








Legal geographies in the making: Urban inequality, neighbourhood networks, and pandemic territorialities

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Abstract

In March of 2020, the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) escalated into a global health emergency. In Madrid, public institutions were overwhelmed by this crisis, and mutual aid networks were deployed in multiple neighbourhoods to assist thousands of families—approximately 15,000 households—with food and care in the absence of actions taken by the Madrid City Council. Drawing on a mixed methodology that combines discourse analysis and statistical data from social actors and multi-level institutions, this study aims to highlight the patterns of socio-spatial inequalities in Madrid in light of the urban impact of pandemic regulations and the role of public institutions in re-territorialising its already existing inequalities through legal zoning. In particular, this study examines the relationship between the territorial irruption of COVID-19-related collective action initiatives and the re-spatialisation of social inequalities in Madrid. In line with this objective, two additional questions are addressed. The study highlights the value of a legal geography theoretical framework in examining how law works as a political technology over territory and also shows how social organisations and networks have claimed legal regulations as bottom-up social change processes, challenging the dynamics in the political production of law. The aim of this work is twofold: on the one hand, we wonder to what extent the solidarity networks could be related to urban territorialities and the spatialisation of social inequalities in Madrid. On the other hand, we aim to show how a legal geography perspective could be useful in examining how law is used over territory as a political technology and as a surveillance tool and, conversely, how from social movements representing social networks in pandemic, many regulations are demanded and vindicated as bottom-up social change processes that mean a contention of former dynamics in the political production of law.

KEYWORDS

cartography, legal geography, neighbourhood, pandemic, territoriality, urban movement

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1 | INTRODUCTION

The Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic has remained a prominent research topic in the social sciences since 2020. Many academics have reviewed the impacts of the crisis, explicitly addressing them in sociological, political, anthropological, and geographical contexts. Studies on COVID-19 are of particular importance in many regions of the world, including Europe (Romero, 2020), Latin America (Conde, 2020; Góis et al., 2022; Montoya Arango, 2020; Ríos, 2020), Central America (Díaz Arias & Viales Hurtado, 2020), Japan (Yamazaki, 2020), and the Middle East (Barreñada, 2020).

Studies have shown that Madrid represented the core of the pandemic in Spain, one of the countries most affected by the virus (Páez et al., 2021; Maza & Hierro, 2022; Pallares Barbera et al., 2022; Hierro & Maza, 2023; Jiménez Franco et al., 2023). To manage the health crisis caused by COVID-19, the Spanish government approved Decree 463/2020 declaring a State of Alarm on 14 March 2020. This regulation limited the free movement of people throughout the territory, confining the population, to curb the pandemic. This confinement, which lasted until 23 May 2020, restricted transit on public roads to strictly essential activities such as acquiring essential food or pharmacies, visiting health centres, commuting to the workplace, and caring for vulnerable people; suspended tourism (art.10); and interrupted educational activities (art. 9). Madrid, the capital of Spain and of the Autonomous Region, reported the highest cumulative number of cases of the virus, accounting for 30.5% on 26 March 2020, when the highest number of cases was reported in Spain.¹ In addition to the number of contagions, the suspension of public transit led to the temporary or complete suspension of several economic activities. In this context, the activation of popular food banks and solidarity and mutual support networks made it possible to cope with the situation in the face of institutional overflow. The number of requests for help from Madrid's most vulnerable groups could not be managed by municipal and regional public services, prompting others to organise a citizen response to the crisis through neighbours' associations or social groupings (Lois & González Iturraspe, 2021).

Accordingly, studying neighbourhood responses in Madrid is a way to understand the impact of COVID-19 on the generation of other urban cartographies and different ways of seeing and acting within the city. Our research seeks to broaden an appreciation of the relationships among territoriality, socio-spatial inequalities, and solidarity networks in Madrid to emphasise the political organisation of space as a source of spatial injustice (Soja, 2010), particularly in times of crisis. It is a first step to examining correlations that might exist across populations in situations of vulnerability,

Key insights

Approaching the territoriality of neighbourhood networks in urban contexts may enhance a more multifaceted reading of inequalities and socio-spatial segregations previous to the pandemics. There is a relationship between territorial irruption of neighbourhood assistance initiatives and existing socio-spatial inequality in Madrid, Spain. The making of legal geography during the pandemics enlightened the various urban actors that produce the social space. Neighbourhood assistance networks challenged the regulation of the pandemic in Madrid and laid the foundations for disputes over spatialities and territorialities there.

pandemic solidarity, and spatial regulations implemented by the regional government in the crisis. The aim is to provide insights into the overlapping spatialities of urban inequalities and popular or much-used city networks to highlight the articulation of multiple cartographies that underline selective confinements particularly in Madrid, but in urban contexts of contentious legal geographies strongly intervened by territorial inequalities. Thus, we examine the production of regulatory recognition and health management during the COVID-19 pandemic, discussing the use of regulations as disciplining and domination devices consubstantial with legal genealogy (Braverman, 2014) and the recursive use of the law by political and social actors (Luhmann, 2005).

We also address the territorial contestation of these devices through social movements and individuals acting on social networks. In the process, we highlight certain trends observed in the legal discourse and its institutional implementation that maintain socio-spatial inequality—especially with the confinements—while simultaneously emphasising the social movements and neighbourhood solidarity networks combatting the city's COVID-19 pandemic, not only as a popular response to unsatisfactory institutional actions but also as a constant contestation of socio-spatial inequality. In other words, approaching the social production of spatiality, we find the tracks of a socio-spatial horizon already envisioned as the right to the city (Lefebvre, 1968).

The paper is structured as follows. Section 2 presents legal geography as a theoretical frame to transcend institutional actions by encompassing other agents (neighbourhood networks) in a city's urban governance during the pandemic. Section 3 reveals Madrid's pattern of unequal spatial development to

correlate it not only with the territorial activation of solidarity networks but also with the selective zoning implemented by the regional government that spatialised the contention of the virus. Finally, the results are discussed and summarised in Section 4.

2 | LEGAL GEOGRAPHIES AND SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

2.1 | Legal geography: A theoretical proposal

Legal geography is a label used for different initiatives that share a common interest in the link between space and law (Brickell et al., 2021). As Blomley (2008, p. 156) argues, interesting bonds exist between law and space that are worth exploring because both elements are considered social products and producers of the same social relations. They take a reciprocal form: spatiality should be viewed as both the cause and consequence of legal production. Both elements are involved in dynamic and power interactions that shape each other and are reformulated accordingly. Finally, the space works like an imaginary for the rights, “forming the forms in which these are constituted, answers and works to produce, and to operate from, delimited spaces” (Blomley, 2008, p. 158), whereas the type of legal categorisation is a concrete means of spatialisation (Banakar, 2010).

Thus, legal geography refers to different objects, when their spatial possibilities are investigated under the law, such as “different spaces and locations; rules and expectations that regulate these spaces; and the implications of these different spatialities on the qualities from the public actors” (Staeheli, 2010, p. 71). It focuses on research into the ways by which action and legal interpretation produce certain spaces and territories (Bartel & Graham, 2023; Staeheli et al., 2012), the located nature (place) of the legal interpretation, and the study of the geographic demands and representations contained in legal speech (Gregory et al., 2009), especially those that question or reproduce the freezing of political imagination through law (Blomley, 2003, 2004a, 2004b, 2007). The performative role of the legal narrative, in a similar way to cartography, establishes law by moving from a normative discourse of “ought to be” to a descriptive narrative of what “is,” as “really existing” data instructed and learned through legal discourse (Ricca, 2017). This point of analysis has grown significantly over the last two decades (Gillespie, 2023).

Thus, legal geography allows us to analyse territoriality and the production of territory as a political technology (Elden, 2013). Territoriality is a practice that demarcates a concrete space, with an intention to control, affect, and influence agency and use or access a

particular geographical area (Sack, 1983, p. 55). This is a key issue not only because of the control exerted over territory but also because it turns social relations into territorial struggles. Moreover, we highlight some issues that combine a legal geography perspective with empirical processes, which can be described as:

the trajectory of the cross-disciplinary endeavour that has come to be known as legal geography. We suggest that there is much to learn by both legal scholars and geographers becoming ‘spatial detectives’ – of learning, Sherlock Holmes-like – to search out the presence and the absence of spatialities in legal practice and of law’s traces and effects embedded within places. (Bennett & Layard, 2015, p. 406)

As we hope to show, in our work on Madrid, we—like other legal geographers—tend to act as “spatial detectives” or, at least, social sciences detectives who “ride through” legal geography navigating many dimensions and issues. This process provides food for thought regarding spatial paths tied to rules and norms that could be studied, especially considering the huge number of available sources, supporting the “empirical test” through the “crime’s scene” of the space (Bennett & Layard, 2015, p. 406).

Additionally, we are concerned with a question about the significance of “where”—and from—law is enacted. As has been noted, “the where of law, the social spaces, lived places and landscapes which are inscribed with legal significance are not simply the inert sites of law but are inextricably implicated in how law happens” (Braverman et al., 2013, p. 1). This issue coexists with the anti-geographical nature of law and rights concerning the abstract nature of both (Bennett & Layard, 2015).

In thinking about the pandemic, we question how the first dimension—the spatial nature of law—negotiates with the second one—the anti-geographical nature—when territory is produced and reshaped through social movements that extend far beyond the state. We stress depictions that are produced through ties between law and space or splices that “identify instances or moments where legally informed decisions and actions take place [in the sense both of the occurrence of a legal performative (an event) and of being spatially located and embodied]. They are locally enacted encodings, which weave together spatial and legal meanings” (Bennett & Layard, 2015). This insight is a cornerstone in the co-constitutive approach of legal geography to the legal co-production of space and the spatial co-production of the law, with new ways of territory production—as we point out, concerning neighbourhoods and solidarity networks—ultimately changing these meanings, encodings, and scopes

(Braverman et al., 2013; Delaney, 2015). The act of regulation as a political resource implies that law and rights imaginaries are emphasised over other political depictions, despite many political processes tied to the COVID-19 pandemic having resulted in regulations from which social agents come to the fore through several political tools and challenge former perspectives in legal geography.

2.2 | Legal geography of COVID-19 in Madrid: A methodological proposal from a social movements perspective

Our case study involves legal and spatial meanings interacting. Although legal geography has incorporated a tradition that predominantly analyses the processes of the production of spatiality through the normative and emphasises the role of institutions, in the last decade, approaches have considered the contestation of such regulations by social movements or political actors not (exclusively) embedded in institutional structures.

In the context of crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, mutual aid has helped reconstruct and preserve life (Lois & González Iturraspe, 2021; Springer, 2020). The convergence of emancipatory initiatives from neighbourhood movements and solidarity economy networks implies a reformulation of the parameters of governance (Sokolowski, 2020)—including the dimensions of networks and solidarity as structural dimensions of governance—and collective action based on the principle of solidarity. Collective action based on mutual aid involves mechanisms of social innovation and scalar tensions, which are key to the case study presented here (Moulaert et al., 2022), allowing us to identify important trends in regulation and normative production linked to recent political processes on a global scale. Although the reformulation of governance could be interpreted as anti-capitalist, we believe that the neighbourhood solidarity network *modus operandi* is primarily altruistic/philanthropic liberalism.

Mutual aid highlights the importance of collectivity. Paradoxically, state measures intended to collectively protect individual rights (such as physical distance or mobility restrictions) re-activated and regenerated spaces of solidarity and reciprocity as the basis of the common. Beyond the dependency of the logics of state or business, mutual aid was confirmed as the foundation of collectivity in moments of social crisis and emergency. Despite the magnitude and importance of these practices, a certain relative invisibility exists in media communication and social networks, revealing the resistant character of these activities. In other words, “as its geographical reach tends to be local or even hyperlocal, mutual aid naturally exhibits

different characteristics in different locations, and this has ramifications for how mutual aid should be studied in post-pandemic times” (Mould et al., 2022, p. 875).

The proposed analysis integrates multiple sources, taking into account of regulations considered by the administrations themselves and of the judicial interpretations issued in this regard.² We also consider statistical sources and sociodemographic reports, such as the vulnerability index (VI) by Districts of the City of Madrid in 2020, 2021, and 2022; the 2020 Activities Report of the Government Area of Families, Equality and Social Welfare of the Madrid City Council; the Sociodemographic Study of the Panel of Indicators of Districts and Neighbourhoods of Madrid 2020–2021; and the Health Study of the City of Madrid in 2014. We also study initiatives that have been recognised by both the European Union (European Citizen Award 2020–2021), the Ministry of Health, Consumption and Social Welfare (“Community Networks in the COVID-19 Crisis”), and the Madrid City Council (“Compartimos Barrio”). Other social mapping initiatives registered with the Regional Federation of Neighbourhood Associations of Madrid (FRAVM) are also considered along with in-depth interviews and research reports obtained from the FRAVM archive between 2020 and 2022.

These numerous sources imply a multidisciplinary perspective on the description and analysis of the case, combining multiple research techniques at different stages. The two main parts of this work differ in terms of their structure and orientation, which can be methodologically differentiated. First, the paper fulfils a descriptive function, as this entire dimension is built by its extensive use of sources, indicators, and data, establishing a solid foundation. Second, it fulfils analytical and interpretive functions through critical discourse analysis, emphasising the practices of space production that are produced from legal discourse (Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999, p. 23) and established by competent administrations in terms of pandemic regulation.

The contrast between the production of space from above and the resistance from below is explained with the help of in-depth interviews and research reports produced by neighbourhood movements. The local scale of the work allowed us to collect direct information through interviews. We worked with various databases provided by the FRAVM, referring particularly to the analysis of the results of interviews conducted with presidents, vice-presidents, and members of various care networks established by the federated neighbourhood associations to count the active neighbourhood networks, number of volunteers, and beneficiaries of each network, among other issues. Following ethics clearances, the participants were selected by the FRAVM through an online questionnaire sent to federated neighbourhood associations, requesting the

contact of spokespersons and people responsible for the management of the care networks. The participants were aware of the purpose of the research—to quantify the impact of the support provided by neighbourhood organisations. Interviews were conducted in April and May 2020, June and July 2021, and June 2022. Although they were not transcribed, a database was created that did not record personal data or user details but captured the aggregate totals of the main variables explored by each mutual support group: type of help provided, total number of people who participated in the initiative as volunteers or activists, total number of people who attended, and so on. Data were analysed from a total of 198 semi-structured telephonic interviews by FRAVM’s technical staff.

Critical hermeneutics enables connecting text, historical context, and the agency of different social subjects (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Our analysis was based on a historical vision of legal discourse and the use of rhetorical categorisation tools. It articulated “a repertoire of political and cultural meanings through which citizens can negotiate and interact with each other ... [shaping] the way people conceive of the political realm and their place in it” (Blomley, 2008, pp. 156–157). Thus, the analysis of the normative focused on the discursive elements that construct a type of representation from the institutional sphere through regulation. Considering the image as “the structured cartographic representation of a spatial or selected information ... that becomes a map when it is represented physically, virtually or linguistically” (Johnston et al., 2000, p. 320), we analysed how the definition and representation of the different territories regulated and recognised as legitimate political interlocutors in the public agenda changed throughout a complex and dynamic political process during the management and regulation of the pandemic.

3 | URBAN TERRITORIES, SOCIAL INEQUALITIES, AND PANDEMIC CARTOGRAPHIES

3.1 | Socio-spatial inequalities in Madrid

This section examines the spatiality of Madrid’s unequal urban development by re-approaching some of its structural asymmetries in the light of the COVID-19.

In fact, socio-spatial inequality and its relationship with COVID-19 have become topics of research interest (Recio et al., 2021; Rogers & Kearnes, 2023). The modernisation, industrialisation, and urbanisation of Madrid configured its socio-spatial patterns of inequality, which remain and are reinforced by the economic transformation of the city toward a global city model (Ariza de la Cruz, 2022). Social and labour segregation and the unequal redistribution of wealth areas determined by the division of Madrid into two zones: the northwest and southeast areas (Jiménez Blasco et al., 2020; Méndez, 2019). The latter is characterised by greater vulnerability in socioeconomic terms.

Through the VI by Districts of the City of Madrid, we can see how these two distinct areas are reflected in the territory of Madrid (Figure 1), divided by a “diagonal of inequality,” with the exception of Tetuán district in the north.

The most vulnerable districts in 2020 were Puente de Vallecas, Villaverde, Usera, and Carabanchel (Table 1), which are located in the south of the city. In contrast, Chamartín, Retiro, Salamanca, and Moncloa-Aravaca, north of the city, had the lowest VI. Using 2021 data, if we compare districts with the highest (San Cristóbal, in Villaverde) and the lowest (El Viso, in Chamartín) VI, the following inequalities emerge: The average annual household income (2018) was €21,070.7

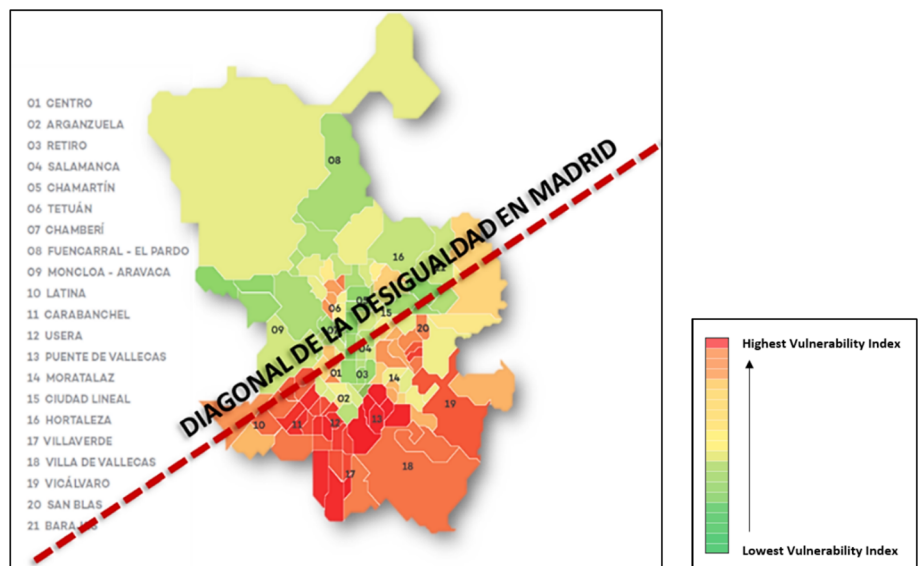


FIGURE 1 The diagonal of inequality in Madrid according to the district vulnerability index (2018). Source: Díaz (2019).

TABLE 1 Vulnerability index by district in Madrid (2020, 2021).

Ranking	District	Index 2020	Index 2021
1	Puente de Vallecas	0.0110	0.0111
2	Villaverde	0.0102	0.0103
3	Usera	0.0101	0.0103
4	Carabanchel	0.0096	0.0097
5	Villa de Vallecas	0.0088	0.0085
6	Latina	0.0086	0.0086
7	San Blas–Canillejas	0.0083	0.0084
8	Tetuán	0.0080	0.0080
9	Vicálvaro	0.0081	0.0080
10	Moratalaz	0.0079	0.0079
11	Centro	0.0076	0.0076
12	Ciudad lineal	0.0072	0.0072
13	Arganzuela	0.0067	0.0065
14	Barajas	0.0066	0.0066
15	Hortaleza	0.0066	0.0066
16	Fuencarral–El Pardo	0.0064	0.0064
17	Chamberí	0.0060	0.0059
18	Moncloa–Aravaca	0.0060	0.0059
19	Salamanca	0.0059	0.0058
20	Retiro	0.0059	0.0057
21	Chamartín	0.0058	0.0057

Source: prepared by the authors based on Ayuntamiento de Madrid (2020a, 2020b, 2022).

and €80,370.4 respectively. The average floor area of the housing was 61.15 m² in San Cristóbal and 139.93 m² in El Viso. In San Cristóbal, 9.6% of people can neither read nor write and 47.6% have only basic education. In comparison, 1.2% of people in El Viso can neither read nor write and 58.6% have higher education. Most statistical analyses reflect a component of greater inequality associated with gender, with women being most vulnerable to these inequalities (Ayuntamiento de Madrid, 2022).

The Health³ and Economy and Employment⁴ determinants by which to understand the capacities and resources of the population of the different districts of the city in dealing with the crisis caused by COVID-19 reveals the Territorial Vulnerability Indicators for the year 2020, as depicted in Figure 2.

Some southern districts such as Usera, Puente de Vallecas, and Villaverde have the highest vulnerability indices mainly in terms of economy and employment, with deep inequality among the districts in Madrid; however, in terms of health, Carabanchel, the most vulnerable district in the Economy and Employment area, improves its condition, unlike Moncloa-Aravaca.

The evolution of unemployment (2020–2022) analysed by districts in Madrid provides another example of existing inequalities and socio-spatial vulnerabilities. The districts with the highest unemployment rates—

Latina, Usera, and Puente de Vallecas—were the most affected by the COVID-19 crisis, as reflected in this indicator. However, it is noteworthy that all of them have not only recovered proportionally compared to the previous unemployment rates but also improved their situation compared to before the pandemic. This may be attributed to the labour measures adopted by the central government in March 2022.

The cumulative incidence rate in the COVID-19 second wave (October 2020) reflects a correlation with the districts with the highest vulnerability indices (Figure 3). Puente de Vallecas, Villaverde, and Carabanchel were the most affected by COVID-19 and had the highest vulnerability indices. This correlation reveals how urban factors, with implications for lifestyles, such as transportation and work typology, combined with social relations models, exhibited higher infection rates in these districts (Esteban et al., 2021).

This diagonal of inequality, analysed in terms of the VI, reveals a stable spatial structure representing the development of Madrid's urban space. Although evident asymmetries exist in accordance with this unequal spatial development, a question arose as to whether links could be established between this socio-spatial inequality and the neighbourhood assistance initiatives and solidarity networks that emerged during the hardest moments of the pandemic.

If we extend the focus to the entire Community of Madrid, these patterns of inequality will remain. Madrid is one of the three provinces with the highest annual per capita income and comprises three of the municipalities with the highest per capita income (in Euros) at the state level: Pozuelo de Alarcón (€26,009), Boadilla del Monte (€22,224), and Alcobendas (€18,684), located in the north of the Community. Other municipalities located in the south of Madrid, such as Parla (9803€), with very low incomes (INE, 2020) also exist.

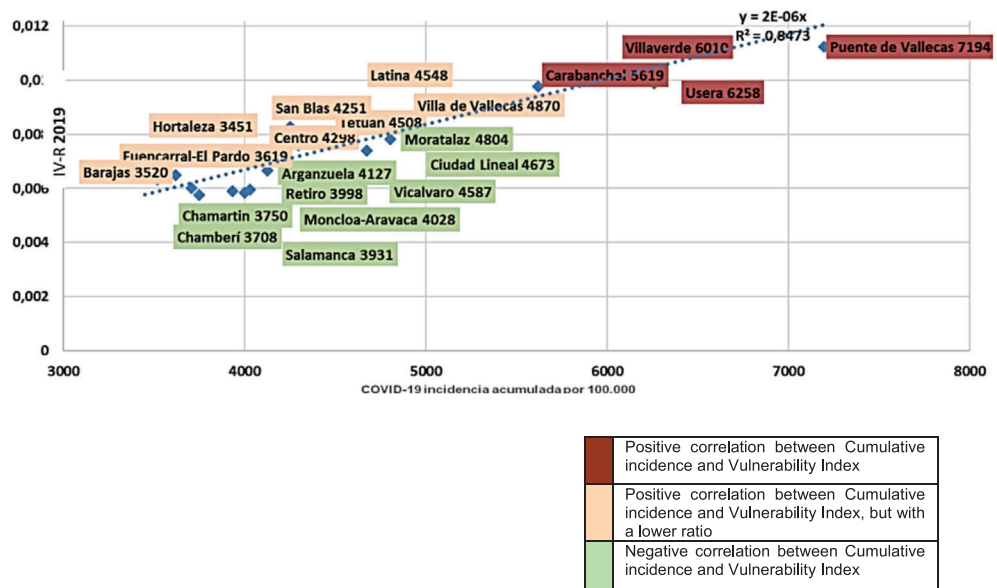
3.2 | Urban territorialities and solidarity neighbourhood networks

This section examines the spatial distribution of social inequalities in Madrid as a variable in the activation of solidarity networks or other initiatives launched during the pandemic. Our analysis accounts for an historical link between socio-spatial inequality and the creation of solidarity networks in Madrid, previously seen in other crisis contexts (Lois & González Iturraspe, 2021), where the so-called *Redes de Solidaridad Popular* (RSP) or Popular Solidarity Network was born to “coordinate the organisation of a solidarity network that begins to alleviate the vacuum of the state” (Red de Solidaridad Popular, 2013, p. 6). The RSP was considered “an instrument of resistance and struggle against the neoliberal policies that are driving the popular and working class into poverty and lack of opportunities”

FIGURE 2 Health vulnerability index and economy and employment vulnerability index by district in the City of Madrid (2020). Source: prepared by the authors based on Ayuntamiento de Madrid (2020b).



FIGURE 3 Cumulative incidence rate of COVID-19 per 100,000 by districts in the city of Madrid in relation to the vulnerability index (VI). Source: Ayuntamiento de Madrid (2020b). COVID-19, Coronavirus Disease 2019.



(Red de Solidaridad Popular, 2013, p. 25). It launched several initiatives that served as foundations for these social movements, such as programs related to food sovereignty, health aid, and public education support.

Of the 16 networks in the Community of Madrid, seven are located in different districts of the Madrid City Council (Figure 4). Examining the spatial distribution pattern of these networks reveals that six of them are

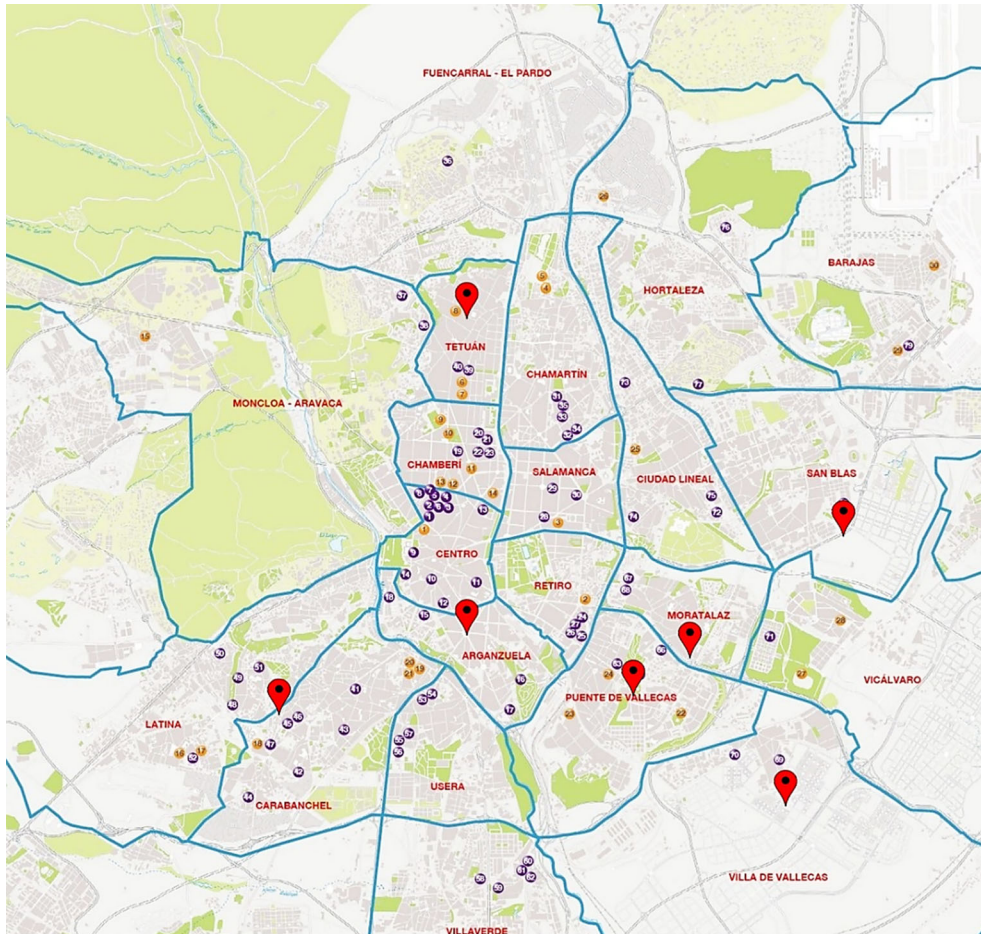


FIGURE 4 Map of the popular solidarity networks in the districts of the city of Madrid. Source: prepared by the authors based on the Statistical Institute of the Community of Madrid and <https://www.reddesolidaridadpopular.org/red/com-madrid>.

located below the “diagonal of inequality”: Centro–Arganzuela, Latina Carabanchel, Moratalaz, Puente de Vallecas, San Blas, and Villa de Vallecas. Only one (Tetuán) falls above this line. Today, only the Latina–Carabanchel and San Blas networks remain active, while others served as a precedent for the mutual support networks that would reemerge following the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. This inequality corresponds to the “overflow” of the demand for social assistance from the Madrid City Council, reproducing the former pattern of socio-spatial inequalities. In this vein, “people who found themselves in a situation of vulnerability for the first time were mainly neighbours of those who, at some point prior to the pandemic, had approached their social services for help” (Ayuntamiento de Madrid, 2020c, p. 64). Figure 5 reveals that the highest density of emergency calls occurred in the southern and eastern districts of Madrid, in addition to others such as Tetuán, Ciudad Lineal, and San Blas–Canillejas.

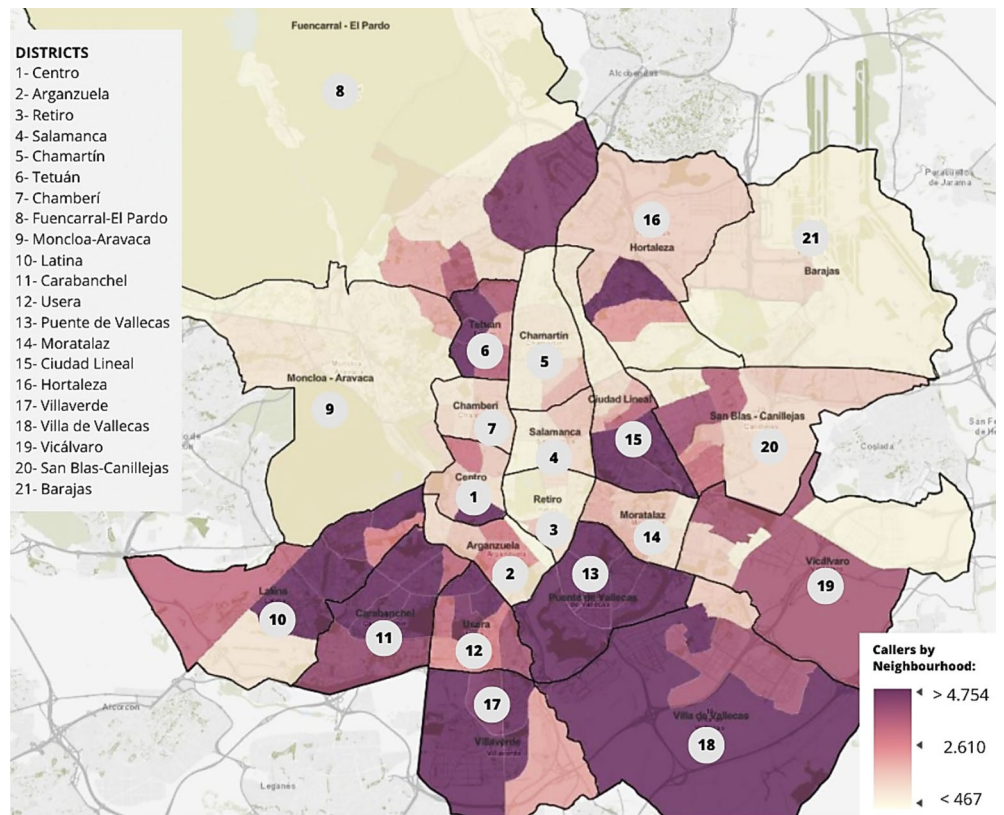
Between 14 March and 3 June 2020, the Social Services Centers of the Madrid City Council remained closed, aiding only via telecommunications services. In other words, demand increased because of not only the paralysis of economic activity but also the lack of

personnel and resources to face the subsequent social crisis that emerged, deepening the pre-existing social (and territorial) gap.

In Madrid, according to the data provided by the neighbourhood networks to the FRAVM—which shouldered the responsibility of the Neighbourhood Associations in Madrid from the beginning of the State of Alarm until 30 April—the networks circumscribed within the city of Madrid distributed food to more than 5800 different families, comprising more than 20,000 people.⁵ The FRAVM registered 58 other neighbourhood networks and 37 solidarity pantries within just 1 month of confinement. As of 31 May, 63 neighbourhood networks were operating in Madrid (76 in the entire Autonomous Community), with more than 50,000 people and approximately 15,000 households receiving food.⁶

The practice of these networks refers to the articulation of collective structures and reveals patterns of solidarity on a local scale, particularly defined by geographical closeness. Citizenship is at the core of how they work and highlights the shortcomings of public policies in combatting the situation caused by the pandemic. The multiple actions of popular solidarity networks contributed to strengthening neighbourhood

FIGURE 5 Map of the calls requesting help that were received during the confinement (March–June 2020). Source: Ayuntamiento de Madrid (2020c, p. 65).



movements organised around experience and daily routines. As one member pointed out in April 2021:

The networks and the neighbourhood associations are the skeleton that has been kept in place ... They have been instrumental in supporting all of this. If we had not the premises, that small infrastructure ... the response would have been zero. You must hit the bottom somewhere, and we have been able to do it on the social networks of the neighbourhoods to drive forward something very powerful. (quoted in Grupo Cooperativo Tangente, 2022, p. 34)

Despite the lack of correspondence regarding the territorial distribution of the activation of care networks, the volume of care provided by these networks in relation to everyday practices and places is significant. In short:

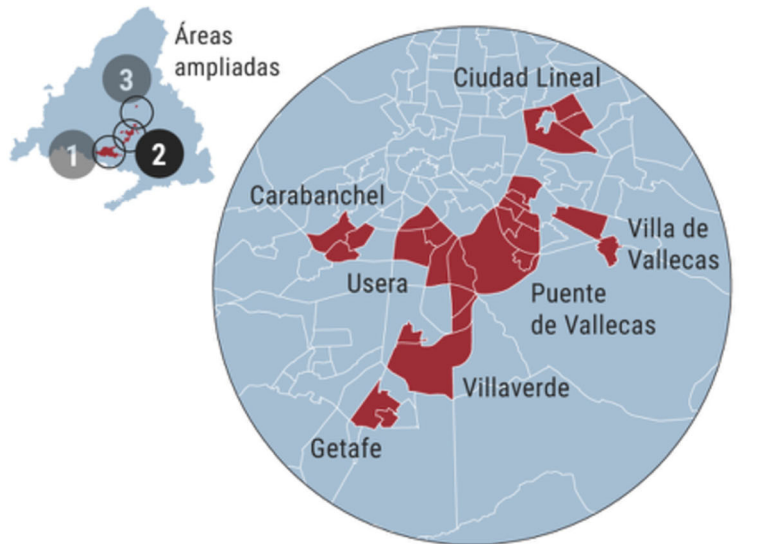
At first, the expressions of solidarity were spontaneous. Neighbours volunteered to do their shopping, take care of administrative formalities, or bring them their medicines. But the crisis hit many more people ... The pandemic highlighted the need for a strong and close network of solidarity to help relieve the most pressing needs,

especially food, of these neighbours. And there, the neighbourhood organisation was, it has always shown, the nearest and most effective. (Bonilla et al., 2021, p. 56)

While food provision was most visible, many actions succeeded in turning often disengaging emotions such as sadness, guilt, depression, and shame into attitudes with a high degree of mobilising potential for hope, indignation, and optimism. Thus, network neighbourhoods are considered political tools with the ability to demand investment in material and human resources to maintain and renew the welfare services provided for everyday life.

Clear relationships exist in the cartography of inequality, need for assistance, and citizenship response. According to Figure 6, between March and June 2020, Latina, Carabanchel, Usera, Villaverde, Puente, and Villa de Vallecas were the districts with the highest demand for help, as were certain neighbourhoods of Tetuán, Hortaleza, Centro, and Fuencarral-El Pardo. Analysis of the data provided by FRAVM as of 30 April 2020 reveals that of the 56 solidarity networks active at the time, 26 belonged to one of these six districts. In other words, almost half of the neighbourhood solidarity networks (46%) were concentrated in these districts and 5,187 of the 10,276 cases recorded in the entire city were also located in these districts.

RESTRICCIONES DE MOVILIDAD POR ZONAS SANITARIAS



CARABANCHEL	VILLA DE VALLECAS	PUENTE DE VALLECAS
ZBS Puerta Bonita	ZBS Villa de Vallecas	ZBS Entrevías
ZBS Vista Alegre	GETAFE	ZBS Martínez de la Riva
ZBS Guayaba	ZBS Las Margaritas	ZBS San Diego
USERA	ZBS Sánchez Morate	ZBS Numancia
ZBS Almendrales	VILLAVERDE	ZBS Peña Prieta
ZBS Las Calesas	ZBS San Andrés	ZBS P. del Tío Raimundo
ZBS Zofío	ZBS San Cristóbal	ZBS Ángela Uriarte
ZBS Orcasur	ZBS El Espinillo	ZBS Alcalá de Guadaíra
ZBS San Fermín	ZBS Los Rosales	ZBS Federica Montseny

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FIGURE 6 Basic Health Zones in Madrid City with perimeter closures (September 2020). Source: Amade/El Mundo Gráficos. Available at <https://www.elmundo.es/madrid/2020/09/18/5f64d3acfdfff11a88b460e.html>.

In July 2021, the FRAVM conducted a follow-up study on active solidarity networks. Of the 34 networks that still existed, 13 were located in the aforementioned districts. Moreover, of the 3,789 families served, 2548 (67.25%) were from these territories (Pérez, 2021).

Thus, solidarity networks acted immediately and offered a structural response to the demand for help, which was not satisfied by the city administration. Several institutional initiatives were launched for recognition and empowerment. First, on 30 April 2020, the Spanish Ministry of Health, Consumer Affairs, and Social Welfare published a document titled “Community Networks in the COVID-19 Crisis,” which included best practices and guidelines for the implementation of “local community networks in response to the COVID-19 pandemic” (Ministerio de Sanidad, 2020, p. 2).

The Madrid City Council, despite its unsatisfactory actions, also launched the “Ecosystem of Proximity” on the website “Sharing Neighbourhood,” which included all the social and business initiatives that were active during the period of confinement. Thus, essential product stores, carriers or delivery companies, and

neighbourhood associations with mutual support initiatives could be registered as part of the initiative:

to become an ecosystem of proximity that serves to join forces of associations and businesses, and thus supply the population that, for various reasons, cannot go out on the street or cannot cope alone with the situation of confinement that we live. (Ayuntamiento de Madrid, 2021a)

Other initiatives were driven by platforms and collectives, and the European Citizen Prize 2020–2021 was awarded in Brussels to the solidarity network “Somos tribu Vk” (We are tribe Vk) from the district of Puente de Vallecas (Castaño, 2021; Martínez Aranda, 2022, p. 78).

Neighbourhood networks provide strategies focused on strengthening community structures to overcome basic primary care needs. Their fundamental purpose is to establish and strengthen relationships built on trust, thereby allowing the development of reciprocity and a mutually supportive culture. As Javier

Cuenca noted, “this has meant the recovery of a neighbourhood and community spirit” (Grupo Cooperativo Tangente, 2022, p. 19).

3.3 | Mapping from above: Pandemic cartographies

In Spain, after the first wave of the pandemic in 2020 and the confinements that accompanied it, the Government and the Autonomous Regions (Communities) implemented different health surveillance, prevention, control, and mitigation measures, affecting citizens in several fields with varying intensities. Capacity, access restrictions, and hygiene measures were accompanied by continuous concerns about perimeter closures and territorial restrictions, including new territorialities such as the Basic Health Zones (BHZs) in the Madrid Autonomous Region (Community) from 2020 to 2021.

The regional government in Madrid enacted BHZ perimeter closures on 21 September 2020, following Order 1178/2020, issued on 18 September 2020. In its first application, these closures affected 26 BHZs in Madrid city (Figure 6), and 37 BHZs in the entire region. The BHZ perimeter restrictions were extended until 21 May 2021, affecting a total of 70 BHZs during this period based on their epidemic evolution measures, which considered 14 days of cumulative incidence. In these zones, entry or exit was forbidden, except for justified movements. The first restriction order established the following criteria: 1,000 cases for 100,000 inhabitants over 14 days of cumulative incidence, regular or rising incidence, and geographical contiguity that allowed perimeter control. During this kind of perimeter confinement, these criteria were adapted and changed according to Madrid Health Department guidelines.

BHZs were not a new territorial or administrative construct. Their creation was linked with Law 14/1986 of 25 April General Health, in which art.62 established the possibility of creating BHZs inside health areas with the objective of achieving “the highest operability and efficacy in the functioning of service in the primary level.”⁷ The central elements that determine their application are the distance and time taken to cross (spatial dimension), population concentration or dispersion (demographic dimension), epidemic features (health dimension), and zone health resources (infrastructure dimension). Therefore, a set of territorial, demographic, health, and infrastructure criteria was established for their delimitation, with a health care centre existence as a reference point. This demonstrates the existence of health and public service provision criteria in relation to territorial and administrative delimitations.

Order 1178/2020 enacted measures consistent with the health regulations established after the proclamation of the State of Alarm in March of the same year.

Looking back at the beginning of this spatial redesign in Madrid through the analysis of the regulations, some trends outline the confluence between the aspects through which some measures were managed during the pandemic and the premises of hierarchisation of public space according to the criteria of social class and previously existing socio-spatial inequality. First, according to the sociodemographic study of the Panel of Indicators of Districts and Neighbourhoods of Madrid 2020–2021 (Ayuntamiento de Madrid, 2021b), four clusters or groupings of districts were demarcated according to three variables based on data from the health study of the City of Madrid in 2014: per capita disposable income index, percentage of inhabitants with a higher or secondary education level, and average life expectancy at birth. Based on these criteria, the four groupings (in ascending order) are listed in Table 2.

In other words, this grouping strategy differentiates collectives into categories associated with social class, reproduced by Order 1178/2020. Among the BHZs imposed, all districts belonging to Group 1 and one district belonging to Group 2 (Villa de Vallecas) were included, indicative of the series of hierarchies reproduced territorially in Madrid. Furthermore, we can establish an analogy between this hierarchy and the dynamics of re-territorialisation around class criteria through the BHZs by revising the daily reports of the epidemiological situation caused by COVID-19 during the week prior to the enactment of Order 1178/2020. According to these reports, the decreed BHZs exceeded 700 confirmed cases of infection per 100,000 inhabitants and the districts of Barajas and part of Chamberí—both in Group 4—and those of San Blas and Centro—in Group 2—had equivalent numbers, while the district of Salamanca had between 601 and 700 confirmed cases per 100,000 inhabitants, without entering the forecast of the BHZs.

Combined with the initial design of the district groupings in the city of Madrid, the policies surrounding the response to the pandemic in these cases seem to imply urban spatial planning mediated by the unequal spatiality previously consolidated throughout the metropolitan area of Madrid. The COVID-19 context has deepened

TABLE 2 District groupings divided according to per capita disposable income index, percentage of inhabitants with tertiary or secondary education and life expectancy at birth.

Group 1	Usera, Puente de Vallecas, Villaverde y Carabanchel
Group 2	Latina, Villa de Vallecas, Vicálvaro, Moratalaz, Tetuán, San Blas–Canillejas, Ciudad Lineal y Centro
Group 3	Hortaleza, Fuencarral–El Pardo, Arganzuela y Moncloa–Aravaca
Group 4	Barajas, Chamberí, Retiro, Chamartín y Salamanca

Source: Own elaboration.

the reproduction of a spatial hierarchy already programmed according to class criteria, which assumes that Madrid's urban public space is planned, conceptualised, and "acted" upon based on territorial levels that respond to class variables. As previously observed, access to public space itself becomes another criterion of social distinction by which some territories with the same confirmed indicators of contagion as the established BHZ are not regulated in the same manner. A distinction was established between the ways of representing and regulating urban space, which ultimately implied that the BHZ became a mechanism of institutional control that worked differently in the four clusters. This zoning of areas based on institutional cartography is deeply entwined with the places where neighbourhood solidarity networks respond to several demands for assistance, leading to questions on how such dialogues are established between institutional cartography and forms of everyday urban spatiality and how these dynamics are practiced and imagined in everyday experience.

4 | DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Our research examined the relationship between socio-spatial inequality and actions to combat COVID-19 in Madrid. It was designed to reveal not only the existence of previous socio-spatial inequality in Madrid related to COVID-19 crisis management but also the unequal incidence of the disease. This socio-spatial situation led to the creation of popular solidarity networks that attempted to fill the gap left by the unsatisfactory implementation of public policies. Territorial confinements to control the spread of the disease were also related to this inequality, which increased grievances between territories.

To support our statements, we analysed socio-spatial inequalities in Madrid with the aim of demonstrating that this situation generated a high degree of vulnerability, impacting the spread and containment of COVID-19. The correlation between the VI and the COVID-19 spread reveals how socio-spatial inequalities significantly determined the effects of the pandemic in the region. Simultaneously, the demand for assistance and aid during the pandemic were concentrated and increased in the most vulnerable districts of the city, causing solidarity networks to emerge in the absence of satisfactory actions by the Madrid City Council. These networks show a prevailing way to fight the effects of the disease and socio-spatial inequality linked to the local public policies of the last decades in Madrid. Related to this pattern, the spatial confinements of the BHZ shaped an unequal cartography to spatially manage COVID-19.

Using these ideas, we sought to underline not only the importance of the visibility of inequality but also the

persistence of social practices contesting it "from below." Additionally, the general purpose of this study was to demonstrate how public policies generate socio-spatial contexts, directly impacting people's lives. In other words, we provide an in-depth analysis of how pandemic-related policies and collective actions have reshaped socio-spatial inequalities and territorial governance in the urban context of Madrid. For this reason, we explored how the use of territorial confinements cuts across these inequalities, revealing a popular response to them in the case of Madrid and the COVID-19 context.

After this analysis, the following final remarks can be outlined: First, there exists a relationship between the territorial irruption of neighbourhood assistance initiatives and the previously existing socio-spatial inequality—not in terms of the territorial pattern but in the location of the greatest number of localised assistance demands.

Second, the regulation linked to the initiatives "from below" or neighbourhood solidarity networks reveals several intertwined elements: A series of disputes over territoriality and territory emerged as a political technology, both in the consolidation of the spatialisation of these solidarity assistance networks and in the regulation of BHZs by public institutions. This implies a negotiation and contestation of geographical scales of reference from which political processes are conceptualised and enacted. This occurs not only through the emotions in daily spatial socialisation that allow the construction of scalar references that contest the predominant scales during the pandemic (Linder, 2022) but also across the re-definition of urban territoriality within the institutional sphere through the BHZs. Thus, if we embrace the definition of territory as "a political technology comprising techniques of land measurement and land control ... a political issue, but in a broad sense: economic, strategic, legal and technical" (Elden, 2010, pp. 811–812), we realise the existing interrelationship between interests and groups in dispute, as depicted here from a legal geography perspective.

Finally, concerning causality and recognition in the regulation of political and social actors that transcend state intervention in Madrid, we observed that neighbourhood networks posed a challenge and underwent a transformation in terms of the regulation of the pandemic by re-setting the foundations for future challenges related to disputes over spatialities and territorialities. Thus, such initiatives have been institutionally recognised as an active part of regulations at the local, regional, and state levels or within the European Union itself. In addition, although less evident, institutional regulations directly responded to these healthcare territorialities, with neighbourhood networks carrying out a scalar response. The establishment of BHZs and the selective confinements intended to redefine urban territoriality while simultaneously

providing an immediate chronological response to the neighbourhood networks, including these initiatives, through their insertion as a territorial policy. Although this type of public policy usually eludes certain power relations under the umbrella of the territoriality of the political process, such power relations constitute a premise of the previous regulation because they are established around social class variables and such correlations are established in the form of territorial patterns of socio-spatial inequality regulated under the form of urban clusters and groups. As addressed, selective confinement was spread over territories with a higher index of initiatives and registered neighbourhood assistance demands. Beyond the political interests and objectives of the regional government, the development of this process recognises neighbourhood organisations and solidarity networks as legitimate actors in regulating the pandemic. In a context where institutions seemed to respond by establishing a regulation contrary to solidarity networks, these neighbourhood demands, which also questioned the geographical scales to manage the pandemic, were able to reverse regulatory causality. Not only were demands for neighbourhood assistance introduced into institutional and regulatory recognition but they were also recognised as the main agencies in the political responses to the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, including the forms of regulation established during and after its outbreak.

Edward Soja (2010) once noted the importance of spatial justice, demonstrating how geography and spatial perspective analysis were fundamental approaches to fighting inequalities and social injustice. Our analysis of popular solidarity networks and confinement areas in Madrid relates to the idea of the right to the city (Lefebvre, 1968) as a way to achieve spatial justice. This paper points out that socio-spatial inequalities affect the capacity to cope with crises; therefore, our main conclusion is that the production of an unequal city has significant consequences for daily life and for ways of coping with critical situations, such as pandemics.

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The authors declare no conflict of interest.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Data were derived from public domain resources.

ETHICS STATEMENT

This work relies on published data from public domain resources. There is no requirement for ethical approval


as the research did not involve human participants, animal subjects or any form of experimentation involving living beings.

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ENDNOTES

¹ Data from the National Epidemiology Center, available at www.cnecovid.isciii.es

² Namely: Law 14/1986, of 25 April 1986, General Health Law; Royal Decree 463/2020, of 14 March, by which a State of Alarm was declared in Spain; Order SND 404/2020 on epidemiological surveillance measures aimed at the adaptation of computer systems and data processing and communications; Royal Decree-Law 21/2020 on urgent measures for prevention, containment, and coordination to combat the health crisis caused by COVID-19; Decree Law 27/2020; Order SND/297/2020, which entrusted the Secretary of State for Digitalization and Artificial Intelligence (SGAD) with “the development of technological solutions and mobile applications for data collection” and Order 1178/2020, implementing Basic Health Zones in the Community of Madrid.

³ The aggregate territorial vulnerability index in the area of health considers life expectancy at birth, SAMUR actions, SAMUR arrival time, pest warnings, and places in sports activities. See <https://igualada.madrid.es/pages/salud>

⁴ The aggregate territorial vulnerability index in the area of employment and labour considers long-term unemployment, low income/consumption ratio population, training actions, and requested opening licences. See <https://igualada.madrid.es/pages/economia-empleo>

⁵ See <https://aavvmadrid.org/economia-empleo-y-consumo/benestar-social/las-redes-vecinales-de-solidaridad-de-la-capital-alimentan-a-mas-de-5-800-familias-y-mas-de-20-000-personas/>

⁶ See <https://aavvmadrid.org/economia-empleo-y-consumo/benestar-social/las-redes-vecinales-distribuyen-alimentos-a-mas-de-50-000-personas-en-toda-la-region/>

⁷ Art. 62, Law 14/1986.

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