performance dashboard linking neighbourhood conditions, planning decisions, infrastructure projects, budgets and delivery milestones. Each intervention should have a baseline, a responsible institution, a defined funding envelope and measurable outcome indicators. OECD and Mori measures should be linked to municipal data only where their definitions are genuinely comparable, with any methodological differences made explicit.

viii. Establish a disciplined investment and accountability mechanism. Madrid should create a coordinated programme of interventions that distinguishes enabling expenditure on planning, data, modelling and institutional coordination from major capital investment in housing, transport, water infrastructure and public space. Projects should be prioritised according to their expected social and economic benefits, implementation feasibility, distributional effects and contribution to relevant benchmarking indicators. Quarterly reviews should examine expenditure and delivery, while annual evaluations should determine whether interventions are producing measurable improvements. Further funding should depend on transparent assessments of progress, affordability and public value.

ix. Adopt an annual international benchmarking and learning cycle. Madrid should examine its performance against a carefully selected group of comparable cities, using the latest available OECD measures and Mori GPCI results to identify specific areas of relative weakness and improvement. The comparison should investigate the underlying causes of performance rather than merely report changes in ranking. Each annual review should lead to a revised programme of interventions, with unsuccessful measures redesigned and

successful approaches expanded where appropriate. The final objective is to make improved international standing the consequence of sustained improvements in housing, accessibility, environmental resilience, economic productivity and cultural interaction—not an independent administrative target.

x. Consider anchoring at either District or Barios level annual reports on SDG score, organised around (1) Activities (2) Performance stat (3) citizen satisfaction surveys versus stats (4) Discussion of public policies (5) Action Plans on how to plug gaps towards a sustainable society.

Perspective

Madrid's redevelopment poses a question that no architect, however ingenious, and no planner, however certain of the future, can answer with blueprints alone: what does progress mean to a city that has already learned, after years of effort, to attend reasonably well to the needs of its people? For a long time, modernisation had the appearance of a promise delivered from the future, arriving in the form of new buildings, faster services and institutions eager to shed the dust of their ancestors. It was welcomed as one welcomes the first rain after a prolonged drought, with the conviction that whatever came next must surely be better than what had come before.

But cities, like the people who inhabit them, eventually reach a moment when the urgency of becoming something else begins to obscure the value of what they have already become. Madrid has been improving its capacity to serve its citizens, repairing deficiencies, renewing its institutions and discovering, in the ordinary business of daily life, that progress need not always announce itself with the noise of demolition or the unveiling of a monumental façade. When public services are already advancing and the machinery of the city is responding more effectively to human needs, the demand for further transformation acquires a different character. It can no longer rely on the familiar incantation of modernity. It must explain what remains unfinished, whose lives would be improved, and why the future being promised cannot be reached by continuing along the road already taken.

For progress, after all, is not a procession in which every generation must destroy the work of the previous one to prove that it has arrived. There are cities that spend their lives pursuing the future and discover, too late, that they have neglected the present; there are others that guard their past so jealously that they mistake stillness for wisdom. Madrid's task is to escape both destinies, to recognise that the most consequential advances may sometimes emerge not from the desire to transform everything, but from the patience to understand what is already working, what remains broken, and what is worth preserving before the next great promise comes knocking at its door.

The real challenge lies in learning to distinguish between the changes a city needs and those it pursues simply because the word progress has acquired the irresistible glamour of a promise. New infrastructure may ease the burdens of daily life; public squares, once neglected, may become places where neighbours meet again, and modern administrative services may return precious hours to people who have too long surrendered them to queues and paperwork. These are not trivial gifts. Yet no project deserves admiration merely because it is new or rises triumphantly above the skyline. Its true worth must be measured in the lives it touches: in the elderly woman who can cross a square without fear, in the family that gains easier access to public services, in the preservation of the character that makes Madrid recognisable to those who love it, and in the care with which public money is spent, as though it belonged to future generations as much as to the present one.

But restraint, too, can become a disguise for fear. Cities are living creatures, restless and vulnerable, shaped by the passage of time and by the changing desires of those who inhabit them. What serves a population today may prove inadequate tomorrow, as new technologies alter daily routines, as generations demand different things, and as other European capitals discover ways of responding to challenges that Madrid has yet to confront. To refuse all further modernisation is not necessarily to preserve what is good. It may mean allowing recent achievements to settle into permanence, watching the city slowly lose ground, or permitting small, neglected difficulties to grow into expensive crises that demand solutions at the worst possible moment.

The answer, then, is neither to remake Madrid endlessly, as though its identity were an old garment that must be replaced each season, nor to preserve every existing arrangement behind the glass of nostalgia. It is to develop the rarer virtue of discernment: to recognise the changes that are necessary, to approach those whose benefits remain uncertain with patience, and to understand that sometimes the most courageous decision is to wait. A city, like a family, must learn which traditions nourish it, which habits hold it back, and which dreams are worth the sacrifices they demand. Only then can Madrid move towards the future without becoming a stranger to itself.

For Madrid, this distinction is particularly important because redevelopment involves more than the technical improvement of services or the renewal of the built environment. It also concerns the relationship between the city's historical inheritance and its future ambitions. The capital's architectural patrimony, public spaces and cultural institutions are not obstacles to modernisation; they are assets that should inform its direction. The question is how to accommodate new functions and contemporary expectations without diminishing the qualities that make Madrid distinctive. Redevelopment should enhance the city's inherited character rather than render it interchangeable with other metropolitan centres.

This consideration is particularly pertinent to Madrid's cultural and diplomatic institutions, those places where a city, like a man, attempts to reconcile the memory of what it has been with the uncertain image of what it wishes to become. A historic building is not condemned to repeat its original destiny. It may become a theatre of ideas, a meeting place for distant cultures, or an embassy of the intellect. Such transformations can restore a purpose to institutions

whose former functions have faded. But novelty, like fashion, is an unreliable architect. To change a building's identity merely because another seems more illustrious is to confuse the name of a thing with its meaning. Any proposed reinvention must therefore answer three questions: what genuine institutional purpose does it serve, what benefit does it confer upon the public, and what does it make possible that the present arrangement cannot?

In the end, Madrid's redevelopment should be measured not by the number of its transformations but by the world those transformations leave behind. A city is not a manuscript that improves with every revision; sometimes the correction destroys a sentence whose significance was not immediately apparent. There are moments when progress demands the invention of a new form, others when it requires the patient repair of an existing one, and still others when wisdom consists in leaving a thing undisturbed. The most convincing future for Madrid would emerge from this distinction: to modernise where necessity can be demonstrated, to preserve what time has rendered irreplaceable, and to devote public resources to improvements whose consequences endure beyond the brief life of a fashion. For the true measure of a city is not how completely it escapes its past, but how intelligently it carries that past into the future.

Madrid does not need to choose between modernisation and preservation; it needs to establish which forms of modernisation genuinely serve the city's long-term interests [1-33].

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