Which cities are studied?

Probing the geographical scope of 40 years of gentrification research

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Picking up on debates about the narrow geographical focus of gentrification research, this paper probes the geographical scope of internationally published gentrification research over the last forty years. While recent critique of geographical selectivity has particularly addressed the Global North/South divide, we focus on differences within the Global North and analyze the relevance of different European capital cities (all EU28 capitals). We conduct a bibliometric analysis based on the SCOPUS database. The analysis is structured along three dimensions: the development of publication output over time across all cities (1), the number of publications on different cities across the whole period of analysis (2) and the development of publications in different cities over time (3). We find a highly skewed distribution of publication output on gentrification in European capital cities, dominated by London and three other West European cities. The longitudinal analysis reveals, however, that the geographical scope has become broader in recent years.

1 Background

It was more than 55 years ago that Ruth Glass coined the term ‚gentrification' in her seminal study on the transformation of Islington, London. Since then, gentrification has arguably become one of the most dynamic and fastest-growing research areas in urban studies. In a recent editorial to a collection of gentrification papers, Davidson (2018) uses the term ‚overchoice' to describe the challenge of selecting a set of relevant papers from the substantial body of literature on the topic.[1] As he writes, *"[f]or almost anyone studying the city, gentrification had become a process to reckon with. Gentrification therefore took on, and continues to have, an oversized importance (…)".*

While the gentrification literature has markedly grown, it has also been blamed for its restricted geographical reach.

This is not a new critique. Empirical studies and theoretical generalizations are argued to be based on a selected number of cities and disregard the rich, and highly differentiated, urban contexts shaping gentrification processes. Back in 2005, Atkinson & Bridge (2005: 1) write that *"Gentrification is now global. (…) It can now be found in new regional centres such as Leeds (United Kingdom) and Barcelona (Spain) as well as capital cities previously not associated with the process such as Moscow, Brussels and Berlin."* This leads them to "*collect the writings of gentrification researchers from around the globe to assemble a comprehensive overview of its emerging forms and current conceptualizations* (Atkinson & Bridge, 2005: 3)." Some 10 years later, Lees et al. (2015: 2) write that *"[w]hile there have been a few academic journal articles that have attempted a more cosmopolitan view of gentrification (eg Harris, 2008), there has not been a sustained engagement with serious conversations across contexts."* This latest wave of critique sits specifically within broader debates on the lack of research attention to the Global South that

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[1]   Davidson solely considered papers that appeared in the journal Urban Geography. His choice could have thus been even harder, if he had to look beyond this one journal only.

is argued to also apply to the gentrification field. Some 15 years after the arguments for a more "global" gentrification research put forth by Atkinson & Bridge (2005), this short paper probes the critique of geographical selectivity through the use of bibliometric analysis. Rather than focusing on the recently debated Global North/South divide (Lees et al. 2015), we focus on differences within the Global North. We systematically explore the role of European capital cities (capitals of all 28 European Union member states) in international gentrification scholarship over the last 40 years[2].

Bibliometric analysis is a firmly established quantitative analysis technique for written publications. Originally, it emerged as a tool to provide bibliographic overviews or identify highly cited publications. It has been used to determine scientific output in particular subject areas, geographical areas, or by particular authors (Ellegard & Wallin, 2015). It is also used to trace citation patterns and identify knowledge clusters and has become an integral part of research evaluations. Bibliometrics have been used to analyze the field of urban studies. Kong & Qian (2017), for example, explore publication and citation patterns with regard to research institutions and urban studies authors. Wang et al. (2012) analyze research trends related to the concept of ,urbanization'. While most bibliometric analyses consider cities as locations of knowledge production (i.e. focusing on cities as places of research institutions), we follow Kanai et al (2018) in using the method to explore which cities are actually studied (i.e. cities are research objects). The next section describes the methodological procedure including its limitations. We then present our results before drawing some broader conclusions.

2 Method

Our analysis is based on primary literature indexed in the Scopus database. Scopus is one of the major multi-disciplinary bibliographic databases for scholarly literature. It includes more than 70 million literature references, covering journal articles, books, book chapters and conference proceedings. Compared to the Web of Science database, it indexes a larger number of journals (Ellegard & Wallin, 2015). Additionally, it has a better coverage of social science journals, which is relevant for the present analysis. Following Kanai et al. (2017), our defining criterion that a publication is focused on a city is that it is referred to in either publication title, keywords or abstract. It is possible that a publication is counted for two cities if both cities appear in either abstract, keyword or title.

Based on this definition, we set up the following search profile in the database:

TITLE-ABS-KEY(gentrification) AND TITLE-ABS-KEY (city name)

We ran this search profile for all 28 European capital cities and exported the results into Microsoft Excel. The data was then cleaned for data errors and analyzed in three steps:

- » First, we summarized the number of publications on all cities by year in order to track the development of the overall research output
- » Second, we summarized the number of publications per city. We ranked the cities by number of publications and calculated the relative frequency of publication counts
- » Third, we combined these two axes and analysed publication counts per city over time. To do so, we divided the 40-year period into ten-year spans. Doing so, we were able t assess shifts in publication activities between cities and correct for instability of year-by-year counts. Again, we ranked the cities by number of publications and calculated the relative frequency of publication counts.

Our analysis is limited in a number of ways. First, the focus on the EU28 capital cities only provides a partial representation of European gentrification research and leaves out research activities on smaller cities. Second, the keyword analysis on the term 'gentrification' limits the focus to studies that use this particular term to study the phenomenon. Third, the analysis is likely to undercount the overall research output on gentrification, as more theoretical or conceptual work that does not refer to a particular city in abstract, keyword or title is excluded through our search criteria. The analysis, thus, may best be considered an analysis of empirical gentrification research on EU28 capital cities. Fourth, the Scopus database, although covering a wide range of publications, mainly focuses on English-language publications. Given the rich intellectual traditions that do not rely on English to document their results, studies that solely draw on Scopus only provide a partial representation of the field. Despite these limitations, we would argue that scholarly work included in Scopus shapes our understanding of the contours of the field in important ways, making an analysis of the database a valuable endeavour (cf. Kong & Qian, 2017).

3 Results

We begin by charting the overall development of gentrification research output on European capital cities. In total, we found 540 publications. As Figure 1 shows, scholarly work has grown rapidly, but particularly in recent years. We can provisionally distinguish three phases. In a first phase, until 2002, research was limited and remained at a maximum of 4 publications per year, with the exception-

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[2]   The choice of 40 years was data-driven: the first entry for our search criteria in the used database was from 1979.

Figure 1: Number of publications mentioning the term Gentrification and at least one of the EU28 capital cities in title, abstract or keyword, 1979-2018
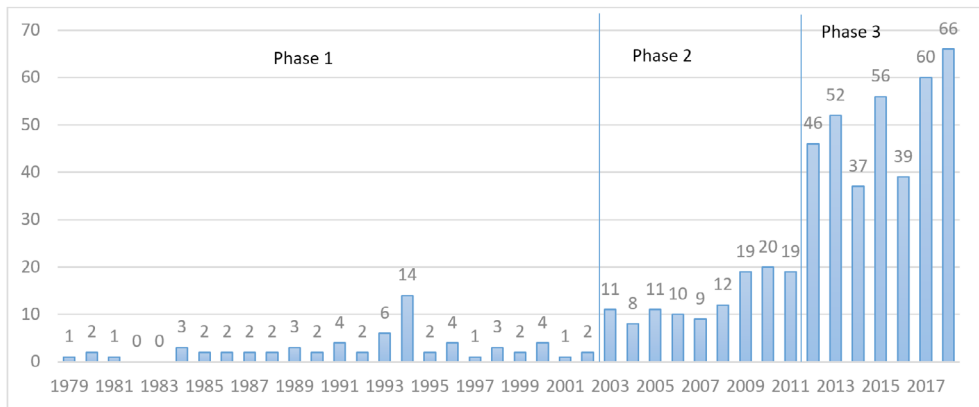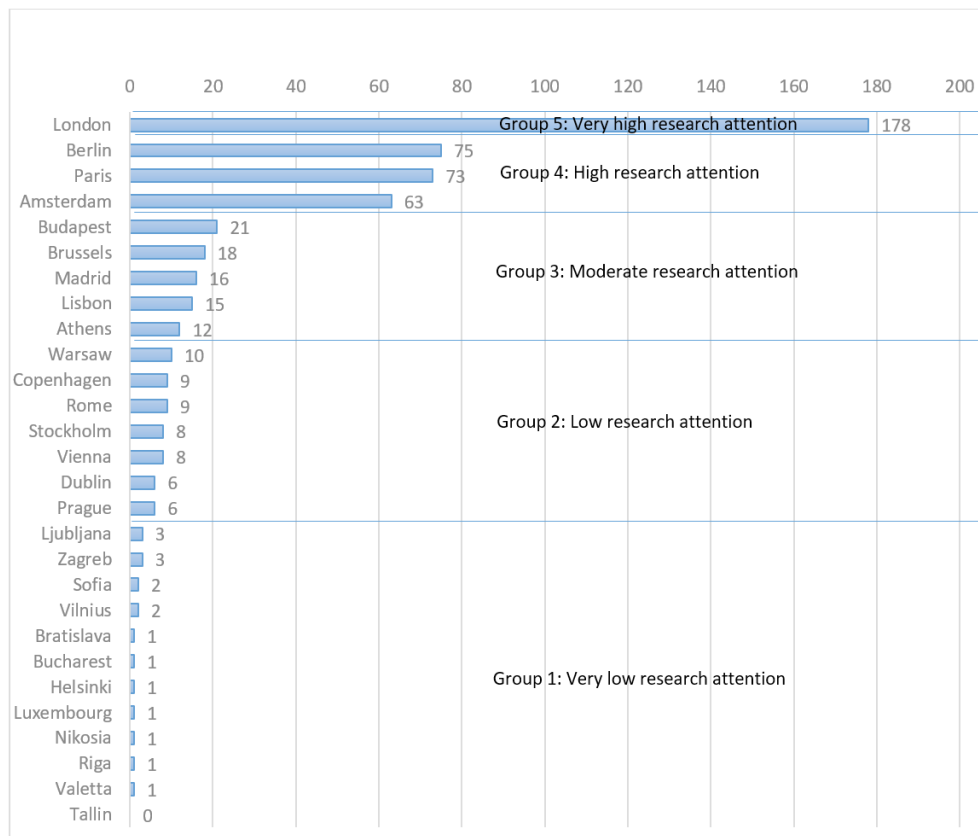

Source: Own compilation based on SCOPUS database

of the years 1993 and 1994 (6 and 14 publications). In a second phase, from 2003 to 2011, research output was at a moderate level. It ranged between 8 and 20 publications per year, with growth at the end of the period. In a third phase, since 2012, research output is at a high level. In most of the years, more than 45 publications – twice the number of publications in phase 2 – are published. The years 2014 and 2016 are underperforming in this respect with 37 and 39 publications. Overall, in the seven years of the third phase, 65.9% of all publications during the last forty years were published.

But which European capital cities are being studied? Figure 2 provides deeper insights. Overall, the distribution is highly skewed and dominated by a few cities that have received a high degreeof attention. For the sake of understanding, we can group cities into four clusters. At the bottom of the distribution are cities with very low research attention. These are cities with 0 to 3 publications over the last forty years. Geographically, this includes the Baltic capital cities, small Southern European capitals (Valetta, Nikosia), Eastern European capital cities as well as Luxembourg. Then, there are cities with low research atten-

Figure 2: Which cities are studied in Gentrification research in Europe? (1979-2018)

Source: Own compilation based on SCOPUS database

tion. These are cities with 5 to 10 publications. It includes a range of capitals from Central Europe, Eastern Europe, Southern Europe, Northern Europe and North-Western Europe. In a third group, we find cities with moderate research attention. These are cities with 12 to 21 publications. It includes Southern European capitals (Athens, Madrid, Lisbon) as well as Brussels and Budapest. In the fourth group, we find cities with high research attention. All cities in this group have more than three times more publications than cities in the group below. Finally, there is the group with a very high research attention, which only includes London. 178 out of the 540 publications (32,9%) were on the British capital, underlining the city's exceptional relevance in gentrification research on European capitals. Overall, the highly skewed distribution is also visible from the fact that almost three-quarters of all publications (72%) are on the four most-studied cities (London, Berlin, Paris or Amsterdam).

Table 1: Which cities are studied? Gentrification publications on European capital cities over time, in periods (1979-2018)

1979-1988				1989-1998			
Rank	City	Number of publications in this period	Relative to all publications in this period	Rank	City	Number of publications in this period	Relative to all publications in this period
1	London	9	60%	1	London	15	37%
2	Paris	4	27%	2	Paris	7	17%
3	Amsterdam	1	7%	3	Budapest	4	10%
4	Stockholm	1	7%	4	Amsterdam	3	7%
5	Athens	0	0%	5	Brussels	3	7%
6	Berlin	0	0%	6	Berlin	2	5%
7	Bratislava	0	0%	7	Copenhagen	2	5%
8	Brussels	0	0%	8	Madrid	1	2%
9	Bucharest	0	0%	9	Prague	1	2%
10	Budapest	0	0%	10	Rome	1	2%
11	Copenhagen	0	0%	11	Stockholm	1	2%
12	Dublin	0	0%	12	Vienna	1	2%
13	Helsinki	0	0%	13	Athens	0	0%
14	Lisbon	0	0%	14	Bratislava	0	0%
15	Ljubljana	0	0%	15	Bucharest	0	0%
16	Luxembourg	0	0%	16	Dublin	0	0%
17	Madrid	0	0%	17	Helsinki	0	0%
18	Nikosia	0	0%	18	Lisbon	0	0%
19	Prague	0	0%	19	Ljubljana	0	0%
20	Riga	0	0%	20	Luxembourg	0	0%
21	Rome	0	0%	21	Nikosia	0	0%
22	Sofia	0	0%	22	Riga	0	0%
23	Tallin	0	0%	23	Sofia	0	0%
24	Valetta	0	0%	24	Tallin	0	0%
25	Vienna	0	0%	25	Valetta	0	0%
26	Vilnius	0	0%	26	Vilnius	0	0%
27	Warsaw	0	0%	27	Warsaw	0	0%
28	Zagreb	0	0%	28	Zagreb	0	0%

1999-2008				2009-2018			
Rank	City	Number of publications in this period	Relative to all publications in this period	Rank	City	Number of publications in this period	Relative to all publications in this period
1	London	36	51%	1	London	116	28%
2	Brussels	7	10%	2	Berlin	66	16%
3	Berlin	6	9%	3	Paris	57	14%
4	Paris	5	7%	4	Amsterdam	55	13%
5	Amsterdam	4	6%	5	Budapest	17	4%
6	Stockholm	4	6%	6	Lisbon	15	4%
7	Ljubljana	2	3%	7	Madrid	14	3%
8	Copenhagen	1	1%	8	Athens	12	3%
9	Dublin	1	1%	9	Warsaw	10	2%
10	Madrid	1	1%	10	Brussels	8	2%
11	Prague	1	1%	11	Rome	7	2%
12	Rome	1	1%	12	Vienna	7	2%
13	Valetta	1	1%	13	Copenhagen	5	1%
14	Athens	0	0%	14	Dublin	5	1%
15	Bratislava	0	0%	15	Prague	4	1%
16	Bucharest	0	0%	16	Zagreb	3	1%
17	Budapest	0	0%	17	Sofia	2	0%
18	Helsinki	0	0%	18	Stockholm	2	0%
19	Lisbon	0	0%	19	Vilnius	2	0%
20	Luxembourg	0	0%	20	Bratislava	1	0%
21	Nikosia	0	0%	21	Bucharest	1	0%
22	Riga	0	0%	22	Helsinki	1	0%
23	Sofia	0	0%	23	Ljubljana	1	0%
24	Tallin	0	0%	24	Luxembourg	1	0%
25	Vienna	0	0%	25	Nikosia	1	0%
26	Vilnius	0	0%	26	Riga	1	0%
27	Warsaw	0	0%	27	Tallin	0	0%
28	Zagreb	0	0%	28	Valetta	0	0%

Source: Own compilation based on SCOPUS database

We can now combine our two dimensions and analyze the development of publications per city over time. Three observations can be made from this. First, the geographical inclusiveness has steadily improved. In period 1, from 1979 to 1988, it was minimal. Only 4 out of 28 capitals were published on. In period 2, from 1989 to 1998, there were already 12 cities included. In period 3, from 1999-2008, there were 13. With the growth of the overall research output in recent years, the geographical coverage has also improved. In the fourth period, from 2009 to 2018, 26 out of the 28 capital cities had at least one publication (see also Table 2).

Table 2: Indicators of geographical inclusiveness, in periods (1979-2018)

	1979-1988	1989-1998	1999-2008	2009-2018
Number of cities that have at least one publication in this period (the higher the more inclusive)	4	12	13	26
Share of all publications that focus on the five most studied cities in this period (the lower the more inclusive)	100%	78%	83%	75%

Source: Own compilation based on SCOPUS database.

Here is a second observation: While this growing coverage might provide some room for cautious optimism, there is still a very long way to go. In the last period, over the last ten years, still, some 75% of all publications were on cities that had the most publications in this period. Although this is an improvement from period 1, when this group included 100% of allpublications, it means that there is still a very high degree of attention put on very few cases. This is underlined by the fact that in period 4, despite its greater geographical coverage overall, the four cities with most publications are those that have most publications over the last forty years overall: London, Berlin, Paris and Amsterdam. Here is a third and final observation: Gentrification research in Europe so far has, to a considerable degree, meant to study London. And this continues to be the case, although at lower levels in recent years. In period 1, 60% of all publications were on London, in period 2 it was 37%. It was back at 51% in period 3. In period 4, it has fallen under 30% for the first time.

4 Conclusion

What does this brief analysis tell us about the geographical inclusiveness of contemporary gentrification research? The analysis shows three things: first, gentrification research on European capital cities has grown rapidly, particularly in the last six years. Second, the field is heavily focused on a little number of cases, with particularly London attracting a striking share of research attention

over the last forty years. Third, the field is steadily becoming more inclusive in terms of cities that are included in publications. However, the focus on a small number of cases remains striking, with particularly London, Berlin, Paris and Amsterdam featuring in the spotlight. We can thus conclude that our analysis underlines the critique of geographical selectivity in gentrification research. While this critique has recently been put forward specifically – and for good reasons – in contrasting well-studied Global North cities and understudied Global South cities, we can confer that in the selected part of the Global North that we have considered here, geographical selectivity seems to be a key issue, too. The empirical scope of 40 years of gentrification research on European capital cities is very narrow, undermining a broad-based learning and theorization of contemporary gentrification processes. In fact, with London, Berlin, Paris and Amsterdam there are four West European cities that dominate the field. Eastern European cities, for example, with their highly different historical, social, political and economic contexts, have received much less attention, although Budapest is an exception in this regard. Also, gentrification in the Baltic capital cities seems to be highly understudied. Nonetheless, the observed patterns provide room for optimism and suggest that the geographical coverage has significantly improved, particularly since the upswing in overall publication output on the topic in the last years.

Our analysis does not provide a basis for explaining the observed patterns, so we can only speculate about underlying reasons why gentrification research remains so limited in empirical scope. Part of the reason may relate to the generally limited empirical scope of the urban studies discipline. While much progress has been made in response to years of critique, there seems to remain a highly selective awareness of the great variety of urban contexts. It almost seems, at least for gentrification research on European capital cities, that the field is still (!) haunted by a simplistic assumption that context does not matter and theorization from a few number of cases is possible. This is quite striking given the time and effort that has have been invested in arguing that gentrification takes contextually-specific forms and requires case-sensitive analyses. To some extent, the limited geographical scope may also be self-reinforcing. Once a city is established as 'paradigmatic' in a debate (see London!) and there is a body of work to refer to, it is much easier for subsequent research to contribute to and link to it. There may also be institutional factors at play. The four cities that are leading the gentrification research publication list in Europe are all home to well-established urban studies research institutes that promote (certainly not only, but predominantly) research on their respective cities. While it is for future research to explore the causes, we have used bibliometric analysis to determine the geographical landscape of forty years of gentrification research as a basis for further reflection and changing practices. Along these lines, we can end with a pinch of optimism: the lack of attention

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paid to most European cities in the contemporary gentrification debate also provides a basis to engage more widely with the phenomenon and establish a much broader basis for empirical and theoretical work on the topic.

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