The Evolution of Urban Gay Space
Utility Change and the Role of Gentrification

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Abstract

The last four decades of neo-liberal inspired development across western society has wrought major changes to its biggest and most powerful urban centres. Notable among these changes has been the proliferation of urban gay neighbourhoods that have mushroomed in almost all the major cities of Europe and the USA. In the context of the increasing liberalisation of society, and the growing economic clout of urban gay communities, urban gay neighbourhoods rapidly evolved from isolation and impoverishment to become some of the most desirable and expensive zones in their respective cities, from Greenwich Village in New York, to Chueca in the heart of downtown Madrid. This thesis has been concerned with analysing two change related aspects of this urban phenomenon. Through a case study of the gay neighbourhood of Chueca, data was generated regarding changes experienced by urban gay zones in terms of how the space is utilised, and by whom. Having identified specific examples of so-called utility change, such as increasing heterosexualisation, overt commercialisation, and class based exclusion, the role played by processes of gentrification in such changes was then examined with a view to establishing a holistic understanding of the contemporary evolution of urban gay space, and of the future trajectory of urban gay zones.

Key words: Urban Space, Gay Identity, Utility Change, Gentrification, Demography
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Introduction

In August every year, Iceland celebrates gay pride with an extravaganza in downtown Reykjavik. Over the years, the event has grown exponentially to become the second best attended event in the country. Only independence day celebrations draw a bigger crowd. This is just one of several thousand such events, from New York to Sidney, that celebrate both gay identity and the ongoing progress of the gay rights movement. Such expressions of pride, activism and solidarity are often centred in a specific urban environment, that of urban gay neighbourhoods. Since the early days of their development, these zones have been colloquially dubbed gaybourhoods due to their high concentration of gay residents, the prevalence of gay owned and managed businesses, and specific orientation towards the consumer and entertainment needs of the LGBT community. The evolution of these zones is the focus of this thesis.

In its broadest sense, this work examines the interaction between the urban gay population and the built environment it inhabits, and how this relationship is changing over time. Evidently, this is a potentially enormous area of research, and so I have confined my research to two specific objectives. In the first instance, this work seeks to identify changes in the functions and utility of urban gay space in recent years. Put more simply, changes in how urban gay space is used and who uses it. In the second instance, this thesis will explore the relationship between these utility changes and processes of urban renewal, specifically gentrification. I will return, in more detail, to these dual objectives after a brief outline of the preliminary sections of the thesis.

The introduction will be followed by the first preliminary chapter, placing urban gay space in historical context by tracing the influence of global processes such as the industrial revolution and major global conflicts, along with evolving attitudes towards homosexuality, in facilitating the initial development of informal and clandestine urban gay space. Though the subsequently created urban gay enclaves, in cities such as Madrid, New York and Berlin in the 1920s, would be tested to destruction by the tumultuous events of the 1930s, they form an essential piece of the jigsaw that, when pieced together, presents a fuller picture of the trajectory of urban gay space from the 19th century to the present day. This will be followed by an exposition on sexuality and identity, and the symbiotic relationship between gay identity, gay culture and urbanism. In aid of this endeavour, some instructive theoretical perspectives will be employed, in particular constructivism and associated theories, which help to make sense of how gay identity was created, and how it has taken a pre-dominantly urban form, manifesting itself within defined physical urban boundaries. Understanding the relationship between sexuality, identity, and urban space, as it relates to
modern gaybourhoods and their inhabitants, is an essential backdrop to any investigation of the current dynamic between urban gay communities and the built environment which they inhabit.

Having completed the preliminary chapters, the thesis will proceed to outline in detail both the qualitative and quantitative research methods that were undertaken to generate data regarding the specifics of utility change in urban gay space. This chapter will outline the precise forms such methods took, why particular methods were employed and not others, where and when the research was conducted, how subjects were chosen, and on what basis, as well as issues surrounding representativeness and validity.

As briefly outlined earlier, there are two interlocking research questions that this thesis aims to explore. The first of these objectives is to identify changes in the function and purpose of urban gay space, in terms of how gay communities utilise and interact with gay space, and its meaning in the lives of 21st century urban gay communities. To this end, anthropological research was conducted in a representative case study environment, the findings of which facilitate an understanding of changes in urban gay space more generally. The case study chosen for this task is the gay neighborhood of Chueca, situated in the heart of the Spanish capital of Madrid. The reasons for choosing this particular zone will be outlined at the beginning of the case study analysis chapter. In order to generate data, a multi-strand data collection strategy was employed, beginning with participant observation activities, to introduce the zone and provide a sense of its urban geography. This was followed by a survey questionnaire, the aim of which is to generate data on changes to how the residents and frequenters of Chueca utilise, and interact with, the neighbourhood. In conjunction with this survey is the third strand of research, consisting of group discussions and individual interviews with those who live in, work in, and frequent the zone. While the aim of the survey research is to identify changes to how Chueca is used, the purpose of the follow-up discussion groups and interviews is to put flesh on the bones, as it were, of these identified changes to arrive at a richer understanding of the nuances inherent in such changes, the human context in which they have taken place, and the how they are viewed from the perspective of those who have had first-hand experience of them.

As with any complex phenomenon, there are often a myriad of factors which help to explain its existence and evolution. Given the inevitable practical limitations of any academic endeavour, one must inevitably choose between various potential causal factors. In this case, the process of gentrification was chosen to be the focus of analysis. Therefore, an exploration of the role gentrification plays in the utility changes identified in the first research question, is the focus of the second. Gentrification has long been associated with the development and evolution of gay zones,
and their transformation from no-go neighborhoods, rife with crime and urban decay, into attractive zones boasting vibrant consumption economies, fueled by the influx of both tourists and non-residents. In addressing this second question, reference to the data garnered though the research process will be strongly complimented by academic sourcing and research done on the relationship between gentrification and gay neighbourhoods more generally. In exploring the totality of the relationship between utility change and gentrification, issues such as the existence or otherwise of a causal link between the development of urban gay neighbourhoods and gentrification, the placing of gentrification in the wider neo-liberal context of corporatisation and privatisation, and the Chueca experience of gentrification relative to that of other urban gay zones, will be explored. The thesis will conclude with a brief restatement of the principal findings, what they reveal about the changing nature of urban gay space, what the future may hold for urban gay neighbourhoods, and their place in an ever more diverse and liberal urban landscape.
1 Urban gay space in historical, political and theoretical context

When the term gay space is evoked, it inevitably brings to mind the most iconic contemporary gay zones scattered around the western world, from the Castro in San Francisco and Greenwich Village in New York, to Soho in London. The objective of this preliminary chapter is to explore how profound changes in the organisation and norms of society, particularly in the second half of the 19th century, facilitated the first tentative steps in the eventual development of these contemporary urban gay neighbourhoods, by creating unprecedented levels of urban social space for gays to inhabit. That is not to say that the journey from oppression to urban freedom followed a simple one-directional chronological trajectory. As will become evident in this chapter, reversals and advances in the lot of homosexuals since the early 19th century were subject to the vagaries of political and social developments that often differed greatly from society to society. The turbulent processes of the 19th century would, however, eventually culminate in the creation of the first clearly recognisable urban gay enclaves in cities like New York, Berlin and Madrid in the 1920s. Though these pioneering urban enclaves would, in some cases, be tested to destruction by the demise of liberalism in the 1930s, they would sow the seeds for the eventual growth and development of the modern gay neighbourhoods that are now a feature of almost every major western city.

1.1 The origins and evolution of urban gay space: historical perspectives.

To the average, carefree, gay twenty-something, donning their glad rags for a night out in Soho or Greenwich village, the connection between the industrial revolution and their current state of unprecedented if incomplete liberation may not be immediately apparent. However, it is probably a more significant a factor in explaining such freedoms than almost any other single process in the intervening 200 years. To understand just how important, the societal upheavals of the 19th century were to the creation of urban gay space, a brief overview of the nature of pre-industrial society, and the role that sex and the family played in such societies, is essential. The industrial revolution represented an unprecedented break with the past in terms of the most fundamental aspects of society, of how people worked, where they lived, and how they lived. It replaced a mode of production that had been essentially family based, and in which the labour of offspring was crucial to its survival (Hobsbawn, 1996). Sex was thus utterly bound up with procreation, not only in the religious sense but as a matter of practicality, in terms of both the production of unpaid labour and as a potential source of support in old age, in an era when state mandated social protection was practically non-existent. In such a brutal reality, which was the lot of all but a
minuscule elite, there was less room for intimacy, sentiment or concepts of mutual pleasure. Such practical constraints kept the nuclear family at the centre of all economic and social activity (Hobsbawn, 1996). Both men and women tended to go from the houses of their parents directly into marriage, with the concept of single living as we understand it today almost unheard of. Apart from widows, widowers and near-do-wells, the nuclear family, which often extended to include grandparents, absorbed almost the entire social space of pre-capitalist society.

Under this type of social regimen, there were and always had been, homosexual acts, but no actually acknowledged homosexuals. The society of the time lacked even the language of categorisation, the actual term homosexual having only been coined in the 1860s, would not gain popular currency for decades (Byrne, 2000). Men who had sex with men were routinely lumped in under the general term of pervert, degenerate or criminal, while lesbians were utterly invisible. The second half of the 19th century, however, played host to powerful forces of industrialisation and urbanisation that utterly transformed the nature of work, and with it the structure of the family. Mass production and the factory system meant that wage labour began to increasingly replace the self-sufficient rural family unit, in the wake of mass migration to urban centres (Hobsbawn, 1996). This migration hugely increased the number of urban-dwelling, single people. These developments had two important knock-on effects, changes in the allocation of social space and changes in social conceptions of sex.

In terms of the allocation of social space, the processes of change wrought by the industrial revolution carved out an opening for the individual, and without individuals there could never be actual homosexuals. By accident rather than design, industrialisation dramatically increased the clandestine urban social space available to closeted gay men who wished to act on their desires. One excellent example was the development of the English railway network from the 1830s to the 1870s. According to the historian Matt Cook, in his work on the history of homosexuality in London, the burgeoning rail network further cemented the development of an urban gay society “through an influx of strangers to the capital for work or a night out, with railways stations becoming the new focal point for illegal amorous encounters” (Cook, 2003, p.26). By the latter decades of the 19th century, the area around Piccadilly station had become notorious for the prevalence of rent boys, and the zone became colloquially known as the meat rack. Though such behaviour was commonly and hypocritically assumed to be the preserve of the deviant working classes, in reality no strata of society was immune. Duly outed and shamed members of the establishment included the bishop of Clogher, caught in the throws of passion with a guardsman in
the white lion tavern in Haymarket, and the arrest of a member of the Society for the Suppression of Vice for picking up a man in Piccadilly (Cook, 2003).

The industrial revolution and its attendant forces of urbanisation and wage labour would also have a profound effect on the role of sexuality in 19th century society. The bed rock institution of the family still remained the predominant unit of society, but it was also now possible to earn one’s keep outside it. This created a social space, heretofore largely absent, in which it was possible to have an identity independent of familial ties. Whereas, traditionally, the finding of a life partner had been largely facilitated through family connections, romantic relationships now began to develop more independently, as the norms of courtship changed with the advent of single living and large communal work places. With the resultant decline in communal familial labour, the average size of families gradually fell as the practical imperatives of procreation waned (Hobsbawn, 1996). This in turn changed perceptions of sex and sexuality, moving them beyond the merely procreative, into the realm of intimacy and pleasure, (within the confines of marriage, of course). Sexuality thus became a more concrete concept, a part of what made us human, rather than merely a biological imperative, and though homosexuality was still reviled, it began at least to take human form. Michael Foucault in his definitive tome, *Sexuality*, articulates the change thus: “Sodomy was a category of forbidden acts and their perpetrator was nothing more than a juridical subject of them”, but the 19th century homosexual, “became a personage, a past, a case history and a childhood” (Foucault, 1990, p.146). This chimes clearly with changing conception of homosexuality as a phenomenon to be studied and cured that emerged in the latter decades of the 19th century, whereby “the sodomite had been a temporary aberration, but the homosexual was now a species” (Foucault, 1990, p.147). This represented a fundamental and profound change because, for any marginalised societal sub-group to progress and eventually prosper, recognition of its existence as a human grouping, and not merely a deviant sexual act, is an essential first step. These changes, though significant in the long term, existed largely on an intellectual or academic plane in the 19th century. They were set against a second, considerably more powerful plane, that of political and social reality, where the influence of institutionalized religion remained hugely powerful.

Starting from the middle ages the “moral” outlawing of homosexual activity soon began to be reflected in the legal framework of the state, and more specifically in the penal codes of national territories, a pattern that was replicated in many countries as same-sex activity passed seamlessly from a moral offense to a criminal one. There was no better example of this than in late medieval England where the offence of buggery was incorporated into the penal code in 1533 when the
strengthening state took over responsibility for the offence from the ecclesiastical courts. The punishment for buggery was death, a penalty carried out in practice as late as the 1830s, before being eventually abolished in 1861 (Byrne, 2000). Many nations across the globe abolished the death penalty for sodomy in the early to mid 19th century, either replacing with lesser sanctions or decriminalising it. Spain, for example, abolished the death penalty for sodomy in 1823 without replacing it with alternative criminal sanction. However, the pendulum of oppression swung back again towards the end of the 19th century in several major European countries (Byrne, 200). It is ironic that while the industrial revolution was busy helping to shape the urban conditions that would facilitate the tentative creation of gay urban space, the captains of industry and their fellow members of the establishment, increasingly influenced by Victorian puritanism, became ever more preoccupied with the immorality of homosexual activity. In England, the final decades of the 19th century witnessed an increasing moral panic, and a consequent determination to throw the book at moral transgressors of the public good. The century culminated in a series of high profile sodomy trials, including that of legendary Irish writer, Oscar Wilde (Cook, 2003).

In Germany, where the Holy Roman Empire reigned supreme in the middle ages, the attitude to homosexuality mirrored that of other catholic dominated regions. Sodomy was duly subject to the death penalty in 1532, a law that persisted until it was abolished by the King of Prussia more than 250 years later. The mid 19th century saw a sea change on the intellectual plane at least, as psychiatry came into its own in Germany. It was also a period in which that country produced the world’s first bone fide gay rights activist, Karl Heinrich Ulrich, decades before any comparable figure would emerge in the rest of Europe or the USA. Born in 1825, Ulrich is credited with devising the first comprehensive scientific theory of homosexuality. His theories at that time were truly ground breaking, particularly his contention that homosexuality was inborn and beyond the control of the individual, in contrast to the prevailing assumption that homosexuality was a vice, like adultery or drunkenness, that could be eradicated (Kennedy, 2005). Though some of his ideas seem very outdated by modern standards, the general thrust of his activism was the same as it is today, to free people like himself from “legal, religious and social condemnation of homosexuality as unnatural” (Ulrich, 1865, p.54). As a gay activist Ulrich was a true pioneer, the first in the world to speak for homosexual rights as an openly gay man, in addition to publishing the world’s first gay magazine in 1870. Again, such progressive advances were overshadowed by political realities, specifically the unification of greater Prussia into the new German empire, under the iron fist of Bismarckian nationalism in 1871. Homosexuality was recriminalized with harsh anti sodomy laws, spelt out in the infamous paragraph 175 of the criminal code. A disciple of Ulrich, renowned
sexologist Marcus Hirschfield, introduced a bill to the Reichstag to abolish paragraph 175 in 1898, where it met with predictably stiff opposition from the ultra conservatives of the Prussian dominated parliament (Kennedy, 2005).

Far from dividing and silencing gay minorities, the moral hysteria of the late 19th century provoked a dynamic, which will be detailed in the next sub-chapter, whereby solidarity and collective identity was forged from oppression. Progress in this respect was greatly aided when the US and many parts Western Europe entered into a period of renewed liberalism in the early decades of the 20th century. This period would witness what George Chauncey describes as the “making of the gay world”, (Chauncey, 1994, p.2), culminating in the creation of the first generation of clearly defined urban gay enclaves in the 1920s. A particularly potent example was that of Greenwich Village in New York, which underwent massive demographic and cultural change in the early decades of the twentieth century. Initially an upper middle-class idyll, by the turn of the century it became increasingly populated by Italian immigrants and developed a more working class hue. The Italians were followed by an influx of writers, artists and radicals (Chauncey, 1994). Gay men were attracted to the zone as it had become a marginalised area with very affordable rents, and the influx of bohemian flamboyance allowed gays to more easily hide in plain sight. At this point in time, the village could not be truly described as a gay zone, as homosexuals did not yet set the tone of the neighbourhood. The eventual development of gay commercial entities and institutions was prompted by the loss of the area’s small scale intimacy through its integration into the larger surrounding city. By 1920, a confluence of events finally “helped to create a gay enclave” (Chauncey, 1994, p.105). Chief among them was the advent of World War One, which created a concentration of urban gays through mobilisation, and the optimum conditions of transience and urban anonymity. This trend was strengthened during the prohibition era that followed, as the Village became the focal point of bohemian entertainment, amid the development of a speakeasy underground culture. It became a mecca for gays escaping small town America and, in the roaring 1920s, they built an extensive gay world there. As the area’s reputation as a gay neighbourhood solidified, it came under increasing media exposure as a centre of vice and moral decay.

Perhaps the most renowned example of pre-Second World War urban gay space was in the city of Berlin. Hirschfield, despite his failure to repeal German sodomy laws in 1898, continued his work undaunted, writing and touring extensively to diffuse his progressive ideas to a wide an audience as possible. In 1919, he founded the institute for sexual research that attracted the crème de la crème of the European gay artist community, including writers Christopher Isherwood and Andre Gide, and the great Russian director Sergei Eisenstein, who all arrived to gain a greater
understanding of their sexuality. In 1921, Hirschfield partly financed, co-wrote and acted in the world’s first overtly gay themed feature film about a closeted homosexual musician whose blackmail and eventually outing destroys his career and leads to his suicide (Mancini, 2010). Such ground-breaking activities were indicative of the growing liberalisation of German society during the Weimar Republic, and the rise of Berlin as the European centre of bohemian culture and sexual freedom, before the Nazis brought the curtain down on liberalism.

Spain also experienced certain liberalising forces in the form of a cultural movement, progressive and anti-Catholic in outlook, in the early 20th century. The beating heart of this movement lay in the Independent Teaching Institute in Madrid, headed by the “Spanish Socrates”, Francisco Gina. Though it would remain a relatively elitist liberal institution, far removed from the rural masses of Spain, it represented the vanguard for the advancement of a larger liberal programme, one important aspect of which was sexual freedom (Carr, 1982). In the 1920s, the institute became a hot bed of homosexual liberation attracting the likes of gay literary icon, Garcia Lorca and the painter Salvador Dali, and formed the nucleus what could be reasonably described as urban gay enclave, not far from the modern-day neighbourhood of Chueca. Through the first decades of the twentieth century, the general forces of liberalism increased in strength, culminating in the creation of the second Spanish Republic of 1931. A new constitution, which established freedom of speech, freedom of assembly, extended voting privileges to women, legalised divorce and stripped the Spanish nobility of special legal status, showed just how liberal the new Republic was (Carr, 1982). The new regime also sought to reduce the legal influence of the church in matters such as homosexuality, and for a time it succeeded. The late 1920s and early 1930s was an era of unprecedented freedom for sexual minorities until the coup of 1936 destroyed the new Republic, ushering in 40 years of dictatorship.

During this period, the world would also experience warfare to a level of unprecedented destructiveness. World War One, as was noted in relation to the Village in New York, played an important role in the development of the urban gay world. Soldiers far from home, and freed from constrictions of society and community, were able act out desires that seemed impossible at home. Many of the major ports across Europe became centres of gravity for anonymous encounters as a result of the constant large scale turnover of transient personnel required by the war effort, including enlisted soldiers, their civilian support network and private sector suppliers (Hobsbawn, 1994). The inter-war years heralded the development of real and recognisable urban gay space, but also its destruction with the rise of fascism. Perhaps the event most potently symbolic of the demise of tentative sexual liberation was the infamous Nazi book burning of May
1935, when the Hirschfield institute was attacked, its precious archive pillaged and thousands of its books destroyed (Byrne, 2005). Though the events leading up to the Second World War were greatly detrimental to urban gay enclaves that had informally grown up in an age of unprecedented liberalism, the war itself would again be transformative as many of the processes inherent in the great war, which had facilitated the initial development of urban gay space, were replicated on an even larger scale during World War Two.

1.2 Sexuality, gay identity and urbanism: theoretical and political perspectives

The story of urban gay neighbourhoods is essentially one of transformation, of the evolution of decaying and marginalised urban space into a physical, cultural and spiritual home of a distinct minority. This transformation of the built environment is inextricably linked with the construction of gay identity, constituting a symbiotic relationship that greatly informed contemporary gay culture. However, in order to construct a holistic, cultural understanding of the development of urban gay space, and more recently, contemporary gay neighbourhoods, some specific issues surrounding identity, sexuality and urban space need to be teased out. This sub-chapter will begin with a discussion of the conflicting perspectives of constructivism and essentialism, which will shed light on concepts of sexuality and so called sexual “deviance”. It will also help to contextualise the subsequent examination of gay identity and urbanism, as the politicisation of theory, amid the culture wars of the late 20th century, solidified the urban liberal/rural conservative divide in western society, thus constituting a major driver of initial gay urbanisation. This opening section will also provide some useful background to the subsequent analysis of constructivist perspectives on the creation of gay identity through social stigma, by exploring the role of the social and the biological in determining sexuality and sexual identity. The second section of this sub-chapter will examine the aforementioned constructivist perspectives, while the third and final section explores the fusion of gay identity with urbanism to create a definitive, territorially based, urban gay culture.

1.2.1 Constructivism, essentialism and the politicisation of theory

In an era of unprecedented acrimony centred on the notion of identity politics, a good a starting place as any for a discussion of gay identity, is the disputed question of the nature of sexual identity itself. One might cynically suggest, perhaps with some justification, that the convoluted academic debate between constructivist and essentialist camps about whether one's sexual identity is built through social interactions or predetermined from birth, is little more than a
verbose take on that age old dispute about nature versus nurture. With regards to gay identity, however, this debate takes on more controversial and indeed contradictory forms, having been politically weaponised in the culture war between gay rights advocates and their reactionary opponents. For this, among other reasons, it is worth delving into this theoretical dichotomy in more detail. As renowned author on the teaching of constructivism Steven Olusegun puts it, this perspective can be described as a theory about knowledge and learning that describes knowledge not as truths to be transmitted or discovered but as “emergent developmental, non-objective, constructed explanations by humans engaged in the making of meaning” (Olusegun, 2015, p.267). Based on this logic, identity is not some fixed inalienable truth but is subjective and ever changing. Perhaps the most vocal and controversial proponent of the notion of identity as a social construction, as it pertains to homosexuality, is Michael Foucault, the once revered but lately rather neglected infant terrible of French post-modernism. He points out that, historically, the homosexual had not been regarded as a person per se. According to Foucault, until the 19th century, there merely existed sexual acts, specifically the deviant act of sodomy. As was noted in the previous chapter, there was no clear division of humanity by sexual preference, and certainly no recognition of homosexuals as a distinct sexual minority (Foucault, 1990). Foucault argued that from the late 19th century onwards, elements of western civilization began to create social constructions around identity. The specific drivers of such constructions included the increasing importance attached to sexuality, and the widespread proliferation of social control mechanisms that operated through sanctions against specific acts that could be singled out as deviant, and which represented a threat to the existing social order. Foucault also cites the growing power of professionals to define social problems and reinforce social mores. Epstein, in Gay Politics, Ethnic Identity, provides a good working example of the social control theory developed by Foucault. According to Epstein, control was sought through the increasing characterization of homosexuality as a psychological condition rather than a criminal act, with psychiatrists gaining the power to diagnose homosexuals with mental disorders in the early years of the 20th century (Epstein, 1987). The result was essentially the official stigmatisation, though establishment institutions such as the medical profession, of people with same-sex attractions who were made feel separate and distinct from heteronormative society.

While on the face of it this might not seem much like progress, with the benefit of hindsight it can be seen to represent the first tentative steps in a long process whereby homosexuals took on the distinct mantle of an identifiable minority group, as supposed to being merely defined by a series of deviant sexual acts. Gay identity, from a constructivist perspective, is a good example of a more
generalised view of identity as the result of social processes underpinned by the vagaries of developmental conditions that were often unique to individuals and specific to particular societies. The convoluted history of homosexuality and homophobia provides historical proof of this contention. As was evidenced in the previous chapter, the trajectory from discrimination and alienation to tolerance, acceptance and something approaching equality, has not been a simple linear journey that mirrors the chronology of human society from antiquity to modernity. In some parts of the world, attitudes to homosexuality were more enlightened in the 15th century than in the 18th. Even today, the assumption we make about the general growing acceptance of homosexuality is a partial and western centric one. In many parts of the world, gay rights and freedoms are being eroded rather than enhanced, with the level of stigmatisation often depending on the demographic make-up, religious character and colonial history of particular nations and societies. Such realities, constructivists would argue, strongly underpin the notion that sexual identity is indeed a social and situational fabrication that varies across time and place.

The constructivist perspective of Foucault is largely rejected by proponents of essentialist theory which conceives of sexual identity as predetermined and pre-ordained, reflecting a broader essentialist philosophy succinctly described by Rahman as “the common cultural understanding of sexuality as an innate and immutable identity which is based on a model of biological sexual drives or instincts” (Rahman, 2000, p.5). In respect of sexuality, the two perspectives seem utterly at odds with one another over whether identity is built “through a lifetime of interaction or predetermined from birth” (Ruiz, 2011, p.3). However, these perspectives have often been employed in contradictory ways by both gay rights activists and their conservative opponents, and which play out in arenas ranging from highbrow centres of academia and science, to fundamentalist places of worship and pop culture. Take music superstar and gay icon, Lady Gaga, for example. A tireless and sincere campaigner for gay rights, one of her most famous songs, Born This Way, is perhaps the most well-known gay anthem of the twenty-first century. Though certainly not its conscious intention, the song promotes an oddly essentialist view of homosexuality as immutable. This has largely been in response to the propaganda efforts of the religious right who have long argued that homosexuality is a deviant lifestyle choice or a mental disorder that can be “cured” with conversion therapies (William, 1992). In doing so, conservatives have actually cheery picked certain aspects of constructivist theory to help frame their argument that homosexuality is the product of deviant interactions that can be reversed though a change in external stimuli. That fact that if one were to apply such perspectives more generally, it would lay complete waste their rigid belief systems based on fixed deities and immutability, is an irony that seems lost on the conservative movement.
In any case, it can be cogently argued that theirs is a gross distortion of the constructivist premise, which does not presume to credit social interactions with the power to completely shape sexuality, but rather the power to shape how sexuality is perceived though identity markers.

While we may accept that nurture plays a major role in how a child develops into an adult, the resultant traits become an immutable part of each individuals’ personality, passivity or assertiveness, shyness or gregariousness, and so on. While subject to gradual evolution in degree and intensity, these traits are not substantially changed. So while the circumstances of one’s upbringing may have a bearing on one’s sexual orientation as an adult, there is no credible scientific or medical evidence to presume that a radical change of environment could somehow reverse the process. If the commandeering of ostensibly progressive social theory by fundamentalists for conservative ends is inherently problematic, the exploitation of conservative essentialism is equally so for progressives. In their haste to nullify the insulting “lifestyle choice” taunts of fundamentalists, they have employed semi-essentialist arguments that risk legitimising a reactionary and exclusionary world view. Venturing down the essentialist path is fraught with danger as, at its most extreme, it is an inherently ugly one. As Paul Ruiz notes, it is dangerous to suggest people act certain ways only because of some immutable aspect of themselves “because it conceives of a singular identity that may engender common stereotypes that are racial, chauvinistic or homophobic in character” (Ruiz, 2010, p.9). After decades of using the “born this way” argument as a central plank of the fight for equality, it has in recent years been increasingly questioned as overly simplistic. It is a testament to the staying power of the slogan that it has remained effective almost 70 years after Kinsey’s publication of the scale of human sexuality. While his findings were somewhat exaggerated, they definitively demonstrated the fluidity of sexual desire for a proportion of the population (Kinsey, 1948). The overly simplistic notion of sexuality based entirely on biology has also been aided by some high profile scientific studies that now appear increasingly dubious, or at least incomplete.

In 1991, for example, renowned MIT scientist, Simon Le Vay, claimed to have found a difference in the size of the hypothalamus, a part of the brain involved in sexual behaviour, between gay and straight men (Le Vay, 1993). Le Vay’s findings were quickly trumpeted as the discovery of the “gay brain”. This led to the popularisation of the idea that, just like men and women, gays and straights were simply wired differently, a notion that has been progressively discredited in recent years. While almost nobody questions the fact that biology plays a role in sexuality and desire, upon closer scrutiny it seems scarcely credible that “gayness could take a single identifiable form in the brain when it took such varied forms in people’s lives” (Young, 2011, pp.41-65). Meg Joan Barker,
academic in the field of sex, gender and relationships and author of *Queer: a graphic history*, makes the important point that people often assume that something being biological makes it somehow more real than something designated as social (Barker, 2016). In fact, according to Barker, most aspects of human experience are actually biopsychosocial, involving a biology, a psychology and the social world around us, with all of these aspects influencing each other in complex feedback loops, making it impossible to tease apart each element, or the direction of any cause/effect relationships. In *Brain Storm: The flaws in the science of sexual difference*, Rebecca Jordan Young, renowned Barnard professor, exhaustively reviewed a decade of scientific research on sexuality and homosexuality, and found that the role that biology plays is far less clear cut than we have been led to believe (Young, 2011, pp.41-65). This strengthens the argument that social factors may have been underestimated and neglected in terms of the role they play in the designation of both sexuality and sexual identity.

The exploration of conflicting essentialist and constructivist views of sexuality and sexual identity is not merely a diverting intellectual exercise in theoretical debate, but also helps to contextualise the historical development of urban gay space. The way in which these theoretical dichotomies have become politically weaponised over the last 40 years has played an important role in the construction of an urban gay identity, in terms of its contribution to the widening of the rural/urban divide, regarding attitudes to homosexuality in Western society. In the consciousness of successive generations of LGBT individuals, intolerant views of homosexuality and fundamentalist perceptions of same-sex attraction as constituting a moral threat to society, a view largely informed by conservative essentialism, have become intrinsically associated with rurality. This is not without a rational premise. The politicians, activists, religious leaders, and indeed communities, most hostile to those who identity as LGBT are overwhelming rurally situated, the most prominent example being the bible belt in the USA (Byrne, 2005). The city, by contrast, has increasingly come to represent precisely the opposite, initially offering, as was noted in the previous chapter, anonymity and opportunity, and in more recent times, something approaching inclusion and acceptance. The effect of this reality in the latter half of the 20th century has resulted in what is sometimes described as the great gay migration from rural to urban, across great swathes of the United States and Western Europe (William, 1992). As will be outlined in more detail in the final section of this chapter, this demographic phenomenon was the first step in creating a critical mass of urban homosexuals required to begin the construction of an urban gay identity and culture.
1.2.2 Constructivist perspectives on the creation of gay identity

As was demonstrated in the previous section, it can be cogently argued that, in the rush to find definitive biological explanations of sexuality and sexual identity, the social element may well have been overlooked. If one seeks to redress this potential imbalance constructivist perspectives, and subsidiary schools of thought such as symbolic interactionism (SI) and labelling theory, provide compelling explanations of the social mechanisms inherent in the delineation of sexualities, and by extension, sexual identity. It was Hector Bloomer, one of most renowned SI theorists of his time, who developed three strands of thought based on the premise of identity as socially constructed (Bloomer, 1969). Firstly, human attitudes towards external objects or phenomena are based on the meanings they ascribe to these things. For Bloomer, it followed that the meaning of such things is derived from the social interaction that one has with others and with society. In the third phase of the process, these meanings are “handled in and modified through an interpretive process used by the person in dealing with the things he or she encounters” (Bloomer, 1969, p.67). Based on this logic, sexual acts in themselves have no inherent meaning, only the constructed meaning ascribed to them by larger society. This premise chimes with Foucauldian perspectives on the evolution of homosexuality from a series of acts into an identifiable human grouping, as western civilisation began to build social constructions around identity. This process, as outlined previously, was driven primarily by the increased significance attached to sexuality, and attempts to regulate it through the sanctioning of specific acts, including adultery and homosexuality. To understand more fully how these social control structures operated in practice, regarding homosexuality, another offshoot of constructivism is again instructive.

According to labelling theory, individuals in society are labelled deviant from mainstream culture because their behaviour deviates from the norm. In order to be stigmatized an individual must undergo a complex process of behavioural action and internalization (Weeks, 1988). In noting the contribution of labelling theory to the understanding of gay identity, Epstein describes behavioural action as primary deviance and the reactions and internalisation of the labelling process as secondary deviance (Epstein, 1987). Primary deviance is represented by the action itself, in this case the act of physical intimacy with members of the same sex. As Jenkins in his 2008 work, Sexual Identity, points out, primary deviance is not enough to actually stigmatise. It is secondary deviance that is far more impactful simply because it internalises the individuals’ feelings of difference from the group or society. One of the best-known examples in the psychological literature is the 1968 Rosenthal and Jacobson experiment. In this study they attributed intelligence to eye colour and observed that school children possessing the stigmatized eye colour consistently
underperformed (Rosenthal and Jacobsen, 1968). The degree to which one is stigmatized relates to the disjunction between the personal identity and the social identity. Personal identity is a perceived set of facts that help an individual define their own personhood. Social identity refers to a larger external construct. Stigma is created in the gap between the personal identity and the social identity. Therefore, stigma is a process where agreed-upon moral values and social labels are, as Jenkins notes, “imposed by the society on the individual, internalized from the perspective of the individual stigma, and subjugated to the larger social control structure” (Jenkins, 2008, p.43). All of which points to one persistent theory regarding identity in general and gay identity in particular, that identities in themselves are not consistent but constructed and dependent on culture and context. It is a process particularly true of contemporary western gay culture, where identity is formed as a result of the meanings ascribed to sexual activity, and processes related to the labelling of deviant behaviour. Instead of one's gay identity originating from a set of inborn naturally occurring characteristics ascribed to subcultures, it is the result of many social and developmental outcomes. These outcomes are the result of the aforementioned processes “of socialization, labelling and self-actualization” (De Emilio, 1995, pp.10-16).

1.2.3 Gay identity and culture as a distinctly urban phenomenon

Having explored the circumstances, both psychological and social, which helped to forge gay identity, the detail of how it became so synonymous with urbanism remains to be examined. According to Foucault, it is the previously mentioned social control structures that drive urbanism and develop communities (Foucault, 1990). If deviance, stigmatisation, labelling and, ultimately, alienation are the weapons employed by wider society as agents of social control, then the task of creating a positive gay identity, that would combat stigma and self-hatred, required a space where homosexual behaviour could be portrayed as the opposite of deviant. As was noted in the first section, rejection of homosexuality by more traditional, rural communities was a major driver of gay migration to urban centres, creating the prerequisite critical mass necessary for urban clustering. In keeping with symbolic interactionist arguments that meaning is derived from the process of interacting with others, this clustering of gays in a shared community space where their interaction became the norm rather than the exception, promoted the normalisation of homosexual activity. In this context, same sex relationships and social interaction become accepted as natural and thus mainstreamed within a fixed and limited territory, by being shielded to a certain degree from the judgemental gaze of the general population. John Gagnon in his 1977 work, Human Sexualities, demonstrated how urban gay communities were created not just by
sexual interactions but by other cultural factors as well. Where heteronormative culture labelled homosexual conduct as deviant, “gays created their own identity by sharing experiences and bonds that modify and create a uniform system of conduct” (Gagnon, 1977, p.4). Establishing a relatively safe physical space in which to practice these interactions became a logical and irresistible imperative. This dynamic could be best described as the territorialised normalisation of what wider society had constructed as “deviant” behaviour. Typical urban space was, of course, not organised with gay needs in mind, and would require a process whereby it could be moulded towards gay utility, and which would in turn prompt lesbians and gays to concentrate in these areas, create their own unique space, and organise politically. At the root of the creation of urban gay community space was the desire to escape stigmatisation and to recreate a social support system to replace the one often brutally withheld by family and wider society. Cities offered opportunities to rebuild an alternative ecosystem in which one could survive and even find acceptance, albeit within the radius of a few blocks of a squalid and marginalised urban ghetto, almost always shared with the other supposed deviants of the day, prostitutes, drug addicts, bohemians and communists.

The physical boundaries that would define the limits of deviant spaces, however, became more than just territories for sexually oppressed outcasts. They became, in the words of Samuel Hodge, “a physical bricks and mortar representation of an international counter-cultural identity movement that gave definition to the gay self” (Hodge, 1995, p.43). In his seminal work, No Fags Out There: Gay men, identity and suburbia, Hodge argues that these places are more than mere locations, they are cultural creations with distinct meanings to the different people who experience them. As gay communities were shaped in urban centres, so too was the cultural conception of a specifically urban gay identity. For Hodge, the physical and the social were inextricably intertwined, so as gays migrated, concentrated and even gentrified, the social construction of an identity went hand in hand with the development of a community. It was a perfect storm of symbiosis, identity and physical community feeding off one another, strengthening one another by turns to the point where they became almost interchangeable and inseparable. Undoubtedly, it was a turbulent relationship developing as it did against a backdrop of marginalization, discrimination, establishment aggression and impoverishment. However, as Ruiz, his treatise on urbanism and gay identity, rightly points out, “in the chaos and disorder of the city it was almost necessary to distinguish oneself socially, economically and politically in urban space” (Ruiz, 2010, p.11). It also allowed individuals to represent the community in real, physically distinctive ways. In other words, urbanism offered gay migrants the opportunity to lead free and
expressive lifestyles, and where the relative anonymity of sprawling city life afforded a certain level of protection from repressive forces. To employ the symbolic interactionist parlance of Jenkins regarding the notion of deviance, the internal gap between primary deviance and secondary deviance could be greatly reduced, if not fully eliminated, by moving to the city.

The preceding paragraphs of this section provide strong evidence for the claim that the creation of a gay urban identity represents a positive narrative of valiant progress, in terms of eking out a robust space in which to exercise rights, and have specific cultural expressions validated and legitimised, both within their identity group and eventually by wider society. It has also been established that urban gay communities slowly reconfigured the repressive constructs of wider society, harnessing that repression and converting it into solidarity and collective identity, which were used as the essential building blocks for the construction of a community with sufficient power to actively commandeer, rather than simply inhabit, available urban space. However, as true as these assertions may be, they are, of course, not the whole truth. It is only when one scratches at the facade of urban gay neighbourhoods that more difficult questions about the changing nature of urban gay communities, and the quality, integrity, utility, inclusiveness and representativeness of the contemporary urban gay space they occupy, are revealed. These are precisely the questions that this thesis, through an exploration of contemporary changes in the utility of urban gay space, aims to address.
2 Methodologies

Before proceeding with a detailed analysis of the case study data, a final preliminary task is required. If one is to have confidence in the research findings, and by extension the conclusions that may be drawn from them, it is essential to have confidence in the methods by which the research itself was conducted. It is, therefore, important to lay out in clear detail the exact methods that have been employed. Inevitably, the specific methods employed are shaped to large extent by what one is trying to test or explore. Its degree of nebulousness, or alternatively, its quantifiable nature, will often determine the investigative approach that one takes. As outlined earlier, this work focuses on the relationship between two specific but interrelated phenomena: changes in how urban gay space is utilised and by whom, and the extent to which these changes in utility may be linked to processes of gentrification. Having established these parameters, the issue regarding research approaches becomes one of utility and viability, deciding which research methods would be best suited to yielding quality data.

In the realm of social science, this often boils down to a choice between qualitative and quantitative methods of data gathering. First to be determined is the relative utility of using one, or both, of these research tools to maximise the quality of the information and data at your disposal, which will ultimately determine the subsequent quality of the conclusions. After much consideration, I decided that to gain meaningful data on twin research questions, diverse in range and specificity, would require a mixed method approach. As Bryman notes in his comprehensive work on the subject, a common technique of the mixed method approach is to employ qualitative methods to understand the relationship between variables found using quantitative methods (Bryman, 2001). This thesis relies to a considerable degree on this formula, particularly regarding the first research question which aims to identify and make sense of utility changes in a particular environment. With this objective in mind, a two-step approach presented itself as the most appropriate. Though the qualitative phase has been designed to be reasonably open ended, the variables found in the quantitative research, i.e. the changes in how urban gay space is utilised and by whom, frame to a large degree the discussions and interviews in the qualitative phase.

Having chosen a specific avenue of investigation, it is always important to be cognisant of the limitations and potential pitfalls of any particular approach. Tashakkori and Teddle, for example, authors of a fascinating work on the quality of inferences in mixed method research, emphasise the importance of credibility, particularly regarding qualitative data, which should display a reasonable degree of fit between the participant’s representation of reality and objective reality.
(Tashakkori and Teddle, 2008). Also salient is the valuable insight provided by Thomas Wimark, in the course of his work on gay migration patterns, into the distinction between conceptual and empirical generalisations, and their relationship with both qualitative and quantitative data. He notes that while making conceptual generalisations from qualitative research is a perfectly legitimate exercise, making empirical ones based on solely qualitative data is best avoided. However, employing quantitative data to make empirical generalisations is common practise, provided that validity and reliability are high (Bryman, 2001). Given that this thesis relies on quantitative data to draw conclusions about utility change in urban gay space, considerations of validity and reliability must be given due regard. One particular concern that various academics have signalled in this respect is the reliability of data derived from internet sources, particularly in the world of dating apps and social media, where accounts are often of dubious provenance, and which are created and deleted at a prodigious rate (Wimark, 2014). Cognisant of the potential dangers of relying on such data, certain steps were taken in this respect, which will be outlined in detail in due course.

2.1 Data collection: choosing a suitable research environment

The principal methods of data collection employed in this work are a mix of qualitative and quantitative approaches, in the form of participant observation, a survey questionnaire, focus groups and one on one interviews, the structures and formats of which will be described in detail shortly. However, there were some preliminary steps that needed to be taken before the field work could begin, not least of which was the choice of a suitable environment, sufficiently representative of urban gay space more generally, and from which one could confidently extrapolate conclusions. With these criteria in mind, the Chueca district of Madrid was chosen. There are a number of reasons, both practical and academic, that informed this choice. As noted earlier, there has been an explosion in the number of urban gay neighbourhoods, particularly across western Europe and the US over the last 30 to 40 years, with zones like the Castro in San Francisco and the Village in New York leading the way. Perhaps the most significant structural difference between gay neighbourhoods in the US and Europe is in terms of residency levels. US gay zones tend to have a higher proportion of LGBT members actually resident within the generally recognised boundaries of the neighbourhood than their European counterparts. This is accounted for, in part, by the great gay migration from rural to urban America in the 1970s, and higher levels of property ownership which anchored LGBT residents more firmly in these areas (Madden, 2010). In Europe, levels of gay residency have tended to be lower. However, the Chueca district, while not
quite reaching US levels of residency, is noted for having a higher residential concentration than is typically found in the gaybourhoods of other European cities (Elpidio, 2017). As well as constituting a representative median point between the two trans-Atlantic traditions, on a practical level it means there are is simply a bigger pool of participants potentially available to survey and interview. Another practical consideration is the fact that I have previously lived in Madrid, have fluency in the language and have accumulated considerable contacts within the city and the zone from which to draw, while at the same time retaining sufficient objective distance from the zone by dint of never having actually lived there, and not being Spanish myself.

2.2 Participant observation

Though I am familiar with the city and the Chueca district, having previously lived close to the zone, I felt that in the context of using the zone as a case study I needed to view the area anew, with the fresh eyes of a researcher. In order to achieve this effect, the first of the mixed methods approaches was employed, namely participant observation. Another objective was to introduce the reader to the area where further qualitative and quantitative research work was to be carried out. This introduction served three purposes, to impart to the reader a visual sense (in so far as it is possible to do so on the written page) of the general structural change that Chueca has undergone, and to re-familiarise myself with its geography. The third objective was to establish the credentials of the zones as a worthy candidate for ethnographic study, and one with the potential to provide a rich seam of data with which to productively address the stated research questions. This entailed living in the heart of the zone for a period, and participating in various events in order to get a sense of the commercial, cultural and social activity of the zone, and the atmosphere more generally. In keeping with the spirit of participant observation, I attempted to employ this method in as natural and organic way as possible. As part of this process, I also embarked on an informal tour of the area in the company of a long-time resident, and enjoyed the typical activities that residents and those who frequent the zone engage in, from the classic Spanish “vuelta” (a circular stroll that takes you back to where you began), to relaxing in the terraces of the multitude of bars and restaurants that populate the neighbourhood. My guide and companion, Antonio, essentially acted as my urban geographical interpreter, pointing out particular changes or developments that I may otherwise have missed, and helping to explain the context in which they occurred. The other benefit of extensive participant observation was the opportunities it afforded me to seek out potential interview subjects, from business owners and the clientele they serve, to the employees of the myriad of LGBT organisations around the zone. Participant observation was also mixed to
useful effect with chats and brief informal interviews. Through such activities, it was also possible to gain a sense of the cultural gay atmosphere, the general evolution of the geographical space over time, and the changing interaction of the inhabitants with the built environment. Having gotten a renewed and more objective sense of the zone, through participant observation, the next step was to organise and execute the quantitative and other qualitative forms of research, in addition to the participant observation, in keeping with the previously outlined multi-step approach.

2.3 The survey questionnaire: Chueca y yo (Chueca and me)

When attempting to construct a questionnaire, there are series of trade-offs that one has to consider, and in some cases ultimately make, when deciding both the overall structure of this research tool, and the style and complexity of questions contained therein. For example, a questionnaire with too many questions can turn off potential participants, while too few may be insufficient to garner the breath of information and data required. The same applies to the structure of individual questions. If they are too complex or time consuming, the chances of a high or fully engaged response rate recede. My concerns thus focused on two key issues, ensuring a high rate of participation to maximise validity, and encouraging serious engagement with the survey. The issue of finding willing participants to ensure a reasonably large sample is a particularly vexed one in the age of social media, as we are constantly bombarded with requests to evaluate this experience or rate that service. It has engendered extreme fatigue on the part of the public in general. When constructing a survey of this type, it is tempting to simply disperse the questionnaire as widely as possible into the gay cyberspace in the hope of maximising responses. There are two fatal drawbacks to this approach. Such a passive strategy will inevitably produce a poor response rate on the part of the public. It also compromises the reliability of the survey as there is simply no way of knowing if the anonymous responses are from appropriate participants, in other words, those who have worked in, lived in, or frequented the zone regularly in recent years.

To avoid problems such as these, a different approach was employed. In the first instance, a minimum target of 100 survey responses was set, a number judged to constitute a viable sample based on the size of the zone. To ensure reliability of responses, two clear criteria for surveying participants was observed at all times, either in person or through trusted, third party intervention. In practise this involved two methods. The first approach was to reach potential respondents in person through interaction with various organisations and social groups, including
sporting organisations and the gay social centre, as well as good old fashioned leg work around the leisure establishments and businesses of the area. Once it was established that one was not selling knock-off DVDs or merchandise, people were generally open to giving 5 to 10 minutes of their time. Those surveys that were not filled out in my presence were distributed via e mail by a small number of trusted individuals to their respective circle of friends. These trusted individuals were then responsible for ensuring that as many of their contacts as possible actually returned the survey. Through these methods a very high response rate was achieved. Though not every single respondent filled out every question clearly or correctly, most questions had a valid response rate of over 90%. Through this method, I was also able to ensure that the sample was reasonably representative of all age groups, a key requirement in a survey which aims to identify utility change over time. The survey was conducted on the basis of strict confidentiality. The only personal detail required of the participant was their age. Participants were confined to those who have lived or worked in the zone, or those resident in the city of Madrid, and who frequent the zone regularly. This information was elicited at the beginning of the questionnaire, and the questionnaires of a very small number of participants who failed to answer in the affirmative to at least one of these options were excluded from the analysis.

In relation to the second principal concern, that of encouraging serious engagement with the survey, careful judgement regarding the format of the survey was required. There is an inevitable trade-off that one must always make when designing a questionnaire between the complexity of the format and the potential richness of the data to be mined. One must try to find the most appropriate balance, keeping in mind the objectives of the exercise, and whether it is a stand-alone method or to be used in conjunction with other research tools. The survey itself, containing 10 multi-choice questions, focused on the past, present and future experiences of Chueca, beginning very simply before slowly becoming slightly more complex. The questions were designed to elicit information on the changing habit of users regarding the zone, the meaning and utility of the zone in their everyday lives, and their perception of how the built environment around them has changed, both in terms of commercial development and demographic make-up. Regarding the format, the tool was extremely user friendly requiring only the placement of an X or a series of Xes on the part of the participant. The decision to err on the side of simplicity with the questionnaire was prompted by the knowledge that more nuanced and detailed data would be gleaned from the subsequent qualitative field work.
2.4 Focus groups and one on one interviews

As was noted earlier, the quantitative approach is focused on the identification of particular trends, but by its nature is inevitably limited in its capacity to provide the necessary nuance and subtext to help explain the trends identified. This being the case, qualitative research is often complimented by more in-depth qualitative methods such as group discussions, participant observation and individual interviews. Given the objectives of this thesis, it was judged that this complimentary approach was the most appropriate in order to effectively put contextual flesh on the bones of the utility changes identified through the survey. As with those who participated in the survey, a conscious effort was made to maximise the validity of the sample by choosing interview and focus group participants with experience of the zone, and ensuring that different age groups were more or less equally represented. Participants were selected from various LGBT organisations, in order to create two focus groups of six to eight participants, one populated with those aged 55 and older, the other with those aged approximately 35 to 50. From these groups, 6 individuals were chosen for more in depth, one-on-one interviews. In addition to those from the focus groups, other individuals, including those working in the zone, business owners and rights activists were also interviewed. A total of 15 individuals engaged in one-on-one interviews of varying lengths. The qualitative and quantitative research was conducted in the late spring of 2019, and the names of all participants were changed to protect their privacy. In relation to the individual interviews, in addition to the standard, sit-down, recorded interview in a place of the interviewees choosing, I occasionally employed more complex and multi-layered interview formats. For example, in one particular case, having been put in contact with an individual whom I judged to be potentially very valuable and informative on the subject of activism, I established a dialogue via email and upon his agreement I forwarded several questions to which he furnished written answers, before eventually meeting him in person. The intention behind this extended format of interviewing is not merely practical but also designed to create an ongoing dialogue. Though much of this material may not have appeared as quotes on the written page, it afforded me a deeper appreciation of a relevant issue, which in turn facilitated more sophisticated and informed approach. This particular type of more intensive engagement is, however, no substitute for conventional sit down, one off, interviews for a number of practical reasons. Many interview candidates may not be available or indeed willing, for whatever reason, to engage on such an intensive level. In addition, not all interview subjects are suitable candidates for this particular type of interview format, and their best contribution may be in the realm of honest spontaneity, and a willingness to share their life experience. Thus, the extended interview format was the exception
rather than the rule, and was restricted to a very small number of interviewees. Almost all of the interviews conducted with residents and users of the zone, though undertaken in a variety of settings, were conventional, single session, recorded events.

As regards the focus group discussions, these took place in a location of the participants choosing. The groups were asked to fill out the survey questionnaire, which would then form the basis of the discussion, and give the participants a frame of reference. This was especially useful and effective for those participants unused to voicing opinions and articulating ideas in a semi-formal setting. Regarding interviews with those who owned, ran, or worked in businesses operating in the area, this sometimes involved quite brief, informal engagement with a view towards corroborating the anecdotal impressions of the zone that emerged in some of the other interviews. A good example of this was a brief interview with a well-established real estate agent in the zone, regarding the perception of the changing demographic of those purchasing property in Chueca, that emerged from the focus groups.

As was noted earlier, the core of this thesis centres on two interrelated research questions, identifying and understanding examples of utility change in urban gay space and exploring role of gentrification in these changes. The thesis, therefore, is something of a hybrid academic work, with the first research question very much centred on anthropological field work while the second relies more on traditional academic sources and perspectives. The second research question does make considerable reference to the data gleaned from the field work, but it is inevitably less central to its composition than that of the first.
3 Chueca: A case study

The preliminary section of this work dealt with important contextual, historical and theoretical aspects of the phenomenon of urban gay space. It began with a brief overview of the phenomenon of early urban gay space, in the political and historical context of major societal changes of the 19th century, the advent World War One, and the rise and fall of liberalism in the lead up to World War Two. This was followed by a discussion on the development of sexuality, gay identity and culture, and how it came to be largely synonymous with urbanism. An endeavour was made to employ, where appropriate, a variety of theoretical perspectives to explain how urban space, identity and collective consciousness have become inextricably intertwined, an essential prerequisite to the fruitful analysis of the changing dynamic between contemporary gay neighbourhoods and their inhabitants.

In the post-war period, under the influence of the civil rights revolution, the gay rights cause began to make serious advances in the late 1960s and early 1970s. This growth in activism went hand in hand with the development of some of the earliest contemporary urban gay neighbourhoods, most famously the Castro in San Francisco and the Village in New York. Similar neighbourhoods developed across urban centres of both Europe and North America in the 1980s and 1990s, and to a lesser extent in South America and parts of Asia.

In recent decades, these zones have been transformed from pariah urban districts into fashionable and economically successful neighbourhoods, boasting some of the highest property prices in their respective countries. Areas like the Village in New York and South Beach in Florida, for example, are among the most desirable locations in their respective cities for both gay and straight residents alike. This transformation has invariably entailed urban regeneration on a grand scale. This can be explained, in part, by the fact that such neglected and run-down locations began from a very low base, in terms of the state of their built environment and associated infrastructure. Also key, however, is the fact that these zones represented the social, cultural and economic requisitioning of urban space on the part of a specific group determined to stamp their imprimatur. Given the parish status of the urban gay communities of that era and the oppression they faced, these areas were not organised with the needs of the gay community in mind. Therefore, radical physical change was an essential part of the process. In urban planning and structural terms, this transformation has been relatively fast, and has long been associated with processes of urban renewal such as gentrification, the role of which is the focus of the second research question, and which will be examined in detail in due course. Given the wholesale structural regeneration of
these areas, it would be surprising if it did not engender changes in the relationship between urban gay space and the LGBT communities who occupy it, how that space utilised and refashioned for the purposes of that particular urban cohort, and its meaning in the lives of the twenty first century urban gay community. It is precisely these changes that are the focus of the first research question, namely to identify examples of changes in how urban gay space is used, and its function in the lives of those who live in, work in and frequent it. This will be achieved by the employment of several ethnographic methods. The first of these is participant observation in the form of a tour though the case study district of Chueca, in the company of a longtime resident, to get a first-hand sense of a neighbourhood in transition. This will be followed by an analysis of the data gleaned from the survey, focus groups and interviews carried out in the zone. As a prelude to an exposition of the quantitative and qualitative research, a few brief preliminary tasks must be completed. The first of these is to establish a working definition of what actually constitutes a contemporary urban gay neighbourhood, of which Chueca is a prime example. This will be followed by a brief history of the trajectory of the zone from marginalised ghetto to prosperous desirable district

3.1 Defining contemporary gay neighbourhoods

In his seminal 2014 work, There goes the gayborhood?, Princeton sociologist and author, Amin Ghaziani identifies a contemporary gay neighborhood as “having a distinct geographic focal point that locals can point out on a map, usually by singling out one or two specific streets” where “gays and lesbians set the tone of the neighborhood” (Ghaziani, 2014, p.3). Other identifiable markers include the iconic rainbow flag that flies prominently in the streets that form the heart of the zone. It is also an area that has a concentration of gay residents. Given the limited gay demographic of any given city, not all or even a majority of those who live in a gayborhood will be gay or lesbian, but many are. Janice Madden in her work, Gaybourhoods also cites the presence of “a grouping of commercial spaces, gay-owned, gay-friendly businesses, non-profit organizations and community centers for the use and pleasure of both resident and non-residents (Madden, 2015, p.57), as defining characteristics of any gay neighbourhood worthy of the title. It is, however, important to note that a zone does not need to reach the iconic status or physical dimensions of places such as the Village in New York or Chueca in Madrid to constitute a legitimate urban gay space. For example, the area around Merced Square in the southern Spanish city of Malaga boasts no more than a handful of out and out gay establishments. And yet, from my own experience, if one asks a random passer-by for directions to the gay zone, they will point without hesitation to Merced
square. It is also where the city’s gay community and their straight family and friends come to socialise, even if they do so in ostensibly straight establishments. In short, its bone fides as an urban gay area in the consciousness of the inhabitants of the city more than makes up for its modest physical dimensions.

As was noted the first section, one of the central motivations for the establishment of urban gay enclaves was the creation of a gay collective identity and culture, not to mention the establishment of a semblance of physical security. In practice, this also meant helping gays and lesbians, who unlike racial minorities or not always physically identifiable, to seek each other out for friendship, sex, dating and love, and where “such individuals could create unique cultures, political perspectives, organizations, businesses, families, rituals and styles of socialization in and around their neighborhood” (Ghaziani, 2014, p.7). Based on these criteria, there are a myriad of such zones dotted around cities across the world, and the Chueca district of central Madrid can make a strong case for being one of Western Europe’s stellar examples of the phenomenon, as a brief history of the zone will now demonstrate.

3.2 From pariah to playground: a brief history of the Chueca district

In the wake of the death of Francisco Franco in 1975, after almost of forty years of dictatorship and isolation, the Spanish state would enter a traumatic phase of tumultuous change labelled the transition, denoting the movement from dictatorship to democracy. Even before the end of the Franco regime, Chueca was fast becoming a byword for deviance, crime and alienation from mainstream society. An article published in December 1976 in ABC newspaper, detailing delays to the construction of the Chueca metro station caused by the behaviour of delinquents and drug addicts, was very much typical of the kind of media coverage the zone attracted (Arbe, 1976). A poor and marginalised neighbourhood with an elderly working class demographic, poor street lighting and decaying infrastructure, its reputation as a den of vice only grew with the construction of its metro station. It prompted the younger generation from all over the city to descend on the square in search of deviant diversion. The dark, winding, labyrinthine streets made the zone an attractive location for committing all manner of misdemeanours. In 1981, the zone was closed to traffic to curtail the ability of people to conduct illegal business from their vehicles and to make the downtown area a more pedestrian-friendly place. It, however, achieved the opposite effect, allowing drug dealers and prostitutes to loiter in the area and ply their trade. The rampant heroin culture of the time has been well-documented (Elpidio, 2017), and as recently as 1998, Spain’s
biggest selling newspaper described the zone as a black point on the city map, better forgotten. Chueca had a clearly earned a reputation that was proving hard to shake.

Its tentative renaissance was complicated by the emergence of La Movida Madrileña, the Madrid cultural movement of the 1980s and early 1990s, when, after the repression of the Franco years there emerged a period time of heightened creativity and artistic expression, which was centred in the area. This cultural expression was, however, also intertwined with the inevitable “sex drugs and rock and roll” aspect of such movements. La Movida and the zone of Chueca were intimately linked as key actors in the development of new ideologies, a product of the revolutionary protest movements that had swept the world in the 1960s and 1970s, but were only now taking shape in a heretofore-isolated Spain (Elpidio, 2017). In such a bohemian milieu, the gay population were able to hide in plain sight, and their increasing concentration there led to the opening of the first overtly gay establishments in the early 1980s. The story of Chueca over the intervening 30 years, as played out in the media, reflects the sea change in the zone itself and in public attitudes to it. In the 1980s, it was dismissed as a dangerous location best avoided, and left to its own devices. In the 1990s, the rise to municipal power of the neo-liberal right in Madrid prompted a more interventionist and reactionary policy, and one aimed at controlling sexual behaviour. This was circuitously achieved by a crackdown on the granting of licenses, and the intervention of the police to enforce arcane by-laws that had long been ignored in other more respectable areas of leisure. However, with the growing liberalism of Spanish society in the first decade of the twenty-first century, and the success of the gay rights movement, a more positive narrative of regeneration and increasing respectability came to the fore. In the last ten years the transformation appears complete, with Chueca having firmly established a reputation as a globally recognised gay neighbourhood, a major tourist attraction, and a fashionable and desirable zone to both frequent and live in.
4 Data Analysis: identifying utility changes in Chueca

Having set the scene by placing Chueca in historical context, we may now proceed to the ethnographic research which will begin with participant observation, in the form of a tour of the zone to garner a sense of the physical evolution of the zone, and the major structural changes it has undergone. This will be followed by analysis of the data harvested from the survey and interviews conducted in the Chueca area among those who live in, work in and socialise in this most representative of European urban gay neighbourhoods. As outlined in the introduction, the research was conducted with a view to collecting data on the two related research questions, the first of which is the evolving utilisation of urban gay space and by whom, and the light such data may shed on the role of gay neighbourhoods in the lives of contemporary urban gay communities. In order to capture data on contemporary utilisation and how this might represent a change from the past, much thought was put into creating a quantitative research tool sophisticated enough to capture worthwhile data while remaining user friendly and not overly complex. With this objective in mind, the questionnaire was divided into three parts, contemporary use of the Chueca neighbourhood, comparison with past use, and speculation about the future. This involved a variety of question formats, where again a delicate balance needed to be struck between very simple formats that are easily answered but do not yield very rich data, and vice versa. Respondents remained anonymous and were only required to confirm their age, and were sought in a way that ensured that different age groups were roughly equally represented in the survey. Examination of the data from the survey is complimented with data from the follow-up focus groups and one on one interviews, helping to explain and expand on the survey findings.

When analysing the data generated from this type of research, many variables, patterns and trends emerge, often with very varying degrees of clarity. Within the confines of a limited academic work it is, of course, not possible to go down every potential data avenue, or follow every potential thread of suggested change. Therefore, this analysis will be divided into four separate sub-chapters focusing on the four specific changes that are most clearly revealed by both the qualitative and quantitative data. The first explores the steep decline of street level activism taking place in the Chueca neighbourhood of 2019, compared to the zone of yesteryear. This will be followed by an examination of demographic change, including the so-called “heterosexual invasion” of the zone, and increasing homogeneity in term of class and ethnicity. The third sub-chapter focuses on the increasing institutionalisation of social, cultural and political activity in the
zone, while the final section examines the growing commercialisation and commodification of the Chueca neighbourhood, and the increasing preponderance of overtly consumer based activity.

4.1 A stroll through contemporary Chueca: mapping structural change

It’s a balmy May day in the heart of the Spanish capital, and I have just emerged from the Metro into the bright early evening sunshine of Plaza de Chueca (Chueca Square). I impatiently await the arrival of my urban guide for the evening. Carlos Antonio Ferrera is a longtime friend of a friend who has lived and breathed the cobbled streets and maze-like warrens of Chueca for almost 30 years. On his suggestion, we meet on a Saturday evening to get a flavour of the zone in its pomp, as it gears up for the busiest night of the week. Having lived in Madrid previously, I have spent time in the zone, but always as something of an outsider, lacking the insight of a Spanish national and/or resident of the area. Antonio, born and bred a stone’s throw from the zone, and resident in Chueca in the 1990s before returning here again in 2010, ticks both boxes and so is the perfect anthropologist’s guide.

Chueca is a neighbourhood located in the heart of downtown Madrid, just a ten-minute walk from Puerta del Sol, the official central square of the city. As Antonio explains, the precise boundaries of the neighbourhood are somewhat open to interpretation, but there are “a central network of streets centred on Chueca square that most consider to be the gay zone proper”. However, there are quite a few bars and clubs that ply their trade on the margins of these parameters, while Fuencarral, a famed shopping street, on the western fringe of the zone, is also fits neatly into the milieu. For Antonio, this street symbolises the divide between the older, poorer Chueca of yesteryear and the more modern, gentrified Chueca of 2019. The street this evening is choc-a-block with twenty somethings, both gay and straight. According to Antonio, “younger gay guys have taken to Fuencarral as an integral part of the new shiny Chueca, as they are too young to know anything different, but I think older gays are not so keen on it”. Intrigued by this, I ask Antonio to explain further. “Well, for me and for guys my age, I think this street has become a kind of symbol of the hetero invasion of the area” as he puts it, in the last 10 years or so. As recently as the mid-2000s, the zone was still in flux, a heady mixture of urban decay and renewal where dilapidated buildings and shuttered premises lay side by side with new developments. “In many ways it was an exciting time, you could see change before your eyes, but the area still had a rebellious, bohemian feel”. Antonio cites the eclectic mix of gay men, lesbians, working class Madrilenos and older neighbours who lived cheek by Jowl in the narrow cobbled streets of Hortaleza, Pelayo and Libertad. Antonio’s generation has seen a gradual melting away of this
demographic mix, as the older era residents die off or sell, to be increasingly replaced by young, affluent professionals, both gay and straight.

As we stroll through Hortaleza street, the beating heart of Chueca, the vibe is resolutely gay with a succession of gay orientated businesses, including the iconic gay bookshop, Berkana, still run by one of Madrid’s legendary gay activists, as well as restaurants, bars and saunas and, of course, the ubiquitous rainbow flag. Here the sight of gay couples, hand in hand, or sharing an intimate moment, raises not an eyebrow from the general populace. We double back through several very narrow streets where pavement space is at a premium and emerge in front of the majestic Mercado de San Antón (San Antòn Market). It is a relatively recent development that occupies several blocks of prime Chueca real estate, and is a particularly potent symbol of structural change in the area. For many years, an abandoned multi-story block, it has become what Antonio describes as “the jewel in the crown” of Chueca regeneration, a sign that the zone had finally attained establishment respectability. As Antonio explains, it was not always thus.

“Old prejudices die pretty hard in this city, you know, and even years after the crime and prostitution moved to other places, Chueca was still pretty much avoided by anyone not gay or over forty. People would look at you like you were mad or dangerous if you mentioned you lived in, or even visited, Chueca”.

As we ascend the pristine escalator to the second floor of the Mercado to inspect the pricey artisan food stalls, Antonio waves his arms demonstratively at the clientele before us and laughs. “If you had told me 15 years ago we would be competing with middle-class couples and retired people for artisan ham and fresh salmon in the heart of Chueca, I’d be sending for the men in white coats!”. From the windows of the Mercado, Antonio points to another ongoing multi-story development next door. It is a project that has entailed the shuttering of several less salubrious gay establishments to facilitate its construction, most prominent among them a bar called Nike, a legendary establishment in the chaotic milieu of Madrid gay nightlife. A charming, down at heel, watering hole, it was famous for serving huge, cheap, mixed drinks in plastic pint glasses. Nike was invariably packed to the rafters every weekend night with the pre-nightclub crowd, propelled to its doors by cheap prices, lax entry requirements, and the ease with which one could get inebriated. It encompassed a truly eclectic and diverse mix of age, class and gay subcultural groups and, along with the metro exit in Chueca Square, became the classic meeting point for all things gay. As I remark on my own personal, positive memories of Nike, the response from Antonio, far from the nostalgic railing against gentrification, is nuanced and informative. It would be easy to put the closure of Nike down to the big bad developers, as he puts it, but the truth is that “there is just not
that much demand for this kind of basic bar in 2019 Chueca”. Antonio puts this down to demographic changes in the zone, a topic that will be entertained in detail in the data analysis section. As we head north of Chueca Square, the gayness that has heretofore set the tone of the area slowly fades as we approach the district of Alonzo Martinez. While boasting some gay establishments and the occasional rainbow flag, it is commonly considered to be on the fringes of the gay zone.

Upon reaching Alonzo Martinez metro station, we lazily dive underground for a quick one-stop return to Chueca square, to enjoy a refreshing Tinto de Verano (a mix of red wine and lemonade) in the shade. As we relax in the late evening sunshine, I realise how much this square, the epicentre of the zone, has changed since I first set foot in it almost twenty years before. Gone are the semi-circular formation of steps where residents would casually stretch out while engaging in idle chatter. The park style benches where one could sit and read, or simply people watch, are also no more. They have been replaced by commercial terrace seating that now occupies the vast majority of the square. It is then that I notice a trio of elderly residents who, in the absence of public seating, have brought chairs down from their apartments to sit in the square outside their building, and who appear to be gossiping amid the weekend buzz and bustle. They appear strangely incongruous in such a youthful, colourful and diverse milieu, representing perhaps the last vestiges of the Chueca of yesteryear that is disappearing before our eyes. They also embody the key theme of this thesis, the evolution of past to present, and the utility changes that journey has wrought. It is to an analysis of these changes that we now turn.

4.2 The decline of street based activism

The first major finding thrown up by the data harvested from both questionnaire and interviews concerns the changes regarding the level of street based activism being engaged in across the geography of the zone. Activism, in all its forms, has a proud tradition in the long trajectory of the gay rights movement, from rights marches and demonstrations, to the occupying of public buildings and street theatre. In this respect, the Chueca district is no exception and in the early years of its existence was the focal point of the Spanish gay rights struggle that regularly played itself out in the zone in the form of street level activism (Elpidio, 2017). It is an issue that, with the aid of data both qualitative and quantitative, will be discussed at some length and detail in this section, as questions in the survey that address, directly and indirectly, motives for spending time in Chueca, generated some surprising data on the subject. The first survey question was particularly revealing in this respect. Respondents were asked to choose from a variety of options
to explain why they spent time in the zone, ranging from very general and everyday social activities such as meeting in a bar, restaurant or nightclub, to more overtly LGBT oriented reasons, such as membership of an unspecified gay organisation or involvement in gay rights activism. The responses to the various options are laid out in chart 1, and it is to an analysis of this data, and what it may tell us about activism in the zone, that we now turn.

Even a cursory glance at the data presented in this chart reveals one very clear finding, and it is, of course, a rather mundane one, that the majority of members of the LGBT community go to the zone to socialise in one form or another. As would be expected, given the all-encompassing nature of the activity, socializing in bars, restaurants or nightclubs was the most common response. This was followed by shopping and entertainment. One could easily imagine finding similar results in any particular neighbourhood, given how social interaction and consumption are both inextricably intertwined, and are the dominant regular activities in contemporary urban life. The question of how leisure and consumption may be changing the way Chueca is used, and by whom, will be addressed in greater detail later, in conjunction with other related data and the issue of gentrification. Away from the headline data, however, there is a seemingly stark, and potentially revealing disparity between the proportion of respondents who cited membership of a gay organization, and those who indicated activism as their primary motive for visiting their gay neighbourhood. While membership of an unspecified gay organisation ranked third, activism was so small as to be almost statistically insignificant. While the option of an unspecified LGBT organisation inevitably scores higher, given its broader parameters compared to specific activism,
one would expect a higher degree of overlap between the two, given the high profile role that activist organisations and street based activism has historically played in the Chueca based, gay rights movement (Elpidio, 2017). So what might this huge disparity tell us about the utilisation of gay space in contemporary Chueca, regarding the role of activism? On the face of it, the data begs two key questions; Are the vast majority of gay organisations in Chueca not engaged in activism, and what kind of activism, if any, is taking place in contemporary Chueca? This first of these questions will be addressed in more detail in the subsequent chapter on institutionalisation. Regarding the second question, other data from the survey would seem to corroborate the perception on the part of inhabitants and users that Chueca is no longer is a place of activism. When respondents were asked to choose from a list of adjectives to describe Chueca, as the data in chart 2 demonstrates, the “activism” option was statically insignificant, trailing behind even homophobia.

![Chart 2 Using adjectives to describe Chueca. The results are based on the responses of 94 survey participants, and who were invited to choose more than one option.](chart-2.png)

This stark finding is a potentially important nugget of data in terms of what it may tell us about how Chueca is utilised and perceived by its contemporary users, regarding activism in the zone. It is well documented that in the earlier years of Chueca`s development activist organisations were a prominent feature of the urban landscape (Smith, 2003). In addition to specifically gay activism,
there were also a grass roots residents organisation that encompassed the wider residential population, dedicated to combating very high levels of drug taking, crime and prostitution, in an effort to improve the image and the safety of the area (Elpidio, 2017). As was noted earlier, such deviant activities were pushed increasingly to the margins, as homosexuality became less stigmatised and less linked with criminality, a fact that would explain the demise of non-gay rights based activism. But what of gay activism itself? While data from the questionnaire suggests a contemporary lack of activism in the zone, data from the focus groups and interviews confirm the strong presence of such activity in the earlier years of Chueca`s development. Indeed, a recurring theme from older interviewees in this respect is the intertwining of socialising with activism, and may help explain the change. One of the older focus group participants, Felix Ortega, a Madrileno from the working class estate of Carabanchel in the south of the city, moved to Chueca in the late 1980s and has lived in the zone ever since. At that time, he recalls that “being openly gay in Carabanchel was not an option”, and claims he would have found it very difficult to get work as an openly gay man back then. For Felix, the idea of moving to Chueca was “exciting but also terrifying because of its notorious reputation”. According to Felix and other older participants, there were no more than a handful of gay establishments at that time, and which were often subject to police harassment. Living in one of the most marginalised zones of the city, Felix and his contemporaries were often penniless and restless, and became willing participants in whatever protest march or demonstration was being organised by the burgeoning gay rights movement. As Rodrigo Bilboa, a retired teacher puts it,

“In those days, there were no fancy malls and fashion stores to spend our afternoons and evenings in. And even if there had been, we didn’t have the money. So events like, you know, a protest, a vigil or something, you built your evening around it...., a good excuse for botejon (Spanish street drinking tradition). We would make some calimojo (a mix of cheap red wine, ice and coca cola) make some (activist) noise, and then get drunk!”.

Most of the participants in the research, both old and young, seemed to agree that this mixing of socialising and activism has all but disappeared except, of course, for the annual gay pride march. In the light of this information, it would appear that when respondents are asked about something called activism, it is commonly understood to mean the street level form of the activity, rather than activism in all its complex diversity.

Such changing patterns of behaviour surrounding street based activism have clear consequences for the evolving utilisation of urban gay space, and when I pursued the topic further in the focus groups and interviews, a more nuanced understanding of the concept of activism emerged. On the
face of it, the simplest explanation for the decline of street activism would be that Chueca, as the original hub of the gay struggle in Madrid and Spain, has been a victim of its own success. Having achieved so much in terms of rights and protections, activism of the type reminisced upon by some of the older interviewees was no longer needed. When I put this to Felix, Rodrigo and others, they agreed that regular weekly, street based, activism in the “Movida” sense of the word, with street theatre and drag for example, is now relatively rare, but not that activism itself has disappeared. According to Rodrigo, activism operates on a whole new level now, having long ago swapped the streets for the court room and the class room. “I retired just a few years ago after 30 years in the public-school system. The changes in my final years were amazing, all sorts of stuff, like inclusiveness and diversity training for teachers, LGBT awareness talks for students, things I didn’t think I would ever live to see.”

What my interviewee is describing is a phenomenon whereby over time, rights movements, especially ones as successful and well-resourced as Spanish gay rights, have become increasingly sophisticated and expert, leading to the professionalisation and institutionalisation of activism, mainly geared towards political lobbying in order to influence policy direction, particularly in education, the media and equality legislation. A second recurring theme of the focus group regarding activism in Chueca is best understood with reference to the exploration of urban gay identity and its formation, conducted in the preliminary section of this work. As elucidated there, alienated gays burnished in the fire of oppression, built self-identification in solidarity with other gays to create a distinct (urban) minority group. However, as Rodrigo admits, nowadays “we don’t have that sense of us against the world that you get from many years of discrimination, the younger generation of gays definitely don’t have it. And why would they? Things are so different now”. My request to describe in more detail the discrimination these older gays suffered produces a litany of remembered incidents, some involving serious physical aggression. What resonates most, however, is not the more extreme cases but the dreary regularity of petty slights and low-level institutional discrimination and disrespect, from the local hospital and social security system, to the police. According to Felix, “As far as the police in the 1980s were concerned, if you lived in or hung around Chueca you were a fag, a prostitute or some kind of criminal.....a lot of (gay) guys would never go to the cops for anything. Now you have cops marching in gay pride!”. In short, the LGBT community, and Chueca’s relationship and interaction with the outside world, has been transformed. It is hardly surprising that the relationship the LGBT community has with the urban gay space it occupies has not been left undisturbed by such radical change.
One the consequences of these radical changes seems to be a weakening of the domino effect upon which urban gay identity, and by extension urban gay territory, was built. This domino effect began with the shared experience of everyday oppression from a variety of sectors of the state apparatus, and institutions such as the church and the police. This oppression in turn provoked a response. In the case of a relatively powerless minority, often their only weapon is their collective numbers, and so resistance often took the form of spontaneous eruptions of street protest, amplified by the growing urban concentration of the LGBT collective in the Chueca zone. Such a dynamic clearly has much less resonance in the Chueca of 2019. It seems clear, therefore, that two key catalysts in the development of gay urban space, that is to say oppression and the street level activist response to it, are far less a feature of the zone than before. The question as to what if anything has taken their place will be addressed in a later section on the institutionalisation of gay space. The subject of activism will also be revisited there in more detail, as processes of institutionalisation are intimately connected with the redirection of activism away from the narrow cobbled streets and plazas of Chueca to the legal, political and educational institutions of the state. For now, however, it is sufficient to note that the decline of Chueca as a centre of street based, grass roots activism is the first important example of utility change that the accumulated qualitative and quantitative data has revealed.

4.3 Demographic change: “heterosexualisation” and class exclusion

As mentioned previously, many urban gay neighbourhoods across the world have made a rapid transition from very disadvantaged districts to very desirable, attractive and expensive neighbourhoods. Chueca is a text book example of this trend, and it has inevitably ushered in changes in who uses the space, and to what purpose. One of the oft suggested demographic consequences of this transformation is that gay zones have become increasingly “heterosexualised”, as they have become more socially acceptable places for the wider population to live in and frequent. The data collected from the zone would seem to confirm that Chueca is no exception, as chart 3 clearly demonstrates.
Chart 3 Evaluating demographic changes in the district of Chueca. The results are based on the responses of 95 survey participants.

As with the previous headline data, the increased heterosexualisation of Chueca that chart 03 reveals is no great surprise, given the increasing attractiveness of gay zones to the general population, and the lessening of stigma around homosexuality more generally. However, as is often the case, the devil is in the detail. While this sentiment was shared across all age groups, interestingly, there a significant difference in degree between older and younger respondents. Among those under forty-five years of age, there was an almost even split between those who feel that the zone has become more heterosexualised in the last ten years, and those who think it has stayed more or less the same. In contrast, those aged over forty-five are much more of the view that the zone has become more heterosexually oriented. This can be reasonably accounted for if one accepts the premise that the heterosexualisation of gay space has been under way for some time. It would then be reasonable to deduce that older residents and users may well remember a time when, in the not so distant past, the average heterosexual couple would not be seen dead in the area. To younger members of the Chueca community, however, this demographic change may not seem so evident as it was already underway upon their arrival on the scene. Though this binary question produced very clear data on the existence of the phenomenon of heterosexualisation, to dig a little deeper into this potentially important change in the utilisation of urban gay space, a follow up question was put to those who agreed that the zone was more heterosexualised, or had maintained levels of heterosexualisation over the past 10 years. This entailed the respondent choosing from a variety of suggested reasons, the results of which are displayed in chart 4.
Chart 4 Evaluating the reasons for the increasing heterosexualisation of the Chueca district. The results are based on the responses of 86 survey participants.

Three of the four suggested reasons garnered reasonable levels of support, suggesting that the causes of the heterosexual “invasion” of gay space in Madrid are multiple and complex. However, it is clear from the data that the most common response was in favour of the notion that the wider heterosexual community is attracted to the leisure and entertainment opportunities the zone offers, such as bars, restaurants, shops and nightlife. The second most popular explanation was the liberalisation of Spanish society, and the fact that the general population increasingly accept gay neighbourhoods as equal, legitimate, and indeed an appealing, part of the urban landscape. Almost equal in preference was the suggestion to the effect that increasing numbers of heterosexuals are renting or buying property in the zone. The lower proportion of respondents who chose the first option is probably indicative of a flaw in the way it was framed which is, in hindsight, too similar to the third option of heterosexuals being attracted by the leisure amenities of the area.

This data is corroborated quite strongly in the focus groups and interviews, with many agreeing with the premise that the increased attractiveness of the area, particularly with regard to its cafes and restaurants which are not as overtly oriented towards the gay populous as bars or nightclubs, are drawing heterosexuals to the zone in greater numbers. One of the interviewees in particular, Mario Valverde, a 57-year-old originally from south-eastern province of Murcia, is in good position to give some insight on the changing clientele of the zone. Mario moved to Madrid almost 40 years ago, and is a classic example of the great gay migration from rural Spain to urban centres in the years after Franco’s death, as more freedom of movement was restored and opportunities presented themselves in the major urban centres. “I come from one of the poorest regions of
Spain, and lived in a small town close to Murcia capital until I was 18 and longed to get out. I left Murcia on a scholarship to study fine art in Madrid”. He has managed a popular restaurant in the heart of Chueca for almost twenty years, and looking back over the last two decades or so, has seen phenomenal change. “In the early 2000s our clientele were still almost all gay guys, their female friends and the bohemian crowd. But in the last ten years it is crazy how it has changed”. According to Mario the change is twofold. “Of course, we still serve a lot of gays and lesbians, but now there are much more straight, professional couples and groups, and of course, a lot of tourists”.

These young, 30-something, predominantly professional, middle-class heterosexuals whom Mario refers to are the so called the children of Zapatero, those who came of age in the early 2000s when Spain, under the socialist party led by Jose Rodrigo Zapatero, underwent rapid social liberalization. Divorce and abortion were made more accessible, and Spain became one of the first countries in the world to introduce equal marriage and adoption rights for gay couples (Smith, 2003). This generation of Spanish citizens is also the first to have no direct memory of the dictatorship, and for whom gay equality is the proverbial “no brainer”. One of the younger interviewees, Luciano, also noticed developments in respect of heterosexualisation, despite the fact that he works as a bar tender in an out and out gay bar. The latest wave of the “hetero invasion” according to Luciano, comes in the form of hen parties and female work outings, who increasingly choose the Chueca area.

“In the few years I have been working here, this has become a real thing. Anything up to a dozen, often quite drunk, young women will arrive into the bar in the middle of the week. Our regulars are not too happy about it! (laughs)..... but for the manager it is very welcome business, especially on a slow week night”.

And it seems that heterosexuals, in many cases, are not just visiting but coming to stay as well. As the data in chart 05 suggests, heterosexualisation has also been prompted by increasing numbers of young heterosexual professionals renting and buying property in the area. Now that Chueca has lost its social stigma, the oft quoted golden rule of real estate, “location location location”, has come increasingly into play. Chueca as a residential and leisure zone could hardly be more centrally and conveniently located. A brief visit to one of the major real estate agents in the zone confirms this demographic change. Luisa Montero has been a realtor in the zone for several years and agrees that the trend is significant and growing. According to Luisa, “one of the big factors is the reality of modern urban living, where property prices are now so high that it is almost impossible to get a mortgage on a single salary”. That inevitably favours middle class, professional couples, of which there are many more straight than gay.
Heterosexualisation of the zone is not the only example of demographic change that is suggested by the research data. The survey questionnaire also sought to generate data on the changing demographic of the zone in terms of class, and by extension, race. In a country such as Spain, which has experienced high levels of immigration in the last few decades, particularly from South America, there tends to be a strong correlation between economic class and race. In terms of access to employment and educational opportunities, immigrants inevitably start from a serious disadvantage, lacking as they do the benefits that citizenship and life-long residency bestows on the native population. These structural inequalities have obvious consequences for the demographic profile of the major urban centres of Spain, dictating where and in what circumstances residents of distinct ethnic or racial backgrounds may live. One of the objectives of the ethnographic research was to determine to what extent these demographic dichotomies might extend to the LGBT population of Madrid, and their potential effect on the demographic profile of Chueca. With regard to the survey work, two interrelated questions were posed in reference to the demographic diversity of the Chueca neighbourhood within the LGBT population itself. The format of the first of these questions was quite simple, asking respondents if the LGBT community which inhabited and frequented Chueca was more or less diverse, in terms of race and class, than 5/10 years ago. The resulting data is presented in the following chart 5.

![Chart 5](image)

**Chart 5** Evaluating the diversity, in terms of race and class, of the LGBT community in Chueca. The results are based on the responses of 94 survey participants.

The responses to this particular question are quite inconclusive in the sense that “don’t know” responses and “about the same” responses are quite high compared to other questions,
accounting for more than half of the total. This, perhaps, reflects the fact that while the structure was relatively binary, the question itself was quite a difficult one, requiring more observatory powers compared to other questions in the survey. Again, with the benefit of hindsight, a more user friendly and better worded question may have produced more definitive answers. While the high number of “don’t know” responses inevitably weakens the validity of the data, a clear majority of those who expressed a definitive opinion considered Chueca less diverse than was the case previously. However, when the topic was raised in interviews, the water was muddied once more by the suggestion that decreasing racial diversity might have more to do with external factors than with Chueca itself. One interviewee by the name of Rafael, a native of Cordoba in Andalucía who spent five years living in the heart of Chueca, before returning recently to his native city, makes an interesting point in this regard. He suggests that “the big crash in Spain might have something to do with all this, with so many immigrants losing their jobs and returning home”. Rafael is referring to the see-saw immigration patterns experienced by Spain over the last twenty years. With the onset of the economic boom in the early 2000s, Spain, traditionally a nation of very high unemployment and by extension emigration, experienced for the first time in its history a major inward flow of workers, from both Eastern Europe and South America. It was a trend that came to an abrupt halt in 2008, and into reverse in the years of devastating unemployment that followed. Immigrant workers, over-represented in low paid, service industry employment were hit the hardest, as Spaniards massively reduced discretionary spending. Though difficult to definitively prove, it is one plausible explanation for the reduction in racial diversity, and by extension, economic diversity in Madrid more generally, and in Chueca specifically. According to Rafael, he “lived in the Chueca right through this period, and I definitely noticed a difference in the faces in the bars and in the streets. I also personally know several foreigners who left in that time, and I’m sure most people you ask would too”. As with any particular phenomenon, however, it is unlikely to be the result of one single factor, and while external economic factors may well have played a role, it seems likely that there are other complex factors at play related to the evolution of Chueca itself. The responses to the second question on the survey regarding diversity strongly suggest that this might be the case. Employing a simpler multiple choice question than the previous one, respondents were asked which sector of the LGBT community Chueca most caters for. The resulting data is displayed in the chart 6 below.
Evaluating which sector of the LGBT community the Chueca district best serves. The results are based on the responses of 92 survey participants.

While the responses to this question are incredibly stark, and are indicative of massive urban bias in favour of a very particular sector of the LGBT community, the data must be qualified by one important caveat, regarding the demographic profile of the LGBT community. While the overall number of those who identify as LGBT as a percentage of the general population has long been subject to dispute, most serious research agrees that gay males make up the largest group within that collective (Black, Gates, Sander and Taylor, 2000), being somewhat larger than the lesbian population and far more numerous than either transsexuals or bisexuals. Other factors, such as the traditional dominance of gay males within the LGBT collective that mirrors patriarchal society more generally, and longstanding, gendered, socio-economic advantages, may also help explain such a stark finding. However, in terms of the issue at hand, that of utility change, the most pertinent question is whether this apparent middle-class male dominance of the zone represents continuity or change. An analysis of the qualitative data would suggest the latter, or at least an intensification of a pre-existing trend.

Jose and Josito are long-time friends, in their early forties, who came out on to the Chueca scene together around twenty-five years ago, and both took part in a focus group and one on one interviews. In considering this question, Jose concedes that “like most gay zones I guess, it has been dominated by gay men since I started coming here”. Jose recalls that in those days, the mid 1990s, Chueca was still something of a black spot. “The first few times I went there I got out at the previous metro stop so as not to be seen coming out of the Chueca exit, in case someone from my neighbourhood saw me”. Jose also notes the diversity of the area in those earlier days.
“In that time people really stood out there because the rest of the city was so much more conservative. It was full of strange and diverse characters. You know... hippies and flammers and drag queens, drug addicts and pushers. There was always seemed to be something dodgy going on at every street corner. That’s all gone now”.

Josito agrees with the sentiments of his friend about the changes, and from what they say it would appear that it is the diversity of male dominance rather than the fact of it that has changed. According to Josito, “in the last few years the zone has really become a bit of a cliché really. If you hear that someone lives in Chueca, straight way, you have a very stereotypical image of that person in your mind. You know,... very groomed and fashionable, very superficial, with money to spend”. For their part, the older interviewees, such as Rodrigo and Felix, who expounded on activism or the lack thereof in the previous section, emphasis the structural change to the built environment in relation to diversity. While they agree that Chueca has always been male dominated, they feel it has now also become quite exclusive in terms of the range of gay males that the zone caters to. Felix puts it down to

“all the seedy bars and back street watering holes that have closed down in the last few years, where all sorts would mix. Back in the old days we were all considered perverts so it didn’t matter so much if you or your daddy was rich. Now it’s a whole new world where everybody is chasing the tourist dollar, and the high spenders, prepared to pay 12 or 15 Euros for a fancy cocktail”.

Based on the cumulative evidence of both the qualitative and quantitative research, it can be reasonably asserted that the demographic shifts regarding both heterosexualisation and class exclusivity represents significant examples of utility change in terms of how urban gay space is used, and by whom. It is also a phenomenon that may have serious implications for the future of the zone and its ability to truly represent the totality of the LGBT collective in all of its manifest diversity. It is in this context that the subject of demographic change, and in particular the issue of class and race based exclusion, will be revisited in substantial detail later in this work, as they are intimately connected with neo-liberal inspired processes of gentrification and commercialisation that are the focus of the second half of this work.

4.4. The institutionalisation of social, cultural and political activity

In the opening section on the decline of street based activism, the contrast between those who cited activism as a reason for frequenting Chueca and those who cited involvement with a gay organisation was unexpectedly stark. This decline in street activism, however, seems to be
mirrored by an actual significant increase in the number of gay organisations operating in and around the area. Andres Fabada works for one of these very organisations, an entity called Madrid Pride, which is a partly state funded and whose principal activity is to organize and plan the enormous global phenomenon that is Gay Pride week in Madrid. In his role, Andres is in constant contact with a variety of related gay organisations and associations. “When I first came to Madrid almost 25 years ago now there were maybe one or two gay organizations”, and they were mostly funded by voluntary contributions, staffed by volunteers and operated on a shoestring budget. Growth over that last few decades has been spectacular. To illustrate the point, Antonio produces a standard map of Chueca, and traces the extensive network of LGBT orientated organizations, associations and institutions, in addition to the Gay Pride office. Antonio explains that

“Most of these organisations have opened in the last ten to fifteen years and are involved in all sorts of activities related to the LGBT community in general. It is amazing the difference from a few years ago...now organisations have proper offices, proper funding, fully paid trained staff, as well as volunteers”.

In my interview with Andres, and through visiting the premises of some of these entities around the zone, it is evident that Chueca is a hive of gay organisational activity. However, given the earlier findings regarding activism, it would seem that whatever work this myriad of gay organisations are engaged in, traditional street based activism is not one of them.

This conclusion begs the obvious question as to exactly what type of activities dominate their agendas. To answer it, I enlisted the help of Rocio Montenegro, a long serving member of an organisation that runs LGBT awareness presentations in secondary schools. From very early on in our conversation it becomes clear that LGBT organisations have long since moved their focus to the realm of social policy centred on welfare, health and education related issues, as well as cultural remembrance and commemoration, rather than traditional street-based activism. According to Rocio there has been a big change in focus over the last 15 years. “We have moved into a new phase I suppose. A lot of rights battles have been won, marriage, adoption etc. But they don’t necessarily change the reality on the ground for everyone, at least not right away”. Rocio cites the example of a middle school student in a poor urban district, bullied for being gay. “Equal marriage does not mean much to that kid if he has go to school every day in fear, and does not feel safe in the education system”. While the contemporary atmosphere is certainly more conducive to coming out at an early age than in the past, it is still far from a stress free process at an individual level. This focus on providing practical support to LGBT members at vulnerable stages of their lives goes to the heart of a clearer understanding of the changing nature of activism, and helps make sense
of the surprising data findings. The organisation that Rocio is involved with, for example, promoting tolerance by organising diversity presentations for secondary schools is, of course engaging in activism, just a much less visible strain than occupying a public building or a candlelight vigil. It is what can be described as the institutionalisation of activism, where such activities have increasingly become the preserve of specific professionals operating within designated organisations, the quasi-political representatives, so to speak, of the wider LGBT community.

This is just one aspect of the wider phenomenon of institutionalisation taking place in urban gay space, and is directly connected to changes in how users relate to, and are represented by, their gay zone. In order to better understand this bigger picture, it is instructive to make reference to what Amin Ghaziani describes as anchor institutions (Ghaziani, 2014). In an era of unprecedented liberalism in western urban culture, the integration of gays within the general population, the increasing heterosexualisation of gay space, and residential drift, means that gay neighbourhoods are fragmenting. While many neighbourhoods have resisted this trend to varying degrees, it has raised important existential questions about the future of urban gay enclaves. (A subject which will explored in greater detail in the final section of this work). This is the landscape that Ghaziani would describe as the post gay era where “it's no big deal anymore to be gay” (Ghaziani, 2014, p.67), at least in the urban west, where gays and lesbians have been increasingly integrated, and their differences from heterosexuals increasingly muted. In other words, as mainstreaming continues apace, the LGBT community increasingly mirrors the rest of the population in terms of delineation along class lines rather than that of sexual identity. In this new liberal dispensation, a well-to-do middle-class gay couple are as almost likely to decamp to the leafy suburbs as any heterosexual couple, or a working class gay male as likely to cleave to affordable neighbourhoods as his straight counterpart. In this transformed milieu, some question the relevance of urban gay space when the need to cluster geographically in the interest of self-preservation and progress is much less urgent. According to Ghaziani, particular anchor institutions play an important role in maintaining the cultural integrity of urban gay space, as residential concentrations of urban gays, (already low given the demographic realities of the gay community that make majority residential status nigh impossible), fall victim to residential drift as a result of mainstreaming. The nature of these anchor institutions may vary from place to place, ranging from the official LGBT centre to the local gay book shop. The existence of distinctive facilities such as gay bars, bookstores, bathhouses and LGBT community centres can often be more salient to the cultural identification of a particular area as gay than residential segregation (Murray, 1990). Just as a small number of professional activists have replaced wider participation in more visible street-based activism, these relatively
small number of anchor institutions help to maintain a gay presence in urban gay zones, and are the brick and mortar representatives of the wider LGBT community.

Gay oriented businesses play a particularly important role in anchoring gay neighbourhoods and define it in the same way that such establishments would define an ethnic neighbourhood. As Solomon Murray explains, “such businesses position sexuality as a quasi-ethnicity” (Murray, 1990, p.4), helping to reinforce a sense of community. The Boys Town area of Chicago, for example, is one zone that has resisted better than most the fragmentation of the area, through the process that Murray describes. Control over real estate enables the business owners of institutional anchors to put down deeper roots into a neighbourhood by buying rather than merely renting their premises (Lees, Statler and Wyly, 2008). Therefore, despite the urban realities of residential flux in the era of mainstreaming, property ownership anchors the LGBT community in Boys Town. A similar process can be observed in another Chicago neighbourhood, that of Lakeview, where a solid foundation was laid when a lot of LGBT individuals finally started buying their homes and buying their businesses as opposed to renting (Ghaziani, 2014). Lakeview, according to Ghaziani, was one of the first to create this precedent, distinct from what happened in previous transitions when LGBT individuals did not actually purchase properties and businesses, and the zones experienced fragmentation and dispersal as a result. Though Boys Town and Lakeview are institutionally and economically anchored to an extent not seen elsewhere, they have become the model examples to which other gay neighbourhoods in the US increasingly aspire. Although the purchasing of businesses in gay neighbourhoods by LGBT individuals is ostensibly a form of economic anchoring, it also constitutes institutional anchoring by shoring up the physical strength of the neighbourhood visually and culturally, in terms of the variety of services that it offers its gay residents, and in providing sponsorship and financial support for gay organisations and their users (Ghaziani, 2014).

From my participant observation activities of interacting with organisations and engaging the services of businesses such as bars, restaurants and shops, it is clear that Chueca is also experiencing the development and growth of anchor institutions. These include the aforementioned myriad of LGBT organisations along with some long established businesses that have become institutional landmarks of the zone, such as the Berkana bookshop, that help to maintain a visibly gay hue in the neighbourhood that no amount of gay residents could achieve. Though Ghaziani tends to focus on economic and official anchors, namely gay-run businesses and LGBT centres, there is another facet to this phenomenon revealed in the research data, and one which is well worth exploring in the context of identifying significant changes in the utility of gay space. To explain this phenomenon, it is instructive to return briefly to data revealed in a previous...
sub-chapter on the decline of activism in the neighbourhood of Chueca. The survey data in chart 1 revealed that the third most common motivation for frequenting Chueca was membership of an unspecified LGBT organisation. Table 1 provides a brief recap of this finding.

Table 1 The most popular reasons for visiting the Chueca district. The results are based on the responses of 95 survey participants, and who were invited to choose more than one option.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Top three reasons for visiting Chueca</th>
<th>No. of responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Shopping and leisure</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bars, restaurants, nightclubs</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gay organisations</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For many people, both heterosexual and homosexual, the term “gay organisation”, is commonly assumed to refer to an entity concerned with a specifically gay issue, from sexual and mental health to rights activism or education. However, when endeavouring to extract more detail on this data finding in the focus groups and interviews, a far more nuanced and complex picture emerged regarding people’s conception of the term “gay organisation”. While, of course, a few respondents clarified that they were indeed members of a gay organisation that conforms to the typical profile of a rights based entity, much more common was involvement with what I would describe as “socio-cultural, anchor institutions”, distinct both from economic anchors of consumption, such as bars and restaurants, and gay organisations specifically concerned with gay rights and welfare issues. Examples would include sporting organisations like football and swimming clubs, cultural endeavours such as choirs and amateur drama, and nature pursuits such as hill walking, hiking and scouting. Essentially, this involves the institutionalisation of activities that are not specific to the gay community, but practiced exclusively by gays in a predominantly gay setting, and which has the effect of drawing LGBT community members to the zone.

One interview respondent in particular was quite representative of this experience. Alex Figuero hails from the sprawling working class neighbourhood of Vallecas, in the south of Madrid, and worked for a time in Chueca in one of the local bars in his younger years. Now 39, Alex has settled in a neighbourhood a few metro stops from the zone, to be near his current place of employment, a social centre for retirees, where he works as a carer. As Alex explains, he does not go to Chueca that much for the purpose of socialising or meeting his friends. “These days I hardly ever go to Chueca to for general socialising with my friends, like going to bars or nightclubs or whatever”. When pressed as to why, he replies that,
“it’s just too expensive for me. I’m basically working in a minimum wage position making less than 1000 euros a month. Chueca does not really cater to the likes of me. A few years ago there were still a few places where you could get a cheap drink, but they have closed down and been replaced by fancier and more expensive places”.

Consequently, Alex prefers to visit other areas such as Lavapies, an increasingly common trend that has seen the rise of what Alex describes as “mini Chuecas”, offering more affordable alternatives to Chueca, a subject that will be address in more detail in the gentrification section. In the context of the present discussion on institutionalisation, however, it is the non-commercial and non-consumptive activities that Alex engages in that are most revelatory. These days, the main reason he visits Chueca is to attend practices and performances of the LGBT choir. “If it were not for the choir I would probably go months without visiting the area. It is actually something I was talking about with other choir people recently and many of them have the same experience, especially the older ones”. This is a classic example of how socio-cultural anchor institutions successfully draw gay Madrilenos to a gay zone which they might otherwise frequent less or not at all, helping to maintain a strong actual gay presence on the ground. This is particularly important as other areas begin to compete for the coveted pink pound, and Chueca itself becomes increasing the preserve of the middle classes, both gay and straight. Activities like the gay choir group that meet in an LGBT centre also constitute a form of institutional symbiosis whereby a centre established within the geographical zone of Chueca, to ostensibly devote itself to gay specific issues, in practice provides a platform and a safe space for the LGBT community to engage in mainstream activities in a gay setting. Another good example of this hybrid phenomenon is in relation to facilities for the older LGBT generation. A far higher percentage of middle-aged and older gay men are single compared to their heterosexual male counterparts, and therefore the LGBT outreach, catering to this age group, is an important element in combating loneliness and isolation, in the relative absence of a family network. These realities are reflected to a certain degree in the data regarding membership of gay organisations. When broken down by age, it is clear that the likelihood of attending a meeting of a gay organisation rises with age.

Table 2  Rate of attendance at gay organisations broken down by age. The results are based on the responses of 44 survey participants.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age group</th>
<th>No. of responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All ages</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over fifty</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Under fifty</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
There are a few obvious caveats to highlight regarding these findings, not least of which is the sample size, which is reasonably valid when drawing conclusions about the group as a whole, but probably a little too small when subdividing it by age. The high percentage of engagement with organisations on the part of older participants may also reflect the fact that, as many are retirees, they have more free time on their hands. As to the hybrid nature of organisations for older gay men, while these organisations are ostensibly welfare ones, in practice they appear to operate more along the lines of the socio-cultural entities described earlier. From conversations on the topic with older interviewees like Rodrigo, it appears that the activities of the organisation for senior gays that he is a member of are quite mainstream and non-gay specific. “It’s not like we spend many hours discussing the ins and outs of gay issues.... It is more like games of Petanque (Spanish bowls) in the park, poker nights and just having a beer”.

So when we speak of so called anchor institutions, in the case of Chueca and presumably gay space more generally, the phenomenon is not confined to brick and mortar buildings, be it a residential home, a gay oriented business or a welfare organisation, but extends to the institutionalisation of cultural and social activities that do much to solidify the gay essence of the neighbourhood by drawing in those who, for a variety of reasons, might not otherwise frequent urban gay space so much. In conclusion, it is reasonable to deduce from the research data that the increasing institutionalisation of urban gay space in terms of activism, anchor institutions and particularly socio-cultural anchor activities are not only key factors in shoring up the essential gayness of neighbourhoods, but also represent clear examples of the evolution in how urban gay space is used, and by whom.

4.5 Chueca for sale: the commodification and corporatisation of urban gay space
As is evident from the research so far, some trends regarding how urban gay space is utilised are particularly identifiable from the data collected from the questionnaire, the focus groups and interviews. Among these are the decline of activism within the physical confines of Chueca, demographic change in terms of those who use the space, and the institutionalisation of socio-cultural activities within the district. However, perhaps the clearest trend that emerges from the research is the overt and growing commodification/corporatisation of the Chueca district. Data gleaned from both the questionnaire and interviews, and my own participant observation activities, clearly points to an overwhelming sense among those who live in, work in and frequent Chueca that the area has undergone intense and increasing commercialisation. Several of the questions posed in the questionnaire either directly or indirectly address these issues. In the
previous sub-chapter on the decline of activism, the data presented in chart 01 (see p. 41) revealed that entertainment and consumption in the form of socialising in bars, restaurants and nightclubs, or shopping in the myriad of outlets in the zone, were by far the most popular reasons that respondents chose for visiting the Chueca district. Chart 02 (see p.42), which presented data based on respondents’ choice of adjectives to describe Chueca, also confirmed the dominance of commercialisation, whereby the adjective “consumption” is only superseded in popularity by that of “entertainment”, itself an activity that is closely related to consumption and commercialisation. Taken together, they account about half of all responses to this particular question. The obvious caveat to this finding is the fact that a wide variety of activities, such as frequenting bars and restaurants, that are essentially social, inevitably involve consumption in an urban setting. That such activity is prevalent is not necessarily a surprise, however the extent to which it dominates responses is not insignificant. The most relevant question in the context of this work is whether it constitutes a change in how the space is used, or at least the intensification of an existing trend.

Though any modern, centrally located zone in the heart of a major European capital is likely to have experienced increased commercial activity, data gleaned from a follow-up question on the subject strongly suggests that, that in common with other gay zones around Europe and across the USA, Chueca has experienced commercialisation on a scale that clearly outstrips that of adjacent non-gay districts. Asked to respond to trends related to commercial activity in the zone, the overwhelming majority of participants agreed with the statement that commercialisation of the zone had increased in the last 5 to 10 years, citing the growing number of establishments dedicated to overt consumption. The specific responses are outlined in chart 7, and constitute one of the starkest and most clear-cut findings in the survey.

Chart 7 Evaluating the commercialisation of the Chueca district. The results are based on the responses of 97 survey participants.
Of all the survey questions that participants were asked to consider, this question generated one of the highest affirmative responses. Overt commercialisation has become one of the hallmarks of urban gay neighbourhoods more generally, and it is no particular surprise that Chueca exhibits similar tendencies. The particularly high level of affirmative responses is also, perhaps, an indication of the relative speed of these developments in Chueca. As with previous data, a breakdown of the responses by age shows older participants more in the affirmative on this question than their younger counterparts, again perhaps reflective of the fact that for younger respondents, Chueca has always seemed overtly commercialised, and are therefore less cognizant of the change. This age divergence is also reflected in the qualitative data, where those aged over forty-five can more clearly remember when Chueca was very much a neighbourhood in transition, and where more traditional, bohemian and less overtly commercialised establishments still existed, creating an eclectic mix between old and new. For example, Mario Valverde, a participant in the focus group of older gays reflects on a time when “you had a bit of a choice. Will we go to our local watering hole tonight or dress up a bit and hit one of the new trendy places? Now it’s all new trendy places!”. And if the data harvested from questions posed regarding the future of Chueca is anything to go by, it is a trend that is not like to abate any time soon. In the final question of the survey, relating to the future of urban gay space, respondents were asked about the degree to which they agreed with variety of particular scenarios. Table 3 provides a breakdown of the responses in this regard. Of particular relevance to this discussion are the responses to the final option, regarding expectation of future commercialisation. The responses regarding the prospect of increased commercial activity in the coming years are very conclusive.

**Table 3** Evaluating the future trajectory of the Chueca district. The results are based on the responses of 95 survey participants.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How strongly do you agree/disagree with the following statements on the future of Chueca?</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chueca will become more heterosexual</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gay life will be less concentrated in Chueca</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modern life and technology will make Chueca obsolete</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chueca will become more commercialized</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The data related to future developments corroborates the general consensus revealed in the other questions that commercialisation has greatly increased and will continue to do so. About 75% of respondents agree or strongly agree that this is the case. As was noted earlier, while relatively binary questions such as the ones posed in this table are efficient at confirming the
existence or otherwise of a particular phenomenon, they inevitably fail to capture nuance or
detail. With this limitation in mind, two related questions were posed in order to get a sense of the
actual form that increased commercialisation has taken in the case of Chueca. Firstly, the
participants were asked the following simple binary question. Do you think there are more, less, or
the same quantity of gay, or gay oriented establishments than 5/10 years ago? The data yielded
from this first question is presented in chart 8.

![Chart 8](image)

**Chart 8** The growth/decline of gay establishments in the Chueca district. The results are based on the responses of 96 survey participants.

The results are relatively inconclusive, with the highest percentage of respondents opting for no
change. The high percentage of “no change” and “don’t know” responses is perhaps partly
accounted for by the fact that, although the question is a relatively binary one, it requires more
specific and non-personal judgement than other binary questions posed in the questionnaire.
Interestingly, a significant minority felt that the number of gay oriented establishments had
actually declined. This would seem to slightly contradict the heretofore well founded assumption
that the zone was becoming ever more commercialised. However, there may be a number of
explanations for this, the first of which is based on innate egotism of human nature. In other
words, when individuals state that there are less gay establishments, what they may actually be
subconsciously saying is that there are less places of interest to them, rather than less places
numerically. The earlier complaint expressed by Mario about the lack of choice and variety of
establishment, rather than the actual number, might be reflective of this phenomenon. The
second factor may lie in utility changes such as heterosexualisation and the growth of the tourist
appeal of the zone. An examination of the data thrown up by the second question, which focused
on establishments in the gay zone more generally, rather than overtly gay establishments, may be
instructive in this respect. Having focused attention on the question of the presence of gay establishments through the initial binary question, a more complex one was then posed, regarding the prevalence or otherwise of different types of establishments in the zone. From a variety of options, respondents were asked to judge which types of establishments they thought were growing in number and which were declining.

Table 4 The growth/decline of commercial establishments in the Chueca district. The results are based on the responses of 94 survey participants.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Which types of businesses are growing/declining in Chueca?</th>
<th>Growth</th>
<th>Decline</th>
<th>No major change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bars</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Restaurants</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gay saunas</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nightclubs</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fashion stores</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The responses were very interesting and revealing on a number of levels, particularly regarding places such as bars and nightclubs that are focused more specifically on the gay demographic, and places such as fashion stores and restaurants that appeal to the wider heterosexual populous. It has been imperially established that in many gay zones across Western Europe and the United States, that the number of gay establishments, bars and nightclubs, performance venues etc., have been disappearing at an alarming rate. A recent investigation by the Guardian newspaper found that the number of gay venues across London more than halved since 2005 (Booth, 2019), with the closure of a myriad of long-established and venerated gay establishments that have been at the heart of the development of gay space, and the urban gay rights movement. One of the reasons often given for this decline is post-gay gentrification, whereby the central location of these establishments have made them more valuable as residential real estate, or as different kinds of commercial enterprises, particularly where gay zones have become more upwardly mobile and attractive for non-gay specific gentrification (Booth, 2019). In this context, it could be argued that urban gay neighborhoods have been both the perpetrators and victims of gentrification. This and other themes surrounding gentrification will be dealt with in more detail in the following section. For our immediate purposes, however, it is interesting to note that the questionnaire data in table 04 would seem to indicate that Chueca is experiencing similar trends. According to the responses, the number of venues that cater for a strictly gay orientated experience, like bars and other gay specific entertainment, seem to have, if not declined, at best stagnated. The two types of
establishments that were seen to have consistently increased their presence in and around the Chueca area are fashion stores and restaurants. These types of establishments are not what one might describe as gay specific, and this data plays into the trends identified in the earlier section on heterosexualisation.

For a business person trying to maximise their profits, an enterprise that caters for not only the gay community but the wider population as well, particularly in a zone that is attracting an increasing number of non-LGBT visitors, make eminent economic sense. It would seem that something of a vicious or virtuous circle has developed whereby the general population are ever more attracted by the leisure and consumption opportunities of gay zones, thereby increasing demand, which in turn prompts increased development of enterprises that cater to the wider population. While this constitutes a virtuous circle for profit hungry entrepreneurs, as will become evident in the following section, it may have far from virtuous implications for the future of urban gay space.

Therefore, it is clear that the commercialisation of Chueca reflects not only changes in how urban gay space is used, but also who uses it. This has an exclusionary effect in terms of the gay population itself, which plays out in a number of ways. One of these is the fact that as the zone becomes more commodified, it narrows its appeal and accessibility to the LGBT community in terms of affordability and aesthetic attraction. This question of exclusion, and the consequences for the representativeness of Chueca and gay neighbourhoods more generally, will be examined in detail in the final chapters, where the process of gentrification, and the role it has played in exactly these types of utility change, will be explored.
5 Gentrification and urban gay space: theoretical and political perspectives

As outlined in the opening section of the thesis, two interrelated research questions were proposed, regarding the phenomenon of contemporary urban gay space. The first of these was to identify key changes in the how gay space is used, who uses it, and how such changes are perceived by those who live, work and frequent the gay zone of Chueca. Given the inevitable limitations of space, this thesis was confined to an exploration of the most clearly signalled utility changes that the data threw up. Four important changes, the decline of street based activism, demographic change regarding heterosexualisation and class, the growth of institutionalisation, and the overt commercialisation of urban gay space were identified, analysed, and placed within the context of how urban gay space more generally has evolved over the last quarter century. Having identified these changes, through research in the field, the second research question now comes into play, namely an exploration of the role that processes of urban renewal, specifically gentrification, have played in these identified utility changes. The analysis of the relationship between gentrification and urban gay space, and the role of the former in utility changes in the latter, will be divided into two chapters. This first chapter places gentrification in theoretical and political context, and is based on one particularly important premise; that gentrification, as it pertains to urban gay space, cannot be viewed or examined in isolation. Only when gentrification is placed in the wider context of the prevailing philosophy of neo-liberalism, in both economic and political terms, and in the context of the trajectory of the modern gay rights movement, can the relationship between gentrification and urban gay space be fully understood. This chapter will begin by establishing a working definition of gentrification, followed by an analysis of gentrification as a neo-liberal construct. The chapter concludes with an examination the evolution of the modern gay rights movement from radicalism to conservatism, and its relevance to the trajectory of contemporary gentrification processes.

5.1 Towards a definition of gentrification

Gentrification is an expression that has been thrown around with increasing abandon in recent years, often to such an extent that the word has begun to lose its meaning, or is increasingly ascribed to processes that may not actually qualify as such. As Lees, Slater and Wyly point out in their work on inner-city gentrification in various major urban centres, despite the fact that “it is an international phenomenon there is a distinct lack of a comparative approach” which if instigated would help to more clearly “distinguish between gentrification and other distinctly different processes of urban renewal” (Carpenter and Lees, 1995, p.4). This begs the obvious initial question
of how one defines the term gentrification. Webster’s dictionary describes it as “the process of repairing and rebuilding homes and businesses in a deteriorating area, such as an urban neighbourhood, accompanied by an influx of middle-class or affluent people, and which often results in the displacement of earlier, usually poorer residents” (Merriam/webster.com). While this definition is inevitably insufficient to fully explain the nuances and complex causal relationships inherent in the gentrification process, it does elucidate some of the key features of the process, such as physical transformation, displacement, demographic change and rising costs, that are clearly reflected in gay zones across the western world, and go to the heart of the dynamic inherent in the utility changes identified in the Chueca neighbourhood. To further elucidate the dynamic of gentrification and its relationship with gay space, it is also important to distinguish between distinct variations of the process. These include gentrification as general phenomenon, earlier and later iterations of gay gentrification, wholly private sector forms, as well as public/private partnerships.

As is evidenced from some of the opinions voiced during the research work conducted in Chueca, gentrification processes in general are the subject of intense criticism on several grounds, closely related to the key features alluded to in Webster’s definition. Anti-gentrification activists argue that such development leads to a form of social cleansing, as lower income, often minorities and immigrant residents, are pushed out by rising costs to make way for the more affluent middle classes. Its defenders, on the other hand, point to spectacular improvements in the quality of housing and ancillary services, and the often strong economic performance of zones where such processes take place. In addition, its promoters would claim that, far from being some neo-liberal conspiracy, it is part of the inevitable ebb and flow of the wider process of urban evolution more generally. This circular debate returns us neatly to the question of the precise forms that gentrification may take. In the eyes of its critics, gentrification in its purest market driven form, is often seen as more corrosive than publicly mandated urban renewal projects, given its more arbitrary and less regulated nature. According to Andrew Leong, for example, particularly rampant forms of gentrification do not just have profoundly negative economic and social effects on more marginalised demographics, but also have serious cultural consequences for distinct communities. Author of a report on changes to America’s Chinatowns rendered by gentrification, Leong considers its effect on these ethnic neighbourhoods to be quite disturbing. In his view, such districts are being turned into sanitised ethnic playgrounds for the rich to satisfy their exotic appetite for dim sum and fortune cookies (Leoung, 2014), losing their ethnic authenticity and geographical integrity in the process. Leong suggests that if this process continues apace it could,
in the long term, lead to the fragmentation and eventual disappearance of even the longest established China town neighbourhoods. Similar fears regarding the effect of such processes on urban gay space have also been increasingly voiced, and among the aims of these final chapters is to assess the extent to which such fears may be justified.

5.2 Gentrification as a neo-liberal construct

As stated in the introduction to this chapter, the task of examining the role of gentrification in terms of its contribution to some of the utility changes in urban gay space identified through an analysis of the research data is best accomplished by approaching gentrification, not in isolation, but as a component of the larger reality of neo-liberal hegemony over the past three or four decades. In doing so, it is important to make a distinction between what I would describe as pure neo-liberal inspired forms of gentrification, public/private initiatives, and more spontaneous, non-profit forms that were more characteristic of the early days of urban renewal efforts in gay neighbourhoods. As will be detailed shortly, urban gay space has been subject to all forms in different periods of its development, a fact that is key to understanding the neo-liberal context of gentrification’s relationship with utility change.

The rise of the neo-liberal order and its consequences have been the subject of intense debate and academic study in recent decades, the details of which should not unduly detain us here. However, a brief exploration of the theme, particularly in the context of Spain’s post-dictatorship political development, is instructive in so far as the experience of Chueca may be extrapolated to reveal wider truths about urban gay space more generally. In the dominant western economies of the time, the late 1970s represented a major break with the post-war Keynesian political consensus of the welfare state, and relatively progressive taxation. The rise of neo-liberal philosophy, and its belief in the supremacy of the market in all areas of political, economic and indeed social life, spearheaded by Reagan and Thatcher, quickly came to dominate most of western capitalist thinking, shattering the post-war consensus about how economies and societies should be run (Jenkins, 2007). It led to a slashing of corporate taxes, and in turn public sector budgets to pay for it, allied to massive political, financial and environmental deregulation. The economic meltdown of 2008 and the intensifying climate emergency are among its most profound legacies. In Spain, however, the trajectory of neo-liberal hegemony was somewhat delayed, the country having just emerged from a dictatorship which had lasted almost 40 years. In the 1980s, as the new democratic system bedded in, politics and policy unsurprisingly turned leftward in terms of attitudes to rights for minorities, women, and labour. The Spanish socialist party emerged the
strong victor from the first democratic elections in 1982, and remained in power for almost 15 years until the late 1990s (Elpidio, 2017). Though increasingly corrupt and venal, they succeeded in transforming the country into a nascent modern social democracy, increasingly connected through membership of the European Union to the global capitalist system. After 15 years of social democracy, the centre of political gravity shifted to the right in the form of the Popular Party, essentially the remnants of the Franco regime who had regrouped in the intervening years. They quickly adopted the type of liberal economic philosophy already well established in neighbouring countries in Europe and in the US. Simply put, the 1980s came to Spain in the late 1990s. Though the tidal wave of neo-liberalism that swept the west in the 1980s was somewhat delayed in Spain, its effect on, and relationship with, processes of gentrification were largely replicated.

Though gentrification as a distinct and identifiable urban phenomenon has its roots in the early 1970s, the liberal economic revolution of the early 1980s provided the perfect conditions in which gentrification in its purest, most rampant form could thrive on a grand scale. That is to say, urban renewal that occurred almost wholly in the private sphere but which benefited greatly from neo-liberal government policy. One of the key features of neo-liberalism which penetrated all spheres of social, political and economic life is deregulation, infamously described by a major proponent as “letting the market rip” (Jenkins, 2007, p56), by unleashing the potential of entrepreneurialism without the pesky interference of the state. As regards gentrification, the renovation and upscaling of whole neighbourhoods with private money was greatly facilitated by massive deregulation of the housing and mortgage market, and the relaxation of planning laws and environmental standards, which have been the hallmarks of the neo-liberal era. Though few would argue that many of the major urban centres across the Western hemisphere were not badly in need of renovation and renewal, it was more a question of the manner in which it was achieved.

In this context, three distinct types of urban renewal can be identified. In addition to the aforementioned pure forms of gentrification facilitated by neo-liberal policies, there exists, in contrast, more overtly state controlled forms of urban renewal where factors such as affordability, environmental concerns and the social diversity of occupants shaped the nature of such projects. In short, what is traditionally referred to as social housing. In between these two urban renewal processes existed of a hybrid form of urban renewal, with the private sector in partnership with the state. These types of initiatives became increasingly common under the new paradigm, as the private sector eyed up lucrative public sector contracts in an era of unprecedented outsourcing. From government’s perspective, it was an opportunity to take the cost of expensive infrastructure projects off balance sheet (Monbiot, 2008). These so-called PPP (public private partnership) and
PFI (private finance initiative) contracts held increasing sway across all areas of public sector construction and procurement, from hospitals to schools to public transport infrastructure. This was no less true in the housing sector, as the building of social housing by local councils went hugely out of fashion (Jenkins, 2007). Whether it was wholly private construction or outsourced by the state, the notion that the private sector always did it better, and all the more so if unrestrained by bothersome regulation, firmly took hold in political and managerial circles. In this environment, gentrification, initially by private individuals but later increasingly by large private companies, became the poster boy for neo-liberal urban renewal (Monbiot, 2008). Concerns about social cohesion, diversity of communities and the avoidance of ghettoisation were discarded. Many major privately funded gentrification projects were very poorly regulated in terms of the social make-up of the units, and environmental impact, the raison d'être being to maximise profit, often at the expense of social cohesion. It was to be the market that ultimately determined who lived where, with the inevitable segregation of rich and poor.

As regards specifically gay gentrification, in the early days, regeneration of run down areas retained the spirit of spontaneous small-scale improvements, with the aim of creating a safe haven and a community of solidarity. However, as gay zones became more socially desirable and potentially lucrative, they succumbed to the same neo-liberal pressures as other areas. In recent decades, renewal of gay neighbourhoods has become increasingly dominated by the property development industry and follows the familiar pattern of displacement, homogenisation, and soaring purchase and rental prices. Our case study example of Chueca is certainly no exception in this respect. In the course of 25 years, property prices in the zone have gone from among the cheapest in the city to among the most expensive (Elpidio, 2017), some of the consequences of which will be elucidated in due course. The following and final section of this chapter will focus on the curious trajectory of the modern gay rights movement, and its contribution towards a contextual understanding of the relationship between gentrification and utility change, particularly regarding commercialisation and commodification.

5.3 Gentrification and the modern gay rights movement

This year the LGBT community celebrates 50 years of the modern gay rights movement. It is commonly accepted that the momentous events of the summer of 1969 in New York marked the beginning of the modern day struggle. After years of police harassment and extortion, the patrons of the city’s best known gay bar, the Stonewall Inn, finally fought back. In response to a particularly brutal raid carried out on a sweltering night in August, several days of rioting ensued, led by a
ragtag band of transvestites, transsexuals and drag queens (Stinson, 1998). In as much as one single event can ever possibly do, it sparked an explosion of unapologetic and militant rights activism across the country and the western world. Such is the symbolic power of Stonewall in the collective gay imagination, that it is easy to forget that gay activism existed long before this event, with pioneers emerging in Europe as far back as the 1860s. As outlined in chapter one, clearly defined urban gay space also pre-dates the Stonewall era. In cities like Berlin, Madrid and New York itself, there existed radical, gay, anti-establishmentarianism in the 1920s and early 1930s, expressed through alternative lifestyles that were truly bohemian, particularly for the time. So while the events of 1969 in New York may have ostensibly inspired the advent of an unprecedented, co-ordinated and organised rights movement, the nature of this movement, its essence, it's innate radicalism and separatist nature, gained inspiration from historical events that far predated the late 1960s.

Drawing on the radical gay imaginaries of the 1920s, from Dietrich`s Berlin Burlesque and the London dandies, to the drag queen balls of Harlem, the gay rights movement of the 1970s became a social, sexual, cultural and political movement which emphasized the desire not to fit in, but to flaunt and celebrate one’s difference unapologetically. This was a radical change from the gay activism of the immediate post-war era, typified in the US in the 1950s by the activities of the Machettine Society. Their approach was characterized by subordination and meekness, and by a belief that the best that could be achieved was to be quietly left alone. The price for such modest gains was discretion and subservience (Stinson, 1998). The gay rights movement that emerged in the 1970s considered this strategy to be little better than appeasement. Pleading for grudging tolerance was replaced by a demand for rights. However, it was also placed firmly in the anti-establishment context of holistic societal change, one which rejected the fundamental institutions upon which traditional society was based, such as marriage, for example, which was considered oppressively patriarchal. The rights movement of the 1970s and 1980s was about setting the human rights of gay people in the wider context of an alternative vision of society, that might not be shared by the majority of people, but which demanded respect (Smith, 2003).

Above all it was, to paraphrase Virginia Woolf, about finding out a place of one's own, where one could securely and safely be oneself. In this sense, the very notion of integration into an oppressive heterarchy was seen as a betrayal, and rejected in favour of the creation of solidarity and separate equality. While there is a certain unavoidable contradiction in this trajectory, as progress towards equality before the law would inevitably lead to increased integration, it was not the stated aim of the early, radical, rights movement. Fast forward to 2019 and the priorities of the mainstream gay
rights movement could hardly be more distinct. In his provocative 2015 work, *Gay normality and queer anti-capitalism*, author and political activist, Peter Drucker, asks a pivotal question in this regard. “How did a movement born out of a riot came to focus on something as inherently conservative as marriage rights?” (Drucker, 2015, p.19). After all, the very concept of marriage had long been derided as a prime instrument of heteronormative oppression. Since its inception in the early 1970s, the modern gay rights movement and the LGBT community more generally has been closely associated with radical leftist politics, no great surprise given to the overt and long standing hostility towards gay rights, and so called “alternative lifestyles”, from those on the right. This tendency certainly still exists today, and repeated surveys show that the voting intentions of LGBT community continue to lean left (Drucker, 2015).

However, this tendency is far from as clear-cut as it once was. There are a number of important reasons for this evolution, that are connected to both gentrification, and neo-liberalism more generally. Though the crash of 2008 and its aftermath has created undeniable flux in the system, the centre of political gravity has moved unquestionably to the right in recent decades with the breakdown of the post-war consensus, and the morphing of socialist parties all over Europe into so called social democratic parties, through almost wholesale acceptance of market economics. One of the great triumphs of neo-liberalism has been to convince even supposedly left-wing administrations that there is little alternative to the free market, and many of them resigned themselves to making progress on social issues, with some window dressing around the market to gently curb its’ worst excesses (Belinski, 2011). On the other side of the equation, the introduction and promotion of wedge issues such as gay rights to energise conservatives, used to such telling effect by political strategist Karl Rove in the election of infamous dullard George W. Bush, began to lose their potency. In the US, for example, support for gay marriage has risen meteorically in the last decade to the point where harnessing opposition to it as a right-wing political tool is increasingly ineffective, beyond the most Christian fundamentalist base of the Republican party (Hartman, 2015). This is particularly true among the younger generation of right wingers for whom the traditional obsession with god, guns and gays is increasingly passé. The British experience is another instructive example in this regard. It was the conservative party of Margaret Thatcher, architects of the infamous section 28, banning the “promotion” of homosexuality in schools back in 1989, that introduced and passed equal marriage legislation in 2016. The then conservative leader and prime minister David Cameron famously remarked at the 2015 party conference that he supported gay marriage not despite being a conservative but precisely because he was a conservative (Healy, 2017).
While for Cameron the introduction of equal marriage legislation was largely born of political expediency, part of a larger project to modernise and detoxify his party, the increasing social liberalism of the right-wing politics, particularly in Western Europe, also speaks to some wider truths about the co-option of the LGBT community into the mainstream. By inoculating them against dangerous leftist radicalism though the granting of access rights such as marriage, they could be successfully neutered, becoming docile and conformist members of consumer society. This increasing divergence of economic conservatism from social conservativism, that more recent iterations of neo-liberalism represent, has also given a growing section of the LGBT community permission, as it were, to embrace more conservative politics. It has led to an increasingly visible movement of conservative homosexuality, which far from wanting to tear down the system, simply wants equality within it. It has rather eyrie, but ultimately logical, parallels with the objectives of the Machettine society in its concentration on making sexuality a non-issue, by rejecting the more radical gay rights perspective that prizes difference and resists notions of assimilation into heteronormative traditions such as marriage. This emerging trend is typified by the likes of Andrew Sullivan, a prominent moderate gay republican, and a ubiquitous presence on the US liberal chat show circuit. His best-selling tome, *Virtually Normal*, epitomises, as the title suggests, this new gay conservative mentality of integration into the existing order rather than the creation of a new one. (Sullivan, 2008). Another potent example of this conservative turn is embodied in second recent rights controversy, the issue of gays in the military. In the early 2000s, the repeal of the “don’t ask don’t tell” fudge confected by the Clinton administration, in favour of being able to openly serve, became a major goal of the US gay rights movement, and was eventually achieved under the Obama administration (Hartman, 2015).

During the course of my qualitative research in Chueca, I endeavoured to interview as wide a variety of people as possible, ranging from the relatively apolitical to passionate activists. A good example of the latter is Inagi Montero, one of the organisers of the annual Orgullo Critico (Critical Pride), an alternative anti-capitalist pride march in Madrid. For Inagi, the disproportionate focus on these aforementioned conservative rights is a worrying sign of how co-opted by the establishment a section of the mainstream gay rights movement has become. “Back in the day, the gay rights movement would have stood shoulder to shoulder in solidarity with victims of the military/industrial complex, recognising them as more oppressed than the LGBT community”. In his view, the focus of a certain section of the gay rights movement on issues such as marriage and military service represents a grotesque distortion of the spirit of civil rights, whereby instead of rejecting and mobilising against oppressive patriarchal institutions and military aggression, “some
of us (LGBT) are actually just angling to get in on the act”. In other words, there is a substantial strand of the rights movement who embrace the materialism and conservativism of neo-liberalism, and the increasingly lucrative sponsorship of its corporate masters, accepting all the inevitable inequality that implies, on the clear understanding that the gay elite will be on the inside looking out, rather than vice versa (Blumenfeld, 2015).

It is this trade off which connects the trajectory of a substantial strand of the modern gay rights movement with the rise of more socially liberal iteration of neo-liberalism, and which will be explored in more detail in subsequent sections. The thread linking the trajectory of the modern gay rights movement directly to processes of gentrification is, in my view, equally strong but may be less immediately obvious. To make clear this complex interconnection, it is instructive to distinguish between various phases of gay gentrification, and the varied forms it has taken. Back in the early days of gay gentrification, the process was the physical manifestation of the creation of an urban gay cultural identity, and the adaptation of the physical environment to provide a distinct urban space in which this identity could develop and thrive. As commandeered urban space was not originally created for the convenience of an ostracised sexual minority, it needed modification. In this sense, gentrification was more about marking a separate but equal territory, in response to the hostile heteronormativity of wider society, than an exercise in real estate investment and property speculation. However, in later years, with the decline in separateness and the rise of integration, epitomised by the increasingly conservative aims of the mainstream gay rights movement, the process of gentrification, once a practical expression of resistance has taken on a much less noble hue. In the age of neo-liberal gentrification, gay zones increasingly reflect the inequities of wider society. The end result is the ironic situation whereby, at the same time the struggle for full equality for the LGBT community in wider society continues apace, processes of market driven gentrification work to increase inequality within the gay community itself, and within urban gay space more generally. Gentrification projects such as the San Anton market, which I visited as part of my tour of Chueca (see p.28), have been supported and driven by the increasingly materialistic mainstream rights movement which, in true neo-liberal tradition, regards increasing inequality and the exclusion of poorer sections of the LGBT collective that such gentrified development engenders, as an acceptable price to pay for the material riches it may bestow on the zone as a whole (Elpidio, 2017).

In the final sections of this work, we shall see just how these processes of inequality play out, as the role of neo-liberal inspired gentrification in the specific utility changes that have taken place in the Chueca, is explored. This will encompass such issues as the decline of street based activism, demographic change, homogenisation, the corporatisation and privatisation of public gay space, class based exclusion, and the deficit of representativeness.
6 Gentrification and utility change in urban gay neighbourhoods

The previous chapter of this work was concerned with developing a greater understanding of the contemporary context of gentrification. Of primary importance was to cultivate an appreciation of the fact that gentrification can never be fully understood in isolation, and is intimately connected with wider political and economic processes such as neo-liberalism, as well as with wider issues regarding the LGBT community, and the trajectory of the gay rights movement. Before proceeding to examine the role of gentrification in the specific utility changes identified earlier, it is first necessary to understand the nature of the relationship between processes of gentrification and the historical development of urban gay neighbourhoods across many of the largest urban centres within western society, and to establish the existence of not just a co-incidental but a symbiotic, if not causal, relationship between the two. Having established such parameters, it will then be possible to proceed to the final task of examining the role which gentrification has played in some of the major utility changes identified through the ethnographic research conducted in the Chueca district, with reference to both data from the survey, focus groups and interviews, and a variety of relevant academic sources.

Though the dynamics of gentrification in relation to the various examples of utility change, such as the decline of street based activism, demographic change and commercialisation, are deeply intertwined and overlapping, for the sake of narrative clarity and academic coherence, this analysis will be divided into three separate but highly interrelated sub-chapters. This first will focus on the effects of neo-liberal inspired, corporatised gentrification on the decline of street based activism, encompassing issues such as the utilisation of urban space, and the co-option of the premier activist event, Madrid Pride, by the prime corporate drivers of gentrification. The second section will explore the relationship between gentrification and the overt commodification and commercialisation of Chueca, particularly in the context of neo-liberalism and the privatisation of public gay space. The final sub-chapter will examine, in turn, the effects of the symbiotic relationship between commercialisation and gentrification on the demographic make-up of Chueca, addressing such issues as the homogenisation of urban gay space through class and race based exclusion, the sanitisation of gay identity, and the deficit of representativeness.

6.1 Gentrification and the development of gay space: a causal or coincidental relationship?

Having established a working definition of gentrification, made some basic distinctions regarding different forms of gentrification and urban renewal more generally, and placed them in political context vis-a-vi neo-liberalism and the gay rights movement, this work will now proceed to an
examination of the historical relationship between gentrification and the development of urban gay neighbourhoods. This analysis of said relationship will focus on a key question. Does the historical intersection of gentrification and urban gay space represent a merely coincidental relationship, or one that enters the realm of symbiotic or even causal? There has long been a conventional assumption that when the LGBT community reaches a critical mass in a certain area, significant gentrification of the built environment occurs. However, it is one thing to establish that areas with high concentrations of gay residents also experience gentrification, it is entirely another to establish that an actual causal relationship exists. This is often one of the most contentious aspects of social science research, whereby two phenomena co-exist and seemingly align, and the application of supposed common sense (often the enemy of evidence-based research) suggests a causal link that may not necessarily exist. Other neglected factors may account, in part or wholly, for processes designated to be principally the result of the phenomenon under investigation. For example, research done on the benefits of marriage to the educational outcomes of children may conclude that because the children of married couples enjoy higher academic attainment levels than children of co-habiting couples, or of couples with other non-traditional living arrangements, there must be a causal link between traditional marriage and better educational outcomes. However, it is commonly accepted that the biggest factor in low educational attainment is poverty, including poor study conditions and an inadequate diet. Therefore, the fact that lower income couples are less likely to be legally married is a likelier explanation of the correlation between high educational attainment and marital status than the benefits of marriage per se. In other words, a coincidental relationship does necessarily indicate a causal one (Allen, 2015). With this caveat in mind, we will proceed to examine this relationship with recourse to extensive literature on the subject.

As was documented in the preliminary chapters of this work, gay communities took inspiration from the civil rights movements of the 1960s, and in the aftermath of the stonewall riots, the movement began to come into its own in the early 1970s, with the creation of pressure groups to fight for a whole raft of rights and protections. It also prompted the beginning of the struggle for safe gay space, increasingly considered an essential component of a broad based movement for radical change. As Harry Bridge, a political leader of the San Francisco gay community at a time when the city was at the vanguard of the early gay rights struggle, remarked, “when gays are spatially scattered they are not gay because they are invisible” (Castells, 1985, p.305). This urban gay strategy coincided with an era in which there was a growing awareness of the need for urban renewal of run-down and battered inner cities. This historical coincidence prompted a raft of
academic studies, aimed at exploring the link between the development of urban gay space and gentrification, as well as publications exploring urban movements and their social impact.

Perhaps the most renowned of these works is *The City and the Grassroots*, by Manuel Castells. It is a ground-breaking work that “focuses on urban oriented mobilizations that influence social structural change and transform urban meaning” (Castells, 1985, p.306). An important example of this is the urban gay rights movement, whereby the spatial concentration of gays allowed the gay liberation movement in San Francisco and elsewhere to gain vital momentum. According to Castells, this spatial concentration was instrumental to the gentrification of certain San Francisco neighbourhoods. As Lees, Statler and Wyly explain in *Gentrification*, San Francisco was major port city in World War Two, and in the aftermath of the conflict, many gay military service men from more rural backgrounds, having tasted a certain sexual freedom amid the tumult and anonymity of war time, were unable or unwilling to return to small town or rural life (Lees, Statler and Wyly, 2008). Slowly but surely, a largely clandestine network of bars and informal meeting places for urban gay males emerged on the fringes of San Francisco city life. The late 1950s also saw the emergence of the beatnik generation, encompassing the radical writings of the likes of Kerouac and sexual libertarian Alan Ginsberg (Hobsbawn, 1996). It was a movement that contributed to a climate of increasing tolerance for homosexuality in the city, certainly relative to other parts of the country that remained far more conservative. In a process that clearly echoed the experiences of the Village in New York in the 1920s, its “reputation as a sympathetic milieu” (Lees, Statler and Wyly, 2008, p.104) for those who chose non-conformity, and its increasing exposure in the national media as a centre of deviance, prompted a wave of migration to San Francisco on the part of isolated gays all over the country. It is a classic example of the gravitational pull from rural to urban outlined earlier in this work.

A decade later, in the aftermath of the stonewall riots, and with increasing national and international attention being garnered for the plight of the LGBT community, Harry Bridges´ maxim about the indispensability of visibility to the gay rights movement seemed ever more prescient. The community and political leaders of the time realised that, as Castells puts it, “between liberation and politics it first had to establish a community, in a series of spatial settings, and through a network of economic, social and cultural institutions” (Castells, 1985, p.356). The gay influx to the city was centred on the rundown and neglected district of the Castro, immortalised in the cinematic opus “Milk”, which recounted the life of Americas first, modern day, gay, political icon, Harvey Milk. From the mid-1970s onwards, the Castro gay ghetto, as it was called, expanded rapidly into dense gay network of bars, health clubs, stores and businesses which developed on the
basis of a growing LGBT population (Castells, 1985). This, according to Castells, was one of the key triggers for a gentrification that helped San Francisco to preserve its historical heritage of beautiful Victorian buildings.

Following on from the work of Castells, several other academic studies focusing on US urban centres also reach broadly similar conclusions regarding the role of mostly gay men and the gentrification of particular areas. Another urban area that emerged as one of the best known gay neighbourhoods in the US is the South Beach district of Miami. It is home to one of the biggest gay pride marches in the world and is a byword for gay tourism. In his extensive study of urban renewal in the 1990s, Dunlop found that real estate investment and housing purchases by the influx of gay men in the early 1990s contributed significantly to the renovation of the area (Dunlop, 1995). A later, more generalized, study of the vagaries of regional property markets, and the diverse factors that contribute to rising property prices in one area while simultaneously falling in another, was conducted by Florida and Melander. In *There goes the metro: how and why bohemians, artists and gays affect regional housing values*, the authors found a strong correlation between critical masses of gays and some of the key factors associated with gentrification, including definitive rises in housing prices beyond inflation, and in notable contrast to surrounding districts (Florida and Melander, 2010). With the benefit of hindsight, more recent extensive research by Doan and Higgins retrospectively confirmed the broad general findings that Castells saw emerging in San Francisco as far back as the early 1980s, with regard to the influence of the gay population in the Castro district (Doan and Higgins, 2011). As part of the same study, Doan and Higgins also examined developments in Atlanta, Georgia and recorded a “decay to renewal” narrative familiar to many urban gay enclaves in their infancy. One of the urban narratives that resonates particularly strongly with the lived experience of residents of the Chueca district in the 1980s and 1990s is that of the Midtown district of the city. Up to the mid-nineties, the area was home to a large and isolated hippy population. It was also the epi-centre of drug culture in the city, and there were striking similarities with the Chueca district in terms of the preponderance of prostitution and petty crime, and in the dilapidated nature of the built environment. Over the course of a decade and a half, it was renovated and gentrified mostly by gay men, attracted into the area, as in so many other urban districts, by the investment opportunities available in cheap housing stock, and where the growing LGBT demographic provided a market for niche, gay oriented businesses (Doan and Higgins, 2011).

Apart from the myriad of studies on the subject, albeit largely focused on major urban centres of the US, there are several other interrelated factors that seem to point firmly towards a causal
relationship between a critical mass of gays in a particular area, and the process of gentrification that subsequently takes place there. As previously discussed, urban gay zones were inextricably bound up in overt political activism in a way that more inter-generational ethnic minority neighbourhoods were not. The whole raison detre of creating Castells´ aforementioned “series of spatial settings” was to create a base from which gay identity could be strengthened and gay visibility raised, thus generating the political and social clout required to push their equality agenda. Therefore, the whole point of creating concentrations of gays in urban districts was to radically change them, culturally but also physically. As such zones were not originally designed with the practical or aesthetic needs of the LGBT community in mind, gentrification of some kind in these urban gay enclaves was almost inevitable.

Another important factor was the practical matter of resources. While studies have shown that members of the LGBT community earn, on average, less than their straight counterparts (Anteby, Knight and Tilcsik, 2015), there are differential subsets within that overall trend, one of them being, unsurprisingly, urban, middle class, gay, professional, white men, who often earn the same if not more than their straight counterparts, and more than most women across all sectors of the economy. In addition, while the prevalence of gays and lesbians having offspring through a variety of means has increased exponentially in recent years, it has begun from a very low base, and childlessness remains the norm for the vast majority of the LGBT community. This was even more the case in the earlier days of gay gentrification in the late 1970s and early 1980s. As Lauria and Knopp pointed out, in their work on the role of gay communities in urban renaissance, this bestowed considerable economic advantage on so called TINKS (two incomes, no kids), and so having “fewer dependents than straight men means that many gay men are in an excellent position to become gentrifiers” (Lauria and Knopp, 1985, p.61). A significant aspect of the so called “pink pound” phenomenon that has emerged in recent years, is the realisation on both the part of the LGBT community and commercial interests, of the increasing economic purchasing power that the LGBT community potentially possesses. From the point of view of businesses, particularly in the area of adult consumer goods and the service industry, the LGBT community represents an important niche market with much higher levels of disposable income at their disposal. Money not dedicated to raising children, in terms of education, health care, etc., is money potentially spent on extra adult consumption. For their part, the LGBT community, and LGBT organisations and activist groups more specifically, have begun to understand the how economic and consumer power can translate into political and social leverage (Madden, 2015). In recent years there have been many instances of gay rights activists leveraging their influence with corporations to fight anti-gay
legislation, most recently in Indiana when the republican led congress were forced to backtrack on legislation that would allow businesses to discriminate against same-sex couples. However, in the early years of urban gay space when discrimination was still rife, and the LGBT community was not yet an attractive market for the corporate sector, these economic advantages translated, for middle-class gay males at least, into the ability to discreetly buy property and still have resources to renovate it.

On this very subject of renovation, Lees and Statler and Wyly also suggest another, more controversial, potential advantage that gay males may have enjoyed regarding the ability to gentrify. This relates to the particular skills often associated the LGBT community, and gay men in particular, and how they might represent an important factor in establishing a causal relationship between gentrification and gay residency (Lee, Statler and Wyly, 2008). The assumption that specific professions are particularly associated with gays and lesbians, or in which gays and lesbians may be assumed to be over-represented, is a controversial subject, particularly in recent years with the activist drive to eradicate potentially damaging stereotypes regarding the LGBT community. Many gay rights activists and organisations are understandably very wary of the notion of pigeonholing gays in particular professions, such as the fashion industry, hairdressing and interior design. There is good reason for this, as heteronormative popular culture has long employed lazy tropes in this regard. It has been a staple of generic Hollywood movies to assign the subordinate “helper” role of hairdresser, interior designer, personal assistant, or best friend, to gay characters, creating, in many cases, offensive and exaggerated stereotypes of the effeminate young man, in awe of the heteronormative hero. Therefore, it is with a certain trepidation that one might seek to present any variant of this notion as a potential driver of the relationship between gentrification and the development of urban gay space. However, gay stereotypes, like so many others, often contain an element of truth that has become dangerously exaggerated, distorted and misrepresented. In recent years, some serious academic studies have tried to explore potentially gay oriented areas of employment, and to place them in credible academic context by explaining the social and cultural roots such tendencies may have. In a fascinating and ground-breaking recent work for Administrative Science Quarterly, Concealable stigma and occupational segregation: toward a theory of gay and lesbian occupations (Anteby, Knight and Tilcsik, 2015), the authors examined the prevalence of gays and lesbians in certain occupation sets against the percentage of gays and lesbians in wider society. They found credible evidence to suggest that gays are over-represented in particular occupations, and find that, in some cases, such trends have roots in discrimination. It is not a great surprise that while, contrary to simplistic stereotypes, 90%
of male hairdressers or ballet dancers are not actually gay, they are certainly over-represented in these professions. This study also found that gay men are over-represented in two particular areas of interest regarding gentrification, interior design and urban planning. Therefore, the contention of Lee, Statler and Wyly that the professional skills and interests of urban middle-class gay males, along with the imperatives of urban clustering and the availability of resources, was a meaningful factor in the correlation between gentrification and urban gay space, is one that can be empirically defended.

In conclusion, the wealth of academic evidence, the most prominent examples of which have been cited in this discussion, as well as the other documented factors, clearly point to a particularly close relationship between gay space and gentrification. Taken in conjunction with the unreconstructed nature of the original neighbourhoods, and the inherent imperative to transform these spaces to recreate them in the image of the dominant community, it is reasonable to conclude that a causal or at the very least a symbiotic relationship has existed between the development and evolution of urban gay neighbourhoods and gentrification. The final question that needs to be addressed is the extent to which this dynamic extends to the specific contemporary utility changes identified earlier. In other words, the extent to which processes of gentrification have played a role, not just in the general development of urban gay space, but in prompting their ongoing evolution and mutation as well.

6.2 The decline of street based activism

One of the first major utility changes identified through analysis of the research data was the massive decline of street-level activism. The data indicated that a statistically insignificant number of respondents to the survey agreed that Chueca was a place of such activity. In fact, street activism scored even lower than homophobia when respondents was asked to describe the zone. This revelation was somewhat surprising and prompted me to delve further into the issue in the subsequent interviews and group discussions. In doing so, a familiar pattern emerged whereby respondents confirmed the absence of street level activism, but qualified their assertion with reference to one obvious exception, “El Orgullo”, the annual gay pride march that takes place every Summer in Chueca. The Orgullo of 2019, which I attended as part of my ongoing research for this thesis, was one of the most politically charged editions of the event for many years, with participants anxious to reiterate that gay pride was not merely a celebration but also a statement of both activism, and the ongoing pursuit of rights and equality. This was mainly a reaction to the emergence of a new political party, the overtly homophobic and neo-fascist Vox, who have made
the derogation of recently enacted LGBT legislation around education and trans rights one of their key priorities. Though they gained insufficient levels of support to achieve these aims, the entry into parliament of the first ultra-right wing deputies since the virulently homophobic Franco era, has caused much disquiet in LGBT circles.

This renewed emphasis on the activist aspect of Orgullo has also prompted increased soul searching about the nature and tenor of the pride celebrations in recent years, and what Daniel Harris, in *The rise and fall of gay culture*, has described as the commercialisation of gay culture (Harris, 1999), not only in terms of the evolution of gay pride event, which will be discussed in more detail shortly, but also in the development and evolution of the Chueca zone more generally. While the role of gentrification in this commercialisation process is one of the more self-evident dynamics at play in the zone, the details of which will be explored in a subsequent sub-chapter, the neo-liberal intersection of gentrification and commercialisation has also had a profound effect on levels of street activism in the zone. It was noted in the research analysis that, with the ongoing success of the gay rights movement, activism had moved from the streets to the legislature, the courts and the education system. While this is undoubtedly true, a complex phenomenon is rarely the result of a single factor, and the decline in street-based activism can also be attributed to neo-liberal inspired gentrification, and one of the most distinctive hallmarks of that economic philosophy, the privatisation of public space. The neo-liberal era has witnessed the exponential rise of the gated community, and the increasing corporate control of heretofore publically owned land and amenities (Peterson, 2006). In the specific context of this work, it refers to the commandeering, for commercial purposes, of heretofore urban, gay, public space, that was previously dedicated to gay cultural expression, in the form of street theatre, dramatised protest and mobilisation, or more prosaically, simply as a place to be oneself with others. Chueca square, the symbolic heart of the gay district in Madrid, is one such example. In its earlier days, the square was simple, open space with park style benches and modest steps which became a natural meeting place to sit and chat, to take in the afternoon sun or read a book, and where the growing LGBT population co-existed with older residents.

There were, of course, business establishments, including a gay book store and some modest cafes and bars, with a few simple terrace tables that did not particularly encroach on the public space of the square. However, when the process of gentrification became turbo charged in the mid 2000s, the public benches and steps were removed, largely to facilitate increasing commercial activity. From a simple exercise in participant observation, such as the one I undertook around the zone, is it clear that in 2019, about 75% of what once was public “gay” space has been
commandeered by private commercial interests in the form of terraced restaurant/bar seating. Where once, institutional and municipal homophobia easily trumped commercial interests, with the advent of an increasingly liberal society, both socially and economically, the pendulum has swung firmly the other way. To illustrate just how much the dynamics of the tripartite struggle over public space between the authorities, business owners and ordinary users has changed over time, it is instructive to briefly relate an incident that took place in the square in July of 1998. On the instructions of the right-wing run municipality of the time, police were dispatched the square to remove 20 terrace tables, citing some obscure by-law about excessive urban furniture. Far from an attempt to defend public space, it was widely seen as an act of homophobic repression on the part of city hall, especially given the fact that no other similarly errant plazas in the city centre were targeted. The incident sparked a brief and noisy “defend our neighbourhood, defend our terraces, defend yourself” campaign in the neighbourhood (Elpidio, 2017). This is a far cry from contemporary reality whereby commercial and municipal interests have effectively joined forces in promoting aggressive gentrification, both anxious to capitalise on its lucrative potential. As urban public space is finite, any struggle over it represents a zero sum game in which there are inevitably losers, and in this case the losers are a certain section of the LGBT community. Not the privileged middle-class cohort of the community, who can afford expensive cocktails in a shaded terrace setting, but those who value diverse, and mostly unprofitable, expressions of gay culture and activism.

Chueca square is just the most stellar example of a commercial gentrification trend that has extended to many areas in the gay district, which severely restricts the public space available to non-commercial events, and has played an important role in the demise of street-based activist expression. In fact, all the major plazas of the zone have now been over-run by high-end restaurants and cocktail bars. The result is that non-profit activity has been increasingly squeezed out of heretofore gay public space which, as will be detailed in the following section, is increasingly geared to professional middle-class gays and heterosexual couples in pursuit of commercialised leisure. According to the aforementioned activist, Inagi, it is not just the practical lack of space but also the growing power of commercial interests that have curtailed street activism, by lobbying to influence how public space is utilised.

“If your proposed act of activism is not connected to one week in the summer (gay pride), it is increasingly difficult to get a permit for any more than a dozen people. The leisure industry in Chueca tends to assume that activism that takes place outside of this period is going to be small scale and not very profitable, and so not worth the disruption”.
In this context, Inagi cites the retail sector as the worst objector, particularly fashion stores and gift shops, who complain that demonstrations outside of pride week restrict access to their businesses. In his critique, Inagi makes repeated mention of the official pride week in Madrid, and it is worth exploring in more detail this specific event, as it is another instructive example of how the intersection of gentrification and neo-liberal commercial culture serves to exacerbate the decline of street based activism.

The early years of Madrid Pride would be unrecognisable to a young participant in 2019. When first enacted in the mid-1980s, it consisted of little more than a few hundred brave souls with placards and a passion for justice, in an era long before gays rights had become the fashionable cause celebre it is today (Smith, 2003). The event expanded steadily, and by 1997 the now very familiar participation of colourful floats, each representing different strands of civil society, had begun to emerge as the rights movement gained unstoppable momentum. In 2005, Madrid Pride was designated as the city of Euro pride for that year, and in 2015, Madrid hosted the World Pride celebrations in recognition of its reputation as one of the gay friendliest cities on the planet, and the establishment of Chueca as one of the world’s premier gay neighbourhoods (Smith, 2003). However, the pride event of recent years appears to have been increasingly co-opted by the corporate interests that have come to dominate the commercial life of the zone. Over the last 10 to 15 years, smaller independently run businesses have been steadily replaced by chain stores and malls as part of the aggressive gentrification model pursued by private sector interests in cahoots with municipal authorities. It is these branded corporate interests, the drivers of gentrification, and their significant financial clout, that have come to dominate the pride proceedings and, as we shall see in the following chapter, the Chueca district more generally.

As previously mentioned, gay rights activism has long been closely connected to leftist party politics, and as part of my qualitative research I was anxious to include at least one interview with a subject that embodied this relationship. Puri Gallego, is a gay activist, a resident of Chueca, and an active member of the radical left anti-austerity party, Podemos. She is deeply involved in organising viable alternatives to the official parade. In her view the Chueca based event “has become a bit of a corporate monster” that has transformed what should be a radical, rights protest into a crass celebration of consumption. While one would expect radical leftist activists like Puri and Inagi to express such opinions, even a cursory look at the event and its funding model supports their contentions. It is widely accepted that the Madrid Orgullo event, which now extends across a full week in July, is a money spinning extravaganza that generates tens of millions euro in revenue for the city each year. As with any such lucrative event, corporate interests have been quick to jump on the bandwagon. The original intention of the parade was to galvanise support
from civil society by inviting participants to march as a group, or create a float to represent their particular sector, and every year an increasing myriad of social, civil and political entities participate. However, in recent times there has been a notable increase in corporate representation, with giants of the retail and leisure industry in the zone paying hefty fees for the privilege. From the corporate vantage point, it represents an efficient deployment of a portion of the marketing budget, particularly in their efforts to connect with the under thirties to create a new generation of loyal consumers. From the point of view of the organisers, it represents an irresistible opportunity to maximise revenue, to fund an ever increasing array of outreach and education programmes. In terms of the decline of street activism, however, a corporately gentrified gay pride has not only had the effect of smothering the radicalness of the event, but also sucks all the oxygen, not to mention potential funding, out of alternative forms of activism that are more critical of corporate interests, and which provide less opportunities for the corporate sector to push their consumer wares.

According to Puri, the overweening dominance of the official Madrid Pride also induces a certain complacency in the gay populous, regarding the necessity for visible street level activism on a continuous and regular basis. This criticism is one that was strongly borne out in the research data on Chueca, where participants struggled to identify the presence of activism in Chueca, apart from Gay Pride. In this respect, Puri makes an astute analogy with the perennial problem in Spain and elsewhere of pets bought for Christmas that are abandoned early in the new year. “Just like the animal welfare ads you get on TV in December, warning people that puppies are not just for Christmas; we need to remind the LGBT community that activism is not just for gay pride but for all year round”. In her view, this has never been more vital than in 2019, with the entry of an openly homophobic political party into the national parliament, who have made no secret of their desire to roll back many of the legislative victories, and to refight the hard won battles, of the gay rights movement of recent years.

At the time of writing, negotiations between leftist parties, the natural allies of the Spanish LGBT collective, to form a new government have collapsed, and Spain now faces its forth general election in four years. It is a truism of Spanish politics that repeated elections in a short space of time has a demobilising effect on the electorate, particularly on the part of left-wing voters. A strong showing for the conservative parties could leave the far right potentially holding the balance of power in a new parliament, representing the greatest threat to the LGBT community since the Franco era. If such an appalling vista transpires, it may become increasingly apparent that Chueca has lost its radical activist zeal at just the moment when the LGBT community may need it most.
6.3 The commodification and privatisation of urban gay space

Perhaps the starkest utility change identified through the analysis of the research data was the rapid commercialisation and commodification of the Chueca district in recent years. This sub-chapter will explore the role that gentrification has played in these processes regarding urban gay space more generally, before focusing on the particular form it has taken in Chueca. The corporatisation of the annual gay pride celebrations, outlined in the previous section, is just the most visible aspect of how, in the view of many critical gay activists, the gay rights movement and urban gay space has been increasingly sold out to commercial interests. There is considerable evidence to suggest that this view is justified, and that one of the principal drivers of this trend is economic gentrification. The quaint notion of gentrification, where a group of oppressed gays do up a run-down tenement in a dodgy district, employing little more than discounted paint and their interior design savvy, is something largely confined to a nostalgic past, and was, by its nature, quite small-scale. With the rise of neo-liberal economics, gentrification of gay neighbourhoods soon became big business, particularly in the US where, as Amin Ghaziani explains, neighbourhoods have increasingly engaged in competing strategies to attract capital by showcasing their stock of ethnic capital (Ghaziani, 2014). He cites the Boys Town area of Chicago as the first gay neighbourhood to overtly promote itself with a view to monetisation, and to attract tourists and the wider population, in the same way that other distinctive minority neighbourhoods, such as Chinatown in New York, had done. Ghaziani describes contemporary gay neighbourhoods as essentially “a post gay landscape, and a culturally divided space as a result of increasing heterosexualization of gay culture” (Ghaziani, 2014, p.5), characterised by commercially, as opposed to culturally, oriented gentrification.

One of the clear features that emerged from the research data on Chueca was the perception of increasing heterosexualisation of the zone. It is a phenomenon that is borne out in the experience of other gay neighbourhoods, and is a key factor in what urban geographers describe as the second wave of gay gentrification. After the initial wave of gentrification in the 1970s, the phenomenon subsided somewhat. In the late 1980s and 1990s, with neo-liberal inspired policies of deregulation and privatisation going into overdrive, a second wave of gentrification emerged, as private housing and mortgage lending became the engine of western neo-liberal economies, characterised by the privatisation of the mortgage industry, and the sale and non-replacement of social housing. In terms of gentrification in specifically gay zones, distinct from the first wave which had been driven largely by gays and lesbians to build up their neighbourhoods, the so called “super gentrifiers” (Lees, Statler and Wyly, 2008, p.106) of the second wave were mostly straight people who began
transforming and commercialising gay districts with an eye to the larger heterosexual population. These second wave financiers and straight newcomers often preferred chain stores to gay bars, bookstores, or bathhouses, as they have wider commercial appeal (Lees, Statler and Wyly, 2008). For some in the LGBT community, this represents the pillaging of their cultures, threatening the iconic institutions of their zones, and indeed the very future of gay neighbourhoods, a subject that will be discussed in more detail in the concluding remarks of the thesis.

The result of such aggressive commercial gentrification has seen what Ghaziani refers to as the disneyfication of gayborhoods (Ghaziani, 2014), converting them into lucrative money making, entertainment districts akin to an urban amusement park for adults, a development that echoes the concerns expressed earlier by Andrew Loeng about the trajectory of many Chinatowns. As institutional homophobia recedes and the monetary potential of such zones is increasingly recognised, private gentrification interests have also worked hand in hand with municipal authorities to develop and market the commercial and tourist potential of such areas. Gay neighbourhoods have increasingly become the social centres of many cities, the place to be seen regardless of one's sexual preference. Understandably, the initial response of the LGBT community was enthusiastic, as the influx of both private and public investment was a welcome change from the alienation and neglect of the past. However, gay residents of such zones, and more radically inclined activists, are increasingly wary of the consequences that turning gay zones into cosmopolitan buffets for hungry tourists, and the indiscriminate entry of straight newcomers to the zone, may have for the cultural and historical integrity of urban gay space, and the radical progressive values that originally underpinned its development. From its earliest days, this process had attracted criticism from a section of the LGBT community. Daniel Harris, in his 1999 work, The rise and fall of gay culture, was particularly scathing about the consequences of gentrification inspired commodification of gay neighbourhoods, and its effect on gay culture more generally. In his view it has “had a trivialising effect on our lives, producing unhappiness and dissatisfaction while reinforcing our intellectual inertia” (Harris, 1999, P.76). This statement is of a piece with the perspective of more contemporary anti-establishment LGBT activists, artists and writers. For this cohort, the commodification of urban gay space and its increasing use as a primary centre of both gay and straight consumption, rather than an area of authentic gay expression, represents what Dr Warren Blumenfeld, in his study of the commercialisation of urban gay enclaves, describes as the sale of a civil rights movement (Blumenfeld, 2017). It comes amid the increasingly commodified gentrification of urban space, and its co-option by the forces of neo-liberal capitalism. For Blumenfeld, this betrayal is particularly evident in the metrosexual sanitisation of LGBT
characterisations on corporate TV networks, and through contemporary pride marches which have morphed into corporate sponsored parties, characterized by mindless consumerism, and increasingly devoid of authentic gay meaning.

The gay writer and Guardian journalist, Julie Bindel, paints an equally sinister picture of corporate infiltration of both gay space and gay culture, the result of which has been stultifying cultural conformity. “As gays and lesbians fight to end oppression, corporations having been piggybacking on our struggles to sell us whatever they can dress up as gay friendly, and much of the urban gay community itself has bought into marriage, babies and big business” (Bindel, 2014). Economic gentrification of urban gay space has been realised through the financial clout of major corporate interests, but would hardly be possible without buy-in on the part of a substantial section of the LGBT community. As Bindel points out, the political base that once defined the LGBT community has been weakened by the lure of “ever bigger and richer sponsors for our pride events and charities” (Bindel, 2014), the price of which is acquiescence to the capitalist establishment rather than defiance of it. Those who may doubt the extent of corporate piggy backing on the gay rights movement need look no further than the astonishingly long list of corporate entities, until relatively recently happy to turn a blind eye to internal corporate discrimination until it became a PR liability, that are now literally falling over themselves to scramble on to the LGBT bandwagon, and to virtue signal their acceptance of homosexuality. From English premier league football (where not a single player has yet to come out) and global betting companies to the major banks, they have all found it expedient business to sink an increasing percentage of their marketing budget into associating themselves with gay causes. Just as with corporate infiltration of the political system, it has an inevitably corroding and debasing effect on the integrity of the movement. Particularly tasteless examples of such piggy backing includes the “proud whopper”, offered by Burger king in the run up to last year’s New York gay pride, and Gucci’s introduction of their new pride team sneakers, at the modest price of $915 (Bindel, 2014). Among the consequences of this trend, which shall be explored in greater detail shortly, is increased inequality and exclusion, as gay neighbourhoods succumb to a corporatised gentrification that increasingly replicates the inequities of wider urban society.

As regards our case study neighbourhood of Chueca, the research data and historical evidence would strongly suggest that the zone is no exception, and indeed may be a classic example of the role gentrification plays in the processes of commodification and corporate infiltration outlined above. In terms of its urban history, as noted earlier, Chueca followed a similar trajectory to many urban gay neighbourhoods, from pariah status to gentrified respectability in a few short decades.
The reputational nadir of the zone largely coincided with the influx of heroin addicts in the mid 1980s, as inner cities across Europe were decimated by the addiction epidemic of that decade. Back then, the average price of a two-bedroom flat fell to a low of about 65,000 euros, substantially below prices in surrounding neighbourhoods. Yet, by the early 2000s, the same two bedroom apartments were being sold for over 250,000 euros, an astonishing fourfold increase in less than fifteen years (Elpidio, 2017). This is only partly explained by the Spanish property boom that took hold around that time, and such increases were also completely out of kilter with surrounding areas. The zone would eventually become so prohibitively expensive that many of the lower income gays, minorities and working class residents who helped to rejuvenate the area have been unable or unwilling to pay such exorbitant prices to buy or even rent in the area, as older locals left or died, their properties selling for multiples of their original value. These developments in Chueca replicate closely the experience internationally, outlined earlier, across such neighbourhoods as the Castro in San Francisco, the Village in New York and Soho in London.

From the research data, it is clear that, from the perspective of those who live in and frequent the zone, Chueca largely conforms to the general gentrification model of urban gay districts outlined in the opening section of this chapter. Respondents to the questionnaire strongly confirmed both the increased influx of heterosexuals to the area, in terms of both leisure and residency, and the marked increase in commercialisation of the zone over the last decade or so. A belief that also emerged from the interviews was that urban gay space has been very deliberately channelled toward commercial activities that appeal to the wider heterosexual community, sometimes crowding out more niche, but less lucrative, gay oriented outlets, in order to maximise monetisation of urban gay space. In my search for interview subjects, a particular focus was placed on long-time residents who could exude a sense of how their physical surroundings had changed over time. One such example is Mariana Delgado, who has lived in the zone for over thirty years. Her contribution on the topic of commercialisation is, perhaps, a more stridently articulated than others, but reflects a quite commonly held view among older residents that "as soon as they (the establishment authorities) stopped officially hating us, they started trying to make money from us". Having realised the rich but ultimately limited commercial potential of what is, and always will be a small minority community, it appears that the private development sector has become more interested in catering for the wider general population, increasingly with municipal participation and indeed, the co-operation of COGAM, the most prominent gay rights organisation in the city.

One of the best examples of this partnership model between the private and public sector was the construction of the San Antón market, which I visited during my tour of the district. Originally
planned as a wholly private development project, the municipal authorities later came on board and injected several million euros of public money into the project (Elpidio, 2017). While few people are against the regeneration of decaying urban sites in general, the exact nature of the development, and the degree to which it enhances or detracts from the authentic gay character of the zone is of crucial import. In this sense, the market represents the worst of both worlds as far as gentrification in Chueca is concerned. On the one hand, it is a classic example of the increasing exclusivity of regeneration in the zone, shamelessly marketed at high-end tourism and well-to-do gay and straight professionals. On the other, apart from the standard decorative affectations that are erected in the week of Madrid Pride, the construction makes no cultural or architectural recognition of the fact that it is nestled in the heart of one of the most iconic gay neighbourhoods in western Europe. As far Mariana is concerned, this is no accident of design but another example of “this constant drive to commercialise and sanitise the zone......to make it so bland that it appeals to everyone and offends no one”.

Perhaps the clearest indication that the aggressive and ongoing gentrification of Chueca has corporatised and commodified the urban landscape to a worrying degree, is the inexorable rise of the phenomenon of Orgullo Critico (Critical Pride). This alternative activist event has taken place for several years now, usually in the weekend leading up the official Madrid Orgullo, and which I attended as part of my participant observation activities. It has roots not only as a reaction to the commodification of gay space, but also in the tumultuous events of 2007/2008, when the global crash sent an overly exposed Spain to the brink of meltdown, with soaring public debt levels, and an unemployment rate that reached 27% (statistica.com, 2012). It was this potent mix of local dissatisfaction with the increasingly shallow consumerist gentrification of Chueca, mirrored at a national and international level by the self-evident disaster that unfettered neo-liberal capitalism had visited upon the nation, that spawned gay activist participation in the months-long occupation of Plaza of Sol, and in the subsequent anti-austerity movement. It provided the catalyst for the re-emergence of the radical, gay rights traditions of the 1970s, in the form of an anti-capitalist strand of activism (izquierdadiario.com, 2016). The first critical pride march was attended by no more than a few hundred hard core anti-capitalists but has grown steadily to become one of the biggest events in the pride calendar. Though not as big as the official pride, the attendance has grown to include far more what one might describe as hard-core anti-capitalists and radical activists, and seems to have struck a chord with the LGBT community more generally. The atmosphere is decided different from the official pride, and is characterised by an informality and spontaneity that has become logistically impossible for an event the size of the official pride march. As well as enjoying
the march and the festivities that continued in the small hours, I also engaged in some informal data gathering among the diverse and exuberant crowd. In reply to my inquiry as to why participants preferred the critico event to the official one, two adjectives, “authentic” and “organic”, were repeatedly cited.

The alternative movement that has driven the success of this event questions not only the commercialisation and de-politicisation of the official pride, and the trivialisation of gay culture more generally, but also rails against what it sees as the consequences of such a gentrified urban landscape, including assimilationist conformity, and the increasing homogeneity of gay culture, in which white, middle-class, gay men increasingly dominate. From a radical perspective, the recent evolution of the zone has led to the increased invisibility of other gay identities, and to a Chueca less and less open to those who not fit the sanitised image of the well-groomed, well dressed, gay but not too gay, corporately promoted stereotype. In the final sub-chapter on the role that gentrification plays in utility change in urban gay space, it is precisely these issues of representativeness and exclusion that will be explored, and the extent which activist fears in this regard are justified.

6.4 Demographic change, class exclusion and the myth of representativeness

In the previous sub-chapters, the role that gentrification has played in promoting certain types of utility change, such as the decline of activism and the increasing use of gay neighbourhoods as zones of consumptive leisure, were laid out. In this final sub-chapter, the extent to which processes of gentrification have dictated not just how gay space is utilised, but by whom, will be explored. In the course of the ethnographic research conducted in the Chueca district, one of the clearest trends that emerged from both the survey data and interviews was the demographic change that Chueca has experienced in recent decades. As with many urban gay neighbourhoods in reconstruction, Chueca witnessed a dying off older, working class residents, who were replaced by younger residents, an increasing percentage of whom were gay. However, as was noted earlier, given the demographic realities of the gay population as a percentage of the general population, a gay presence could never constitute anywhere close to a majority of residents. This limitation was compensated for by creating a gay atmosphere and ambience out of proportion to their numerical strength.

However, as the research data suggests, two newer elements of demographic change have become increasingly apparent in recent years. The first of these, the so called “heterosexual invasion”, was dealt with in some detail in chapter four, and is strongly linked to economic
gentrification on two counts, firstly in terms of the property market. The effects of gentrification, allied to the modern reality of dual income mortgage requirements, means that professional heterosexual couples are one of the few cohorts of the population who possess the financial wherewithal to buy property in Chueca. In addition, they inevitably outnumber their gay counterparts. As the stigma of the Chueca zone has died away, attributes such as its central location, and a vibrant cultural and social atmosphere, have made it an increasingly attractive location to rent and buy property for those who can afford it. Secondly, as was detailed in the previous sub-chapter, gentrification has been a key driver of the profit maximisation imperative that is the hallmark of neo-liberal economic philosophy, and has made the attraction of the heterosexual population to the zone a logical priority for the commercial interests that increasingly dominate and control urban gay space.

In terms of demographic change within the diverse collective of the LGBT community itself, the research also pointed toward the increasing hegemony of one particular sector, in terms of how Chueca caters to the need of its LGBT users, namely white, middle-class, gay males. And it is to an exploration of the role of gentrification in driving this class based, demographic change that the remainder of this chapter will be dedicated. In this endeavour, the discussion at the outset of the thesis, regarding the construction of sexual identity, and more specifically urban gay identity, is of particular relevance. Given that the LGBT community is usually one of the smallest minority groups in any given demographic environment, when speaking about the “gay community” there is a tendency to treat it as a more monolithic entity than would be the case when defining the general population. However, when dissected it becomes clear that urban LGBT communities have become as riven with class, race, and gender inequalities as wider society. In such a niche community these disparities are, if anything, heightened compared to wider society, and creates urban gay communities overwhelming dominated by micro-elites. Peter Jackson in his 1989 work, Gender and Sexuality, rightly advises readers that when dealing with the concept of gay identity one should proceed with extreme caution. In his experience, “what usually passes for the gay community is actually a minority of a minority at its most privileged and vocal” (Jackson, 1989, p.122). This phenomenon of urban gay class bias is also reflected in much of the research conducted over the decades into so-called gay gentrification, which, in reality refers to a specific section of the urban LGBT community, and is often far from representative of the urban LGBT community as a whole. This reality has important implications for a holistic understanding of the complex, and not always flattering, dynamic between urban LGBT communities and the built environments which they commandeered, and now inhabit.
As far back as 1985, when gentrification of urban gay space was in its relative infancy, demographers Lauria and Knopp, in their work on the role of gay communities in urban renewal, emphasised the fact that “urban gay identity is middle-class, white and male” (Lauria and Knopp, 1985, p.346), and that almost from the outset, the development of urban gay space was subject to class cleavages, in some cases quite deliberately. In this respect, they cite a fascinating case in New Orleans where a wealthy gay individual used his connections with the conservative real-estate industry to create a gay enclave of solely wealthy people. Such examples highlight the reality that even very early gay gentrification was not always simply a collective response to oppression but sometimes an alternative strategy for overcoming institutional obstacles to investment, and for the accumulation of class based wealth. Therefore, as Lauria and Knopp rightly insist, any understanding of gay gentrification must incorporate the question of class interest as well as gay identity construction (Lauria and Knopp, 1985). As class in the US, and to varying degrees in Europe, is invariably bound up with historical power dynamics between races, when seeking to understand the trajectory of urban gay neighbourhoods over the last few decades, the importance of the intersection of race and class in the demographic trajectory of urban gay space cannot be ignored or underestimated.

With this qualification in mind, it is instructive to briefly outline the fascinating trajectory of class and race based utilisation of urban gay space from the earliest days of its formation. It was noted in a previous chapter that the early twentieth century development of urban gay space was forged by seismic world events such as industrialisation, mass urbanisation and global war, which produced urban gay space characterised by a bohemian outlook, alternative lifestyles, marginalisation, poverty and criminality. From the African American community in Harlem to the bohemian artists and drug users of Berlin, the early original residents of urban gay space were all overwhelmingly poor and/or working class. Given the economic intersection between race and class, and the marginalised, deprived nature of early urban gay enclaves, it is not surprising that minorities were over-represented in these zones.

More generally, whether it be Berlin, London or Harlem, what all such early examples of gay space had in common was a respectable middle-class conspicuous by its absence. In stark contrast to twenty-first century urban gay space, middle-class gays in earlier decades were more likely to lead double lives, marry respectably and as George Chauncy, in The making of urban gay world, eloquently puts it, “venture to the dark recesses of the ghetto to escape their middle-class straitjacket of respectability, if only for one night ” (Chauncy, 1994, p.56). In the moral atmosphere of the time, such people were rightly fearful of losing status, and placing at risk their
professional working lives. Conversely, working class homosexuals, having been deprived of respectability by the lowly circumstances of their birth, had little or no standing to lose. This class dichotomy persisted right through most of the twentieth century and only began to change when the stigma of homosexuality began to dissipate in the latter decades of the twentieth century. Despite the best efforts of Hollywood films such as Stonewall to white-wash and class-wash the early explosive years of the gay rights movement, (the main protagonist of the film is a respectable, middle-class, white boy from the sticks), the historical record clearly shows a high level of involvement on the part of the working classes, minorities and drag queens, about as far from middle-class respectability as one could hope to get (Stonewall Uprising documentary, 2010).

In term of class and race, the trajectory of the gay rights movement mirrors to a certain degree that of the development of urban gay space. As both developed more mainstream characteristics, they became increasingly the preserve of white middle-class males, and as we saw in the research data, it is a trend that Chueca has belated followed. It would seem that as the stigma of homosexuality waned, the historical and structural advantages which allowed white well-to-do males to dominate the discourse of so many aspects of life in the general population, began to be mirrored in the gay world as well. The result has been a reversal of the demographic trend that prevailed for decades in urban gay space, whereby contemporary urban gay neighbourhoods are now increasingly dominated by middle-class, white, gay males.

The reasons of this reversal are, unsurprisingly, strongly linked to economic power, and the structural inequalities inherent in neo-liberalism. According to Peter Jackson, it is easier economically and otherwise for middle class white males to identify and live as openly gay people then it is for women, non-white and non-middle class people. Middle income males generally have more discretionary income and a greater recourse to resources that would enable them to buy property, even in the earliest days of gay gentrification (Jackson, 1989). The so called “super gentrification” of more recent years, aided and abetted by the neo-liberal paradigm, has only intensified this disparity. Conversely, non-white members of the population were much more likely to be immigrant and working class with lower levels of purchasing power, and who had originally gravitated to these urban gay zones primarily because their pariah and crime ridden status made rents affordable. The advent of gentrification created a geographical conflict of interest between these two classes, which working class gays were bound to lose. So while it is legitimate to explain gay gentrification in terms of the need to escape to an oasis of tolerance, and to combat oppression by creating neighbourhoods with greater levels of personal freedom, it has, in many cases, led to the irony of domino effect oppression, where the methods by which one class escapes
oppression succeeds in creating it for another. Gay gentrification may be distinguished from more general forms in a number of ways, but its socio-economic consequences are inevitably the same. As was clearly demonstrated in an earlier section on the nature of the relationship between gentrification and gay neighbourhoods, the consequences of this dynamic have invariably included a steep rise in property values and higher cost of living in terms of the enjoyment of services and leisure. So, just as with non-gay specific forms of gentrification, the result is the displacement of existing low-income residents, mostly working class and minorities. That these consequences may have been unintended is of little consolation to such disadvantaged groups. As Castells, for example, points out the *City and the grassroots*, there has been little urban improvement for the black families forced to move from the Hayes Valley in California because of real estate speculation from an increasing influx of gays in the early 1980s (Castells, 1985).

This exposes the uncomfortable reality that gay urban liberation has at least partly facilitated the oppression of other minorities in the form of displacement, because the vanguard of contemporary gay gentrification of urban gay neighbourhoods is white, middle-class and male, a cohort that wields disproportionate economic power. In other words, a replication within gay space of the inequalities of wider society favouring white males, that had been partially suppressed by the stigmatisation of homosexuality, has come to the fore as discrimination dissipates. This dynamic of inequality manifests itself in a lack of diversity, not just between the LGBT community and other minority groups, but within the LGBT collective itself, as gentrification pushes residency in contemporary gay neighbourhoods beyond the reach of a large percentage of working-class and lower-middle-class gays. In demographic terms the consequences are twofold; an overall decrease in the concentration of gays, and an increase in the homogenisation of urban gay neighbourhoods, because those who can afford to remain, and those who can afford to move in, are overwhelmingly middle-class, male and white.

Those who find these criticisms of the effects of gay gentrification overly harsh, would argue that these critiques overlook the positive aspects of such urban renewal. This alternative view sees gay communities as essentially pioneer gentrifiers, and an emancipating force for urban space. In this context, such neighbourhoods are construed as oases of tolerance, creating spaces in which the LGBT community can combat internalised self-hatred, and in which to develop economic and political clout. While this image had some basis in reality in the earlier days of gay gentrification, before the long-term unintended consequences became more apparent, it is, in my view, overly romanticised, even by the most rigorous of academics. Castells, for example, in his otherwise quite objective work, *The city and the grassroots*, dons the rose tinted glasses for gay San Franciscans.
who in his view “have paid for their identity,.... survived.... and at the same time they have revived the colours of the painted facades, repaired the shaky foundations of buildings, lit up the tempo of the street, and helped make the city beautiful and alive” (Castells, 1985, p.207). He also extolls the virtues of these gay spaces in terms of the freedom they afforded gays to develop positive identities and a sense of community. While this is all undoubtedly true, their elevation in importance, to the exclusion of other harsher realities, by the predominantly middle-class academics who study them, serves to further underline the middle-class bias inherent in urban gay neighbourhoods. As prominent gay scholar, John De Emilio, pointed out in his study of urban gay sexuality, gentrification projects such as those undertaken in San Francisco, while aesthetically pleasing in themselves, are “a cultural manifestation heavily driven by white, middle-income males” (De Emilio, 1995, p.56), and are overwhelmingly reflective of middle-class sensibilities and taste. The long-term consequences of this exclusionary form of gentrification, in terms of the relationship between urban gay identity and class are profound in two interrelated ways, both of which do a great disservice to working class gays, and by extension the racial minorities that are overrepresented in this demographic.

In the first place, it has exacerbated what I would describe as an increasingly pronounced identity/representation deficit in the urban heartlands of the LGBT community. In other words, the inability of urban gay culture, given practical expression in urban gay neighbourhoods, to truly reflect urban gay identity in all its considerable diversity. It has also prompted the increasing equation of a middle-class variant of LGBT identity with that of LGBT identity generally. This has the effect of making ever more invisible the diverse, non-white, non-middle class, non-male variants of LGBT identity which in reality constitute the majority of urban LGBT communities. Both mainstream LGBT organisations and the contemporary mainstream media have played a pivotal role in exacerbating these trends. In his seminal work on class and sexual self-expression, Donald Barrett notes the increasingly middle-class image of homosexuality promoted by LGBT organisations that, in the age of professionalisation of activism, have themselves become dominated by middle-class activists. They are aided in this projection by a contemporary media landscape, itself middle-class and male dominated (Thurman, 2016), and where LGBT identity is increasingly presented as largely synonymous with its middle-class variant. According to Barret this is largely “due to historic, economic and social advantages” (Barret, 2014, p.438) bestowed on the middle classes, and, as was noted earlier, eventually began to make themselves felt among middle-class gay males, as stigmatisation of homosexuality faded. It also reflects the increasingly conservative strategy being pursued a modern gay rights movement that simply seeks to access an
unequal system rather than to change it, and believes that presenting the LGBT community as “virtually normal” is the most effective way of achieving it.

Another consequence of this trend, that further marginalises the voices and experiences of the non-middle class sector of the LGBT community, is the characterisation of working class communities as more inherently homophobic, and who act as a break on societal acceptance. As previously outlined, the working classes were historically over-represented in gay space and more likely to act on their sexual desires, while middle-class gay men remained shrouded in a veil of suburban respectability. The contemporary urban gay landscape, however, is dominated by the middle classes, a development characterised in the media as reflecting greater inherent liberalism on the part of the middle classes when, in reality, as was pointed out by Jackson earlier, it merely reflects the economic advantages enjoyed by this cohort. A famous contemporary gay rights victory also gives the lie to this misrepresentation of working-class attitudes. In 2015, the Republic of Ireland became the first country in the world to introduce equal marriage by referendum, as Ireland’s antiquated, catholic inspired, constitution required it. In the aftermath of the vote, an analysis of the demographic data showed that urban working class zones registered equal or higher levels of support for the amendment, when compared to middle class districts, and significantly higher than the rural, landowning classes (Healy, 2017).

A final aspect of the increasing conflation of LGBT identity with gentrified middle-class sensibilities in recent times is in relation to representations of masculinity. The gentrified aesthetic of the professional, respectable, middle-class, white, urban gay male is powerfully distilled and projected to the public by a (middle-class dominated) corporate media, and an image conscious, corporately co-opted, mainstream, rights movement, anxious to present a sanitised, conforming, ideal of the modern gay as well groomed, sophisticated and above all, non-threatening, both as an individual, and in relation to society. In such a context, the rich and longstanding culture of more provocative, blue collar, working class representations of gay masculinity, from bear and leather sub-cultures to the village people, is increasingly downplayed and marginalised in favour of an airbrushed homosexuality (Barret, 2014). On a practical structural level, the process of gentrification in gay zones, with its emphasis on the commercial imperative and plush, sanitised interiors, has seen the huge decline of niche venues such as bear bars and leather clubs that reflect the true diversity of representations of gay masculinity (Booth, 2019).

Regarding the specific case study example of Chueca, the role of gentrification in promoting exclusivity and homogeneity in gay zones would appear to be replicated here. This is evidenced in the economic realities of the zone in relation to real estate, the cost of living and in the perception
of who Chueca serves. These are concrete changes that resonate quite strongly in the research data. In relation to real estate, as detailed earlier, the cost of renting and buying property in the zone has skyrocketed in recent years, and is clearly a direct result of the gentrification process, evidenced by its disproportionate rise compared to adjacent neighbourhoods, a phenomenon that has been reliably recorded in many other gay zones (Madden, 2012). The inevitable result of a reduction in affordable housing in the neighbourhood is the displacement of lower-income residents, creating a pattern of residential segregation between the gay haves and have nots. Several of the interviews conducted as part of the qualitative research process were with ex-residents of the zone. The economic challenge of remaining in the zone was a common refrain with this cohort, with one baldly stating that “I lived in Chueca for about six months then moved to Lavapies, because I simply needed an affordable place to live”. Another respondent remarked on the irony that “if you are one of the army of service industry workers on minimum wage, who keeps the cocktails and the tapas flowing 24/7 in Chueca, you definitely can’t afford to live there yourself!”. In terms of the cost of living, the demise of modestly priced local bars and cafeterias in favour of chain outlets and expensive restaurants, that gentrification almost always seems to promote, has excluded lower social classes from the neighbourhood, and by extension minorities. In the case of Madrid, this means the Latino community, who are by far the largest immigrant group in the city, and are hugely over-represented in the aforementioned army of service industry workers. Several of my interview subjects either currently work in the zone or have done so in the past, including Ignacio, who arrived from Ecuador in search of work in 2015, and is one such soldier. He wryly admits that on the weekends, “if I have the early evening shift and want to go out afterwards, I usually have to leave the zone, as a lot of my friends don’t go here very much”. He concedes that he might go to Chueca to “have a coffee sometimes during the day but not for a night out, it is just too expensive”. Yet another respondent describes the zone as “very posh, very exclusive.... just for gay men who have money”, a view that resonates with the experiences of Jose and Josito in an earlier chapter.

The pointed use of the phrase “Chueca is just for...” goes to the heart of the exclusionary effects of gentrification in terms of race and class. In fact, the word “gay” that has traditionally been shorthand for the queer community in all its diversity has, in Chueca, come to refer to a rather specific sector of that collective, that of the middle-class, urban, gay, Spanish male. It also increasingly encompasses the stereotype of the gym toned, perfectly dressed metrosexual, and underlines the increasing absence of bohemianism, radicalness or diversity in the zone. This has led to a curious sense of nostalgic longing on the part of some interviewees for what mainstream contemporary
gay society would consider the bad old days of Chueca. It is expressed in sentiments such as “in the last 10 years it has become very fancy it doesn't feel like it is for me” or “I came out here but now I have found other places that identify with more”. This final sentiment perfectly reflects the increasing segregation of urban gay space along class lines. For some of the younger and, after almost 10 years of brutal recession, often poorer, generation of gays, Chueca has become the epitome of pale, male and stale, the preserve of the middle-class and the middle-aged. Some have deserted Chueca in favour of more authentic and affordable spaces that have popped up in response to this demand, leading to the alternative of mini gay zones, less formal and plush, and which shun overt commercialisation and the consequent economic exclusion. Added to these spaces are relatively new queer friendly neighbourhoods, some of which I discovered during my participant observation activities in Madrid. Zones in the capital such as Lavapies and Malasana are distinguished from Chueca by the fact that the majority of residential and commercial use is heterosexual but, in the liberal dispensation of the 2019 Madrid, are becoming increasingly fluid and intermixed. It is telling that as far back as 2008, COGAM, the biggest mainstream gay rights organisation in Madrid, increasingly criticised as corporate sells outs by the radical anti-capitalist activists behind “orgullo critico”, was furiously spinning the fragmentation of urban gay space in Madrid along essentially class lines as a victory for diversity, rather than an indictment of the shortcomings of Chueca in terms of representativeness and inclusion (Elpidio, 2017). The issue of the fragmentation of urban gay space is one which has been the subject of intense debate among academics, demographers and activists in recent years, and is a topic that will be dealt with in greater detail in the brief concluding chapter of this work, which explores what the future may hold for Chueca and urban gay neighbourhoods more generally.
7 Conclusions

The central objective of this academic work has been to develop a fuller understanding of change that has occurred in the gay neighbourhoods of western urban society, which have experienced such exponential growth in the final decades of the 20th century and the early year of the 21st. To this end, two interrelated research questions were proposed. The first of these questions focused on contemporary utility changes, in terms of the way in which the space is used by its residents, and those who frequent it, and how this is reflected in the changing demographic of such zones. The second research question examined these utility changes in terms of the extent to which processes of gentrification played a role, either directly or indirectly.

Before embarking on a variety of research methods to identify potential utility changes, it was necessary to provide a contextual framework, which involved the exploration of both theoretical and historical perspectives. Regarding history, this entailed an examination of the development of sexual identity and sexuality in pre-industrial and industrial society. Up until the late 19th century, any type of sexual activity that did not conform to heterosexual norms of procreation was designated as a deviant immoral act, and placed in the same category as adultery and criminality. Under this predominant pre-capitalist system, the family remained both the primary social and economic unit of society, with little social space outside it. The advent of the industrial revolution, and the factory system, utterly transformed the basis on which society operated. One of the biggest consequences was mass urbanisation, as vast numbers of young, single men and women migrated from the countryside in search of employment. Such processes created a social space outside the family unit by affording the opportunity to maintain a single, individual existence, a turn of events that would gradually transform the exterior lives of both unmarried women and homosexuals. Regarding theory, appropriate theoretical perspectives, such as constructivism, were employed to explain the gradual development of gay sexual consciousness, through the creation of solidarity and self-identification as an oppressed minority in the face of hostility from wider society. Inherent in this process was the increasing conflation of gay culture with urban gay identity, and the importance of a spatial context in which this could be allowed to develop.

7.1 A summary of data findings

Having detailed the research methods employed, and the criteria upon which they were based, I proceeded to analyse the data that emerged from both the survey work and the interview process. When drilling down into the detail of any reasonably well conducted survey, a variety of patterns of greater and lesser clarity inevitably emerge. Given the limitations of any academic work, it is
necessary and desirable to select only those which resonate most strongly from the data. In this particular case, that required choosing the examples of utility change that the data most clearly identified. Therefore, the data analysis focused on four specific utility changes that the Chueca district has experienced in recent years, providing valuable insight into the evolution of the symbiotic relationship between the built environment and its inhabitants, and the factors driving this evolution. For instance, one of the major utility changes identified from the quantitative research was the decline of street-based activism. Through the follow up qualitative research, it was revealed to be connected to a number of factors, such as the success of the well-funded and well-organised gay rights movement. This transformed activism from a street-based activity to one which more often took place in the courts and classrooms. These processes also ushered in the professionalisation of the role of activism itself, increasingly concentrated in organisations dedicated to specific forms of non-street-based activism, undertaken on behalf of the wider LGBT community. Regarding the role of gentrification in the transformation of urban gay space, it was established as a key factor in the decline of street activism by reducing not just the physical urban space in which to perform such activities, but also the psychological head space that drives the impulse to engage in street-based activism, through a dilution of the diversity and radicalness of the zone.

Another important finding, regarding the changing demography of Chueca, was the extent of the so-called “heterosexual invasion” of urban gay space, and an increasingly middle-class profile. The quantitative research indicated a notable increase in the numbers of heterosexuals, particularly women and heterosexual couples, frequenting and living in the Chueca district. For its part, the qualitative research shed light on some of the motivating factors behind this trend, the most important of which was the increased attractiveness of the zone as a location of leisure, entertainment and consumption for the wider urban population. These changes went hand in hand with a sharp decrease both in the stigmatisation of homosexuality generally, and in the perception of Chueca as an unsafe and crime-ridden zone. In terms of buying or renting a property in Chueca, once the area had established a better reputation the normal rules of contemporary real estate acquisition kicked in, the most important of which is the modern day indispensability of dual incomes in order to obtain a mortgage. This inevitably favours heterosexual couples who far outnumber their homosexual counterparts. In terms of the role of gentrification, it was found that this process played an important role in detoxifying the zone, and promoting the imperative of profit maximisation, the logical extension of which is the tailoring of the zone to the needs and desires of the wider heterosexual population, rather than just the LGBT collective. A second
important demographic change is related to class. As was elucidated by historical references, survey responses, interviews and participant observation, Chueca has become increasingly exclusive to a narrow sector of the LGBT community, namely white, middle-class, gay males, with the economic resources to rent, live and socialise there. A key component of the development of class based exclusion is neo-liberal inspired gentrification that re-orient urban gay space in economically restrictive ways.

One of the most interesting findings to emerge from the research was related to the institutionalisation of activity in Chueca. When analysing the research data, it was intriguing to discover a large discrepancy between those who visited Chueca to participate in an unspecified gay organisation, and those who indicated that they engaged in activism. Organisation membership was very high while activism seemed almost non-existent. As was documented at the beginning of the research analysis section, the latter was accounted for by the massive decline in specifically street based activism in favour of professionalisation. The former, upon further scrutiny during the qualitative phase of research, turned out to be closely related to the phenomenon of anchor institutions, such as local gay rights organisations, book shops or saunas, that help a zone retain its gay flavour in the face of increasing heterosexualisation and residential drift. What emerged from my research was a slightly different form of this phenomenon, which I described as socio-cultural anchor institutions, whereby the gay populous engage in non-gay specific, mainstream activities in a gay setting. In many cases it was the principal reason for maintaining a connection with Chueca, as the zone lost other aspects of its original appeal by becoming too expensive or homogenous. Of the four principal utility changes identified, this is the one which appears to be least directly connected to processes of gentrification, seems to have flourished despite rather than because of such processes, and indeed acts as a counterweight to the exclusionary effects of gentrification.

The final finding regarding utility changes in the Chueca zone was the intensification of its use as a centre of leisure, entertainment and consumption by both the LGBT community and the wider population. What Ghaziani and others have referred to as the “disneyification” of urban gay space, whereby gay neighbourhoods become amusement parks of sorts for the middle classes and tourists who can afford their ever increasing prices. Of the utility changes identified though the research data, it is, perhaps, the one mostly closely associated with the process of gentrification, and best understood when gentrification is viewed through the prism of neo-liberal capitalist accumulation. Inherent in the economic logic of neo-liberalism is the concept of perpetual growth, the expansion of market share, and the pursuit of consumers with sufficient means to sustain such a model. This being the case, the LGBT community, both too small and too varied in economic
circumstances, would never be sufficient to serve expansion and maximise profits. Therefore, gentrification becomes the perfect vehicle with which to achieve these aims. It separates the wheat from the chaff, economically speaking, by driving out lower income residents and users in favour of higher income ones, and expands the consumer base of the zone by attracting the wider heterosexual population. What neo-liberal economic policy and processes of pure, market driven gentrification have in common is a general disregard for the inevitable effects on the social, cultural and environmental well-being of the zones and countries in which they operate. In this respect, Chueca has become a prime example of the consequences that gentrification, as a neo-liberal construct, has for the integrity of urban gay space. These consequences, laid bare through the research conducted for this thesis, includes the dilution of the gay character and culture of such zones, an emerging lack of ethnic diversity, the increasing failure of urban gay space to adequately represent the LGBT community in the entirety of it manifest diversity, and the general crassness of indolent consumption that has increasingly come to dominate the character of many urban gay neighbourhoods.

In the light of the extensive ethnographic research carried out in the Chueca zone of Madrid, allied to both historical and contemporary academic sourcing, and with reference to other gay neighbourhoods, it is fair to conclude that Chueca, and gay space more generally, has undergone extensive and significant utility change in the last two decades. Furthermore, there is sufficient, academic, ethnographic and anecdotal evidence to suggest that processes of urban renewal, and more specifically, gentrification, have played a major and defining role in shaping said utility change, and is likely to continue to do so for the foreseeable future.

7.2 The future of urban gay space

The seismic changes that have occurred over the last two decades in all aspects of gay life and community in western society, from the significant progress achieved in the area of human rights and equality, to the unprecedented visibility of a heretofore largely hidden minority group, have prompted a myriad of questions and hypotheses regarding the future of urban gay communities, and the space they inhabit. According to Amin Ghaziani, we have, in the west at least, entered what he describes as a post gay world where the imperatives of solidarity and rights activism, which required placing sexual orientation and its expression at the centre of gay lives, have declined in importance (Ghaziani, 2014). In their comprehensive work on the fragmentation of gay enclaves, Usher and Morrison also cite factors such as the technological revolution, where contact and connections are available at swipe of a screen (Usher and Morrison, 2010). This has led such
commentators to question whether the long term survival of gay neighbourhoods is viable, or even desirable. This prospect has inevitably generated some sensationalist media headlines. As far back as October 2007, New York Times pronounced that “Gay enclaves face prospect of being passe” in an article predicting the demise of the Castro district of San Francisco, fuelled by a familiar mix of factors; including the dramatic increase in societal acceptance of homosexuality, urban revitalisation efforts, an influx of straight people, and “a waning sense of belonging that is also being felt in gay enclaves across the Nation” (Brown, 2007). As was noted earlier, sober academic analysis by several academics also seem to indicate that gay neighbourhoods are becoming less concentrated and less segregated across western urban centres (Murray, 1990) (Peterson, 2006) (Madden, 2015). Such trends bely the false assumption that once created, queer neighbourhoods would be inevitably self-sustaining. As gay activist Dan Romesburg rightly points out, this is not necessarily true because “our neighbourhoods get built within particular economic, political and cultural circumstances. When those circumstances change so do our neighbourhoods” (Ghaziani, 2014, p.6). At the same time, however, it is important not to overstate the situation. The key word in the previously referenced quote is “change”, which does not necessarily equate with disappearance. Amin Ghaziani’s work on the future of gay neighbourhoods is the provocatively titled “There goes the gaybourhood?”, but even he is not suggesting the imminent collapse of quite deeply rooted and long established urban gay neighbourhoods.

In an earlier chapter, it was noted that the development of anchor institutions helps to maintain the gay character of urban zones that otherwise experience increasing dilution of gayness in the face of residential drift and “heterosexualisation”. This thesis also identified a related phenomenon in Chueca, which I described as the development of socio-cultural anchor institutions, where mainstream activities practiced in a gay setting aided the maintenance of links between the gay populous of an urban centre and its traditional gay space. Pulling at the social fabric of gay space in the other direction are processes such as gentrification and commodification, that increasingly exclude large sections of the LGBT community, both culturally and economically. Though one may cogently argue that it is an increasingly one-sided battle, the general result is a curious tug of war where contradictory forces are simultaneously tearing down and shoring up the ramparts of urban gay space.

In such a context, the debate about the future should not centre on the black and white simplicities of destruction or survival, but on two key qualities of contemporary gay neighbourhoods that are at stake; cultural authenticity and geographical integrity. To facilitate an understanding of what these concepts entail, and how they are related to the future of gay urban
space, it is instructive to return briefly to the research data. The final question in the survey invited participants to speculate on the future of their city’s gay zone, and the emerging data provided some interesting and valuable perspectives on this hotly contested question (table 03, p.60). Respondents overwhelmingly rejected the notion that the increased liberalism of society and the tech revolution would lead to the death of urban gay zones, while accepting the proposition that urban gay space would become more and more oriented towards the wider heterosexual population, and become more geographically dispersed. As this thesis has demonstrated, both these processes are already underway, and threaten not necessarily the official existence of urban gay space, but its authenticity and geographical integrity. As Ignacio Elpidio, author of When Chueca dies has noted, this trend does not presage the imminent demise of the zone, but the gradual dilution of its gay essence (Elpidio, 2017). An effective analogy to unpack this contradiction is the debate surrounding the future of the nation state. Many credible political scientists have been predicting the demise of the nation state for some years. The fact that, in 2019, it remains the primary unit of the international system has led many to dismiss such predictions out of hand. However, historians such as Eric Hobsbawn and others have posited a more nuanced view, suggesting that while the nation state on the surface remains intact, upon closer scrutiny one can argue that its powers and functions are being increasingly hollowed out, domestically by the encroachment of the private sector, and internationally by systems of regional and global governance, the most obvious example being the European Union (Hobsbawn, 1996). This thesis has provided ample evidence to suggest that urban gay neighbourhoods are following a similar trajectory, intact on the surface while experiencing a degradation of their authenticity as they no longer serve, to the same extent, their original purpose and function in terms of providing shelter from oppression, space for sexual expression, and collective solidarity (Hodge, 1995).

The second key element regarding the future of gay neighbourhoods is the issue of geographical integrity, and the tendency towards fragmentation of urban gay space. In relation to Chueca specifically, the research data showed that the increasingly exclusivity of the area, driven by rising prices and homogenisation, is progressively alienating a significant section of the urban gay population who increasingly search for alternative gay-friendly locations, aptly described by one interviewee as “mini Chuecas”. These are places which offer an alternative, less commercialised, more affordable, and some would argue, a more authentic gay environment. The extent of this fragmentation is likely to vary from city to city, depending on how well established the original gay neighbourhood is. Though this fragmentation will continue, a gay zone as iconic and well-established as Chueca is likely to retain its centrality for the foreseeable future. This evolving
model is also in evidence in other major cities. In his definitive tome on the history of gay London, Peter Ackroyd pointedly observes that the long established dominance of Soho at the centre of London gay life has been challenged somewhat in recent years by alternative locations such as Shoreditch (Ackroyd, 2017). However, in terms of gay numbers and sheer volume, Soho is still comfortably the largest gay neighbourhood in London. Berlin is another good example of how gay urban life has fragmented to a certain extent, as the traditional gay stomping grounds are being challenged by alternative spaces. There is, of course, a strong sense of urban inevitability to this process, not unique to gay neighbourhoods, whereby new locations and recreational hubs spring up in opposition to more traditional zones. However, in terms of how younger LGBT urbanites now socialise, in the new liberal era of metrosexuality and hipster culture, there has been a blurring of the lines between gay and straight venues with the advent the “gay friendly” scene, as gays increasingly integrate and friendships cut cross sexual lines. As Andrew Sullivan points out in his work on gay assimilation and its meaning, it may be reflective of the fact that sexual minorities are finally integrating into the mainstream of western society, in the way that successive generations of immigrant minorities have been doing for decades (Sullivan, 2005). For gay academics such as Ghaziani, this process of cultural absorption is a primary feature of the post gay era. It is also reflective of the fact that a new, more confident LGBT generation feel less need to place their sexual identity front and centre in their lives.

Perhaps it is fitting that the final paragraph of this work returns us to where we began, to the question of identity. In this brave new post-gay world, academics such as Ghaziani (2014) and Sullivan (2005) are increasingly of the view that gay identity has outlived its usefulness as it pertains to the urban gay community, and with it the urban space which has traditionally been pivotal in developing and maintaining that identity. There are, however, two important caveats to this seemingly logical assumption, with which to conclude this discussion. Firstly, minority dedicated urban space, as this thesis has clearly outlined, is capable of mutation, whereby its functions may be refashioned. And though the results are not appreciated by all, it may well still constitute urban gay space of sorts, and maintain its importance in the lives of a significant number of LGBT community members. Finally, assertions regarding the redundancy of urban gay space are based on the notion that, in the brave new world of post-gay identity, urban gay space has lost its defining function, that of maintaining an increasingly obsolete gay identity though the provision of solidarity and refuge. However, as has been repeatedly pointed out in this work, the journey from oppression to liberation has not always been a chronologically linear one. And in this increasingly reactionary age of Trump, Salvini, Vox and white nationalism, who is to say which way
the pendulum of oppression may swing. An authoritarian turn of events in the future may once again confer upon urban gay space the yester-year role of solidarity, refuge and political relevance, that it seems to have lost today.
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