

**The struggle to belong**  
***Dealing with diversity in 21st century urban***  
***settings.***

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**The Breeder Feeder: Tracing Gentrification in Athens City  
Centre**  
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## **Abstract:**

Gentrification is an inner city process broadly discussed for almost half a century. Discourse on gentrification and the study of the process derive from the experience of western world cities. Notwithstanding, gentrification research on cities of the lower hierarchy has identified divergent trajectories of the process, giving insight to the multiple perspectives of inner city dynamics. The process should be analysed as a neoliberal restructuring of the inner city orchestrated by the middle class, where displacement is experienced by the lower societal strata, the voices of the neighbourhoods fade and a middle class playground is being established instead. As this urban trend plays out differently according to the specific socioeconomic background of each city, this paper will analyse the emerging dynamics in the city centre of Athens, focusing on a former working class neighbourhood called Metaxourgio. The elaborated research question is whether through the underlying forces that are changing the urban and social tissue in this inner city area, are we about to experience another incidence of gentrification: that of sporadic and private-led gentrification, where this trend plays out in the street level, the building or even the floor level reflecting the middle class preferences of resettling in the city centre. The first part of the paper will deal with the broader gentrification debate. The second will give a feedback of the current city centre dynamics. The third part will analyse the way gentrification performs in Athens and the social consequences of the process in the neighbourhood. The conclusion will raise some issues about the perspective of gentrification in a Mediterranean compact city like Athens

## Introducing Gentrification Issues

Gentrification is a highly disputed concept for almost half a century. However simplistic or chaotic its conceptualization may be, one should try to uncover the underlying meanings that are suggested by the literature. Before trying to unravel it, it would be better to suggest that '*accepting gentrification as a normal form of urban development*' is not apt (Bernt and Holm, 2009). Trying to trace it back to its roots, gentrification raises serious matters of social and spatial justice. Initially, the term, that was coined by Ruth Glass in 1964, was put ahead in order to describe and explain the housing movement of the middle and upper class back to the city centre of London. Nonetheless, this input of people and capital in specific inner London neighbourhoods, was accompanied by an output of the already existing residents, i.e. the displacement of poorer and weaker households.

The practice of gentrification in inner cities was then observed and researched in cities of the higher hierarchy. Dealing with the specific geographies and socioeconomic background of western cities in the USA, Canada, the UK and Australia several researchers tried to explain it. Neil Smith (1986; 1996) has documented that gentrification should be perceived as the flow of capital investment in the built environment. His 'rent gap' theory puts gentrification in the cycle of capital investment-disinvestment-reinvestment in the built environment and focuses on the relationship between land and property value particularly on the way in which disinvestment enhances the possibility of capital accumulation. As he states: "*When economic growth is hindered elsewhere in the economy, or where profit rates are low, the built environment becomes a target for switching of much profitable investment*" (Smith, 1996: 58). In this whole process, the role of the state is rather crucial. Hackworth and Smith (2001), after observing the gentrification process in New York, have identified three waves of state involvement. Whilst in the first wave the state is more energetic in helping investments in high-risk neighbourhoods, in the second wave, it takes a step back and lets the private capital and cultural industries to gentrify the inner cities; however, in the third wave it becomes more involved in the process of inner city gentrification by large real estate companies.

Other researchers have highlighted the fact that gentrification is better understood as an inner city process highly related to the transition of the cities' economic base from the manufacturing industry to service based industry (Ley, 1996). This has resulted in changes in the occupational class structure that has turned from one which was based around the dominance of a large manual working class to one dominated by professionals, managers and technical workers in the financial, cultural and service sectors, which are concentrated in cities (Hamnett, 2000;1984). This new middle class, driven by its consumption habits, moves to the city centre because of its particular characteristics. Ley (1996: 38) in examining the gentrification process in Canadian cities states that: "*a central location in a metropolitan area is valued offering access to work, shops, and the cultural activities of the central city, a set of linkages between home, work and leisure...environmental amenity is also highly regarded, whether in the physical environment (views) or the built environment (architecture, streetscape, freedom from through traffic, the character of local shops)*". As such, inner city neighbourhoods emerge as suitable housing locations for the new middle class, as proximity to workplace and other cultural activities give a new dimension in the evolving relationship of home, work and leisure (Lees et al, 2008).

From this perspective, many studies have made use of a stage model in order to indicate a progression in the process (Shaw, 2008). In the initial stages of gentrification, people of high cultural capital, but low economic one, like artists, settle in dilapidated central areas, in order to minimize their cost of everyday living. As with their 'sweat equity' (Glass, 1964; Zukin, 1989) they renovate their houses, they end up acting like magnets to other social strata of higher economic power. As the stages of this model continue, the areas undergoing gentrification, witness inflows of higher and better uses and succession of gentrifiers with more economic capital. Shaw states that (2008: 1794): "*In the final stage, highly renovated dwellings are returned to the market at greatly increased prices to the most affluent buyers and renters as gentrification takes hold. Social diversity diminishes and the search for the next ungentrified locality moves on. The end state is supposedly 'the creation of a new set of socially homogeneous middle-to-upper-middle class neighbourhoods with an associated economic and cultural transformation of*

*neighbourhood commercial zones*'. As the whole gentrification process develops and *'culturally validated neighbourhoods automatically provide new middle classes with collective identity and social credentials for which they strive'* (Zukin: 1987), the displacement of poorer households is as well accompanied by the displacement of the marginal- early stage gentrifiers.

In general terms, it can be argued that gentrification has mainly to do with flows: flows of capital that follow the flows of people and vice versa. However, the stage model was used so as to describe gentrification trajectories in western cities of the higher hierarchy, and as such it reflects the specific socioeconomic background of those geographies at the specific timing that they were researched. Van Criekingen and Drecoly (2003: 2451) underpin that gentrification processes in lower hierarchy cities challenge the stage model by arguing that *"each of these processes is relevant on its own- i.e. linked to a particular set of causal factors rather than composing basically transitional states within a step-by-step progression towards a common gentrified fate"*. As such inner city socioeconomic restructuring is *"better understood as the outcome of various combinations of several distinct processes"* (Van Crinkingen and Drecoly 2003: 2453). From this perspective, now that gentrification has gone global and different case studies of gentrification highlight diverse rhythms (Atkinson and Bridge, 2005), the boundaries between stages should be blurred (Shaw, 2008), hence agree to the fact that *"the [gentrification] continuum need not imply that all neighbourhoods will move through all 'stages'. Nor that they will reach the same end state, not indeed, that they can only travel in one direction. This conception is neither chaotic nor overly broad: it is complex, indeed, contextually inclusive and reinforces the common, underlying logics of gentrification"* (Shaw, 2008: 1713).

Another issue that arises at this point is whether inner city restructuring should be analysed through the lenses of gentrification no matter if it is identified in cities of the developing world or in cities that their socioeconomic context relates little with the one of the western ones. As Maloutas (forthcoming) observes *"how meaningful can it be to analyse the practices of different middle and upper middle class groups involved in gentrification processes, and their place related identity formation strategies, if they are not*

*inscribed into particular contextual coordinates.” He continues by arguing that the way “gentrification is evolving as a concept that embraces almost any form of urban regeneration is detrimental to the analysis, especially when applied to contexts different from those it was coined in/for. At the same time, however, it is probably true that we can no longer escape this ‘concept’ since it has acquired a substance of its own, has transcended the limits of academia and has become a sociopolitical issues and a stake in itself”.*

Nonetheless, as Smith states (1983:6) *“gentrification is a highly dynamic process, it is not amenable to overly restrictive definitions, rather than risk constraining our understanding of this developing process by imposing definitional order, we should strive to consider the broad range of processes that contribute to this restructuring, and to understand the links between seemingly separate processes...”*. As the *“movement of capital and people act as driving forces for neighbourhood changes in the form of gentrification”* (Atkinson and Bridge, 2005:16) it would be more amenable to embrace the four core elements of gentrification discussed by Davidson and Lees (2005) in order to identify, research and unravel gentrification even in the different socioeconomic contexts of less developed countries. The reinvestment of capital, the social upgrading of the locale by incoming high-income groups, landscape change and direct or indirect displacement of low income groups can become research guidelines in the periphery. Nonetheless, before applying it to diverse socioeconomic contexts, the specific place geographies and the city dynamics should provide a strong feedback to the research and concomitantly challenge its advocacy; as Maloutas (forthcoming) highlights: *“We should, therefore, constantly challenge it by revealing/reminding its implicit contextual assumptions and by comparing them to the contextual realities of the analysis each time at hand. This is mainly a task that researchers outside the Anglo-American core should carry out, even though researchers within that core would have plenty to gain from an increased awareness of the contextual limits of their own”*.

## Broader City Centre Issues: Introducing Local Insights

Before focusing on the case study, current the inner dynamics will be discussed. The post war development model of the country mainly focused on the tertiary sector and the urbanisation waves had more to do with *“political repression during and following the civil war with the big cities offering more protection through anonymity against political discrimination and more possibilities compared to exacerbated perpetual crisis of the rural economy”* (Maloutas, 2003b) than with industrialisation. Nonetheless, industrial uses and factories were mainly allocated in Piraeus axis that connects the city centre of Athens to the city centre of Piraeus<sup>1</sup> (Sarigiannis, 2000).

As Maloutas (2003a:173) claims that: *‘the post war urbanization of Athens followed a model of rapid and unplanned growth which resulted in a rather mixed urban tissue, primarily in terms of land use and secondarily in terms of social residential patterns’*. As there was hardly any state provision to the urbanizing population, housing was the outcome of two substantive types of construction: i) of construction under the system of self promotion (antiparohi) and ii) of illegal settlements (Mantoubalou, 1996; Sarigiannis2000). Antiparohi refers to the system where promotion is co-exercised by small owners and small construction firms in ad hoc joint ventures to produce small condominiums (Maloutas, 2003, Sarigiannis, 2000). Its implementation led to the erection of the majority of the low-rise—and more often architecturally interesting- housing stock, especially in the central areas of the city, and its replacement by high-rise and dense blocks of flats.

The antiparohi system led to a form of vertical segregation in the central parts of the city (Maloutas and Karadimitriou, 2001: 712): *“It transformed most of the central community residential zones by creating, in the beginning, a massive inflow of intermediate professional categories towards a newly built modern apartment housing”*. The more affluent households settled in the higher roofs of the buildings (with nice vistas of the city) and the working class or other lower income population to the lower floors and the basement (ibid).

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<sup>1</sup> Piraeus is known for its port; it is the major port of the Attica Region, and Athens belongs to this region as well.

The accelerated construction pace and the unregulated use of private cars, led to the deterioration of living conditions in the city centre, hence a suburbanisation movement of the upper social strata emerged in the 1970s orienting towards the northern or eastern suburbs<sup>2</sup> (Maloutas and Karadimitriou, 2001). Nonetheless, some central areas of the city were never abandoned by the affluent population, mainly due to historical reasons and the relatively higher living quality.

During the 1990s the city experienced a mass inflow of immigrants mainly from Eastern European Countries. As there was not any housing provision for the immigrant population, they had to use the private rented sector. As such they settled in the cheapest parts of the city i.e. in the central areas of Athens in the lower floors of the antiparohi buildings, *“reinforcing the vertical segregation pattern and giving it an ethnoracial dimension as well”* (Maloutas, 2011: 7), and in some cases in the remaining old low-rise housing stock (especially in the areas adjacent to Piraeus Avenue).

Since the 1990s the state (mainly the local) conducts many regeneration studies that focus on central areas that are either implemented in parts or not implemented at all. Their scattered implementation has to do with pedestrianisations and beautification of public spaces, while the societal context of the areas is hardly considered (Kaftantzoglou, 2001). The poor population that resides in the areas is not taken under serious consideration and in cases of full implementation (like in the district of Plaka) they were forced to leave due to the rise of the land prices.

Nonetheless, as Athens hosted the Olympic Games in 2004, many regeneration schemes were conducted in terms of emergency, i.e. the planning tools and laws were detoured and regeneration in central areas took place in very peculiar terms (Kazeros, 2005). Especially areas that were related to the ancient history of the city were put to the fore: a great pedestrianisation uniting the Acropolis with the great walk to the gates of the city (to Piraeus Avenue) was constructed by a private company owned by the Ministry of Culture called the “Unification of Archaeological Sites S.A.”. This

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<sup>2</sup> Segregation in Athens approximately follows the following pattern: the more affluent population resides in the Northern or the Eastern parts of the city and the working class population in the southern and western parts.

walk affected the trajectory of the adjacent neighbourhoods –arising gentrification tendencies in some cases- one of which is the Metaxourgio district where my research takes place.

The very recent trend in the city centre which is highly published by the media is that of violence. During the 2000s Athens experienced another migration wave: immigrants from Asia and Africa arrived in Athens on their way to other European countries<sup>3</sup>. Due the European Union Treaty of Dublin II, immigrants are not allowed to leave Greece and they are sent back to the country of entrance in case they are illegally found in other European countries (Tzirtzilaki, 2009). As there is not any housing provision for the immigrants, this population resides in derelict buildings in the city centre or gets exploited by groups of people who provide mattresses in apartments in the city centre; it is said that the cost of a mattress raises up to 5€ per night and that most the apartments do not have toilets nor kitchens. With the country's economy in crisis and the increasing number of unemployment, some city centre areas are facing serious problems considering delinquent behaviours, trafficking, and narcotics.

The dynamics that currently shape the city centre of Athens are multiple and contradictory. On the one hand, the city centre living conditions have deteriorated since the housing stock gets older, the social condition gets mixed (Athenians living next to immigrants spatially but social bonds hardly develop), and some areas are neglected by the state (in various terms be it from street cleaning and waste management to security of public spaces). On the other hand, same inner city enclaves are experiencing gentrification dynamics: many young childless households, artists and higher income families from the affluent suburbs have relocated themselves to the centre of the city.

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<sup>3</sup> Greece is in general considered a transit country

## **Methodological Approach to the Athenian Context of Gentrification**

A brief outlook of Athens' city centre would suggest that the city centre of Athens is ungentriifiable. The high rise buildings that via the antiparohi system that concurred inner cities, high percentages of small ownership, mixed land uses, illegal uses, deviancy and generally the densely and not well maintained built environment cannot attract new residents. Additionally, their re-evaluation through regeneration initiatives seems complicated as the local state has run out of money and apart from that, the state hardly imposes schemes that would harsh landowner interests.

Nonetheless, some central areas were not that affected by the antiparohi system. Areas close to Piraeus Avenue were not appreciated by the middle and upper classes due to their proximity to the factories thus they used to house the working class population. Additionally, in these areas the antiparohi system did not flourish as contamination from the factories and the other land uses developed low land prices, thus the investment in antiparohi would not provide the adequate returns. In these areas many low rise houses reminiscent of the neoclassical époque still remain: most of them are architecturally interesting whilst with the regeneration schemes that took place for the preparation of the city for the Olympic games, many two-storey houses obtained economic interest (use value).

As such, if we should look for processes with gentrification-like social impact in Athens, we must turn to the micro-scale (Maloutas and Alexandri, forthcoming). Gentrification may be taking place within a particular street, block or even within a building, where gentrifiers replace or displace former residents. The main hypothesis of the thesis is that gentrification in Athens reflects the specific socioeconomic and planning history of the city and as such it is staged, sporadic, and semiotic. For this reason research is focused on a case-study neighbourhood that is called Metaxourgio, elaborating qualitative methodological approaches.

Fieldwork started in February 2010 and is still under process. In order to approach the gentrification dynamics in the neighbourhood open-ended semi-structured interviews are conducted with the different population groups.

New residents, are questioned about their demographic background and their decision to move into the area and their everyday living. The basic aim is to draw the profile of the gentrifiers in the Athenian case of gentrification. Old residents are asked questions dealing with their past memories, how they have perceived the recent trajectory of the neighbourhood. Immigrants are asked about their decision to settle in the area and their relation to it and its other residents.

Snowball sample techniques are adopted. As Arber (2001: 69) states: “*probability samples require the selection of respondents from some kind of sampling frame*”. Hence, when conducting non-probability or snowball sampling techniques, the sample frame cannot be numerically controlled. Additionally, the interviews were conducted until the point where the respondents began to suggest the same views.

In the following period interviews are going to be conducted with members of the local government, with agents of the Ministry of Environment and Climate Change (Central Government), developers and that invested in the district and other key informants of the neighbourhood such as the priest and the public primary school director.

The research is further supported by in situ observation, regeneration reports undertaken from the local state (1991) and the Unification of Ancient Sites SA (2001), and the use of visual and material documentation. Articles in newspapers, magazines and web-pages and blogs are scrutinized in order to identify the images of the area that are put forward and the arguments that are used for the advertising of the district. Frequent field visits, in situ observation and photographs help the researcher develop a more holistic approach to the current reality of the area and provide continuous feedback, so as to follow the traces of gentrification. Simultaneously the data provided by the state reports help to construct a more coherent view of the past and present dynamics.

### **The Metaxourgio District: Ten Reasons to Go to Athens**

If you travel from Paris to Athens with the Air- France-Airlines and you take a look at the airlines’ magazine, you will come up to an article that

provides you with ten reasons to go to Athens. The ninth reason refers to the creative surge: *“I know so much is going to happen in this district! Says Rebecca Camhi and with her intuition you can believe it... in her gallery in Metaxourgio a working class district... the new hip gallery spot. At the Breeder, you can see the best of Greek contemporary art... Arty fashionistas flock to The Breeder Feeder, a creative eatery on the top floor. Two streets away there’s a charmingly dilapidated old building housing Kunsthalle Athena, a venue for street art and performances”* (French Airlines Magazine: 126).



**Map 1: Mapping Metaxourgio in Athens**

Metaxourgio is a former working class district, in close proximity to the central squares of Athens (Omonia and Syntagma Square), next to the Acropolis and other important archaeological sites. It is surrounded by Pireaus Avenue<sup>4</sup> and Iera Street that used to be the ancient path used for a secret ceremony that now accommodates huge former industrial buildings that are currently used as folklore nightclubs.

This area is considered to be deteriorated, due to the land uses that used to accommodate. However, its urban tissues is rather mixed. Brothels, former warehouses and industrial spaces, the Chinese community shops and residences, working class and other immigrant residences in the antiparochi

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<sup>4</sup> As afore mentioned the axis were all the industrial uses were gathered

buildings and abandoned low storey houses that are used by drug addicts and by immigrants without papers are one part of its picture.

Metaxourgio's housing stock is of great architectural interest: if you look back at the planning history of modern Athens, before the establishment of the king's palace in Syntagma square (that now is used as the parliament), Omonia square was considered a very favourable spot for the palace installation hence as the administrative district. As such, many rich people bought lots of land and built houses in the area of Metaxourgio. These houses still exist, some of them are well maintained, some are derelict, some are renovated by the new residents of the area and some others are used as art spaces or gourmet restaurants.



**Picture 1: The GEK TERNA S.A building and its interior.**

Additionally, in the district new expensive developments emerge; especially the complex constructed by GEK TERNA S.A. is an outcome of modern architecture that relates little to the rest of the built environment. As it is consisted of four multi-storey buildings, with inner private yard, piscine and parking lots, compound with concrete and some kind of fencing that allows a see-through view of its yard, it gives the notion of a small scale gated

community; an old resident noted: *“it is like they have brought the Averof<sup>5</sup> prisons in here”* (personal interview). The description provided by Giannakopoulos (2010: 126) is straightforward: *‘these private security main doors and the following fence door isolates the precinct and the main entrance not from the access and the look of the passenger’*.

### **Tracing Gentrification and the gentrifier population in Metaxourgio**

In Metaxourgio two kinds of gentrifier population co-exist. Members of the high upper class, possessing economic and cultural capital, have bought and renovated two-storey houses; thus the first wave -marginal- gentrifiers, as described in the literature, (students, artists, young people in the early stages of their professional carrier, childless couples, gays, lesbians etc), rent apartments in the antiparohi buildings or rent old low storey houses with their friends or their partners. With their sweet equity they put money and aesthetics so as to ameliorate the condition of their houses. In the case of Metaxourgio the whole gentrification process takes place via private investment practices. However, as the gentrifier’s inflow in the neighbourhood is scattered in space, both groups co-habit with immigrants and older residents.

The more affluent households come from the wealthy Northern and Eastern suburbs, whilst in some cases some central areas that the high-upper class never abandoned were mentioned. From another scope it can be argued that the affluent gentrifiers originate from the city enclaves that the upper class had strong housing preferences be it the rich suburbs or prestigious inner cities. The marginal gentrifiers come from other parts of the city that are in close proximity to its centre and they are considered good neighbourhoods, i.e. with better living conditions comparing to other central areas as Metaxourgio.

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<sup>5</sup> Averof prisons were built in 1896 for young people that broke the law and for women. They were located in another area of the city centre and their building was considered enormous for its time.

The staged model of gentrification is challenged once more, as it is not the first wave of more bohemian gentrifiers that acted as magnet to the second wave of more affluent gentrifiers. In this case, different socio-economic groups were drawn to this neighbourhood for quite similar reasons, like the lower cost of buying or renting a house and the area's proximity to the city centre and the archaeological landmarks. This is not to say that the staged model should be dismissed but the Athenian perspective suggests another type of gentrification that gentrification waves coexist. As gentrification forms and performs accordingly to the specific socio-economic background of the city (Clark, 2005), probably this is another issue that has to do with the different socioeconomic background of the Athens, but this is a matter that needs to be further examined.



**Picture 2: Renovated House in Metaxourgio**

The change in the land uses of the area is another indicator of its gentrification trajectory. Many galleries are transferred from other parts of the city, art spaces and theatres open up and many former industrial spaces or basements are rented by theatrical, percussion and dance groups, jugglers, poets and generally by groups of people that deal with alternative modes of

culture. It seems that these land uses that deal with art and culture act as magnets to other uses that have to do with their particular clientele and the consumption habits of the new middle class that has settled in the area. Many buildings are rehabilitated by wine bars and expensive restaurants: Funky Gourment is the first restaurant in Athens to perform molecular cuisine it is situated in Metaxourgio and it is considered of the most expensive restaurants in the city. Trendy hairdressers and second hand furniture shop open up, followed by an artistic boutique and an organic shop. Very recently due to the merger of Carrefour and Dia supermarket, the Dia supermarket that existed in the area changed to Carrefour Express. As an immigrant noted: *“for my everyday shopping I used to go to Dia supermarket, but now that it has changed into Carrefour it is very expensive and I cannot shop there any longer”* (personal interview).

Simultaneously, investors have great interests in the area. The GEK TERNA SA construction is composed of very expensive apartments that their average selling price per square meter is 4,000 € whilst their rent raises up to 700 €. These prices are considered to be rather high compared to the prices of other prestigious Athenian neighbourhoods<sup>6</sup>. The property development company Oliaros has bought many buildings in the area of high architectural interest<sup>7</sup>. While the company has not made any sales yet, it engages in several initiatives: it participates in the Exemplar Neighbourhood citizens' network, that is going to be analysed in the next section, it organizes the artistic event of Remap, where artists from all over the world exhibit in its buildings and people are provided with neighbourhood maps so as to locate the exhibits, and it has organized two architectural contests one for the construction of student residences in the area and the second one for the renovation of four of its buildings.

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<sup>6</sup> Average prices per square in the very rich areas of the city centre for new built apartments are about 7,000€ per square meter, the area of Metaxourgio is considered as part of the rich areas of the city with prices ranging over 3,500€ per square meter, whilst the average price for less expensive areas range from 1,800€ per square meter (available from: <http://www.lifo.gr/now/view/2307>)

<sup>7</sup> it is claimed that it owns around 60 properties in the area



**Picture 3: The former Silk Factory (Metaxourgio) as the new Municipal Gallery**

Atkinson (2000) claims that measuring gentrification is measuring the invisible. The invisible is not only in measuring; when a process starts smelling like gentrification some people have already been displaced. Hence, trying to indicate displacement is an abstract issue. Research in Metaxourgio has identified a direct form of displacement. Older people, gypsies, immigrants, boheme gentrifiers, generally people with no economic nor politic power, get evicted as the landowners want to sell their properties to gentrifiers. *'I know that the owner wanted to sell the house and that there was an older couple living here for many years... there are many old households like them in Metaxourgio... you know pensioners... When we bought the house we did not collect their rent so as to give them the opportunity to search for a new home for two years... of course they were living in very bad conditions... now we see them every day; they have rent an apartment in a block of flats by the end of the street'* (upper class gentrifier, personal interview). Additionally, eviction takes place when the landowner decides to raise the rent and rent the property to bar or restaurant owners who will then renovate the building and turn it into a bar or a restaurant. It is straightforward that the rent paid by a non-residential more profitable use such as bars, is much higher than the one afforded by immigrants or older people. *'When I saw the floor off my coffee shop it was enough for me. I said to myself that I*

want it... before we use this building as a coffee shop, illegal immigrants lived inside ... it was very dirty and it smelled a lot' (gentrifier and coffee shop owner, personal interview). In the case of a gypsy family facing eviction, that refused to leave the building, they were threatened by cut of power and water supply. *'Do you know how many gypsies used to live in this street? Every day was like a Sunday bazaar, they were out in the streets making baskets and talk loud to each other. Now they are all gone... after 2005 they were forced to leave and the owners shut their houses'* (old resident, personal interview). As an immigrant mentioned: *'many immigrants used to live in the derelict houses... now they are gone since the houses were sold to newcomers and were renovated. The area now is more beautiful'* (personal interview). Eviction is not visible in Metaxourgio; as the whole process is sporadic, eviction is selective. Apart for the gypsy community, no other mass eviction has taken place as such it is imperceptible. This does not imply that it does not exist, but it may explain why there are not any anti-gentrification movements in the area.

In the whole process, the role of the state has been rather passive, hence more neoliberal, as it lets the private capital to circulate and form the built environment according to its own predilection. From a first standpoint, regeneration schemes are rather semiotic, mainly dealing with pedestrianisations and the restoration of the former silk factory<sup>8</sup>. The pedestrianisations that took place since the 1990s and especially the ones that took place for the preparation of the city for the Olympic games acted as magnets to high income households that bought houses in the area: *'We used to rent a house in Plaka<sup>9</sup> when our child was not born yet, and we experienced all its mutation that initiated with the pedestrianisations there. When our child was born, we needed more space... Our dream was to buy a house in the city centre ...since the state started to pedestrianise streets in Metaxourgio we thought that it would become like Plaka so we decided to buy a house... at that time, prices in the area were really low and the renovation cost was not that high'* (upper-class gentrifier, personal interview).

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<sup>8</sup> Metaxourgio- the neighbourhood was named after it as silk in Greek is metaxi

<sup>9</sup> Plaka is the first area of Athens to be fully gentrified during the 1990s. It is situated on the Acropolis foots.

Another state initiative that provoked gentrification was the regeneration reports produced by the Municipality of Athens and the Unification of Archaeological Sites S.A. These reports that mainly supported that regeneration should take place via pedestrianisations and amelioration of the built environment and the housing stock, were highly advertised by the press: *‘with all these rumors going on we thought that the neighbourhood would cleanse and that the whole situation would become better’*.(upper-class gentrifier, personal interview). Additionally these reports supported that the area should be turned into the cultural hub of the city. Although galleries, artistic spaces and artists already reside in the area, before the last municipal elections the former factory of silk was turned into the Municipality Gallery. Its exhibitions are really interesting (now exhibiting Picasso and Warhol) and are strongly advertised by the press and the media. This tactic enforces the notion of the cultural hub of the city centre, as it attracts people from all parts of Athens to visit Metaxourgio.

Another state initiative took place in June 2011<sup>10</sup> and has to do with measures to attract new ‘creative’ residents. The district is declared as *‘Zone of Special Regeneration’* and many economic incentives that mainly have to do with tax reductions when buying and renovating a house are provided. The basic aim is to attract the “creative” generation of young childless couples. Although creativity strategies as the ones claimed by Richard Florida are not yet part of the new agenda, a first hint of them can be identified in this recent declaration. Apart from that, especially after the Minister’s declarations, many immigrants without papers are arrested by the police. As claimed by a boheme gentrifier: *‘the police is very violent. The policemen as dressed in black and they wear full face masks, they are very tall and they arrest immigrants just like that in the streets... I got really scared’* (personal interview).

In this whole process of urban renaissance in areas that relate to broken windows theories the police patrols and arrests may seem well

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<sup>10</sup> On May 2011, a man was robbed and killed by immigrants on his way to get his car as his wife was in labour. This provoked fierce rage against the immigrants and many right-wing groups started hunting immigrants on the streets and beating them till death (at least one incident mentioned by the press). Many demonstrations took place, others from right wing and other with a left wing perspective, so the Minister of the Environment and Climate change announced new measures for city centre regeneration initiatives.

documented. Nonetheless, Metaxourgio is still a district with high land prices, besides the economic crisis, where the building restoration, be it by renters or owners, still takes place. Probably what really justifies police intervention is the ecology of fear (Davis, 1998), or the ecology of monsters (Arapoglou, 2010) and the general fear of the other. The cleansing of the district from 'the others' such as immigrants and gypsies, i.e. from non-white people with different cultures and no social integration perspectives in the Greek society, seems crucial at the moment in order to help the gentrification process to go on.

### **Social Ties in Metaxourgio: Implosion or Explosion?**

In terms of social ties, each group has developed relations with members of the same group while there hardly any relation with members from other groups. The upper class gentrifiers have formed a Non-Profit Organisation that is called Exemplar Neighbourhood, through which they are trying to put pressure on the authorities so as to regenerate the area or advertise city living in Metaxourgio. Their actions vary from guerilla gardening techniques to regeneration proposals to the Municipality of Athens, from meetings with the Director of the Central Police Office to media announcements and advertisement (Skai radio and TV channel, the Vogue magazine, Kathimerini newspaper), basically asking for more green spaces and better living inner city conditions. Nonetheless, the rest of the communities are not aware of the Exemplar Neighbourhood's initiatives: *'I found out about the regeneration proposal from the newspapers, after they had presented it at the Municipality'* (old resident, personal interview), *'I don't know that such a meeting with the head police officer will take place... what are going to talk about?'* (Immigrant, personal interview), *'well a lady gave me some fliers about the police officer meeting, but I don't know if I will go in the end'* (old resident, personal interview). Their decisions and initiatives are not products of participation from all groups of people that live in Metaxourgio. Nonetheless, they project themselves to be the voice of the area and maybe this is another aspect of the way that the voice of an area changes (Atkinson, 2004) when gentrification takes place.

Upper class gentrifiers do not seem to mingle with the other communities. Although they use the local shops that are managed by immigrants or old residents, they hardly develop deeper ties: *‘that dirty and smelly Muslim who looks at me as if he wants to rape me, who throws rubbish on the street, who doesn’t work, who hits girls so as to take their purses I want to kill him... He is an immigrant... but Yolan is an immigrant too and he paints my house, he has a family and his child goes to school. I am friends with him he is sweet charming... are these two types of immigrants the same?’* (upper class gentrified, personal interview); *‘our relations are based on commercialization, whenever they want something to be fixed they refer to the immigrants otherwise they don’t have anything in common’* (bohemian gentrifier).

Nonetheless, marginal gentrifiers seem to mix more with older residents and immigrants. Each spring they organize a street carnival that is advertised by wall papers translated in many different languages. As they do not have enough money they enjoy the immigrants’ coffee shops, the older residents’ shops and delicatessens. A young immigrant when referring to a gentrifier said: *‘I really love him he has done a lot for the neighbourhood and he is my friend; we go out together’* (personal interview). Nonetheless, their bonds seem to be stronger amongst them: *‘everything is here, theatres are here, art studios are here, dancers, actors. There is a cultural buzzle going on and it is the other residents that have to come along and mix with it... I am not the one to tell them what to do’* (artist- gentrifier).

On the other hand, immigrants do not share the same picture. Immigrants meet with members of their communities in the parts of the city that a minority enclave has emerged: *‘every Sunday that I finish work I go to Kipseli where my friends are. We go to church, and we spend the day there’* (Immigrant, personal interview); *‘we don’t have any friends here; every weekend we meet with other people from Georgia and we have fun’* (Immigrant, personal interview).

Old residents are mainly retired people with low income. As such most of them do not spend much time outside their houses nor do they have any information about the cultural happenings of the area nor about the Exemplar neighbourhoods initiatives. Most of them are afraid of the immigrants

especially the gangs on the streets as they have robbed their friends: *'don't you see the situation here? It is full of black people'* (old resident, personal interview). But not all voices are like that: *'every morning I go to the coffee shop and then I come back home and spend my time with my wife... the other day I went to the supermarket and I fell... and it was there this black boy selling products in the street and he helped me to stand up again. I told that to my wife. Everyone is human... the next way I went to the supermarket again and I bought a little statue that he was selling... I wanted to thank him somehow'*.

### **Conclusion:**

What is very crucial when researching gentrification is its timing. At the initial stages of the process where displacement is not well established, new land uses mix with old ones and different kind of people seem to mingle it seems that the advantages of gentrification transcend its disadvantages (Atkinson, 2002). In Metaxourgio everybody welcomes the new land uses, the renovated housing and the street lighting that is supported by the new bars. However, it seems that the different groups do not share the same neighbourhood stories as they experience different realities. The upper class is well situated in its new city-centre houses, nonetheless it tries to ameliorate the outer scenery through its initiatives; artists are happy with the district agglomeration, whilst old people and immigrant stay put in their old flats or get evicted. Nonetheless, as the process unravels the impacts of gentrification become more apparent: cleansed enclaves of affluent households establish their position in the city centre. Nonetheless, as Athens inner city dynamics are at a strange forefront what the future of the research area would be is not clear. It may adhere to the gentrification forecast of a socially homogenous wealthy area but it may as well follow a rather different trajectory. At the time being, the Breeder- Feeder welcomes you in Metaxourgio with alternative cocktails made of pear, mastic and sake that you can enjoy while viewing the gallery's exhibition. If you do not see any immigrants or old residents inside it is because they are not aware of the

Feeder nor the Breeder; however, Athenians with a cultural disposition will be there to join you.

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