

The struggle to belong
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Socio-spatial inequality and segregation processes in suburban context.

A case study in Athens.

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ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on the explanation of socio-spatial inequality and exclusion issues in the suburbs of Athens. More specifically it seeks to examine the new forms of segregation and urban inequality that exist in the west suburbs- the working class areas (Menidi, A. Liosia, Aspropyrgos) in Athens.

The spatial concentration of disadvantaged households leads to the question of what the role of local state or neighbourhood in social segregation is. The neighbourhood affects the subsequent options of households, either by providing opportunities for social mobility or by reducing life-chances. A number of initial questions arise. How do mechanisms of social reproduction, such as education, reproduce and reinforce tactics of social segregation? What are the different strategies of middle class social strata and how do their choices empower segregation as, for instance, the residential or educational one? How do the state institutions adopt the same segregation strategies? Does the new suburbanization lead to more polarization, such as rich enclaves and poor enclaves? Our results are based mainly on data collected from secondary schools and are further supported by data from semi-structured in-depth interviews with parents, teachers and key actors. The study area is a suburban area in the western region of Athens characterized by various forms of urban informality, especially in housing together with large-scale interventions and mega-projects for the Olympic Games (2004).

Our empirical research constitutes a closer examination of the local community and household strategies for social reproduction and mobility, which tend to produce new forms of segregation and fragmentation of urban space. Poor urban environment and the weakness for social and spatial mobility produce formations of "poverty traps". The school system contributes to this pathology of areas in terms of the growing separation between public schools.

1. Introduction: Athens urban development and segregation processes

This paper focuses on the explanation of social and spatial inequalities and segregation processes in disadvantaged neighborhoods in the west suburbs - the working class areas (Menidi, A. Liosia, Aspropyrgos)- in Athens. More specifically it seeks to examine the forms of school segregation and also the extent to which residential composition is directly mirrored in schools. Also, it seeks to investigate the different forms of middle class education strategies centered on school choice and the consequences of school catchment areas evasion. To this end it attempts to answer questions, such as: How do mechanisms of social reproduction, reproduce and reinforce tactics of social segregation? What are the different strategies of middle class social strata and how do their choices empower segregation as, for instance, the residential or educational one? How do the state institutions adopt the same segregation strategies? Does the new suburbanization lead to more polarization, such as rich enclaves and poor enclaves?

The research was conducted through a study of the working-class areas, in the suburbs of Athens. On one hand it will serve to understand concepts of indicators of the urban and education policies and the role of local state in advanced marginality and how this varies in different places and diverse communities. On the other hand, there is little analysis of the institutions intervention in terms of how they mediate into the production of space and contribute to the genesis of urban inequalities. In order to achieve this, we analyze data collected from secondary schools (grades, drop-out rates etc.) and further data from semi-structured in-depth interviews with parents, teachers and key actors.

In this article the aim is to give a closer examination of the social spatial inequality in suburban context in Athens, especially the role of middle class educational strategies. The contemporary Greek elementary and secondary school system is organized on a principle of “proximity”, which means that children from a given neighbourhood attend the school that is closest to where they live. The enrolment is controlled by catchment areas which mirror the local environment and the neighbourhood.

Our analysis will try to identify the relation between education and poor urban environment, as well as to analyze the mechanisms that produce formations of

"poverty traps". The formation of institutions and the build environment is of crucial importance in this organized space. According to D. Harvey:

“Such institutions typically become centers for the formation of dominant discourses as well as centers for the exercise of power [...] Many institutions (e.g. local governments and the state) are organized territorially and define and regulate activity at a particular spatial scale (D. Harvey, 2002: 243)”.

It seems that the activities of many institutions –schools, cultural associations, local services - become mechanisms of social reproduction and their tactics reproduce and reinforce social segregation. In the same way the formation of the build environment limits the possibilities of citizens for social participation (encouraging some and discouraging others). Considering the welfare state is important to address the role of the local state and how it mediates state policies (Murie and Musterd, 2004). It is also crucial to consider the role of the different strategies of middle class social strata and their choices in education services in the production of new forms of segregation and fragmentation of urban space.

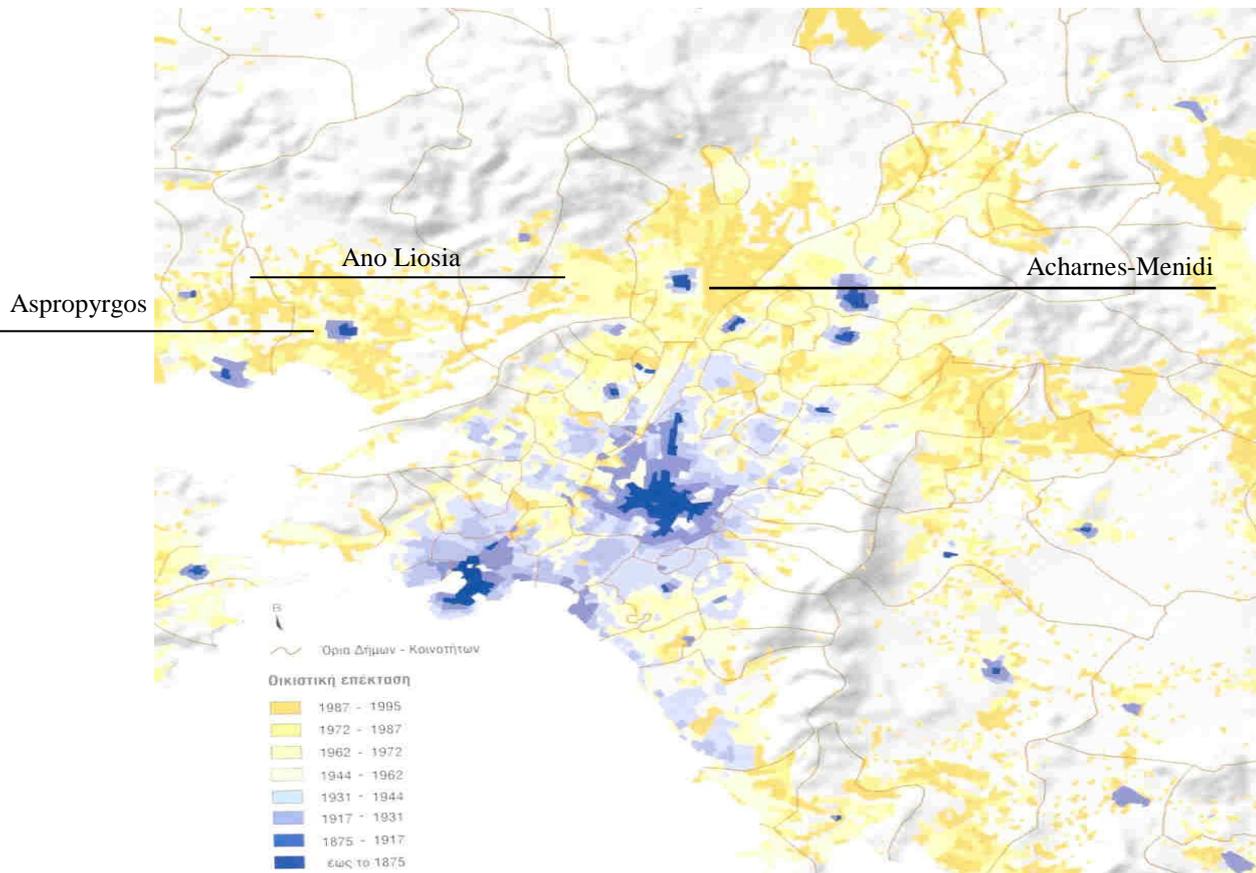
A closer look at the socio-spatial formation of the city of Athens shows that in the western suburbs there is a high concentration of working class (manual workers near the manufacturing area and the industrial units) with a high mixture of different population categories (immigrants, ethnic groups, Roma people). The concentration of working class in mixed urban areas is related to the historical development of the land and the housing market in the city of Athens (Leontidou, 1990, Maloutas, 2004).

By contrast, in the eastern parts there is a sprawl that makes more visible the historical division of the city's space between west and eastern suburbs and a tendency of spatial polarization between these areas (Arapoglou, Sayas 2009). In the north-east suburbs there is a concentration of professional strata and in the south-eastern part there is more population of sales and clerical occupation.

Map 1 shows the urban expansion of Athens. In the first post war period there was the region expansion (legal and informal housing/self- built houses of the poorer residents) of the rural migrants. During the '50s and the '60s the west suburbs rapidly grew without official planning and different kinds of informal buildings appeared, the so-called 'informal' houses (self –built) of the poor. The most recent areas are those of suburban expansion of higher and middle class social strata. The expansion of road

infrastructure to the country side and the use of private cars were processes that helped in this development.

Map 1: Athens urban expansion



Source: Maloutas, ed. (2000)

Our study area is located in the north west part of the metropolitan area of Athens (Axarnai-Menidi, Liosia, Aspropyrgos). The choice of the research area is based on the high mixture of social strata and ethnic groups with diverse ethnic and cultural identities (Roma people, repatriated groups of Greek origin from the former Soviet Union and Albania, immigrants from different Balkan countries and Russia). The area has historically received migrants and newcomers and different groups and, consequently, diverse social, ethnic and cultural identities have coexisted. However, social mixing doesn't imply the existence of social cohesion in the area.

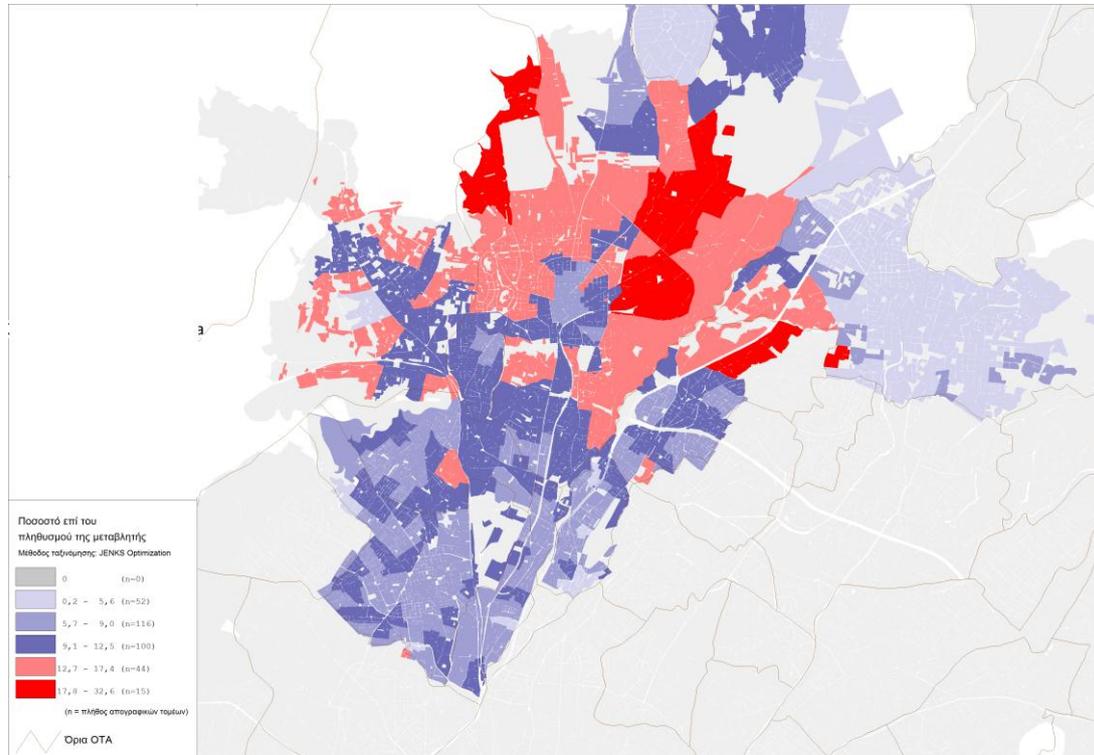
Each group prioritises the problems in the neighbourhood differently, which makes it difficult for different groups to work together. Prejudice, mistrust of the local authority, broader clientelistic political culture and the lack of information leave little

space for social concern and cohesion. Also, local policies treat some of the groups as “invisible citizens” or, during elections, as a reservoir for votes, isolating the poor neighbourhoods from the neighbourhoods where middle class families live. The replacement of social welfare policies with policies of surveillance makes the region more problematic. The classification of the area as a “problem area” leads to undesirable stigmatization of the inhabitants. The local policies, which are mainly financed by the EU, consider the problem of social inequality as a static one and address it in most cases without clear results. In the case of Roma people, the policies of forced removal and dispersion were common tactics.

The west suburbs is a region that receives population mainly from low economic social strata that work in the neighboring areas in industry and manufacture.

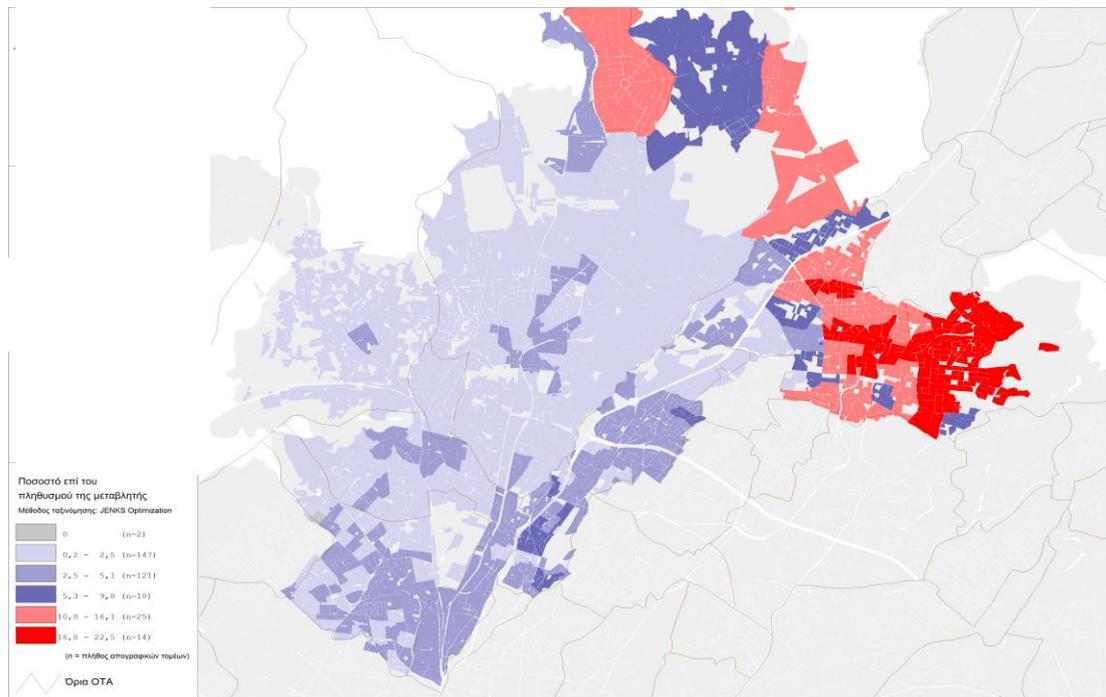
Map 2 and Map 3 show the distribution of lower and higher socio-economic groups in Axarnes-Menidi and the west neighboring areas. There is a concentration of low-income population in the west suburbs, in contrast to the north-east neighboring areas with high concentration of higher socio-economic groups. The expansion of the Greek professionals and higher socio-economic groups in the north-eastern suburbs further intensifies the historical formation of the city’s space across the west-east social class division. By contrast, there is a high distribution of self-employed, small enterprises etc. in Acharnes and the neighboring area (Map 4).

Map 2: Distribution of lower socio-economic groups (routine occupation: cleaners, un-skilled workers, etc.) in Acharnes-Menidi and neighboring suburbs (A. Liosia, Zefyri, Kamatero, Ilion, Ag. Anargyroi, N. Filadelfeia, Metamorfofi, Kifisia, Thrakomakedones).



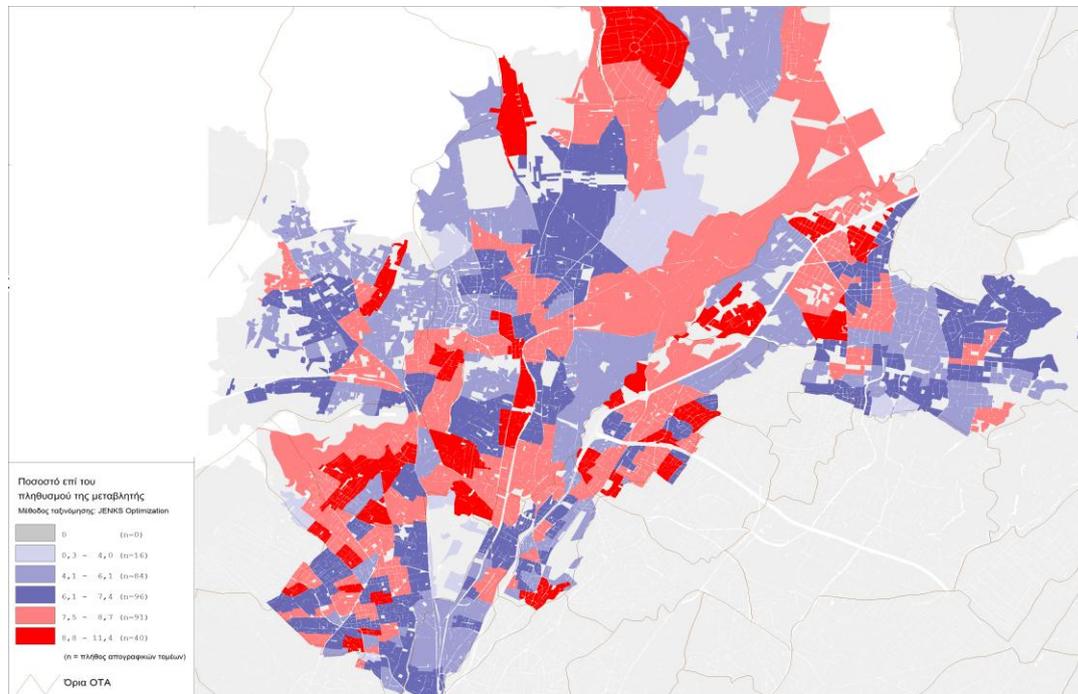
Source: National Centre for Social Research (EKKE)-Panorama and 1991-2001 Census data

Map 3: Distribution of higher socio-economic groups and higher administration staff in Acharnes and neighboring suburbs (Kifisia, Thrakomakedones, Varibobi, N. Erythrea)



Source: National Centre for Social Research (EKKE)-Panorama and 1991-2001 Census data

Map 4: Distribution of self employed occupations, small enterprises etc. in Acharnes-Menidi and neighboring suburbs (A. Liosia, Zefyri, Kamatero, Ilion, Ag. Anargyroi, N. Filadelfeia, Metamorfofi, Kifisia, Thrakomakedones).



Source: National Centre for Social Research (EKKE)-Panorama and 1991-2001 Census data

Another interesting characteristic of the area is the presence of various forms of urban informality, especially housing together with large-scale interventions and mega-projects for the Olympic Games (2004). A number of public works (“Attica Highway”- the new peripheral road of Athens, the suburban railway) and the Olympic Village have attracted more population.¹ After the 2004 Olympic Games, the Olympic Village was used to house the low social economic strata as a public housing policy. Unfortunately, the lack of transportation and the lack of complete infrastructure isolated the village and transformed it to a gated community in just a few years.

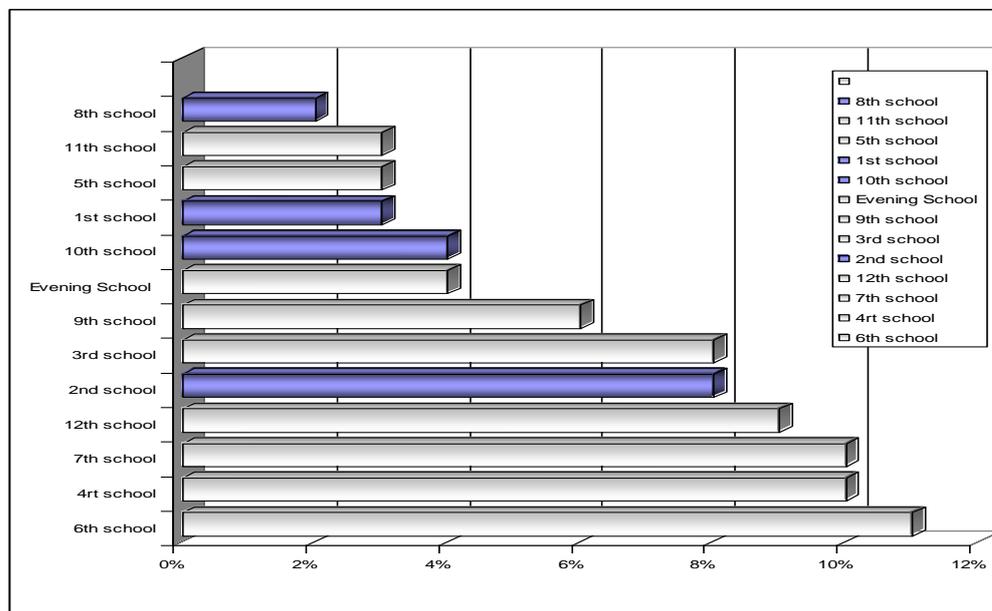
¹ According to Census data, in 1991 the population was 61,350 and in 2001 it reached 79,000. After 2004, 10,000 people reside in the Olympic village.

2. School segregation and the reproduction of urban inequalities in the suburbs: Methods, data collection and investigation outcomes

The research results are based mainly on data collected from four (4) secondary schools (grades, drop-out rates etc.). This is further supported by data from semi-structured in-depth interviews with parents, teachers and key participators in school education. 2001 Census data² were also used to obtain information on the social-economic background at the district level and the socio-spatial differentiation of educational performance. The sample pertains to 1,094 pupils (558 boys and 536 girls of secondary education). 55 semi-structured in-depth interviews with parents, teachers and administrators were held (35 parents, 17 teachers, 3 administrators).

Figure 1 shows the percentage of immigrant children per school in the secondary schools of Acharnes. The highest percentage is 11%. The schools shown in dark colour are the sample schools.

Fig. 1: Percentage of 13-16 year olds immigrant children by school.

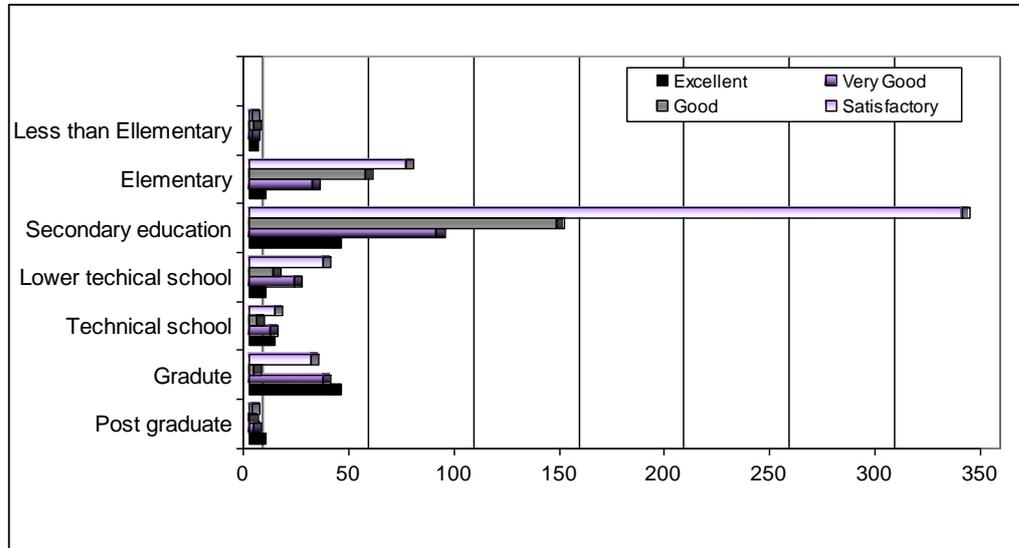


Children from higher economic strata have better educational results than those from lower ones. Figure 2 shows that the educational level of parents plays a very important role in the educational results. The pupils whose parents have graduated

² National Centre for Social Research-(EKKE)-Panorama

have better outcomes in comparison to those who have post-secondary and elementary education.

Fig. 2: Grades (level of achievement) of pupils between the ages 13-16 (1st, 2nd class) by the educational level of the head of the household in the sample schools (2006-07).

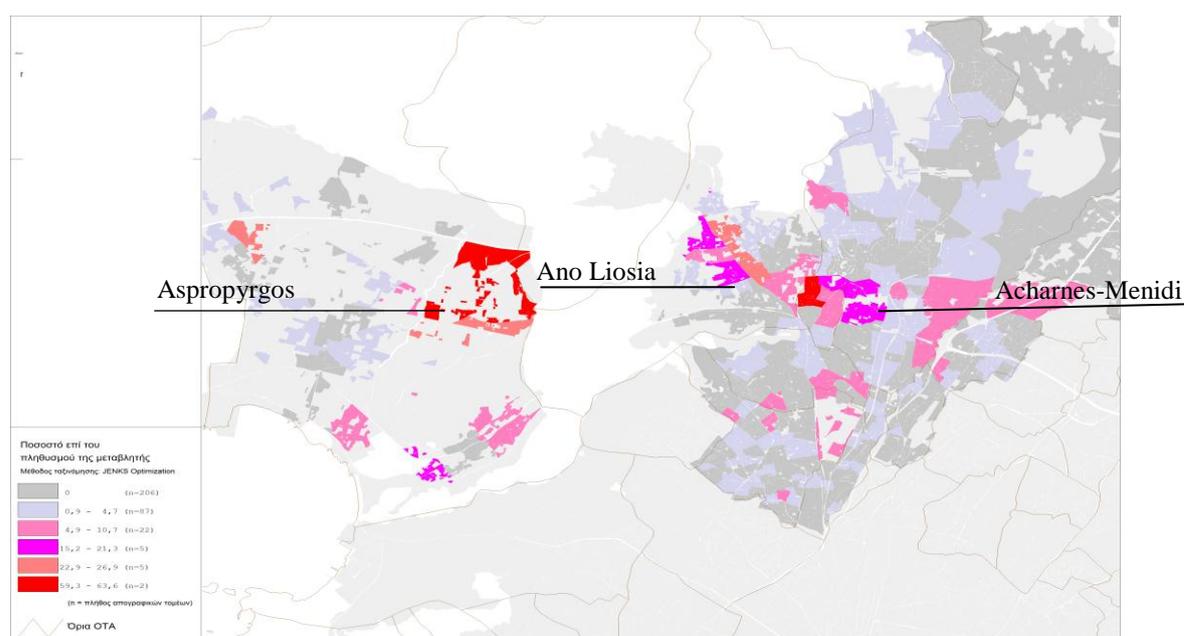


We assume that there are two different middle class educational strategies that intensify social selectivity. First, local school evasion without changing residential area, heightens social diversity between schools. Ethnic school composition plays an important role in school evasion. The social heterogeneity of schools and the strong presence of unfavorable social and ethnic groups is the main reason for school evasion. Second, indirect intervention through their associations, which increases social segregation and the diffusion of the negative image of the neighborhood.

These strategies of middle class parents effect school composition, strengthen the social segregation between schools and regions and stigmatize neighborhoods. The early stage of elementary education is the starting point of choosing school and middle class parents tend to search for the best schools. The presence of Gipsy pupils in schools is a criterion for school evasion that intensifies segregated outcomes in education and in residential area. The structure of a new school near the Gypsies settlements with homogeneous social-ethnic composition (Gypsies children) is an indication of social segregation, exclusion and ghettoization of the area. The same tactics are found in the neighboring municipalities (Zefyri) with the same social-ethnic composition of the population.

Map 5 shows all members of households aged between 10 and 13 that were not involved in any kind of education in Acharnes-Menidi and neighboring suburbs. We conclude that this group becomes increasingly marginal and have very clear social and spatial limits. They are concentrated in the deprived neighbourhoods where there is a strong presence of disadvantaged groups, especially Gypsies. Drop out rates are extremely high in gypsies and the difficulties start from the primary and continue to secondary education. Especially in high school, there are high drop out rates in the beginning of the 1st grade.

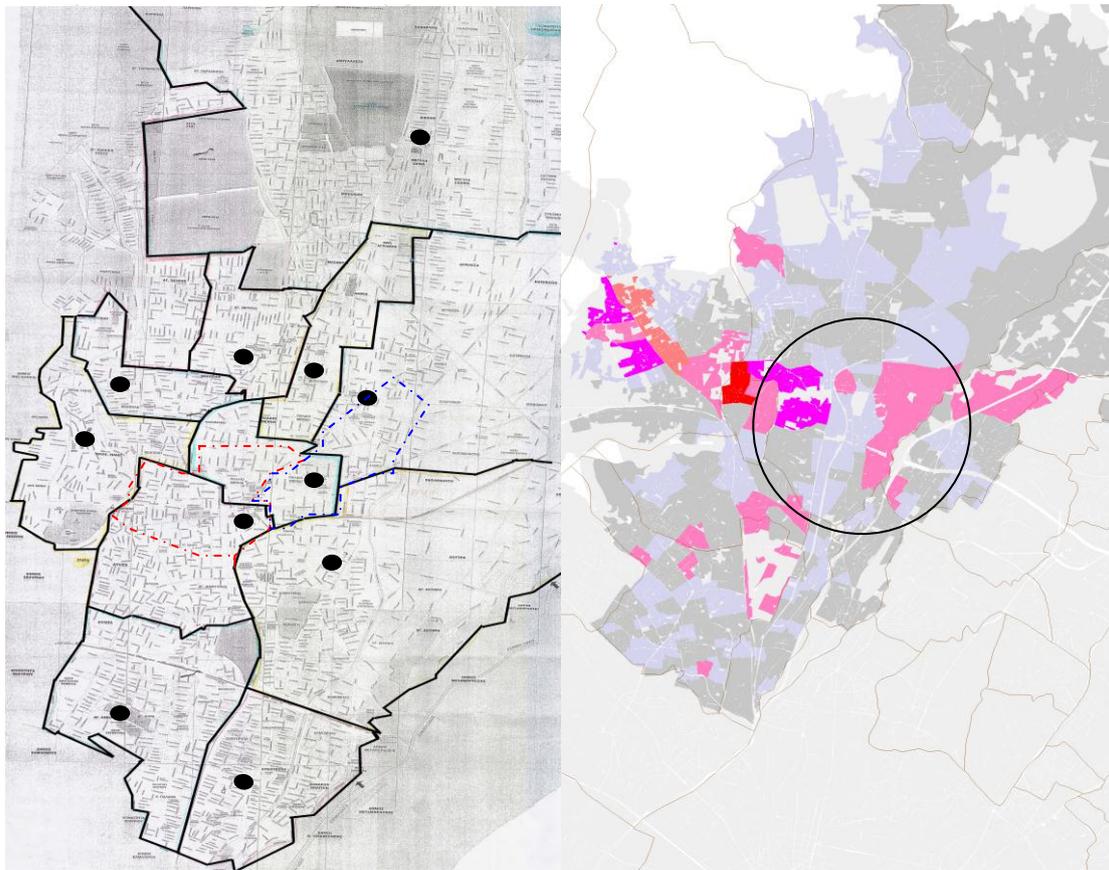
Map 5: Distribution of children (aged 10-13) that do not attend school in Acharnes-Menidi and neighboring suburbs (A. Liosia, Zefyri, Kamatero, Ilion, Ag. Anargyroi, N. Filadelfeia, Metamorfvsh, Kifisia, Thrakomakedones, Aspropyrgo).



Source: National Centre for Social Research (EKKE)-Panorama and 1991-2001 Census data

Moreover, the research has shown that the number of Greek children that change school increases in proportion to the number of Gypsies and immigrant children present in the original school. In schools with Gypsies and immigrant children, the Greek parents adopt intervention strategies – either by changing the limits of the school catchment areas, especially near Roma settlements (Map 6), or by evading the local schools through the use of false addressees or by adopting intervention strategies in the function of the school.

Map 6: School catchment areas and the changing limits (2007-2009) - Distribution of children (aged 10-13) not attending school in Acharnes-Menidi



In order to attract pupils from the upper and middle classes, schools adopt strategies of academic selection, such as: good grades, suspension of pupils with bad behavior and resilient administrative measures for transfers to other schools. The attraction of pupils with higher economic and social status preserves the schools' prestige in their areas, their image and their favor of local elites. Also, teachers choose to send their children to schools other than the ones they work in.

3. Conclusions

Summarizing the results, we conclude that school segregation follows spatial segregation, especially housing. Children in schools are more segregated than the residential area they live in and gypsy children are the most segregated. Indirect discrimination and acts of institutional racism appear to be more common in the field of education compared to other areas in the region. Certain groups, such as Roma, migrant laborers from Eastern Europe and Asian countries, ethnic-Greeks from the

post Soviet Union are more likely to experience discrimination and educational selectivity than others. However, we cannot come to the conclusion that school choice of middle class social strata is based only on ethnic school composition, but it also depends on the evaluation of social desirability of the pupils.

In relation to educational strategies of middle class parents, we conclude that the tendency of middle class parents to evade local schools increases in proportion to the number of Roma and immigrant children, especially in cases where the latter do not speak Greek. In such cases, parents threaten to withdraw their children from local schools and send them to other public or private schools. They co-operate with school administration in a clientistic way. They buy preferential treatment for their children by offering services to the school (economic, assistance, etc.). They influence the demarcation of school catchment areas through the decisions of local authorities (mainly near Roma settlements). Finally, middle class parents evade the local schools through the use of false addressees.

In order to counteract these negative developments, it is necessary to redefine the scale of the catchment areas and to give more mobility to disadvantaged people. The educational system should closely monitor the procedures of assignment of migrants and Roma to special educational programmes and in cases of early drop outs or exclusion to take appropriate measures.

Finally, the spatial form of urban inequality in the Athenian space mirrors the continuous geographical and social separation of middle class social strata. New forms of segregation appear, which strengthen the geographical separation of different social groups, such as “poverty traps” in the central city, a progress of “regions of exclusion” in the suburbs and an urban sprawl by both upper and middle class in the peri-urban areas.

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