

Guest Editorial

# New Forms of Gentrification: Issues and Debates

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## ABSTRACT

**This special issue addresses the questions of gentrification and new-build gentrification, two processes of urban transformation that significantly contribute to the reconfiguration of the socio-demographic profile of populations in contemporary cities. Whereas gentrification has long referred to the physical and social transformation of central areas through rehabilitation of existing housing stock and population displacement by more affluent households, the concept has recently been extended to include new high-status developments (regeneration of brownfield sites or demolition/reconstruction of existing residential areas). Although these new developments do not always cause direct population displacement, the question of the possible indirect consequences has been critically raised while the densification of the built environment appears as a favourable outcome in a context of environmental sustainability concerns. The papers collected in this issue focus on the emerging debates surrounding the new forms of gentrification, the increased residential attractiveness of core cities, and the actors who are involved or affected by these processes. In so doing it discusses the geography of gentrification, expanding analysis towards a wide range of contexts.**

**Keywords:** gentrification; new-build gentrification; demographic changes; public policy; housing market; urban regeneration

## INTRODUCTION TO THE SPECIAL ISSUE<sup>1</sup>

**G**entrification usually describes particular socio-demographic transformations in urban areas. As such it relates to different research fields, although writings on gentrification have rarely appeared in population studies to date (for an exception see Smith, 2002 and Philips, 2009). Yet urban gentrification is very much about population turnover in neighbourhoods in central cities. Gentrification describes the movements of relatively wealthy in-migrants (gentrifiers) and lower-income out-migrants (displacees or evicted populations) in urban neighbourhoods. These migratory flows can be seen as the outcome of public policies and/or the strategies of private actors in the housing market as well as the result of the changing residential aspirations of affluent households. This raises questions about the characteristics and motivations of the “urban seeking” populations in comparison with the “urban fleeing” populations in a situation where movement to the suburbs is still dominant (Hamnett, 1991; Butler and Robson, 2003). Gentrification is also influenced by broader demographic evolutions defined as the ‘second demographic transition’ (Buzar *et al.*, 2005).<sup>2</sup> It may also be associated with specific stages in the life-course (the typical gentrifier lives alone or in a childless couple). Finally, gentrification sheds light on the demographic turnaround of core cities and their renewed residential attractiveness, a situation that has been observed in a growing number of contexts. In considering these population aspects this special

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issue discusses different forms of gentrification and focuses on 'new-build gentrification'.

Following on from Atkinson and Bridge (2005) and Lees and Ley (2008), this special issue also seeks to continue the project of expanding geographically the analysis of gentrification. The papers<sup>3</sup> discuss contexts as diverse as Bologna, Brussels, Leipzig, León, Ljubljana, London, Montreal, Shanghai, Toronto, and Swiss cities. In so doing the special issue moves beyond the spaces generally covered by Anglo-American urban research and investigates a particularly wide range of urban contexts. This extension offers a better understanding of the multiple dimensions of gentrification. It also provides new insights into theoretical debates, showing that what are often considered to be a series of mutually exclusive explanations of a process of urban change, when seen in a single context, can become a repertoire of possibilities.

#### REVISITING AND REVISING THE CONCEPT OF GENTRIFICATION

In Glass's (1964) seminal definition, gentrification corresponds, on the one hand, to a process of displacement of working-class residents in inner city areas by more affluent social groups and, on the other hand, to the physical rehabilitation of those areas. Rehabilitation involves the transformation of built forms, often buildings endowed with a heritage value, by a cultural and economic elite. Since the mid-1960s, however, processes of urban change have evolved and so too has the definition of gentrification itself in order to include other/new forms of social upgrading, other/new actors and other/new spaces (see, for example, Lees *et al.*, 2008).

#### Forms

If initially the concept of gentrification was restricted to the rehabilitation of existing housing stock in inner city areas by more affluent households, several authors have extended its definition to other forms and have looked at the upgrading of public spaces and commercial services too. Zukin (1995), for example, describes the transformation of public spaces in New York City, showing that street furniture and architectural style, as well as explicit and implicit norms of use, contribute to social filtering and the

exclusion of social groups formerly frequenting those spaces. Other authors have studied how commerce can be the actor and engine of gentrification and not only 'the reflection of previous socio-residential transformations' (Van Criekingen and Fleury, 2006).

The upgrading of public and commercial space is complementary to the classic residential gentrification described by Glass and other pioneers of gentrification studies. It points to the importance both of the aesthetics of built form and of the socially specific practices embedded in urban space.

In parallel, other authors have qualified as 'new-build gentrification' the construction of high-status housing in inner urban areas and notably on brownfield sites (Davidson and Lees, 2005). Such projects are considered as a form of gentrification because they share a series of features with classic gentrification: (i) reinvestment of capital in inner cities, (ii) social upgrading of locale by incoming high-income groups, (iii) landscape changes, and (iv) direct or indirect displacement of low-income groups. This last aspect is further elaborated on by Davidson and Lees in this special issue. As the brownfield areas concerned are usually not inhabited, the displacement of lower-status populations is mainly *indirect*. This extension of the definition of gentrification has been debated recently in a special issue of *Environment and Planning A* (Smith and Butler, 2007). Instead some authors prefer to use the term *reurbanisation* and to keep the term gentrification for processes where direct displacement takes place (Boddy, 2007; Buzar *et al.*, 2007).

#### Actors

The ideal type of the gentrifier has long been identified: small and usually childless middle-class households, often unmarried, primarily under 35 years of age, employed overwhelmingly in the advanced services (professional, administrative, technical, and managerial occupations), highly educated. The members of this *New Middle Class* are considered as driving the demand side of the gentrification process (Ley, 1996).

Other authors have highlighted the increasing participation of women in the job market and the growing numbers of dual-career couples (Rose,

1984; Warde, 1991), the role of gay households (Lauria and Knopp, 1985), the increase of small non-family young adult households (Ogden and Hall, 2004), the influence of position in life cycle (Smith, 2002), or the emergence of a transnational or global elite (Rofe, 2003; Butler and Lees, 2006). Ley has also shown the role of cultural actors, artists in particular, who were, in many cases, the forerunners of gentrification, occupying buildings with a low rent but with a promising location in the urban landscape. Ley (2003) thus underlines how artists and their lifestyle work as attractors for members of the *New Middle Class*.

N. Smith (1984) has insisted on the role of investors and real estate agents in the detection and exploitation of rent gaps, seeing gentrification foremost as a reinvestment of capital in inner cities. According to his rent gap theory, the original cause of gentrification lies in the geographical mobility of capital and in the historical cycles of investment and disinvestment in urban areas. The suburban investment which dominated the twentieth century and the correlative disinvestment in the inner cities paved the way for the strategic reinvestment in specific areas of city centres – the process of gentrification.

N. Smith (1996) has also studied the role of municipal authorities in the US, who, according to him, have actively promoted gentrification and have led a real war against the poor, block by block, in the inner cities. Widening his scope to other contexts, N. Smith has argued that gentrification has moved on from being a local anomaly to becoming a generalised, global urban strategy. Indeed, the role of public policies, their diversity, and their impacts have received new attention in the gentrification literature (see Lees and Ley, 2008).

### Spaces

Finally, if gentrification first affected central working-class neighbourhoods ‘colonised’ by more affluent social groups, the spatiality of gentrification has become much more diversified. Studies have looked at the different national contexts (Atkinson and Bridge, 2005), at different levels in the urban hierarchy (Van Weesep, 1994), and at the spaces of rural gentrification (Phillips, 2004), touristic gentrification (Gotham, 2005), and gentrified inner city areas that have been super-gentrified (that is re-gentrified) by even more

affluent groups (Lees, 2003). The implicit thesis in this body of work is that these processes of urban change do not have a universal character but take on different forms in relation to their national, regional, or local context of emergence.

Considering the spatiality of gentrification means paying attention not only to the contextuality of the phenomenon itself but also to the contextuality of the theoretical approaches developed to make sense of it. As noted by Lees (2000), the main theoretical frames in the gentrification literature must be seen, partially at least, in relation to the place where they were developed, so that N. Smith’s revanchist city theory is related not only to his philosophical and political positioning (Marxism) but also to the very polarised and sometimes brutal character of US cities (especially New York City of the 1990s where he has done most of his empirical research). The cultural approach of authors such as Ley (1996) and Caulfield (1989), who write about the lifestyles, values, and desires of gentrifiers, are contextually related to the ‘emancipatory’ features of gentrification processes in Canadian cities (see Lees, 2000). Calls for a broader ‘geography of gentrification’ (Ley, 1996; Lees, 2000) were made some time ago now, but we are far from having reached an understanding of the global complexities of this process. Too often still, theoretical debates about gentrification are context blind, drawing general conclusions from a series of US and UK case studies. If, for instance, the discourse regarding social mix is generally seen in UK and US research as a mere rhetorical clothing for pro-gentrification policies (see Lees and Ley, 2008), it is generally perceived differently in France where it is more related to the introduction of social housing into wealthy communities than to high-status housing in working-class communities (Béhar *et al.*, 2004). The contributions to this special issue should thus be considered in such a global context and be read as an additional step in the direction of a more nuanced assessment of the mechanisms of change in the population geography of contemporary cities.

### THE PAPERS

The papers gathered in this special issue address and pursue different aspects of this discussion regarding recent reorientations in the field of gentrification studies. They will be introduced

hereafter with reference, first, to the forms of, and, second, to the actors in gentrification and more specifically 'new-build gentrification'.

### The Forms of Gentrification

Two papers in this issue, in particular, make a plea for the extension of gentrification studies to take account of new developments. Davidson and Lees (2009), who coined the term 'new-build gentrification' in 2005, argue that the concept should be elastic enough to cover the different forms of the class remake of the urban landscape. Rérat *et al.* (2009) point out that an extended definition of the concept is heuristically profitable because it allows a better articulation between studies dealing with the mechanisms through which cities are revalorised.

New-build gentrification is used to characterise two forms of projects. A restrictive definition focuses on reclaimed brownfields or on in-fill developments on vacant lands (Rérat *et al.*, 2009; Rose, 2009), whereas others also include the demolition/reconstruction of existing residential areas (Davidson and Lees, 2009; He, 2009). There are also hybrid forms such as the Aragon Tower in London, a building that has been totally refurbished and to which five extra floors of penthouses have been added, which escape simple categorisations (Davidson and Lees, 2009).

As mentioned above, the meaning of new-build gentrification differs according to context. In London, new-build gentrification is discussed by Davidson and Lees (2009) as a means of expanding the class remake of inner urban areas into marginal, derelict, and industrial sites along the Thames. It is described as a process through which the working class is displaced, be it literally or symbolically, through the loss of a 'sense of place'. In Swiss cities (Rérat *et al.*, 2009), the classic gentrification processes have not (yet?) been a major trend due to the structure of the housing market and its legal framework. New-build gentrification thus appears as the main expression of the renewed residential attractiveness of core cities for the middle to high classes.

Other forms of gentrification are identified and analysed in this special issue. In Montreal, Rose (2009) describes an in-fill or 'instant' gentrification often taking place in areas scarcely touched by classic gentrification. New-build gentrification in Toronto takes, as Kern (2009) shows,

the form of a massive wave of condominium development, whereas in Brussels (Van Crieelingen, 2009) the dominant process is classic gentrification but affecting mainly the rental market (rental gentrification).

Another issue raised by the papers is the social dimension of urban changes and, in Slater's (2006) terms, the eviction of critical perspectives from gentrification research. Thus, different authors criticise the use of class-neutral terms such as 'reurbanisation' (Davidson and Lees, 2009; He, 2009; Van Crieelingen, 2009). On the other hand, Haase *et al.* (2009) point out that there is no unified understanding of the concept of reurbanisation. According to them, reurbanisation has been largely eclipsed by the debate on gentrification. In their conceptualisation, reurbanisation is understood, at the macro-level, as a process of relative or absolute demographic increase of the core city in comparison to its surroundings. At the meso-level, it is understood as a consolidation of the residential function of the inner city receiving a diversified population in terms of age groups and socio-economic backgrounds. They reject the criticism that the term reurbanisation is deliberately used to remove the social or class issue from urban 'renaissance' agendas and they assert that reurbanisation and gentrification are qualitatively distinct processes.

### The Actors in Gentrification

The papers stage four main types of actors: the gentrifiers, the displacees, the private actors of the housing market, and local authorities. Their role and characteristics vary according to the case studies.

#### *The gentrifiers*

Gentrifiers do not correspond to a homogeneous demographic and socio-economic category of population. Several groups can be distinguished not only between but also within different contexts. Kern (2009), for example, discusses the attraction of affluent professional women to central residential locations. Adopting a feminist perspective, she describes a gendered social geography of new-build gentrification in Toronto by exploring both the gendered ideologies shaping this process and women's experiences as downtown condominium owners. This is not a

marginal dimension of urban change in Toronto, as women make up a high percentage of condominium owners and as condominiums are extensively marketed to them. The residential choices of this clientele are supported by a series of motivations: tenure (home ownership as a source of autonomy, investment, etc.), personal safety (the presence of security guards, CCTVs, etc.), and city life (the desire for an interconnection between work, leisure, and domestic life).

Van Criekingen (2009) shows that the reinvestment of inner city neighbourhoods in Brussels is driven to a large extent by an expanding number of middle-class young adults living in non-family households. He unravels some connections between gentrification and population change: the growing importance of this specific population group is explained by the role of the second demographic transition and more precisely by the changes in the transition to adulthood. The process of achieving economic, family, and residential independence is less linear and uniform than it once was in post-war decades. The desynchronisation of the conventional thresholds – leaving the parental home, finishing school, starting a career, getting married, and having a first child – opens up a new stage in the life course during which renting a flat in central areas represents a frequent residential project. The nature of this phenomenon is, however, not only demographic. Van Criekingen underscores the uneven socio-spatial implications of changing transitions to adulthood, as young adults who can afford to live in non-family households in the central areas are more likely to hold a higher level of education.

Haase *et al.* (2009) also insist on the role of demographic factors – the second demographic transition and the growing number and diversity of small households – to explain the resurgence of the central areas of Bologna, Leipzig, León, and Ljubljana. The concept of reurbanisation sheds light on why these inner cities are becoming increasingly attractive. Reurbanisation processes are driven by households representing a variety of social, lifestyle, and income groups (and not only gentrifiers): younger households, non-traditional households, people who are well educated or in the process of acquiring a higher education, families, international migrants, as well as people with a precarious income situation, an unstable residential situation, or in a

transitory stage of their life. Their residential motivations are more precisely the expression of a conviction, a lifestyle, or a pragmatic adaptation to the needs and constraints of the individual situation and resources. This new diversity of private living arrangements has changed the demand side of the urban housing market.

#### *The displacees*

As Van Criekingen (2009) puts it in his paper, it is nevertheless important to ‘keep a clear sense of who is benefiting from current waves of urban changes and who is affected by them’. This raises the question of displacement, which is re-theorised by Davidson and Lees (2009) in their contribution. Drawing on the humanistic tradition in geography, they argue that gentrification transforms places in a multitude of ways and is accompanied by several forms of displacement, even in the case of new developments. Displacement can be direct (as in classic gentrification) and indirect (‘exclusionary displacement’ or price shadowing where lower-income groups are unable to access property because of the gentrification of the neighbouring areas). However, displacement is much more than the ‘moment of spatial dislocation’; it is also the loss of place (loss of neighbourhood, community, family, and home) in a phenomenological sense. An influx of new-build gentrifiers transforms the neighbourhood’s social composition, which in turn shifts local politics and planning, generates new commercial demands, and, subsequently, stimulates wider gentrification.

The forms of displacement differ in temporal and spatial terms, but what they all share, according to Davidson and Lees (2009), is the alteration of the class-based nature of the wider urban neighbourhood. In a similar vein, Van Criekingen (2009) shows that the process of gentrification in Brussels results in a rising competition for residential space and that youngsters from working-class or immigrant origins are increasingly ‘locked up’ in remaining non-gentrified inner neighbourhoods. In Shanghai, He (2009) analyses the wide-ranging residential displacement – from 50,000 to 100,000 relocated households each year between 1995 and 2007 – and the profound population changes resulting from extensive redevelopments in central areas. With surveys carried out in pre-gentrified sites and in new buildings, she highlights the

differences between both populations in terms of socio-economic profile, age, and tenure status. She also shows that displacement to the outskirts not only deprives low-income groups of the convenience of urban life but also jeopardises their socio-economical prospects and household livelihoods (fragmented social networks, inconvenient access to public facilities, increase in the time and costs of commuting that may result in unemployment, etc.).

#### *The private actors*

New-build gentrification can be interpreted as gentrification by capital because the size of the operations usually requires large corporate developers (Warde, 1991). The role, logics, and motivations of private actors are therefore of prime importance and are addressed in two papers on the basis of interviews. Kern (2009) focuses on the condominium development firms active in Toronto and shows that they actively target young professional women. Developer narratives express gender ideologies about women's desire for independence but also security, which has become one of the most common features of condominium projects. Developers in Toronto have, in other words, commodified a certain feminist vision of urban life. In the case of Swiss cities, Rérat *et al.* (2009) identify several kinds of actors (building companies, real estate companies, stock market-listed property funds, institutional investors, etc.), each one with a specific rationale as to the building of new high-status developments in core cities. The increase in property investments is not explained by a trade-off favourable to core-city locations and to the detriment of suburbs. Rather, the trade-off operated by developers and investors involves choices between investing in dwellings or in office spaces and between investing in property or on the stock exchange.

#### *The local authorities*

The role of local authorities is interpreted in two ways in the papers. In some, local authorities are portrayed as playing an active part and 'state-led gentrification' is considered to be the expression of a neoliberal urban agenda (Davidson and Lees, 2009; He, 2009; Kern, 2009; Van Criekingen, 2009). In papers discussing other contexts, a more nuanced image is given of the strategies of local authorities where they result from the

consensus between different and sometimes conflicting requirements (Rérat *et al.*, 2009; Rose, 2009). Here again the geography of gentrification is at play and explains these different interpretations.

He's (2009) analysis of the role of the state in Shanghai addresses some general features of state-led gentrification such as the creation of optimal conditions for capital circulation or the investments in infrastructures and in the beautification of residential areas. Her contribution, as well as the papers by Van Criekingen (2009), Kern (2009), and Davidson and Lees (2009), illustrate what Hackworth and N. Smith (2001) have conceptualised as a third wave of gentrification,<sup>4</sup> where local and national states, through major infrastructural investments and public-private partnerships, seek to initiate large-scale downtown-fringe redevelopments. Attracting and retaining middle-class residents has indeed become integral to urban entrepreneurialism, though such strategies might be 'packaged' as the promotion of 'mixed communities' (Davidson and Lees, 2009), urban revitalisation (Van Criekingen, 2009), or a knowledge-based economy (Kern, 2009).

Rose's (2009) paper explores the tensions and conflicts within the local state apparatus around gentrification on the basis of a longitudinal study spanning over 20 years on the proactive housing policy of the City of Montreal. Its successive policies appear as resulting from tensions between a corporate vision of housing (where it is seen as a tool of economic development and fiscal stability) and a redistributive one (where it is seen as a tool of socio-economic redistribution with, for example, the inclusion of affordable housing in large development sites). So, while Montreal's municipal policies have supported new-build gentrification, it is, Rose argues, inadequate to view its housing policy as a mere servant of local business interests or as a transmission belt for neoliberal measures imposed from above. The need for a more complex conception of the local state is also suggested in the paper by Rérat *et al.* (2009) where Swiss cities appear to have diverse or ambiguous attitudes. Local authorities in Switzerland have taken planning measures to ease the construction of dwellings and are interested in attracting new tax payers. Yet their wiggle room for developing other policies is rather limited. Private investors determine the

characteristics of new dwellings (size, comfort, tenure) except when a project is carried out on public land. In this case, some local authorities try to regulate new-build gentrification by privileging non-profit organisations such as cooperatives or by negotiating shares of social housing with the investors. This policy is, however, limited by the amount of land owned by local authorities.

## CONCLUSION

Gentrification – and its various forms, places, and processes – has been under scrutiny for four decades now. The present economic crisis that began in 2008 may temporarily slow it down but is not likely to stop it (see Lees, 2009). The question of gentrification is in fact coming across with much keenness in regard to the demographic evolution and the residential attractiveness of cities. Indeed, the European and North American cities discussed in this special issue have all experienced a recent demographic turnaround after decades of population loss. Moreover, a wide literature is providing growing evidence concerning the negative impacts of urban sprawl (consumption of land and non-renewable resources, automobile dependence, costs of urbanisation, social segregation, etc.) and on the necessity to achieve a more compact urban morphology in order to take into account the principles of sustainable development (see, for example, Frey, 1999; Newman and Kenworthy, 1999; Squires, 2002).

The renewed attractiveness of city life, which now appeals to a wide range of demographic and social groups, and the ever more compelling pressure of the sustainability agenda represent two elements that are increasingly changing the shape of cities. They consequently have to be taken into account in research on gentrification and in population geography. Further critical and constructive research is required to shed light on the social groups benefiting and losing from these trends, the different migratory flows, the evolution of the various urban dynamics (notably gentrification, reurbanisation, and urban sprawl), and the logics and roles of different actors from private developers to local authorities. This is a necessary task in order to identify ways to conciliate the objectives of urban renaissance and of the model of the compact city with social equity and justice.

## NOTES

- (1) Many thanks to Loretta Lees, who improved the scientific and linguistic quality of a text written by non-native speakers.
- (2) The second demographic transition is characterised by a slowing demographic growth (mainly based on migration), a rising life expectancy (resulting in an ageing population), and a decreasing fertility rate below the threshold of replacement (because of the postponement of marriage and childbearing, declining marriage and rising divorce rates, etc.). One of the major consequences of the second demographic transition is the growing number of small and non-family households (people living alone, childless couples, etc.) (Van de Kaa, 1987).
- (3) The contributions to this special issue are based on papers given at the seminar ‘New-Build Gentrification: Forms, Places and Processes’ organised by the Institute of Geography, University of Neuchâtel, in November 2007. The authors are grateful to the Swiss National Science Foundation that funded the research project ‘Back to the City?’ (Request 107033; research programme ‘Sustainable Development of the Built Environment’) as well as to the Swiss Academy of Sciences, the Association of Swiss Geographers, and the University of Neuchâtel that financed the seminar. The authors would also like to thank the participants of this seminar for their very interesting contributions and debates.
- (4) The first phase involves sporadic gentrification (where the pioneering households are the main protagonists). The second phase involves the anchoring of gentrification (here, the main protagonists are promoters and private investors).

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