

Ambiguities of vertical multiethnic coexistence in the city of Athens. Living together but unequally... Between conflicts and encounters

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Introduction

Ethnic diversity in the city of Athens and, relatedly, the coexistence of different ethnic groups constitute relatively recent socio-spatial phenomena. During the 20th century, Greece was predominately a country of emigration and thus it rarely received any important inflows of foreign populations (Emke-Poulopoulou 2007). Indeed, it was only in the early 1990s that Greece became a destination country for international migrants and asylum seekers, as well as a transit country for those trying to reach northwestern European destinations.

During the 1990s, the first large migration wave was mostly comprised of people from the Balkans and Eastern Europe, while after 2000 the second significant wave also included people from Africa, Asia and the Middle East. Over the last twenty-five years, these large inflows have increased the country's migrant presence 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 from more than 200 different countries, Albanians constitute by far the largest migrant population, followed 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 are concentrated in urban areas, primarily in the region of Attica and especially in the municipality of Athens, where they represented almost 17.5% of the total population in 2011 (EKKE-ELSTAT 2015).

Due to migration being a recent and substantially urban phenomenon, over the last twenty-five years, the population of the large metropolitan areas in Greece, especially Athens, has become increasingly diverse in terms of its ethnic characteristics. This increasing diversity has led to controversial debates regarding the effects of multiethnic coexistence, including the spatial relations and the social interactions that develop between population groups of different ethnic background.

In this chapter, we focus on a specific and particular manifestation of ethnic diversity in the city of Athens, namely vertical multiethnic coexistence, which refers to the *spatial and social* relationships that develop between different ethnic groups living within the same residential building. The aim of our study is to highlight the various and sometimes contradictory effects of vertical multiethnic coexistence, as well as to reveal multiple aspects of ethnic diversity that are less visible and hence often overlooked in both public and academic discourse. The main argument is that, despite high levels of ethnic mix in the neighbourhoods of the city and within residential buildings, crucial inequalities still exist between Greek and migrant residents, while their in-between spatial proximity not only entails relations of tolerance, solidarity and friendship, but also manifestations of racism, mistrust and xenophobia. In other words, we will argue that, in the city of Athens, Greeks and migrants live *together but unequally* and their social relations vary *between conflicts and encounters*.

The chapter begins by discussing certain crucial issues stemming from the global literature. These issues concern the ambiguous effects of urban diversity, multiethnic coexistence and residential segregation, and highlight the complex correlation between socio-spatial proximity and distance. Then follow some necessary methodological considerations regarding the means of coexistence between different ethnic groups in the case of Athens. The specific local socio-spatial context is presented through a brief literature review. The empirical evidence unfolds in two parts. The first part focuses on the spatial dimensions of multiethnic coexistence and reveals less visible but still crucial inequalities amongst households that live together within the same residential building. The second part also examines the social interaction between households of different ethnic origins and reveals both sides of neighbours' social relations. The chapter closes by drawing some general conclusions regarding the complexity of multiethnic coexistence and relating them to further reflections on urban policies aimed at addressing diversity.

Urban diversity and residential segregation debated

In the city-related literature, urban diversity has mainly been examined using two different approaches. On the one hand, scholars have focused on the significance of diversity as an urban asset capable of fostering competitiveness, creativity, entrepreneurship and economic growth (Florida 2002; Bodaar and Rath 2005; Fainstein 2005; Eraydin, Tasan-Kok and Vranken 2010) or contributing to socio-spatial cohesion and justice (Sandercock, 2000; Amin, 2002; Fainstein, 2005; Camina and Wood, 2009; Perrone, 2011). Yet, on the other hand, scholars have highlighted how a very optimistic or neutral conceptualisation of diversity may lead to distorted understandings of urban societies; for instance, it may obscure various and crucial social inequalities that actually exist in largely diversified urban environments (Martiniello, 2004; Fainstein, 2005, 2009; Kokkali, 2010; Syrett and Sepulveda, 2011).

In order to further build on the latter approach, it is important to recognise that the explicit link between diversity and inequality is usually missing from urban analyses. Marcuse (2002) reminds us that cities—whether more or less diverse—have always been spatially and socially partitioned, reflecting various types of hierarchies. For this reason, urban diversity cannot be viewed as a neutral condition, since stratified societies tend to convert differentiations into inequalities (Kandylis, Maloutas and Sayas, 2012). Further, when social inequalities meet heterogeneity, urban segregation typically appears as the spatial outcome (Leal, 2004). Following the above reasoning, diversity is inherent in segregation discourse and vice versa. Thus, segregation appears to be a critical parameter in a more complex approach to urban diversity; an approach that essentially considers socio-spatial inequalities and embraces all the different aspects, contradictions and ambiguities of diversity.

Similarly to diversity, which can be conceived as both an asset and a difficult challenge for urban life and the coexistence of different population groups, segregation can also be viewed in multiple and ambiguous ways. Indeed, it can be seen not only as a negative, but also as a favourable condition. For instance, segregation typically has a negative connotation in academic and public discourse, since it is related to socio-economic divisions, racial discrimination, exclusion, marginalisation and the reproduction of hierarchies. From this perspective, public policies often aim at socially and ethnically mixed neighbourhoods with a view to tackling problems such as poverty, racism, weak integration and the lack of a sense of community. However, this prevalent rationale has often been challenged (for a critical overview of social mix policies, see Galster, 2007; Bolt, Phillips and Van Kempen, 2010). In many cases, scholars have observed that high

spatial concentrations of specific population groups (such as low-income neighbourhoods or ethnic enclaves) do not always have negative effects, but may instead prove beneficial; for instance, they may increase the sense of community, offer mechanisms of mutual support, favour socio-spatial integration etc. (Marcuse, 2005). In such cases, urban policies aimed at fostering a social and ethnic mix have been thoroughly criticised for being inadequate and focusing on only the spatial symptoms of social problems and inequalities rather than addressing their origins (Cheshire, 2007).

Nowadays, many scholars agree that the spatial mix and, therefore, the spatial proximity of different population groups is not a necessary and sufficient condition for achieving social cohesion, equality and justice. As argued by Chamboredon and Lemaire (1970) when they studied the case of socially and ethnically mixed neighbourhoods of social housing in Paris, spatial proximity does not necessarily entail social contact. The same argument has been supported in several different northwestern European countries. To offer a characteristic example from German cities, Häussermann and Siebel (2001: 73-74) observed that interethnic social contacts in ethnically mixed neighbourhoods should not be taken for granted, since serious interethnic conflicts may arise instead. Similar evidence has been seen in southern European countries after they became the principal destinations for international migrants from the beginning of the 1990s. In fact, despite the low levels of segregation and high ethnic mix seen in many southern European cities, scholars have observed serious housing inequalities between households of different ethnic origins, high levels of migrants' social marginalisation and of neighbourhood deprivation (Malheiros, 2002; Arbaci, 2008; Arbaci and Malheiros, 2009).

To illustrate this contradiction, namely the existence of crucial social distances despite high levels of spatial proximity, Fujita (2012) discussed cities where people live 'together but unequally'. The city of Athens has also been included in this conceptual category: against a background of increasing ethnic diversity and despite high levels of ethnic mix, social inequalities and distances between Greek and migrant residents subtly exist. This notion has previously been argued in the related academic discourse and it will be further demonstrated here through our empirical research.

Methodological considerations

To explore the spatial and social effects of the increasing ethnic diversity in the city of Athens, as well as to reveal less visible inequalities and distances between different ethnic groups who live

together, the emphasis here is on the micro-scale of everyday multiethnic coexistence within the city's residential buildings. Our study is based on in situ qualitative research conducted in ten different yet typical Athenian condominiums (figure 8.1) located in various neighbourhoods of the Municipality of Athens (figure 8.2). The research took place during the period from March to December 2013 and it included two distinct but complementary stages.



Figure 8.1. Typical residential buildings in the city centre of Athens (Patisision Avenue). Source: Authors' visualisation

During the first stage, the research mostly focused on the spatial relations developed between residents of the same building. For each studied building, we collected data on the residents' social profile (nationality, professional occupation, sex, age, household size) and their apartments' characteristics (floor of residence, apartment surface, occupancy status, rental cost, housing conditions). The aim was to reveal all the possible but not so visible inequalities that exist between neighbours. During the second stage, the research moved beyond spatial relations and further explored the everyday social interactions developed in cases of multiethnic coexistence. In all ten studied buildings, we conducted twenty-seven semi-structured, in-depth interviews with residents of different social profiles. The sample of interviewees included seven Greek and twenty migrant residents: eleven Albanians, four Romanians, one Pole, one Moldavian, one Georgian, one Indian and one Pakistani. The interviewees comprised ten men and seventeen women, and their ages ranged from 28 to 80 years. Seventeen of the interviewees were homeowners, while ten were tenants. The aim of the interviews was to explore the dynamics of everyday interethnic social

interactions, not only within the vertically differentiated residential space, but also within all spaces of everyday life, as well as to reveal their multiple and sometimes contradictory aspects and perceptions.

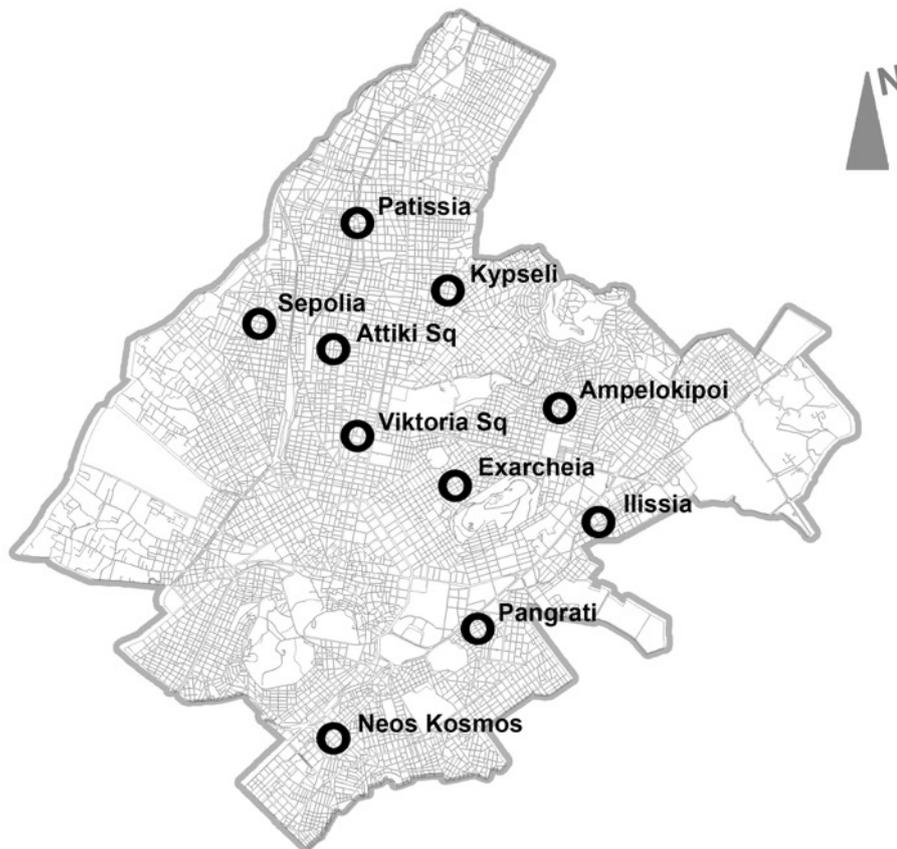


Figure 8.2. Studied residential buildings in ten different neighbourhoods of the Municipality of Athens. Source: Authors' elaboration.

Before proceeding, we would like to make an important clarification. Although the groups represented in this work are primarily defined in terms of nationality, the term 'ethnic' is extensively used in this chapter. Like this we wish to open up to further possibilities for shaping social difference, beyond simple lines of nationality, as 'ethnicity' embraces various and complex cultural characteristics. Furthermore, and equally importantly, we recognise that the hereafter reference to national-ethnic categories as '*the Greeks*', '*the Pakistanis*', '*the Albanians*' etc., may

appear, in a sense, essentialist. We definitely acknowledge the problematic and contested nature of such terms; group identities should not be seen as homogeneous and definitive but the individual's role and interactions must be considered (Abdallah-Preteille, 2006). However, the use of these categories here echoes the way the latter have been used by our research participants during interviews. In this way, we seek to show as clearly as possible how national-ethnic categories are reproduced and become essentialised in every day discourse.

The primary research presented here takes into account the specific and particular local context of Athens, and it follows the scientific debate that has already developed around the multiple effects of multiethnic coexistence in both the neighbourhoods and the residential buildings of the city. Thus, a short literature review, closely related to the main questions of this chapter, precedes the detailed presentation of our empirical findings, which add to the related discussion.

Socio-spatial effects of multiethnic coexistence in Athens

In order to contextualise our research, this section briefly describes the evolution of multiethnic coexistence in Athens. In the first few years after their arrival, migrants mostly concentrated in the city centre and they experienced precarious residential conditions, including homelessness in public squares and metro stations or overcrowding in old hotels and abandoned buildings (Psimmenos, [1995]2004). However, fairly soon, most of them managed to access housing, mostly through the private rental market (Petronoti, 1998; Vaiou et al, 2007), while few years later, a significant percentage of migrants even had access to homeownership (Balampanidis, 2015). Overall, in a relatively short period of time, the majority of migrants in Athens followed upward residential trajectories, gradually improving their occupancy status (for instance, from homelessness to homeownership) and their housing conditions (moving to apartments with more living space per person, a higher floor, better household equipment etc.).

The migrants' residential trajectories took place in many different neighbourhoods of the city, neighbourhoods that were socially, ethnically and culturally mixed. Mapping the horizontal distribution of migrants (both tenants and homeowners) in Athens reveals a dual geography (figure 8.3). On the one hand, it is possible to notice high ethnic concentrations around the north and west of the very central Omonia Square, that is, in the most deprived and affordable central neighbourhoods of the city. Yet, on the other hand, a significant dispersion of migrants across almost all the city of Athens is also evident, even in the more expensive neighbourhoods to the east and south.

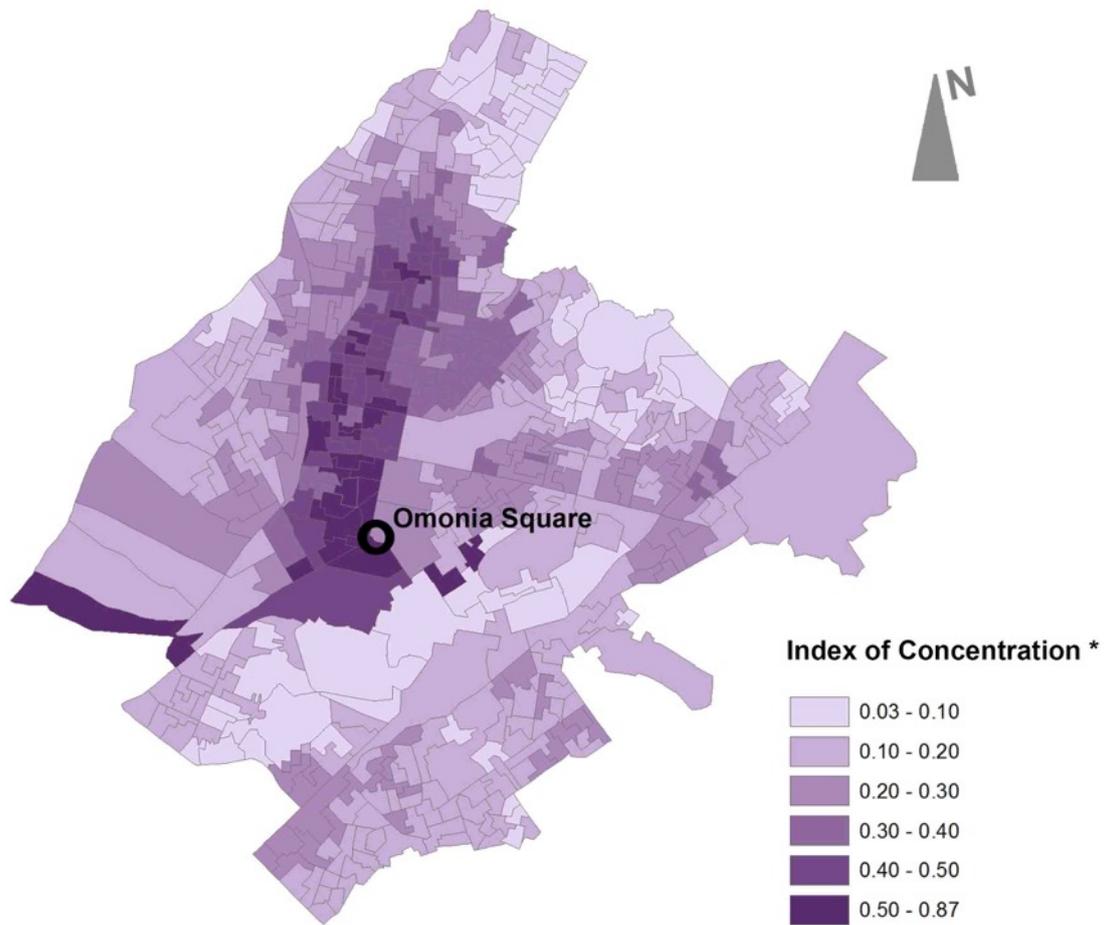


Figure 8.3. Concentration of migrants per census tract, Municipality of Athens, 2011. *Index of concentration = Number of migrants/Number of residents. Data source: Population Census 2011, map edited by the authors.

According to many quantitative and qualitative studies of migrants' settlement and spatial distribution, Athens appears to be a relatively homogeneous and cohesive city that is socially, ethnically and culturally mixed, with low segregation levels, not only horizontally (at the neighbourhood level) but also vertically (at the building level) (Maloutas, 2007; Vaiou et al, 2007; Maloutas et al, 2012). Regarding the vertical mix in particular, it has been possible thanks to a certain peculiarity of typical Athenian residential buildings, which offer various apartment types for a wide range of prices and, therefore, for a wide spectrum of different incomes. More spacious and expensive apartments for middle- and upper-class households are found on the upper floors, while smaller, darker and thus cheaper apartments for middle- and working-class households are located on the lower floors (Leontidou, 1990; Maloutas and Karadimitriou, 2001). Thus, the

spatial distance between different groups may decrease, although social distances may come to the fore.

Despite the relatively low levels of segregation observed in the Municipality of Athens (both horizontally and vertically), crucial socio-spatial inequalities and distances subtly survive. In fact, Greeks and migrants may share the same neighbourhoods and residential buildings, but they enjoy unequal housing conditions (Arapoglou, 2007; Maloutas, 2008; Arapoglou et al, 2009). Vertical social differentiation in particular, while considered to be an ‘alternative to community segregation’ (Leontidou, 1990: 12), offers good examples of the inequalities that exist at the building level. For instance, Maloutas and Karadimitriou (2001) observed a close correlation between income, educational level and nationality on the one hand and floor of residence on the other, concluding that the micro-scale diversity at the building level ‘is hardly the image of social coexistence that the tourist gaze expects’ (ibid.: 715). The spatial mix between households of different ethnic origins living within the same residential building may obscure not only inequalities such as those described above, but also significant interethnic social distances (Kokkali, 2010), which implies not a substantial but rather a ‘shadow integration’ of migrant residents (Kandylis, Maloutas and Sayas, 2012: 269). In fact, Greek and migrant residents sharing the same residential buildings develop a wide spectrum of social relations, including all aspects of human interaction; for instance, not only interethnic contacts, friendship and solidarity (Kambouri, 2007: 206-241; Vaiou et al, 2007: 167-172) but also interethnic distance, racism and xenophobia (Arapoglou et al, 2009; Kandylis and Kavoulakos, 2010).

Ambiguities of vertical multiethnic coexistence in Athens

Drawing on the aforementioned academic discussion, and considering the existing research findings, our study adds empirical evidence at a scale best suited to revealing the many ‘shadow’ aspects of multiethnic coexistence in central Athens. Focusing on the micro-scale of everyday experience within typical Athenian residential buildings and beyond (in the neighbourhood, at the workplace, the school or university) can be helpful in understanding the socio-spatial dynamics of urban diversity, with the latter being situated in its particular local context.

Together but unequally...: Evidence from a typical Athenian residential building

In order to exemplify our evidence, one of the ten studied residential buildings is presented here. Before that, an important clarification needs to be made. The use of one sole case study does not

claim any absolute generalisation; rather it seeks to provide the readers with an illustrative, comprehensible example of a condition that is considered typical for central Athenian neighbourhoods. We would like to stress then that the aim of this paragraph is not to re-present the (vertical) space of the condominium as a 'neutral grid' (Gupta and Ferguson, 1992:7) on which each group distinctively occupies *its own place*, which takes here the form of apartments. On the contrary, we believe that the production of social difference (be it ethnic, in our case) is a process involving numerous, not isolated but certainly interrelated spaces (Gupta and Ferguson, *ibid.*; see also Amin, 2002), something that becomes evident in the chapter's following parts.

Throughout the basement of the residential building, the ground floor and the five floors above, thirteen dwellings are found; two for each level from the basement to the fourth floor and one final apartment on the fifth floor. The included cross-section illustration of the building (see figure 8.4) summarises the described evidence by illustrating the spatial pattern found across the floors and amongst households of different social and ethnic backgrounds. The overall socio-spatial condition corroborates the broader findings on Athenian vertical social differentiation described by Maloutas and Karadimitriou (2001). Four general points have to be noticed here. First and foremost, Greeks and non-Greeks coexist vertically, with the latter being absent from the upper floors, while the former are very weakly represented in the lower floors. Second, the floor of residence appears to be correlated with its residents' presence in the city: the most recently arrived migrant households, for example, the Bangladeshi, have settled in the basement and ground floor, while the Filipinos, who have been settled in Athens for a longer period, reside on higher floors. Third, nationality is strongly correlated with occupancy status: Greek residents are all homeowners while migrant residents are all renters. Fourth, besides one and only unemployed in the basement, Greek residents belong to higher socio-economic categories, while their foreign neighbours belong to lower ones. In other words, the nexus between floor of residence, social status and integration is complexly reflected in the households' composition, occupations, occupancy status and nationality.

Regarding the building's vertical residential pattern, nationality and floor of residence are strongly interrelated. Greeks, Filipinos and Bangladeshis are the nationalities that appeared in this vertical pattern. Migrants are overrepresented on the bottom floors, while Greeks gradually become separate on the upper ones. No natural light reaches the basement's common hallway, which is the only way to access the two flats. A one-person Greek and a four-person Bangladeshi household are located in the basement. Each apartment is 30 m², with no separate bedroom and one single window facing the street; moisture was evident on the walls during the field visit. Both

the ground floor apartments are rented by Bangladeshi migrants. Filipinos reside in the first floor's two apartments, while the second floor houses a Greek and a Filipino family. Only Greeks dwell on the following three floors, namely the third, fourth and fifth. It is on these floors, and on the last floor especially, that good illumination and ventilation are accompanied by an ample view over the city and significantly reduced street noise. Filipinos settled in the building before any other foreign residents; "they were the first ones to arrive" a Greek resident stated, "even before the Albanians" another added. The Filipino migrants inhabited the then empty apartments of the building's lowest levels. After upgrading their economic conditions and social integration, they ascended in spatial terms too by moving upwards. As far as the occupancy status is concerned, another distinction is evident: all the Greek households live in self-owned apartments, while all their foreign neighbours live in rented ones.

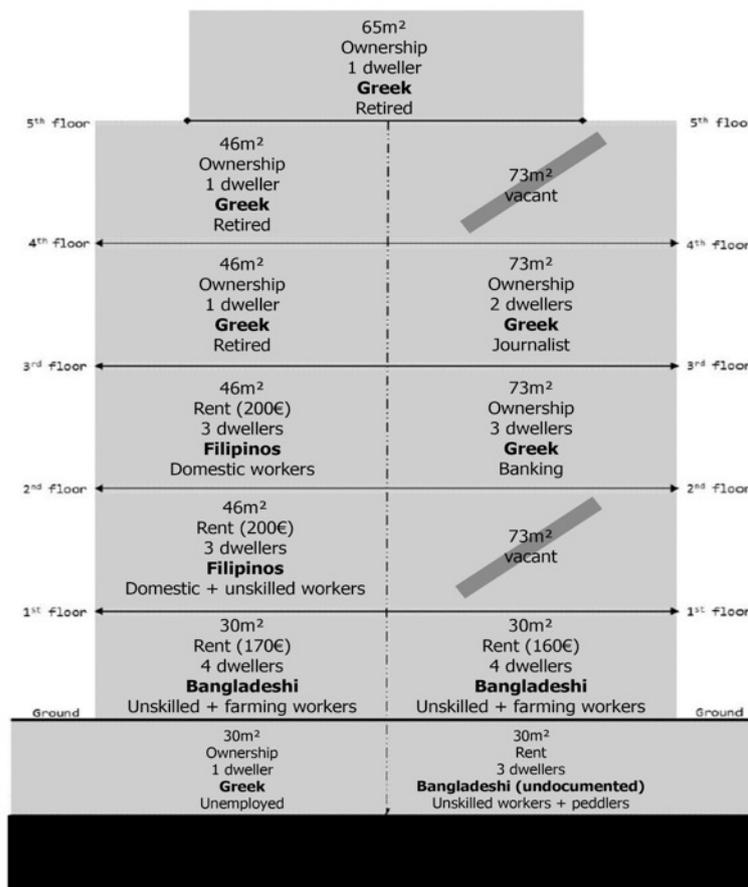


Figure 8.4 . Cross-section of a typical Athenian residential building. Source: Bourlessas 2013, edited by the authors

In terms of the residential space per capita, discrepancies were found: 10.7 m² accounts for each foreign dweller, while the equivalent average for the Greeks is more than three times higher.

Nevertheless, investigating the non-Greek group in detail highlighted further complexities. For Bangladeshis, the average domestic space drops to 8.2 m², while for Filipinos, the number almost doubles to 15.3 m². This fact could perhaps relate to the specific economic conditions that often lead migrants to form collective households; on the contrary, Greeks may opt for single person households (age can be an important parameter here). Furthermore, some gendered nuances of the building's socio-spatial pattern are evident: migrant women are under-represented in the basement and ground floor (with Indians and Bangladeshis being predominant), while they are more prominent on higher floors (with Filipinos and Albanians being predominant). Here, we can draw links to the male or female character of migration, depending on the country of origin; for instance, the migrant groups from India are male-dominated, the ones from the Philippines are female-dominated, while the groups from Albania and other countries of the former Eastern Bloc follow family migration patterns (Arapoglou and Sayas, 2009; Kandylis, Maloutas and Sayas, 2012).

...between conflicts and encounters: The social dynamics of vertical multiethnic coexistence

As the above exemplary case showed, diversity at the micro-scale may enclose a multiplicity of considerable inequalities, ranging from the residents' different socio-professional and ethnic profiles to their occupancy status and housing conditions. Diversity is thus translated into a complex plexus of spatial relations that can be expressed vertically. This section marks the passage from these spatial relations to the social dynamics of vertical coexistence, with the latter being explored through interviews with both Greek and migrant residents, since within the spatial interethnic proximity, crucial social distances and proximities may dynamically manifest themselves through the formation of a complex spectrum of interethnic social relations. These very relations, presented below, remind us that diversity is not just reflected in a pre-given and static space but is rather shaped and understood within numerous dynamic and interrelated spaces of everyday life.

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 for this may be purely 'practical', such as the general lack of time that people spend at home, especially in the case of migrants, who usually work for many hours and in many different jobs. As Eda explained:

‘To be honest, we don’t have many relations with our neighbours in the building. Just a “good morning” and “good afternoon”. Because I work all day and my husband works overtime [...] we lack time [...], we don’t even see our children [...] I even work on weekends. There is no time for friendships’ (Eda, Albanian, female, 46).

Similarly, Evi, a Greek resident, attributes the overall lack of communication between herself and her neighbours to the general absence of families in the building and, instead, the dominance of single-person households:

‘There are no families here any more, everybody lives alone [...] When the Kyriakou family lived next door, I used to visit them very often. We were always helping each other. Once they had a problem and knocked on my door at three o’clock in the morning, I supported them’ (Evi, Greek, female, 79).

However, beyond such ‘practical’ reasons, the interethnic social distance may also derive from a general sense of reluctance, suspicion and fear among neighbours (both Greeks and migrants), as well as from a general climate of alienation and fear in large metropolitan cities. For instance, Mimi’s words indicate that family can play a completely different, perhaps opposite, role to the one described by Evi above. Instead of an opportunity for social contact, family calls for protection and enclosure:

‘Neighbours here don’t 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 into your place. And if you have children, you can’t... And in a foreign country, you are afraid’ (Mimi, Albanian, female, 38).

A focus on the interviews conducted with Greek residents results in a composed discourse in which common linguistic patterns prove crucial to the verbal manifestation of social distances. More specifically, many Greek residents utilised racial and ethnic classification devices. Words and phrases such as “foreigners” or “immigrants” accentuated the migrants’ non-Greek origins by occurring repeatedly in stories referring to migrant residents. Similarly, physical characteristics such as “the dark ones”, “the black ones” or others that accentuate conditions of negative appraisal emerged several times: migrant neighbours are the ones “starving and exhausted”. Additionally, this differentiation sometimes became explicit; for instance, “foreigners are not included” in the community, as one interviewee mentioned.

Moreover, occupancy status appeared to be crucial to the distance between Greek and foreign residents. More specifically, homeownership marks another line of division according to some Greek interviewees. One Greek resident stated that “seven out of the thirteen owners [...] are a kind of community”, before later underlining that homeowners are “a group with common goals”. Consequently, homeownership may function as a prerequisite for social contacts between residents. Indeed, one interviewee mentioned that “the ones who are mainly in contact are the homeowners”, while another said that she “only [knows] the names of the homeowners, not the tenants”.

Further specification techniques were also deployed. On the one hand, Greek residents were mentioned in the interviews by their name or surname, while on the other hand, foreign residents were mentioned merely by their nationality rather than by their name: “Bangladeshis and Pakistanis are all the same”, one interviewee stated. However, it is worth mentioning here that to the Greeks the ‘different’ status was based not only on foreign background and physical characteristics, but also on the floor of residence. Phrases such as “those from the basement” and “the ones below” were used in order to label the migrants who live on the lowest floors. Furthermore, the ‘different’ may sometimes appear as unknown or vague; for instance, a Greek resident repeatedly asked herself during the interview whether her neighbours from the basement “are from Bangladesh or not”.

Negative representations of foreign neighbours often appear in the stories in an explicit manner too. Thus, migrant residents are sometimes blamed for having annoying habits: “they don’t pay the rent” and they “cause damage”. Community problems within the building are sometimes attributed to them: “we don’t have bonds because we have the foreigners”. Future narrations were used with a similar tone: “they will stop paying rents [...] they will cause damage” and they “will definitely sub-rent it”, a Greek stated when referring to his migrant neighbours. Furthermore, the non-Greeks may have annoying habits because “they speak too loudly” and “their food smells bad sometimes”. Undesired feelings could also be provoked; for example, one interviewee noted that he is “afraid of them”. Clear statements of xenophobia were also present, with phrases such as “I dislike the immigrants who live here”, “I would bar [them] from my country” and “here is not an asylum” exemplifying this tendency.

It is remarkable though that the discriminatory discourse used by the Greeks was also appropriated by some migrant interviewees. An Indian stated that he ‘might need to live in a basement one day’ given his foreign background, while a Bangladeshi said that, if he got involved in any trouble

with Greeks, he would think: “I am a foreigner, so you are right”. Further, the discourse appropriation was sometimes explicit, with foreign residents making statements against ‘other’ migrants, who are viewed as the reason for the neighbourhood’s deprivation. For example, Adela explained:

‘Our best man was living in this neighbourhood. And I was asking him: “How can you live 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, Romanian, female, 42).

The social distance, lack of contact and familiarisation, and racist and xenophobic attitudes described above do not foster interaction among different ethnic groups despite their vertical spatial proximity. Instead, they seem to favour in-group enclosure according to ethnic origin and floor of residence, and offer the ground for essentialist attitudes towards the social and spatial ‘other’. The social contacts of the Greek residents who live on the upper floors appeared remarkably limited to their co-ethnics—whom they used to refer to by name—while they excluded their migrant neighbours—whom they used to mention by nationality. At the same time, a similar counter-cluster seemed to develop at the condominium’s lowest pole. Entering one of the condominiums on a late afternoon revealed another space of intra-ethnic interaction, this time of another ethnic group: the doors of the ground floor apartments remained open and Bangladeshi residents were moving from one residence to the other, using the building’s common entrance hall as a space for in-group communication.

Nevertheless, the discourse and the existence of social distance, xenophobia and racism constitute only one side of the interethnic social interaction. Both Greek and non-Greek interviewees also described interethnic relations of mutual help, collaboration, solidarity and friendship. These positive social contacts need time to develop through repeated everyday habits and routines that should not be underestimated. Meeting at the entrance to the building and in the common corridors, exchanging visits at home or playing in the backyard offer opportunities for encounters through a process of familiarisation, tolerance and mutual trust.

‘[...] in the building where we live [...] people used to leave us the keys to their apartments so that we take care and answer phone calls. And they would show trust [...] there were kids in our building [...] and they would often play downstairs and therefore families

became closer and got to know each other. They used to play downstairs, in the entrance hall. This building also had a big courtyard. Kids would play there as well' (Joseph, Pole, male, 63).

Interethnic encounters go beyond the space of home and the residential building, and they also develop, for example, in the neighbourhood between residents and shopkeepers, in the workplace between employers and employees, as well as at school or university among schoolmates or students from different ethnic backgrounds. Eda offered an example of friendly relations developed in the workplace between migrant women working in domestic or personal care services and Greek female employers:

'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 talk, she is my best friend...' (Eda, Albanian, female, 46).

As for the space of school, Mimi provided an example of social relations developed among schoolmates: "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 their own problems" (Mimi, Albanian, female, 38).

Overall, within all the different everyday life spaces, the quality and degree of interethnic social contacts depend on the way people spend their free time. They also differ according to age or professional occupation, and they are gender-related. To offer a characteristic example, the mothers' responsibility for childcare and taking their children to the local square or park creates a 'common place' for Greek and migrant women to develop relations of contact and friendship. As Lorena explained: "I have good relationships... with other mums 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, Albanian, female, 28).

Last but not least, it is remarkable how often the process of familiarisation and social approaching depends on the way people, especially migrants, embody 'normality': migrants who speak fluent Greek, integrate common practices or become homeowners are more easily accepted by their

Greek neighbours than migrants who still clearly embody ethnic and social ‘otherness’. “[...] Our neighbour is very nice, she comes from Albania. [...] I visit them at home, I like it there... because they are peaceful, clean, follow a schedule in their life. They don’t make a mess... they never cause problems” (Nick, Greek, male, 68).

Embodying ‘normality’ as a prerequisite for interethnic social contact is sometimes even appropriated by migrant residents who are disturbed by the presence of ‘other’ migrants in their neighbourhood or their building. For instance, homeownership occurs again as a prerequisite, appropriated this time by foreign residents. As an example, Mimi from Albania, after many years living in Greece, is today a homeowner in a building where other migrants, when living there as tenants, are not welcome:

‘In the building we are all homeowners. There are not many of us (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 only have foreigners who are homeowners, on the third floor from Romania and on the fifth from Albania’ (Mimi, Albanian, female, 38).

All the evidence presented above highlights the complex social dynamics that can unfold within buildings where Greek and non-Greek residents coexist. Two points need to be underlined here: that such social dynamics vary widely from social proximities to social distances; and that the micro-scale of the building as a scale of analysis, in addition to its various methodological benefits, should not prevent us from expanding our views to the numerous urban spaces where social relations are dynamically developed.

Conclusions: diversity as complexity

By accentuating the micro-scale manifestations of urban diversity, this study revealed multiple contradictory and ambiguous effects of multiethnic coexistence. In typical Athenian residential buildings, people may live *together but unequally* and *between conflicts and encounters*. The chapter has sought to clearly demonstrate that, in the case of Athens, low segregation levels—both horizontally and vertically—and spatial proximity between different population groups do not necessarily result in spatial and social justice and cohesion.

The building scale offers an opportunity for enhanced insight into urban diversity and its dynamics of socio-spatial proximities and distances. Within instances of vertical socio-ethnic mix, various less visible but still crucial inequalities may exist concerning the residents' social profile (e.g. nationality, professional occupation, sex, age) and their housing conditions (e.g. floor of residence, square metres per capita, occupancy status). Additionally, in this particular context of spatial proximity, interethnic social interaction may embrace a wide spectrum of relations, ranging from conflictual tensions to more harmonious contacts. By and large, the development of interethnic social contacts, along with their quality and degree, constitutes a long, dynamic, complex and porous process that occurs in multiple spaces (at home, in the apartment building, in the neighbourhood, at the workplace, at school or university etc.) and differs by nationality, socio-professional profile, sex, age or the way people spend their spare time and shape their everyday life habits and practices.

The multiple, contradictory and ambiguous socio-spatial effects of vertical multiethnic coexistence should not be underestimated, but should instead be subject to serious consideration when addressing diversity in urban environments that are partitioned in various ways (e.g. along the lines of class or nationality) and at different scales (e.g. at the neighbourhood or building level), depending on the particularities of the local context. The case of Athens discussed here showed that diversity—when related to segregation—can be interpreted as complexity, as a multi-faceted socio-spatial condition, in contrast to very optimistic or neutral and, therefore, distorting approaches to urban life. A complex perception of diversity can help us to rethink social inequalities and thoroughly understand the multiple social dynamics that it may entail.

Finally, considering the intrinsic complexity and ambiguity of diversity, urban policies aimed at achieving a universal panacea to the 'problem' can be questioned. For example, policies aimed at facilitating ethnic and social mix alone are not sufficient tools for tackling inequality, weak integration and social marginalisation, since there is no linear, clear-cut relation between spatial and social proximity or distance, while both negative and positive outcomes may constantly arise. In any case, one should not forget that any 'togetherness' in terms of space may foster not only social encounters but also social tensions. Due to diversity being a complex condition to address, urban policies should not underestimate the multiplicity and dynamism of contextually dependent socio-spatial phenomena and their unpredictable effects, especially within constantly transforming, stratified and conflictual urban societies.

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