



# QUADERNI

## #13 Anti-gentrification nelle città (Sud) Europee

Anti-gentrification in (Southern) European cities

Edited by Sandra Annunziata  
Commentary by Loretta Lees

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maggio agosto 2017  
numero tredici  
anno cinque

**URBANISTICA**   
giornale on-line di  
urbanistica  
ISSN:  
2531-7091

# URBANISTICA **ire**

giornale on-line di  
urbanistica  
journal of urban  
design and planning  
ISSN: 2531-7091

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Progetto grafico / Nicola Vazzoler

Impaginazione / Giulio Cuccurullo

Data di pubblicazione: Roma, dicembre 2017

*In copertina:*

illustrazione ad opera dell'artista Antonia Santolaya,

approfondisci il progetto grafico del numero a p. 131

edito da



con il supporto di



per informazioni



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maggio agosto 2017  
numero tredici  
anno cinque

may august 2017  
issue thirteen  
year five



in questo numero  
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**Anti-gentrification  
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# Commento

Commentary



# Resisting gentrification in (Southern) European cities

Resistenze ai processi di gentrificazione nelle città del (Sud) Europee

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I am very pleased to be writing this short commentary for this special issue which is one of the many important outputs to come out of an EU Marie Curie funded project<sup>1</sup> in which Sandra Annunziata has spent two years researching anti-gentrification practices in Southern European cities, specifically Rome, Madrid and Athens. The focus of this special issue is on resistance to gentrification, something I have been working on as a scholar activist since the late 1990s (Lees, 1999; The London Tenants Federation, Lees, Just Space and SNAG, 2014; Lees and Ferreri, 2016; Lees, Annunziata and Rivas-Alonso, 2017). Critical urbanists, like many in this special issue, who have made it their goal to research practices of resistance to gentrification commit their time and energy to fighting for social justice in the city. The research is bottom up, participatory, grounded and empirical. This is not the quick and dirty editorialising and theorising that has come to define the ‘publish or perish’ culture of C21st academia. In my mind it is the deep and sophisticated empirical research on the ground that can be fed through to the critical conceptual *and* resistance work needed that deserves the most recognition. Like Annunziata, in her editorial, I agree that anti-gentrification practices are deeply rooted in the territorial setting in which they are performed, as is the process of gentrification itself. But this is a different contextual argument from those who would argue that gentrification is something that should be confined to Anglo-American cities, and in extremis 1960s London where the term was coined (for critiques of such a position see Bernt, 2016; Lees, Shin and Lopez-Morales, 2015; Shin and Lopez-Morales, 2018; Slater, 2018). Empirically grounded, comparative research that takes seriously the ‘new’ comparative urbanism is a first step in investigating gentrification globally (see Lees, 2012; Lees, Shin and Lopez-Morales, 2016<sup>2</sup>; Lees, 2018). Such work may even include cities like Marseilles in France in the Southern European city discussion, a city that looks south rather than north. As Ley and Yang (2017) state, at a time when many academics ‘pursue esoteric individual research with limited social payoff’, collaborative projects across continents place a ‘spotlight on a major existential problem of our time: the growing commodification, inequality, and injustice of the urban housing market’ (p.115). Anti-gentrification scholars need to learn from anti-gentrification activists on the ground and vice versa, the pooling of knowledge on anti-gentrification practices, local and global, is vital. The workshop in Rome that fed into this special issue which I attended did just this<sup>3</sup>.

Different types and processes of gentrification are causing displacement in Southern European cities (see for example, Alexandri, 2015, on Athens;

<sup>1</sup> PI: Lees, L. Col: Annunziata, S. FP7-PEOPLE-2013 Marie Curie Action Fellowship 2014-2016 ‘AGAPE: Exploring anti-gentrification practices and policies in Southern European Cities’.

<sup>2</sup> Watch [www.youtube.com/watch?v=uvKF3ocqj-gX](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uvKF3ocqj-gX)

<sup>3</sup> See <http://www.city-analysis.net/2017/02/10/philipp-kat-sinas-reviews-anti-gentrification-workshop-staying-put/>

Cocola-Gant and Pardo, this issue, on Barcelona; and Manzo, this issue, on Milan) and resistance against this gentrification is growing, as it is in Europe more widely. Indeed this summer in Southern Europe, in Barcelona and Majorca, protest groups including Arran Paisos Catalans and Endavant Ciutat Vella rallied against tourism gentrification and made international headline news. More widely, what once seemed like limits or barriers to gentrification (see Ley and Dobson, 2008) are being overcome in Europe and elsewhere. In London council housing which long stood in the way of gentrification is being demolished and low income tenants are being displaced (Lees, 2014). In Thessaloniki, Greece's second largest city, the economic crisis has both stalled *and* triggered different forms and scales of gentrification, pointing to the uneven geography of the process, as a local and global urban strategy (Katsinas, 2017).

To date, research detailing practices of resistance against gentrification has been small compared to the voluminous literature on the why, how and impact of the gentrification process (see Annunziata and Rivas-Alonso, 2018). This situation is changing now and a new body of work is emerging, work in which this special issue is situated. It is significant that a paper by anti-gentrification activist Andrej Holm on Berlin has been included, given that Berlin is one of the few cities where anti-gentrification legislation has emerged – in the form of the new Milieuschutz Law. Holm outlines various modes of protest in Berlin and in so doing reveals that the practices are not greatly different to those happening in Southern European cities. Ferreri, reflecting on her anti-gentrification work in London, now that she has relocated to Barcelona, discusses questioning of the appropriateness of the British term 'gentrification' by activists outside of the UK. Such questioning is important and terms that work best locally are perhaps the most appropriate ones to mobilise; but many would argue, myself included, that globally a common term is needed, and politically 'gentrification' has a lot of planetary punch. Words, terms and discourse aside, the most difficult part of resisting gentrification is about coming up with alternatives. We need to resist gentrification but we also need alternatives to put on the table, much less energy has been focused on this to date and this too must change (see Bunce, 2018; Steele, 2018).

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# i QUADERNI

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maggio\_ agosto 2017  
numero tredici  
anno cinque

**URBANISTICA** tre  
giornale on-line di  
urbanistica  
ISSN:  
2531-7091

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