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Review: Handbook of Gentrification Studies

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Lees, L. and Phillips, M., eds. *Handbook of Gentrification Studies*. Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2018, 496 pp. ISBN: 9781785361739, hardcover. US\$290.00; also available as an ebook.

Have you ever noticed through the years a sudden transformation in a familiar neighborhood you thought you knew well, with tangible mutations from a popular, homogenous area to become classy, fancy, trendy, or populated with “new” types of inhabitants? Or, another significant shift, this old street where you used to park your car for free, unlimited periods, is now filled with parking meters or replaced by a bicycle lane? This emerging phenomenon of lifestyles sophistication or change in the identity of a place that is now part of urban studies and demography is usually known as gentrification. A debated phenomenon, gentrification is a sociological concept that comes from England; British sociologist Ruth Glass (1912-1990) is reputed to have first coined “gentrification” in 1964 (p. 1). According to Glass, writing then about the British context, “any district in or near London, however dingy or unfashionable before, is likely to become expensive, and London may quite soon be a city which illustrates the principle of the survival of the fittest — the financial fittest, who can still afford to live and work there” (Ruth Glass, 1964, quoted by Lees, 2018, p. 2). Ultimately, gentrification seems irreversible and “goes on rapidly until all or most of the original working-class occupiers are displaced and the social character of the district is changed” (Glass, quoted by Antonia Layard, p. 444). Incidentally, some regions and some languages have not coined a genuine term equivalent to gentrification, even though they nevertheless experience the ongoing process of gentrification, as explained in Chapter 2, titled “Beyond Anglo-American Gentrification Theory” (p. 16).

This comprehensive *Handbook of Gentrification Studies* gathers 27 commissioned chapters on gentrification, defined in various ways, and understood by Petra Doan in Chapter 10 as “a process in which higher income land-users replace lower income land-users and increase capital investment in the neighbourhood” (this concise definition by

Doan paraphrases and refers to Eric Clark's definition from 2005, p. 155). Among many fine contributions, Chapter 20 on "Green Gentrification" delimitates three apparently similar subcategories: environmental gentrification, ecological gentrification, green gentrification (p. 331).

Some inspiring chapters, such as "Resisting gentrification" by Sandra Annunziata and Clara Rivas-Alonso, adopt a renewed theoretical approach, particularly valuable in this interdisciplinary field. Prior to their demonstration (Chapter 23), Annunziata and Rivas-Alonso remind us that gentrification studies are often rooted, for better and worse, into schemes within an Anglo-Saxon tradition and framing: "As post-colonial conceptualizations challenge Anglo-Saxon hegemony in knowledge production, new geographies of gentrification contribute to the understanding of the global regularities of class restructuring processes intertwined with unresolved colonial histories and racial fault lines" (p. 393). As Annunziata and Clara Rivas-Alonso explain, new forms of resistance to gentrification and/or excessive tourism appear, and therefore observers and social scientists may note different ways to describe and interpret gentrification, through critical counter-narratives or awareness campaigns. For example, in a neighborhood where everyday life gets complicated with a new, touristic vocation, in which Airbnb units progressively replace families and then diminish the minimum number of children needed to justify a local primary school (p. 402).

This welcome *Handbook of Gentrification Studies* has some strong points: it provides the richest, the most comprehensive presentation on gentrification, with its main concepts and subfields, the various disciplines referring to it, and numerous ramifications such as tourism gentrification, soft gentrification, rural gentrification, and many others. Moreover, it does not only point out an unresolved issue for many towns and cities, it tries to indicate some means to resolve gentrification issues and excessive speculation, although one has to admit these proposed solutions are much less convincing, as they need to be validated and cannot easily be transposed from one region to another. This *Handbook of Gentrification Studies* will be useful for graduates studying anthropology of cities, urbanism, geography, and new urban identities. There is no more complete handbook on gentrification in the English language to date.

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