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The Role of Civil Society in Addressing Territorial Stigmatization and Housing Challenges

The case of the Cementerio area in Alicante, Spain

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Abstract

This thesis explores the phenomenon of territorial stigmatization in the Cementerio area of Alicante, Spain, with particular attention to the Roma community, which has been the predominant population in the area for decades. The research highlights the significance of partnerships between NGOs and civil society in addressing problems resulting from historical administrative neglect. It is based on an internship with the NGO Arquitectura Sin Fronteras España (ASFE) under the Asertos program, carried out between March and May 2024.

The study focuses on two key questions: How do residents respond to stigma? And what has been the influence of Asertos' work in improving their living conditions? To answer these questions, qualitative methods were employed, including a combination of interviews with key actors such as residents, surrounding commercial operators, local authorities representatives, and stakeholders, as well as participant observations, and analyses of media representations, main urban policies, and maps. By integrating these methods, the research captures a comprehensive understanding of the interconnected dynamics of social exclusion, urban vulnerabilities faced by the residents of the Cementerio area, and the role of collaborative urban regeneration efforts.

The findings reveal that social exclusion in the Cementerio area is perpetuated by stigmatizing narratives, limited economic opportunities, and systemic neglect in urban planning. Media portrayals and historical policies have legitimized the area's marginalization, while residents face significant barriers to social and economic mobility, often perceiving migration as their only path to improved living conditions. Additionally, the stigma associated with the Cementerio area, of being seen as a place of degradation, continues to block external investment and engagement, further isolating it.

By addressing these dynamics, this thesis contributes to the broader discourse on urban inequalities and highlights the essential role of initiatives like Asertos in counteracting historical neglect. Through their efforts in fostering community self-management and promoting co-creation and inclusive practices, Asertos offers a model for urban regeneration that prioritizes social equity and empowerment. These observations provide practical guidance for developing and implementing more inclusive urban policies and initiatives.

Table of Contents

Abbreviations

AROPE	At Risk of Poverty or Social Exclusion
ASFE	Arquitectura Sin Fronteras España
ASI Board	Australian Social Inclusion Board
CIS	Spanish Center for Sociological Research
DGDFSS	Directorate General of Family Diversity and Social Services
EC	Commission of the European Communities/European commision
ECRI	European Commission against Racism and Intolerance
EU	European Union
FECONS	Foundation for the Development and Construction of a Unified World
FOESSA	Foundation for Social Studies and Applied Sociology
FSG	Gypsy Secretariat Foundation
INE	National de Statistics Institute
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
MPI	Multidimensional Poverty Index
MSCBS	Ministry of Health, Consumer Affairs and Social Welfare
NGOs	Non Governmental Organizations
NRIS	National Roma Integration Strategies
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OPHI	Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative
PNAIN	National Action Plan for Social Inclusion
POAS	Platform of NGOs for Social Action
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
UN	United Nations
UN-Habitat	United Nations Human Settlement Programme
VEUS	Visor of Sensible Urban Spaces
WHO	World Health Organization

Lists of Figures

Lists of Tables

1. Introduction

This chapter provides the necessary foundations for exploring the implications among socio-spatial inequalities, historical narratives, and local experiences by first identifying the problem and the research questions to frame the case study and provide the understanding for the synergies at play.

The Cementerio area, or 'neighborhood' as referred to by its residents, is a spontaneous settlement within the Ciudad de Asís neighborhood and the industrial estate of Llano del Espartal at the periphery of Alicante, Spain, characterized by the vulnerable conditions and material scarcity most of its residents experience. Additionally, most of them are of Roma descent, a group that still faces many challenges in Spain, including social exclusion. Lack of public spaces, access to services, and poor housing conditions are the main reasons why Cementerio projects an image of insecurity and marginality to the rest of the city. Poverty has stained the area, which is now perceived as a slum, a place of social disintegration, where for some of its residents the only way out of the stigma is moving outside of it.

The distinction of the Cementerio area, separated from Ciudad de Asís, is a result of its physical isolation, as it is inside of an industrial estate and has a discontinuous residential urban fabric. But the main distinction is between its residents, as Cementerio's are subject to a poor reputation sustained by the general society, built on stereotypes out of both material and immaterial differences, such as ethnicity, socio-economic characteristics and material deprivation. Hence, Wacquant's (2007) theory on territorial stigmatization, which is an unjust collective process fixed in place that affects the residents' well-being and dignity. In Cementerio's case, due to the exposure to structural inequalities, including tenure and housing

conditions. This concept provided a valuable framework for analyzing the experiences within the area.

Therefore, it is crucial the existence of policies that address both material deprivation factors like urban poverty, and also the symbolic ones, like the production of territorial stigmatization. Such poor housing conditions in the area brings concerns about the children's safety and the health compromises among the residents. Nevertheless, Alicante's lack of public housing and political will to take actions on the matter, brings the attention to external organizations as alleviators to providing solutions to the underrepresented communities.

As a response to the systemic neglect the Cementerio area has experienced from the local authorities to address their challenges, the Asertos program has been leading participatory based urban regeneration works in the area since 2017. Through the process of community building and resource bank strategy, the NGO Arquitectura Sin Fronteras España (ASFE), through Asertos, encourages the residents to share their skills and together counter the effects of poor housing access, lack of public spaces and precarious work. One crucial task is finding and maintaining the interest of the, as Pereira & Queirós (2014) would call them, 'activists' residents and band together to prove the inaccuracy or unjustified nature of the stigma, improve the community, and prevent its further deterioration. They also provide a framework on the scope to fight the stigmatization, which implies first acknowledging their history and trajectory; secondly, understanding their current situation and symbolic boundaries; and thirdly, examining the authorities' actions, or the lack of, to deal with the materially and symbolically degraded areas of the city.

Through the months of March to May 2024, I did my internships with the Asertos program in the Cementerio area or Alicante. This experience allowed me to get valuable primary information into the dynamics of the area and the challenges its residents face. Asertos has been working since 2017 toward the local development of vulnerable neighborhoods by fostering residents' resources, which facilitated my direct engagement with the community. This opportunity allowed me to observe, participate in, and understand the multifaceted ways residents cope with stigma and navigate their living conditions.

During this period, I actively participated in various activities organized by Asertos. These included assisting and conducting Asertos' interviews with residents interested in joining the program, measuring and evaluating their housing conditions, and engaging in community-building initiatives. More specifically, some projects were maintaining the urban garden and conducting workshops to build wooden furniture, planters, and a pergola for a new communal space, all of them accompanied by the residents of Cementerio and some others also

by volunteers. These experiences enabled me to more than only gather information from residents, but also use participant observation for a better understanding of their interactions and relationships, providing valuable insights into the social fabric of the community.

In addition to participating in Asertos' activities, I used an ethnographic method to structure the data collection during my internship. The primary method used for gathering empirical data was conducting interviews with different actors, such as residents and stakeholders, which gave me deeper insights into their lived experiences and challenges. These interviews served as the foundation for understanding the different perspectives of the stigma, the systemic inequalities they face, and their aspirations for improving their environment.

Participant observations also played a critical role in my data collection. By visiting the area at least twice a week, once on a weekday and once on the weekend, I was able to observe the residents in their 'natural environment' and document their daily dynamics. These visits provided more understanding of their experiences of living in challenging conditions and their openness to collaborate with the NGO.

This internship provided an immersive experience that combined community engagement, data collection, and observations, allowing me to perform comprehensive participant observations. It offered a unique perspective on the work of Asertos in empowering residents and addressing systemic inequalities in the Cementerio area, revealing both the potential of participatory approaches and the limitations from broader structural challenges.

This research highlights the importance of participatory methods in addressing socio-economic inequalities and territorial stigmatization. It underscores the need for collaborative approaches that empower marginalized communities and foster sustainable urban regeneration.

1.1.   Research Scope

The topics of social inclusion and social exclusion have been becoming more relevant in the modern discourse of sustainable cities, but how do they materialize in specific scenarios? When it comes to challenging social stigmas and systemic deprivations, regulations at national levels tend to be too overreaching, therefore local scale actors play an important role as mediators between the parts at play. Moreover, this material deprivation is important to be examined as if it is a result of hidden oppressive structures. While it is important to develop nationwide plans for addressing inequalities, actually it is more crucial to assure synergies at the local levels since particular issues could be addressed more effectively.

This work analyzes the territorial stigmatization processes experienced by the residents of the Cementerio area in Alicante, Spain. As well as the perceptions of the different actors and the different activities and work done by the NGO Asertos to address such inequalities in this area of the Ciudad de Asís neighborhood. The aim is to highlight the role of this type of synergies to deal with systemic inequalities.

First, it is necessary to investigate the background of the community, their socio-economic characteristics, and the institutional problems that reinforce the systemic inequalities. Secondly, it is fundamental to understand the perceptions the residents have of themselves, as well as the local administration's, the NGO's, the different stakeholders', such as the surrounding commercial operators and the FSG in the area, and in particular the image portrayed by the media since it influences the perceptions of the area from the general society. Finally, the role of Asertos and their activities in the area are examined to identify their progress in addressing the many challenges this community faces.

With this research it is hoped to encourage NGOs to work alongside vulnerable communities to address systemic problems, while at the same time inspire authorities to develop and promote strategies that endorse such synergies.

1.2. Research Questions

This work seeks to answer the following questions regarding territorial stigmatization and the role of civil society to challenge it:

1. How does the media's portrayal of the Cementerio area residents affect how they are perceived by the general society and among themselves as a community? How do they respond to the stigma?

2. What is the role of Asertos in helping the community to address their material scarcity and overcome stigma? And which are their limitations for future projects?

1.3. Thesis Structure

This thesis is structured into seven chapters to investigate the process of territorial stigmatization and their implications in the urban context, focusing on the Cementerio area in Alicante, Spain, while at the same time exposing the impact of the Asertos program's efforts to address such challenges in the area.

The first chapter is introductory, it provides the foundations for understanding the implications of socio-spatial inequalities, historical narratives, and local experiences by first identifying the problem and the research questions to frame the case study and provide the understanding for the synergies at play.

The second chapter of this thesis aims to explore how socio-economic challenges, cultural stigmas, and housing inequalities intersect to influence urban experiences. The theoretical foundation draws from existing literature to illuminate the systemic dynamics that perpetuate marginalization and exclusion while highlighting pathways toward equity and social sustainability. Throughout this segment it is emphasized the impact of socio-political constructs, such as territorial stigmatization, symbolic violence and systemic exclusion, on the marginalized community of the Cementerio area.

The literature review begins by addressing the structural and systemic challenges that sustain poverty, exclusion, vulnerability, and marginalization in urban contexts. It then delves into the social mechanisms that reinforce symbolic violence over minority groups and territorial stigmatization. Housing inequalities and limited access to urban infrastructure are also analyzed as critical barriers to achieving urban equity. Lastly, social sustainability is introduced as a framework for fostering inclusive urban development, emphasizing on the potential of collective action within communities and the role of stakeholders to promote it.

Together, these first two chapters provide a comprehensive perspective on the systemic inequalities faced by marginalized communities and highlight practices for building more inclusive societies. This framework is essential for understanding the dynamics of territorial stigmatization and evaluating urban regeneration efforts in the Cementerio area of Alicante.

Then, in the methodology chapter it is disclosed that this research employed ethnographic methods to explore territorial stigmatization processes in Cementerio, and the roles of individuals, communities, and institutions, particularly Asertos', in addressing related challenges and fostering social cohesion. To answer the two research questions the thesis combines different qualitative methods, including analysis of historical and contextual data, news articles, media representations, participant observations, qualitative interviews, and mapping tools. By integrating these methods, the research captures a comprehensive understanding of the challenges faced by the Cementerio community and the impact of collaborative urban regeneration efforts.

The fourth chapter gives a specific focus to the Roma community's experiences within the broader European and Spanish contexts, tracing the historical processes that have led to their discrimination and marginalization while also recognizing recent advancements.

Then chapter five provides a concise overview of the case study background to examine where the problem comes from, on which aspects of society it has roots in, and the influence of the interventions to overcome them. Subsequently, this chapter of the thesis explores three key aspects to provide a comprehensive framework for analyzing the area's marginalization and the work being done to promote its regeneration. Its historical development, socio-economic characteristics, and the impact of urban policies on its residents, as these elements are essential for contextualizing the systemic challenges faced by the community and the ongoing efforts to address them.

The first subsection, Socio-economic Characteristics, examines the profile of the area's residents, highlighting their struggles such as high unemployment rates, limited access to education, and inadequate infrastructure. These factors underline the multi-dimensional nature of the community's marginalization, which are predominantly Roma, and its connections to broader systemic inequalities.

The second subsection, History of the Cementerio area, delves into the origins and evolution of the Cementerio area. This once a working-class community with roots in agriculture, has undergone significant transformations, leading to its current state of social isolation and physical degradation. This subsection presents how external narratives have contributed to the stigmatization of the area and its residents.

Finally, Urban Policies on Poverty, Social Inclusion of the Roma and Social Housing, addresses the role of local and national policies in shaping the conditions of the Cementerio area. This includes an analysis of social housing initiatives, relocation programs, and the broader framework of urban poverty management. By situating the Cementerio area within these policy contexts, this section demonstrates how governance decisions have both perpetuated and attempted to mitigate the challenges experienced by the community.

These subsections aim to provide a foundation for understanding the complexities of the Cementerio area. They set the stage for analyzing the role of territorial stigmatization and the efforts of organizations like Asertos in addressing the systemic issues that continue to affect this vulnerable area.

Chapter six, findings and analysis, presents the data of the research conducted in the Cementerio area, offering an in-depth examination of its socio-economic challenges and the efforts to address them. By connecting empirical evidence to existing theories, this section seeks to expose the challenges faced by the Cementerio area while highlighting potential pathways for change.

The first subsection delves into how Poverty, Social Exclusion, Vulnerability, and Inequalities are experienced in the area, and it explores how interlaced disadvantages shape the lives of residents. It digs into issues the residents experience, such as unemployment, inadequate services, and social exclusion; and then examines how these factors aggravate vulnerability and inequalities.

The second subsection, Symbolic Violence and Territorial Stigmatization, focuses on the narratives and power dynamics that perpetuate the marginalization of the Cementerio area. Drawing from resident testimonies and media representations, it highlights how stigmas are created, reinforced, and resisted, shedding light on the broader implications of symbolic violence.

The third subsection, Housing Inequalities and Urban Challenges, addresses the pressing issue of access to quality housing and urban infrastructure. It evaluates the policies and practices that contribute to housing disparities, as well as the specific challenges faced by Cementerio residents in navigating a housing system that often excludes them.

And the fourth subsection, The Role of the Asertos' Work on the Area, examines their contributions in fostering community development and social cohesion. It shares their methodologies, successes, and limitations, offering insights into how bottom-up approaches can complement institutional efforts to improve living conditions in vulnerable communities, as in the case of Cementerio. Together, these subsections provide a comprehensive analysis of the Cementerio area, and reinforce the importance of holistic, participatory approaches to urban regeneration.

The subsections two and three aim to answer the first research question, How does the media's portrayal of the Cementerio area residents affect how they are perceived by the general society and among themselves as a community? How do they respond to the stigma? based on a qualitative analysis of the perceptions on the community by different actors. For this purpose interviews were carried out, as well as a review of the media that mentions the area. And the subsection four answers question two, What is the role of Asertos in helping the community to address their material scarcity and overcome stigma? And which are their limitations for future projects? where the work of the NGO in the case study area is reviewed.

And Finally, the seventh chapter, the conclusion, synthesizes the key findings and insights derived from the research, reflecting on their implications for urban development, social inclusion, and community empowerment in the Cementerio area of Alicante. By connecting the empirical evidence with the theoretical framework outlined in the literature review, this

conclusion highlights the complex interplay between poverty, stigmatization, housing inequality, and community resilience.

This chapter considers the challenges faced by Cementerio residents, including the systemic neglect, socio-economic disadvantages, and territorial stigmatization that have shaped their lived experiences. Also highlights the potential for change, emphasizing the role of participatory initiatives and community-led approaches in fostering social cohesion and addressing structural inequalities. And lastly it highlights the importance of integrating marginalized communities into decision-making processes, adopting holistic approaches to tackle systemic inequalities, and addressing the root causes of exclusion and poverty. By framing these findings within the larger context of urban development, the conclusion aims to inspire a more inclusive and equitable vision for cities.

2. Literature Review

Marginalized communities experience multidimensional processes triggered by the relationship between social structures and urban development. This literature review aims to establish a theoretical foundation for understanding how socio-economic challenges, cultural stigmas and housing inequalities intersect to shape urban experiences, with an especial focus on the vulnerable populations.

The review begins by outlining the structural and systemic challenges that perpetuate poverty, vulnerability and marginalization in urban contexts. Followed by the examination of the social mechanisms that reinforce exclusion and stigmatization of minority groups. Then, the issues on access to quality housing and urban infrastructure are discussed due to its importance for urban equity. The next section examines the experiences of the Roma community in the European context and specifically in Spain, that led to their discrimination, exclusion and marginalization, highlighting their advances. Finally, the review concludes with the concept of social sustainability, for marking a pathway for an equity-driven urban development powered by the collective potential of communities.

Overall, these sections provide a perspective on the systemic inequalities lived by the marginalized communities, such as the Roma, and highlight the practices that should be considered for more inclusive societies. They provide a framework for the examination of territorial stigmatization and the urban regeneration efforts at work in the marginalized community of the Cementerio area in Alicante, Spain.

2.1.   Poverty and Social Exclusion: The Foundation for Vulnerability and Inequality

Initial approaches to define poverty attempted to address its endurance over time, but often fell short capturing everything it entangled, due to its complexity. For instance, Valentine's (1968) 'poverty culture' theory suggested that to solve societal problems like inequality, it is required the poor to change, letting go of 'poverty culture attitudes', and adopt middle-class conventions and values. This perspective was heavily criticized for placing the blame on the poor for their situation, without questioning the role of society as a whole and disregarding structural inequalities. Miller (1968b) criticized this approach for being founded on the prejudices of the middle class, as it 'middle-classifies' the disadvantaged and considers their cultural patterns as 'static adjustments to deprivation'. Also, Boissevain (1968) argues from this theory that even if poverty-culture values are altered, probably poverty will not disappear due to the relativity of such standards. This theory is now considered outdated as it fails to address the broader societal structures contributing to poverty.

Later definitions of poverty consider societal standards and start acknowledging its multidimensional nature and the various ways it impacts society. Townsend (1979) then argues that Poverty is the situation where individuals lack resources to feed themselves, face struggles to participate in social activities, and their living conditions are below the accustomed standards in the society they belong.

While current definitions agree on its variability and context-dependence, by recognizing that the concept of 'acceptable living conditions' may vary across societies, the Commission of the European Communities (EC) (2003) broadens the definition by incorporating the aspects of experiencing multiple disadvantages, such as unemployment, low income, poor housing conditions, inadequate healthcare and other barriers to learning, culture, and recreation. Therefore, nowadays poverty is recognized as a phenomenon that disorganizes the lives of both individuals and societies, and its definition has been challenging to establish as it is shaped by rising societal standards and complex interdependencies (Govender et al., 2007; Pietras-Eichberger, 2021).

Poverty is usually classified in three categories: subjective, relative, and absolute. Nor & Manaf (2020) argue that subjective poverty refers to the individuals' perceptions of having a lack of resources to meet their needs. Relative poverty is defined by individuals having less than the median of the society they take part into, making it context-dependent. Extreme or absolute poverty, on the other hand, refers to individuals living below an 'objective minimum', experiencing severe deprivation of basic needs, dignity and human rights; in essence, it describes a situation of critical deprivation, hunger, suffering or premature death (Nor & Manaf,

2020). Even the World Bank relies on this approach of focusing on the individuals' capability to provide themselves with essential services like food, potable water, health, and shelter by measuring poverty based on a person's income, consumption, and access to the basic services (UN, 1996); to which Pietras-Eichberger (2021) argues that though such definition of extreme poverty has been accepted it is based on a 'money-metric approach'.

Furthermore, the World Bank's definition of poverty has influenced the construction of the 2000's Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the 2015's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by the United Nations (UN). Both initiatives have given the battle against poverty an important role, as the first Goal of the SDGs is 'End poverty in all its forms everywhere', and subsequently, its first two targets aim to eradicate extreme poverty, and reduce the amount of people living in any of the poverty dimensions respectively (UN, 2015).

Therefore, measuring poverty surges as a tool to understand who is living in degraded conditions and why. Such measurement has evolved to better capture its multifaceted nature and inform global efforts to eradicate it, as the UN uses the method of defining an international poverty line. This tool marks the transition between whether or not an individual is considered to be living in poverty as it suggests the minimum income a person requires to meet their needs (McKendrick, 2021). First the MDG considered the poverty line of $1 (international dollar) a day as the minimum level of income required to consume what is strictly necessary, but for the construction of the SDGs, other indicators were considered, adjusting the line to $1.90 a day.

Such changing indicators for the SDGs are the product of the Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI), developed by the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative (OPHI). The MPI defines three dimensions for its calculation, education, health, and living standards, by measuring the deprivation of the following ten indicators: years of schooling, child enrolment, child mortality, nutrition, electricity, clean drinking water, improved sanitation, flooring material, cooking fuel, and household and transportation assets. Nevertheless, it primarily offers a methodology that could be adapted to local contexts and national policy priorities (Alkire & Santos, 2010; Larrú, 2021).

Furthermore, Poverty reflects its causes on society and is deeply intertwined with economic, environmental, and social factors, so most countries have several programs aimed at making the poor reach at least the lower middle class level. Economic factors of poverty include unemployment rates and the creation of economic policies; environmental factors comprehend extreme weather conditions and natural disasters; and social factors involve issues such as lack of education, weak social structure, discrimination, inequality and more (Sylva, 2021; Mitra & Mitra, 2021). Shrestha (2021) highlights that the lack of basic services, such as safe drinking water,

food, electricity, shelter, sanitation, and education, is the catalyst for letting individuals provide themselves with other fundamental needs and prevents them from leading decent lives.

This absence of infrastructure is particularly critical in areas that also lack facilities for education, health, and water and energy supply centers, as well as regions with high unemployment, where interconnected challenges aggravate the disadvantages. For instance, without education, individuals struggle to develop the knowledge and skills needed to secure employment, and weak health conditions could be improved by providing access to potable water, sanitation, and food security (Shrestha, 2021). So, integral interventions are needed to uplift the living standards of the disadvantaged.

Moreover, Atkinson (2015) argues that poverty, induced by an economic factor, could lead to conditions of social divisions and symbolic displacement, fostering feelings of isolation and nostalgia over lost connections and relationships in the individuals who experience it. Notably, in the urban environment, poverty also manifests itself as homelessness, inadequate housing, social discrimination, exclusion and lack of participation in decision-making processes (Pietras-Eichberger, 2021). In particular within the household setting, Atkinson (2015) argues that poverty leads to a feeling of instability that affects the individuals' degree to feel at home by being perpetually 'on notice' to move out of their residence or neighborhood.

Poverty is often discussed alongside social exclusion, as both concepts are correlated. Social exclusion extends beyond the economic hardships and material deprivation poverty primarily refers to; it also covers societal, cultural, and political barriers that restrict individuals' participation in daily life. In other words, poverty can be both a cause and a consequence of social exclusion, but exclusion itself is a broader phenomenon that manifests in multiple dimensions. Therefore, it is crucial to examine how exclusion works in society, who they affect, and how it can be mitigated.

Just like poverty, the concept of social exclusion has evolved over time. Juliano (1981) argued that those individuals with widespread shared values and expectations are integrated in society, whereas those with values different from the ones in the dominant group, are often unable or unwilling to participate in certain types of integrative societal activities of everyday life. However, this perspective overlooks the structural and systemic barriers that contribute to exclusion. So, nowadays social exclusion is understood as a multidimensional process.

Current definitions highlight its complexity, as the EC (2003) describes social exclusion as a process where certain individuals are prevented from fully participating in society due to factors such as poverty, lack of education, and discrimination; resulting in a limited access to employment, education opportunities, and social networks. Additionally, the limited access to

power and decision-making processes that affect the daily lives of the socially excluded, contributes to a sense of powerlessness among the affected groups.

Silver & Miller (2003) further identify four key characteristics of social exclusion: it is multidimensional, relational, relative to the context and dynamic and processual in nature. Levitas et al. (2007) support this perspective, highlighting the link between social exclusion and the lack of material and immaterial resources, rights, goods, and services; but also with its relational basis due to the inability to participate in normal activities or relationships, accessible to the majority of people in society.

Furthermore, social exclusion is not solely driven by economic deprivation as it could derive from both material and non-material deficiencies. Del Campo Tejedor (2003) highlights that physical and mental distancing between the groups play a significant role in making participating in societal activities more difficult, without being necessarily tied to economic deprivation. These barriers could be either economic, social, cultural, or political, and still affect 'both the quality of life of individuals and the equity and cohesion of society as a whole' (Levitas et al., 2007).

Another essential aspect of exclusion is its context-dependent and evolving nature. Silver & Miller (2003) argue that social exclusion is relative to the context and society the individuals experience; as well as that it is dynamic and processual, impacting people in different ways and degrees over time, depending not only on their current circumstances, but also their past background and future prospects. Azmat (2020) argues that the groups that experience the highest levels of social exclusion nowadays are immigrants, racial minorities, homeless people, the poor or unemployed, people with less education, families with a large number of children, among others.

Given its complex and multidimensional nature, social exclusion is challenging to measure. It is often mixed interchangeably with poverty in daily discourse, and although the two are often intertwined, social exclusion is not synonymous with poverty, which is best to keep differentiated. Poverty is just one of the dimensions, yet important, of exclusion, but exclusion also covers broader relational and societal barriers (Saunders, 2015; Saunders et al., 2008).

Similarly, the term social inclusion is often used as the opposite of social exclusion, as one focuses on 'the problem' and the other is seen as 'the response' (Saunders, 2015). But, Phipps (2000) argues that social inclusion is more than just 'not exclusion', it involves processes, actions and the creation of opportunities and resources for mitigating the disadvantages and enabling such individuals to fully participate in society. In other words, social inclusion includes proactive measures to create opportunities and remove structural disadvantages.

Nevertheless, social inclusion still lacks a formal definition on its own, since it is oftentimes defined in relation to social exclusion, and it also varies on the many domains it is considered, such as education or healthcare (Azmat, 2020; Rawal, 2008). The Australian Social Inclusion (ASI) Board (2012) defines social inclusion as the process of providing resources, opportunities, and the capability to people to be included in working, learning and social activities. The EC (2003) provides a similar definition, as it is considered as the process that ensures, to those at risk of poverty and social exclusion, gaining the necessary resources to fully participate in economic, social and cultural life, as well as to enjoy a 'standard' way of living relative to their society, asserting a greater participation in decision-making processes that affect their lives.

Efforts to measure and address social exclusion and social inclusion have gained traction globally, particularly since the introduction of the SDG 10 'reducing inequality within and among countries' in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Specially, the target 2 of this goal seeks to 'empower and promote the social, economic and political inclusion of all irrespective of age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion or economic or other status' (UN, 2015; Azmat, 2020). This international focus on social inclusion and social exclusion intends to facilitate inclusive growth, and create opportunities for all individuals.

Social exclusion arises from multiple, interconnected factors. Azmat (2020) identifies four complementary and interrelated forms of capitals that influence social inclusion: financial, physical, human, and social capital. Financial Capital allows individuals to exchange goods and services, and is accessed through earnings or their own financial assets. Physical Capital refers to land or property ownership, contributing to the individuals' financial capital. Human Capital is closely linked to financial and physical capital, and is accessed through their own education. Finally, social Capital refers to the social networks and relationships that assist individuals in integrating into society, which is important for job searches, financial support, and social participation.

These forms of capital collectively shape an individual's ability to participate in society, and deficiencies in any of them could lead to exclusion. Economic barriers, such as unemployment or lack of financial resources, limit access to education and housing. Social barriers, including discrimination and weak social structures, further restrict participation. And cultural and political barriers, such as systemic biases and exclusion from decision-making processes, further aggravate the issue. Therefore, tackling social exclusion requires addressing these interconnected factors through holistic policies that promote economic opportunity, social equity, and inclusive governance.

Poverty and social exclusion are deeply intertwined, and when they happen together, patterns of disadvantage are reinforced. Exclusion worsen poverty by diminishing opportunities for social mobility. Both create the foundation for vulnerability, exposing individuals and communities to risks and intensifying social and economic inequalities.

The World Health Organization (WHO) (2022) defines vulnerability as the susceptibility of individuals, communities or systems to risks, determined by physical, social, economic, and environmental factors. These vulnerabilities are shaped by historical, political and cultural processes that mold people's lives, such as living in poor housing, facing health problems or bearing political tensions. Pizarro (2001) further argues that vulnerability includes both demographic and economic aspects, and states that it is a result of the current development pattern, where certain individuals or groups are unable to confront, neutralize or obtain benefits from the system itself.

Beyond economic deprivation, environmental and social factors could also worsen vulnerability. Alguacil Gómez et al. (2014) argues that factors as prejudices could also contribute to vulnerability, aggravated by factors like noise pollution, contamination, crime, isolation from the urban services or absence of green spaces. These conditions, often concentrated in disadvantaged neighborhoods, reinforce cycles of exclusion and limit opportunities for social and economic participation.

Moreover, vulnerable groups are often at a higher risk of disasters, making them continuous subjects of their precarious conditions. Bukowski & Kreissl (2021) highlight that exposure to poverty leads to vulnerability, and making quality services available, affordable, and equitable, is fundamental for raising the living standards of the poor, in the efforts to end poverty and achieve sustainable development. In this context, addressing inequalities and promoting the inclusion of vulnerable groups by strengthening policies, should be the main focus of all nations; by means of encouraging local governments, private companies and stakeholders to work together (Shrestha, 2021).

Consequently, vulnerability is closely tied to inequality, as both concepts capture the uneven distribution of risks, opportunities, and resources within society. The SDG framework acknowledges this link with the goal 10, 'Reduced inequalities' which emphasises the need to foster economic growth among the low income populations and target income disparities to reduce them (UN, 2015). While this target encourages more inclusive and sustainable standards of living, it also recognizes that inequality is a process of multiple facets, involving disparities in opportunities, education, and employment. Swart (2020) argues that reducing inequality is essential to eradicating poverty, as income inequality is associated with diverse social problems

that end up contributing to poverty, creating a constant loop. So addressing both inequality and poverty demands comprehensive and coordinated actions to undertake them simultaneously.

One of the most common ways of measuring inequality within a population is the Gini coefficient, but typically used just for income inequality. It is a statistical calculation that measures from the numbers of 0 to 1, where the highest numbers indicate greater inequality. A value closer to 1 indicates greater inequality, revealing significant disparities in wealth distribution and economic power within the considered population (Hasell, 2023). Mitra & Mitra (2021) argue that such power structures favoring the privileged groups are responsible for perpetuating poverty in society, as it maintains an oppressive system over the disadvantaged. These dynamics create structural barriers that limit access to opportunities for lower-income populations, sustaining cycles of disadvantage across generations.

In conclusion, poverty and social exclusion together create the foundation for vulnerability and inequality. While poverty considers primarily financial elements such as individuals' income, capacity to support their basic needs, and well-being from a monetary perspective, social exclusion captures the broader societal mechanisms that limit individuals from accessing opportunities, contributing to their continued marginalization. These conditions could lead to vulnerability when the disadvantaged are exposed to risks, such as economic instability, environmental hazards, or political instability.

Without targeted interventions, these vulnerabilities become deeply ingrained, reinforcing structural inequalities that sustain cycles of poverty and exclusion. Addressing these interconnected challenges requires a comprehensive approach. Asiamah (2021) suggests that improving the necessary socio-economic infrastructures for human development, such as housing, electricity, education, healthcare, and transport can mitigate poverty and vulnerability.

Valentine (1968) asserts that inequality is the essence of poverty, and the social classes' main structural manifestation, as it considers the relations with both status and power. He adds that understanding poverty as the result of values and behavioral patterns of the poor, is 'middle-class intellectual rationale', because it shifts onto the poor rather than addressing the societal structures that perpetuate it (Boissevain, 1968). This aligns with Miller's (1968a) argument that power structures actively sustain poverty, making the poor remain in deprived conditions and making it difficult to escape it.

Additionally, the concept of 'poverty culture', as exposed by Valentine (1968), has often been used to justify social hierarchies, reinforcing class-based stereotypes that obscure structural inequalities. Leacock (1968) adds that 'poverty culture' tends to make moderate differences into polarized opposites by overgeneralizing a trend or a slight variation, such as the association

between female-headed households and family instability. Such narratives ultimately distract from the need for systemic change, further legitimizing inequalities.

Therefore, addressing poverty requires a shift in how society responds to social exclusion, vulnerability, and inequality as well, further than just economic assistance. So a holistic approach is essential to fostering a more just and equitable society, challenging discriminatory structures.

2.2.   Symbolic Violence and Territorial Stigmatization in Urban Contexts

Wacquant's concept of territorial stigmatization is rooted in Goffman's (1963) notion of 'spoiled identity', which occurs when individuals possess an attribute that is deeply discrediting within a specific social context, leading to stereotypes, discrimination, and social exclusion. Wacquant's idea also draws from Bourdieu's (1993b) concept of 'symbolic power', which refers to how dominant groups maintain and reinforce their status in society by exercising power and control over other individuals and groups, by means of the manipulation and the symbolic appropriation of the instruments of material production, economic capital, and cultural production, cultural capital. Symbolic capital, as analyzed by Bourdieu & Wacquant (2013), refers to how a recognized and 'legitimate' difference works as an asset of distinction; and if combined with any other form of power, credits their relationship by means of expressive manifestations of a certain lifestyle, like language, clothing or behaviors.

Territorial stigmatization is closely tied to the concept of stigma, which is just the result of social exclusion processes, where meanings, a product of interpreting reality, are constructed, reproduced and assumed by both external agents and the stigmatized subjects themselves (Del Campo Tejedor, 2003). Stemming from Goffman (1963), who categorized stigma into three types, based on the individuals' characteristics: body abominations, blemishes of character, and affiliation by lineages. Also, Link & Phelan (2001) explore how social groups in specific social contexts are stereotyped, discriminated against, and socially excluded because of their particular attributes; and how this relates to power dynamics and the reproduction of social inequalities. Stigmatization is therefore, of dynamic nature and a product of cultural negotiations about the desirable attributes or practices.

Notably, Wacquant et al. (2014) views stigmatization as an unjust process, emphasizing on the space as another factor for social discredit, where collective perceptions of a community stain the reputation of a place, and symbolically degrade them in return (Bourdieu, 1993a), fostering feelings of alienation and estrangement to place (Atkinson, 2015). Consequently, spatial organizations matter, playing a crucial part in shaping the perceptions of individuals or communities, asserting the material and symbolic construction of places (Meade, 2021).

Wacquant et al. (2014) argue that even though territorial stigmatization is 'partially autonomous' to poverty, ethnicity, degraded housing and crime, it has become "democratized" where some areas of cities have become synonyms with degradation among journalist and politicians; then noted that the stigmatized neighborhoods are viewed as 'vectors of social disintegration' that can't be fixed, reinforcing stereotypes and often racialized, associating the state of being poor to darker skin tones; leading to the penalizing urban marginality, which is a position rooted in fright. This view is consistent with Link and Phela's (2001) notion of stigma, which elements of stereotyping, discrimination and status, emphasizes power dynamics affecting the individual's prospects in employment, housing, and well-being.

Once a place is labeled as a 'slum', authorities may use it to justify public policies, as means for some measures to 'solve it', that further marginalize the residents (Wacquant, 2007). However, regardless if an area is indeed dangerous and if their residents are affected by the fragmentation of wage labor or not, the prejudice they suffer prevails. Pétonnet (1981) describes how living in stigmatized areas often creates a sense of guilt and shame among residents, that frames their relationships, such as hiding their address or avoiding inviting people into their homes to protect their social image.

Even though intervention plans in marginalized areas oftentimes only consider the infrastructural deficiencies, both the material and symbolic aspects should be considered in them. Del Campo Tejedor (2003) highlights the importance of aiming for models that do not overlook ideological and cultural factors, for interventions that simultaneously work on their socioeconomic development while also deconstructing the stigma that perpetuates exclusion. Meade (2021) extends this idea, identifying territorial stigmatization as a form of symbolic violence due to its intersections with economic inequalities, social classes, and at the same time reinforces the spatialization of other conflicts. Symbolic violence happens when one dominant social class, with economic and political power, asserts its legitimacy over another through instruments of communication and knowledge, like media representation, and is a product of the recognition of any form of capital (Bourdieu, 1979; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 2013).

Moreover, Wacquant (2016) suggests switching the terms of low-income neighborhoods or marginal communities to urban relegation, due to two main aspects: the possible heterogeneity of backgrounds, since they might not have a shared identity as the word 'community' implies; and more importantly, to point out that the problem does not lies with the people or the place itself, but from broader processes of economic, social and symbolic powers at play; in other words, this linguistic shift redirects the focus onto the institutional mechanisms that produce and reproduce inequalities.

Wacquant (2007) notes that even though territorial stigmatization is only asserted by thrusting the stigma onto a 'faceless' other, it affects how different people feel, think, and act around the stigmatized. The territorial stigma impacts the residents' sense of self; the surrounding commercial operators by provoking avoidance; the quality of services; the outputs of symbolic production like journalism and televised stigma; and the state officials' views, who have the power to shape public policies (Wacquant et al., 2014).

Additionally, Wacquant (2011) lists the ways in which people cope with the stigma rooted in place, dividing them in two groups, either the stigmatized submit to it, with actions like dissimulating the stigma, distancing from it and elaboration of micro-differences, denigration of those same places, retreat into the private circle or exit the area; or they could also resist the stigma by showing indifference to it, defending the neighborhood or inversing the stigma, by reclaiming the negative aspects. Effective and adequate to scale policy interventions must be addressed to operationalize both problems of material deprivation and the symbolic violence pressed on the stigmatized communities, at the neighborhood level (Atkinson et al., 2009).

Krase (1977) analyzes the ways people react to the territorial stigmatization, and categorizes the residents into 'achievers' or 'failures', based on their means or aspirations to 'exit' the stigmatized area. Pereira & Queirós (2014) indicates a third group, useful for taking action on territorial stigmatization, it is to identify and cooperate with the 'activists' of the stigmatized locations, to improve the material and symbolic conditions of the area. For lasting change, Del Campo Tejedor (2003) exposes the need to acknowledge the complex causes of stigmatization, since it could be triggered by endless numbers of factors; therefore even if the social, economic, cultural, political, historical, demographic and infrastructural conditions of the stigmatized groups are analyzed, it would be incomplete if the articulation and social interactions of the inhabitants of marginalized areas with individuals of the local society is not considered, in other words, to attend the stigma, dealing with the material conditions is just as necessary as to sort out the collective images and perceptions held by both residents and society, since they serve as a symbolic border for the exclusion of the 'other'.

With a case study, Del Campo Tejedor (2003) illustrates how a neighborhood, after years of overcoming their material deprivation and the transforming the self-perception of its residents, continued to experience the stigma from the rest of the city. The community then decided to use instruments of communication and knowledge distribution, such as articles, books, and media to raise awareness of their evolving role. The strategy worked, but most of the people that changed their perceptions of the neighborhood and its inhabitants, missed the point that the stigmatization faced by the area was a direct cause of the fabricated stereotypes that prevailed even when its material conditions have already changed. It took several years of work on the

infrastructural deprivation, forming a neighborhood association, collaborating with nearby neighborhoods, and enhancing media representation to shift the reputation of the 'marginal neighborhood'. These actions, along with changing the self-perception of the residents and the area, highlights the multidisciplinarity required for this kind of intervention. Although the process of changing the perceptions of the neighborhood was long and challenging, it was also crucial for resisting the stigma and their efforts to integrate the residents into the local society (Del Campo Tejedor, 2003), also overcoming experiences of alienation and disconnection to their neighborhood as the character of the place changed (Atkinson, 2015).

In conclusion, social exclusion emphasizes the individual or collective possibility and ability to fully participate in social, economic, political and cultural life, while also diminishing their relationships with broader society. Territorial stigmatization, as a form of social exclusion, is deeply tied to broader socio-economic structures and operates through both symbolic mechanisms and material deprivation; therefore addressing these inequalities simultaneously is essential. Highlighting the role of debunking the stereotypes and shifting the perceptions from both the stigmatized communities themselves and from society to foster social inclusion, as in the Pereira & Queirós' (2014) case study, where leveraging instruments of communication attained what infrastructure interventions alone could not. Nevertheless, challenging territorial stigmatization is a complex and multifaceted process that requires interdisciplinary efforts to legitimize the neighborhood's, and residents, place in society.

2.3. Housing Inequalities and Urban Challenges

The rapid population growth the world is experiencing, especially in urban areas, increases the demand for infrastructure development such as public transport, water supply, waste disposal, energy, education, health care services, and mainly in the housing market. Urbanization processes provide opportunities and, oftentimes, decent jobs that increase the living standards of the people and boost the economy. Hence, the importance of housing in the sustainable development discourse; housing shapes communities, and when not well planned and managed, could cause fragmentation and inequalities (Shrestha, 2021).

The executive director of UN-Habitat, Clos (2014), criticizes that city planning and development have been long influenced by the economy and jobs, so he proposes that people should be put at the center of city development. People are what make cities, so people's needs and aspirations should guide planning; this translates into the UN-Habitat (2015) prioritizing housing. Housing affordability is currently one of the most critical problems of housing and has become a crisis

across the globe; due to its strong negative impact on the wellbeing of people and the aggravation of urban inequalities, governments around the world are undertaking the labor to create, preserve and improve affordable housing. Other challenges related to housing are segregation and gentrification, which are a product of inadequate regulation and planning (UN-Habitat, 2015). Some of the strategies to improve affordability in urban areas are to promote mixed land-use plans, plan city extensions, support urban in-fills, better transport infrastructure and inclusionary zoning, in terms of accessibility, especially for the poor and in vulnerable conditions (UN-Habitat, 2015).

Atkinson & Jacobs (2022) consider that since now housing is a central component of economic activity, also its sociology must engage with it, like its influence on daily social life. Unfortunately, this is not so common, usually in the exchange between the buyer and the seller is purely economic, with little to no attention to the occupants of that housing, their views, beliefs and chances in life. Furthermore, considering also that in many societies, homeownership has become a fundamental source of identity and status, housing is being treated as a market asset, instead of a right. Therefore the disequilibrium in housing markets is not determined by social inequalities, but is a symptom of them (Atkinson & Jacobs, 2022).

Additionally, the lack of decent housing conditions and neighborhood environment also affect the individuals' sense of belonging and place attachment. Ganugi & Prandini (2023) present that it is natural the desire to belong to a group and maintain such bond with the community and territory, as well as attaching feelings to a specific territorial area, since they provide a feeling of security; and bonding with people's cultures and experiences help develop one's self-esteem and self-image. They add that this applies to those who are physically present in the area, but also to those who frequent those spaces for whichever the reason, such as, among others, job, hobbies or relatives.

Then, defining 'home' is necessary, Sinxadi & Campbell (2020) consider that it is a place with security and protection, stability, comfort, warmth, and happiness. But Edgar (2009) recognizes more domains to the home than just the social one, that allow people privacy and have social relations; it is illustrated that a home also contemplates the physical domain, able to deal with the individuals' needs, and the legal domain as well, meaning having security of occupation. Residential vulnerability expresses itself with substandard housing, that comprises a lack of decent living conditions, from the lack of basic facilities or the poor state of the building, to overcrowding (Alguacil Gómez et al., 2014). This follows UN-HABITAT's (2014) concept for 'adequate housing', where more than security of tenure and habitability, it must provide other elements just as fundamental, such as availability of services, facilities and infrastructure,

cultural adequacy, affordability, accessibility, and location; emphasis in location, since housing is not considered 'adequate' if it cuts off employment opportunities, access to schools, health-care services, or deprives individuals from other fundamental rights. Physical problems, related to the residential situation, like the presence of dampness or the lack of adequate inside temperature or natural light, lays the groundwork for health-related problems to develop, like respiratory problems, difficulties in falling asleep or repercussions on the mental health of the individuals (Millor Vela, 2022a). Residential vulnerability increases the social vulnerability of individuals and groups, and weakens their ability to cope with problems, not only affecting the housing and its residents, but also the neighborhood environment (Millor Vela, 2022a; Alguacil Gómez et al., 2014).

Adequate housing is internationally recognized as a right since 1948 as part of the right to an adequate standard of living in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and then more explicitly in 1966's Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (UN-HABITAT, 2014). Considering housing as a human right conveys a set of freedoms and minimum characteristics, including affordability, and means that countries accept the responsibility to protect it in terms of policy-making to facilitate access. Fernandez (2021), points out its relevance to achieve the SDGs, specially due to its synergies with SDG 1 "No Poverty", SDG 3 "Good Health and Well-Being", SDG 4 "Quality Education", SDG 6 "Clean Water and Sanitation", SDG 7 "Affordable and Clean Energy" and SDG 11 "Sustainable Cities and Communities" (UN, 2015).

Additionally, the UN-HABITAT (2014) clarifies that acknowledging housing as a human right, does not imply that the government must provide free housing, but to work collectively in the matter, with actions like resource allocation, incentives for the private sector to develop affordable housing, rent control regulations, provide protection from evictions or many other means.

Nowadays, countries worldwide are facing problems due to the reduction of public funding, not only increasing the role of the private sector in the housing market but, in many cases, asserting its dominance over public interests and the social housing market (Albisa et al., 2013; Fernandez, 2021). Letting the market lead the housing development has encouraged its commodification, and in some cases the displacement of population, particularly the ones in the lowest income levels; hence, the need for policymakers to design policies, regulations or legal instruments that protect the housing right, of not only of the middle income households but the disadvantaged populations (Albisa et al., 2013; Fernandez, 2021).

The lack of affordable housing is undeniably an increasing problem worldwide. Part of the issue is that houses are not being built quickly enough to absorb the increasing demand; so the lack of supply makes prices rise, aggravating accessibility not only to the low-income families, but to

anyone whose income does not grow at the same pace of housing prices (Fernandez, 2021). Fernandez (2021) expresses that just building more houses is an insufficient approach, and in some cases it could lead to more problems, the access to basic services, proximity to education and health facilities, job centers, as well as transportation should be considered equally (UN-HABITAT, 2014). Oftentimes governments decide to build those housing estates away from the mentioned facilities, which end up transforming it into dormitory towns or abandoned; so future affordable housing projects should take into consideration integrating them with the rest of the economic system, and simultaneously the associated transport issues (Fernandez, 2021). This issue is not relevant to just low-income counties, since many scholars have studied this problem worldwide, some calling it already a housing crisis, because the lack of affordable housing is indeed related to poverty, affecting extremely vulnerable people (Fernandez, 2021).

Therefore, it is also important to introduce homelessness. Globally, homelessness is defined as people without any accommodation, living in temporary accommodation or living in insecure and inadequate accommodation, and it is linked to economic, urban, and human settlement policies (Sinxadi & Campbell, 2020). There are many approaches to homelessness; first, homelessness 'by choice', it is rooted in assumptions about the poor, whether they are responsible for being homeless and the perceptions on their personal behavior, seen as immoral (Tipple & Speak, 2009) relating them with drug and alcohol abuse, recklessness, and irresponsibility, Somerville (2013) argues this was the predominant conception until the 1960s.

Then homelessness 'by force', this was the main approach between 1960s and 1980s, and refers when the circumstances of the homeless are attributed to structural factors such as unemployment and lack of access to decent jobs and housing (Somerville, 2013), or eviction (Sinxadi & Campbell, 2020), but it is not clear if the cause is the failure of the housing market to provide adequate, affordable housing, or global economic factors (Tipple & Speak, 2009); nevertheless, it leads to severe and traumatic consequences like the damage of property, breaking up of social networks, loss of access to essential facilities and services, and often violence (Du Plessis, 2005), to combat this it is necessary a societal and economic change, with more adequate housing and more job opportunities. Somerville (2013), adds a third approach, which considers individual's actions and choices that are beyond the control of an individual person, in other words homeless people with mental health problems, personality disorders, and other vulnerabilities.

Somerville (2013), exposes six factors that might prompt homelessness. First, the main driver of homelessness is the loss of economic position, triggered by actions like losing a house or a job. Second, the inability to find a niche in the market, when unsuccessful to find a job opportunity. Third, displacement of youth without alternative shelter options and therefore inability to join

the workforce, usually it is a result of escaping dysfunctional families. Fourth, there is a shortage of affordable housing, this represents the greater risk factor for homelessness, especially for people with a restricted income. Fifth, poverty is the most prevalent characteristic of the homeless worldwide, and it could be triggered by many factors like unemployment, housing costs, health care, declining value of minimal wages, etc. And lastly, sixth, substance and drug abuse, which is considered part of the characteristics of homelessness by choice.

Moreover, lack of affordability for adequate housing and access to basic services can cause homelessness, and represent one of the major challenges of urbanization globally, since it represents one of the extreme forms of deprivation and exclusion. Therefore, governments should provide access to public housing stock, social housing, and other affordable housing options (Sinxadi & Campbell, 2020). Benjaminsen & Andrade (2015) also exemplify government actions to deal with it, like the USA with the 2009 "Homelessness Prevention and Rapid Re-Housing Program" which provided financial assistance to keep at-risk individuals and families from becoming homeless and quick allocation of the affected ones into permanent living situations. Also Denmark, issued the Social Assistance Act, that forces municipalities to provide temporary shelters to the homeless, resulting in at least one or more homeless shelters in most large and medium sized municipalities.

Atkinson & Jacobs (2022) exposed that a financial crisis, like the one in 2007, could have been partly predicted if economists, financial institutions and central governments address housing related concerns like poverty, homelessness, eviction and repossessions, the underfunding of social care in domestic settings and the difficult situations of low income renters. Additionally, they (Atkinson & Jacobs, 2022) expressed hope on a more sociologically informed economics of housing, one that considers the relevance of social influences as they shape how households and individuals produce, consume and experience housing, by recognising these issues, as well as the material and economic realities of the housing system.

Additionally, another product of poverty are the disadvantaged neighborhoods, that in developed countries it is also a cause of a mix between rapid urban population growth, specially by migration, and urban infrastructure failures (Mitra & Mitra, 2021). The UN (2023) reports that 55 per cent of the world's population was living in urban areas in 2022, the urban growth mainly happening in small cities and intermediate towns, but it is projected to rise to 70 per cent by 2050, which would aggravate inequalities and urban poverty, probably making the number of people living in slums might triple if no policy framework is established to address it (UN, 2013).

UN-Habitat (2003) defines a slum household as lacking at least one of these aspects: access to clean water, access to improved sanitation, secure tenure, a durable housing structure and

sufficient living area. Mitra & Mitra (2021) add that slums are characterized by the absence of planned road networks and basic amenities, are usually built in hazardous locations and the houses often use non-durable materials for construction, such as plastic sheets, pallets and waste materials or furniture (FECONS & Montaño Garcés, 2020). Additionally, they are also deprived from other services like proximity to education, and health facilities, therefore, it has an impact, not only physically, but also emotionally, mentally and socially, damaging their self-esteem and their mental health (FECONS & Montaño Garcés, 2020; Shrestha, 2021). The UN (2023) states that while the proportion of global urban population living in slums slightly declined from 25.4 per cent in 2014 to 24.2 per cent in 2020, the total number of people living in slums continues to increase with the expanding urbanization, from 883 million urban residents living in slums or slum-like conditions in 2015 to an estimated 1.1 billion people in 2020; and over the next 30 years it is expected that such settlements could host an additional 2 billion people more.

The UN (2023) argues that the escalating slum population is a manifestation of the housing crisis, so the support in the vulnerable and exposed areas is much needed; therefore, it is necessary to promote a comprehensive urban development approach, one that coordinates the influences of government bodies, agencies, and relevant stakeholders to provide diverse housing options, equitable public transportation and basic services to the urban residents (UN, 2023; Shrestha, 2021).

In summary, the increasing demand for urban housing has brought to light great issues in the accessibility and affordability of adequate housing. Overlooking that housing is a basic right and treating it as an economic asset affect primarily the vulnerable populations from affecting their health and economic stability, to fostering inequalities and social exclusion (Fernandez, 2021; Atkinson & Jacobs, 2022). The absence of comprehensive policies and inclusive planning in cities, could induce the risk of homelessness and the expansion of substandard housing or slums (UN, 2023; Shrestha, 2021). And lastly, addressing housing inequalities requires a multidimensional approach that integrates equitable public policies, urban development frameworks, and cooperative efforts between the community and the public and private stakeholders.

2.4. The Role of NGOs to Foster Social Sustainability

In the urban context, planning authorities propose many solutions to deal with societal problems and the crisis of public space, but fostering social cohesion has been set as the 'remedy' for many. Ganugi & Prandini (2023) add that also scholars identify it as the objective of participation forms as they are the territorialization of informal social actions, pointing out the positive role of non-profit organizations to encourage community involvement and support social cohesion in

society. Fonseca et al. (2019), defines social cohesion as the ongoing process of developing well-being, sense of belonging, and voluntary social participation within the members of society, while developing communities that promote a multiplicity of values, and also granting equal rights and opportunities in society. Then, social cohesion practices are multidimensional and scale-sensitive, and it is fostered by boosting a community's sense of belonging, place attachment and participation in public affairs (Ganugi & Prandini, 2023).

The power to shape cities worldwide relies, in most cases, in the hands of small political and economic elites who have established democratic control of the urban environment through urbanization. But Harvey (2015) considers it is too narrowly confined, proposing that the power of reshaping the processes of urbanization should be a collective right, since it depends on the exercise of a collective power over the urban; therefore, the right to the city is more than claiming individual access to the resources of the city, it is the right to change ourselves by changing the city (Harvey, 2015). In the same way, Fainstein (2014) exposes the theory of the just city, which has an emphasis in the democratic decision-making claiming that a broad participation in policy decisions, especially a greater role of those in disadvantaged groups, should produce more just outcomes and less frequent 'contemporary urban renewal programmes', those that underline the displacement of the poor. The just city is based on three main pillars: democracy, diversity, and most importantly equity (Fainstein, 2014). So, participative approaches and the inclusion of bottom-up initiatives in urban governance processes are considered to be the response to both theories; and since they rely on the involvement of individuals from the civil society in the management of urban governance processes, the ground floor for inclusion processes and a more just democracy is layed down (Tanyanyiwa & Mufunda, 2020).

Top-down urban design solutions, especially those aiming for the transformation of deprived or poor urban areas, hold a great power over vulnerable communities; they involve an institution, which hold the power in the decision-making processes, deciding whether or not to involve citizens, meaning that they could either play an instrumental role or be limited to non-participation (Pavani, 2024). When a place develops an undesired reputation, authorities could easily justify measures to 'fix' it, even if it means destabilizing or further marginalizing their residents (Wacquant, 2007). Tyagi et al. (2021), exemplifies this situation with the case of giving aid: when an externally decided top-down approach means to regularly give aid to a community, where they share no responsibility on the matter, it creates the risk of dependency and 'learned helplessness', where the aid is seeing as a 'reward' for staying in the state of needing it, weakening their budding capacity for 'self-help' and thus ends up being unhelpful and creating an unsustainable scenario, as it leaves individuals in a passive state of expectation and

dependency for both human and economic resources; therefore, the best form of assistance is to help people help themselves (Tyagi et al., 2021; Pavani, 2024). De Gregorio Hurtado (2020) argues that sectoral and hierarchical/top-down approaches that just aim to physically transform an 'undesired' neighborhood, even if marked as necessary, have proven limited and insufficient by analyzing the unsuccessful social outcomes of projects of the sort in the 1960s United States and Europe.

Moreover, also when the perspective of an urban plan is rather narrow, it could serve as a route for urban renewal, gentrification or to benefit just part of the community it is intervening in. Governments, by attempting to regulate and 'civilize' unruly urban populations, may fabricate a desirability in the aspirational and urban middle class, using them as catalysts to integrate poorer groups into the labor market and reduce disorder; this might not be interpreted as a 'market-led renewal' but as 'state-sponsored gentrification' due to its level of implication (Helms et al., 2007). Fernandes (1998) exemplifies these kind of state-led actions with what the municipality of Porto did to an area labeled as 'hipermercado das drogas', where they launch an 'urban renewal' plan aiming insert the neighborhood back into the city's real estate circuit, but at the same time several police raids took place for the purpose of expelling and scattering the local addicts, squatters, and unemployed away from the area, without worrying about the displaced residents. Pavani (2024) questions why these top-down processes are so commonly presented by institutions if they have proven to be socially unsustainable in the long run. Therefore, there is a necessity for sustainable governance, one that on top of offering transparency, integrity, efficiency in operations, accountability, and responsibility, carries out its administrative responsibilities with ethics and human values of the people it influences at its core, in all the hierarchies of the government, to build a well-organized, sustainable society (Lakavath, 2021).

Therefore, Luttrell et al. (2009) propose that for targeting the existing inequalities of a community caused by being exposed to poverty or vulnerability, it is necessary to acknowledge the individuals and groups' capacities for actions to shape their environment. Therefore, Perkins (2010) considers empowerment as a valuable tool, defining it as a dynamic, community centered process that involves group participation, allowing them to gain control over their own development and achieve a common goal. In other words, it is a set of measures that aim to boost the autonomy and sufficiency of people and communities by gaining the ability to represent themselves and get the necessary resources to transform their environment; a collective process that requires involvement of active participation to get access to decisions and resources (Perkins, 2010). De Gregorio Hurtado (2020) considers the empowerment of a local community as instrumental to deliver durable transformation, since it has the potential of building local capacity to face the processes that reproduce poverty.

Additionally, Perkins (2010) exposes the three dimensions of empowerment. First, economic empowerment, meaning the capacity for people to make choices regarding their engagement in the market. Second, political empowerment, giving people access to influence decision-making processes. But, this last one is not enough if people do not perceive themselves as capable to participate and mobilize resources. Therefore, the third dimension, social empowerment, is depicted as gaining self-confidence and a degree of autonomy to change social relationships.

Bukowski & Kreissl (2021) point out that empowerment is a process, and it cannot be achieved overnight since it is fueled by a collective notion, and requires engaging in economic, political, and cultural activities. Also, Blomkvist (2003) expresses that the level of engagement of people in the empowerment process, depend on many factors such as health, literacy, sense of identity and social belonging, self-esteem, the ability to aspire for a better future, and many more; simplified as human, social and physiological capabilities. Senyk (2005) points out the relevance of considering the individuals' cultures, living conditions, and preferences in the empowerment process, since ignorance or disrespect could have a reverse effect or even reinforce the dominant power-structures. Pavani (2024) adds that this initial process requires the assistance of a social worker for the reconstruction of their personal narratives, for then introducing interventions such as collaborative group efforts and community engagement.

Some of the strategies to foster empowerment are uniting the poor and vulnerable people in local associations or cooperatives to increase their social and political influence. Also regulating and investing in economic and social infrastructure, like promoting decent work as well as policies and programs that support and protect the individuals; social protection activities such as boosting children's capabilities and productivity improvements of households (Bukowski & Kreissl, 2021). The UN (2023) argues that investments on supporting job creation and expanding social protection could generate millions of jobs globally, and despite its high initial cost, it will generate long-term results, like fueling just transitions and creating more resilient, inclusive and equitable societies for all, and makes emphasis in its necessary role. Nevertheless, without the interest of challenging structural inequalities, empowerment would remain an intangible strategy; meaning addressing oppressive structures, and acknowledging local efforts to cope and improve their situations (Bukowski & Kreissl, 2021). Alongside the emergence of the concept of sustainable urban development, there has been a growth in request of local communities to participate in projects for the transformation of their own neighborhoods and the search for other styles of working for urban governance (Healey, 1998); hence, strategies like Integrated Urban Regeneration, which seeks lasting improvement of a vulnerable urban area by a multi-agent collaborative process, including the civil society, and relies in building local capacity to increase their resilience (De Gregorio Hurtado, 2020).

Public participation is a process established in the premises of the 'Right to the City' and the 'Just City' perspectives, and refers to all processes where the government and civil society share information or establish partnerships, to design, implement, or evaluate development initiatives, and it requires involvement of the interested parties, including the poor and marginalized groups (Organization of American States, 2001); in particular, those individuals who experience oppression, must take active roles as agents of change. Also, a community-based approach does not mean leaving communities to find their own solutions, but continuous support from the authorities to increase their self-organization capacities (Howard & Wheeler, 2015), it requires a minimum administrative, technical, and organizational efforts for its implementation and involvement of the relevant actors, including the residents or, if any, the informal social networks able to mobilize the local community (De Gregorio Hurtado, 2020), which are valuable in contexts without a strong administrative and technical capacity, unable to exercise direct authority over public decisions and neither make them become policy (Fung, 2006). Therefore, local governments should provide sustainable strategies for the interaction such as regular local assemblies, work-shops, roundtables, media information dissemination, or many more (Tanyanyiwa & Mufunda, 2020).

Then a switch of focus for local authorities is needed, Millor Vela (2022b) proposes that instead of having a focal point on the 'community' itself, their intentions should point towards 'making community', since it is a perspective that requires inclusion. Then, for more socially sustainable societies, participation methods should be strengthened since they could avoid designing services that promote a passive state of dependency by 'finding out what the people are trying to do and help them to do it better', while at the same time empowering the individuals (Pavani, 2024; Schumacher, 1961).

Consequently, Torfing et al. (2019) proposes the concept of co-creation, meaning the alliance of public and private actors aiming to solve shared public problems by seeking innovative potential in the constructive and mutual exchange of knowledge, resources, and ideas; either by providing visions, strategies, policies, or services that could trigger a different understanding of the problem, leading to new ways to solve it. Co-creation processes recognize citizens as 'experts by experience' and not just recipients of a service, it is also important to make sure that citizens are not considered just as co-implementers, assuring they have the role of co-designers or co-initiators; achieving the process itself should be considered as the goal (Pavani, 2024; Voorberg et al., 2015). Co-creation enables public and private actors to use their relations to accomplish new things, it may strengthen social cohesion and build more resilient communities by empowering local actors in development processes, also it build additional social capital by allowing the concerned people affirm their own economic, social, and cultural conditions, and

lastly it may enhance democratic participation and mutual trust, especially allowing the disadvantaged to make choices that concern their interests through democracy (Torfing et al., 2019; Tanyanyiwa & Mufunda, 2020; Tyagi et al., 2021).

Tanyanyiwa & Mufunda (2020), consider that all types of participatory approaches rely in an already well-developed social capital, and Torfing et al. (2019) acknowledges other critiques to co-creation such as the results might be biased, favoring the most advantaged segments of the population in the sense of their influence on joint decisions, but Tyagi et al. (2021) points out that 'community self-help programs' tend to foster and strengthen community sustainably because it helps develop the community capability to manage its own affairs and deal with its problems more effectively, demonstrating high potential to guide a sustainable and resilient urban transformation (De Gregorio Hurtado, 2020). Nevertheless, other difficulties of participation are ensuring democratic accountability and transparency in decision-making, its monitoring and the cost and time-consumption such meetings require (Torfing et al., 2019), which could be replaced by online participation to reduce their cost.

Therefore it is necessary to enhance the trust in government and the democratic legitimacy of the public sector. In particular, Tanyanyiwa & Mufunda (2020) stress the limitations of bottom-up approaches, exposing that they require citizens to have trust and to engage in processes that increase the confidence in the institutions, for complex issues like poverty could be reduced, meaning that decision-making would still rely solely on the State; Pavani (2024) critiques that these forms of participation, therefore, display tokenism, since it allows those without power to express themselves, without compromising the decision-making privileges of those already in power. Besides, Moulaert et al. (2013) consider that contemporary societies' complexity needs more than just one actor, than just the State; hence social innovation processes, which advocates for reshaping the dynamics between the State, civil society, and the market by letting individuals and institutions propose changes and lead actions that address social problems (Pavani, 2024).

Then a third dynamic is proposed, bottom-linked which, just as participatory processes, it promotes new practices and diverse perspectives for a more democratic society, and it differs from the bottom-up dynamics in the promotion, support, development and implementation of its projects and initiatives, by the involvement of all stakeholders, including all the institutions, such as transnational institutions, local political and social actors, scholars, professionals, and participation practitioners (Jobert & Muller, 1987, as cited in Moini, 2011; Moulaert & MacCallum, 2019; Pavani, 2024). In other words, bottom-linked dynamics imply the institutionalization of participatory initiatives in an aim to achieve social sustainability. If the participation initiatives are not institutionalized, then there is not a 'genuine' commitment by institutions to consider the

citizens' demands, and for social work to be sustainable, individuals must be empowered and able take part in decision-making processes to effectively address their problems (Pavani, 2024). Moreover, Ganugi & Prandini (2023) argues that bottom-linked governance models offer an effective framework that could foster long-term social cohesion because it recognises the centrality of initiatives, while at the same time stresses the necessity of institutions to sustain them through lasting practices. They add that this model helps challenge mainstream cultural discourses, promote local alternative initiatives and stimulate different governance arrangements of public spaces.

In conclusion, to build a socially sustainable future for the vulnerable, marginalized communities and society as a whole, it is important to consider that top-down approaches often fail to generate genuine engagement and participation (Pavani, 2024), and while Shrestha (2021) argues that bottom-up approaches linked with strategic synergies are the solution, since it considers the individuals' needs, and at the same time increases the effectiveness and efficiency of the actions, Pavani (2024) points out that they rely too much in advocacy, and depends on receiving the tools and the strength to influence decision-making processes. Still, Tanyanyiwa & Mufunda (2020) argue that it cannot be said that bottom-up approaches are better than top-down, since depending on the context and scale one could be more relevant than the other in different situations; therefore, it is important for decision-makers to clarify in which processes, participation should be sought. Nevertheless, in terms or social work, the bottom-linked approaches have the potential to make it more socially sustainable, because it has roots in co-creation processes and they effectively integrate local governance and different sectors, for the creation of social capital and social justice (Pavani, 2024; Cuthill, 2010).

3.   Methodology Overview

This section describes the methods used to understand territorial stigmatization processes in the Cementerio area of Alicante, Spain and the role of individuals, communities and institutions, such as the NGO Asertos, in challenging the related problems and fostering social cohesion., it also exposes the tools used for the data analysis and presents the findings of the research, done in Spain from March to May 2024. The research was guided by two main questions: how do the residents of the Cementerio area respond to the stigma? And what has been the influence of the work done by Asertos to improve their living conditions?

To answer these questions, a mixed methods approach was used to achieve a deeper understanding of the issues, including an in-depth study of historical contexts, the analysis of news articles and online publications, observations of the site visits, carrying out in-person qualitative interviews, mapping relevant relationships and finally analyzing the findings. Most of these tasks were in-person activities, enabling the research to have more accurate data from primary sources.

The collection of the secondary data was crucial to understand the narratives that were constructed around the background and present circumstances of the study area, as well as taking participant observations to compare with the perceptions of external observers and the media representation. It is important to highlight that the aim of the research is not to identify if the outside perceptions match, are contrary or share some features with the reality of the area, but to have it as a framework to answer the questions previously mentioned.

The selection of this case study was driven by acknowledging that there are 12.55 million people at risk of poverty or social exclusion in Spain, which represents 26.5% of its population, located in 918 vulnerable neighborhoods scattered around 132 cities (Eurostat, 2024; Alguacil Gómez et al., 2014). Moreover, the Valencian Community has experienced a significant increase of severe and critical urban vulnerability, where Alicante is one of the cities with the most population living in vulnerable neighborhoods, around 120 thousand people (Alguacil Gómez et al., 2014). Within Alicante there are several neighborhoods in vulnerable conditions, such as Les Carolines, Virgen del Remedio or Colonia Requena, all of these have the presence of Asertos. But the NGO has been working the longest alongside the residents of the Cementerio area in addressing their social, economic and residential vulnerability, being ideal for the study of the synergies between this type of partnerships.

This direct contact with the community was facilitated due to having an internship period with the NGO ASFE, under the Asertos program, between March and May 2024. Since 2017 they have been working towards the local development of vulnerable neighborhoods starting from the local resources of their residents. During this period I got the opportunity to assist the activities Asertos held on the site, these included conducting and assisting interviews with the residents who wanted to participate in the program, taking measurements and evaluating their housing conditions, and participating in community building activities, such as maintenance of the urban garden, and workshops for building wood furniture, planters and a pergola for their new communal space. These experiences allowed me to not just rely on information from secondary sources or even just their perceptions, but also to observe their relationships to get an insight of the community.

3.1.   Research Tools

For this research the 'Case Study' strategy was used, as it has the possibility to provide more specific information on the relationships between the civil society and associations, Cementerio area residents and Asertos. The selected research approach works for gathering contextual information about a real-world situation, such as the perception of stigma from the ones who are experiencing it and from the outside, as well as its roots in place, allowing to study its implications in the quality of life of individuals and to showcase the importance of overcoming such challenges.

Therefore, there is a need to study such relationships in their 'natural settings', for a thorough understanding and interpretation of the roles at play. So, this qualitative research employs various methodologies, in order to collect rich and detailed data of such complex relationships,

and uses a ethnographic approach that allows flexibility in the questions to be adapted to the different types of participants.

The data collection methods used in this work are the analysis of news articles and online publications, participant observations, site mapping, looking up into official documents and policies to build a framework of the conditions the Cementerio area is subjected to. But, the main method used to organize their empirical experiences was performing interviews. These activities were carried out during my internship period with Asertos between March and May 2024 in Alicante.

Moreover, performing the qualitative interviews took about 10 to 15 days in total, and lasted between 10 to 50 minutes each, as the prepared questions were not used as a questionnaire, but in a conversational and structured way, as conversation starters in order to leave the interviewee free reign to pursue their line of argument. The Interviews were conducted among 17 participants who are aware and have contact with the study area. Certainly this research was carried out on a small sample, it does not cover all the residents and commercial operators in the area, nor all local authorities actors that have some connection with the area. Due to these limitations, it was fundamental to make an information-oriented selection of the subjects to maximize the diversity of perspectives, experiences, points of view, especially with the residents; the participants were selected on the basis of expectations about their expected contribution (Flyvbjerg, 2006).

Fuerther, also a multi-perspective approach was considered for the interviews since it was intended to consider the views of different actors and stakeholders on the area, including residents, nearby commercial operators, the Gypsy Secretariat Foundation (FSG), local administration and the NGO itself. This comprehensive approach was useful to build a thorough picture on the perception of the Cementerio area, due to considering the narrative of each actor and their different viewpoints, with firsthand perspectives and experiences. Through this approach, useful information about the city's overall conditions on the matter of the housing problem was also obtained, as a result of the on-site personal interviews that allowed greater interactions with the participants and getting interesting insights.

After defining an ideal diversity of characteristics for the interviewees, the final group was the output of the voluntary consent to participate. It was fundamental that the interviewees participate willingly to ensure expressing their views and opinions openly. To foster this environment, the goal of the interview and the research was stated before starting, as well as providing them with an informed consent document where I vouch to ensure the anonymity of their personal information.

Additionally, such interviews were carried out with theoretical sampling, to ensure a varied range of perceptions given by different characteristics of the participants, as shown in Table 1. Out of the 17 interviewees, a majority of 58.8% (10) were male, while 35.3% (6) was provided by female participants, and one respondent identified themselves as 'other' when asked about their gender. On the age distribution, nearly 30% (5) of the participants were between 26-35 years old. And when asked about their Ethnicity 35.3% (6) of the individuals considered themselves as part of the Roma community, while with the same proportion people decided to not answer that field.

Table 1. *Sociodemographic characteristics of participants.*

Gender	Female	6 (35.3%)
	Male	10 (58.8%)
	Other	1 (5.9%)
Age	21-25	2 (11.8%)
	26-35	5 (29.4%)
	36-45	4 (23.5%)
	46-55	4 (23.5%)
	Over 55	2 (11.8%)
Ethnicity	Roma	6 (35.3%)
	Non-Roma	5 (29.4%)
	Not Specified	6 (35.5%)
Type of Actor	Resident	11 (64.7%)
	Commercial Operator	2 (11.8%)
	Stakeholder	2 (11.8%)
	Local Authority	2 (11.8%)

Note. Own work.

As seen on Table 1, four types of actors were interviewed. The first three groups correspond to people that have constant contact with the study area, meaning that they live or work in Cementerio, because they are likely to have firsthand knowledge and information on the reality lived in the study area, further than just the material scarcity. First the residents; for these actors in addition to looking for diversity in age, gender and ethnicity, the 'zone' where they live within the Cementerio area was also taken into consideration. The plan was to interview between 10 to 15 residents, but many of them were not comfortable with the idea to participate, still 11 residents agreed. Most of them live between the two main zones of Cementerio, Barrio del Cura and Barrio de Abajo, but residents of the remaining three zones were also interviewed. Further, the interviews were structured in three sections, the first one delves around their experiences and challenges of living in the Cementerio area, the second section touches on their work and educational status, as well as using the available tools offered by the FSG to improve their

conditions. Lastly, the third section asks about their involvement with the NGO Asertos for the improvement of their community.

The second type of actors are the surrounding commercial operators, that since they do not reside in the area, but still interact with it regularly, could provide a unique point of view that considers both perspectives. For these actors it was important that the participants do not reside in the area. Also it was intended to perform the interview to workers from all surrounding areas, including the car dealers at the south of the study area, the construction materials retailers at the east, the recycling factories and warehouses at the west and the cemetery related businesses at the north part. But things didn't go as planned as the majority of them rejected an interview, even when offered to reschedule it, resulting in the participation of 2 commercial operators from different smaller businesses, in the vicinity of the cemetery square, that were open to contribute. This interview was also structured in three sections, the first one intends to assess their familiarity with the study area, the second one asks for their perception on the area and their residents, and the third section asks if the company have integrated or taken a part in the alleviation of the scarcity lived by the residents.

The third actor is the stakeholder, as are the Gypsy Secretariat Foundation and the NGO ASFE. Given their varying degrees of involvement with the community, different sets of interview questions were prepared to ensure the collection of pertinent insights.

First, the FSG's contributions were expected to be similar as of the commercial operators', as they do not reside in the area but hold a constant interaction with the residents of the area. The key difference is that they attend to their specific needs and have much direct contact with the residents everyday. There are two offices of the FSG in the Cementerio area, one in the La Casita zone and the other in Barrio de Abajo, so it was intended to interview one representative from each post to understand their different scopes, but I didn't get the chance to meet with the representative from the post in La Casita zone, therefore just one representative of the FSG was interviewed. The interview was divided into three sections. The first section sets the stance of the interviewer and the foundation in the area as to how long they have been active in it. The second section asks about their job in the community as well as their limitations. And the third section is regarding their perception of the area.

Second, the contributions of the NGO ASFE, through the Asertos program, were crucial to the research as they have been working in the area and could provide greater understanding of the aim of their efforts when addressing the material scarcity. This organization frequently collaborates with underrepresented communities in Alicante, and are experts on the social impacts of their spatial actions. One representative of Asertos was interviewed, and the interview

was divided into four sections. The first section consists of questions regarding the scope of action of the organization. The second section is about the perception of the area. The third one asks for their awareness of actions led by other actors that influence the community. Lastly, the fourth section asks about the impact of their initiatives.

Lastly, local authorities, the participants were selected to learn more about how existing urban policies influence the spatial distribution and the awareness of the public body on material scarcity lived in this area of the city. At this level the plan was to conduct interviews with the department in charge of planning and housing on the political party in power as well as on the opposition parties, to have a broader scope of what is being done and their critiques. But an answer from the governing political party was never received. Nevertheless 2 members of the opposition party agreed to the interview. Their interview was divided into three sections. The first section focused on their attention and actions to address urban marginality and material inequalities in the city as a whole, the second section dives into their awareness of the reality of the Cementerio area and their residents, and finally, the third section opens up a discussion on the future plans and interventions on the area.

As previously stated, different open-ended questions were prepared for each type of actor, with the aim to carry comprehensive qualitative interviews. In light of the potential for the interview questions to cause discomfort to some interviewees, a set of techniques was employed to ensure their comfort and ease during the interview. I tried to carry the interview to seem like an ordinary conversation, limiting the use of technical words, in order to make the participants feel comfortable and get more honest answers. When the participant mentioned a particularly interesting topic, they were encouraged to elaborate more on it with everyday conversational cues, while at the same time keeping the focus of the conversation to get the desired information; as it was important not to imply the stigmatization of the residents of the study area, but the participants were encouraged to expand if the topic was brought up. Nevertheless, there were some participants that didn't want to answer a specific question or felt uncomfortable, leading to skipping to the next one, while at the same time there were other individuals that spoke freely with a minor hint of the topic; this is reflected on the interview recordings which vary from 10 to 50 minutes.

These interview questions were first prepared in English, and then translated to Spanish to later perform such interviews in both the participants and the researcher's native language. The interview questions are attached in the annexes section and are available in both English and Spanish. Some participants were uncomfortable with their answers being recorded but allowed me to take notes of our interview, nevertheless every entry was transcribed and organized in an Excel file before proceeding with its analysis.

3.2. Method of Analysis

The objective of this research is dual: first, to understand the perception, representation, and experiences of Cementerio residents regarding the stigma; and second, to gain insights into the synergies between organizations and civil society to diminish the effects of the systemic problem. Hence the purpose of using the case study approach since it could enlighten the general issue by studying a particular case, considering its time, place, social and size restrictions. The use of a case study, in conjunction with the capacity to conduct fieldwork in the designated study area, has proven to be particularly advantageous.

This led me to also consider an ethnographic approach to the research, as it extends into many methods of data collection, such as the analysis of news articles, policies and online publications, participant observations, and qualitative interviews. As a result of the many tools selected, different methodologies to interpret and analyze the collected data were used.

The goal of analyzing official documents and policies is to understand the conditions the Cementerio area is framed by from the authorities. Looking into the news articles and online publications was an important part as they retell past events that worked for having a clearer picture of the background and, in some cases, historical information of the case study. The aim of using these techniques for analyzing the study area was to have a thorough illustration of the perceptions of the area from the broad society, specially in Alicante.

The representation of the media was settled by the analysis of news articles, videos and publications on social media, all available online. The selection process consisted on searching the keywords into the main media outlets, from social media to online versions of traditional media, such as newspaper articles. There were three types of publications; first, those that report on the material scarcity of the area and call for action from the authorities. Second, those reporting on crimes that are linked to the area or any of their residents. And lastly, those showing the work done by the Asertos and the experiences from the residents. These topics are further evaluated in the media representation section to illustrate more the images that are reproduced for the space and its residents.

Likewise, participant observations were considered since they could provide an understanding of people's dynamics while in their 'natural environment'. By observing and interacting with the residents of the Cementerio area, it was possible to collect first-hand information about their experiences of living in challenging conditions, and their openness to work with the NGO to improve their living conditions, including the area's as a whole. This empirical material was a

product of visiting the area at least two times a week, one during weekdays and another one during the weekend, during my internship period, between March and May 2024; it was recorded in form of annotations in a personal journal, but it was not transcribed for this work.

During the internship period, the opportunity arose to engage actively in all five of the organization's core activities, thereby acquiring firsthand experience in their community-driven approach to urban regeneration.The socio-spatial stays, which took place weekly in the Cementerio area, constituted the primary focus of involvement. In collaboration with the Asertos team, residents were consulted on their concerns regarding housing conditions. These interactions contributed to the updating of the Resource Bank, a crucial tool for identifying local challenges and mapping available community assets.

Additionally, I participated in the accompaniment for good living, which included conducting housing surveys to assess issues such as structural damage, moisture, and inadequate lighting. This helped build a tool that assigns vulnerability scores to prioritize interventions based on need. Beyond these two primary activities, I engaged in participatory workshops and assemblies, where residents and volunteers collaborated in the transformation of communal spaces.Additionally, I contributed to maintenance tasks, such as the upkeep of the urban garden, and participated in hands-on workshops that involved constructing wooden furniture, planters, and a pergola for a shaded communal space. Through my engagement in these diverse activities, I gained profound insights into Asertos' methodologies and the obstacles encountered in implementing sustainable, community-led initiatives.

Whereas for the interviews, since the aim of the research is to understand the human experiences better, it was necessary to use a method that allowed the easier understanding of the collected qualitative data. Therefore the thematic analysis was used. This analysis approach divided the process in three steps.

First, the transcription of the data. The interviews were either recorded on audio or taken notes on, for then to be manually transcribed and using in some cases digital softwares. Oftentimes the interviews were re-listened to and the transcript re-read at the same time to stay close to the respondents' own words.

Second, identifying codes and themes. This step involved reading once again the transcripts of the interviews and separating the sentences or paragraphs that have the same focus and placing it in an Excel file. These topics or keywords identified for each sentence are called codes, which are just clear labels, and sometimes the codes require a sub-code for further organization and understanding diverse details embedded in the same group. Then a pattern between the codes

was found leading to their clustering into themes, which then served as a base for the interpretation of the comments in an intentional and structured way.

Moreover, this strategy was particularly useful for the questions where the participants spoke freely and mentioned different interesting things. Also, the privacy of the participants was considered by assigning a three digit code to each of them, depending on the type of actor, in order to ensure their anonymity, see Table 2. This participant code was then linked with another three digit question code and the result is the one used on the transcript of the interviews, for example the code for the first participant (RE1) answering the first question (A01) would be RE1_A01.

Table 2. *Interviewee Identification Code.*

Interviewee Code	Type of Actor	Age	Gender	Ethnicity	Date of interview
RE1	Resident	32	Male	Roma	24th April, 2024
RE2	Resident	67	Male	Roma	24th April, 2024
RE3	Resident	75	Male	Roma	24th April, 2024
RE4	Resident	30	Male	Not Specified	27th April, 2024
RE5	Resident	35	Male	Roma	27th April, 2024
RE6	Resident	18	Other	Not Specified	27th April, 2024
RE7	Resident	40	Female	Not Specified	4th May, 2024
RE8	Resident	18	Female	Roma	4th May, 2024
RE9	Resident	50	Female	Not Specified	4th May, 2024
RG1	Resident	37	Male	Not Specified	4th May, 2024
RG2	Resident	30	Female	Not Specified	4th May, 2024
CG1	Commercial Operator	49	Male	Non–Roma	8th May, 2024
CG2	Commercial Operator	45	Female	Non–Roma	4th May, 2024
AG1	Local Authority (Opposition Party)	50	Male	Non–Roma	2nd May, 2024
AG2	Local Authority (Opposition Party)	49	Female	Non–Roma	2nd May, 2024
SE1	Stakeholder	36	Male	Roma	8th May, 2024
SG1	Stakeholder	32	Male	Non–Roma	8th May, 2024

Note. Own work.

Lastly, the third step is the interpretation and results, which means to study the comments under each theme and connect them to structure a cohesive case by considering the different types of actors and the topics of the literature review. For doing this interpretation the answers

were reviewed in their original language and then analyzed in English for the corresponding sections of this research. With this method similarities and differences were noticed across perspectives to then build the conclusions.

3.3.   Limits of the Research

It was crucial to identify and acknowledge the potential biases in the research, and in the different methods for data collection and data analysis; especially for a qualitative research built up on empirical data, as perceptions could be easily shaped by the hidden biases and prejudices, limiting the accuracy of observations, and could lead to some viewpoints being underreported. The researchers' bias was challenged by having many sources of information, such as performing interviews and looking at the online publications, as considering multiple points of view limits the possibility to bring forward a single discourse.

One limitation of the study was that it was not possible to reach all the people who were wanted to be interviewed. The goal was to interview 10 to 15 residents, but only 11 agreed to participate. Many people were hesitant or uncomfortable with the idea of being interviewed. This may have affected the diversity of perspectives gathered. Some people who were more skeptical of external interventions may be underrepresented. It was also hard to get business owners to participate. Most of them refused, even when offered a different time. This led to only two interviews with business owners from the cemetery square area. This means that there were no interviews with business owners from other nearby areas, such as car dealerships, construction material retailers, and recycling factories.The small number of business owners who participated may not show the full range of views about the Cementerio area.

Also, it was hard to get interviews with key people from institutions.We wanted to talk to more representatives from both FSG offices in the Cementerio area, but we could only reach one. This might have limited our ability to understand how their work varies in different areas. Additionally, the department of the governing political party responsible for planning and housing did not respond to several attempts to contact them. This meant that the study's results were mostly based on the views of the political opposition. It would have been better to include the views of the current leaders, as this would have given a more balanced picture of the urban policies and decision-making processes in the area.

Another limitation to consider is that the research is constrained on a specific context and time, meaning that, since certain dynamics are flexible, the conditions considered at the time of developing this work could change through the years, in the shape of the introduction of new

policies, changes in public opinion, or other cases. The time frame of the research, from March to May 2024, also limited what could have been done. Doing the study over a longer period might have allowed for a more extensive data collection process, including follow-up interviews and a deeper engagement with residents and stakeholders.

Additionally, it could have provided opportunities to observe the impact of municipal interventions, and the NGO's ongoing projects. Since it takes time to build trust and get people involved, having a longer study period might have gotten more detailed and nuanced answers from the people in the study. To deal with these problems, in the future, the study could try other ways to collect data to mix with the interviews. For example, anonymous surveys could get people to share their thoughts without feeling pressure to do a formal interview. Also, it would be good to spend more time studying the Cementerio area and coming back to the community at different times to learn more about it. Finally, it would be good to work more with city officials and other groups that make decisions about the city to make it easier for the residents to talk to the people who make decisions affecting the neighborhood.

4.   The Roma Community in Spain

The Roma community has played an integral role in Spanish society for centuries; yet, they have been historically marginalized. Their presence in Spain dates since the 15th century. Their status has been shaped by continuous exclusion, discrimination, and systemic inequalities. It is critical to understand the background, cultural identity, and challenges of the Roma community to contextualize their experiences within broader urban and social policies. This section provides an overview of the Roma community in Spain, focusing on their historical trajectory, discrimination and disadvantages, particularly related to housing conditions.

The first subsection, The Roma Background and Culture, explores the origins of the Roma people, their migration patterns, cultural traditions, and their role in Spanish society. The second subsection, The Stages of the Roma in Spain, examines key historical periods that have shaped their legal and social status, including legislative measures that have influenced their integration or marginalization.The third subsection, Discrimination and Antigypsyism in Spain, delves into the structural and everyday discrimination faced by the Roma community, with a focus on contemporary antigypsyism and its impact on their social mobility. The final subsection, Disadvantages in Spanish Roma Households, examines the socio-economic challenges faced by Roma families, in domains like employment, education, and access to adequate housing.

This section draws on a range of sources, including academic studies on Roma history and culture, reports from institutions such as the Fundación Secretariado Gitano (FSG) and Spanish governmental data on social inclusion policies. By synthesizing these perspectives, this chapter aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the Roma community's experiences and the structural barriers they continue to face in Spain.

4.1.   The Roma Background and Culture

Fraser (2000) exposes that originally 'Roma' was a self-designated name from the eastern European Gypsies, but nowadays is the most common name for the collective, with its variations such as 'Rom' and 'Romani'. They are characterized for having a distinctive culture, customs and habits, specially their own language, music, justice system, religion, and spiritual beliefs, but they are mostly associated with their nomadic background. Due to the lack of a written culture, many authors from the 15th century started to address questions of the gypsy origin, but the outcome theories are inconclusive or inconsistent, it is most likely they come from the 'East' and entered Europe through the Balkan countries in an attempt to escape from disruptions and racially motivated attacks driven by the Ottoman empire (Santiago Camacho, 1997; Fraser, 2000), see Figure 1.

Figure 1. *Different Paths Followed by the Roma Leading to Spain.*
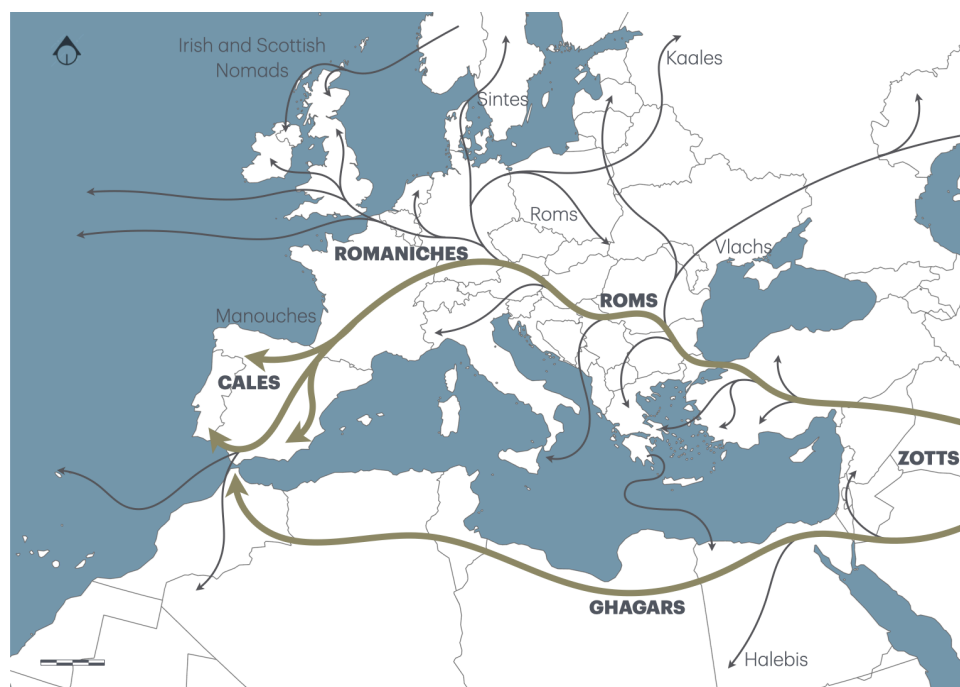
Note. Adapted from "Nos acercamos a una cultura: Los Gitanos", by Santiago Camacho, 1997 and "GISCO: Geodata – Administrative units/Countries" by European Commission, n.d.

Fraser (2000) affirms that there is no evidence this group had a single collective name for themselves, but before 'Roma' was adopted, many countries came with their own terms. Some people associated them with Egypt, calling them 'counterfeit Egyptians', which evolved into 'Gypsies' in English and 'Gitanos' in Spanish; other countries derived from the Byzantine term 'Athínganoi', which origin is unclear, and rose to 'Tsiganes' in French, and 'Zingari' in Italian (Fraser, 2000). Nevertheless, some of those terms still hold a derogatory connotation, so from now on, this work will use the term Roma for referring to such groups.

Vega Cortés (1997) argues that the history of Roma has shaped the most characteristic features of the culture, such as the absence of Roma literature, making it a spoken culture that is transmitted through generations, pointing out the importance of the language for constituting the culture; as well as the Gypsy laws and traditions that serve as an expression of their daily life and create a sense of identification. He also presents that family is at the core of the Roma culture, promoting values of respect, care and honor, while also projecting hospitality and solidarity to the community as a whole. Santiago Camacho (1997) adds that for the Roma, family means more than just blood ties, but still, their lineage takes an important role in shaping their character, serving as an object for recognition among the members of the community. She also clarifies that there is no hierarchy in between lineages.

Thereby, its role in the 'Gypsy Law', a set of rules conducted by the elderly in the community, that encourages solidarity within the members, and strictly prohibits them from betraying any member of the group or family; any person committing a crime has to face the Spanish law penalties, and also the ones from the Gypsy law, which could go as far as exile from the community. She also points out that the figure of the 'uncle' is very important for the community, it is a 'title' given to a respected, usually mature, person within the group that due to their wisdom or problem solving abilities serves as an advisor when a conflict or event occurs, oftenly miscalled as the Gypsy king or patriarch by the non-Roma population. Also, the elderly, people from 65 years of age, are in charge of ensuring 'family unity', therefore it is prohibited to take them to nursing homes or any place where they live without their family (Santiago Camacho, 1997).

The Roma community has endured stigmatization and violence for many centuries. Fraser (2000) exposes that in the 16th century these communities of 'wanderers' moving between cities for commerce, specially craftworkers and entertainers, were depicted as the 'dangerous classes', lenting support for anti-Gypsy legislations, primarily led by the church in an attempt to 'unify', or 'standardize' the nations (Vega Cortés, 1997). England, 1562, approved an Act for criminalizing a 'Gypsy way of life' regardless their nationality; similarly, Spain, 1619, sought to suppress 'Gypsyism' from the entire nation, this form of forced assimilation forced them to adopt the language, dress and lifestyle or leave the kingdom. He adds that in fact, all over Europe there were social regulation measures, repressing the Roma people, even if they no longer have a nomadic lifestyle. Heinrich Grellmann, a German author, remained relevant in the 18th century for his portrayal of the Roma people as "untrustworthy, primitive, childish and in need of firm guidance and control"; this was followed by many governmental authorities, who enforced labor in the Roma people and sold their possessions, as they were seen as an incorrigible population (Fraser, 2000). Then, in the early 20th century, half a million of Roma people were either killed

due to the Nazi ideology of 'racial hygiene', or in other cases sterilization techniques were forced on them, meaning to eliminate all those of 'inferior stock' (Santiago Camacho, 1997; Fraser, 2000; Vega Cortés, 1997). In modern times the Spanish word 'Gitano' still carries implications of foreignness, and they are still characterized as wandering people, even when the majority already have a 'settled' lifestyle. So, even though Roma people are no longer persecuted, the historical oppression from the dominant groups, specially from judicial authorities, is still noticeable by the stigma they bear (Fraser, 2000).

Roma people are settled in many countries worldwide apart from Europe, they could be found from Western Asia, Northern Africa and in the Americas. Santiago Camacho (1997) exposes that many ethnographers concur that nowadays there are three main groups of Roma people in Europe, which then each further split up into several subgroups based on factors such as occupation, ancestry, or territorial origin. First, the Kalderash Romani, primarily coppersmiths and metal workers, arrived from the Balkan Peninsula, and is the most populous confederation of the three, extending from Romania, Bulgaria, Serbia, Bosnia, Russia, Ukraine, France and Sweden. Second, the Manouche or Sinti, traditionally Bohemians mostly settled in France, Germany (sometimes as Alsatian Sinti), Italy and central Europe. Lastly, the Gitanos (Gypsies) or Calé, also called the Iberian Romai group, because they are mainly found in Spain, Portugal, south of France and north of Africa (Santiago Camacho, 1997).

The General Directorate of Family Diversity and Social Services (DGDFSS) (2021b) estimates that nowadays there are around 725.000 to 750.000 Roma people in Spain. Gutiérrez Sánchez et al. (2020) points out that the majority of them are located mainly in autonomous communities of Andalucía with 37%, followed by the Comunidad Valenciana with 11.8%, and Cataluña with 11.1%; They also point out that regarding the proportions between Roma and non-Roma, that Andalucía remains first with 22.6%, followed by Murcia with 20.8%, and then the Comunidad Valenciana with 12.3%. Showing that they are mainly concentrated in the autonomous communities at the south of the country.

4.2.   The Stages of the Roma in Spain

Santiago Camacho (1997) argues that the history of the Roma people in Spain could be divided into five periods. First, the Idyllic period between 1425 and 1499, when they first entered Spanish territory they presented themselves as pilgrims, so they were welcomed and enjoyed some pilgrim privileges, like not paying taxes; even so, that there is evidence of the nobility at the time taking measures to prevent offenses against the Roma, safekeeping their lives and property (Caselles Pérez & Romero Sánchez, 2019).

Secondly, the "Expulsion" period from 1499 until 1633, with the development towards territorially organized states, the necessity to control the population by a common set of values throughout the state grew, firstly by means of religion (End, 2012). Their image began to be distorted, and the Roma were starting to be blamed for all kinds of misfortunes, they were also accused of robbery and witchcraft, creating stereotypes and prejudices that are still relevant in todays' society (Santiago Camacho, 1997; Caselles Pérez & Romero Sánchez, 2019). The catholic kings at the time started persecuting the community and forcing them to assimilate the social norms, like, among others, settling down, finding a job and leaving their language and habits or they would face expulsion, but if recurrent, they could face other punishments such as mutilation or enslavement (Santiago Camacho, 1997; Vega Cortés, 1997).

The third phase is the "Integration" period between 1633 and 1783. It is characterized by the arising controversies with the community, reaching to point when the king Fernando VI ordered the 'General Roundup of Gypsies' in 1749, a historic milestone of antigypsyism where around 14.000 Roma people were captured and imprisoned in mines or dockyards all over Spain (Caselles Pérez & Romero Sánchez, 2019). Up until this point the Catholic Monarchs developed around 250 anti-Gypsy decrees, but after years of controversy they were abolished and the Roma were starting to be considered Spanish citizens, gaining similar rights as the rest of the population (Caselles Pérez & Romero Sánchez, 2019; Santiago Camacho, 1997).

Fourth, the "Migration" period from 1783 until 1812, the industrial revolution made many people leave their nomadic lifestyles to live in cities or settle in the countrysides, especially in Andalucía and Extremadura at the south of Spain, which hosted the first groups of sedentary Roma people (Santiago Camacho, 1997). At the same time in the countryside the Roma began to fill an economic space in agriculture and livestock, becoming small agricultural landowners in the process, which brought social recognition and respect with it (Vega Cortés, 1997).

Lastly the "constitutional" period, between 1812 and 1978, is characterized by the inclusion of regulations on trades, but mostly because of the re-incrimination of the Roma people and their culture during the Francoist dictatorship, between 1936 and 1975 (Santiago Camacho, 1997); and considering that during the 1950s the agriculture industry was experiencing a period of rapid transformation and modernization, most of the Roma could not keep up with it and were once again outside of the productive system (Vega Cortés, 1997). After the dictatorship period with the democratization of Spain and the Spanish constitution in 1978, the Roma population gained full recognition as Spanish citizens from the national authorities, sharing equal rights (Santiago Camacho, 1997).

To sum up, this transformation period meant, among others, the rising significance of labor and work, the establishment of many nation-states and the strengthening of gender roles and moral codes; the individuals that project a failed attempt to achieve such values were stigmatized as "Gypsies", which became related to the idea of undermining and ignoring the standards of civilization (End, 2012).

Nicolás Lizama (2016) and Caselles Pérez & Romero Sánchez (2019) point out that the 21st century has brought some change in the attention paid to the Roma with the Amsterdam Treaty of 1999 which reinforced the policy of equal treatment and the fight against poverty in the European Union (EU), also the Manifesto of the Ombudsman of Spain and the regional parliamentary commissioners, in support of the rights of the Roma people in 1999 marked an important step for the historical reparation of the Roma; but most importantly, the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union in the 2000s, which prohibits all types of discrimination, from ethnic or social origins to political or any other opinion. All of which has paved the way for the Madrid City Council that in 2019 held an institutional Act of Reparation to the Roma, asking for forgiveness for the historical injustices they have faced for over 500 years, initiated by the Catholic Monarchs (Caselles Pérez & Romero Sánchez, 2019).

Therefore, the Roma population has historically been forced to carry a marginalized life in poverty, and social exclusion; but, with the end of their persecution they got to adapt and develop cultural diversity over the years. Santiago Camacho (1997) indicates that nowadays, they could be found in any social group, from the socially integrated ones with high levels of education, and stable jobs to others living in social housing or in unsanitary conditions. In fact, the Ministry of Health, Consumer Affairs and Social Welfare (MSCBS) (2018) confirms that many Roma families have gained access to housing and basic services over the last years. Even so, that Vega Cortés (1997) argues that although in the current situation of Spain, a significant part of the Roma community lives in poverty, it is not an automatic result of being 'Gypsies', and considers that their condition as poor should be considered within a general framework of social justice for the social integration of the most vulnerable population.

There are many possible interpretations of the disadvantages faced by the Roma, they could be understood as a form of ethnic discrimination, or a response to their lower skill levels in the job market; nevertheless, they are both a product of discriminatory practices and limited access to education in their past, exposing the cyclical nature of Roma employment problems (O'Higgins & Ivanov, 2006). Vega Cortés (1997) and Marques Gonçalves (2020) argue that the stereotype of the criminal, homeless, illiterate Gypsy has passed down through generations, perpetuated by the media, and the weight of this image remains the greatest obstacle for Roma daily life, leading to many of them claiming having experienced covered forms of discrimination or racism.

4.3.   Discrimination and Antigypsyism in Spain

The EC (2018) and Marques Gonçalves (2020) argue that racism occurs through the exploitation of the racialized 'Other' by means of creating stereotypes; these generalizations play a role in social relations and are reinforced by daily life acts, as well as in media discourses. Marques Gonçalves (2020) continues by exposing that placing other ethnic groups as inferior asserts the dominant group's symbolic power, as majorities need minorities for maintaining their privileges and legitimize their exclusion from certain rights. Therefore, racism is based on exploding differences, creating hierarchies and maintaining the power of the dominant society, which further produce the marginalization of certain social groups. Racism is typically seen as an 'external thing of the past', but the inequalities it brought are a reflection of structural problems at the center of everyday politics (Marques Gonçalves, 2020).

Consequently, antigypsyism is an ideology founded on racism, racial superiority, and hatred against the Roma that has existed in different forms for more than 500 years; and their perception as 'nomads' and 'beggars', even when they have settled and work as farmers for generations, has become a 'cultural tradition' from the majority society, a mind construct that does not require any real experience to subsist (End, 2012). The European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) (2020) marks it as a form of the institutionalization of racism, based on historical discrimination, that could be expressed by violence, hate speech, stigmatization, and others. Then, antigypsyism should be recognised as a distinct form of racism, since it is one of the results of the social exclusion and inequalities faced by the Roma for centuries (EC, 2018; End, 2012).

Marques Gonçalves (2020) notes that identifying as a 'gypsy' in Spain means being stigmatized, since they are widely associated with vulnerability, social exclusion, poverty and marginalization, and treated as such, instead of being acknowledged as part of a viable and complex ethnic group. In fact, Cea D'Ancona & Valles Martínez (2018) exposes that 50% of the Spanish population perceives the Roma as the group with most difficulties to access a job, above the elderly and the mentally disabled. Similarly with housing, where being poor and being Roma are perceived as the most challenged groups for accessing them. The Gypsy Secretariat Foundation (FSG) (2023a) exemplifies the fact that antigypsyist values are deeply rooted in society, by exposing the different reactions of society when an crime is done by a Roma or a non-Roma person, exposing that even though in both cases the legal responsibility lies in the individual, but in the case of being a Roma, a collectivized discrimination process also takes place.

Moreover, the acceptance rate of the Roma in Spain, as seen in Figure 2 and Figure 3, is inferior to any other discriminated group or ethnicity. Figure 2 shows a great rejection to the roma community, exposing it as the most uncomfortable to have as a neighbor. Even so there has been a progress between the years 2013 and 2016, it is just 52%, meaning that there is still a great gap to cover on the perceptions of the Spanish population. Similarly happens with Figure 3, in which the Roma shows a greater acceptance in Spain than the European median, but comparatively they still are the lowest group on the list.

Figure 2. *Percentage of acceptance of intergroup relations within their neighborhood.*

It would not bother you to have … as a neighbor.
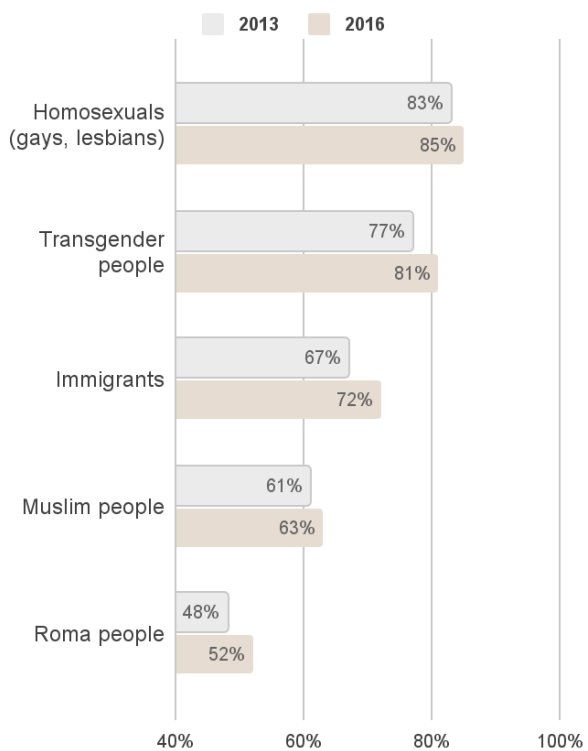
Figure 3. *Percentage of comfort on ethnicity.*

Would you be comfortable/indifferent if your children are in a relationship with a … person?
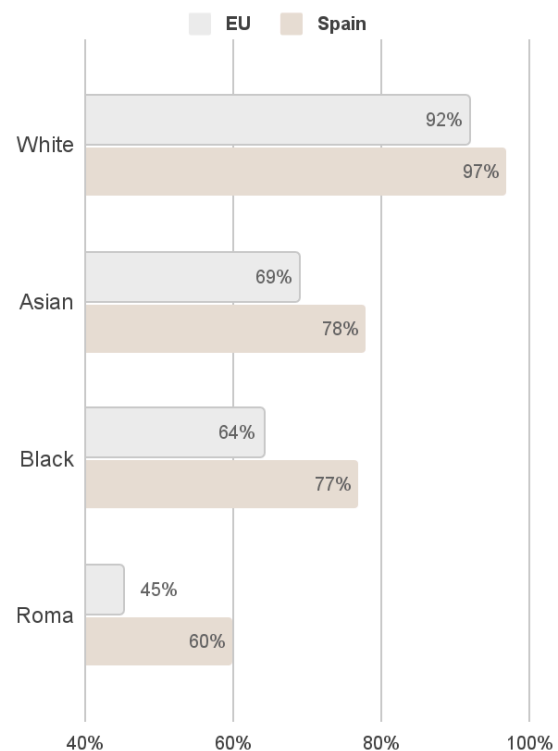
Note. Adapted from "Evolución de la discriminación en España: Informe de las encuestas IMIO-CIS de 2013 y 2016", by Cea D'Ancona & Valles Martínez, 2018.

Marques Gonçalves (2020) presents that in the interviews performed to Roma people, cases of 'everyday racism' were evident, where the subjects experienced discrimination through their chosen vocabulary, gestures and looks. Campos Gómez et al. (2019), argue that even when a person from the majority group is not involved in any form of segregation, their ignorance or indifference, regarding the racial or ethnic inequalities, still play a role in reproducing them.

The FSG (2023a) has collected and dealt with 532 cases of discrimination in Spain 2022, and each entry was categorized into 9 groups by the field in which they happened, as seen in Figure 4. There were 68 cases in media, where most of them were news mentioning the ethnicity of people in cases of violence, delinquency or criminality when it was not relevant for understanding the news, which further stigmatizes the social image of the Roma and could lead to hostile attitudes, violent attacks or discrimination. 217 cases in social networks of hate speech on the Internet, inciting violence and dehumanizing the Roma people; in 2022 hate speech against the Roma was the most frequent kind in Europe, above homophobic, Islamophobic and other types of hate speech. 70 cases in the section of access to goods and services, where the access of Roma to restaurants, swimming pools and other leisure centers were restricted due to their ethnicity. 44 cases in the educational field, commonly coming from stereotypes and prejudices teachers have towards the Roma students. 46 cases in the field of employment, comprising companies that refuse to accept Roma people as candidates, discrimination or harassment within the workplace and being unjustifiably accused of theft. 18 cases in healthcare, consisting of hostile treatment or negative comments towards Roma patients by the medical staff. 18 cases in the area of police services, from prejudiced or rude treatment by police officers towards the Roma to police identifications based on the ethnic profile. 29 cases in the area of housing, finding discriminatory actions for both renting and selling, unjustifiable evictions and harassment from hostile neighbors towards Roma families. And finally 22 cases marked as 'other' because they do not occur in a specific area, like hate crimes in public places, or graffities inciting violence towards the Roma community.

Figure 4. *Cases of discrimination by area.*
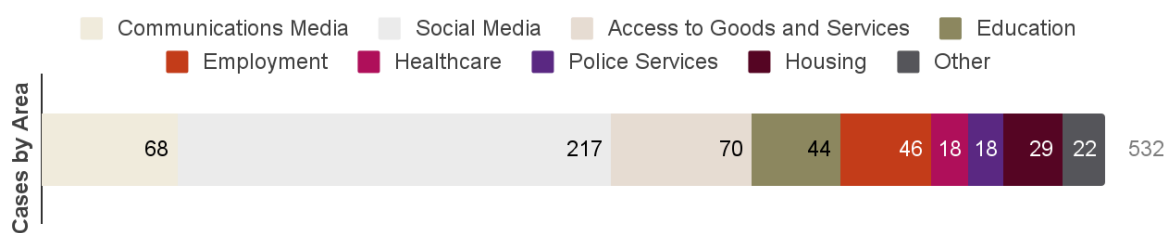
Note. Adapted from "Discriminación y comunidad gitana, informe anual FSG 2023: El hostigamiento colectivo antigitano", by the FSG, 2023.

Additionally the FSG (2023a) also identifies that even though there are many discrimination actions and hate crimes directed to a specific Roma person, more than 70% of the cases show discrimination actions against the community as a whole, as seen on Figure 5. At the same time they highlight that even when the awareness of Roma people about discrimination is increasing, there are still barriers for more active reporting measures to impact access to justice.

Figure 5. *Cases of discrimination by targeted subjects.*
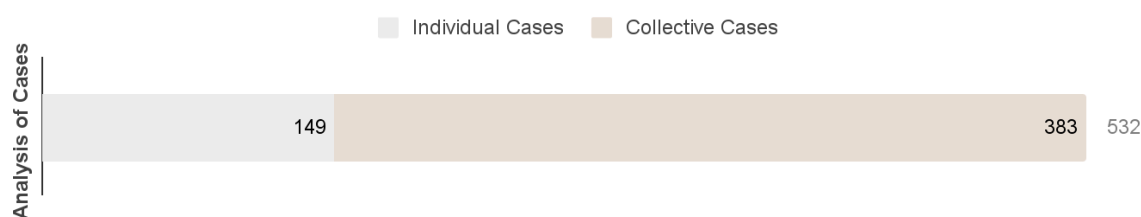
Note. Adapted from "Discriminación y comunidad gitana, informe anual FSG 2023: El hostigamiento colectivo antigitano", by the FSG, 2023.

'Everyday' forms of discrimination are usually strongly denied in society, due to hidden biases and barriers and the practices of silencing discriminatory experiences (EC, 2018). Due to keeping those experiences 'like a secret', Campos Gómez et al. (2019), attribute the fact that only 20% of Roma that are victims of discrimination report the situation, and regardless whether they are, or not, aware of the procedures to follow, the sense of helplessness they might experience is a reflection of how minorities suffer the effects of racism and its normalization.

Nevertheless, the FSG (2023a) considers that it is relevant to point out that the Roma people are becoming more aware of their right to equality, making them report these situations faster, seeking for justice. In Table 3 it is evident the low rate of reporting antigypsyist hate crimes in Spain, but also a slight trend up in recent years.

Table 3. *Amount of known cases of hate crime recorded in Spain by year.*

Type of Hate Crime	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Antigypsyism	14	22	18	22	37
Aporophobia	12	10	10	17	18
Political Ideology	596	326	326	245	352
Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity	278	277	466	459	522
Racism/Xenophobia	515	485	639	755	856

Note. Adapted from "Informe sobre la evolución de los delitos de odio en España 2020", by López Gutiérrez et al., 2020 and "Informe sobre la evolución de los delitos de odio en España 2023", by Muniesa Tomás et al., 2023.

Moreover, Marques Gonçalves (2020) exposes that during her interviews, more than half of the people reported being discriminated against, due to their ethnicity, in their school years, and makes a relation with the high school dropout rate among the Roma population. She points out that in Spain the nationality of the Roma population is no longer questioned, but they are judged by their apparent inability to adapt to society, which is another form of delegitimizing their sense of belongingness.

To the stigma, the Roma respond just as Wacquant (2011) argues, by means of dissimulation, inversing the stigma or retreating into the private circle. Therefore, it is necessary to develop targeted actions and efforts to eradicate antigypsyism, and its social sources, at every level. Additionally, it is also essential to address the deeply rooted antigypsyist biases in society to effectively foster a 'positive self-image' among the targeted people (Marques Gonçalves, 2020; End, 2012).

4.4. Disadvantages in Spanish Roma Households

The DGDFSS (2021b) and the MSCBS's (2018) concur that the Roma population has made significant social advances, but to achieve equality and social inclusion, there is a need for more work on the areas of housing, education, healthcare and employment, especially in eradicating slums, access to quality basic services, and generally improving Roma households and their urban environments. They add that the Roma continue to be one of the most disadvantaged groups within the general Spanish population. Campos Gómez et al. (2019), highlights a framework for action against discrimination under the idea of 'restorative justice', which intends to 'repair' historical discriminatory processes to increase social justice in society. Similar approaches are taking place throughout European countries, targeting groups that suffered from forced assimilation and any sort of exclusion and confinement, such as banishment and slavery (Campos Gómez et al., 2019). They add that with Resolutions and International Conventions, such as the the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination of 1965, the UN promotes the recognition of the victims rights and the 'remedy', asserting their right to justice.

Nicolás Lizama (2016) points out such disadvantages are more evident the data on the Roma is compared with the general population's. For example on the education gap, 10.4% of the general population are not educated contrasted to the 59.3% of Roma, or within teenagers between 16 and 24 years old who have received the compulsory secondary education graduate title, for the Roma is 35.6% meanwhile for the total population of the same age is 86.7%, or even comparing the 13.5% of illiteracy within the Roma to the 2.19% within the entire Spain; and regarding the salaried employment, is 83.6% for Spain as a whole compared to 38.4% for the Roma, which occupy mostly low-skilled jobs, where 46.3% them work as vendors in street markets (Nicolás Lizama, 2016).

Moreover, Gutiérrez Sánchez et al. (2020) argue that Spain's limited progress on the matter at the national and regional levels, could be linked to the significant cuts in the social affairs budget during the economic crisis; nevertheless, End (2012) argues that since indeed an economic crisis could promote the development of antigypsyism, through movements, laws or actions, it is not

the cause itself. The other reason for the little progress of Spain is the different levels of commitment to intervene in the protection of the Roma community among the autonomous communities due to having, or not, planning and action instruments (Gutiérrez Sánchez et al., 2020). The EC (2018) argues that community targeted initiatives must go alongside horizontal policies in the areas of non-discrimination and racism, advising the consideration of discussion with experts, funding opportunities and fostering cooperation with private actors. Additionally, it is encouraged to eradicate institutionalized discriminatory attitudes and practices at every level; hate speech online, in the public and in political discourse, increases the levels of mistrust in the authorities (EC, 2018).

Then, Luggin (2012) adds that to address the discrimination and protecting the fundamental rights of the Roma, the EC managed to put Roma integration high on the EU's political agenda, as well as on its Member States' national agendas, by launching the 'EU Framework for national Roma Integration Strategies'. Luggin (2012) also exposes that the EC monitors the Member States on the implementation and application of the Racial Equality Directive (2000/43/EC), the Free Movement Directive (2004/38/EC) and Council Framework Decision on penalizing certain forms and expressions of racism and xenophobia (2008/913/JHA); of which, if well implemented they could greatly contribute to the fight against racism and xenophobia against Roma. At the same time Ademi (2012) points out that Spain joined the 'Decade of Roma Inclusion' in 2008, which provides a framework for governments to set their own goals to develop their 'National Roma Integration Strategies' (NRIS) and National Action Plans in accordance with EU principles. For the NRIS to succeed, clear actions to combat antigypsyism must be at the core of the strategies, as well as addressing the existence of institutional racism, the direct and indirect everyday forms of discrimination endured by the Roma and the appropriate measures to eliminate it (Ademi, 2012).

The DGDFSS is the governing body responsible for the provision of social services that takes action against poverty and social exclusion of the Spanish population, including the Roma people. They are responsible for developing the 'National Strategy for the Social Inclusion of the Roma Population in Spain 2012-2020', encouraging government bodies to take active action and recording the needed data to better the lives of the Roma community in the country; as an answer to the the crisis the Roma experience in Spain regarding the 'Gypsyphobia' and mistrust of the Roma towards authorities to address such problems (Nicolás Lizama, 2016). Nicolás Lizama (2016) highlights that it maintained already established funds for the Roma population at both the national level and European funds. Nevertheless, she also mentions that the main limitation of the plan is the quantification of the Roma, as the Spanish Constitution, national legislations and European level directives support the right to privacy, establishing that people should not be forced to declare any 'sensible' data, including their ethnicity. However, she adds that some

organizations, like the Gypsy associations, note that the collection of such data is not prohibited, in fact, they consider that the absence of data promotes political indifference regarding their inclusion. In the DGDFSS's latest plan 'Strategy for Equality, Inclusion and Participation of the Roma People 2021-2030', establishes four main strategic lines of action: education, health, employment, and housing, it also sets new goals on each line based on social action, participation, improvement of knowledge and promotion of equal treatment, while at the same time it proposes guidelines and actions for the state administrations, autonomous regions and local bodies (Nicolás Lizama, 2016).

Housing plays an important role in social inclusion processes, especially in groups like the Roma where access to housing has led to advances in their health, education and employment, as well as empowering them to exercise their rights as citizens and transform their surrounding environment (MSCBS, 2018). In the case of access to decent housing, the MSCBS (2018) notes that only 36% of Roma families are in 'free-market households', 54.45% are in subsidized housing and the remaining 9.54% of families reside in mobile housing, self-constructed dwellings or in illegal occupation. Nevertheless, as shown in Table 4, there has been some improvement with the reduction of the slum housing, dropping from 3.9% in 2007 to 2.17% in 2016, but most importantly with the reduction of overcrowded Roma households, which went from 29.4% to 8.9% in the same timeframe. But in particular, 92% of the people living in slums belong to ethnic minorities, where 77% of them are Roma (FSG, 2023b).

Moreover, the DGDFSS (2021a) argues that one of the main changes with the new strategies is the inclusion of poverty and social exclusion as a strategy line, since it could foster more public administration commitment to improve the socio-economic situations of the Roma community, but especially to those in vulnerable conditions. It is a response to the higher levels of poverty and social exclusion the Roma suffer when compared to the general population, mainly due to segregation and discriminatory treatment.

As shown in Table 5, 46% of the Roma population is extremely poor and 65.6% are in severe poverty situations; the DGDFSS (2021a) further compares that while 85.9% of the Roma population is at risk of poverty and/or social exclusion, just 29.3% of the general population is. Moreover, the MSCBS (2018) exposes that not many Roma lives in city centers, even so, that 84% of them are located scattered all around the municipality, but mostly in neighborhoods at the cities' outskirts, which are related to urban development models and policies that tend to concentrate social housing there; nevertheless, it is not every case, 22.64% of them live in buildings in state of repair, 15.26% live in neighborhoods with poor street maintenance and 13.54% have serious transportation difficulties.

So, encouraging more housing in the urban context, with access to quality services and efficient connectivity to urban services, such as health facilities, higher education options or more job opportunities, could help improve the quality of life of the people. It also has to be considered that deeply rooted in Roma culture is the desire to live close to their relatives (MSCBS, 2018), serving as another reason for promoting house accessibility throughout the city. The MSCBS (2018) indicates that the interventions implemented by local governments have helped enhance Roma households and their surroundings as well as mitigating social inclusion difficulties. At the same time they argue that most of those interventions are not being implemented in the most deteriorated neighborhoods, but in others that already have an intermediate social status, emphasizing on the prioritization of the most vulnerable populations over other market interests.

Additionally, Harper et al. (2009) points out that communities of lower socioeconomic status and the least educated not only have difficulties accessing 'environmental benefits' such as potable water, sewage or sanitation, but they are also more exposed to environmental hazards because they usually reside in the vicinity of 'undesired areas', such as waste sites, factories or abandoned industrial facilities where environmentally controversial practices tend to concentrate. With their case studies they highlight the relevance of understanding the historical and political context at the national and and local levels, as well as identifying the capacities of social actors in establishing an appropriate social justice 'vocabulary' for mobilizations; as they could strengthen the social cohesion, promote social inclusion and play a role in poverty reduction (Harper et al., 2009).

Furthermore, the DGDFSS (2021a, 2021b) highlights the importance of continuing to make progress in improving the living conditions of Roma, their basic equipment and, nowadays also, the access to digital services. The advances in the interconnectivity of Spain have brought benefits to the general population, as well as additional challenges for the vulnerable. The DGDFSS (2021a) considers that the access to digital services and the technological skills gap affects the most people with incomes of less than 900 euro, illiterate people and people who have not reached primary education, all profiles where Roma population has shown greater challenges than the general population. As an example only 26% of the Roma population over the age of 15 years old receives a salary, and their average monthly salary is 754 euro, compared to the 1,216 euro average salary and 60% working general population (DGDFSS, 2021a). This digital divide might be presented as a growing challenge for vulnerable communities, including the Roma, because they have eased the delivery of social services, the completion of bureaucratic procedures, teleworking, access to information, among other things; putting many processes at

the midst of being digitized, making the people with limited access to it, at risk of social exclusion (DGDFSS, 2021a).

In conclusion, the Roma are a resilient community that have endured centuries of legal and social marginalization due to discriminatory stereotypes and institutionalized racism. Recent reparation actions on the access to adequate housing and essential services have been made to the community, but the Roma remain the most disadvantaged group in Spain. Continued efforts to address their inequalities especially within healthcare, education, and employment sectors are crucial to kindle their social inclusion and integration processes to combat the stigma. And considering these issues as part of the social justice framework and restorative measures could lead to recognition within society, the historical wrongdoings they faced and the Roma's right to equality.

Table 4. *Objectives in housing and access to essential services for roma households in Spain.*

Specific objectives	Indicator	Previous Data (2007)	Target 2015	Latest Available Data: 2016	Intermediate Goal (2027)	Target 2030
Eradication of slums and substandard housing	Slum rate	3.9% (FSG)	2%	2.17% (MSCBS)	1%	0%
	Rate of substandard housing	7.8% (FSG)	6%	6.46% (MSCBS)	4.50%	3%
Reduce segregation and residential concentration of Roma	Residential segregation rate	-	-	2.9% (MSCBS)	1.90%	1%
Guarantee access to essential services for Roma and improve the basic equipment and quality of housing	Households without access to water	8.5% (CIS)	4.20%	4.2% (MSCBS)	2.10%	0%
	Households without access to electricity	8.5% (CIS)	4.20%	5.2% (MSCBS)	2.10%	0%
	Households with access to heating	-	-	27.59% (MSCBS)	38%	50%
	Overcrowding	29.4% (CIS)	25%	8.9% (MSCBS)	6%	4%
	Homes in poor or bad state of repair	-	-	66.2% (MSCBS)	50%	20%
	Neighborhoods without waste collection service	-	-	1.7% (MSCBS)	1%	0%
	Neighborhoods without street lighting	-	-	1.8% (MSCBS)	1%	0%
	Neighborhoods without paving	-	-	4.3% (MSCBS)	2%	0%
	Neighborhoods without public sewers	-	-	3% (MSCBS)	1.50%	0%
	Reduce the percentage of Roma households lacking suitable urban facilities	19.5% (CIS)	15%	10.34% (MSCBS)	-	-
Reduce discrimination in access to housing	Rate of discrimination perceived by Roma in the area of housing	-	-	30.8% (CEDRE)	25%	15%

Note. In parenthesis is the source of the data. Adapted from "Estrategia Nacional para la Igualdad, Inclusión y Participación del Pueblo Gitano 2021-2030", by DGDFSS, 2021 and "Informe de evaluación final: Estrategia Nacional para la Inclusión Social de la Población Gitana 2012-2020", by DGDFSS, 2021.

Table 5. *Objectives in poverty and social exclusion for roma households in Spain.*

Specific objectives	Indicator	Latest Available Data: 2019	Intermediate Goal (2027)	Target 2030
Reduce the incidence of poverty and social exclusion among Roma	At-risk-of-poverty rate in the Roma population	85.9% (FSG)	60%	45%
	Severe poverty rate	65.6% (FSG)	45%	30%
	Extreme poverty rate	46% (FSG)	23%	10%
	Severe material deprivation rate	76.8% (FSG)	60%	45%
	AROPE Rate	91.9% (FSG)	60%	45%
Reduce the incidence of child poverty among Roma and break the intergenerational cycle of poverty	Child poverty rate in the Roma population	89% (FSG)	60%	31%
	Severe child poverty rate	70.2% (FSG)	58%	40%
Improve access to economic and social benefits	Unemployed Roma in receipt of unemployment benefits (contributory and non-contributory)	32.9% women 24.7% men (FSG)	40% women 34% men	50% women 45% men
	Roma households in severe poverty receiving social benefits	33.2% (FSG)	60%	90%
Reducing the digital divide of Roma	Access to digital media: people in a situation of economic vulnerability (with an income of less than 900 euro per month) who have connected to the internet via laptop computer	22.4% (POAS)	35%	50%
	Digital skills: people with no digital skills or low skills in a situation of economic vulnerability	56.6% (POAS)	30%	15%

Note. In parenthesis is the source of the data. Retrieved from "Estrategia Nacional para la Igualdad, Inclusión y Participación del Pueblo Gitano 2021-2030", by DGDFSS, 2021.

5.   Contextual Background

The city of Alicante is the capital of the province of Alicante within the Valencian Community, and is located in the southeastern coast of Spain, see Figure 6. Its location along the Mediterranean Sea, being bordered by mountains and its close proximity to other major Spanish cities, such as Valencia and Murcia, have been demonstrated as strategically useful for their history in trade, tourism, and cultural exchange.

Figure 6. *Location of Cementerio in Alicante, Valencian Community and Spain.*
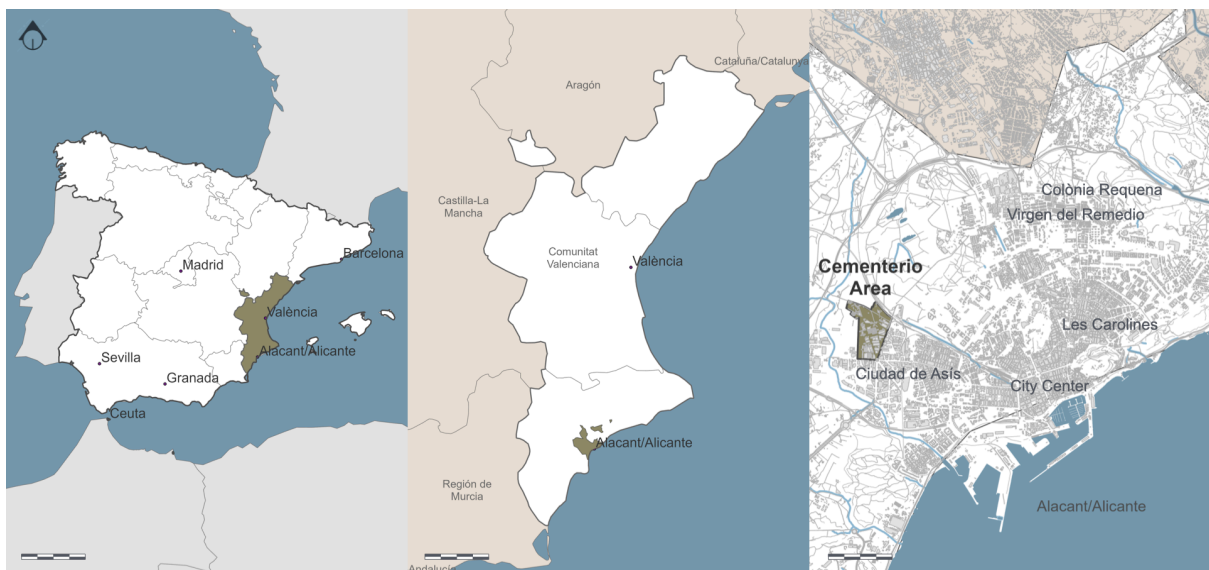
Note. Own work adapted from "GISCO: Geodata – Administrative units/Countries" by European Commission, n.d., "Centro de Descargas: Cartografía catastral" by Instituto Geográfico Nacional, n.d., and the Asertos' program database.

At the west side of the city, inside of the Ciudad de Asís neighborhood and one of the city's most prosperous industrial polygons Llano del Espartal, lies the Cementerio area, or 'neighborhood' as referred to by its residents. This spontaneous settlement receives its name due to a close proximity to the municipal cemetery Nuestra Señora del Remedio. The artificial borders of the area are the Camino de Alcoraya and the train tracks at the north, Carrer D'Ocaña at the south, the Avenida Zodiaco at the east 'separating' it from the Florida-Alta or Florida-Portatge neighborhood, and mostly empty industrial plots at the west.

The Cementerio area is located in a partially urbanized area of the city, within a discontinuous urban fabric zone. The area is composed of many different types of uses that would not commonly pair up, such as housing, warehouses, garages and many industrial buildings that do a diverse range of activities.

Within the limits of the Cementerio area, as shown in Figure 7, there are five further subdivisions of the residential nodes led by the residents. From north to south, the first zone is called 'La Casita', which are four municipality-owned housing units given to Roma families as part of the relocation of people living in slums around the city. The second zone is called 'Barrio del Cura' or 'Barrio de Arriba', it is mostly habited by Roma families that share a collective bond, showing a strong social capital on their daily routines. Thirdly, 'Barrio del Pino', is the smallest zone located within the streets Turia and Pino. Lastly 'Barrio de Abajo', extends from both sides of Vial de Los Cipreses, at the east side there is the 'Barrio del Loco', named after one of the few cafes in the area, which has a distinct urbanized morphology; and at the west side the 'Barrio del Matadero', named after one of the nearby local industries, as is the chicken butcher building.

The Vial de los Cipreses is the main street that structures the Cementerio area. It is transited by the trucks of the nearby industrial buildings, but mostly to arrive at the municipal cemetery, which is located at the end of the street. Thereby, the area is heavily transited by the citizens of Alicante, and noticing the material scarcity is inevitable.

Cuesta Ávila (2020), argues that 'dirty', 'amorality' and 'delinquency' are the three elements that construct the prejudiced image of the area. These kinds of discourses that come from a distanced and external point of view, influences a feeling of rejection. Nowadays, the people of Alicante associate the Cementerio area as problematic, conflictive and dangerous. But this is not how they were always perceived, the area once was a working class neighborhood with a close connection to agriculture and, as time passed by, degradation and marginality became part of the main social construct given to the area and the people who reside in it.

So, to understand the Cementerio area it is essential a multidimensional perspective that helps frame its current challenges within broader historical, socio-economic, and policy contexts. This

section provides an overview of the area's history, its demographic and economic characteristics, and the institutional frameworks that have shaped its development. By examining these factors, this section establishes the necessary foundation for analyzing the processes of territorial stigmatization, social exclusion, and urban inequality that affect its residents.

Figure 7. *The zones within the Cementerio area.*

Note. Own work based on the Asertos' program database.

The first part examines the history of the Cementerio area, tracing its origins as an informal settlement and its evolution in response to broader urban transformations in Alicante. It explores how migration patterns, labor shifts, and housing policies have influenced its development, particularly as an area for low-income and marginalized groups.

The second part focuses on the demographic profile of Cementerio residents, highlighting key aspects such as employment, education, household composition, and income levels. It discusses how structural disadvantages, including precarious labor conditions, limited access to services, and systemic neglect, contribute to the area's persistent marginalization.

The final part situates Cementerio within Spain's broader policy landscape as it explores the effect of urban policies regarding poverty, social housing and the Roma. It reviews national and local approaches to social housing, poverty alleviation, and the inclusion of Roma communities, analyzing their impact on Cementerio's development. This discussion is critical for understanding how institutional decisions have shaped the area's vulnerabilities and the extent to which existing policies address, or fail to address, the needs of its residents.

These parts provide a comprehensive backdrop for the research, offering insights into the historical and structural forces that have shaped the Cementerio area's trajectory and everyday realities experienced by its residents.

5.1. Socio-economic Characteristics

For understanding a social phenomenon the Fundación de Estudios Sociales y de Sociología Aplicada (FOESSA) (2024) argues that even when nowadays the new technologies allow for new spaces to build personal relationships, the cities and specially the neighborhoods are the first place where the networks of multidimensional wellness are formed and creative solutions to crises are fostered. Therefore, a national look on urban vulnerability is important, but it is even more relevant in the particular cases of Alicante and the Cementerio area.

In order to address the Cementerio area it is necessary to note that the urban vulnerability in Spain is measured by national observatories, estimating 918 areas in a situation of vulnerability corresponding to 6.7 million people (Hernández Aja et al., 2018a). Moreover, the National Institute of Statistics (INE) (2024), estimates that 20.2% of the Spanish population is at risk of poverty and 26.5% are at risk of poverty and social exclusion using the AROPE rate; for the Comunitat Valenciana the values are 24.3% and 29.6% respectively for the year 2023. As shown in Table 6, the Comunitat Valenciana is the fourth autonomous community with the most population living in vulnerable neighborhoods, and the third one in terms of proportions, this brings special attention in the matter for their main cities, Valencia and Alicante.

Additionally, some autonomous communities have their own observatories, like the Visor de Espacios Urbanos Sensibles (VEUS) for the Generalitat Valenciana. This one estimates 309 areas in a situation of vulnerability inhabited by 408.716 people in the autonomous community, mainly located in the provinces of Alicante (59%) and Valencia (37%) (Institut Cartogràfic Valencià., n.d.).

At the neighborhood level there is a valuable tool called the Vulnerable Neighbourhoods Catalogue which, among other things, calculates the index of studies, housing and unemployment in such neighborgoods. The Index of Urban Vulnerable Neighborhoods (IBVU) Studies measures the illiterate and uneducated population in the area, the IBVU Housing measures the amount of homes in poor or deficient condition a family has, and IBVU Unemployment the amount of residents in the area older than 16 years old that are unemployed. Considering these indicators, each area of the research is then classified into four levels of vulnerability, mild, medium, severe and critical.

Table 6. *Population living in vulnerable neighborhoods at the national, regional and local levels from the 2011 census.*

Territorial Entities	Number of Vulnerable Neighborhoods	Population in Vulnerable Neighborhoods	% of the Population on Vulnerable Neighborhoods
Spain	918	6.697.400	14.4
Andalucía	215	1.594.075	37.7
Cataluña	188	1.463.505	36.1
Comunidad de Madrid	140	1.068.030	19.8
Comunidad Valenciana	128	978.170	43.0
Valencia	39	326.185	41.2
Alicante/Alacant	21	120.625	36.6
Canarias	69	491.385	45.1
Ceuta	8	70.540	84.5

Note. Adapted from "Barrios vulnerables de las grandes ciudades españolas", by Hernández Aja et al., 2018a.

Nevertheless, there are some limitations. The data used for the Vulnerable Neighbourhoods Catalogue was taken in 1991, 2001 and 2011, expanding to new neighborhoods and vulnerable areas of the city each time it was carried out, covering 4, 6, and 21 areas respectively. But the borders of the study areas were changing as well, leaving the Cementerio area out of the studies, as shown in Figure 8. So the available information on the matter is not updated, since it references data from more than 30 years ago, and even so, the study area is included in a much larger and heterogeneous census section, which makes the data not transferable. Therefore, the socioeconomic and demographic data of the area is practically non-existent (Asertos, 2020b).

During the 1991 research, none of the 4 studied neighborhoods were categorized having severe or critical vulnerability, 3 of them were placed on medium vulnerability, but the neighborhood of Ciudad de Asis, which comprises the Cementerio area, was depicted with mild vulnerability. Nevertheless, Hernández Aja et al. (2018a) exposes that even though the position Ciudad de Asis received, they make a remark that one area of the neighborhood showed a higher vulnerability rate, mostly related to the IBVU Housing index. And even when they fail to specify the area of the neighborhood they call marginal, it is clear that Cementerio is being referenced.

Figure 8. *Vulnerable neighbourhoods catalogues from 1991, 2001 and 2011.*
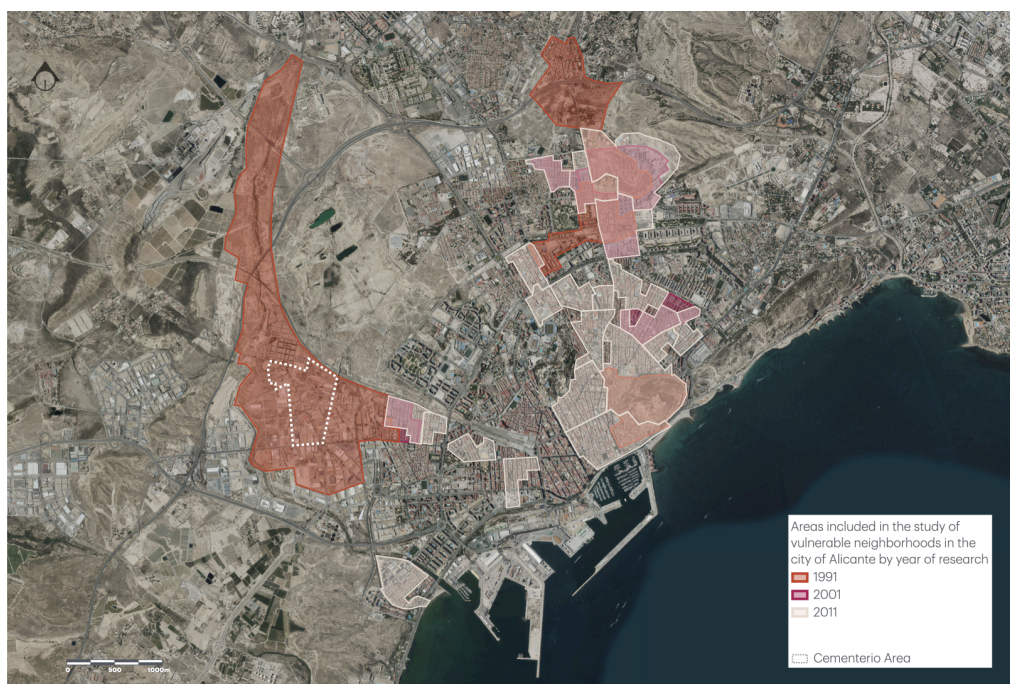
Note. Adapted from "Orthophoto express from 2024 of the Comunitat Valenciana in RGBI at 25 cm resolution", by Institut Cartogràfic Valencià, 2024 and "Catálogos de Barrios Vulnerables de España 1991, 2001 y 2011", by Rodríguez Suárez et al., 2021.

Nowadays, as shown in Figure 9 and 10, there is still a lack at the urban level of accessibility to schools, green areas, and convenience stores for everyday grocery shopping in the area, forcing the residents go to nearby neighbourhoods, like Florida Alta or Ciudad de Asís, to access those services. The Cementerio area has a few recreational areas for kids and minimal leisure areas for adults. For this last one, the bar 'El Loco' located in the lower zone acts as a meeting point for most neighbors, playing an important role in the social integration of the neighbors, especially from different zones. The other bar 'Los Álamos', located in the cemetery square, does not play the same role for the residents as it mainly attends the occasional customers coming to the area for the cemetery services.

Figure 9. *Accessibility to the educational centers in Alicante.*
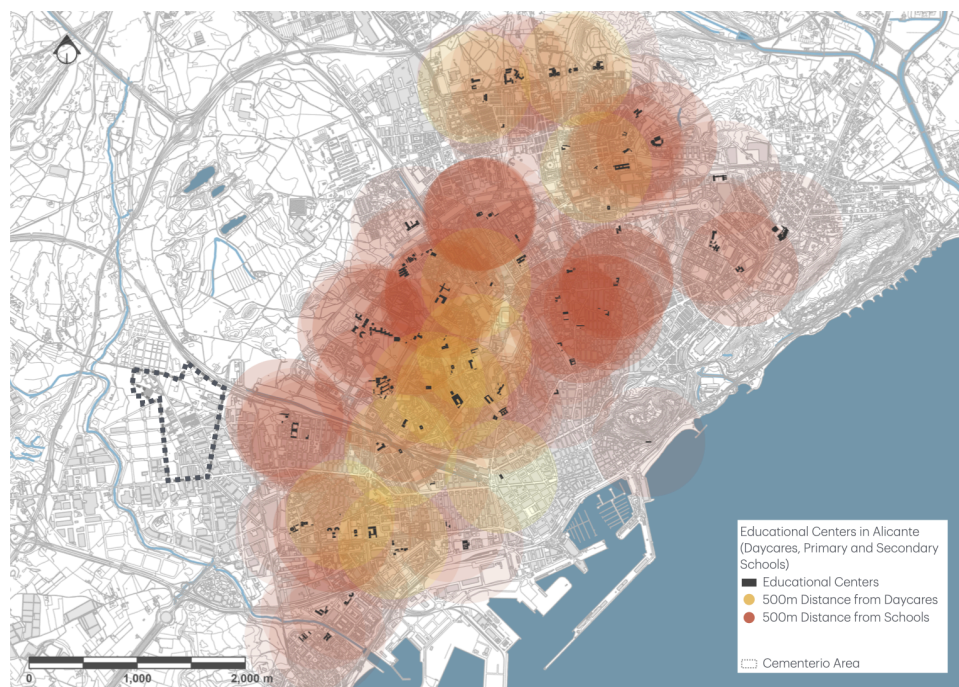
Note. Own work based on the official Cartography from the Institut Cartogràfic Valencià and adapted from "Exploración Socioespacial: Barrio del Cementerio Alicante", by Asertos, 2020.

Figure 10. *Accessibility to the green areas in Alicante.*
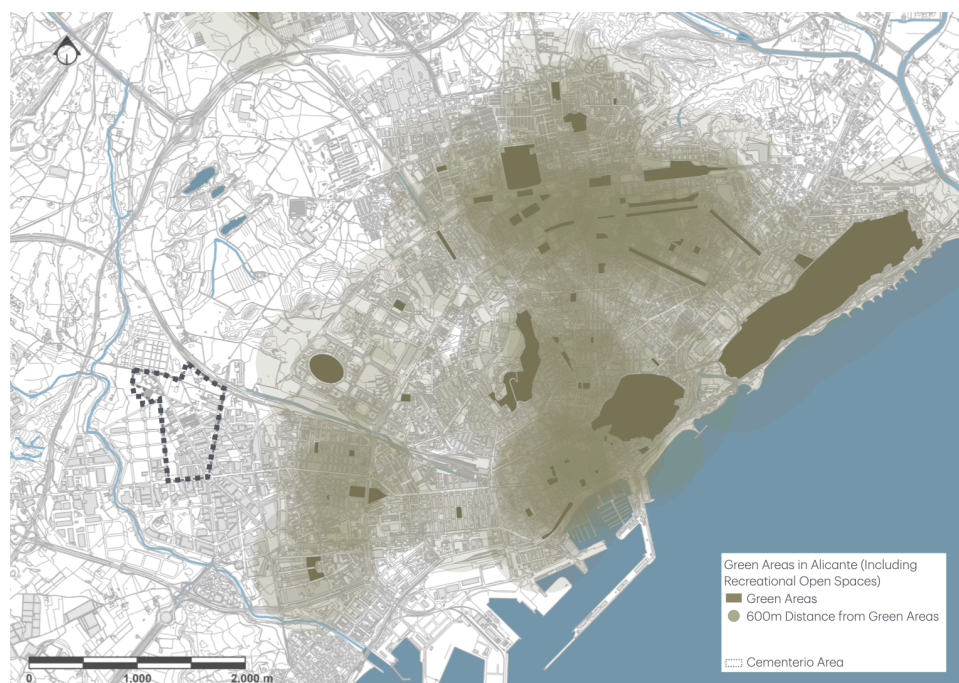
Note. Own work based on the official Cartography from the Institut Cartogràfic Valencià and adapted from "Exploración Socioespacial: Barrio del Cementerio Alicante", by Asertos, 2020.

The General Plan of Alicante approved in 1987 is the document that determines the urban planning strategies that affect the Cementerio area. Asertos (2020b) exposes that there are two different classifications of land in the area, the northern part is classified as non-urbanizable land, and it is also classified as public land which is said to be intended for future extensions of the municipal cemetery, lacking to acknowledge both the Barrio de Arriba and La Casita zones, leaving them in a situation of non-planning. The rest of the area is classified as urban, mostly as industrial, this time considering the zones of Barrio de Abajo and Barrio del Matadero as the residential parts of the area.

As shown in Figure 11, this plan is reflected in the area by showing that 68% of its land is destined for industrial use, but it only represents 66, or 25% of the total number of buildings in the area. In contrast, while the 173 residential buildings that represent 65% of the total number of buildings in the area, only take up 18% of the land. In other words, the few industrial buildings are of larger size, taking up much more space than the residential buildings. Those industrial buildings are recycling companies, construction supply, car dealers, warehouses and more. Also scattered around the Cementerio area there are other companies related to the cemetery functionality, such as funeral services, flower shops and gravestones suppliers.

Figure 11. *Land uses in the Cementerio area.*
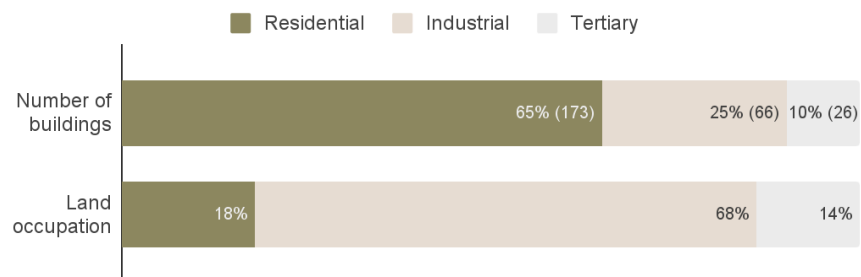
Note. Adapted from "Exploración Socioespacial: Barrio del Cementerio Alicante", by Asertos, 2020.

Additionally, it is relevant to notice that the Cementerio area goes unnoticed in the 2001 and 2011 updates of the study on the vulnerable areas of the city which are prepared by the administration, meaning that there has not been any specific work carried out on the site since 1991. Nevertheless, in both the specific reports of the vulnerable neighbourhoods catalogue for Alicante, in 1991 and 2001, the Cementerio area is mentioned as a small spontaneous settlement at the periphery of the city of self-built housing, home to a marginal immigrant population mostly of 'gypsy race' who are mainly employed in the industrial and construction sector. It also pointed out the lack of infrastructure, including green areas, the low quality and poor state of homes and public spaces, its location surrounded by an industrial polygon and the municipal

cemetery, and the waste collection problems and the loud noises at night due to the bars. It is also acknowledged that 'this settlement (the Cementerio area) is home to some of the city's most marginalized population' (Rodríguez Suárez et al., 2021).

Hence, the prejudices affecting the residents of the area are grounded in some real aspects, most of them are lower to lower-middle class, with low educational level, high unemployment rates and most of their income comes from informal jobs, or public subsidies aimed for large Roma families. In the residential aspect, most of the homes in the area are ground-floor buildings with poor quality materials, but the ones located in the upper zone are more precarious, as most are self-constructed houses in undeveloped land, with inadequate sanitation and some of them lacking electricity supply (Cuesta Ávila, 2020).

Moreover, the sanitation of the entire area is heavily compromised. Cuesta Ávila (2020) exposes that especially in the upper zone, some plots have become illegal landfills or rubbish dumps where organic remains and material waste accumulate with impunity without control. Sometimes, the rubbish is too much that fills up the streets, and blocks the regular circulation of vehicles to the industries, as seen in Figure 12. The rubbish and rubble have become the daily panorama of Cementerio, exposing the neglect the area has endured. These conditions are increasingly calling for a plan of aid from the administration.

Figure 12. *Rubbish and rubble in the streets of the Cementerio area.*

Note. Retrieved from the Asertos program photos archive.

Moreover, the livelihood of many residents depends on recycling, which involves collecting various types of waste and salvaging valuable materials. To make this process happen faster, they often burn the collected items, which range widely in composition. The extracted, often by burning, reusable materials are then sold to major recycling companies in the area. However, while this is their main source of work, this practice poses significant environmental and public health hazards. The proximity of the burning sites to residential areas leads to widespread air pollution, as large and uncontrolled fires release thick, toxic smoke that innindate the entire Cementerio area.

As illustrated in Figure 13, safety precautions are minimal or nonexistent, leaving children dangerously exposed to these hazardous areas. Furthermore, the lack of oversight means flammable materials and large quantities are burned at the same time, causing smoke to spread out of control. This not only worsens air quality but also increases the risk of accidents and long-term environmental degradation, stressing the urgent need for sustainable waste management solutions and protective measures within the community.

Figure 13. *Burning site and large smoke clouds coming from the Barrio de Arriba zone.*

Note. Retrieved from the Asertos program photos archive.

To address these issues, Asertos developed a manual outlining safe practices for burning materials, clearly identifying which items are appropriate to burn and which pose significant risks. A designated burning area was established to minimize potential hazards to residents and the surrounding environment. Additionally, Asertos organized educational assemblies to

disseminate this information and raise awareness of the environmental and safety implications of improper burning practices.

However, despite these efforts, residents occasionally burn prohibited materials in unauthorized locations. This highlights a need for continued reinforcement of the guidelines and more targeted educational initiatives to emphasize both the risks of non-compliance and the long-term benefits of adopting safer practices.

The area's housing conditions reflect this socio-economic marginalization. While the most common type of dwelling is a semi-detached, single-family house approximately ranging from the 75-100 m² of constructed area (Asertos, 2020b), the poor state of maintenance is compelling, as shown in Figure 14. Many homes, constructed with low-cost materials such as masonry walls, wooden beams, and tiled roofs, show signs of deterioration, with facades often tiled to mitigate dampness, and reflects the broader systemic neglect faced by the community. According to the Asertos program surveys, 25% of the total houses in the area are either in ruins or in unsanitary conditions, as shown in Figure 15. It should also be considered that around 45% of the residential buildings in the area are left to survey, so a higher number could be expected.

Figure 14. *Facades of the houses in Cementerio.*

Figure 15. *Housing conditions in Cementerio.*

Note. Retrieved from the Asertos' program photos archive.
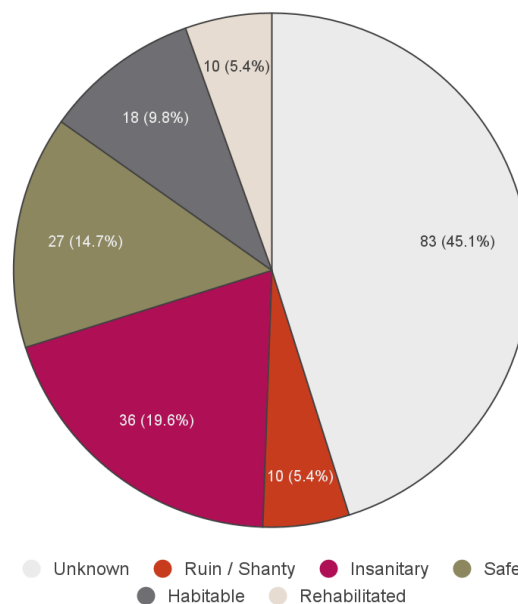
Note. Based on the Asertos' program dynamic database.

These precarious conditions on the exterior of the area's houses further reflect the state of their interior. With structural issues and inadequate infrastructure, the challenges faced by residents

increase. The improperly paved streets and deficient sanitation systems encourage the creation of sinkholes that contribute to the dampness problems all over the area, creating mold damage that affects plaster and paint, while along the lack of maintenance causes cracks, falling false ceilings, and structural instability, as shown in Figure 16. In fact, one of the most critical problems lies in the roofs and terraces, where poor maintenance leads to water leaks, dampness, and structural damage.

Moreover, irregular connections to electricity, water and sanitation services foster unsafe living conditions, and among roof, structural and interior treatments problems they are the most common type of issue in the Cementerio area according to Asertos' surveys, shown in Figure 17. Without the compliance with current regulations, these systems pose significant risks to the residents, that's why Asertos has categorized them as 'Emergency Interventions'. The combination of these factors highlights the urgent need for targeted interventions to address the area's housing deficiencies.

Figure 16. *Precarious housing conditions in the Cementerio area.*

Figure 17. *Emergency interventions as collected by Asertos.*

Note. Retrieved from the Asertos' program photos archive.
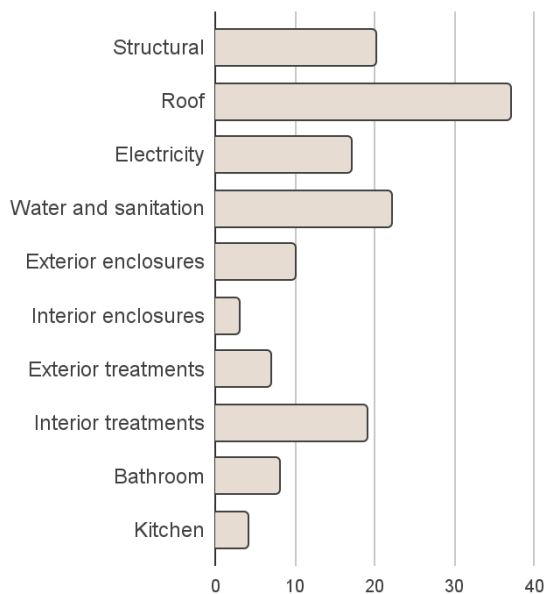
Note. Based on the Asertos' program dynamic database.

Furthermore, more than the marginality, and the initial conflicts due to the incomplete relocation processes, many residents are finding a sense of belonging within this area, becoming a focal point for the Roma community in Alicante. Even when the initial residents of the Cementerio area have met these relocation policies with resistance, associating them with

neighborhood decline and the introduction of new social challenges to the community, their ethnic identity has helped create social bonds.

Despite these external narratives of stigma, based on the insufficient public investment in the area, the majority of Roma residents in the Cementerio area take great pride in their ethnic identity. According to FSG & Daleph (2016), Alicante has historically hosted one of the largest Roma populations in Spain, with an estimated 10,691 individuals across the city, even where approximately 402 of them live in substandard housing conditions.

There is a collective pride in their Roma heritage, highlighting their resilience and cultural strength that has persisted through their historically challenging living conditions and the related stigma. Within the Cementerio area, this sense of identity fosters community cohesion and an improved perception of self, supporting a shared narrative that goes beyond external labels. As shown in Figure 18, some residents decided to paint the Roma flag on their backyard, and during the community festival 'La Luz del Barrio' in the Cementerio area, one of the muralists got asked by the neighbors to include the Roma flag in their design, reinforcing the discourse that their ethnic identity serves as a catalyst for social cohesion and collective identity.

Figure 18. *Cementerio residents are proud of their Roma heritage.*

Note. Retrieved from (top left) 'Flag of the Romani people', by AdiJapan, 2008 , (top right) '26 Camino Llano del Espartal' in Barrio del Matadero, by Google Street View, 2022 and (bottom) mural in Barrio de Abajo from 'Festival Comunitario del barrio del cementerio La Luz del Barrio', by Domínguez, A., 2023.

5.2.   History of the Cementerio area

The history of the Cementerio area is tightly related to the overall history of the city and its developments. The Ciudad de Asís neighborhood, where both the industrial polygon of Llano del Espartal and the case study are located, was subject of the industrial development the city experienced in the 1950s, the construction of housing units for the new workforce arriving to the city, state-led relocation programs of the homeless Roma people squatting in the city, the appearance of self-built housing units at the vicinity of the municipal cemetery, the authorities' neglect to address the marginalization of this area of the neighborhood, the appearance of an NGO to aid the community, and many more. But to tell the story of the Cementerio area, Cuesta Ávila (2020) proposes the identification of 5 phases.

The first phase, from 1925 to the 1950s, is characterized by the development of residential dwellings spread throughout the area. The Cementerio area has not been defined by marginality since its beginnings, but as an area for hardworking people. At the west side of the city of Alicante, just outside the urban fabric, a dormitory neighborhood by the name of Ciudad de Asís was starting to be consolidated. This development project consisted of new affordable housing buildings to expand the availability of housing for the increasing numbers of workers arriving from rural parts of Spain and abroad into the city, to work in factories, the port and the railway; most of these newcomers work in the vicinity of the neighborhood.

During this period, this part of town was subject of new factories, housing units and commerce in general, due to cheap land and its proximity to the city center, influencing the planning authorities to change its previous agricultural use, into partially urbanized to consolidate these new uses. Nevertheless, in Figure 19 it could be appreciated that by the end of this period, the majority of the Cementerio area was still divided in plots the size of agricultural fields, according to its previous use. Cuesta Ávila (2020) considers that there were three main actions that characterized this period.

First, the local horticultural company Bonny opened a new plant in the area for growing tomatoes, taking advantage of the good conditions of the soil on top of the previously mentioned benefits. The low-income farmers working in the company then built their own houses, many of them shed-like houses, in the vicinity of the farmland.

Second, the inauguration of the Municipal cemetery Nuestra Señora del Remedio in 1925 and the construction of the street Vial de los Cipreses to connect it to the rest of the city. These were the main projects influencing the area since the beginning of construction in 1918. It all started similarly with the horticultural company, with some of their workers building their own houses near their workplace, but then shops started to appear both in the cemetery square and along

the street, such as florists, gravestones businesses, companies offering funeral services, and more. Slowly new 'village houses' began to be built gradually as well.

Figure 19. *Aerial image of the Cementerio area in 1956.*
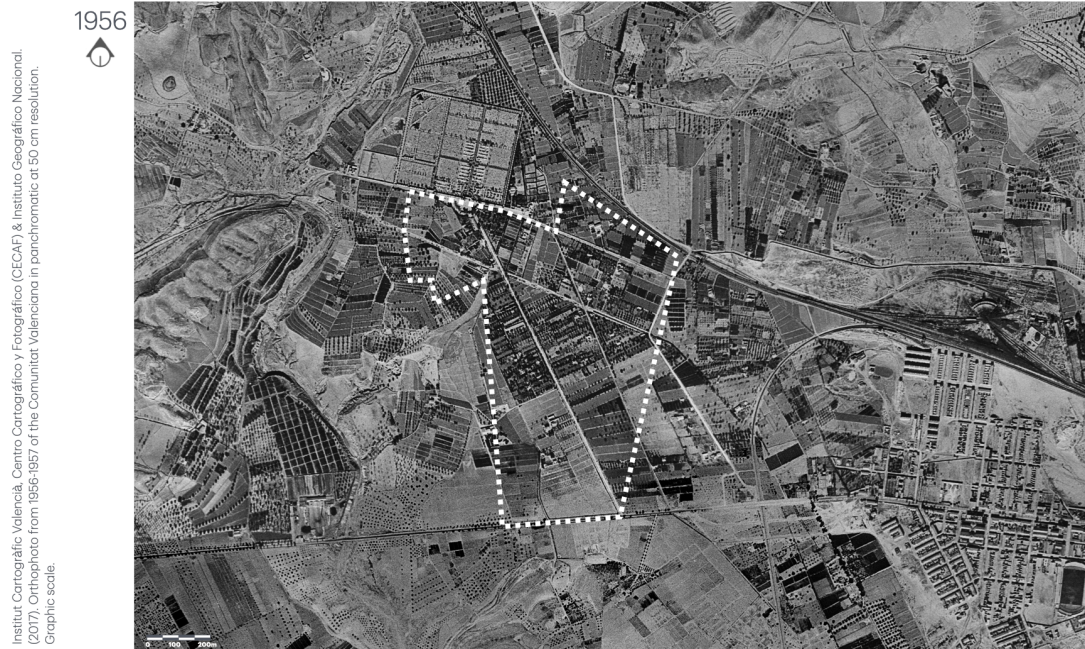
Note. Adapted from "Orthophoto from 1956-1957 of the Comunitat Valenciana in panchromatic at 50 cm resolution", by Institut Cartogràfic Valencià et al., 2017.

And third, the expansion of the urban fabric of the city. Cuesta Ávila (2020) argues that during that period there was a lack of urban planning, due to the multiple areas where the expansion was happening in the city, describing it as dispersed, and far from a compact urban residential development. The development on the west periphery follows the same pattern, the Cementerio area was once considered as part of the neighborhood 'Florida Alta' or 'Florida-Portazgo' due to its proximity, but later on it became part of the 'Ciudad de Asís' neighborhood in the 1950s.

Therefore this period of the Cementerio area was characterized by urban expansion, the consolidation of factories and the self-built residential buildings from the workers of such factories. These processes served as a good location for the workers since they could fulfill their basic needs of food and clothing, and at the same time reside near the place they work. Due to its humble beginnings, those houses were built with modest materials and most of them just one storey tall, but not 'poor looking'.

The second phase, from 1960 to the 1990s, is characterized by the beginning of conflicts in the area. In the previous period, the industrial polygon Llanos del Espartal attracted many people for the job availability, who then settled down in the surrounding neighborhoods, fostering a direct relationship between the companies and the neighbors. Cuesta Ávila (2020) describes the

relationship between the neighbors as good and warm, independent of their background or where they came from. But there were two aspects that started to affect it.

First, in the 1060s illegal drug dealing activities started to surge in Cementerio, to finally settle in the area by the end of the 1990s. The emerging illicit businesses and eventual criminal relationships, started to stain the reputation of the area.

And second, by the 1980s the city of Alicante started a relocation program of homeless families living throughout the city, and mostly those of Roma descent were transferred to the Cementerio area. So, a higher level of urbanization of the area is notable in Figure 20, of both industries and housing buildings.

Figure 20. *Aerial image of the Cementerio area in 1985.*
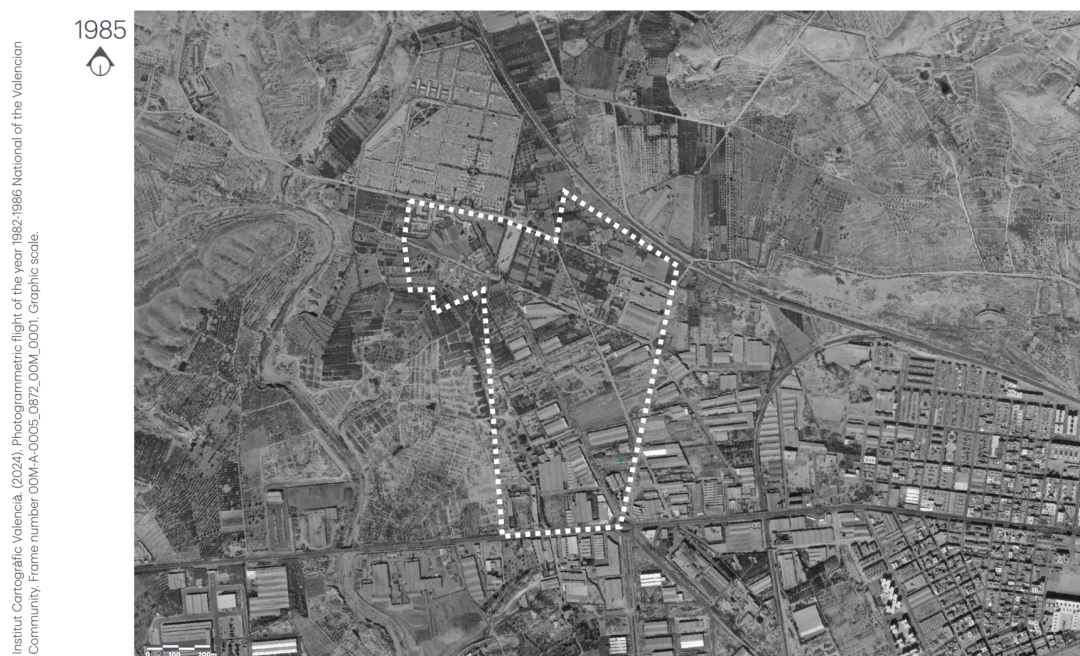
Note. Adapted from "Photogrammetric flight of the year 1982-1986 National of the Valencian Community", by Institut Cartogràfic Valencià, 2024.

But, Cuesta Ávila (2020) exposes that the plan lacked a strategy for the integration of the residents coming from different backgrounds and support on the adaptation to live together in a neighborhood environment, in other words, the strategy didn't consider the inclusion of social workers for a smooth transition to their new context. Therefore the lack of commitment from the public authorities to address the social aspects of their project, resulted in the beginning of internal conflicts between the residents from diverse backgrounds, affecting the previous good relationships among them. This conflict then resulted in the material degradation of the public spaces.

Then, Cementerio was a humble 'neighborhood' area, where due to the lack of action on the social aspect of the relocation projects, the neighborly relationships in the area were affected. By the end of the period their social capital was improving, but their economic conditions remained precarious, staining the reputation of the area as marginal.

Cuesta Ávila (2020) presents the third phase, between 2000 and 2001, as a period of social action, characterized by the coming together of the neighbors to demand the authorities for better conditions in the area. Many neighbors argue that the action of bringing together many homeless families living all over the city to the Cementerio area was part of a plan to 'hide' the marginalization of a city that means to take a bet on tourism. This plan failed to address the social impact of the actions, so the new residents and their problems were also transferred to the area, making the drug problem reach its peak during this period. Also, with the newcomers to the area a necessity for better infrastructure and general conditions to the area was reached, so there were several meetings between the neighbors and the authorities to find solutions to the conflicts.

At the beginning of the 2000s the local authorities chose the Cementerio area as one of the relocation points all over the city to collect the dispersed Roma population around the city, promising to consider the social impact of the actions this time. But then, one night of May 2000 one resident got hurt at night by a speeding driver who fled, so the neighbors started to demand public lightning, traffic signs, regular police surveillance and other basic security measures before the relocation project started. The neighbors collected 900 signatures and were backed by 125 companies for stopping the relocation project before some measures to improve the area were done, claiming that otherwise it would make the marginalization problem even worse.

The claim was presented to the authorities, and a constant back and forth started. The authorities promised to make infrastructural changes to the area alongside the construction of the 17 prefabricated houses they planned to put in the area. A couple of weeks passed by, the works on the housing units started, but what was promised remained untouched, increasing the sense of disbelief in the authorities and their promises. Then the residents started a protest, blocking the way to the plots of the units, they were demanding to first improve the safety of the area and then letting the relocation project continue.

During this back and forth, the media spread a view from the authorities that influenced the citizens, where the residents of the Cementerio area were racists for obstructing the project that could help 17 homeless Roma families, while at the same time failing to expose the claims of the protest, their daily experiences with the stigma related to where they live, the difficulties on accessibility to some parts of the area, the lack of public transportation and many more services.

Finally, the local councilor got a direct approval from the mayor of the city to begin the agreed infrastructural interventions, this made the residents and companies backed down from the protest and let the works continue. Two things remained from this conflict, the lack of trust for the authorities and the 'racists' stigma, which added to the ones already associated with the residents.

Throughout this time, the opposition political parties criticized the decision of selecting the Cementerio area as one of the locations for the project in the first place due to the lack of infrastructure services, the lack of a permanent social center, the urbanistic land use, and the unaddressed slum settlement in the upper zone of the area, as shown in Figure 21. All these actions led the mayor to publicly acknowledge the state of decay of the area and assign a portion of the 2001 city's budget to address such challenges. Nevertheless, of all the agreed interventions, the only project that was carried on was the construction of a park, but still lacking a sewerage system, public lightning installation, access to many houses of basic services, like clean water, electricity, gas. Many argue that the Cementerio area has not received its importance because the area is still considered industrial, meaning that there is no constraint for the authorities to provide residential infrastructure, and that there is also a bigger area called 'Zona Norte', that comprises many neighborhoods, where all intervention plans against poverty are focused.

Figure 21. *Aerial image of the Cementerio area in 2002.*

Note. Adapted from "Photogrammetric flight of the west of Valencia and Alicante provinces corresponding to the year 2000", by Institut Cartogràfic Valencià, 2019.

Another issue happening in this period was an economic crisis, that led to a radical decline in the construction market, affecting the residents of the Cementerio area as the main work source for many families was the sorting and recycling of waste, mainly coming from construction projects. Therefore even more families were now relying either on public aid, any kind of subsidies and informal jobs.

The fourth phase, from 2002 to 2017, is characterized by the once again 'disappearance' of Cementerio in the discussions of the city. The unattended degradation of the area has not changed, either the way people perceive it and its residents. The area is part of the industrial polygon Llanos del Espartal, see Figure 22, its industrial activities have been changing into car repair, warehouses or bus depots, but the recycling plant remained, so the public spaces of the area were still filled with burnt waste making it unpleasant for the drivers passing by. And even when the area is surrounded by many important companies at the global, national, and local level in a variety of fields, there is no mutual help between the parties.

Figure 22. *Aerial image of the Cementerio area in 2007.*

Note. Adapted from "Orthophoto from 2007 PNOA of Alicante province in RGBI at 50 cm resolution", by Institut Cartogràfic Valencià et al., 2007.

While the negative image, of problematic and dangerous, that has been popularized of the Cementerio area, has roots in real events, it is product of its isolation from other structural reasons that have led to such points. Cuesta Ávila (2020) argues that such rejection coming from external prejudices is narrow sighted, since it attributes the blame on the individuals for their own disadvantages, and at the same time it does not consider the public irresponsibility. So this

area has been mistreated by the authorities, portrayed a distorted image by the media and ignored by most of the people from Alicante.

Lastly, the fifth phase exposed by Cuesta Ávila (2020), from 2018 to the current times, is characterized by the coming together of associations, ONGs and the authorities for the urban renewal of the area. The local authorities under the Municipal Plan for Social Inclusion 2016-2020, paved part of the La Mina street in the Barrio del Cura, at the north side of the area, improved the public lighting, and devoted resources for the social and educational support of the residents, but it is still lacking a long-term strategy for the better disposition of the limited resources and actions.

Therefore the Asertos program, under the ASFE ONG, has been attempting to foster urban renewal from both material and social point of view since 2017 in the Cementerio area. They acknowledge the territorial stigma that negatively stains the population, but also focus on the positive aspects of the community as its resilience and strong social capital. This program came to the area to generate an impact on more than just the physical conditions of the area, but the social aspects. The aim is for the residents of Cementerio to believe in themselves again using participatory projects along the way, to then change the perceptions from the outside.

Figure 23. *Aerial image of the Cementerio area in 2024.*

Note. Adapted from "Orthophoto express from 2024 of the Comunitat Valenciana in RGBI at 25 cm resolution", by Institut Cartogràfic Valencià, 2024.

Millor Vela (2020) exposes that most of the residents suffered from the COVID-19 lockdown since their job was mainly informal. Due to this crisis and the lack of a neighborhood association, one

neighbor contacted the nearby companies to collect funds and provide essential products to the residents of the area. Asertos and some volunteers supported the distribution of goods in March 2020, for three days a week. This neighbor-led initiative is just one of the examples the Asertos team shows as potential for a successful program, it shows the leadership and management capacity of some residents, as well as an increased social cohesion. The Asertos program continues to work on the area, and to this day they have led many projects. But the most relevant ones at the urban level are the urban garden and Sol-Florida playground in the Barrio de Abajo and the communal shed and football field in the Barrio del Cura, as shown in Figure 23, all of them products of participatory assemblies, decided by the residents.

5.3.   Urban Policies on Poverty, Social Inclusion of the Roma and Social Housing

At the European level, the EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies serves as a cornerstone for addressing the social and economic disparities faced by the Roma community. Its primary goals include reducing inequalities in access to essential services and combating systemic discrimination, thereby fostering greater social inclusion.

The Territorial Agenda of the European Union 2020: Towards an Inclusive, Smart, and Sustainable Europe of Diverse Regions provides strategic guidelines for territorial development and cohesion policy across member states. This agenda emphasizes supporting initiatives that transform cities into engines of smart, sustainable, and inclusive growth, making them attractive places to live, work, visit, and invest in (López Jiménez, 2016). In this framework, urban policies are recognized as crucial tools for addressing socio-economic challenges, including those related to poverty and social exclusion.

Moreover, the European Cohesion Funds for Integrated Sustainable Urban Development 2014-2020 advocate for the financing of projects aimed at regenerating existing urban areas. These initiatives align with the objectives of new urban policies by promoting integrated sustainable urban development. This approach encompasses the physical renewal of cities alongside measures to enhance education, stimulate economic development, encourage social inclusion, and protect the environment (López Jiménez, 2016). Such policies and funding mechanisms underscore the EU's commitment to addressing urban poverty and improving housing conditions, particularly for marginalized communities such as the Roma.

Furthermore, at the national level, improving housing accessibility has become a crucial driver of initiatives targeting marginalization in Spain, as homelessness represents the most extreme manifestation of the housing system failure. Expanding the social housing market is a key

strategy to address the housing shortage, particularly given that Spain spends less than 1% of its GDP on housing policies (Gibb, 2001). The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2024) estimates that social housing in Spain accounts for less than 2% of the total housing stock, compared to the EU average of approximately 8%. This disparity highlights the country's insufficient provision of affordable housing. Furthermore, Spain's rental sector is particularly small, constituting about 11% of the total housing stock, in contrast with homeownership at around 85% (Housing Europe, 2010).

Social housing in Spain is primarily financed through a combination of public funds and private investments, supported by EU structural funds in some cases. Historically, Spain has prioritized homeownership over rental housing, leading to underinvestment in the social housing sector. Governmental focus on subsidies for home purchases and mortgage tax relief has contributed to this imbalance, neglecting the rental and social housing markets (Pareja-Eastaway & Sánchez-Martínez, 2017). Moreover, local governments, which are often responsible for implementing housing programs, face limited financial capacity and a lack of coordination with national strategies, further exacerbating the problem (Sutela, 2023).

Housing, education, employment, and social participation are the foundation of Spain's plans for tackling marginalization and fostering inclusion, aligning with European frameworks. The National Action Plan for Social Inclusion (PNAIN) 2013-2016 serves as a central framework to address poverty and social exclusion in Spain, with a particular focus on vulnerable groups such as the homeless, immigrants, and Roma communities; and it was structured around three strategic pillars aligned with EU inclusion guidelines. The first pillar aimed at labor market inclusion by improving the employability of individuals facing significant barriers. The second focused on creating minimum income schemes to strengthen social assistance, ensuring social security benefits to better address basic needs. And the third emphasized on improving access to quality public services such as education, healthcare, and social assistance, with the potential to reduce inequality and enhance living conditions (Consejo Económico y Social, 2017).

Additionally, the National Strategy for the Social Inclusion of the Roma Population 2012–2020 explicitly targets issues of housing inequality, educational access, and Roma participation in policymaking processes (FSG, 2012). And both the Atlas de la Vulnerabilidad Urbana and the Catálogo de Barrios Vulnerables provide essential tools for identifying urban vulnerability across Spanish municipalities. These resources analyze sociodemographic, socioeconomic and residential vulnerabilities to guide targeted interventions (López Jiménez, 2016).

The national educational strategy of the 'aprendizaje - servicio' program also plays a role in addressing local challenges in many cities throughout Spain. Under this framework,

schoolchildren, guided by teachers and experts, study local problems and propose actionable solutions. These programs have supported social action in various cities across Spain, fostering awareness and community engagement in addressing pressing issues. By integrating educational efforts with housing and social policies, Spain aims to create a more inclusive and resilient society (Red Española de Aprendizaje - Servicio, n.d.).

Furthermore, regional strategies in the Comunidad Valenciana have been developed within the framework of national policies while addressing the unique challenges faced by local populations. The Strategic Plan for Social Inclusion 2006–2008 emphasized social integration through employment promotion, improved access to housing and essential services, and strengthened partnerships with NGOs (Consejo Económico y Social, 2017). This regional strategy follows the path laid by broader national objectives, focusing on marginalized groups but placing particular emphasis on collaboration with civil society for a more tailored and inclusive approach. This strategy provided a foundation for addressing poverty and social exclusion in the Valencian Community.

In the housing sector, the Valencian Housing and Urban Regeneration Plan incorporated measures aimed at bridging inequalities between Roma and non-Roma populations. As highlighted by the Fundación Secretariado Gitano (FSG, 2012), this plan supported educational programs to combat high dropout rates among Roma children, initiatives to improve access to adequate housing, and training programs to enhance the employability of marginalized communities. Even though this strategy was not exclusively targeted at the Roma population, there were efforts to recognize their specific vulnerabilities, to then address them through the marginalized communities framework with general intervention.

Nevertheless, access to social housing in the Comunidad Valenciana still presents significant challenges. The regional government maintains a registry for applicants seeking public housing. Yet, the lists of social housing applicants reflect a great demand, exceeding the availability of units (Sánchez, 2019). In particular, the limited capacity of the Valencian Institute of Housing to meet this demand illustrates broader systemic issues, including insufficient investment in public housing and a lack of coordinated urban planning. These challenges disproportionately affect vulnerable groups, such as low-income families and the Roma community, who often face additional barriers like discrimination in accessing adequate housing.

Then, at the local level, national and regional strategies have influenced Alicante's initiatives targeting social housing and urban regeneration, even showing similarities with the challenges faced at the regional level. For example, the Alicante Social Housing Program aims to alleviate precarious living conditions by improving access to affordable housing to all citizens. However,

the program also faces significant challenges, such as their limited funding and inconsistent implementation across neighborhoods, which obstruct its capacity to address social exclusion comprehensively (FSG, 2012). While such programs are targeted to all residents of Alicante and the Valencian Community, it is important to keep in mind that the problem of precarious living conditions disproportionately affects more Roma families.

The demand for social housing in Alicante has grown substantially in recent years, reaching approximately 10.000 solicitant families (Rico, 2024). These lists for social housing requests, once open for all citizens of Alicante, have remained closed to the public since 2016, leaving the registry outdated and failing to reflect the actual number of residents in need of social rental housing. But as of September 2024, the local authorities reopened them with a new system aiming to provide for the vast demand. Even when in 2016 there were 154 contracts for renting social housing, and now the city claims having a total amount of 748 public housing units, divided in many programs for different type of solicitors (Ayuntamiento de Alicante, 2024), the gap between administrative processes and the real housing crisis underlines the necessity for transparent policies and an updated framework to ensure equitable housing distribution.

One notable initiative is the Plan Integral de Recuperación de la Zona Norte, developed under the European URBAN project. This municipal program tried to foster social cohesion and local development in one of Alicante's most vulnerable areas. However, according to López Jiménez (2016), while these European-funded projects have addressed specific challenges in certain neighborhoods, they lacked a comprehensive city-wide framework, not plans that approach urban poverty and housing in a fragmented way, as it limits the long-term impacts.

Local experts stress the need for "long-term vision" policies, capable of addressing Alicante's structural challenges in housing and urban development. A focus on participatory planning, community engagement and considering the specific histories and needs of individual neighborhoods would allow tailored responses to the unique socio-economic dynamics instead of one-size-fits-all solutions (Cuesta Ávila, 2020).

Moreover, after filtering through the available reports of Alicante City Hall's biweekly meetings, it comes to notice that the Cementerio area has been referenced only 13 times in those records since 2014. This illustrates how Cementerio has been historically overlooked in municipal discussions. However, in recent years there has been a noticeable increase in attention, with more mentions of the state of the area, suggesting a growing interest in the area's challenges and its potential inclusion in broader urban policy frameworks.

During these discussions between the elected and opposition political parties, the Cementerio area is acknowledged as a marginalized zone with serious poverty issues, substandard living

conditions, and inadequate infrastructure (Ayuntamiento de Alicante, n.d.). Representatives have consistently described the area as emblematic for its 'long-standing neglect', where systemic issues such as poor sanitation, unpaved streets, and degraded public spaces perpetuate vulnerabilities and social exclusion. The perception of the area as 'problematic' has driven calls for targeted interventions aiming to address its marginality and precarious conditions.

In response to these challenges, various municipal representatives have proposed a range of actions aimed at reducing the area's isolation and integrating it into broader urban development strategies. Infrastructure improvements, such as street paving, enhanced public lighting, and the establishment of green spaces, are recurring proposals in the biweekly city council meetings. There is also a strong emphasis on addressing housing issues, with discussions about the construction of social housing units and improving the existing rental assistance programs, to foster inclusivity in the city's development plans.

During these meetings some political parties' representatives go beyond proposing just physical upgrades, and also advocate for initiatives that promote social cohesion and community engagement, such as proposing community centers and programs to involve local organizations. This reflects an understanding that addressing poverty and exclusion requires more than infrastructure, but also empowerment and participation. Collaborations with external organizations, such as Fundación Secretariado Gitano (FSG) and Arquitectura Sin Fronteras (ASFE) under the Asertos program, has been appreciated as they have been drivers for both culturally sensitive and impactful interventions in the area.

Despite the growing recognition of the Cementerio area's issues, progress has been slow due to several factors. First, these meetings frequently highlight the lack of consistent funding and coordination between municipal, regional, and national authorities. Then, political disagreements over the prioritization and scope of interventions, as the uneven distribution of resources across neighborhoods has been criticized. And even when there have been actions tailored to the area, the efforts fail by addressing isolated problems without tackling systemic inequality.

After analyzing urban policies and their impact on the Cementerio area, it becomes evident that this area has historically faced neglect and marginalization. The General Plan of Alicante, approved in 1987, classified the northern part of the Cementerio area as non-urbanizable public land, intended for potential expansions of the municipal cemetery. This classification ignored the existing communities in Barrio de Arriba and La Casita. Meanwhile, the southern parts, including Barrio de Abajo and Barrio del Matadero, were designated as urban land, and recognized as detached residential areas. This urban segregation is perpetuated by the area's proximity to the

Llano del Espartal industrial estate, and its disconnection from the city's residential zones (Asertos, 2020b).

The Cementerio area's socio-economic profile has been further shaped by historical relocation policies. During the 1980s and the 2000, the city of Alicante undertook programs to address the population living in shantytowns, including Montoto, Casalarga, and San Antón, concentrating the Roma families into specific areas, with Cementerio becoming one of the chosen destinations. However, the second relocation effort was met with resistance from traditional residents of Barrio de Abajo, who attributed the area's degradation to the arrival of marginalized groups and the lack of compensatory public investments to improve the infrastructure, leaving the area to deteriorate further (Cuesta Ávila, 2020).

The zone of La Casita exemplifies the long-term consequences of inadequate planning, as in the process of one of the relocation efforts of the city, four families were temporarily placed in four available municipal housing units in the said zone of the Cementerio area. These units, originally built for cemetery workers, were intended to be a short-term solution. However, around 20 years later, the residents remained in these same housing units, living in deplorable conditions as the city, as the property owner, has failed to provide maintenance, and the tenants are also constrained by their economic conditions, as well as by social rent agreements, from making necessary repairs (Cuesta Ávila, 2020). This lengthened neglect left the residents in a state of uncertainty, unwilling to invest in housing they do not own while remaining unsure if or when they will be relocated. This issue was brought to the City Hall meetings many times, and by march 2024 the City Council agreed to solve the specific issue of these for families and by October 2024, they were relocated to other parts of the city.

Additionally, another example of small steps toward improving the Cementerio area's infrastructure in recent years, was the paving of Calle de La Mina, under the guidelines of the Municipal Social Inclusion Plan 2016–2020. Cuesta Ávila (2020) argues that while this initiative marks progress, it remains a symbolic gesture that highlights the need for more comprehensive and sustained efforts to address the area's challenges.

In conclusion, although discussions about the Cementerio area have increased in frequency during city council meetings in recent years, showing the authorities' awareness of its marginalization, actions have largely been reactive and fragmented, rather than proactive, more inclusive and integrated. This requires a commitment to sustainable urban planning, consistent financial investment, and participatory decision-making processes that actively engage residents in shaping their area's future.

6. Findings and Analysis

This chapter presents a detailed analysis of the ethnographic fieldwork and participant observations gathered in the Cementerio area of Alicante, and is further organized into four sections: Dimensions of Poverty, Social Exclusion, and Vulnerability in Cementerio; Stigma and Symbolic Violence: The Social Perceptions of the Cementerio Area; Housing and Structural Challenges in Cementerio; and The Role of Asertos in Addressing Social and Spatial Inequalities. Such sections intend to answer the research questions by exploring how urban policies, media narratives, and other interventions interact to shape the experiences of the residents by living in a marginalized and neglected area of the city.

To understand these issues, an ethnographic approach was employed, combining participant observation and a comprehensive analysis of media representation of the area, and qualitative data from interviews with various types of actors, such as residents, commercial operators, local administration representatives and stakeholders. Data collection was conducted during fieldwork in Alicante between March and May 2024, which provided firsthand insights into the challenges experienced by the residents of the area. The interviews offered residents' personal experiences with poverty and exclusion, while the media analysis helped to contextualize how public discourse contributes to territorial stigmatization. In addition, this research reviewed how administrative initiatives and policies have affected the area, situating the local experiences within a broader framework.

This chapter seeks to answer several key research questions. Specifically, how media portrayals impact the social image of Cementerio residents in Alicante, how the residents perceive their community and experience social exclusion and inequalities. Moreover, the analysis investigates

the role of the NGO ASFE and the Asertos program in mitigating material scarcity and overcoming stigma, as well as their limitations that might constrain future projects. By integrating data from the fieldwork, participant observation, and qualitative interviews, the chapter provides a comprehensive basis for understanding the intersection of poverty, social exclusion and vulnerability, with territorial stigmatization and other urban challenges in this area.

Overall, the findings detailed in this chapter delves into the systemic inequalities that affect the Cementerio area but also critiques urban regeneration projects that didn't consider their social impact in the local discourse. The insights exposed in this research highlights the importance of inclusive and participatory urban planning practices that empower residents and foster community resilience, as it leads to a more equitable society. This analysis promotes further discussions on housing inequalities and urban challenges, forming a critical link in the research's argument regarding the potential of community-based interventions to change the subject's conditions.

6.1. Dimensions of Poverty, Social Exclusion, and Vulnerability in Cementerio

The Cementerio area, with a population of fewer than 800 residents and approximately 175 homes, stands as one of the most marginalized neighborhoods in Alicante, a city with over 350,000 inhabitants. According to local government representatives, the area suffers from a range of systemic issues, including inadequate public services, poor waste management, unpaved streets, lack of potable water, and insufficient public lighting. High unemployment and low employability rates further compound the area's socio-economic struggles. As one councilor noted, "It is a neighborhood where many problems accumulate," (AG1, interview) reflecting the deep neglect that the area has faced over decades, emphasizing that Cementerio has been "very much abandoned on all levels" by the local authorities (AG1, interview).

The physical condition of the Cementerio area mirrors its socio-economic challenges. Reports from local media emphasize the persistent accumulation of trash, deteriorated public spaces, and general neglect, underscoring the poverty experienced by its residents. Descriptions of rats, debris, and decayed infrastructure clearly illustrates the daily difficulties faced by the community (Losa, 2022; Martínez, 2023). Such visible markers of poverty contribute to the stigmatization of the area, further isolating it from broader urban improvements.

The profile of the interviewed residents highlight the multi-faceted nature of poverty in the area. Interview data reveal that family ties are the primary reason many residents moved to

Cementerio, often to be closer to relatives or to establish a household in an affordable area. For some, the motive for their relocation was a previous estate of homelessness, as one interviewee shared their experience of not having stable housing prior to settling in Cementerio. The length of their residency in the area varied among interviewees, with three residents living there for five years or less, three for ten to twenty years, and four having spent their entire lives in Cementerio, expressing a stronger sense of attachment to the area, despite its challenges.

Employment among the Cementerio residents is limited, as most of the interviewed residents are unemployed. Although a minority reported having formal jobs, primarily in the recycling or construction sector. The rest were mainly engaged in unpaid domestic work or caregiving responsibilities. Among the unemployed, only one respondent indicated actively seeking work, but stated dissatisfaction with the low salaries that are commonly offered in the city. Others revealed that family obligations prevented them from pursuing job opportunities. Overall, the economic precarity of the residents highlights the structural barriers for improving their quality of life.

The perspective of NGOs working in the area adds another dimension to understanding poverty in Cementerio. Representatives of the Gypsy foundation, which has been active in the area for approximately eight years, described the area as severely neglected and "reminiscent of a ghetto." One representative highlighted that in the area "most are of Gypsy ethnicity, with educational and social problems" (SE1, interview). Therefore, the residents' struggles reflect deeper systemic issues that perpetuate cycles of deprivation and exclusion.

The rising costs of housing in Alicante have had a significant impact on residents of the Cementerio area. Of the interviewees, only two considered themselves unaffected by these price increases. In contrast, five others mentioned rising rents as a primary reason for moving to Cementerio or being unable to relocate elsewhere. Some also highlighted the lack of social housing and the prolonged waiting times on the city's housing applicant lists, which were created by the city council to better assess the scale of the housing crisis.

The interviewed councilors representing opposition parties, while not directly involved in municipal governance or policymaking currently, have substantial knowledge of the economic, housing, and employment challenges facing the city. These councilors emphasized the systemic inequalities affecting neighborhoods like the Cementerio area, highlighting how inadequate social housing policies perpetuate them, and stressed on a governance gap that continues to sustain it.

A recent study of social housing demand in Alicante reveals a marked increase, as evidenced by data from the Generalitat Valenciana's EVHA project, which has maintained an open applicant list

since 2021. Between April 2023 and January 2024, the number of applicant families in Alicante increased, as shown in Figure 24, from 2.847 to 4.504, representing an overwhelming 58% increase in just nine months.

Figure 24. *Social housing solicitations in the Valencian Community.*
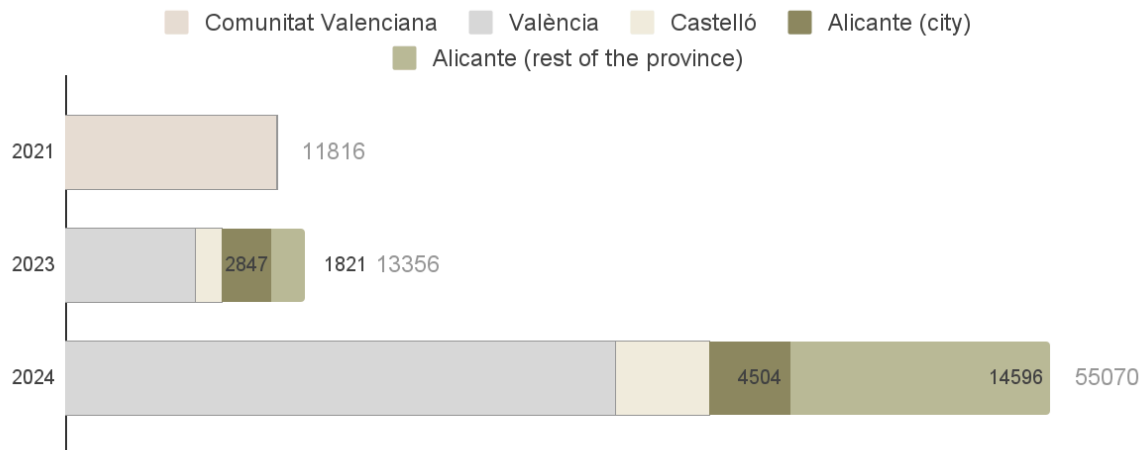
Note. Adapted from "La Lista valenciana de demandantes de Vivienda Pública se dispara un 33% en Menos de dos Años", by Gil & Torres, 2023, "El PSOE de Alicante insta al PP a abrir las listas para acceder a una vivienda pública", by Alicante Plaza, and "Las familias que piden una vivienda social se cuadruplican en un año y Medio", by Ros, 2024.

These figures reflect severe limitations in private housing accessibility, with 4.504 families, encompassing one to five members each, representing a significant proportion of the city's 350.000 inhabitants (Alicante Plaza, 2024). This trend highlights the deepening inequalities in housing access. Alicante's lists for social housing have remained closed since 2016, and after many years of discussion in the city hall meetings, pressure from various opposition political parties, and the approval to reopen them passed on 2023, they were finally available to the public once again since september 2024 (Ayuntamiento de Alicante, 2024).

The disparities extend beyond housing availability to resource allocation. Media reports draw attention to how other neighborhoods in Alicante benefit from municipal investment and maintenance, while Cementerio is neglected (Losa, 2022). Trash accumulation, poor maintenance, and minimal infrastructure investment exacerbate social and economic inequalities in the area. The unequal attention to the Cementerio area has allowed them to develop a behaviour towards public space that in some other parts of the city could cause a scandal, like burning mattresses on the street to collect the metal springs on their inside (Losa, 2023). These kinds of allowances further marginalize its residents, creating a sense of exclusion and neglect.

The spatial manifestation of socioeconomic inequalities is evident in both housing conditions and broader urban governance. As noted by Asertos, "It's this idea of urban vulnerability. The common issue is that socioeconomic inequality is reflected in the city, and this has an impact both at the most intimate scale, such as housing, and at a more collective scale" (SG1, interview). This underscores how systemic inequality influences not just individual homes but also the collective identity and functionality of neighborhoods like in Cementerio.

Beyond systemic neglect, the bureaucratic barriers in Alicante's social housing policies exacerbate these inequalities. Despite a motion to reopen social housing application lists being approved in 2023, it took one year to reopen them, showing a persistent political inertia that has the possibility to delay progress. This issue is exemplified by events in Valencia, where a building fire prompted the swift allocation of 131 vacant housing units within a week, of units that had been left unassigned, despite they were bought by the city for social renting and the city itself having a waiting list of over 1,000 families. This tragic catalyst underscores the lack of proactive governance, raising questions about "will it take a tragedy to happen (in the Cementerio area) for them (planning authorities) to act?" (AG2, interview).

Alicante's promises of intervention, further reinforce the systemic neglect that perpetuates urban vulnerabilities. The time they spend since the plan is approved, to the actual intervention, oftentimes takes too long to happen, and in some cases they are just dropped unfinished. This inaction, or slow action, has led to significant frustration among local representatives, who criticized the lack of follow-through: "The problem with the proposals taken to the council is that they are easily forgotten" (AG2, interview). Even preliminary steps, such as holding a meeting to set priorities, whether re-urbanizing streets, repairing the playground, or addressing essential services like plumbing and potable water, have yet to be realized.

Moreover, the Cementerio area is characterized by a complex relationship between its residents and their immediate environment, shaped by both external stigma and internal community dynamics. Even when they feel at home in the area, these factors influence their experiences, highlighting the challenges faced by the area in terms of physical isolation from the rest of the residential areas in the city and insufficient infrastructure.

Health-related vulnerabilities further worsen the quality of life in the Cementerio area. While only three interviewees reported chronic health conditions, every case was unrelated to their age, such as severe back pain and high blood pressure. These conditions interfere with their ability to actively engage in some community activities, and is aggravated by broader challenges related to the poor connectivity to healthcare facilities.

Nevertheless, the area's self-built nature shows its residents' resilience to contest limited opportunities. As described by an Asertos' representative, "It is a self-built neighborhood in a part of the city where there is basically an opportunity to self-build", which is not very common (SG1, interview). However, this autonomy is a product of their physical isolation, but also translates into social isolation of the entire area, as noted in the observation that "It's true that it's a very complex territory, very complicated in many ways, but also very isolated" (SG1, interview). This isolation amplifies the challenges of addressing daily conflicts, which, according to Asertos, often escalate due to the absence of consistent administrative presence. As clarified, "there are conflicts, like in any other neighborhood, daily conflicts that probably in any other context would be resolved differently. There, they escalate, and when they escalate, you get all kinds of conflicts between people that turn into fights" (SG1, interview).

Media coverage further illustrates the precarious conditions faced by Cementerio residents. Reports highlight the area's lack of adequate infrastructure and safety measures, which, coupled with unsanitary conditions, aggravate its residents' vulnerabilities (Maestre, 2023a). Additionally, the visible security risks and insufficient public health measures underline the systemic neglect that defines the area (Alicante Al Día, 2018a). These portrayals reinforce the narrative of vulnerability that is not only shaped by physical conditions but also compounded by administrative inaction and structural inequality.

Additionally, in other informal media platforms, the same image of vulnerability is perpetuated. One youtuber whose content specializes in making video blogs of their visits to the most dangerous neighborhoods around the world, portrayed the Cementerio area as a "forgotten" neighborhood, making emphasis on its social exclusion from the broader city of Alicante (Zazza the Italian, 2022). The depiction stresses the lack of integration and the area's invisibility within broader urban policy frameworks. Further, this representation is supported by other sources, which examine the historical marginalization of the area, highlighting how past urban planning and policy decisions have entrenched its exclusion, and further reinforcing the geographic and social divide between Cementerio and the rest of the city (Campello, 2024).

The Cementerio area's autonomous development, joint with its isolation, reflects a deeper layer of social exclusion. The interviews revealed a pattern of self-management and conflict within the community, distant from external city dynamics, as of "there has been significant self-management, many conflicts, and a very autonomous evolution of the neighborhood's small history, always in relation to the rest of the city but in a very isolated manner" (SG1, interview). This sense of autonomy is not only internal but also spatial, as one participant shared, "it is so isolated there is no circulation of people who are not from the neighborhood, there are no

people passing through, those people are confined there (the Cementerio area)" (SG1, interview). Such statements highlight a clear separation of Cementerio from the wider city.

The concept of Cementerio as a 'transitory neighborhood' emerges strongly in interviews with local commercial operators. Many residents, according to the interviewees, feel that remaining in the area limits their opportunities. One interviewee recounted the story of a resident who frequently moved between cities to support his family, stating, "The guy has a family; in fact, he recently went to Madrid with his sister. He just came back, but he will leave again, and so it goes. He is just trying to make a living" (CG2, interview). Another commercial operator described how some residents felt bound to leave to secure better futures for themselves and their families, saying, "I've seen others who have left the neighborhood, and the kids have gone on to live normal lives (...). They knew that if they stayed here, they couldn't go anywhere" (CG1, interview). These perceptions suggest a common idea that the Cementerio area is a place of stagnation, where residents perceive their prospects as limited, often tied to drug-related work.

Further on this perception of stagnation, when asked to the commercial operators whether they had ever hired someone from the Cementerio area, the participants responded negatively. Nevertheless, one interviewee recounted an indirect case where a neighbor occasionally assisted in parking cars and was given financial aid for lunch, but this was an isolated instance. Another participant justified the hesitation to hire residents, due to concerns about involvement in drug-related issues. Additionally, they shared a specific example of a former employee who resigned after three months due to the inability to afford their desired housing expectations, which led them to relocate to another city. This situation highlights the barriers to employment faced by residents, as well as the broader challenges of integration and stability within the labor market.

The businesses interviewed are longstanding, family-owned establishments that have been in operation for approximately fifty years, heavily reliant on the nearby municipal cemetery Nuestra Señora del Remedio. The interviewed individuals have maintained their positions for over two decades, highlighting the stability of these businesses despite the surrounding social issues. When asked about their awareness on support initiatives for the Cementerio area, one participant recalled an instance where a local resident took the initiative to help others find work or learn valuable skills. However, they noted that this individual had not been seen in recent years, and similar activities are now run by the FSG in the area. One interviewee pointed out that many of those who received help eventually found better employment opportunities and moved out of the neighborhood. This constant turnover of residents, combined with the persistence of stigma, has perpetuated the cycle of marginalization in the area.

6.2.   Stigma and Symbolic Violence: The Social Perceptions of the Cementerio Area

The Cementerio area has long been subjected to symbolic violence, a phenomenon rooted in historical neglect and systemic marginalization that is clearly manifested in several local government practices. According to Asertos, the municipal government failed to address the needs of the area during its formative years, disregarding residents when they first built their homes. Over time, the administration compounded this neglect by relegating people displaced from other parts of Alicante to Cementerio without oversight or support. This abandonment of duties from the local authorities, left the community to fend for itself, creating an environment of unchecked marginalization and escalating social challenges.

The systemic neglect of the Cementerio area has entrenched broader urban vulnerabilities that reflect symbolic violence. As one councilor noted, the area faces intersecting challenges of drug trafficking, lack of basic services, and inadequate infrastructure, with little effort by authorities to address these interconnected issues. Due to this neglect "it's not just a housing problem anymore, it's a tremendous social issue, where everything is completely interconnected" (AG2, interview), a comprehensive social issue, requiring intervention in education, employment, healthcare, and infrastructure. The councilor's statement stresses how institutional inaction perpetuates the area's symbolic degradation and systemic exclusion.

The interviews with the commercial operators further revealed how the area's image has shifted over time, reflecting symbolic violence in public perception. Historically a humble working-class neighborhood known for its lively festivals and well-kept homes, the Cementerio area is now seen as a deteriorated, marginalized space characterized by poverty and its streets full of rubbish. Interviewees described it as a 'transitory neighborhood' where residents arrive due to adverse circumstances but leave as soon as other opportunities elsewhere emerge. This perception of transitoriness, some residents have about the area, perpetuates the narrative of degradation and neglect, further isolating it from the rest of Alicante.

Adding to this, the discourse of some local operators reinforced the stigmatization of residents. One interviewee criticized residents for being "used to living in a ghetto" and suggested they lacked the motivation to change their circumstances, portraying the community as reliant on benefits without contributing in return. Such remarks, including one stating, "sometimes it's just not your job (external help), it's that people want to live like that" (CG1, interview), reflect a symbolic form of violence that shifts blame onto residents while ignoring systemic barriers to improvement. This discourse takes for granted the residents' power to change their conditions and contributes to their exclusion.

Media coverage has also contributed to symbolic violence through the framing of the Cementerio area as inherently problematic or degraded. One article, while advocating for the area's regeneration, perpetuated the notion of Cementerio as a 'problem' to be solved, reinforcing its stigmatized status (Alicante Plaza, 2023). This subtle but common framing underscores how media narratives, even when well-intentioned, can reinforce negative perceptions and contribute to the symbolic marginalization of the community.

Additionally, these media narratives and local perceptions that frame the area as inherently problematic support the, deeply embedded, territorial stigmatization of Cementerio. Reports frequently associate the area with unlawful behaviors, such as references to criminals fleeing "in the direction of the cemetery," (Gil López, 2024) reinforcing stereotypes about the area as a center of illicit activities. Similarly, coverage of protests against relocation plans framed residents as resistant to integration and accused them of racism, disregarding that they were vouching for infrastructural improvements to accommodate the additional families. These portrayals perpetuate a cycle of marginalization, where legitimate petitions are distorted, further alienating the area from the rest of the city.

The internal dynamics of the area also reflect the broader stigmatization. Some residents noted shifts in the community's composition, highlighting cultural incompatibilities between long-term residents and new arrivals as a source of division. For example, one commercial operator remarked, "The people who have moved in (...) have tried to bring their culture with them and carry it on, so they didn't adapt to the neighborhood. And the people who used to live here moved out to other neighborhoods because they weren't compatible anymore" (CG1, interview). These narratives, while reflecting real challenges, also contribute to the stigmatization of new residents and reinforce the perception of Cementerio as fragmented and troubled.

This stigmatization is also reinforced by perceptions within Cementerio. Residents offered varying perspectives on the degree to which the area is as problematic as the rest of the city perceives. Two-thirds of interviewees rejected this notion, describing the Cementero area as calm, with conflicts that are limited to neighborly or familial disputes typical of any other part of Alicante. However, a third of the residents identified more significant issues, such as drug dealing and consumption, noise pollution, poor waste management, and slum-like housing conditions. Despite this divide, a common concern emerged about the future of the area, particularly the adequacy of basic services, public cleanliness, proximity to amenities, and the potential impact of these deficiencies on future generations.

In addition, some residents noted distinct differences between different zones, such as stronger family ties and more community activities observed in certain areas compared to others. Noting

that there are zones with a greater sense of togetherness, while others show a weaker social cohesion, mainly associated with a more individualistic attitude, further complicating efforts to build community unity. As one resident expressed, "It feels like separate neighborhoods" (RE3, interview). This fragmentation within the area contributes to the perception of disconnection not only from the city but also among its residents.

The physical isolation of Cementerio adds another layer of stigmatization. Its location near the municipal cemetery, surrounded by industrial zones and vacant lots, disconnects it physically and socially from Alicante. One commercial operator noted, "I don't see it as a neighborhood per se (...) for me, this is just the work area (...) here in the cemetery zone is not the same as in the proper neighborhood area (Ciudad de Asís)" (CG2, interview). This disconnect is evident and contrasts with neighboring areas. One operator who lives in a nearby but more affluent neighborhood commented, "Yes, I live (...) five minutes from here, but that neighborhood is one of the best in Alicante (...) it has nothing to do with what is in here" (CG2, interview). Comments such as these reinforce the marginalization of the Cementerio area as a separate and inferior part of the urban landscape.

Perceptions of the residents further reveal how territorial stigmatization manifests at an individual level. While some community members rely on local businesses for temporary work, such as parking cars or cleaning services, they are not seen as inherently troublesome by commercial operators. As noted by one interviewee, "Here come people from the nearby neighborhoods (the zones of the Cementerio area) because of the cemetery, and we don't have any problems with them" (CG2, interview). However, these brief interactions are insufficient to bridge the gap between the Cementerio residents and its frequenters, leaving the area's isolation unchallenged.

The stigmatization of the area is also rooted by narratives that focus on visible markers of degradation. The FSG representative noted that while the challenges faced by the Cementerio area are not unique, the visibility of issues such as trash accumulation and poorly maintained housing amplifies the negative perception of the area. This framing not only intensifies the stigma but also is founded in the broader structural issues that underlie these visible problems. Similarly, Asertos highlighted how personal struggles, often aggravated by poverty and marginalization, manifest as visible acts of degradation, supporting the stereotypes of crime and disorder. The Asertos' representative remarked, when people talk about the crime in Cementerio "I think that many times it is more the stigma that is generated than the reality of the area. In Cementerio, there are good and bad people like in any other area" (SG1, interview). This statement exposes how external narratives of criminality often overshadow the complexity and diversity of the community.

The stigmatization of the Cementerio area matches the stigma lived by its residents, also fostering marginalization and tied to administrative neglect. Local officials have described the area as plagued by crime, poverty, and social disintegration, further reaffirming negative stereotypes. Observations of unpaved streets, deteriorated homes, and neglected public spaces highlight the visible markers of this neglect. One councilor remarked, "(The residents) have been living in a state of precarity, neglect, and abandonment from the administration" (AG1, interview). This neglect is compounded by the physical characteristics of the area, with its isolation intensifying the impression "as if it (Cementerio area) wasn't part of Alicante (the city)" (AG2, interview).

Together, these elements illustrate how symbolic violence manifests in the Cementerio area through historical neglect, systemic exclusion, and the perpetuation of stigmatizing narratives by local actors and media. These dynamics reinforce the community's marginalization and block its integration into broader urban policies. Also, such structural and social barriers perpetuate the stigmatization of Cementerio, isolating its residents from opportunities. The symbolic violence and territorial stigmatization suffered in the area, diminish their sense of inclusion and complicate the challenges faced by its residents. This discussion leads to the examination of how these systemic issues are legitimized by the democratization of unjust processes.

One of the most tangible manifestations of this inequity is the pervasive sense of neglect expressed by Cementerio's residents. Many highlighted the poor quality of services provided by the municipal government, including irregular garbage collection, insufficient street cleaning, and inadequate public lighting. These problems are compounded by the precarious housing conditions that persist in the Cementerio area. One resident summed up this frustration by noting "They always say, 'we'll do this, we'll do that,' but then nothing happens. When will they do something? Will it take a real tragedy to happen for something to change?" (RG2, interview). This sense of neglect is further exemplified by the compelling condition of the four public housing units in La Casita zone, a recurring point of concern for many residents.

Commercial operators in the area echoed these frustrations, emphasizing the lack of sustained support from the city government. One interviewee recounted the efforts of a resident who organized community initiatives to support her neighbors. Despite these efforts, the lack of institutional support and the limited participation of newer residents affected the longevity of such projects. This underlines the broader challenges in fostering collective action and addressing structural inequities, which remain rooted in the area.

Homelessness also plays a significant role in perpetuating vulnerabilities in many neighborhoods in Alicante, as highlighted by members of the local administration. An estimated 300 individuals

in the city lack stable housing, with many displaced to peripheral neighborhoods like Cementerio due to the enforcement of the civic ordinance, commonly referred to as "the shame ordinance." This policy penalizes homeless individuals for sleeping in public spaces within Alicante, but due to uneven presence of law enforcement it mainly covers the city center, effectively pushing them to areas already struggling with systemic neglect. As one representative noted, "homeless people are expelled to neighborhoods and areas like Cementerio" (AG2, interview). This displacement places additional strain on an already vulnerable community and reinforces cycles of marginalization.

The unbalanced presence of law enforcement in the city is noted by the representative of the Asertos program, "the problem is that the biggest difficulty in Cementerio is that the Municipal Police does not go to the area, but only the National Police" (SG1, interview). This absence creates challenges in maintaining order and addressing daily conflicts in the area. The normalization of these conditions was further highlighted by the representative, who remarked, "there are things that if you treat them as normal, they become normal, like that (rubbish issue), and many other things of basic coexistence. I think that is the most different thing that you can find in the cemetery" (SG1, interview). These observations exemplifies how systemic neglect, along with inadequate institutional support, allows inequities to persist and become ingrained in the area's everyday life.

The democratization of these unjust processes, through a combination of policy failures, limited institutional presence, and normalized neglect, further isolates the residents of Cementerio. This systemic exclusion and stigmatization legitimize the challenges they face and perpetuates marginalization. This interplay of factors, illustrates the deep and multifaceted impact of inequities on the community.

6.3. Housing and Structural Challenges in Cementerio

The Cementerio area is an example of persistent housing inequalities, characterized by precarious living conditions and inadequate public housing initiatives. Among the residents interviewed, two individuals shared that they had built their own homes, while another recounted their experience of living in a slum before relocating to the area. These stories highlight the prevalence of substandard housing and the risks faced by those living in such conditions. This is aggravated by a lack of opportunities for self-improvement through skill acquisition or employment. Most respondents expressed openness to learning new skills that could either help them improve their homes or create job opportunities. As one resident noted, "I would like to learn more about construction to fix my own house" (RE5, interview). These

aspirations, however, highlight a systemic gap in access to training and resources, which incite the own bearers to break the cycle of residential precarity with their own hands.

Public housing conditions in the Cementerio area illustrate a more direct manifestation of housing inequality. A striking example is found in La Casita zone, where four municipal housing units, allocated to families over twenty years ago, remain in a state of severe disrepair. Despite municipal promises to evaluate and address the issue, no substantive progress was made in a long time, leading to rising frustration among residents. One authority reflected this sentiment, stating, "A month has passed, we approved urgent intervention, and we still have no response" (AG1, interview). Three of the affected families have already agreed to temporary relocation while awaiting repairs, but delays fueled by bureaucratic inefficiencies leave them in limbo. Many people have concerns with the authorities efficiency, one interviewee voiced sharply "do we have to wait for a disaster to happen?" (AG2, interview). Others just question the awareness of the current local government on the housing problem, "I think they're not aware of the housing problem happening in Alicante" (AG2, interview). This stance is based on the lack of using the available national funds as tools to overcome the issue.

Such challenges in the Cementerio area reflect broader structural issues in Alicante's housing policy. With less than 1% of its housing stock allocated to public housing, the city lays behind the national average of 4% but more significantly when compared with the European average of 9–10%, asserts one authorities representative. Alicante reportedly has over 16,000 vacant homes, yet inefficiencies in bureaucratic processes and a lack of political will have obstructed progress. Further, over 20 vacant public homes remain unutilized and several public housing construction projects have been set aside or delayed. Instead, local authorities have shifted responsibility for addressing the housing crisis to higher levels of government, such as the Valencian Community.

Interviewees emphasized the need for concrete action, such as incentivizing the conversion of vacant homes into affordable housing, or reopening the lists of social housing requesters, the creation of a directive that regulate rental prices, limit the number of vacant properties, or possibly applying taxes or penalties to primarily large property holders, but also medium-small property owners to let them know they are also part of the possible solutions. Several opposition parties' representatives have shown interest in the lack of social housing in Alicante, and a few also in the complex issues of Cementerio. Unfortunately, proposals such as including the Cementerio area's rehabilitation in the city's budget and expanding the public housing stock have been rejected by the finance committee of the ruling political party. Additionally, at the regional level, there is housing law that allows municipalities to declare some of their neighborhoods as "strained areas" to limit rent increases and offers potential solutions but Alicante's authorities have not made use of it yet for unknown reasons.

The allocation of municipal funds shows the systemic neglect of housing issues by the city officials. Currently, only 0.19% of Alicante's budget is directed toward housing, an insufficient amount to address the scale of the problem. The lack of clarity on whether these funds are allocated for new housing developments or rehabilitation projects annoy the issue, leaving residents uncertain about any prospects for improvement. "Housing policy is a low priority for the government," remarked one interviewee (AG2, interview), reflecting the frustration shared by many in the Cementerio area.

Interviewees criticized the commodification of housing, where market forces prioritize profit over the basic needs of residents. This issue is particularly evident in Alicante's reliance on tourism-driven housing investments, which have reshaped the housing market to favor wealthier retirees and foreign investors. Between 1996 and 2006, housing prices in Alicante rose by 344%, significantly outpacing the national average of 280% (Espinosa Seguí et al., 2017). Today, secondary homes account for over 25% of the province's housing stock, with some municipalities surpassing 50%. These trends have reduced the availability of affordable housing for local residents, compounding the challenges faced by vulnerable communities like Cementerio.

Finally, the intersection of housing inequalities and broader social issues is evident in the lived experiences of Cementerio's residents. As one community member reflected, "The majority of people are in a situation of social and residential exclusion, and this exclusion translates into a lack of attention to the public agenda, a lack of basic services" (SG1, interview). This extends beyond housing quality to the absence of equitable access to public spaces and essential infrastructure. Media coverage of evictions in the area further highlights systemic inadequacies in preventing homelessness and addressing the housing needs of marginalized populations (Álvarez, 2023; Maestre, 2023b).

The Cementerio area exemplifies persistent housing inequalities, marked by precarious living conditions and insufficient public housing initiatives. Among the residents interviewed, two individuals shared that they had built their own homes, while another recounted their experience of living in a slum before relocating to the area. These stories highlight the prevalence of substandard housing and the risks posed to those residing in such conditions. This is further compounded by a lack of opportunities for self-improvement through skill acquisition or employment. Most respondents expressed openness to learning new skills that could either improve their homes or create job opportunities. As one resident noted, "I would like to learn more about construction to fix my own house" (RE5, interview). These aspirations, however, underscore a systemic gap in access to training and resources necessary for breaking the cycle of residential precarity.

Public housing conditions in the Cementerio area illustrate a more direct manifestation of housing inequality. A striking example is found in the 'upper zone,' where four municipal housing units, allocated to families over twenty years ago, remain in a state of severe disrepair. Despite municipal promises to evaluate and address the issue, no substantive progress has been made, leading to mounting frustration among residents. One interviewee reflected this sentiment, stating, "A month has passed, we approved urgent intervention, and we still have no response" (AG1, interview). Three of the affected families have already agreed to temporary relocation while they await repairs, but delays fueled by bureaucratic inefficiency leave them in limbo. One interviewee powerfully expressed their concerns: "Do we have to wait for a disaster to happen?" (AG2, interview).

Such challenges in the Cementerio area reflect broader structural issues in Alicante's housing policy. With less than 1% of its housing stock allocated to public housing, the city lags significantly behind the national average of 4% and the European average of 9–10%. Interviewees emphasized the need for concrete action, such as incentivizing the conversion of vacant homes into affordable housing. Alicante reportedly has over 16,000 vacant homes, yet inefficiencies in bureaucratic processes and a lack of political will have obstructed progress. Moreover, existing public housing construction projects and over 20 vacant public homes remain unutilized. Instead, local authorities have shifted responsibility for addressing the housing crisis to higher levels of government, such as the Valencian Community or state authorities.

The allocation of municipal funds further underscores the systemic neglect of housing issues. Currently, only 0.19% of Alicante's budget is directed toward housing, an amount insufficient to address the scale of the problem. The lack of clarity regarding the allocation of these funds, whether for new housing developments or rehabilitation projects, exacerbates the issue, leaving residents uncertain about prospects for improvement. "Housing policy is a low priority for the government," remarked one interviewee (AG2, interview), reflecting the frustration shared by many in the Cementerio area.

At the regional level, the housing law, which allows municipalities to declare 'strained areas' to limit rent increases, offers potential solutions, but remains unenforced in Alicante. Interviewees criticized the commodification of housing, where market forces prioritize profit over the basic needs of residents. This problem is particularly evident in Alicante's reliance on tourism-driven housing investment, which has reshaped the housing market to favor wealthier retirees and foreign investors. Between 1996 and 2006, housing prices in Alicante rose by 344%, significantly outpacing the national average of 280% (Espinosa Seguí et al., 2017). Today, secondary homes account for over 25% of the province's housing stock, with some municipalities surpassing 50%.

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Building on the intersection of housing inequalities and broader social challenges, the sense of belonging in the Cementerio area reveals the social and emotional dimensions of these systemic issues. Beyond the structural deficiencies and lack of basic services, the attachment of the residents to the area reflects a deeper interaction of interpersonal relationships, community dynamics, and historical processes. The lived experiences of Cementerio's residents illustrate how social and familial ties can provide stability in the face of challenging events.

Even when most residents expressed a strong attachment to the Cementerio area, due to their deep social and familial ties, three individuals conveyed a desire to move away, citing limited or strained interactions with their neighbors and dissatisfaction with communal living practices. This disparity highlights how relationships with neighbors significantly influence residents' sense of belonging and their decision to remain in or leave the area. For those with robust community ties, Cementerio provides a sense of stability and connection, whereas for others, the lack of meaningful interactions leads to feelings of detachment.

Community services play a pivotal role in shaping the residents' connection to the area. One resident shared, "they (the FSG) helped me get a forklift license and with unloading and everything. They've always helped me a lot, either to earn a diploma or certificates to help me find a job as well. I'm happy with their work because they are helping a lot of people" (RG1, interview). Additionally, other three respondents expressed seeking their assistance for legal documentation or employment opportunities, expressing gratitude for the organization's support. And while four residents reported never using the FSG services, it was primarily due to a lack of awareness. These services not only address practical needs but also foster a sense of inclusion within the community.

Over time, the social fabric of the Cementerio area has undergone significant changes. Commercial operators, who are not residents of the area, noted a decline in communal activities such as festivals, bonfires, and parades. They attributed this shift to the changing demographic composition of the area and its increasing challenges, including drug-related issues. As one interviewee observed, "Everyone knows what's going on, but no one does anything about it" (CG1, interview). This comment highlights how long-standing problems have been disrupting the communal bonds that once defined the area. Furthermore, the influx of new residents has complicated relationships, introducing a widespread sense of individualism and diminishing collective action, especially remarked when unresolved disputes between neighbors happen, and "everyone has an attitude of 'each one on their own'" (CG1, interview), so the conflicts never get resolved, but postponed.

The historical context of the Cementerio area adds another layer to the analysis of belonging. The area originated in the early twentieth century following the construction of the city's cemetery. Since then, some relocation projects brought individuals from substandard housing conditions in Montoto, within the broader neighborhood of Els Àngels, and other parts of town to the area. Four families were placed in four homes owned by the city hall, that once were for the houses of the municipal cemetery workers, in La Casita zone temporarily almost twenty years ago. This historical neglect and the supposed 'temporary' nature of their placement, first prevented them to develop a sense of belonging, but over the years they have been integrating more.

When asked whether there were any comprehensive initiatives or projects for the intervention of the Cementerio area or for the La Casita zone, interviewees responded negatively. One participant noted, "not only are there none, but we've had to force the government team in some way to intervene and make those four homes habitable because there are real dangers" (AG1, interview). The four municipal-owned properties are in a state of disrepair, which is indicative of the municipality's negligence regarding the Cementerio area. The current administration has disregarded these properties, leaving them in a state of neglect. Local residents have expressed their discontent, stating that these residences have been largely abandoned and are not a priority despite their critical condition and pressing needs.

Administrative processes further complicate residents' connection to the area. A participant shared new updates regarding those four families in La Casita zone, "A couple of weeks ago, the council decided to offer them social housing, somewhat blindly, without giving them much choice in other neighborhoods, in exchange for them leaving the home with the threat that if they didn't leave, they would be evicted anyway and they would be left without a home" (SG1, interview). Such top-down approaches exemplify the lack of meaningful engagement with the

community, as noted by the interviewee "The moment the city council acts, there is no turning back" (SG1, interview). These practices undermine residents' sense of agency and exacerbate feelings of exclusion, as they are subjected to comply with the institutional decisions over them.

Building upon these top-down administrative practices, the Cementerio area of Alicante faces a range of interconnected urban challenges that deepen residents' sense of exclusion. Rooted in infrastructural inadequacies and systemic issues such as housing commodification, rising touristification, and persistent administrative neglect, these challenges further erode the community's ability to thrive. Limited access to basic services, exacerbated by these broader structural inequalities, further exacerbates the social and economic vulnerability of the area's residents.

A persistent problem in the area is the limited availability and poor connectivity of public transportation, which exacerbates residents' isolation from the city center and essential services. Only two respondents reported complete reliance on public transportation for daily tasks and emergencies. While some residents use private vehicles or rely on family or friends for transportation, several expressed dissatisfaction with the single bus line serving the area.

They mentioned infrequent service, poor connectivity with other neighborhoods, and prolonged travel times as significant obstacles. This lack of mobility reinforces the area's physical and social disconnection from the broader urban environment. Similarly, the high-speed traffic along key roads such as Vial de los Cipreses and Carrer Riu Turia poses safety concerns, especially for families with children, as noted by representatives of the FSG. Even among the foundation workers, reliance on private transport or carpooling highlights the inadequacy of the area's public transit infrastructure.

While security in the Cementerio area has improved over time, past incidents of minor thefts and drug activity have contributed to a lingering perception of vulnerability and marginalization. Commercial operators recalled increased police patrols in response to these issues, which created tension among local business owners and workers. Although these activities have subsided, the association of the area with crime persists, perpetuating its stigmatization. The persistence of informal behaviors, such as scrap metal cleanup on streets, is seen as normalized in the absence of adequate municipal regulation and enforcement.

At the broader level, interviewees emphasized that housing accessibility is the most pressing economic and social challenge facing Alicante. The city's most critical issue at the moment is the accessibility to housing, one participant referred to it as "the first economic and social emergency of the city" (AG2, interview), and unless there is a change in approach, the problem

will only worsen over time. This sentiment exposes the intersection of inadequate housing policies and the deepening crisis for vulnerable communities such as those in Cementerio.

Housing commodification has emerged as a critical dimension of urban challenges in Alicante, affecting residents of the Cementerio area. In interviews, participants reflected on the dehumanization of the rental process and highlighted the unchecked increase in rental prices, driven by landlords prioritizing profit over tenants' rights in other parts of the city. Cases of evictions without late payments or violations emphasize the systemic neglect of housing as a fundamental right. As one interviewee noted "Landlords prefer to throw a family out on the street, even if there are no nonpayments, because they want to earn a few more euros a month" (AG2, interview). Moreover, financial institutions' reluctance to provide surety bonds to low-income individuals, compounded by the practice of selling properties to investment funds, has further entrenched housing inequalities, leaving numerous residents with limited access to secure housing options. This lack of empathy within the housing market raises broader questions of social responsibility and societal priorities, prompting another reflection: "As a society, we should ask ourselves, where are we heading?" (AG2, interview).

Another major factor contributing to these inequalities is the touristification process the city is undertaking. With over 38,000 tourist rentals, Alicante has become increasingly inaccessible to its local population. The local administration expressed that the higher purchasing power of tourists has led to an increase in rental prices, mostly in the center of the city, often displacing long-term residents to the peripheral neighborhoods in favor of short-term tourist stays. Property owners now prioritize renting to tourists, given the economic profitability of this market. One interviewee reflected, "a completely dual city is being created: a city for tourists in the San Juan beach area, where certain parts of the city are maintained, and another city where most neighborhoods and districts are forgotten and neglected by the administration" (AG1, interview). This phenomenon intensifies social inequalities and underscores the urgent need for housing policy reforms to balance the interests of residents and tourism-driven economic benefits.

Despite these pressing issues, municipal initiatives to address the housing crisis in Cementerio remain minimal. Interviewees noted a lack of comprehensive intervention plans, with some municipal actions limited to superficial improvements like painting houses (Alicante Al Día, 2018b). These small-scale efforts fail to address structural issues such as inadequate sanitation, road maintenance, and the lack of public amenities, fueling community discontent. As reported in local media, the €10,000 investment allocated for infrastructure upgrades in the Cementerio area was widely criticized for its limited impact, emphasizing the broader neglect of the area's complex needs (Concejalía de Acción Social et al., 2018).

The lack of political will and bureaucratic inefficiency further frustrate progress in the area. For instance, despite proposals from opposition parties to increase public housing stock and rehabilitate the Cementerio area, such initiatives have been routinely rejected by the ruling political party's finance committee. The absence of a clear urban regeneration plan since the approval of the General Plan of Alicante in 1987 highlights a systemic failure in planning the urban development of the area. As one participant stated, "that is precisely the great challenge, that the City Council does not clearly state what it wants to do with the neighbourhood" (SG1, interview). This neglect perpetuates inequality and marginalization, leaving residents in a cycle of poverty and exclusion.

In conclusion, the Cementerio area serves as a clear example of how systemic neglect, housing commodification, and urban challenges converge to perpetuate cycles of exclusion and inequality. The difficult living conditions experienced by residents, made worse by a lack of affordable public housing and ineffective government action, show that we need fair housing policies.Systemic problems, like touristification and gentrification, make these challenges worse. These problems focus on making money instead of helping vulnerable communities.

To address these challenges, we need a variety of solutions. These solutions must address the immediate needs of residents. Some of these needs are improved infrastructure and access to affordable housing. Other solutions must also make big changes to the way we think about and treat housing. Moreover, fostering a stronger sense of belonging and community cohesion in Cementerio is essential to creating a sustainable path forward. By prioritizing inclusion, equity, and sustained investment, policymakers can begin to challenge the barriers that continue to isolate and marginalize this area.

6.4.   The Role of Asertos in Addressing Social and Spatial Inequalities

Arquitectura Sin Fronteras España (ASFE), an NGO committed to achieving social transformation through universal access to decent housing, plays a crucial role in addressing housing inequalities in Alicante. Through the Asertos program, ASFE works with the autonomous coordination of Levante, which includes Alicante. They believe that neighborhoods are the best place to create new ideas and drive social innovation. Through this lens, ASFE and Asertos provide support to individuals and groups living in vulnerable neighborhoods, fostering community urban regeneration by integrating participatory planning with activities designed to improve housing and community development.

The Asertos methodology for community development is structured into three stages: Discover, Connect, and Mobilize. The discovery phase stresses on the identification of shared needs to connect and mobilise these resources. This phase is further subdivided between the Search, understanding the neighborhood within the city, the Feel, mapping space to reveal potential and the Empathize part, which is learning about the residents' lived experiences. The Connect stage is based on the methodology of Asset-Based Community Development, which intends the creation of a Neighbourhood Resource Bank from the local resources the community has, such as skills, passions, interests, etc. Lastly, in the Mobilise stage, spatial transformation projects are put at the service of the community, community-based urban regeneration, so the resources dedicated to improving housing and common spaces also serve to strengthen the social cohesion of the community. These stages create a foundation for meaningful engagement, connecting with residents, and mobilizing neighborhood resources, both material and human, to drive sustainable regeneration efforts, while fostering their empowerment and autonomy.

Asertos has operationalized the concept of "community regeneration of vulnerable neighborhoods" into five core activities that blend architectural and urban planning services with community development goals. These activities include socio-spatial stays, participatory workshops and assemblies, accompaniment for good living (focused on transforming habitats to improve well-being), training programs, and community events (SG1, interview).

First, the socio-spatial stays involve weekly visits of the multidisciplinary Asertos team to designated community spaces within the Cementerio area. During these sessions, residents are invited to share issues related to their living space, such as housing problems, public facilities, and street conditions (Asertos, n.d.). Once the issues are identified, these insights are gathered in the Resource Bank, which maps local strengths and challenges, and serves as the foundation for future interventions.

Further, the Resource Bank itself is divided into two key components: the directory and the movement of resources. The directory collects detailed information about residents' skills, preferences, and social networks, while the movement of resources monitors community support activities, such as assisting neighbors with repairs or participating in neighborhood improvement initiatives. A reciprocal system ensures that residents contribute back to the community, often through activities like teaching workshops, street cleaning, or sharing skills, thereby fostering a sense of mutual support.

Second, the participatory workshops and assemblies function as associative activities that bring together neighbors and volunteers to, in collaboration, transform or maintain the communal spaces of the area (Asertos, n.d.). These events serve as a space for exchanging knowledge and

culture, as well as forging the identity and future of the area, while promoting social cohesion by the mobilization of local assets, allowing the residents to shape their environment.

Third, the accompaniments for a good living offer structured and continuous residential support to the residents. This process begins with a comprehensive diagnosis and survey of each family's home, called the Housing Census, followed by the development of targeted projects to improve living conditions, and concludes with the establishment of an architectural and legal itinerary to regularize each residential situation (Asertos, n.d.). This approach integrates the search for external resources with local exchanges to ensure a continuous improvement process.

The Housing Census exemplifies Asertos' commitment to improving residential conditions. This initiative involved visiting each home to assess structural issues such as moisture, mold, leaks, and lack of natural light, while also documenting the residents' experiences. The census not only evaluated physical conditions but also gathered demographic data, including the number of residents, their ages, and whether they had disabilities. Using these results, Asertos developed a vulnerability score for each household, which was cross-referenced with their Resource Bank. This tool tracks community participation and serves as a guide for prioritizing interventions.

Fourth, the training programs are aimed at enhancing social and labor integration. In partnership with local construction companies, the NGO holds 'learning by doing' sessions that provide training in construction techniques, such as plastering, roof rehabilitation, and sustainable building practices (Asertos, n.d.). These sessions are designed to empower residents by equipping them with practical skills that can improve their employment prospects and contribute to the maintenance of their own homes.

Finally, community events serve as assembly spaces for collective decision-making. These events, which typically involve groups between 10 to 20 residents and professionals, employ 'Manual Design' methodologies that combine discussions, drawings, and models to inspire creative urban transformation projects (Asertos, n.d.). Such workshops not only foster the development of shared visions for the neighborhood but also promote inclusion and pave the way for sustainable community-led initiatives.

Together, these initiatives create a comprehensive framework for addressing multidimensional challenges in vulnerable areas, and highlights Asertos' commitment to fostering empowerment and participation in the Cementerio area. By building on existing local resources and strengthening social cohesion, the program aims to transform both the physical and social fabric of the area. My internship with Asertos from March to May 2024 provided insight into these dynamics, and highlighted the critical role that participatory interventions play in addressing urban poverty and marginalization.

In the Cementerio area, Asertos has also prioritized the revitalization of public spaces as a means of fostering social cohesion and creating opportunities for community interaction. Public space interventions are co-designed with residents to ensure alignment with their needs and aspirations. Successful projects, since 2019, in Cementerio include the creation of the Sol-Florida playground, a shaded meeting area, a communal shed, and the two flagship projects being the community garden in the Barrio Abajo and a football field in Barrio del Cura. These spaces serve as hubs for interaction, leisure, and community building.

Furthermore, Asertos has supported initiatives such as mural projects since 2019, which have transformed public spaces into vibrant, colorful environments, countering the stigma associated with the area and instilling a sense of pride among residents (Rodríguez, 2023). Similarly, in 2022 the construction of pergolas in Barrio Arriba highlights Asertos' commitment to enhancing urban spaces while actively involving the local community (Cortés, 2022; Hernández, 2022), see Figure 25.

Figure 25. *Community projects in the Cementerio area.*

Note. (left) Mural in the Carrer San Pedro Alcantara in Barrio de Abajo, (top right) Pérgolas in Barrio Arriba and (bottom right) Community garden in Barrio de Abajo. Retrieved from the Asertos program photos archive.

In their efforts to address systemic challenges, Asertos has established partnerships with academic institutions like the Universidad de Alicante, which has provided interns to support Asertos' initiatives, and secured grants from the Generalitat Valenciana, especially targeted on areas such as social housing cooperatives and the regeneration of abandoned spaces. The

organization is also exploring opportunities and partners to offer residents skills training that could enhance their employability.

Beyond partnerships, Asertos facilitates communal activities such as neighborhood cleaning drives, housing rehabilitation projects, and workshops on skills like sewing and bracelet making, see Figure 26. These activities not only improve the physical environment but also strengthen social bonds within the community.

Figure 26. *Communal activities in the Cementerio area.*

Note. (left) Cleaning drives, (Center) Housing rehabilitation, and (right) basketry workshops. Retrieved from the Asertos program photos archive.

In contrast to the stigma associated with Cementerio and its residents, Asertos views the area as both a space of vulnerability, but also a space of opportunity, as their representative reflected, "If you ask me one word, I would say opportunity" (SG1, interview). However, this sense of opportunity exists alongside the acknowledgment of "normalized vulnerability in the Cementerio" (SG1, interview), highlighting the systemic challenges faced by its residents. Asertos approaches these challenges through a multidimensional framework, primarily focusing on the residential dimension while inevitably addressing the social and economic dimensions as well. This approach has been exemplified in their work on public spaces such as Jardines del Cura and Sol Florida Street, which include a community garden and a children's park, two key areas of activity that aim to foster social cohesion and improve the quality of life for residents.

The impact of Asertos' initiatives is evident in the perspectives of residents. Nine out of eleven interviewed residents reported participating in activities organized by Asertos, with many expressing interest in continuing their involvement. One resident noted that their participation was initially due to fulfilling social work hours but later found activities that personally resonated

with them. However, two residents highlighted barriers to participation, suggesting that more personalized outreach efforts could improve engagement.

Residents also recognized the tangible benefits of Asertos' work. One interviewee reflected, "Before, there was nothing, and now there are projects to fix houses and create spaces for children. Before, kids played in the dirt, in whichever lot. Mothers had nowhere to take the younger children" (RE1, interview). Such feedback underscores the transformative impact of Asertos' initiatives on both the physical environment and residents' quality of life.

Despite its successes, Asertos faces significant challenges in addressing the systemic inequalities affecting the Cementerio area. For instance, during my internship with Asertos, the organization assisted residents in obtaining title deeds for their homes. One requirement was to connect houses to the electrical grid, a costly endeavor for residents. While brainstorming solutions, Asertos explored ideas ranging from advocating for reduced differential service fees to researching energy community policies. This example illustrates how the organization navigates the limitations of its resources while seeking long-term solutions for residents' basic needs.

As one participant observed, "The fact that the majority of people are in a situation of social and residential exclusion means that fewer rights are covered at an institutional level. It's not just that the houses are in poor condition, but also that attention to quality public spaces is fulfilled in a very unequal way depending on the part of the city" (SG1, interview). This statement encapsulates the broader challenges Asertos faces in its mission to promote equitable urban regeneration.

Asertos' approach to promoting a more equitable Cementerio area is to foster empowerment and participation, deeply rooted in the principles of asset-based community development. This framework emphasizes citizen leadership within a specific territory by focusing on local resources, building relationships, and prioritizing inclusion. Affirmative actions bring the invisible into view, using asset mapping to identify key individuals, facilitate exchanges, and allow constructive conversations to happen (Millor Vela, 2022a). Such efforts progressively build narratives that strengthen the community's identity and resilience.

Those are the principles of Asertos' practices, meaning that community engagement is not constrained to abstract planning but also influences actionable initiatives. The organization facilitates moments for collective decision-making, through assembly-style gatherings, which sometimes turn into rehabilitation projects. By integrating project-based work with social-labor and community support, Asertos optimizes existing resources to enhance the immediate environment while simultaneously fostering social cohesion (Millor Vela, 2022a). These

initiatives, from housing improvements to communal spaces, exemplify how economic, material, and social resources can be harmonized to achieve tangible and sustainable outcomes.

Millor Vela (2022a) exposes that the results of such collaborations are often manifested as activities, events, or urban transformations, all of which prioritize opportunities for relationship-building. These projects demonstrate the potential of participatory urban regeneration to strengthen ties among residents. Cooperative models provide long-term scenarios for fostering participation and ensuring the sustainability of interventions, aligning with the belief that meaningful change must begin at the local level (Millor Vela, 2022a).

My internship experience with Asertos provided firsthand insights into these participatory efforts. During this period, I engaged with residents by conducting interviews to the participants interested to take part in the resource bank, measuring homes for improvement projects, maintenance works in the urban garden, and other workshops. These workshops included building wooden furniture, creating planters for communal areas, and constructing a pergola for a shaded space near the football field, see Figure 27. These activities were carried out alongside residents, volunteers, school students, and the Asertos staff, and relied on materials donated by the community. This hands-on involvement exemplified how participatory initiatives could transform underutilized spaces into vibrant, functional areas.

Figure 27. *Residents, volunteers and the Asertos staff during one participatory workshop.*

Note. Own work.

As emerged during the interviews, the residents themselves have noted the importance of these projects, particularly their role in addressing urgent needs within the community. Overall, there is a common feeling of gratitude with the NGO for taking care of the area's necessities. Nevertheless, others emphasized the need for sustained maintenance efforts led by the residents themselves, criticizing the lack of unity between the families to keep such efforts going and

prevent decay. There is also a desire for workshops that go beyond communal building to include skill development for employment opportunities, reflecting the community's broader aspirations for socioeconomic mobility.

When asking the interviewed residents about their willingness to participate in activities aimed at improving the area, many expressed openness but underscored limitations related to time, resources, or specific interests. While most respondents showed interest in participating, only three identified specific people they would like to collaborate with, such as family members or close friends. This indicates a significant challenge in translating intent into concrete action plans, suggesting a need for targeted strategies to build a broader collective action within the area.

Asertos' strategy prioritizes empowering residents to advocate for their rights and take an active role in community decision-making. This approach emphasizes the importance of not only improving physical infrastructure but also supporting the political organization of neighborhood groups. By fostering functional and well-structured groups, Asertos enables residents to engage more effectively with local authorities and demand the resources and recognition they deserve. As one interviewee noted, the focus extends beyond spaces to the people who inhabit them, as strengthening social bonds is integral to lasting community transformation, "it is much more important to support groups than spaces" (SG1, interview).

Asertos has also acknowledged the significance of maintaining a balanced approach to its work. While the organization plays a critical role in initiating change, it remains committed to ensuring that residents take the lead in driving change. This careful balance between guidance and community ownership is essential for fostering sustainable progress. The Asertos representative reflected on this dynamic, "it is a challenge because many times you want to go faster and it is very difficult to realize that you are making a mistake" (SG1, interview).

Another aspect of Asertos' methodology involves recognizing and leveraging the social structures within the Cementerio area. The organization has noted that the area is often divided by family groups, which roughly align with its distinct zones. Identifying key 'activist' residents who serve as informal leaders within these groups has been instrumental in implementing successful projects. Such 'activists', as described by Pereira and Queirós (2014), are essential for mobilizing collective action and ensuring that interventions address both material and symbolic needs.

The recognition of these efforts has extended beyond the local context. For instance, Daniel Millor's, head of Asertos, acknowledgment at the Princess of Girona awards not only highlighted the challenges faced by the Cementerio area but also served as a platform to amplify the

community's resilience and ongoing efforts. This visibility reinforces the importance of participatory approaches in addressing systemic challenges and empowering marginalized communities (Ferrándiz, 2024).

In the process to overcome the many challenges, the residents of the Cementerio area acknowledge some of their limitations, such as the need for further assistance to improve their environment, emphasizing the importance of external support and internal collaboration. Many interviewees expressed a desire for greater involvement from the Alicante City Council, highlighting the lack of visible action by authorities. As one resident remarked, "We don't feel them," referring to the absence of meaningful engagement from local officials (RE5, interview). However, the residents also recognized their own role in fostering change, with comments like "There's a lot that needs improvement, and much of it has to come from us" (RE3, interview) capturing the general sentiment of a fragmented sense of community .

Moreover, Asertos has shared the biggest challenge they face in their work, often reflecting on the core strategies required for effective community development. Their main strategy is to rigorously follow the methodology of discovering, connecting, and mobilizing neighborhood resources. This approach makes sure that their efforts, whether focused on urban gardens or housing rehabilitation, stay aligned with their ultimate goal of empowering residents.

However, maintaining this focus is not without its challenges. Limited funding and the need for a consistent presence in the area often strain Asertos' capacity. As one representative noted, the challenge is to balance the visible impact of their work with the need to sustain long-term efforts, "How do you manage to have a constant presence in the neighborhoods and not falter... all that is very complicated" (SG1, interview). While their housing initiatives have undeniably improved living conditions for many residents, questions remain about their success in fostering broader social cohesion. "To what extent have we, the program, been able to generate social cohesion? That is where I have the most doubts," one Asertos representative admitted, underscoring the need for more time and refined strategies (SG1, interview).

The most obvious limitation is the urgency of responding to unforeseen emergencies, as it constrains the Asertos' ability to adopt a more holistic approach to community development. This constant exposure to crises diverts attention from long-term goals, hindering their ability to fully implement strategies that could lead to sustained change (SG1, interview). Additionally, cultural challenges, such as the 'welfare mindset' among some residents, create further complications. Despite Asertos' clear messaging, their role is often perceived as that of a service provider, a perception that can undermine their goal to foster empowerment (SG1, interview).

Moreover, the FSG is another stakeholder with significant impact in the Cementerio area, but Asertos calls for better coordination and adaptation to the area's informal dynamics. The Asertos' representative reflected on the FSG role in the area, stating "I think that in the neighborhood it would be better to have more networked work and more adapted to informality (...) but the truth is that they do a good job of accompanying the children, though we have not managed to generate alliances with the rest of the things that we do" (SG1, interview).

Other stakeholders working in the area are the education centers located in its vicinity. Highlighting the role of schools like the Nazaret School, the CIP Ciudad de Asís, and the Figueres Pacheco Institute. In addition to these schools, other organizations, such as the Red Cross, also provide sporadic courses to support youth in the area (SG1, interview). Employment-related initiatives, such as socio-labor support courses run by the Red Cross, aim to improve access to the labor market, though Asertos noted these programs tend to take a service-focused approach (SG1, interview). The media highlights the efforts of the Red Cross in fostering youth inclusion through workshops and labor training programs, which aim to break cycles of exclusion and provide participants with essential skills (Alicante Al Día, 2021a).

Additionally, Asociación Lozana has contributed, providing systemic psychosocial support to students both in schools and their homes, while Fundación Nova Feina assists residents with job searches. Additionally, Philias, a subcontracted organization, focuses on community development and offers support in building collective capacity within the Cementerio area (SG1, interview).

The FSG also plays a role in supporting Cementerio's development. Although no residents are employed directly by the foundation, they have received support from two residents, who have occasionally volunteered and worked on some specific cleanup duties. In addition, Alicante City Council has allocated funds to FSG to finance vocational training programs and promote the integration of Cementerio residents into the labor market, thereby addressing critical risks of social exclusion (Alicante Al Día, 2021b; Alicante Al Día, 2021c). Furthermore, a €100.000 allocation by the City Council to support associations in the North Zone, including the FSG, emphasizes the city's commitment to aiding marginalized areas like Cementerio. This funding facilitates community support and assistance, improving the quality of life for residents (Alicante Al Día, 2020).

Beyond education and employment, other citywide organizations also engage with housing-related issues, as noted by interviewees from the local administration. For example, the Sindicato del Barrio Carolinas (Carolinas' Neighborhood Union) addresses the impacts of touristification and gentrification in the Carolines neighborhood. While the Plataforma Antidesahucios (Anti-Eviction Platform) seeks collective solutions to housing shortages and

excessive rent increases. These organizations operate outside Cementerio but tackle broader systemic issues affecting vulnerable populations, including those in this area.

In conclusion, this section illustrated how Asertos has employed participatory methods to empower the residents of the Cementerio area. By integrating infrastructural improvements with initiatives aimed at fostering social and political organization, the NGO has adopted a holistic approach to urban regeneration that fosters equity and sustainability. This comprehensive strategy not only addresses immediate material needs but also enhances the community's capacity to advocate for their rights and actively participate in shaping their environment.

However, it is also acknowledged the need for a multidisciplinary approach to overcome the existing limitations in the Asertos' work. The absence of diverse expertise within their team presents a significant challenge to reimagining and refining their strategies in neighborhoods like Cementerio. As one representative highlighted, "More people with other skills are needed to be able to think differently about work in neighborhoods" (SG1, interview). While Asertos continues to address these gaps, these limitations highlight the complexity of fostering sustainable change in socially and economically vulnerable communities. Nonetheless, their ongoing efforts remain a vital component in the broader mission to support and empower the residents of Cementerio.

7. Conclusions

In addressing the research questions, this study set out to explore two key issues: first, how the media's portrayal of the Cementerio area residents influences their image both externally in the general society and internally within the community, and second, the role of the NGO Asertos in mitigating material scarcity and overcoming stigma, as well as the limitations it faces in its future projects. Data was collected through interviews, media analysis, and participant observations conducted during my internship with Asertos between March and May 2024. This mixed-method approach allowed a comprehensive examination of the various dynamics at play in the Cementerio area.

During my internship, I had the opportunity to engage directly with residents, local stakeholders, among other actors, which provided me with a deep understanding of the lived experiences in the Cementerio area. By actively participating in Asertos' community activities and gathering first hand insights, I was able to observe how participatory methods are used to empower the residents and promote urban regeneration. These experiences highlighted the importance of integrating community-driven approaches into urban policy frameworks to contribute to the broader discourse on social inclusion and urban regeneration.

This research has shown that the residents of the Cementerio area face multiple disadvantages, including substandard living conditions, low income, unemployment, and limited access to healthcare, education, culture, and recreation, aligned with the European Commission's (2003) definition of poverty. The lack of essential services, discriminatory practices, limited opportunities, and exclusion from decision-making processes contribute to a pervasive sense of powerlessness among residents. This sense of invisibility to authorities and restricted access to

social networks reflects their deep level of social exclusion. Matching Silver & Miller's (2003) dynamic and processual understanding of social exclusion, the evolving circumstances of the Cementerio area have only aggravated the issue. However, the processual nature of exclusion also leaves room for positive change, presenting opportunities to overturn stigma and enable residents to fully participate in society, enjoy standard living conditions, along with social inclusion as defined by the EC (2003).

The majority of Cementerio residents belong to an ethnic minority, as the Roma community, are people with limited economic resources or education, unemployed, and have large families, which complies with the groups Azmat (2020) describes as the most affected by social exclusion. Addressing their disadvantages is essential to ensuring a decent quality of life, and the interconnected nature of these challenges demands integral interventions, as exposed by Shrestha (2021). Efforts to assist the area currently focus predominantly on improving residents' employability through educational workshops, a type of support that many residents have expressed a desire to expand. However, these efforts must also address other dimensions of exclusion and disadvantage.

Local authorities frequently reference issues such as high unemployment rates, inadequate housing policies, and the marginality of the Cementerio area in their discourse. However, their approach largely focuses on the economic dimension of poverty, following a 'money-metric' perspective. While addressing financial capital is necessary, Sylva (2021) highlights the importance of also considering environmental and social dimensions of poverty. In the Cementerio area, this could involve tackling visible issues such as waste accumulation while addressing broader structural discrimination and inequalities, both at the city level and within institutional practices.

Asertos' methodology, rooted in community planning, adopts a participatory approach to decision-making that targets the social dimensions of poverty. By fostering social capital, the organization strengthens the financial, physical, and human forms of capital in line with Azmat's (2020) framework. While residents have expressed appreciation for Asertos' impact, the NGO's size limits its reach compared to the influence of the local government. The residents of Cementerio would benefit greatly from participatory processes implemented at the citywide level that would allow them to be included in broader urban decision-making. Such initiatives could not only improve their living conditions but also rebuild trust in the authorities, which has weakened after years of neglect.

The vulnerability experienced by the Cementerio residents is a result of historical, political, and cultural processes. As argued by the WHO (2022), its prolonged exposure to poor living

conditions, systemic disadvantages, and political neglect has, in fact, entrenched their precarious situation. Alguacil Gómez et al. (2014) identify additional aggravating factors, such as prejudice, noise pollution, contamination, crime, isolation from urban services, and the absence of green spaces, all of which are evident in the Cementerio area. To reduce vulnerability, poverty must be addressed comprehensively and from multiple perspectives, fostering partnerships between local governments, private companies, stakeholders, and civil society. This remains a challenge for the area, where the only notable partnership to date has been between the residents and Asertos. Expanding collaborative efforts is crucial for addressing the systemic disadvantages faced by this marginalized community.

Moreover, the process of social exclusion experienced in the Cementerio area has fostered generalized stereotypes and stigmas that disproportionately impact its residents. These stereotypes often relate to their ethnic background, associations with crime, and interpretations of their living conditions and marginalization. Such narratives serve as tools to discriminate against the residents, legitimizing their exclusion and reinforcing existing power dynamics and social inequalities, as argued by Goffman (1963) and Link & Phelan (2001).

A clear manifestation of symbolic violence, as theorized by Bourdieu (1979; 1993b), was evident during a protest held by Cementerio residents against an authority-led relocation program. The residents advocated for infrastructure improvements throughout the area, yet the authorities used their symbolic power to frame the protest in the media as an act of racism, shifting the narrative against the residents. This manipulation not only debilitated the residents' demands but also added to the stigmas already associated with them.

Just as exposed by Wacquant (2007), territorial stigmatization is legitimized by the media discourse. It consequently happened in the Cementerio area, where its residents were already associated with negative attributes, such as crime and marginalization, to include accusations of racism. This stigmatization, unjustly linked to the geographic area, became a marker for all Cementerio residents, affecting their collective identity and perpetuating exclusion.

Moreover, the 'democratization' of such stigmas, as theorized by Wacquant et al. (2014), has painted the Cementerio area as a 'vector of social disintegration.' Journalists and politicians perpetuate the image of the area as irreparable, intensifying its marginalization. However, these stigmas are not static. Their dynamic nature suggests that over time, with targeted efforts, the negative attributes could be countered and even reversed, allowing the area and its residents to reclaim their social standing.

Having done my internship with the Asertos program, under the NGO of ASFE, in the Cementerio area helped to directly get useful observations into these dynamics. Collecting information

directly from residents and interviewing various stakeholders with different levels of involvement revealed the multifaceted ways residents cope with stigma. Newer residents often withdraw from public life and think about moving away to escape the negative reputation of the area. Others try to validate their experiences by creating small differences between the different parts of the area. Some residents, however, reject the negative reputation completely. They are passionate about defending and improving Cementerio and are working to change the negative ideas associated with it.

These resistant individuals align with Krase's (1977) concept of 'activists,' whose potential Asertos has recognized and nurtured. By partnering with these residents, Asertos provides resources and support to mobilize collective action. Together, they work to improve both the material and symbolic conditions of the area. This partnership highlights the importance of community power in addressing territorial stigmatization and fostering long-term regeneration.

Moreover, the residents of Cementerio have long been subjected to systemic housing inequalities, including experiences of homelessness, elevated rental prices, evictions, and the impacts of gentrification in Alicante's urban core. A significant contributing factor is the commodification of housing in an increasingly touristic city. This phenomenon manifests in a high number of vacant housing units and dehumanizing evictions, often targeting tenants with no history of nonpayment, solely to re-rent properties at higher rates. This trend is further intensified by landlords prioritizing short-term rentals over providing stable housing for families living in the city. While this phenomenon is mainly happening in the center of Alicante, it ends up displacing the most disadvantaged groups to peripheral areas of the city, like Cementerio.

Homelessness, housing unaffordability, and limited access to basic services characterize the experiences of many Cementerio residents before arriving in the area. The city council has implemented initiatives to address disadvantaged neighborhoods and slums in various parts of Alicante, yet these efforts often fall short. While some families were relocated, others simply moved on their own, maintaining their poor living conditions. Sadly, the Cementerio area has not been considered in such plans since 1991 when in the 2001 census of vulnerable neighborhoods update, Cementerio was subtracted from the study areas of the plan.

A stark example is seen in the case of four families residing in social housing in the La Casita zone. These families lived in "temporary" housing for over two decades, a prolonged state of uncertainty that inhibited their ability to establish social connections or improve the deteriorating conditions of their units. The ever-present fear of eviction undermined their sense of belonging to Cementerio. After significant media coverage, the city hall finally decided to relocate these families. However, this was described as a "rather violent process (...) that is quite

characteristic of the city council, which is to do everything in a unidirectional way and without considering the people" (SG1, interview). Families were offered preselected housing units without meaningful consultation, leaving them with little power in the decision process to pick their own home and no option to remain in their previous ones.

As UN-HABITAT (2014) outlines, providing adequate housing should be central to economic development. However, both Alicante and Spain as a whole have failed to prioritize affordable housing. Compared to the EU median, Spain has a significantly lower stock of social housing units and insufficient funding directed toward addressing this shortfall (Gibb, 2001; OECD, 2024). While some local representatives in opposition parties have raised concerns about the housing crisis and advocated for new projects, their efforts have been hampered by the slow pace of implementation and the lack of ambition in proposed solutions. One interviewee aptly summarized this sentiment: "I think they're not aware of the housing problem happening in Alicante" (AG2, interview).

The concepts of the right to the city by Harvey (2015) and the just city by Fainstein (2014) are essential in advocating for the inclusion of underrepresented and disadvantaged groups in democratic decision-making processes. Their frameworks stress the importance of involving marginalized populations to prevent urban programs from displacing the poor or creating new problems, as has often been the case with relocation initiatives in the city. The Alicante city council has faced frequent criticism for its top-down approach to urban design solutions, which often fails to account for the social impact of its policies.

In the context of the Cementerio area, this top-down planning approach has often taken a more passive form, as it has been overlooked altogether. Many urban plans have neglected its existence entirely, perpetuating inequality by allocating minimal funds to areas that, paradoxically, intend to address inequalities. This systemic neglect highlights the limitations of centralized urban planning approaches in addressing the needs of marginalized communities.

In response to this structural gap, the Asertos program has adopted a bottom-up approach to urban regeneration in the Cementerio area. Through participatory methods, the NGO is still working on the empowerment of the residents to claim their tools to shape their urban environment. As Perkins (2010) and Gregorio Hurtado (2020) emphasize, empowerment is a critical tool for achieving durable transformation, fostering local capacity to collectively face future challenges. By engaging the community in this dynamic process, Asertos encourages participation toward the shared goal of improving the area, while also building resilience.

Asertos acknowledges that empowerment is an incremental process and cannot be achieved overnight. Reflecting on their social impact, an Asertos representative remarked, 'that's where I

question myself the most. To what extent have we, the program, been able to generate social cohesion? That is where I have the most doubts. If coexistence is better, if there is more understanding, more collaboration. I think to achieve that, we haven't had enough time' (SG1, interview). This recognition highlights the challenges of fostering cohesion in a community that has long been neglected.

The Asertos methodology centers on building community, a strategy that has proven socially sustainable over time. This approach avoids creating a state of dependency, where the NGO is seen as a provider, and instead positions Asertos as an intermediary facilitating empowerment. Crucially, their process is grounded in 'finding out what the people are trying to do and help them to do it better' through community assemblies and co-design sessions. Unlike many traditional frameworks, Asertos does not treat residents as co-implementers of predetermined ideas but as co-creators and mediators between experts and the community (Schumacher, 1961; Voorberg et al., 2015; Millor Vela, 2022b; Pavani, 2024).

From this research, it becomes evident that while the role of the NGO in addressing issues caused by local authorities' neglect has been vital, the root problem must be addressed. To build more sustainable societies, the participatory methods employed by Asertos should be institutionalized. The empowerment of communities and the adoption of participatory approaches should not remain the exclusive domain of NGOs in Alicante, but should be integrated into the practices of local authorities. A bottom-linked approach, as exposed by Ganugi & Prandini (2023) and Pavani (2024), proposes the institutionalization of participatory initiatives, demonstrating a genuine commitment on the part of institutions to consider citizens' demands.

In the case of Alicante, where authorities often overlook vulnerable areas like Cementerio, this method offers a more effective solution. Participatory planning ensures that the appeals and needs of marginalized communities are no longer perceived as obstacles to unilaterally decided plans but are instead integral to the development process. Through this institutionalized approach, long-term social cohesion can be fostered, empowering residents to take an active role in shaping their future.

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Annexes
Preguntas de la Entrevista para los Representantes de los **Residentes**

Nombre: _____

Edad: _____ Género: _____ Etnia: _____

Gracias por la reunión

Presentarme, mi tema de investigación y el objetivo de la entrevista

Pedir permiso para grabar la conversación y entregar el formulario de privacidad firmado

A. ¿Cuánto tiempo llevas viviendo en este barrio?

B. ¿Dónde vivías antes? ¿Por qué te mudaste?

C. ¿Te gustaría mudarte a otro lugar o prefieres quedarte aquí? ¿Por qué?

D. ¿Podrías darme una palabra que describa tu opinión sobre este barrio?

    a. Ahora, descríbelo en términos generales. ¿Cómo son las personas, la comunidad, el espacio físico, etc.?

E. Sé que este barrio a veces se percibe como problemático debido a diferentes problemas, ¿qué piensas tú?

F. ¿Sientes alguna diferencia entre la parte de arriba y la de abajo del barrio? ¿Podrías describirlas?

G. Me han dicho que algunas instalaciones como escuelas, tiendas de comestibles y hospitales no están muy cerca. ¿Cómo te desplazas hasta allí (autobús, coche propio, familia)?

H. ¿A qué te dedicas (trabajo, estudios, trabajos ocasionales)? ¿Dónde? ¿Te gusta?

I. ¿Te gustaría trabajar o estudiar en algo diferente?

J. ¿Estás buscando trabajo? ¿Cómo te está yendo?

    a. Si es difícil, ¿Cuál dirías que es el problema (a nivel nacional, local o personal)?

K. ¿Te han afectado los precios de la vivienda/alquiler en la ciudad? ¿Podrías mencionarme otros problemas en la ciudad? ¿Hay problemas similares en este barrio?

Sé que hay dos lugares de ayuda comunitaria (uno en la parte de arriba y otro en la parte de abajo) destinados a ayudar a los residentes con algunas tareas que necesiten.

L. ¿Has pedido ayuda allí antes? ¿Estás satisfecho con su trabajo? ¿Qué crees que podrían mejorar?

El programa Asertos realiza actividades para mejorar viviendas y espacios públicos.

M. ¿Has participado en alguna de sus actividades? ¿Cuál? ¿Cuándo? ¿Qué hiciste? ¿Fue remunerado o en el banco de tiempo?

N. ¿En qué tipo de proyectos te gustaría participar para mejorar el barrio? ¿Con quién te gustaría trabajar?

O. ¿Sientes la influencia de Asertos en el barrio? ¿Cómo?

P. ¿Crees que el barrio necesita más apoyo? ¿De quién (residentes/autoridades locales)?

Preguntas de la Entrevista para los Representantes de los **Operadores Comerciales Circundantes**

Nombre: _____

Edad: _____   Género: _____   Etnia: _____

Gracias por la reunión
Presentarme, mi tema de investigación y el objetivo de la entrevista
Pedir permiso para grabar la conversación y entregar el formulario de privacidad firmado

A. ¿Cuánto tiempo has estado trabajando aquí? ¿Vives cerca?
B. ¿Cuánto tiempo lleva operando la empresa aquí (aproximadamente)?
C. ¿Podrías darme una palabra que describa tu opinión sobre este barrio?
    a. Descríbelo en términos generales. ¿Cómo son las personas, la comunidad, el espacio físico, etc.?
D. He escuchado que este barrio a veces se percibe como problemático debido a diferentes problemas, ¿qué piensas tú?
E. ¿Has tenido algún conflicto con los residentes o en el barrio que haya afectado tu trabajo?

Sé que este es un barrio subrepresentado con muchos desafíos (muchas familias de bajos ingresos, problemas con la recolección de basura, etc.).

F. ¿Sabes si la empresa ha hecho algo para ayudar a resolver esos problemas (donaciones de dinero o materiales)?
G. ¿Conoces alguna iniciativa para apoyar a los residentes?
H. ¿Has tenido algún empleado o compañero de trabajo que sea del barrio?
    a. ¿Lo considerarías?
    b. ¿Cómo fue tu relación con ellos?

Preguntas de la Entrevista para el Representante de los **Colaboradores Asociados (Mesa de Ayuda Comunitaria - Fundación Secretariado Gitano)**

Nombre: _____

Edad: _____   Género: _____   Etnia: _____

Gracias por la reunión
Presentarme, mi tema de investigación y el objetivo de la entrevista
Pedir permiso para grabar la conversación y entregar el formulario de privacidad firmado

A. ¿Cuánto tiempo llevas trabajando aquí? ¿Vives cerca?
B. ¿Cuánto tiempo ha estado operando la mesa de ayuda aquí (aproximadamente)? ¿Cuándo está abierta la oficina? ¿Cuántas personas trabajan aquí?
C. ¿Qué servicios ofrecen a los residentes?
D. ¿Cuál es el problema más común por el que contactan a la mesa de ayuda?
E. ¿Qué opinas sobre este barrio? ¿Podrías describirlo en términos generales? ¿Cómo son las personas, la comunidad, el espacio físico, etc.?
F. ¿Han tenido algún conflicto con los residentes o en el barrio que haya afectado tu trabajo?
G. ¿Qué piensas sobre el servicio que brinda la mesa de ayuda comunitaria? ¿Encuentras alguna limitación para hacer tu trabajo (financiamiento, tiempo, recursos)?

Preguntas de la Entrevista para los Representantes de las **Autoridades Locales**

Nombre: _____

Edad: _____   Género: _____   Etnia: _____

Gracias por la reunión
Presentarme, mi tema de investigación y el objetivo de la entrevista
Pedir permiso para grabar la conversación y entregar el formulario de privacidad firmado

A. ¿Cuánto tiempo has estado en el cargo?
B. ¿Cuáles son los mayores desafíos que enfrenta la ciudad (en general y en tu área)? ¿Desde cuándo?
C. ¿Tu departamento está involucrado en abordar esos problemas? ¿Cómo?

Estoy realizando una investigación sobre el barrio Cementerio para mi tesis. Este barrio ha sido subrepresentado y enfrenta muchos desafíos (muchas familias de bajos ingresos, problemas con la recolección de basura, fragmentación social, etc.).

D. ¿Cuál es tu opinión sobre el barrio? ¿Cómo son las personas, el espacio físico, los conflictos, etc.?
E. ¿Estás al tanto de alguna acción/intervención/plan por parte de las autoridades locales/gobiernos locales en esa área?

Hace unas semanas, hubo una audiencia para abordar los problemas físicos de cuatro viviendas públicas en el barrio. Estas viviendas estaban destinadas a ser temporales, pero las familias han estado viviendo allí durante más de 20 años.

F. ¿Sabes dónde vivían antes? ¿Por qué se mudaron?
G. ¿Dónde se suponía que serían reubicadas? ¿Por qué no lo fueron?
H. ¿Cuál es el plan ahora? ¿Reubicarlas/rehabilitar sus hogares?
I. ¿Hay algún plan para abordar el resto del barrio (en espacios públicos)?

Preguntas de la Entrevista para el Representante de la **ONG (Asertos)**

Nombre: _____

Edad: _____   Género: _____   Etnia: _____

Gracias por la reunión
Presentarme, mi tema de investigación y el objetivo de la entrevista
Pedir permiso para grabar la conversación y entregar el formulario de privacidad firmado

A. ¿Cuánto tiempo lleva operando la ONG? ¿En Alicante? ¿cuantas personas trabajan con usted?
B. ¿Podrías describirme las actividaes generales que realiza la ONG? ¿En cuantos barrios de Alicante tienen presencia activa o han tenido en el pasado?
   a. En caso de haber dejado de acoger un barrio ¿por qué? ¿qué sucedió?
C. ¿Cuales son los problemas más comunes a los que asisten?
D. Desde su punto de vista ¿Cuáles son los mayores desafíos que enfrenta la ciudad? ¿Desde cuándo?

Como sabe, estoy realizando una investigación sobre el barrio del Cementerio para mi tesis.

E. ¿Podrías darme una palabra que describa tu opinión sobre este barrio?
   a. Ahora, ¿podrías describirlo en términos generales? ¿Cómo son las personas, el espacio físico, hay conflictos, etc.?
F. He escuchado que este barrio a veces se percibe como problemático debido a diferentes problemas, ¿qué piensas tú?
   a. ¿Les ha sucedido que algún conflicto entre los residentes del barrio haya afectado su trabajo? ¿Han escuchado de algún conflicto notable recientemente?
G. ¿Has percibido alguna diferencia entre la parte de arriba y la de abajo del barrio? ¿Podrías describirlas?

Sé que hay dos puestos donde se ubica la Fundación Secretariado Gitano, uno en la parte de 'arriba' y otro en la parte de 'abajo' del barrio, destinados a ayudar a los residentes con algunas tareas específicas.

H. ¿Qué opina de su labor en el barrio?
I. ¿Sabe si los residentes usan sus servicios? ¿Qué crees que podrían mejorar?

Este barrio enfrenta muchos desafíos como muchas familias de bajos ingresos, problemas con la recolección de basura, escasez material, entre otros.

J.   ¿Estás al tanto de alguna acción/intervención/plan por parte de las autoridades locales/gobiernos locales que afecten a esta comunidad?
K.   ¿Conoce de otras organizaciones o actores sociales que también trabajen en el barrio del Cementerio?

El programa Asertos tiene presencia en el barrio por proyectos de regeneración urbana que consideran tanto viviendas como espacio público, además de animación comunitaria.

L.   ¿Podría compartir las iniciativas más relevantes que hayan liderado en el barrio?
M.   ¿Cómo hacen para motivar a los residentes del barrio de participar en ellas?
N.   ¿Siente que su presencia en el barrio ha ayudado para mejorarlo? ¿en cuáles aspectos?
O.   ¿Cuáles considera que son sus limitaciones u obstáculos?
   a.   ¿Considera que el barrio necesita más apoyo? ¿De quién (residentes / autoridades locales)?

Interview Questions for the **Residents** Representatives

Name: _____

Age: _____   Gender: _____   Etnicity: _____

Thanks for the meeting
Introduce myself, my research topic and the aim of the interview
Ask for permission to record the conversation and hand out the privacy form signed

A. For how long have you been living in this neighborhood?
B. Where did you live before? Why did you move?
C. Do you wish to move somewhere else (or stay)? Where? Why?
D. Could you give me one word that defines what do you think about this neighborhood?
    a. Now please describe it to me in general terms? How are the people, the community, the physical space, etc.
E. I'm aware that this neighborhood is perceived as problematic due to different problems, what do you think about it?
F. Do you feel a difference between the arriba and abajo part of the neighborhood? Could you describe them for me?
G. I'm aware that some facilities (schools, grocery stores, hospitals) are not so close, how do you get there (bus, own car, family member)?
H. What do you do for work/study (small gigs too)? Where? Do you like it?
I. Would you like to work/study on something different?
J. Are you looking for a job? How is it going?
    a. If difficult, what would you say is the issue (national, local or individual)?
K. Have the housing/rent prices in the city affected you? Could you tell me other problems in the city? are there similar problems in this neighborhood?

There are two community helpdesk service places (upper and lower part) set to help the residents with some tasks you need.

L. Have you asked for their help before? Are you satisfied with their job? What would you ask them to improve?

The Asertos program makes activities for improving housing and public spaces.

M. Have you participated in any of their activities? Which one? When? What did you do? Was it paid or for the time bank?
N. In which type of projects would you like to get involved to improve the neighborhood? With whom would you like to work with?
O. Do you feel Asertos' influence on the neighborhood? How?
P. Does the neighborhood need more support? From whom (residents/local authorities)?

Interview Questions for the **Surrounding Commercial Operators** Representatives

Name: _____

Age: _____   Gender: _____   Etnicity: _____

Thanks for the meeting
Introduce myself, my research topic and the aim of the interview
Ask for permission to record the conversation and hand out the privacy form signed

A. For how long have you been working here? Do you live nearby?
B. How long has the company operated here (roughly)?
C. Could you give me one word that defines what do you think about this neighborhood?
   a. Could you describe it to me in general terms? How are the people, the community, the physical space... etc.
D. I'm aware that this neighborhood is perceived as problematic due to different problems, what do you think about it?
E. Have there been any conflicts with the residents or in the neighborhood that has affected your day of work?

This is an underrepresented neighborhood with many challenges (many low-income families, garbage collection, etc.).

F. Are you aware if the company has done something to alleviate those challenges (money or material donations)?
G. Do you know of any initiative to support residents?
H. Have you had an employee or coworker from this neighborhood?
   a. Would you consider it?
   b. What was your relationship with them?

Interview Questions for the **Stakeholder (Community Helpdesk - Gypsy Secretariat Foundation)** Representative

Name: _____

Age: _____   Gender: _____   Etnicity: _____

Thanks for the meeting
Introduce myself, my research topic and the aim of the interview
Ask for permission to record the conversation and hand out the privacy form signed

A. For how long have you been working here? Do you live nearby?
B. How long has the helpdesk operated here (roughly)? When is the office open? How many people work here?
C. What services do you provide to the residents?
D. What is the most common issue you (the helpdesk) get contacted for?
E. What do you think about this neighborhood? Could you please describe it to me in general? How are the people, the community, the physical space... etc.
F. Have there been any conflicts with the residents or in the neighborhood that has affected your day of work?
G. What do you think about the service that is provided by the community helpdesk? Do you have some limitations to do your job (funding, time, resources)?

Interview Questions for the **Local Authorities** Representatives

Name: _____

Age: _____   Gender: _____   Etnicity: _____

Thanks for the meeting
Introduce myself, my research topic and the aim of the interview
Ask for permission to record the conversation and hand out the privacy form signed

A. How long have you been in office?
B. Which are the biggest challenges the city is facing (generally and from your area)? For how long has it been like that?
C. Is your department involved in addressing those issues? How?

I'm conducting a research on Cementerio for my thesis. The neighborhood has been underrepresented and faces many challenges (many low-income families, garbage collection, social fragmentation, etc.).

D. What's your idea/opinion on the neighborhood? People, physical space, conflicts, etc.?
E. Are you aware of any actions/interventions/plan by local authorities/local governments on that area?

A couple of weeks ago there was a hearing to address the physical problems of 4 public houses in the neighborhood. They were intended to be "temporary" houses, but the families have been living there for over 20 years.

F. Do you know where were they living before? Why were they moved?
G. Where were they meant to be relocated? Why weren't they?
H. What is the plan now? Relocate them/rehabilitating their homes?
I. Is there a plan to address the rest of the neighborhood (on public spaces)?

Interview Questions for the **NGO (Asertos)** Representative

Name: _____

Age: _____   Gender: _____   Etnicity: _____

Thanks for the meeting
Introduce myself, my research topic and the aim of the interview
Ask for permission to record the conversation and hand out the privacy form signed

A. How long has the NGO been operating? In Alicante? How many people work with you?

B. Could you describe the general activities that the NGO carries out? In how many neighbourhoods of Alicante do you have an active presence or have had in the past?

   a. If you have stopped asisting a neighbourhood. Why? What happened?

C. What are the most common problems that you assist?

D. From your point of view, what are the biggest challenges that the city faces? Since when?

As you know, I am doing research on the Cementerio neighbourhood for my thesis.

E. Could you give me a word that describes your opinion of this neighbourhood?

   a. Now, could you describe it in general terms? What are the people like, the physical space, are there conflicts, etc.?

F. I have heard that this neighbourhood is sometimes perceived as problematic due to different problems, what do you think?

   a. Have you ever had any conflicts between residents in the neighborhood affect your work? Have you heard of any notable conflicts recently?

G. Have you perceived any differences between the upper and lower part of the neighborhood? Could you describe them?

I know that there are two posts where the Fundación Secretariado Gitano is located, one in the 'upper' part and another in the 'lower' part of the neighborhood, intended to help residents with some specific tasks.

H. What do you think of their work in the neighborhood?

I. Do you know if residents use their services? What do you think could be improved?

This neighborhood faces many challenges such as many low-income families, problems with garbage collection, materials scarcity, among others.

J. Are you aware of any action/intervention/plan by local authorities/local governments that may affect this community?

K. Do you know of other organizations or social actors that also work in the Cementerio Neighborhood?

The Asertos program is present in the neighborhood through urban regeneration projects that consider both housing and public spaces, as well as community animation.

L. Could you share the most relevant initiatives that the organization have led in the neighborhood?
M. How do you motivate the neighborhood residents to participate in them?
N. Do you feel that your presence in the neighborhood has helped improve it? In what aspects?
O. What do you consider to be your limitations or obstacles?
    a. Do you think that the neighborhood needs more support? From whom (residents / local authorities)?