"Ambiguities of vertical multiethnic symbiosis in the city of Athens: living "together but unequal" between "conflicts and encounters"

Balampanidis Dimitris, Bourlessas Panagiotis*

(*) d.balabanidis@yahoo.com, panagiotis.bourlessas@gssi.infn.it

Introduction: Diversity in Athens

The massive presence of foreign migrants in the city of Athens and, therefore, the multiethnic coexistence constitute a very recent social experience. In its history of the 20th century, Greece has mostly been a country of emigration and hardly received any important inflow of foreign populations (Emke-Poulopoulou 2007). Actually, it is only at the beginning of the 1990s that Greece turned into a destination country for international migrants and asylum seekers, as well as into a transit country for many of them who are trying to reach northwestern European destinations. During the 1990s, a first large immigration wave included migrants mostly from the Balkans and Eastern Europe, while after 2000 a second significant wave included migrants also from Africa, Asia and the Middle East. Within the last twenty five years, these large flows have wrought the country's migrant population from 1.6% of the total population in 1991 to 7% in 2001 (ESYE 2009: 45) and 8.5% in 2011 (ELSTAT 2011). Among migrants coming from more than 200 different countries, Albanians constitute by far the largest foreign population, followed firstly by Romanians, Bulgarians and migrants from the former Eastern Bloc, while those coming from Africa, Asia and the Middle East are less represented. The great majority of migrants in Greece concentrates in urban areas, primarily in the region of Attica and especially in the municipality of Athens where they represent almost 17.5% of the total population in 2011 (EKKE-ELSTAT 2015). With immigration being a recent and substantially urban phenomenon, over the last twenty five years, the large metropolitan areas in Greece and especially Athens are being more and more diverse in terms of ethno-cultural differences. This increasing diversity raises controversial debates on the multiple effects of multiethnic coexistence, more precisely on the spatial relations and social interactions between different ethnic groups.

From diversity to segregation

Within a current discussion on urban planning, the term "diversity" appears in city-related literature as a two-fold notion. For some scholars, it is considered (along with other social and physical elements) as a prerequisite to foster urban economic growth (for the role of mixed urban uses, see Jacobs 1961; for its link with creativity, see Florida 2002). On the other hand, a second approach marks an effort to use and integrate diversity in urban planning in order to achieve social justice (Fainstein 2005, Perrone 2011, Sandercock 2000). Therefore, in both cases, diversity is viewed as an asset, as a "means" to achieve the —accordingly defined— desired condition.

Although the latter approach addresses social inequality and exclusion aiming at social justice, none of these major theoretical views uses "diversity" to explore and explicitly highlight the significance and prevalence of social inequalities as manifested throughout largely diversified urban environments. Within this constructed ambiguity of the term, "diversity" is interpreted in a selective manner, which renders this analytical concept "problematic" since it obscures possible negative sides (Fainstein 2005:9; for a "methodological critique" on the concept's use, see Kokkali 2015). Hence, what is missing here is an explicit link between diversity and inequality.

Historically, cities have been spatially partitioned, reflecting a multi-layered diversity (see Marcuse 2002). Yet, stratified societies tend to convert differentiations into inequalities (Kandylis, Maloutas, Sayas 2012). It is when social inequality intersects with heterogeneity that urban segregation appears as the spatial outcome (Leal 2004); hence, "diversity" —although often labelled otherwise— is inherent in segregation discourse. Due to its rigid relation to inequality, segregation becomes a decisive parameter towards a perhaps more "socially sensitive" approach of urban diversity by embracing also negative sides of the urban coexistence. Consequently, social inequality can be revealed and addressed in relation to its spatial manifestations. Such an enhancement of the term "diversity" may provide less distorting understandings of urban societies.

Since residential segregation may occur "at any geographical level" (Arapoglou 2006:19), in this paper we focus on its vertical manifestation, namely vertical social differentiation, in the context of Athens. This phenomenon describes the vertical cohabitation of diverse population groups (e.g. social classes, nationalities etc.) within the same residential blocks (see Leontidou 1990; Maloutas & Karadimitriou 2001). Starting from this spatial mixture at the building scale, the aim of this study is to shed light upon various less visible socio-spatial differentiations and distances between Greek and non-Greek residents, in order to reveal different sides of diversity. Considering that "in vertical segregation, it is the process of social distancing that takes precedence over the difference in the form of the spatial referent" (Maloutas & Karadimitriou ibid: 700), we will argue that in the city of Athens, Greeks and migrants may live "together but unequal" and their in-between interactions can vary "between conflicts and encounters". The presented cases of high spatial proximity are here interpreted as micro-scale expressions of urban diversity; it is this mere shift of scale and consequent perspective that accentuates the role of everyday practices and dynamics of social distancing or approaching within urban life's complexity.

The paper begins with some general insights stemming from the global literature exploring the multiple socio-spatial effects of multiethnic coexistence and highlighting the correlation between spatial and social proximities and distances. The Athenian context is further enhanced with the particular spatial expressions of the city's increasing diversity. After methodological clarifications, our empirical evidence follows in two parts: one describing the existing inequalities amongst households within the building and another exploring the social relations amongst dwellers. Finally, we conclude with some general remarks and propose further related questions to be discussed.

Residential segregation debated: spatial proximity - social distance

Within the context of social inequality, the spatial confinement and distancing between different population groups raise concerns related to socio-economic

distances, exclusion, marginalization, weak integration, reproduction of hierarchies etc. Hence, segregation is usually negatively loaded in public and academic discourse; consequently, public policies often aspire to "socially mixed" neighbourhoods in order to tackle problems such as poverty, insufficient integration or lack of community by avoiding high concentrations of specific groups in space.

However, this ever-prevailing rationale may sometimes be challenged; there exist cases of spatial concentration, such as ethnic enclaves, that are not always negative but may instead prove beneficial for minorities (for instance, see Marcuse 2005). Moreover, criticism has been put as well on policies aiming at spatial propinquity and mixture of diverse socio-economic echelons, by stressing the lack of evidence and the focus simply on the symptoms —not the origins— of social inequality (for the case of the UK, see Cheshire 2007).

Therefore, the issue of socio-spatial proximity and distance seems to be debatable; any linear relationship or positive correlation between the two is open to dispute. Chamboredon and Lemaire argued already in 1970 that spatial proximity does not necessarily entail social proximity, studying the case of socially and ethnically mixed neighbourhoods of social housing in Paris. Since then, this argument has been supported by many other scholars in several different northwestern European countries. For example, in the ethnically mixed neighbourhoods of Germany, evidence showed that both social contacts and conflicts may arise, the so-called "hypothesis of contact" and "hypothesis of conflict" respectively (Häussermann & Siebel 2001:73-74). The same evidence has been confirmed also in cities of the European South after the beginning of the 1990s, when these countries turned into the principal destinations for immigration waves. In this case, despite the low segregation levels and high ethnic mix, scholars revealed crucial housing inequalities between different ethnic groups, high levels of neighbourhood deprivation as well as migrants' social exclusion and marginalization (Malheiros 2002, Arbaci 2008, Arbaci & Malheiros 2009). In order to illustrate this very contradiction, Fujita (2012) labels cities with low segregation levels and, at the same time, with social inequalities as places where people live "together

but unequal". The Greek capital city is included in this conceptual category; in the following part, we try to illuminate the reasons why.

Socio-spatial effects of multiethnic coexistence in Athens

In connection with the global academic debate presented above, scientific research on the geography of migrants' settlement in the city of Athens has revealed multiple and contradictory effects of multiethnic diversity on space and society. In Athens, despite the high levels of social and ethnic mix, socio-spatial inequalities and differentiations appear crucial. In the context of low segregation levels between different population groups, a wide spectrum of contradictory socio-spatial relations develop, varying from spatial sharing to divisions and from social contacts to distances.

To briefly describe the evolution of multiethnic coexistence in Athens, in the first few years of their massive arrival migrants concentrated mostly in the city-center and experienced precarious residential conditions, like homelessness in public squares and metro stations or overcrowding in old hotels and abandoned buildings (Psimmenos [1995] 2004); but, fairly soon, they massively got access to housing, mostly through the private rental market (Petronoti 1998, Vaiou et al. 2007) while few years later a significant number of them got access even to homeownership (Balampanidis 2012). In other words, in a short period of time, migrants in Athens traced various residential trajectories, which involved an impressive upward residential mobility. The housing pathway of Adela, who arrived in Athens from Romania in 1998, is a characteristic illustration of this evolution **(Map 1)**: her trajectory reflects a gradual improvement of both her housing conditions and occupancy status, while moving from irregular, precarious and temporary to regular, secure and more permanent settlements as well as from lower-level to higher-level housing conditions (bigger living space per person, upper floors, improved housing equipment etc.).

Migrants' residential trajectories took place in many different neighbourhoods of the city, socially, ethnically and culturally mixed. Mapping the horizontal distribution of migrants (both tenants and homeowners) in the municipality of Athens reveals a

dual geography **(Map 2)**. On the one hand, one can notice high ethnic concentrations around, north and west of the very central Omonia square, namely in the most deprived and affordable central neighbourhoods. At the same time, a significant dispersion of migrants almost all over the municipality of Athens is evident, even in more expensive neighbourhoods in its eastern and southern parts.

As many scholars agree, Athens seems to be a relatively homogeneous and cohesive city, socially, ethnically and culturally mixed, with low segregation levels, not only horizontally (namely at the neighbourhood level) but also vertically (namely at the building level) (Petronoti 1998, Vaiou et al. 2007, Arapoglou et al. 2009, Maloutas et al. 2012). Regarding especially the vertical mix, it has been possible thanks to a certain particularity of the characteristic Athenian residential buildings, which offer various apartment types, in a wide range of prices and, therefore, for a wide spectrum of households **(Image 1)** (Leontidou 1990, Maloutas & Karadimitriou 2001).

However, despite the low segregation levels (both horizontally and vertically), crucial spatial and social differentiations and inequalities subtly survive. Firstly, Greeks and migrants may share the same neighbourhoods and buildings but they enjoy unequal housing conditions (Arapoglou 2007, Maloutas 2008: 52-53). And secondly, in this context of spatial proximity, they develop a wide spectrum of social relations, involving not only interethnic contacts, friendship and solidarity (Kambouri 2007: 206-241, Vaiou et al. 2007: 167-172) but also interethnic distance, racism and xenophobia (Kandylis & Kavoulakos 2010).

Vertical social differentiation, an important contributor to the city's low horizontal segregation, was considered by Leontidou as an "alternative to community segregation" (1990:12). Yet, a decade later Maloutas and Karadimitriou (2001) revealed a complex situation in vertically differentiated apartment blocks of central Athenian neighbourhoods. Verifying correlations between nationality, income, education and floor of residence, they concluded about this micro-scale diversity that "is hardly the image of social coexistence that the tourist gaze expects" (Maloutas & Karadimitriou 2001:715) as multiple social inequalities subtly survive. In this sense, it is important to take into consideration that the remarkable spatial mix of different

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population groups in Athens may distort inequalities, differentiations and exclusions (Kokkali 2010) resulting in "shadow integration" of minority groups (Kandylis, Maloutas, Sayas 2012:269). These discussions as well as more recent ones (Maloutas forthcoming) are considered crucial for the purposes of our study.

Methodology

Our study focuses on the ambiguities of vertical multiethnic coexistence already highlighted in the relative Greek literature, exploring its multiple spatial and social effects within the characteristic residential buildings of the city. In order to reveal less visible differentiations, inequalities, divisions and distances that exist in cases of spatial proximity between different population groups, the emphasis is laid upon the micro-scale of the characteristic Athenian residential buildings: 10 condominiums in various neighbourhoods of the municipality of Athens have been selected as potentially "typical" cases (Seawright & Gerring 2008) of vertical social differentiation. In the paper's descriptive part, two of them are presented in order to contextualize our main research and clearly illustrate any "shadowed" social, economic, ethnic and other differentiations; two sections of residential buildings are designed to present the results on residents' profiles, housing conditions and spatial relations. Then, the focus shifts to genuinely qualitative data; 27 semi-structured and in-depth interviews have been conducted with residents of these socially and ethnically mixed buildings. The interviewees are both Greeks and migrants, men and women, homeowners and tenants, between 30 and 80 years old. For the purpose of this work, they are presented here with a focus on the inter-ethnic social interactions and relationships within this heterogeneous cohabitation.

"Together but unequal": Evidence from two Athenian condominiums

This section expands upon the differentiations amongst households in the two selected cases of vertical cohabitation **(Figure 1, Figure 2)**. To begin, in both cases

there is a considerable presence of foreign nationals; Albanians, Filipinos, Bangladeshis and Uruguayans inhabit shared residential space along with Greeks. However, there appears a clear correlation between nationality and floor of residence: foreign nationals are overrepresented on the bottom floors while Greeks occupy almost exclusively the building's upper pole. Along with this leading vertical pattern, we have documented a positive correlation between floor of residence and further differentiations regarding occupancy status, housing conditions, professional occupation and gender.

Homeownership seems to be the case primarily for the "native" households; besides one Albanian family, all foreign dwellers of both buildings live in rented flats. Concerning the living space per person, in one of the buildings 10,7m² account for each foreign dweller while the equivalent for the "natives" rises up to 37m², as highly located apartments are significantly more spacious (from 45 up to 80m²). Nevertheless, examining the non-Greek groups in detail reveals further discrepancies. For instance, for Bangladeshis the average drops to 8,18m² while for Filipinos it almost doubles to 15,33m². It is usual for migrant residents to opt for collective households in order to afford the rental costs. The latter reflects the diverse by-floor housing inequalities; residents on the upper floors are privileged in terms of ventilation, luminosity and view as well as noise and air pollution.

The overall vertical differentiation in rental costs, housing conditions and different nationalities corresponds also to accordingly different socio-professional profiles, uneven consumption capacity and significant economic dissimilarities among the households. High-status professionals, such as journalists or bank employees, concentrate higher than the third floor, while low-status categories, such as domestic, unskilled or farming workers, cluster lower. Regarding especially the apartments of the basements, they house the most precarious workers, socially and professionally insecure and vulnerable residents, namely one unemployed Greek and mostly unemployed, unskilled and undocumented Bangladeshis.

Last but not least, the vertical social stratification appears also gender-related. Migrant women are under-represented on the basements and ground floors, while

they are more present on higher floors and mostly among Albanians and Filipinos. This is related to the male or female character of immigration (depending on the country of origin), the professional occupation of migrant women and the moment of family reunification during the "integration process" in the host country (Arapoglou & Sayas 2009).

"Between conflicts and encounters": The everyday practices of cohabitation

"Between conflicts…"

It is now clear that the spatial proximity between Greeks and migrants in the multiethnic neighbourhoods of Athens and its ethnically diverse buildings does not necessarily exclude the existence of various differentiations and inequalities concerning the residents' socio-professional profile, housing conditions and occupancy status. Similarly, within this increased spatial proximity, crucial social distances may exist. In fact, exploring the interethnic social interactions within the characteristic Athenian condominiums (as well as in other places of everyday life), a wide spectrum of social relations was revealed, varying from conflicts to encounters.

So, despite the context of ethnic diversity and mix, some of the interviewees described the social relations between Greek and migrant neighbours as distant or even non-existent. The reasons may be just practical, such as the general lack of time that people spend at home, especially migrants who usually work for many hours and in many different jobs. As Eda explained:

"To be honest, we have not many relations with the neighbours in the building. Just a "good morning" and "good afternoon". Because I work all day and my husband works overtime [...] we lack of time [...] we don't even see our children [...] I work even on weekends. There is no time for friendships" (Eda, Albania)

But, beyond practical reasons, the interethnic social distance may also derive from a general sense of reluctance, suspicion and fear between neighbours (both

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Greeks and migrants) as well as from a general climate of alienation in big metropolitan cities. As Mimi explained:

"Neighbours here don't use to visit each other at home. Because, you know, when you are alone and you have no one, you have to protect your family, it's not easy to invite someone to your place. And if you have children, you can't… And in a foreign country, you are afraid" (Mimi, Albania)

From the side of some "native" residents, social distances were manifested through a scheme of "us-them" differentiation. The different, the "other", was emphasized during the interviews through the repetition of words such as "others", "immigrants" and "foreigners". Similarly, their skin characteristics were underlined ("the dark ones", "blacks") as well as their social condition ("starving and exhausted"). Their position within the building gives foreign residents further attributes that "place" them accordingly and mainly "below" the Greek dwellers: "the bottom ones" or "the ones from the basement". This discriminatory discourse was also appropriated by some migrant interviewees. One stated that, given his foreign background, he "might need to live in a basement one day" and another that, in case of any troubles with Greeks, he "will say that [he is] a foreigner and [he] understand[s]".

The aforementioned interethnic distance, as marked by Greek interviewees, was further enriched by racist discourses and the reproduction of stereotypes. Through various negative representations ("they don't pay the rent"), migrants were blamed for existing problems (e.g. "they cause damages") or annoying habits (e.g. "they speak too loudly", "their food smells bad"). Such representations can culminate to overt discriminatory statements made by Greeks, such as "I dislike immigrants who live here" or "I'm afraid of them". Moreover, a nostalgic feeling for a past when neighbours were all Greeks and the sense of community was stronger was expressed by "native" interviewees. Again, such a racist discourse was appropriated by some foreign residents against "other" migrants, who were presented as the reason for the neighbourhood's decay. For example, Adela explained:

"Our best man was living in this neighbourhood. And I was telling him: "How can you support living here"? [...] This neighbourhood seemed to me dangerous and

dirty [...] And I didn't like it, when I was coming by trolley, you know, it was full of…
migrants… me too I'm a migrant, but... you know, black migrants… I don't have a
problem with them… but the trolley was smelling bad, stinking, always…" (Adela,
Romania)

The social distance, lack of contact and familiarization, racist and xenophobic attitudes described above do not facilitate interethnic interaction albeit the spatial proximity and intermingling. Instead, they seem to favour in-group enclosure and self-isolation by ethnicity and floor of residence. In one of the case-studies, the social contacts of Greek residents living on the upper floors seemed highly limited to other Greeks —to whom they referred by name— while they excluded their migrant neighbours —whom they mentioned only by nationalities. At the same time, a similar "counter-cluster" of interaction seemed to develop at the condominium's lowest pole. Bangladeshi residents of the basement and ground floor were gathering during the evenings; the building's main entrance hall was transformed into a place of contact exclusively for this specific group.

"...and encounters":

But, the fact and the discourse of social distance, xenophobia and racism constitute only the one side of the interethnic social interaction. At the same time, the interviewees (both Greeks and migrants) described interethnic relations of mutual help, collaboration, solidarity and friendship. These positive social contacts need time to develop through repeated everyday-life habits and routines that we should not underestimate. Neighbours meeting at the entrance of the building or the common corridors, exchanging visits at homes and children playing in the backyard open the opportunity for encounters through a process of familiarization and mutual trust. These encounters go beyond the space of home or the residential building and develop for example also in the neigbourhood between residents and shopkeepers, in the workplace between colleagues or at school between schoolmates. Additionally, the

quality and degree of interethnic social contacts depend on the way people spend their free time, differ by age or professional occupation and are gender-related.

To give a characteristic example, the mothers' responsibility for childcare and taking children out to the local square or park create a "common place" for Greek and migrant women to develop relations of contact and friendship. As Lorena explained:

"I have good relationships... with others moms and the friends of my daughter… Greeks and Albanians. [...] In the neighbourhood, thanks to the children, when we are going out, i make friends. [...] Tomorrow, my daughter's friend has a birthday party and we are going…" (Lorena, Albania)

Another gender-related example concerns friendly relations developed between migrant women working in domestic or personal care services and their women employers or elderly people whom they are taking care of. As Eda explained:

"In the neighbourhood of Kypseli, I met Katerina and Dina, i clean their office [...] two amazing women who helped me a lot and I will never forget [...] We visit each other at home [...] our friendship became closer [...] I also clean Katerina's house. We go for coffee, we discuss, she is my best friend... " (Eda, Albania)

Beyond the friendly social relations developed especially between women in the public spaces of the neigbourhood or in the workplace, interethnic social interaction may also occur at school or university through different processes for children or students:

"At school, children come from all countries of the world, Bulgaria, Romania, Albania, Pakistan [...] Children manage to get along easily, easier than parents [...] My children have mixed friendships. I never told them: "Don't hang out with him or her" [...] They solve themselves their problems" (Mimi, Albania)

To sum up, the development of interethnic social contacts and positive relations is a long, dynamic, complex and open process which occurs in multiple spaces (at home, in the apartment building, in the neighbourhood, at school, in the workplace etc.) and differs by nationality, socio-professional profile, age, sex or the way people spend their time and shape their everyday life habits and practices. It is remarkable that often the process of familiarization and social approaching depends on the way

people, especially migrants, embody normality: migrants who speak fluently Greek, integrate common practices or become homeowners seem to be easier accepted by their Greek neigbours than migrants who still clearly embody ethnic and social "otherness". This process of assimilation as prerequisite for interethnic social contact is sometimes appropriated even by migrants who start to be disturbed by the presence of "other" migrants in their neighbourhood or their building. Mimi from Albania for example, after many years in Greece, is today homeowner in a central neighbourhood of Athens, in a building where other migrants, especially tenants, are not welcome:

"In the building we are all homeowners. We are not many (the foreigners). And there are no tenants. [...] And we don't put foreigners in the apartments. We are trying to maintain a certain quality in the building. We have only foreigners who are homeowners, on the third floor from Romania and on the fifth from Albania" (Mimi, Albania)

Conclusions: Diversity as complexity

To draw some general conclusions, by accentuating the micro-scale manifestations of urban diversity, this study of vertical social differentiation within the characteristic Athenian residential buildings revealed multiple contradictory and ambiguous outcomes of this multiethnic coexistence. It has sought to clearly demonstrate that, in the case of Athens, low segregation levels (horizontally and vertically) and spatial proximity between different population groups do not necessarily result in spatial and social equity and justice. Within instances of high socio-ethnic mix, various less visible but crucial differentiations and inequalities may still exist, concerning the residents' social profile (nationality, professional occupation, age, sex etc.), housing conditions and occupancy status. Additionally, in this particular context of spatial proximity, interethnic social interaction may embrace a wide spectrum of relations, varying from conflictual tensions to more harmonious contacts. The quality and degree of these interactions derive from a long, complex, dynamic and continuous process which takes place in multiple spaces of everyday life and differentiates depending on people

various histories, profiles and practices. To sum up, our initial assumption is confirmed, as clearly stated in the title of this paper: in the neighbourhoods and residential buildings of Athens, Greeks and migrants live "together but unequal" between "conflicts and encounters".

The above multiple, contradictory and ambiguous socio-spatial effects of vertical multiethnic coexistence should not be underestimated but, instead, should be seriously taken into consideration when addressing diversity in urban environment. In contrast to one-sided approaches, diversity can alternatively be interpreted as complexity, as a multi-faced socio-spatial condition which goes beyond distorting approaches of urban life and helps us rethink social inequalities. Considering this intrinsic complexity and ambiguity, urban policies aspiring for a universal panacea to the "problem" of diversity are put into question. For example, policies of ethnic and social mix in space alone are not sufficient tools to tackle inequality, weak integration and social marginalization, since there is no linear relation between spatial and social proximity or distance while both negative and positive outcomes may arise. Anyhow, one should not forget that any "togetherness" in space may become fertile for social tensions. If, as discussed above, addressing diversity as complexity is a dynamic and continuous process, requiring equally flexible, adaptive and combined urban policies, then the quest for an "ideal city" emerges as utopian or, at least, out of reach at the present. It underestimates the multiplicity and dynamism of contextually dependent socio-spatial phenomena and mostly their "openness" and unpredictable effects, especially within a constantly transforming, stratified and conflictual urban society.

Map 1 Adela's residential trajectory in Athens (migrant woman from Romania)
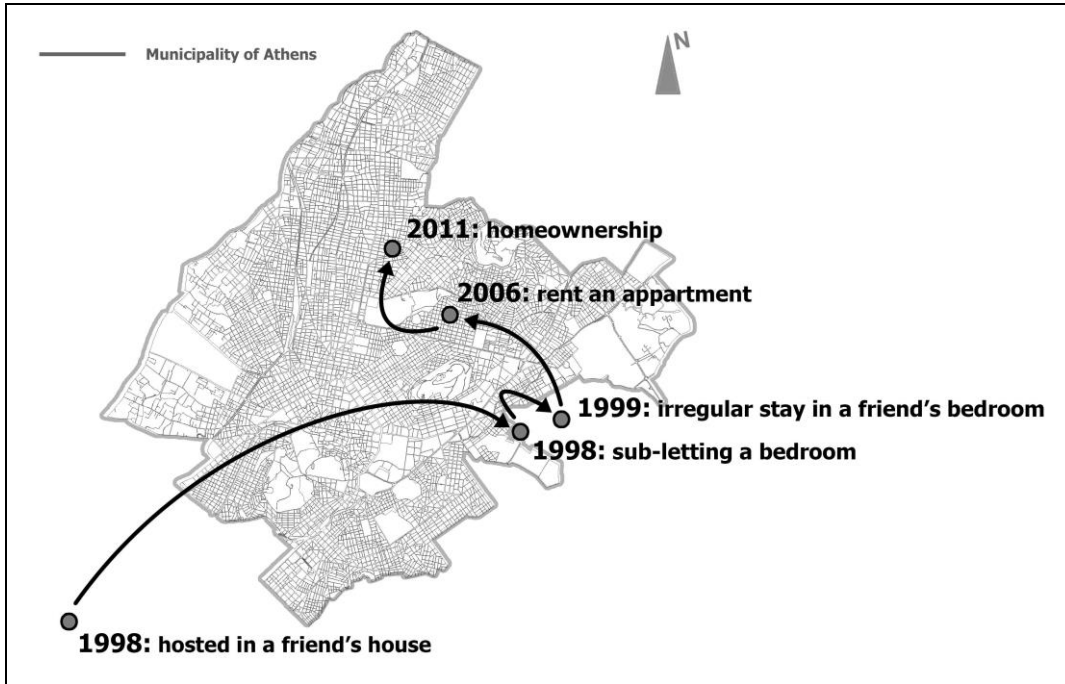
(Source: Balampanidis 2015)

Map 2 Concentration of migrants per census tract, Municipality of Athens, 2011
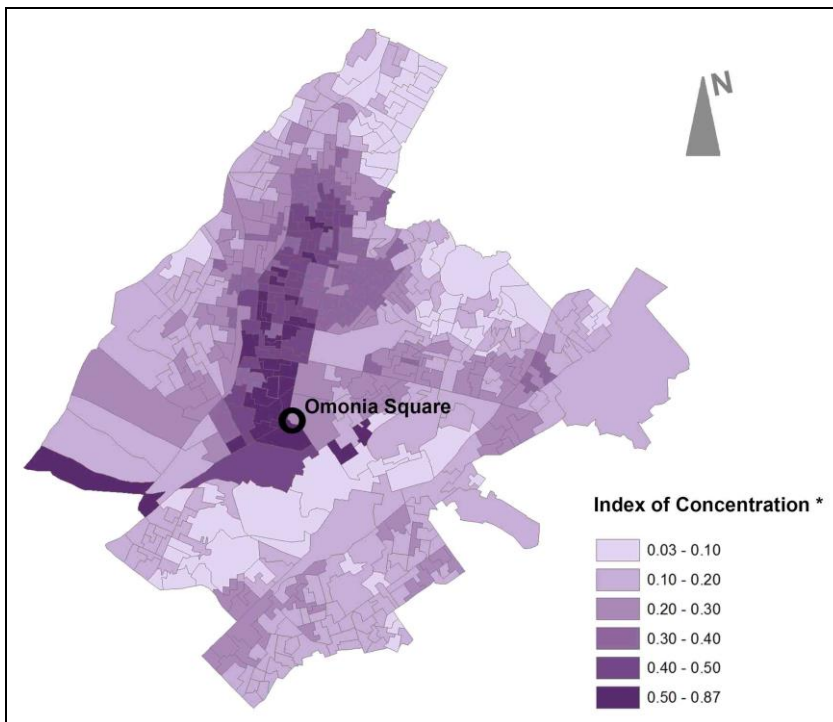
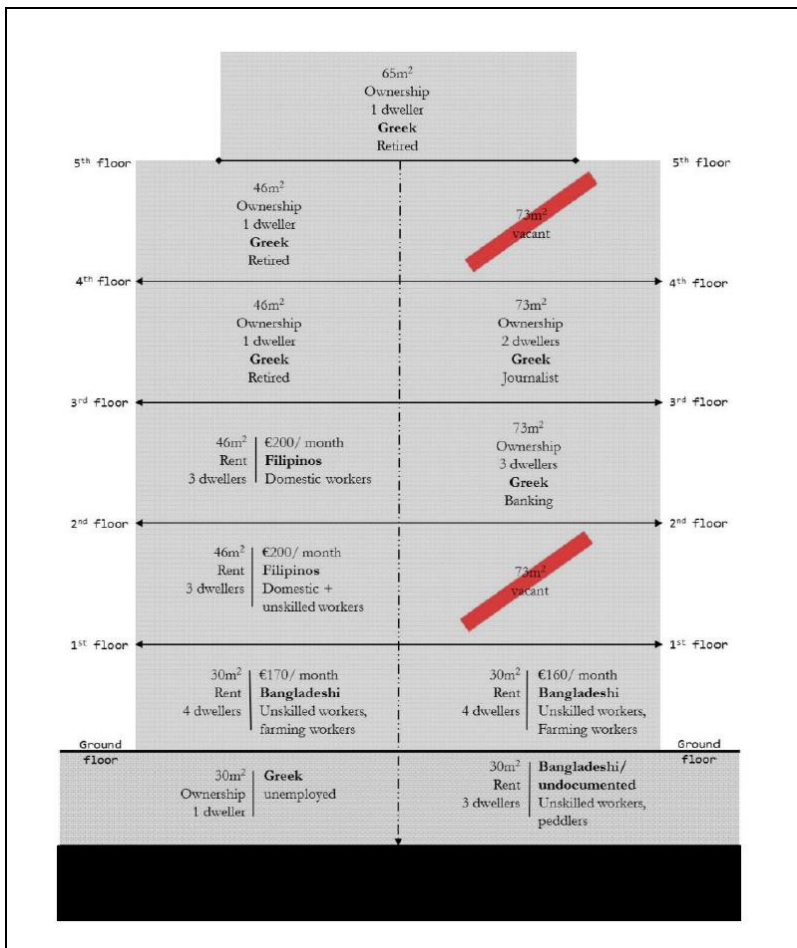*Index of concentration = Number of migrants / Number of residents

(Data Source: Population Census 2011 / Map edited by the authors)

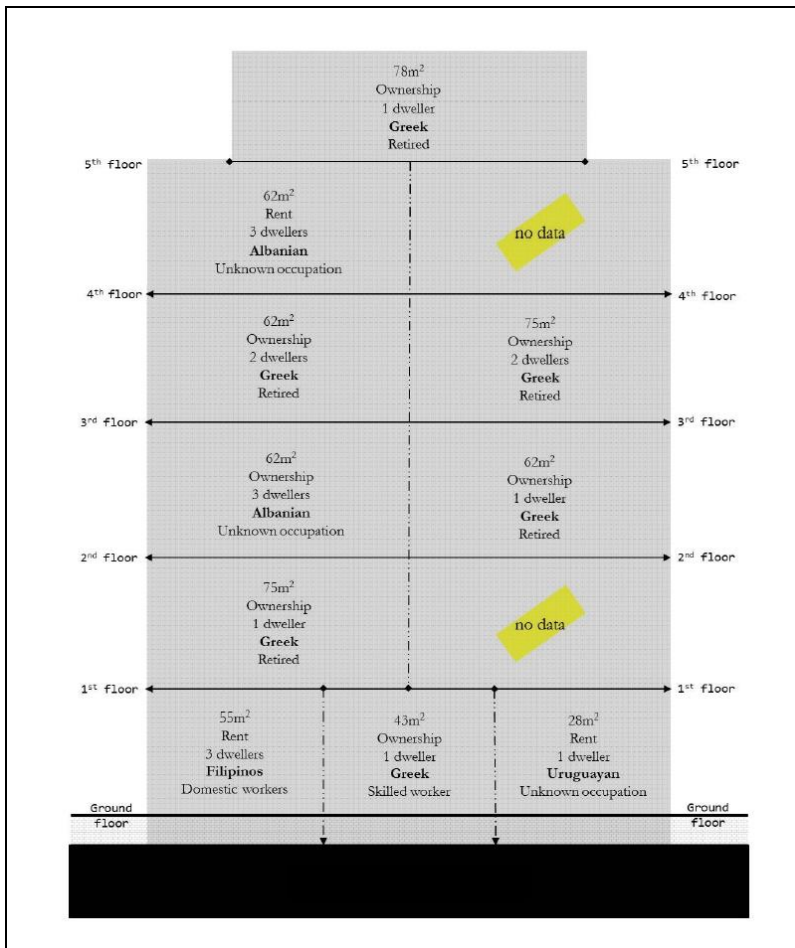**Image 1** Characteristic view of Athenian residential buildings

(Source: http://en.yerolymbos.com/filter/architectural-photography/Athens-Spread,
last accessed: 30.06.2015)

Figure 1 Section of a "typical" athenian condominium

(Source: Bourlessas 2013)

Figure 2 Section of a "typical" athenian condominium

(Source: Bourlessas 2013)

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