Commentary

"Qualifying Peripheries" or "Repolarizing the Center": A Comparison of Gentrification Processes in Europe

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Abstract: Reflecting a broader form of neo-liberal urban policy underlying the progressive return of capital investment, gentrification is a key issue in urban studies. Although earlier definitions of "gentrification" focused mostly on socio-cultural processes, recent works have qualified gentrification as a mixed political–economic issue. Clarifying whether inner city gentrification should be supported, controlled, constricted, or prevented is a key debate in urban sustainability and metabolism, contributing to managing and, possibly, enhancing metropolitan resilience. To define the causes and consequences of gentrification, understanding the intrinsic linkage with different social contexts is crucial. There are no universal and comprehensive gentrification processes, displaying similarities and differences at the same time. A comparative analysis of different forms of gentrification and urban change provides basic knowledge to delineate complex, non-linear paths of socioeconomic development in cities, shedding light on the increased socioeconomic complexity and the most appropriate policies to fuel metropolitan sustainability in a broader context of global change. From this perspective, our commentary focuses on the main issues at the base of gentrification in Europe, starting from basic definitions and providing a regional vision distinguishing three "gentrification ideal-types" (northern, eastern, and Mediterranean). The implications of these different socioeconomic processes for the policy and governance of sustainable and resilient cities were discussed, evidencing new lines of investigation to frame (or re-frame) the increasing complexity of urbanization patterns and processes.

Keywords: urban sustainability; mobility; policy; advanced economies

1. Introduction

Gentrification is a multi-faceted concept that has been (more or less) intensively investigated according to economic structures and performances, social dynamics, demographic trends, and local

government policy. Regardless of the multiple forces underlying gentrification, knowing the repercussions of this process can be helpful in order to foresee the future of metropolitan regions. Glass [1] was likely the first to coin the term "gentrification" to describe the process by which higher-income households displace lower-income residents in urban neighborhoods of Islington, northern London. While a coherent definition of "gentrification" is semantically and operationally difficult, it can be seen as a process of urban development in which a city neighborhood develops over a short time, with the neighborhood's residents being frequently displaced by rising rents and living costs. Being regarded as a common and controversial topic in politics and regional planning, gentrification often increases the economic value of a neighborhood, with the resulting demographic change becoming a cause of conflict within (and, sometimes, outside) the urban space. Since the mid-1960s, scholars have defined gentrification around three main perspectives: (i) the gentrifiers [2], (ii) the displaced [3], and (iii) a combination of both actors [4]. Although the early definition of gentrification focused mostly on socio-cultural processes intended as a sort of "sweat equity", more recent works have qualified gentrification as a mixed political–economic issue. Such an approach reflects a broader form of neo-liberal urban policy underlying, e.g., the progressive return of capital investment [5–8]. Nonetheless, gentrification has been often regarded as an entropic and complex issue [9]. Two main schools of thought have considered the positive and negative impacts of the gentrification process distinguishing among urban agents. Real estate companies, politicians, and the middle class discern the process as a positive stimulus to urban growth and change. Conversely, the working class experience a higher cost of living and the ultimate risk of being displaced. Therefore, a topical debate is to understand whether gentrification should be supported, controlled, constricted, or prevented in inner cities [10].

Scholars studying gentrification have argued that this phenomenon is planetary [11]. Smith [7] defined gentrification as a "global urban strategy" to redesign and upgrade cities, especially central cities. Contemporary gentrification is also regarded as a pivotal force in the reproduction of capitalism worldwide, being frequently linked to neoliberal theories [12]. Concerning gentrifiers' characteristics, Lees et al. [11] argued that "gentrifiers globally are [now] a much more diverse entity in terms of income (some are very rich, some lower-middle class), politics (some are liberal, some are conservative even authoritarian), and lifestyles (some are highly consumer-orientated, other much less so)". For instance, globalization has driven the increased number of "Millionaire migrants", who set their professional activities in China while their families settle elsewhere for various reasons, such as quality of life or their children's education [13]. This evidence suggests how gentrification should be increasingly considered as a subtle and latent process acting at different spatial scales and multiple time frames. For such reasons, a quantitative assessment of gentrification patterns and trends is often intended as a particularly hard task. Specific definition issues and especially the intimate linkage between "gentrification" and the more general notion of "urban change" add to the intrinsic difficulty of delineating the socioeconomic processes underlying gentrification trends at both local and regional scales.

Research on gentrification has been mainly a traditional Anglo-American issue of study, and the key concepts that have dominated gentrification studies in North America include class, rent gaps, displacement, and spatial capital. In other parts of the world, the "gentrification" issue is frequently missed out of public and academic discourse, while being rather evident on the ground [14]. Atkinson [15] argued that many typologies of urban change have been labeled incorrectly as gentrification, assuming that "there are more relevant and necessary conditions for gentrification to exist: the class polarization that lies beneath the appearances of gentrifying urban areas across the globe; the noticeable increase in investment put into the economic circuits of urban 'regeneration'; and different forms of displacement—direct displacement, indirect displacement, exclusionary displacement, displacement pressure, social exclusion and so on".

To define the causes and consequences of gentrification, understanding its engagement with different social contexts is crucial. According to Lees et al. [11], gentrification processes can be generalized if the concept itself is kept "general enough to facilitate universality while providing

the flexibility to accommodate changing conditions and local circumstances". In this perspective, a comparative analysis of gentrification provides a refined understanding of urban complexity around the world. As a matter of fact, the regional literature on gentrification is rather distinctive, reflecting the peculiar characteristics of socioeconomic contexts at both the urban and metropolitan level. For instance, the literature on Latin American gentrification assumes "slum gentrification" or the development of "favela chic" as a state-led securitization policy for favelas' transformation and renovation, especially in tourism areas. In other cases, a subtle form of "commercial gentrifications" is putting pressure on residential neighborhoods to make profit through the exploitation of the distinctive cultural attributes of local communities [16–23]. Most of the scholars analyzing gentrification processes in Eastern Asia have highlighted the role of the state in facilitating real estate development for residential renewal programs and sold-out public housing units on real estate local markets. Such large-scale development programs have focused on maximizing landlord profits, and less attention has been given to improving the housing welfare of displaced low-income residents [24,25]. Some authors argued that contemporary gentrification is a consequence of the corporation activities of state interests and the corporate sector, being distinct from processes of class formation or consolidation [11].

At the same time, the Middle East gentrification literature has been mostly seen as a result of conflicts in the region, population migrations, and the differential economic performances among countries [11]. The main policies of gentrification in the region could be discussed as a "spatial fix" capitalistic system [26], opting for "new gated developments" [27–30]. South African cities experienced post-colonial racial gentrification [31,32], and the gentrification in Eastern European countries has been primarily—but not exclusively—related to "functional gaps" in post-socialist urban expansion [33,34]; post-industrial gentrification is characteristic of other European countries. As can be seen, there is no universal and comprehensive definition of gentrification, and the underlying processes of urban change display together similarities and differences. In these regards, the European continent provides a sort of "melting pot" of different processes of urban change—more or less intimately linked with gentrification—representing a particularly interesting case study for the heterogeneity and fragmentation of the underlying socioeconomic forces at national, regional, and local scales.

Based on this premise, we propose a literature review of gentrification in Europe, highlighting similarities and differences and reconnecting these processes with more general socioeconomic conditions and territorial contexts characteristic of cities and metropolitan regions across the continent. A comparative analysis of the different forms of gentrification provides the necessary knowledge to delineate complex and non-linear paths of socioeconomic development in cities, shedding light on the increased urban complexity and the most appropriate policies to fuel metropolitan sustainability in a broader context of global change. This commentary is organized in sequential sections, focusing on the main issues at the base of gentrification processes in Europe, starting from basic definitions of the process (Section 2). A regional vision of gentrification processes in Europe is then provided (Section 3), distinguishing three main "gentrification ideal-types" referring respectively to northern, eastern, and Mediterranean socioeconomic contexts. The implications of these processes for policy and the governance of sustainable cities are extensively discussed in Section 4. Section 5 provides a thorough discussion of the main results of this comparative analysis, evidencing new lines of investigation to frame (or re-frame) the increasing complexity of urban expansion. The policies to face gentrification all over Europe and in other advanced economies and how gentrification can contribute to (or harm) urban sustainability goals are finally debated.

2. Gentrification: Basic Research Issues

Much of the research on gentrification has traditionally focused on the harmful impacts of gentrification on poor households. In this direction, the "gentrification" notion remembers a (more or less long and intense) process of change in the intrinsic characters of a neighborhood through the influx of more affluent residents and businesses. The causes of gentrification include rapid job growth, tight housing markets, preferences for city amenities, and increased traffic congestion. With the

development of new and more expensive housing and businesses in an innovative architectural style, the direct influence of gentrification on neighborhoods' racial/ethnic composition has also been hypothesized. Nonetheless, an optimistic and broader notion of urban transformations has been more recently elaborated to define how gentrification encompass the new "spatiality" of the state, boosting the local economy. Brenner [35] explained that the spatiality of the state is not simply "filled", as if it were a territorial container given at the outset. On the contrary, the geography of spaces is produced and actively transformed by means of regulatory projects and socio-political struggles, and articulated in different institutional sites which are located at different geographical levels. Spatiality is not an object, a container, or a platform, but a matrix of socio-spatial interactions that is together conflictual, socially produced, and under constant change. With the political and economic control of space evolving continuously, the internal dynamics of cities, including gentrification, are together the product and the engine of an important part of this process [36].

A prodromal form of gentrification might date back to ancient Rome, where, due to the extensive urban renewal of the largest cities, small shops and houses were replaced by large villas or denser buildings. The contemporary emergence of gentrification was forerun in the capitalist world of post-war cities. For instance, in the late 1850s, the working class of Paris endured the early "embourgeoisement" of the Haussmann plan [37,38]. In the late 1930s, the displacement of labor classes took place at the hands of class politics in most United States cities, where the rebuilding and rehabilitation improvement of Paris and London were considered the fashion trend of urban improvement [39]. In Europe, cities such as Edinburgh, Berlin, and Madrid experienced early gentrification, reflecting policies that improved inner cities' conditions. As Smith [39] mentioned, "this all begins to change in the postwar period, and it is no accident that the word "gentrification" is coined in the early 1960s."

Gentrification has been more recently intended as a continuous adaptation of the city's space to the needs and wants of the "new cultural class". From a demographic point of view, typical gentrifiers—e.g., the so-called "baby boomers"—were mostly affluent and able to take the investment risk in the real estate market in order to satisfy their tastes and lifestyles [40,41]. The typologies of gentrifiers, however, have progressively changed due to social transformations. This change was extensively discussed according to three stages of gentrification [42–44]. In the early stage, artists, writers, musicians, students, homosexuals, hipsters, and political activists—taken as prototypical "marginal" gentrifiers—move into a central neighborhood for its affordability, accepting the risks of rehabilitating the deteriorated property. As they have skill and ability, they make efforts toward urban beautification and settlement rehabilitation [45]. Later, the neighborhood is fostered and, in such a transitional stage, upper-middle class professionals, such as teachers, journalists, and librarians who are often politically liberal-progressive, are attracted by the vibrancy created by the pioneer arrivals [46]. In the later stage, wealthier people of the private sector move in, with a related increase in the real estate prices. The higher prices lead to excluding the traditional residents of the pioneer stages [47].

Socio-demographic changes in the late twentieth century, such as "school gentrification" [48,49] in the United States, or "studentification" [7,50] in Europe, have broadened the new horizon of the social consequences of gentrification in inner cities. Studentification is a key process transforming neighborhoods within cities with higher education institutions. School gentrification firmly increased the number of middle class families, with the improvement of infrastructures and upgrading of educational recourses. However, this process led to spatially explicit forms of exclusion and/or marginalization of low-income students and families, changing the school culture and social dynamics [48,51]. Studentification contributes to economic opportunities, so-called "commercial gentrification" [52–55], causing social conflict with existing residents due to visual and noise pollution at the same time. Some "student ghettoes" around cities have thriving nightlife during term time but then become ghost towns over the summer [36], posing additional issues in urban management (e.g., crime control).

Besides socio-demographic changes, green initiatives have also laid the groundwork for neighborhoods to be gentrified. One of the most prominent examples of such an approach is the

High Line Park in Manhattan. Urban greening, as a global phenomenon, causes and/or enhances gentrification and social inequality [56,57]. With this perspective in mind, gentrification can be intended as an uncertain and conflicting process, and is sometimes criticized for the displacement of the poor and the destruction of neighborhood authenticity due to the arrival of speculative investors. At the same time, it can be seen as a positive phenomenon of urban renewal, providing higher school standards; a reduction in crime rates; and the arrival of better infrastructure, markets, and parks [58].

Some scholars finally claim that gentrification underlies capital's movements (more than people's movements) in order to overvalue inner-city housing for major profit [12,59]. According to this view, gentrification is the result of local policies and regenerative projects promoted by city councils and other public authorities [60,61] responding (directly or indirectly) to the challenge of global capitalism and the rise of the creative class, especially in large cities [62]. Atkinson and Bridge [12] underlined the beneficial "broader sense" of urban change, demonstrating that the driving forces behind gentrification prevent the intrinsic decline of inner cities, (i) increasing the value of properties and stabilizing neighborhoods, (ii) reducing vacant dwellings and crime rates while improving the social mix, and (iii) boosting the local fiscal revenues. Furthermore, gentrification has been demonstrated to stimulate further development in the consolidated urban fabric, reducing suburban sprawl over fringes. In line with "post-industrial" approaches to metropolitan transformations, various interpretations of the relationship between urban cultures and economic development have been proposed over the last few decades, some of which are directly related to gentrification [36]. Gentrification in post-industrial cities is known not only as a process of renovating deteriorated urban neighborhoods [63], but also as an environmentally sustainable approach to clean up brownfield and highly contaminated areas [64], giving an indirect contribution to urban sustainability and metabolism.

The study of culture is another issue intimately connected with the study of cities, in turn assuming culture as a powerful engine of economic growth. The link between cultures within economic systems is labeled "symbolic economy" [65]. In this regard, symbolic economy explains the recent development path of cities and regions that occupy a superior hierarchical position in the global chessboard and endorse the production of two assets: (i) space, through the synergy between capital investment and cultural meanings [66], and (ii) symbols, which build both a currency of commercial exchange and a language of social identity [36]. Just as in the past—when the major cities at the center of the industrial capitalist world system mass-produced goods which were then exported to peripheral areas—nowadays some cities, especially global ones [67], have specialized in the production of images, texts, art, knowledge, design, entertainment for export purposes but also for local transformation. "The city as entertainment machine" [68] definitely underlines how constructed amenities (e.g., theaters, bars, coffee shops) boost economic development. Therefore, besides urban transformation benefits, gentrification is often favorable for local businesses. The consumption-side theories on gentrification finally affirm that gentrifiers embrace the historical past as well as the novel urban lifestyle and culture, supporting local shops and service-based economy [8,36,44].

3. Regional Specificities of Gentrification Processes in Europe

Spatial changes and the resulting social exclusion characteristic of European cities date back to the economic crisis of the 1970s, representing the beginning of intense deindustrialization processes. In the subsequent wave of globalization, investments addressing central cities were boosted. The middle class earned more power and cities restructured their spatial arrangements with new infrastructures. The economic realm of "Blue Banana" [69], intended as an economic corridor for the accumulation of industrial capital and services, made European cities a paradigmatic example of a complex developmental model. Such a corridor is also important in terms of the urban diversity and socio-spatial arrangement of cities. However, a differentiated spatial arrangement can be observed since, in northern countries, the poor are located in core cities and the rich in peripheral settlements, while the reverse is observed elsewhere in Europe. Such a socio-spatial position dates back to the economic changes of the 19th century.

The first green city movement tended to create better living conditions for working classes in suburbs, while Haussmann's renovation plan flourished in inner cities, pushing out poor classes from the main historical centers. After World War II, squatter settlements arose as an answer to the shortage of housing, and, in terms of socio-spatial configuration, the middle class were located in suburbs. Kesteloot [70] argued that "the simple conception of urban space as a center with its periphery reveals suburbanization and gentrification to be centrifugal and centripetal forces which, in relation to the social groups involved, appear as processes of distanciation (from other social groups) or reconquest (of lost positions in urban space)." Following such assumptions, it is clear how population flows between the center and periphery are recurrent throughout urban history, implying, at the same time, the extrinsic movement of a social group from one context to another. In this way, new socio-spatial configurations have been created at both local and regional scales, being progressively shaped by vastly different underlying forces. From this perspective, globalization has exacerbated social polarization, creating the necessary spatial distancing between classes with increasing territorial interests and wealth concentration in few places. Based on this long tradition of urban change, the present section seeks to delineate the basic gentrification trends in Europe, generalizing the different experiences in three main ideal types (western, eastern, and Mediterranean) assumed to be representative of the multiple histories of gentrification in the continent.

3.1. "Western" Europe

Western and, in some way, Northern and Central European cities have been frequently seen as paradigmatic examples of gentrification in the old continent. The "baby boomers" became the new middle class shaping the inner cities of northern and western regions [43]. However, as Smith [7] and Lees et al. [45] highlight, the intrinsic features of gentrification processes have been continuously changed in such regions because of the spatially varying forms of contemporary gentrification. Most Northern and Western European countries were associated with the social welfare state system, which had a large impact on the dynamics of metropolitan change and the real estate economy [71]. Franz [72] emphasized that urban development takes place according to different political driving forces: socialist regimes, liberal capitalistic regimes, and welfare state regimes [73–75]. Within the welfare state regime, social inequalities are alleviated through the process of resource re-allocation; urban development is the result of dualistic functioning of private markets and state allocation. Green/environmental gentrification [57] and social housing [76] have been extensively discussed in such lines of thinking, being controversially debated between its opponents and proponents. Opponents have noted the rental gap and declining affordable housing stocks as the main consequence of such forms of gentrification, whereas proponents "find themselves caught between prioritizing investor interests due to the cuts in public budget and the interests of public welfare" [72].

Even though gentrification enhances urban quality, social justice matters in most of the Northern and Western Europe processes of urban change and, consequently, the public sector have often compensated for gentrification [77]. The main forms of gentrification in Central European countries, such as Germany, are slightly different, adding some heterogeneity to the "Westernized" ideal-type. The dynamics of gentrification and social upgrading were more intense in the first decades of system transformation [10]. However, the revitalization of inner cities and green policy for former industrial sites have been always taken among the main planning policy. During the last few years, growing population, limited new housing construction, and above all a neoliberal decimation of social housing have caused a structural housing crisis. The privatization of public housing units, incentives for modernization, and the growing rental gap have led to enormous displacement pressures, and gentrification has become the new urban norm for vast parts of the urban core, leading sometimes to anti-gentrification movements and putting pressure on local administrations for a completely new housing policy.

3.2. Eastern Europe

The literature regarding gentrification processes in Eastern Europe deals with the role of post-socialist systems and de-industrialization. According to Franz [72], the socialist regime included equality and standardized the characteristics of urban fabrics. Hence, the socialistic regime encouraged a radio-centric metropolitan expansion rather than urban renewal. Rural and suburban gentrification has been also occasionally observed [73–75]. Socialist cities were more recently facing rapid suburbanization and social segregation. The inner cities' social status has been upgraded due to extensive regeneration and re-urbanization plans, and gentrification was intended as a consequence of such diversified upgrading [78]. Gentrification in post-socialist cities was not only dependent on social, political, and economic transformations, being in turn shaped by a subtle process of local integration in a more global economic system. The pioneer gentrifiers were basically newcomers who were involved in foreign investments and demanded luxury dwellings in central neighborhoods [79–81]. To increase the major benefit of land rent, the developers constructed residential buildings on former wasteland or post-industrial sites in inner cities [79].

Nonetheless, following intense changes in political and economic regimes, the restoration of ownership rights has become essential to clarify the legal status of land and buildings. It has been highlighted in most of the studies that the lack of legal regulation concerning property seized by the communist government, was one of the key factors influencing gentrification in post-socialist cities. The primary and secondary investments ownership was basically connected with "privatization" and "re-privatization" processes. Privatization concerns with purchasing houses and flats, while re-privatization is intended as retaking expropriated properties—e.g., after World War II. Primary investment regarded new housing construction, while secondary investment concerned revitalization and renewal of built-up space [82]. The run-down areas of socialist cities have been considered as adequate space for rehabilitation and therefore extensively gentrified [7]. Nevertheless, the legal status of land and buildings has limited gentrification to a very small spatial extent, such as one tenement house/block of flats, and this is frequently regarded as "spot gentrification" [34,83–86]. In this regard—apart from the more classical forms of "pioneer gentrification", "new-build" gentrification, or "state-led" gentrification—it seems that gentrification is intended as an integral part of post-communist adjustment [34].

3.3. Mediterranean Europe

Gentrification practices in Southern Europe have been mainly discussed in terms of economic austerity and its consequences [87,88], tourism development policies [89], commercial plans in central areas [16,90], urban regeneration in general [91–93], as well as sale policy of public housing in city centers [94]. In Spain, Italy, and Greece the displacement of people happened mainly because of land grabbing, privatizations, and shortage of public housing. Prior to the 2007 recession, the homeownership was set on private indebtedness, which led to the evictions for mortgage and repossession of ownership by banks soon after the crisis [87]. Other financial approaches such as "urban regeneration" arose to improve the quality of residential building downtown, in order to foster the tourism economy. The risk of losing properties and urban displacement has broadened anti-austerity and anti-gentrification movements in most Mediterranean cities.

Annunziata and Lees [87] argued that gentrification can also broaden the horizon towards new solutions. More specifically, "anti-gentrification scholars/activists could learn from the political space of Southern Europe where anti-eviction platforms are mobilizing, re-framing their strategies, adjusting themselves to different manifestations of austerity and enriching the repertoire of solutions and alternatives that are feasible in a time of scarcity and in the face of austerity gentrification" [87]. Such processes have (directly or indirectly) driven a partial gentrification of inner cities, e.g., in Madrid [16] and Milan [95]. In Athens, Gypsy communities were especially impacted, being marginalized in the border of the city thanks to a sort of "silent clearing of public space" [87,90]. In Rome, displacement processes have been mainly linked with the sale of public housing and rental arrears. Because of cuts

in public funds for social housing and the rise of local market rents, squatting movements have also spread [87,96].

4. Gentrification and Urban Policy

In most cases, gentrification has been explored under the lens of critical urbanism literature, where a proper normative framework is lacking. Webb [97] argued that "a strong opposition to gentrification that would contribute to the defense of communities against displacement and dispossession, would be one that acknowledges the normative value of exclusion". Although with counter-intuitive normative positions, "critical" gentrification research has become confused and contradictory. Instead of concentrating on gentrification as an outcome, it was more effective wondering what effects it produces when it is regarded as an integral part of urban policy. Through the improvement of cities' livability [98], public administrations continue to take care of their citizenship, promoting social cohesion. To be livable, a territory needs to promote a sort of "social mix" [99], starting from the assumption that a differentiated social composition allows the creation of social bonds, economic capital, job opportunities, and community integration [36]. One possible outcome, therefore, is gentrification. However, it is essential to counter gentrification through alternative legal mechanisms.

Although gentrification has been critically explored by some scholars adopting a normative perspective, Brueckner and Rosenthal [100] considered gentrification as a direct consequence of the aging process of durable housing stock, being a predicted outcome in all cities. Their study prescribes gentrification practices as progressive community-based alternatives to housing provision, land ownership and stewardship to challenge local-scale social transformations, encouraging community self-determination and empowerment to shape new urban futures. Layard [101] argued that gentrification often follows the same legal mechanisms—leases, licenses, planning permissions—as well as key legal absences (rent regulation, the security of tenure, or compulsory financial contributions to communities) that facilitate gentrification [102,103]. Legal concepts such as ethical landlordism, rent controls, the security of tenure, state-led construction, and social retail ventures could act as alternatives to counter gentrification [104].

Bunce [105] outlined the utility of community land trusts and eco-villages to strengthen the community-owned and stewarded land and housing. However, most of the scholars disapproved the social/public housing mechanisms as they are being gentrified globally [106]. Individual or community-led initiatives are extensively recommended, as the state is no longer trusted [58]. Steele [107] makes clear that self-renovating neighborhoods are a good solution to the destructive choice between "gentrification or decline". Neighborhoods become sites for social goods and economic opportunities—both intended (empirically and normatively) as rights for the future [108]. By carrying out surveys of displaced residents, Schill and Nathan [109] and Vigdor [110] have found that the majority of displaced residents have increased levels of satisfaction with their home and neighborhood. Nonetheless, much of the research concerning gentrification has focused on the harmful aspects of gentrification on poor households [18,19]. As a result, the literature on resistance to gentrification looks at anti-gentrification movements as the creation of alternatives or simply a series of oppositional, defensive practices to resist the assault of displacement [87]. Anti-gentrification measures usually do not make cities better [111–113]; however, the concepts of "socially aware renovation" can be considered when guaranteeing the socioeconomic role of gentrification.

5. Post-Crisis Dynamics: Future Prospects of Gentrification around Europe

In 2016, The Guardian newspaper pressed tales of gentrification around the world—from community displacement to tourism-triggered evictions and crazy rent hikes—quoting that "we are building our way to hell". Three years later, COVID-19 sweeps all around the world, making the future of gentrification around the world still more uncertain. With European inner cities being increasingly linked with tourism, events, and nightlife with large masses of temporary users, such development models seem to have (at least partially) collapsed because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Semi [114]

affirmed that "there will be human absence in the streets, selective closure of some activities and this will have a violent impact on an economic sector that was already fragile, a trail of unemployment and empty spaces, a real economic and social disaster. It is the result of a choice, devoting entire areas of the city to a particular economic crop".

As far as the immediate consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic on inner city gentrification, Semi clearly highlighted the intricate linkage with metropolitan resilience at large, arguing that "most of the European cities do not have that large amount of capital to react quickly according to the changes. (...) The central districts will suffer differently from the suburbs. Tourism gentrification and studentification would stop for one or two years". From this perspective, is much clearer now that the 2007 crisis—and, more recently, the COVID-19 shock—have exacerbated inequalities: "those who were already poor will be much poorer, those who were rich will still be richer than the others, those in the middle will slide downwards" [114]. According to this interpretation, middle class gentrifiers who benefit from smart working will abandon their busy urban life for a better lifestyle in the countryside, while upper class gentrifiers could even enjoy the exotic remote land of the globe.

Some gentrification literature has focused on gentrifiers' residential aspiration. Proximity and mobility issues have been placed at the forefront of motivation, and thus central areas have been strategic locations [115–119]; such a tendency could change due to the new challenges. In this line of thinking, Rérat [120] interpreted gentrification through the lens of spatial capital and mobility to explain how contemporary gentrification has caused "the increasing diversity of gentrifiers and the increasing recognition of new geographies of gentrification both in terms of spaces and countries". He took into consideration one particular group of gentrifiers, namely the (highly mobile) transnational class, intended as a global elite aspiring to be elsewhere on the globe quickly and easily through real or virtual networks [121].

Transnational capitalism is finally opening an intense debate on "global wealth migration and local affordability" [122]. In the past years, thanks to airline connections, Chinese "millionaire migrants" have opened a way of life between two continents, acting as the global gentrifiers of our era [13]. At the same time, because of the increasing openness of the labor market across Europe, southern "high unemployment countries" workers still migrate to northern "high employment" countries [123–125]. If transport-oriented policies may allow this class to increase their chances of being in their own country quickly and easily, it may create a locational advantage to attract gentrifiers in the global south [126–128]. If this analysis is accurate, this would mean that the future of European urban reality is no longer dependent on the relations between social classes in inner cities [129–131], but will be increasingly focused on socio-spatial groups of middle class people who will travel across the continent, still gentrifying affordable areas around Europe.

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