

Gentrification, a frontier reshaping social division of urban space in the inner Paris

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▶ **To cite this version:**

Anne Clerval. Gentrification, a frontier reshaping social division of urban space in the inner Paris. Urban life, boundaries and transformations, 50th IFHP World Congress, 2006, Genève, Switzerland. non spécifié. halshs-00152809

HAL Id: halshs-00152809
https://shs.hal.science/halshs-00152809

Submitted on 7 Jun 2007

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Gentrification, a frontier reshaping social division of urban space in the inner Paris

Abstract

Gentrification, this specific form of middle-class penetration that affects older and working-class areas and that is accompanied by the restoration of housing, is a long-term movement in continental European cities that leans on the traditionally central positioning of the middle classes. Nevertheless, the movement has accelerated recently due to the convergence of a network of causes, including the changes to the global economic system and their expression in the world's largest cities, and the implications for the property market in those same cities.

Starting with the example of Paris, we will show how gentrification resembles a pioneering wave very similar to battle or invasion plans with its advance posts, skirting strategies and front lines. This pioneering front is nevertheless not a clear demarcation line, but a frontier zone where the gentrifiers live alongside the working classes, who are more and more often immigrants as gentrification progresses. In these spaces where such different groups live together, the ongoing process results in a change of scale in segregation between the different streets, flats and in other domains such as education or leisure activities.

What is the role of public policies in urban planning and housing in a process of this kind? Gentrification is often ignored or poorly understood by the public authorities, who are happy with the social desegregation that results in working-class areas. Furthermore, policies for the restoration of housing and the regeneration of public spaces - even in consultation with the residents, who are primarily the gentrifiers - work in favour of their acquisition of the area at the expense of the working classes. But there is little room for manœuvre for politicians who genuinely want to put a stop to this process.

Résumé : La gentrification, un front pionnier qui recompose la division sociale de l'espace urbain. Le cas de Paris ***intra muros***.

La gentrification, cette forme particulière d'embourgeoisement qui touche les quartiers centraux anciens et populaires et s'accompagne d'une réhabilitation des logements, est un mouvement de long terme dans les villes européennes continentales, prenant appui sur les localisations traditionnellement centrales de la bourgeoisie. Il connaît cependant une accélération récente, due à la convergence d'un faisceau de causes, parmi lesquelles les transformations du système économique mondial et ses traductions dans les plus grandes villes du monde, et les conséquences que cela entraîne sur le marché immobilier de ces mêmes villes.

À partir de l'exemple de Paris, on montrera comment la gentrification s'apparente à un front pionnier, proche des plans de bataille ou de conquête avec ses avant-postes, ses stratégies de contournement et ses lignes de front. Ce front pionnier n'est cependant pas une ligne de démarcation claire, mais une zone frontière où les gentrifieurs coexistent avec les classes populaires, de plus en plus souvent immigrées à mesure que la gentrification progresse. Dans ces espaces de cohabitation de populations aussi différentes, le processus en cours conduit à un changement d'échelle des ségrégations, entre les différentes rues, les immeubles et dans d'autres domaines comme l'école ou les loisirs.

Quel est le rôle des politiques publiques d'aménagement urbain et de logement dans un tel processus ? La gentrification est souvent ignorée ou mal comprise par les pouvoirs publics, qui se réjouissent de la mixité sociale qu'elle entraîne dans les quartiers populaires. En outre, les politiques de réhabilitation des logements et de requalification de l'espace public, même en concertation avec la population, c'est-à-dire surtout les gentrifieurs, favorisent leur appropriation du quartier au détriment des classes populaires. Mais la marge de manœuvre est étroite pour des politiques qui voudraient réellement freiner ce processus.

Gentrification is a process whereby the middle class and upper middle class settle in in older and working-class areas in the centre of great cities and that lead to the restoring of housing. It creates a new frontier within cities that deeply reshapes the social division of urban space. In the city of Paris, gentrification is part of a wider process of long-term "*embourgeoisement*" that concerns even the upper class areas. Like in others continental European cities, the upper class has been actually settled in the centre of Paris for a long time. So, the context is very different between these cities and those of United Kingdom or USA, where the concept of gentrification was elaborated, so that the word "gentrification" has only been used since the end of the nineties in France, though the process was well described by French authors since the sixties[1].

Anyway, gentrification in Paris has become conspicuous since the end of the eighties only. It has gradually created a frontier zone in which gentrifiers live next to old native working-class people or often poor immigrants. Like London or New York, Paris is actually a cosmopolitan city where foreigners represent 14.4 % of the population (5.5 % in France), and that's a double wave of new dwellers that affects the former working-class neighbourhoods of Eastern Paris: gentrifiers and immigrants. These are coming from countries that are more and more farther, foremost Northern Africa, then Sub-Saharan Africa (especially West Africa), and even Asia (especially China). Thus, gentrification is only one of the deep social changes that affect this part of the city. And this new type of social mix is a major issue, especially for urban planning and public policies of housing. That is what I would like to focus on in this presentation.

At first, I will present the Parisian context of gentrification. Then, I will give more precisions on what this new type of social mix represents in gentrifying neighbourhoods. Finally, I will show which role public policies play in front of gentrification process.

1. Gentrification in the Parisian context

Unlike the English and North-American cities, the city of Paris has always been inhabited by the upper class, especially in the Western "*beaux quartiers*", and the social standing's rise of the poorer and working-class neighbourhoods around that we call "*embourgeoisement*" is elder than gentrification in English and North-American metropolis. For that matter, the specificity of gentrification is not unanimously acknowledged in France.

1 See, for instance, COING H., 1966, *Rénovation urbaine et changement social : l'îlot n° 4 (Paris 13e)*, Paris, Éditions ouvrières, 295 p., and GODARD F. (dir.), 1973, *La Rénovation urbaine à Paris : structure urbaine et logique de classe*, Paris, La Haye, Mouton, 148 p.

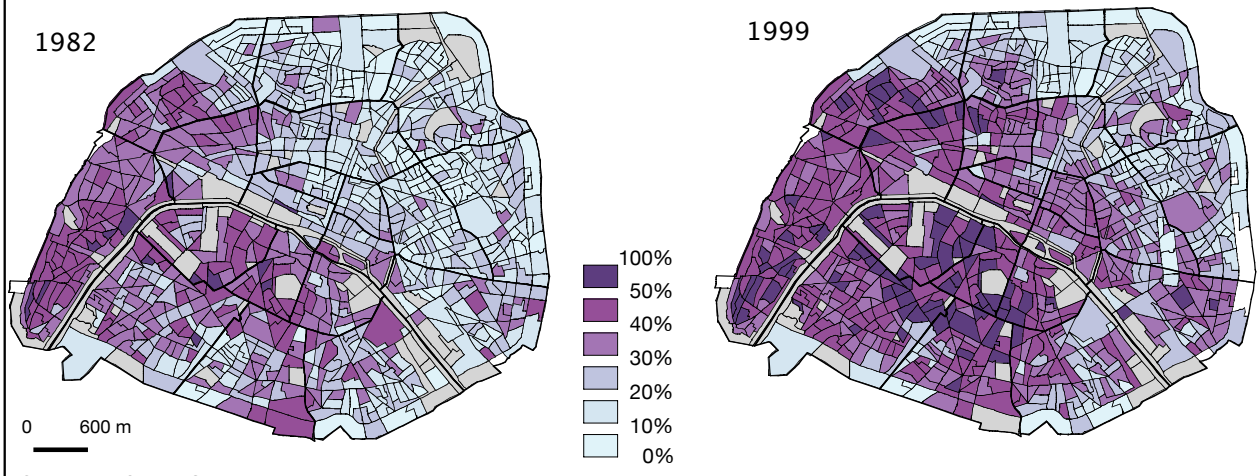
1.1. Gentrification and "*embourgeoisement*"

The entire city of Paris' (and even the nearby suburbs), each of its neighbourhoods' social standing has been rising up for a long time. The famous Quartier Latin, for instance, was a poor neighbourhood in the 19th century and the upper middle class settled in gradually after Haussmann's work. This long-term process of "*embourgeoisement*" affected lower middle class areas and affects now middle class areas, especially on the left bank of the Seine, and it proceeds by renovation work or new buildings construction. The first working-class neighbourhoods that have been transformed in Southern and Eastern Paris were demolished and rebuilt, but they became social house buildings and the transformation was limited.

Gentrification is only one type of "*embourgeoisement*" that affects working-class neighbourhoods with the arrival of more affluent inhabitants who purchase their flat (unlike the former inhabitants who were tenants) and the restoration of housing without razing. This restoration can be led by a real estate developer and sold back to gentrifiers, or by themselves after having purchased an old flat. Thus, gentrification is a type of social change in a neighbourhood, a change in legal status of occupancy and in urban landscape. It has become the main form of social transformation in Paris since the eighties, even if the upper class neighbourhoods' social standing keeps rising up too. The context is a shortage of housing and the soaring price of it, which throw back the working-class families and more and more the lower middle class one in the suburbs.

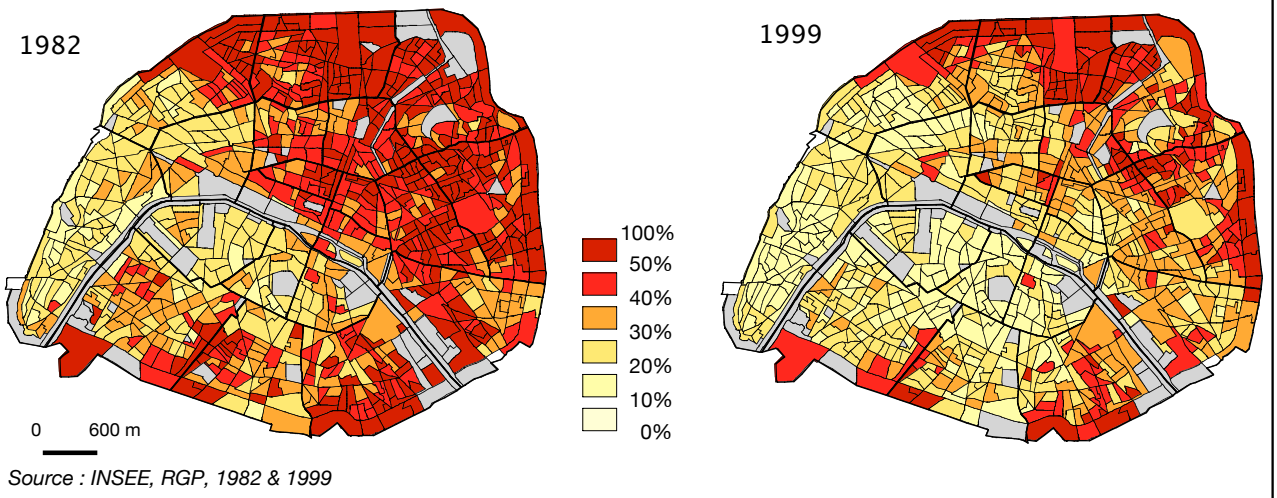
1.2. The progress of gentrification in Eastern Paris

Doc. 1: Part of **upper middle class** (professionals, managers, artists, intellectual professions), working or retired, in households' population of Paris



Source : INSEE, RGP, 1982 & 1999

Doc. 2: Part of **working-class** people (skilled non manual, skilled and unskilled manual), working or retired, in households' population of Paris



Source : INSEE, RGP, 1982 & 1999

The first and the second documents deal with the social evolution of the population of Paris between 1982 and 1999 at a fine scale. At the first glance, these four maps seem to represent the movements of a tide of two opposite social groups. And gentrification seems to be a simple diffusion process from the upper class neighbourhood of Western Paris on. But if we look closer, there are different processes: on the South bank of the Seine, it is not gentrification but the social standing's rise of middle class neighbourhoods, which ensues from the diffusion of upper class. This is the case of the 15th urban district on the West, for instance. Many high standing housing buildings have been erected at that period. On the contrary, the 13th district, on the East of the left bank, was partly demolished to build social housing.

Strictly speaking, gentrification takes place on the right-bank of the Seine, first in the four central districts, and then in the three peri-central districts (9th, 10th, 11th). It ensues again from a diffusion process from the Western and left-bank *beaux quartiers* on, creating a frontier zone that marks the march of gentrification in Eastern Paris. However, we already can see some advance posts in peripheral districts, especially around the green areas of the Buttes Chaumont garden (19th district) and the Père Lachaise cemetery (20th district). These advance posts seem to ensue from skirting strategies to avoid the area of Belleville. This neighbourhood is actually made of social housing and rundown buildings, where working class immigrants from Northern Africa and China live. We can also notice a breach in the front line between the 10th and the 18th districts: that is Montmartre, an entirely gentrified area, while this front line remains strictly linear nearby. Eastern 18th district is another working class immigrants' neighbourhood, La Goutte d'Or, also made of social housing in the South part and rundown buildings in the North one. There, the immigrants are coming from all countries of Africa, and the North of the neighbourhood, Château Rouge, is perhaps the only Sub-Saharan Africa area in

Paris, with many shops of exotic food, all colours clothes, etc. In 1999, these immigrants working class neighbourhoods seem to stop the march of gentrification. But in fact, gentrification had already begun in the rundown housing areas of these neighbourhoods, and now some gentrifiers live in the heart of immigrants' neighbourhoods.

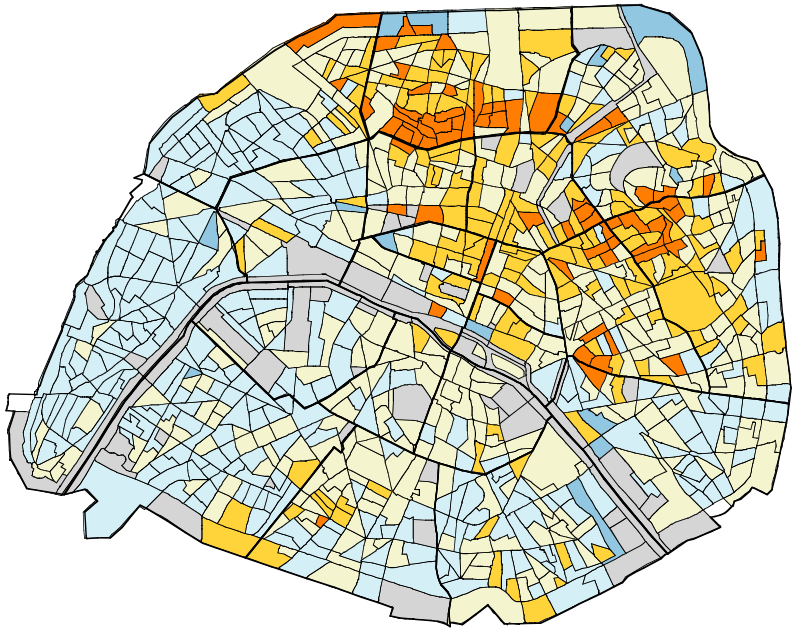
2. Social mix in gentrifying neighbourhoods

As the gentrification advances towards the boundaries of Paris city, gentrifiers come to live alongside working class people, and social mix in the frontier zone become a real issue for researchers as well as authorities.

2.1. Who are the gentrifiers? And the working-class?

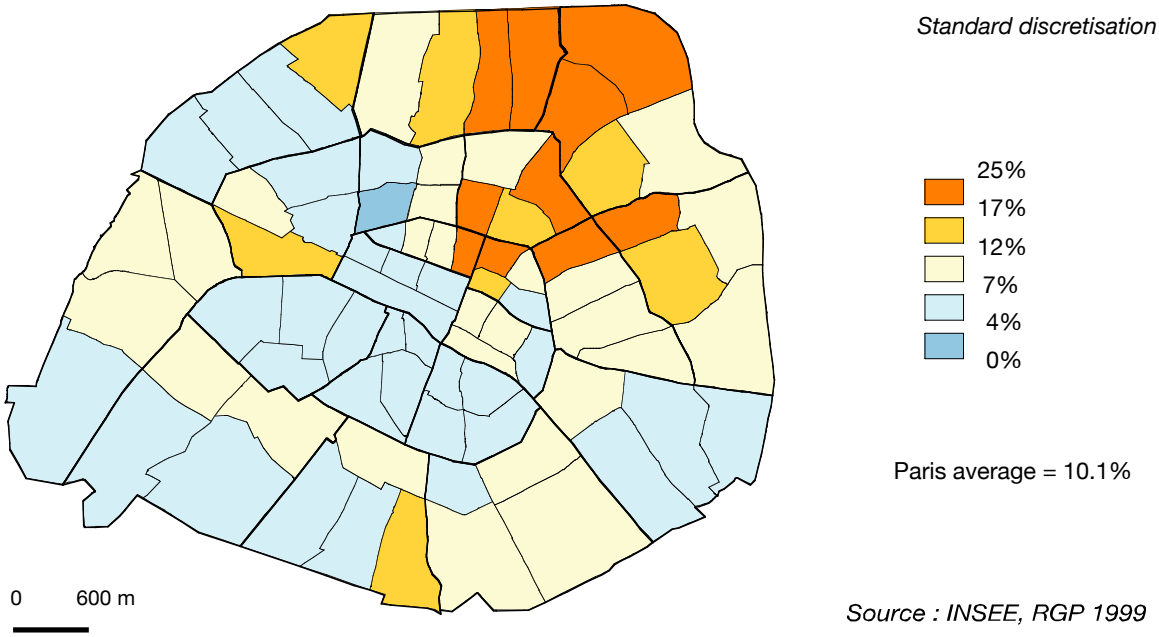
First of all, I have to precise who are the gentrifiers. The social status of the incomers in gentrified neighbourhoods is quite wide: it especially depends on the stage of gentrification in the neighbourhood. The first incomers belong to the middle class: they are artists, journalists or employees in cultural firms, often insecure jobs but well regarded. Then the incomers become more and more affluent and belong to the upper middle class: they are professionals like architects or photographs, often well-known, like actors, producers or directors in theatre or cinema, and for the most part well-paid executives in cultural firms. The latter can be characterized by a high cultural and social capital, and less important economic capital, following Bourdieu's terminology. They belong to the 25 % or even 10 % richer households of Ile-de-France region.

Doc. 3: Part of cultural professions (journalists, artists, etc.) among upper middle class households' population of Paris in 1999



The third document shows that a main group can be distinguished among gentrifiers: the cultural professions, i.e. journalists, artists, designers, etc. They are the main part of upper middle class in North-Eastern Paris, and especially in Montmartre, around the Bastille Opera, and in Belleville and La Goutte d'Or.

Doc. 4: Part of foreigners from others countries that European Union (15) among the population of Paris in 1999



And the fourth document shows that these working class neighbourhoods like Belleville or La Goutte d'Or are those where extra-European foreigners are the most numerous. To sum up, there, the social mix is made of more or less rich artists and cultural professions and poor immigrants of Africa or Asia, as well as old French working-class people.

2.2. A change of scale in segregation

With gentrification, luxury flats can be neighbours of small and rundown one, even in the same building. As a result, segregation becomes more and more complex. Instead of a macro-scale segregation between upper class and upper middle class Western Paris on the one hand and lower middle class and working class Eastern Paris on the other hand, gentrification lead to a micro-scale segregation between different streets, buildings, or even between two blocks in the same building. Most often blocks looking on courtyard are gentrified whereas blocks on street remain poor. And even when gentrifiers and working-class people are neighbours, they don't meet each other very much.

Actually, gentrifiers settle in in former working-class neighbourhoods because of economic constraints and the profound desire to live in Paris and not in the suburbs. They haven't chosen the neighbourhood first, but their flat: big and tall, well situated regarding the exposure to sunlight, the quietness in the close neighbourhood, the view onto the roofs, etc. At first, they don't like the neighbourhood very much; they'd rather choose closed courtyards or passages. But quickly they become fond of it: they enjoy the cheap shops, and above all the social and cultural mix. Yet, they continue to choose carefully the school of their children, often educated in the private sector, but also in "good" public schools, using dispensations that are less and less special, to ensure the social reproduction of their offspring. Likewise, they don't go to the same cafés as the working-class people and the immigrants, but to the many trendy bars that have opened in the gentrifying neighbourhoods. Conversely these bars are too expensive for working-class people and immigrants. Thus, the social mix is not effective and do not contribute, for instance, to the integration of immigrants who live in such neighbourhoods. On the contrary, the shortage of housing and the rise of real estate and rents prices lead to their ousting.

Nevertheless, gentrifiers always praise the social mix when they are talking about their neighbourhood, insomuch that this mix becomes like a key-element for the gentrifiers to distinct themselves from the traditional *bourgeoisie* and to recognize each other as a social group. And gentrifiers are still settling in in these neighbourhoods, despite of the rise of real-estate prices, in order to live with other people like them.

3. The role of public policies in front of gentrification process

So, gentrification is an ambiguous process, which leads to the restoring of housing and in the same time creates new forms of segregation and jeopardizes the presence of working class people in Paris city. We need to ask ourselves two questions: which role do the public policies play in gentrification process? And which role do they play in front of it?

3.1. A new direction in urban planning since the end of the 1990's

Gentrification is viewed as a basically spontaneous households' movement. Yet, there is a debate on this point among researchers. Neil Smith argues that gentrification is a back to the city movement of capital before people[2]. Capital has a wide meaning that includes private banks, real estate investors and developers and public authorities. All together, they lead a conquest of rundown town centres, that N. Smith calls "revanchist"[3].

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[2] SMITH N., 1979, "Toward a Theory of Gentrification : a Back to the City Movement by Capital not People", *Journal of the American Planning Association*, n° 45, p. 538-548.
[3] SMITH N. 1996, , *The New Urban Frontier : Gentrification and the Revanchist City*, New-York, Routledge, XX-262 p.

This revanchism is not so obvious in Parisian public policies, but they do play a role in gentrification. The spontaneous movement of richer household's settling in in Paris centre was actually preceded by several important urban planning policies: in the seventies was created the high-speed suburban branch of the Paris metro with a central station at Châtelet-Les Halles, which linked the latter to the new economic centre of La Défense in a few minutes. Nearby this station the contemporary art centre Georges Pompidou was build. Both of these big equipments strengthened the centrality of the four first districts of Paris.

And spontaneous gentrification became precisely conspicuous in the late seventies in the Marais, in the 4th district. The Marais is a special case because it is a former aristocratic neighbourhood. It was built in the 15th century for the greatest families of the kingdom and the king himself, which means architecture of high quality like mansions for example. But, the aristocracy left the neighbourhood after the Revolution in the 19th century for the Faubourg St-Germain and was replaced by workmen and craftsmen, among others Jewish people from Eastern Europe. And today, upper middle class people and gay businesses reinvest it. The Marais is also the first place, as well as the 7th arrondissement, where urban heritage protection's policies were tried out.

A threshold was crossed with the Faubourg St-Antoine in the 11th district. The building of the Bastille Opera has accompanied the gentrification of the neighbourhood in the eighties. It could be explained by the low cost of the flats, due to a rundown urban fabric, that is to say mainly old buildings of poor quality. Previously, this type of urban fabric was demolished and rebuilt in a modern way, like in the 13th district (Les Olympiades) or in the 20th one in Belleville. It was the renovation. To consider this type of urban fabric as an urban heritage in the same way as the Marais or the historic centre was totally new. The definitive giving up of the renovation for rehabilitation takes place in the nineties with the OPAH, which means planed operations for flats and buildings restoring and housing improvement. The Faubourg St-Antoine was used to display this new type of operations after the mayor changed in 1996. But it is since 2001 that these operations have been put into general use by the new socialist town council. New green areas and nurseries creations in Eastern Paris also answer to the gentrifiers' claims.

Thus, gentrification is the result of several convergent processes: the deep change in employment patterns, the rent gap in some rundown neighbourhoods, and finally the urban policies which favour the upper middle class to settle in these rundown neighbourhoods.

3.2. The limits of housing public policies

Yet, the socialist town council put forward a new social housing creation policy in order to keep working-class inhabitants in Paris city. It plans to create 3,500 social housing units per year when the construction had dropped to less than 2,000 per year with the previous town council. As a comparison, Pierre Merlin estimated the needs in the early eighties at 8,000 social housing units per year[4]. Presented as ambitious, the socialist plan appears limited, for many reasons.

First, construction represents only 15 to 35 % of the annual creations, which are above all rehabilitation of buildings bought by the city agencies. So it cannot stop the shortage of housing in Paris and the rising of real-estate prices, which is one of the main causes of gentrification. Furthermore, the legal definition of social housing changed in 2000: the PLI[5]category, which was far over the maximum income that allows access to social housing, went out the definition, but another intermediate category was created, the PLS[6], that allows an exceeding of 30 % over the maximum income. With the rise of maximum income to get social housing flat, the only category intended for low-income people, the PLAI- PLA-TS[7], represents only 15 % of social housing creation today, although 70 % of those who are asking for a social housing flat correspond to its income level.

Finally, this plan has a geographical dimension: some social housing operations have been realized in Western "*beaux quartiers*", for example in Mozart avenue, in the 16th district. And in Eastern Paris, especially in working class and immigrants neighbourhoods, the plan intends to create PLS for middle class, in order to favour social mix there. In other words it is going the same way as spontaneous gentrification, instead of protecting working class inhabitants facing it.

To conclude this presentation, gentrification appears like one of the main social processes that deeply change Paris city, even in restoring the old neighbourhoods. It actually reshapes the traditional social division of urban space by moving back the working class and by creating a social mixed frontier zone. But it represents more a new type of segregation, at a fine scale, than a real social mix. And before this ambiguous process, the public authorities' attitude is also ambiguous: on the one hand it favours gentrification by giving grants for housing restoring, and on the other hand, it pretends to help working-class inhabitants to stay with a social housing plan. However, I have shown some limits of this so-called ambition.

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[4] MERLIN P., 1983, *Pour une véritable priorité au logement social à Paris*, rappsort au ministre de l'Urbanisme et du Logement, Paris, La Documentation française, 394 p.
[5] Prêt locatif intermédiaire : intermediate building loan for rent.
[6] Prêt locatif social : social building loan.
[7] Prêt locatif aidé d'intégration : integration assisted building loan. Prêt locatif aidé très social : very social assisted building loan.