Moving In/Out of Brussels’ Historical Core in the Early 2000s: Migration and the Effects of Gentrification

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Abstract
Exploring migration dynamics associated with gentrification is particularly important in order to shed light on the nature and contested effects of such processes. Quite paradoxically, however, this aspect remains underinvestigated in the gentrification literature. This paper explores the migratory dimensions of gentrification in Brussels’ historical core, hence offering a view from a city wherein current rounds of middle-class reinvestment of inner urban space operate under circumstances that partially contrast with those reported from more prominent global cities. Findings stress that educated young adults living alone and renting from private landlords are predominant among both in- and out-movers to or from Brussels’ historical core, suggesting in turn that renting in a gentrifying area is for most of them associated with a transitional step in their housing career. In addition, findings indicate that displacement of vulnerable residents is a limited but actual constituent of the migration dynamics in Brussels’ historical core and point to other harmful consequences of gentrification in the area. In Brussels, gentrification and its effects operate under circumstances associated with the preponderance of a poorly regulated private rental housing market in the city’s inner neighbourhoods.

1. Introduction
Gentrification of urban neighbourhoods is now observed in a wide range of cities across the globe. The process is no longer confined to the world’s largest global cities where it was first empirically documented—and is still most investigated (Lees, 2000; Atkinson and Bridge, 2005). Although the forms and protagonists of the process may vary greatly between cities or between neighbourhoods within a single city, gentrification retains defining characteristics that make it a workable concept. The migratory dimension of the
process is probably the trait most agreed upon among gentrification researchers. Lyons (1996, p. 40), for instance, has stated that “the shared and defining characteristic of gentrification everywhere is socio-economic change through migration”, while Bondi (1999b, p. 204) has acknowledged that “gentrification necessarily prompts questions about migration”. These statements emphasise that contemporary upward neighbourhood trajectories are driven first by middle- or upper-class newcomers moving into working-class neighbourhoods rather than by upward social mobility of incumbent residents. They also stress that migration flows to or from gentrifying districts are intrinsically socially differentiated. This point is central to the definition of gentrification as a process of class transformation through which impoverished urban neighbourhoods are being recast in the mould of wealthier newcomers (Smith, 1996).

Quite paradoxically, however, the migratory dimension of the process has received relatively little attention in gentrification literature, as far as the trajectories of both in- and out-migrants to or from gentrifying neighbourhoods are concerned (Smith, 2002). In this paper, we will explore the migration dynamics associated with gentrification in Brussels in the early 2000s. Brussels is quite a ‘non-traditional’ setting for gentrification literature, for the city is much smaller in size (i.e. about 1 million inhabitants in the core city and another 700 000 in the wider metropolitan area) and driven by a less intense business service economy than archetypal global cities. However, mostly since the late 1980s, tangible signs of residential and commercial reinvestment are multiplying in Brussels’ central areas, affecting neighbourhoods long viewed by the middle class as inappropriate places to live in outside working hours. In parallel, a severe housing affordability crisis is now manifest in the city, following periods in which upsurges in rent levels and housing costs far outweighed increases in disposable income. Such a tension in the housing market is particularly problematic since the majority of households in Brussels rent their home from private landlords. In addition, the lack of social housing is striking, accounting for only 8 per cent of the housing stock, whereas 30 per cent of the population is below the poverty line (Statistics Belgium, 2005).

Recent evolutions in Brussels obviously relate to the development of the city from the national capital of a small country to a major place of transnational political centrality, in the wake of the concentration of the core institutions of the European Union in the city since the late 1950s (Vandermotten, 1999; Baeten, 2001a; Elmhorn, 2001). This development has indeed motivated many landlords and real estate investors to cash in on the influx of new high-income expatriate professionals in the city. However, in a previous account of gentrification in Brussels, it has been argued that marginal gentrification is predominant in driving recent waves of middle-class remaking of Brussels’ inner neighbourhoods (van Criekingen and Decroly, 2003). That is to say that, alongside élite expatriate population groups, young adults living alone or in unmarried couples, highly educated but (still) modestly earning professionals and mostly private renters are crucial protagonists in many present-day upward neighbourhood trajectories in Brussels. Such kinds of protagonists, however, have largely been overlooked in the literature so far, in a haste to assign gentrification to the colonisation of inner neighbourhoods by higher-income professionals servicing the growth of global corporate functions (for example, Rofe, 2005). Evidence of such wealthy, corporate gentrifiers buying prestigious—new or renovated—residences in the inner city is still scarce in Brussels. Hence, separating between types of protagonists is necessary in order to reach a better conceptualisation of
the time–space unevenness of gentrification. As Dutton stated, this aim would be best served by delimiting the concept into two distinct and separate processes. Modelling this duality between marginal gentrifier/peripheral city and global gentrifier/core city relies upon empirical research which captures and compares the characteristics of gentrifiers at a particular time-space juncture (Dutton, 2005, p. 224).

Some new theoretical challenges stem from the consideration of this kind of ‘non-traditional’ context for gentrification research. If marginal gentrification plays a predominant role in reshaping inner neighbourhoods in a city like Brussels, what does it imply for the migration dynamics of the process? Moreover, as the term ‘marginal’ may appear to soften the significance of changes under way, can it be used to indicate that this kind of process does not result in harmful consequences for lower-income urban-dwellers? The empirical analysis implemented in this paper will demonstrate that, even in such a context, current rounds of middle-class reinvestment of the central city still create winners and losers, although under partially specific circumstances, which contrasts with received wisdom from the mainstream of gentrification literature.

The rest of this paper is divided into three parts. The next part is dedicated to making a brief review of established knowledge on the migratory dimensions of gentrification. Specific attention will be paid to issues in this field that require further empirical investigations. Section 3 addresses the context of gentrification in Brussels. It comprises further conceptual development about the nature and protagonists of gentrification in Brussels and argues in favour of considering the role of private renters in this context. Section 4 is devoted to an empirical exploration of migration flows to and from Brussels’ historical core in the early 2000s. It uses an original dataset that connects the demographic and socioeconomic characteristics of the population in 2001 to their residential trajectories over the 1996–2002 period. Results allow a discussion on the nature of the migratory dynamics of gentrification in a city like Brussels, as well as an assessment of the effects of gentrification on vulnerable urban dwellers in such a context.

2. Gentrification and Migration: Existing Evidence

Analyses building on comparisons of ‘before’ and ‘after’ snapshots of the social composition of neighbourhoods have been dominating in gentrification literature so far. Such an approach, typically making use of cross-sectional census data over a one- or two-decade(s) time-interval, says much on the extent and trajectories of neighbourhood change but conversely little on the socio-spatial and housing trajectories of the protagonists of gentrification themselves (Bridge, 2003). However, some important findings—mostly derived from longitudinal datasets—can be brought out from the existing literature, as far as both in-migrations to and out-migrations from gentrifying districts are concerned.

That gentrification is not a ‘back-to-the-city’ movement is probably the most established statement in this respect. Rather than a reversal of long-established trends of middle-class suburbanisation, gentrification rests foremost on a reshuffling of the stock of middle- and upper-class households within the urban area (Kruythoff, 1991; Bondi, 1999b; Atkinson, 2000, 2004). The Brussels case makes no exception to this model, for migration balances between the core part of the metropolitan area (i.e. the Brussels Capital Region) and the rest of Belgium (i.e. Flanders and Wallonia) still show largely negative values—and indeed are very similar to the ones recorded in previous decades. This indicates that suburban areas long-established
as (relatively) homogeneous and family-oriented social environments are still very attractive for middle-class households, despite ever-increasing commuting costs.

Some analyses have investigated further on the socio-spatial trajectories of middle-class households moving into gentrifying areas. Discussing interview material gathered from professionals who had bought property in two gentrifying neighbourhoods in Edinburgh, Bondi (1999a, 1999b) notes that many of her interviewees were young adults living alone or in childless couples, who had become familiar with inner-city living as students in higher education. Drawing attention to their housing aspirations, the author concludes that for many young professional people, gentrification is less of a lifetime alternative to suburban lifestyles and more of a staging post on a journey likely to proceed towards parenthood and suburban or ex-urban living (Bondi, 1999b, 217).

Similarly, building on a Bristol case study, Bridge (2003) stresses that gentrification may have for middle-class households limited temporal boundaries within housing and socio-spatial trajectories which are pursued later in the life-course in the wider urban area. Findings by Authier (1995) on Lyon also suggest that moving in a gentrifying area may represent short-term options within the socio-spatial trajectories of middle-class households. However, evidence to support further this hypothesis is still sparse in the literature, making it a contested issue. Ley, for instance, firmly counters such a point of view and stresses that the notion that the inner city acts as a temporary holding area for the new middle class, a cheaper location to tolerate until the more desirable suburbs become affordable, is a fable that must be put to rest (Ley, 1996, p. 205).

Further investigations are needed here on the complex ways through which contemporary demographic, cultural and economic dynamics at the household scale (including restructuring of life-courses) impact on the socio-spatial trajectories of diverse strata of the middle classes (Smith, 2002; Bridge, 2003; Buzar et al., 2005). Such investigations should notably pay greater attention to middle-class households setting up home in gentrifying districts as private renters, for studies of gentrification typically focus only on new owner-occupiers in the city. For instance, Bromley et al. (2007) have highlighted that the recent population expansion in the city centres of Bristol and Swansea is closely associated with rising numbers of private renters, mostly young adults who expressed transitory attitudes to inner-city living (see also Davidson and Lees, 2005). To what extent can (some) renters—not only students in higher education (Smith and Holt, 2007)—be considered as (upcoming) gentrifiers, under which circumstances and with what kind of social and spatial consequences, are still largely open questions.

The scarcity of analyses centred on the residential trajectories of those who moved out of gentrifying districts is even more striking. Methodological obstacles are instrumental in this knowledge gap, for research tools to trace those who moved out of a selected area are sparse (Atkinson, 2000). Yet, Slater (2006) has argued that this dearth of analyses on out-migrations from gentrifying neighbourhoods is specific to recent contributions to the literature and reflects a decreasing interest in exploring the effects of gentrification, at times when leitmotivs of ‘urban renaissance’ or ‘urban revitalisation’ are at the forefront of countless discourses. Displacement of incumbent vulnerable social groups, a well-documented mechanism in previous contributions to the gentrification literature, is a particularly sensitive issue in this respect (Marcuse, 1986; Atkinson, 2004).

Actually, existing evidence mostly suggests that displacement should be conceived as one...
among several types of out-migration flows, for heterogeneity in types of households and socioeconomic profiles is recurrent among out-movers from gentrifying neighbourhoods (LeGates and Hartman, 1986; Lyons, 1996; Atkinson, 2000; Freeman and Braconi, 2004; Newman and Wyly, 2006). For instance, in an analysis of selected gentrifying boroughs in Inner London between 1971 and 1981, Lyons (1996) has highlighted that low-status households were specific among those who relocated within their borough of origin, while higher-status households were predominant among those who left the borough. The author has interpreted this pattern of ‘selectivity by distance’ in terms of a contrasted relationship to constraint and choice among different types of migrant. Low-status migrants, Lyons argues, are tied to short-distance moves given their lack of purchasing power and their dependence on locally available amenities and supportive networks, whereas better-off households have more opportunities to realise their consumer preference in the wider urban housing market (see also Atkinson, 2000).

Displacement, however, remains a highly controversial issue in gentrification literature. Some authors consider this mechanism as negligible. This is very clearly expressed by Freeman and Braconi when they argue about New York that gentrification

[brings] with it neighbourhood improvements that are valued by disadvantaged households, and they consequently make greater efforts to remain in their dwelling units, even if the proportion of their income devoted to rent rises (Freeman and Braconi, 2004, p. 51).

The claim by Hamnett (2003) about the middle-class remaking of Inner London is rather about discussing the conceptual relevance of gentrification-induced displacement. Following a careful analysis of changes in the occupational class structure of London over the 1961–2001 period, the author points out that

the slow reduction of the working-class population in many inner-city areas is, in part, a result of a long-term reduction in the size of the working-class population of London as a whole (by a combination of retirement, death, out-migration or upward social mobility) and its replacement by a larger middle-class population. In other words, the key process may be one of replacement rather than displacement per se (Hamnett, 2003, p. 2419, original emphasis).

Although there is no doubt about the direction of occupational and class restructuring in London over recent decades, as in most other Western metropolises, mechanisms put forward for the shrinking share of the working-class households among inner-city residents seem problematic. It is surprising, first, that downward social mobility is not considered as an option, since those falling into unemployment or those leaving the formal labour market are left out of the picture. Secondly, and probably more crucially, it is not explained in what sense moving out of the city should be viewed as antonymic to the idea of displacement—or, rather, precisely as a sign that gentrification has gone so far in a city like London that vulnerable groups are forced out of the city as a whole.

Finally, debates on the extent and meaning of out-migration flows from gentrifying neighbourhoods should also take two other arguments into consideration. First, gentrification may occur without direct displacement (as in cases of new-build upscale developments in formerly non-populated industrial spaces) but may still imply harmful consequences for those urban-dwellers with fewer resources (Davidson and Lees, 2005). Marcuse (1986) has coined the term ‘exclusionary displacement’ to make explicit that the ability of low-income households to move into neighbourhoods that once
provided a significant stock of affordable housing opportunities is severely reduced as gentrification continues apace. Secondly, vulnerable social groups may show low propensity to move out of gentrifying districts simply because there are very few affordable alternatives in the rest of the city’s housing market—and thus not because they value recent neighbourhood evolutions. Staying in a gentrifying neighbourhood is then very likely to incur heavier costs (such as housing downsizing, cutbacks in household expenses as rising rents have to be supported) (Newman and Wyly, 2006).

These briefly outlined discussions are based on empirical material gathered mostly from case studies in prime world cities in the US or the UK. As the face of gentrification is—at least partly—different in a city like Brussels, one could question the strength of existing interpretations in such a ‘non-traditional’ context. We will now try to demonstrate that analyses grounded in contexts such as that of Brussels are beneficial to a more comprehensive understanding of the migration dynamics of gentrification.

3. Brussels: Gentrification in Context

Since the late 1950s, Brussels has gained a prominent, yet highly specific place in the world-city network. On the one hand, the city has a very limited control capacity over international capital. Only 4 among Europe’s largest transnational corporations are headquartered in the city, compared with 43 in Paris and 60 in London (Vandermotten, 1999; Rozenblat and Cicille, 2003). However, Brussels has gained a considerable international visibility parallel to the setting up of the core executive and administrative bodies of the European Union (EU) in the city. This has led to the concentration of a large set of transnational activities in one part of the eastern inner city—the Leopold quarter, now more commonly referred to as the ‘EU district’—and the wider urban area, including a vast array of region, city or state representation offices, international (non-) governmental organisations, lobbyists, subsidiaries of foreign-based financial, law or consultancy firms (Baeten, 2001a; Elmhorn, 2001; van Criekingen et al., 2005).

The development of this EU(-related) economy undoubtedly makes a major contribution to economic growth in Brussels. A recent research report has evaluated that the EU economy accounts for about 13 per cent of Brussels’ GDP (Vandermotten et al., 2007). Furthermore, this leads a sizeable group of generally high-status expatriate professionals (i.e. about 40,000) from different national backgrounds to live and work in the city. The influx of these new high-income groups surely sustains the dynamics of the housing market. Notably, several real estate actors have developed strategies to turn part of this new demand towards newly built prestigious residential projects they had developed in the inner city. Nevertheless, such dynamics have not materialised so far in a massive high-income gentrification of Brussels’ inner neighbourhoods. It is very likely that the small size of the city plays a significant role in this respect, for a household that can afford housing in a long-established bourgeois neighbourhood in the southeastern part of the city (or in a first-belt suburban municipality) actually enjoys close proximity to the historical core and the CBD, while living outside areas still heavily stigmatised as unsafe living environments because of their working-class and ethnic character. This helps to explain why, in Brussels, evidence of high-income gentrification in working-class inner-city neighbourhoods is thin, whereas further embourgeoisement of wealthy first- or second-ring neighbourhoods is proceeding apace (van Criekingen and Decroly, 2003).

If classic forms of high-standard corporate gentrification are (still) rare in Brussels, this
by no means suggests that other forms of middle-class colonisation have not been significant in central neighbourhoods over the past two decades. Following Dutton (2005), we argue that marginal gentrification should be looked at as a process of upward neighbourhood trajectory in its own right in a city like Brussels. This is not to say, however, that we will adopt a rigid binary core–periphery conceptualisation of the geography of gentrification. Rather, both high-income, corporate forms of gentrification and processes closer to the notion of marginal gentrification (and obviously still other processes of urban change) are concomitantly at stake in Brussels, but the latter with seemingly greater magnitude than the former.

Compared with most other European cities, the private rental sector accounts for a very large share of the housing stock in Brussels, with 47 per cent of households renting their home from private landlords. This proportion reaches 49 per cent in the historical core and peaks above 60 per cent in most neighbourhoods of the 19th-century inner ring. In addition, only 10 per cent of households in the city are in public-owned homes, mostly in small social housing estates. In this context, many young adults from middle-class backgrounds start their housing career as renters of private landlords in the inner city. Renting in an inner neighbourhood enables these educated individuals, typically between 25 and 34 and in non-family households (i.e. living alone or in an unmarried couple without children) to benefit fully from residential independence and lifestyle autonomy, while giving them ample possibilities for adapting to future changes in their household composition and professional career (Leloup, 2002). In addition, these categories show high levels of residential mobility, and many amongst them simply postpone their move towards more conventional middle-class suburban areas because of the increasing difficulties of securing an income and a family arrangement in post-Fordist, more flexible socioeconomic contexts. Others, however, will buy and renovate an old housing unit in a traditional working-class neighbourhood in the inner city later in their life-course.

In this context, gentrification in Brussels’ inner neighbourhoods is largely associated with the influx of middle-class young adults and the circulation of the latter on the private rental market. Highly relevant in this respect is the strong growth (+45.5 per cent) of the number of young adults (25–34) living alone in the Brussels Capital Region between 1981 and 2001, while the total number of households grew only slightly (+4.2 per cent) over the same period (see Hall and Ogden, 2003 for similar findings in London). This increase in young adults living alone has been particularly concentrated in inner neighbourhoods—that is, in the historical core and in adjacent neighbourhoods making the connection between the latter and traditional bourgeois areas in the south-eastern part of the city. Young adults living alone or in childless unmarried couples account now for more than half of the total number of households in most of these neighbourhoods. Moreover, these areas are now commonly referred to in local representations as the city’s new ‘trendy hotspots’, for they concentrate many consumption facilities such as fashionable cafes and stylish (but not luxury) boutiques (van Criekingen and Fleury, 2006).

Nevertheless, working-class households—among which are families of immigrant origin, lone-parent households and low-income elderly people—also strongly rely on the inner-city private rental housing market for accommodation purposes (Kesteloot, 1995, 2000). This segment of the market even acts de facto as social housing for low-income population groups. This is to say that, in Brussels, many among the urban poor are tenants of private landlords in
central neighbourhoods since provision by the public-owned social housing sector (*de jure*) is largely insufficient (Charles, 2006). These households are therefore highly vulnerable *vis-à-vis* escalating rent levels. Furthermore, this sets the scene for potentially highly problematic gentrification-induced effects in Brussels, even if the nature of gentrification here shows notable differences from more ‘classic’ stories of the process wherein incoming affluent home-buyers in working-class neighbourhoods are at the forefront.

4. Moving In/Out of Brussels’ Historical Core in the Early 2000s

The focus is set hereafter on Brussels’ historical core—that is, the central area of the city commonly referred to as the ‘Pentagon’ (‘Pentagone’, in French, or ‘Vijfhoek’, in Dutch) after the layout of the boulevards marking its boundaries. It corresponds to the city’s territory prior to the major urban developments of the 19th century. Today’s boulevards were then one of the outer walls of the city, originally erected in the 14th century. The Pentagon today makes up the central part of the territory of the municipality of Brussels. The latter is one among the 19 municipalities composing the territory of the Brussels Capital Region (Figure 1).

The Pentagon reached its population peak by 1890 (about 160 000 inhabitants) and then continuously lost population until the mid 1990s (40 000 inhabitants). This dramatic depopulation trend resulted from very destructive town-planning interventions throughout the 19th century (such as the building of Hausmann-like inner boulevards) and the 20th century (including the destruction of densely populated working-class neighbourhoods for the erection of an underground railway junction between North and South stations). Depopulation continued apace after 1945, in the wake of a massive suburbanisation trend of the Belgian middle class. Actually, it is the influx of foreign working-class immigrants since the 1960s that has prevented Brussels’ inner city from becoming an even more depopulated, monofunctional office district crisscrossed by a network of motorways (de Lannoy and Kesteloot, 1990; Baeten, 2001b). Since the mid 1990s, the Pentagon has been gaining inhabitants again and, today, the area has approximately recovered its population number of the late 1980s. Yet, this evolution still operates at modest rates (+5.5 per cent between 1997 and 2003). Evolution is more pronounced if looking at the increase in the number of households (+6.4 per cent between 1997 and 2003; +12 per cent between 1991 and 2003).

However, (public and private) reinvestment in the Pentagon’s housing market and the concentration of new policy efforts dedicated to its ‘revitalisation’ are probably the most spectacular evolutions in this area in recent years. In particular, Brussels’ municipal authorities have created in 1995 a new executive body, the Delegation for the Development of the Pentagon (DDP) (Délégation au Développement du Pentagone/Afvaardiging voor de Ontwikkeling van de Vijfhoek). This team of about 10 architects and planners, backed by strong political support from the deputy burgomaster in charge of town planning and cultural policy, has been put in charge of, among other issues, the promotion of the area towards real estate investors, housing developers and new potential inhabitants, the redevelopment of old industrial buildings, the reoccupation of flats above shops and the design of public space rehabilitation programmes. Policy efforts at other levels of government (i.e. the regional, federal and European levels, notably via the ‘Urban’ and ‘Objective II’ programmes) have been added to this ‘revitalisation’ agenda. Efforts to improve the attractiveness of the Pentagon have also included the extensive
rehabilitation of public spaces. The renovation of pavements and road surfaces, modernisation of street lighting, street furniture and greenery, and the installation of surveillance cameras are visible realisations of state efforts to respond to demands by the middle class for ‘purified’ space in the inner city (van Criekingen et al., 2006).

As a result, about 70 per cent of the total number of vacant sites in the Pentagon has been invested between 1995 and 2004. This reinvestment accounted in 2004 for about 2800 new, mostly private, housing units built on vacant land or developed in previously abandoned (non-)residential buildings in the Pentagon (DDP, 2004). As recently noted by the DDP:

The new development of the Pentagon has led to a considerable revalorisation of the real

Figure 1. Location of the Pentagon in the Brussels-Capital Region
estate market, but it is difficult to put figures on this evolution. Development has particularly affected the housing sector, but broader effects have also been produced. For instance, the market value of disused industrial buildings (which was initially much too low) has increased fourfold … What is at stake now is to control the effects of this success, while continuing to give quality of interventions an advantage over quantitative aspects (AVCB, 2006; author’s translation, emphasis added).

This interpretation of recent housing and real estate market dynamics in the Pentagon in terms of a ‘success story’ clearly reflects the explicit endorsement of gentrification as a goal of urban policies in Brussels since the 1990s. This is also an expressive example of the kind of uncritical discourses, invariably articulated around optimistic-looking labels such as ‘revitalisation’ or ‘revalorisation’, that compose the mainstream of political and media assessment of current dynamics in the inner city. On the other hand, effects of the processes underway on incumbent inhabitants and working-class users of the city’s historical core are consistently kept out of sight.

These elements eventually made Brussels’ historical core a relevant case study for analysing the migration dynamics of gentrification and the effects of such a process.

4.1 Residential Mobility Levels and the Origin of the Migrants to the Pentagon

The following empirical development makes use of an original dataset built from a combination of two sources: the 2001 census and the Population Register. For each inhabitant in the Pentagon in 2001, our dataset provides a set of demographic and socioeconomic characteristics (extracted from the census) and an indication of their municipality of residence for three dates: 1996, 2000 and 2002 (available from the Population Register). Accordingly, this dataset provides information on the residential trajectories of all residents registered in 2001 in the Pentagon over the 1996–2002 period. It is not a longitudinal dataset since demographic and socioeconomic variables are only available from the census in 2001. In contrast to most longitudinal datasets, however, it does not deal with a population sample but with the entire population in the Pentagon as of 2001 (i.e. 40,515 inhabitants and 22,165 households).

Among residents in the Pentagon in 2001, 18 per cent moved into the area during the year before the census. Moreover, 55 per cent moved in between 1996 and 2001. As far as the number of households is concerned, figures are very similar (i.e. 21 per cent and 62 per cent for the 2000–01 and 1996–2001 periods respectively). These figures reflect the high residential mobility rates in Brussels, a feature linked to the predominance of the private rental sector in the central city (49 per cent of the households in the Pentagon).

A private rental accommodation is easy to obtain in Brussels, but the market is highly segmented in terms of housing price and quality.

A look at the municipalities of origin for newcomers to the Pentagon between 1996 or 2000 and 2001 shows the irrelevance of ‘back-to-the-city-movement’ models. Intraurban moves are clearly predominant and this conclusion is valid both as far as the number of residents or the number of households is concerned (Table 1).

Migrants whose previous residence was outside Belgium account for about one-fifth of those who settled in the Pentagon between 1996 (or 2000) and 2001. Unsurprisingly, EU citizens are the largest group among the latter (54.4 per cent of the households which moved in between 1996 and 2001 from abroad, excluding new eastern European EU member-states) and one-person households strongly dominate (84.3 per cent). It is therefore very likely that many among the in-movers to the Pentagon coming from abroad are expatriate professionals working for
the EU, EU-related organisations or trans-
national companies headquartered in the city, 
or other European ‘free movers’ (Favell, 2001). 
Other sizeable groups are citizens from the 
Maghreb and Turkey (18.8 per cent) and 
from the rest of the world outside Europe 
(12.1 per cent, excluding Congo and the US). 
These figures eventually reflect the growing 
multicultural composition of Brussels’ popu-
lation, with very diverse types of foreign 
migrants concomitantly flocking into the city 
(Corijn and de Lannoy, 2000).

In the rest of this section, we will deal with 
the other four-fifths of the migrants to or 
from Brussels’ historical core—that is, con-
sidering people moving into (or out of) the 
Pentagon from (or to) the rest of the Brussels-
Capital Region or the rest of Belgium. Mi-
grations between the Pentagon and the rest 
of the municipality of Brussels cannot be 
dealt with here since only intermunicipal 
migrations are included in our dataset. 
Nevertheless, a focus on moves between the 
Pentagon and other municipalities in the 
Brussels-Capital Region (i.e. 18 out of 19 mu-
icipalities) or in the rest of Belgium makes 
up an appropriate lens through which the 
migration dynamics of gentrification can be 
observed. In what follows, attention is paid 
first to the socioeconomic and household 
characteristics of those moving into the 
Pentagon. In-migrants will then be compared 
with those moving out of this area.

4.2 Recent In-movers and Stable 
Residents in the Pentagon: Two 
Contrasted Population Groups

Figure 2 compares the age distribution of 
those who moved into the Pentagon between 
1996 and 2001 with the age distribution of 
stable residents in the area (i.e. people in the 
Pentagon who have not changed residence 
since 1996). Young adults are largely pre-
dominant among in-migrants, with a peak 
for the 25–34 age-group, while children, older 
adults (40–60) and elderly people stand out 
among stable incumbent residents. Contrasts 
are very similar if considering tenants from 
private landlords separately (i.e. 28.4 per 
cent of stable residents, 42.6 per cent of in-
movers). Therefore, this strongly suggests 
that stable renters in the Pentagon and those 
moving into the area are very contrasting 
population groups.

Recent migrations into the Pentagon gener-
ate a growing gender imbalance since the 
male population clearly outweighs the fe-
male among recent in-movers (Table 2, cols 2 
and 3) (see Bromley et al., 2007, for similar 
findings in four British cities). This trend is 
strongly connected with the predominance of 
one-person households among in-migrants,

Table 1. Origin of in-migrants to the Pentagon, 2000–01 and 1996–2001 (percentages)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Where in 2000 or 1996?</th>
<th>Number of residents outside the Pentagon in 2000</th>
<th>Number of residents outside the Pentagon in 1996</th>
<th>Number of households outside the Pentagon in 2000</th>
<th>Number of households outside the Pentagon in 1996</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Municipality of Brussels a</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rest of the Brussels-Capital Region</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rest of Belgium</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abroad</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unspecified</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total (number)</td>
<td>7,391</td>
<td>22,463</td>
<td>4,623</td>
<td>13,771</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a i.e. in the Pentagon or in the rest of the municipality of Brussels.
Sources: 2001 census and Population Register.
for men living alone account for 47 per cent of all in-moving households, whereas the share of women living alone among in-movers is comparatively much lower (24 per cent) and indeed not very different from the share of women among stable residents (27 per cent). This hides, however, a difference as regards age: young women moving in vs stable elderly women (see Figure 2). For the rest, households with children are about three times more frequent among stable residents and, apart from one-person households, only childless couples of unmarried partners are more represented in the group of in-migrants. These characteristics are unambiguous reflections of the predominance of young adults in non-family household arrangements, mostly men living alone, among in-migrants to the Pentagon.

As far as education levels are concerned, contrasts between in-migrants and stable residents are also telling, for 54 per cent of the

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\begin{array}{c}
\text{Non-movers in the Pentagon, all,} \\
\text{1996–2001} \\
\end{array}
\]

\[
\begin{array}{c}
\text{Non-movers in the Pentagon, private renters,} \\
\text{1996–2001} \\
\end{array}
\]

\[
\begin{array}{c}
\text{In-migrants to the Pentagon, all,} \\
\text{1996–2001} \\
\end{array}
\]

\[
\begin{array}{c}
\text{In-migrants to the Pentagon, private renters,} \\
\text{1996–2001} \\
\end{array}
\]

\[
\begin{array}{c}
\text{Sources: 2001 census and Population Register.} \\
\end{array}
\]

\[
\begin{array}{c}
\text{Figure 2. Population pyramids for in-migrants to the Pentagon between 1996 and 2001 and} \\
\text{for inhabitants in the Pentagon in 2001 who did not change residence after 1996} \\
\end{array}
\]
Table 2. A comparison of the demographic, socioeconomic and tenure profiles of stable residents and recent in- or out-movers to or from Brussels’ Pentagon

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of individuals</td>
<td>18 052</td>
<td>8 520</td>
<td>3 075</td>
<td>3 514</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of households</td>
<td>8 375</td>
<td>5 938</td>
<td>2 067</td>
<td>1 970</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage male</td>
<td>50.7</td>
<td>58.7</td>
<td>57.4</td>
<td>54.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Household type (percentage)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Man living alone</td>
<td>30.2</td>
<td>47.1</td>
<td>49.6</td>
<td>46.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Woman living alone</td>
<td>26.6</td>
<td>23.8</td>
<td>26.1</td>
<td>24.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married couple, no child</td>
<td>10.9</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>5.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unmarried couple, no child</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>3.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Un)married couple with children</td>
<td>19.6</td>
<td>9.3</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>10.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lone parent</td>
<td>9.4</td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>8.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education level (percentage)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower education</td>
<td>33.6</td>
<td>19.0</td>
<td>18.4</td>
<td>23.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upper secondary education</td>
<td>24.2</td>
<td>21.4</td>
<td>21.9</td>
<td>23.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher education</td>
<td>29.5</td>
<td>54.3</td>
<td>53.2</td>
<td>44.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No diploma or no answer</td>
<td>12.6</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>7.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students in higher education</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>3.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional positions (percentage)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contract staff in the public sector</td>
<td>12.8</td>
<td>9.2</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>8.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statutory staff in the public sector</td>
<td>8.1</td>
<td>12.3</td>
<td>11.9</td>
<td>10.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Head of company</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employee in the private sector</td>
<td>22.8</td>
<td>37.6</td>
<td>37.4</td>
<td>36.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worker in the private sector</td>
<td>17.2</td>
<td>10.7</td>
<td>12.7</td>
<td>15.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-employed</td>
<td>15.5</td>
<td>13.4</td>
<td>11.4</td>
<td>9.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other professional positions</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>4.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No answer</td>
<td>15.1</td>
<td>9.7</td>
<td>9.6</td>
<td>13.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nationality (percentage)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belgium</td>
<td>68.5</td>
<td>77.2</td>
<td>69.3</td>
<td>66.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EU member-states</td>
<td>11.7</td>
<td>10.1</td>
<td>12.4</td>
<td>12.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other European countries</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maghreb and Turkey</td>
<td>15.1</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>10.2</td>
<td>11.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>8.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tenure mode (percentage)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Owner-occupier</td>
<td>23.7</td>
<td>10.9</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>8.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Renter (private landlord)</td>
<td>39.3</td>
<td>60.8</td>
<td>68.3</td>
<td>69.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Renter (public authority)</td>
<td>32.7</td>
<td>25.7</td>
<td>21.7</td>
<td>18.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: 2001 census and Population Register.
former hold a higher degree compared with only 29 per cent of the latter. Students in higher education, however, only account for a very small share of newcomers in the Pentagon—as well as a small share of incumbent residents. Furthermore, employees in private companies or agents of public organisations are predominant among in-movers to the Pentagon. Conversely, workers and self-employed persons (although including very diverse categories such as storekeepers, lawyers and doctors) are relatively more numerous among incumbent residents. It is also worth mentioning that, for the public sector, in-migrants are relatively more numerous among contract than among statutory staff. These characteristics suggest that in-migrants to the Pentagon are mostly educated individuals in non-manual occupations but still in the early stages of their professional career. Their income is thus likely to reach only moderate levels, making an obvious difference from wealthier households in traditional bourgeois neighbourhoods but also from lower-income households in the historical core and other inner-city neighbourhoods.

Regarding ethnicity, Table 2 indicates that Belgian citizens are predominant among both in-migrants and stable residents in the Pentagon, although even more among the former group. There is therefore no evidence here to support the idea of a significant influx of expatriate EU citizens moving in the historical core of Brussels from the rest of the city or the rest of the country—but the importance of this category among migrants who moved into the Pentagon from abroad has been emphasised earlier.

Finally, Table 2 highlights that the majority of in-migrants to the Pentagon are private renters. Conversely, owner-occupiers and renters from a public authority are markedly more numerous among the Pentagon’s incumbent residents. This strongly suggests that moving into the Pentagon is very rarely associated with home-buying trajectories or with entering social housing. Rather, moving into the Pentagon occurs most frequently in the private rental market and often represents a short-term option within residential trajectories.

As Table 3 indicates, nearly 4 in 10 private renters who moved into the Pentagon between 2000 and 2001 stayed for less than 2 years (i.e. they moved out of the area between 2001 and 2002) and about 1 in 3 renters stayed for less than 6 years. This implies a rapid population turnover in the Pentagon.

To summarise, empirical evidence presented thus far indicates that most typical among those who moved in the Pentagon from the rest of Brussels or the rest of Belgium between 1996 and 2001 are Belgian young adults living alone or in childless couples, holding degrees and at the start of their professional career; they settle in the historical core of the

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 3. Private renters in the Pentagon in 2001 who moved out of the area between 2001 and 2002, according to past mobility pattern</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Percentage who moved out of the Pentagon between 2001 and 2002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private renters who moved into the Pentagon between 2000 and 2001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private renters who moved into the Pentagon between 1996 and 2001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private renters in the Pentagon, non-movers between 1996 and 2001</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: 2001 census and Population Register.
city as private renters for relatively short-term periods. These results both reflect the importance of the private rental sector in Brussels’ inner neighbourhoods and echo aforementioned findings from other case studies claiming that residing in a gentrifying neighbourhood is for many young professional people a transitional step in journeys likely to proceed towards parenthood and residence in another (sub)urban locality.

4.3 Comparing In- and Out-movers to or from Brussels’ Pentagon

We turn now to a comparison of the profiles of in- and out-movers to or from the Pentagon. We consider here, on the one hand, in-migrants to the Pentagon from the rest of Belgium or the Brussels-Capital Region (outside the municipality of Brussels) between 2000 and 2001 and, on the other hand, outmigrants from the Pentagon to another municipality in the Brussels-Capital Region or the rest of Belgium between 2001 and 2002. We therefore compare migration flows that took place at a one-year interval. There is, however, no reason for considering that the nature of migration flows to or from Brussels’ historical core would substantially differ from one year to the next.

Figure 3 compares the age distributions of these in- and out-migrants. In both cases, young adults (i.e. 25–29) constitute the predominant age-group. They are even more numerous among in-movers, whereas the shares of children, middle-aged (35–44) or older (55–64) adults are slightly larger among out-movers.

![Figure 3](https://example.com)  
**Figure 3.** Population pyramids for recent in- and out-migrants to or from the Pentagon  
*Sources:* 2001 census and Population Register.
Similarities between in- and out-movers are also evident when comparing their socio-economic profiles, types of household and tenure modes (Table 2, cols 4 and 5). First, single-person households are predominant in both groups, with men living alone standing out as the largest category in both cases. The only notable difference is for married couples with children, for the share of this type of household is double among out-migrants. As far as education levels are concerned, one can note a larger share of degree-holders among in-movers. Types of occupation, the share of students in higher education and the distribution of ethnic groups are largely similar in both groups. Finally, comparing tenure modes brings out the prevalence of private renters in both cases.

In fact, these similarities were highly predictable, given the rapid population turnover in the Pentagon mentioned earlier. This means that a large proportion of in- and out-movers are the same kind of people—that is, mostly Belgian young adults living alone or in childless couples, holding degrees and renting from private landlords. What remains at stake, however, is to assess whether other, socially or demographically differentiated in- and out-migration flows are hidden behind this turnover of young adults. Put another way, the question is: who is moving out of Brussels’ historical core apart from young adults who arrived in the area a few years before? Exploring this issue can help to test whether an actual pattern of displacement of low-status households is observable among residential mobility patterns originating from Brussels’ Pentagon in the early 2000s.

4.4 Gentrification-induced Displacement in the Pentagon?

Extensive empirical evidence reported in literature stresses that vulnerable groups displaced from gentrifying neighbourhoods are mostly renters in the private housing market (for example, Atkinson, 2004). We will accordingly focus here on private renters moving out of the Pentagon. Moreover, in order to mitigate as much as possible the impact of the turnover population dynamic, we will not deal with those private renters who stayed only for a short period of time in the Pentagon before moving out. This means focusing on migrants who arrived in the Pentagon before 1996 and who moved out between 2001 and 2002. In doing so, we select ‘long-time’ renters, for they have stayed for at least 5 years in the Pentagon. This group accounts for 401 migrants and 21.6 per cent of private renters (5 years or more) who moved out of the Pentagon to the rest of Brussels or Belgium between 2001 and 2002.

In Figure 4, the age distribution of this group of out-migrants is compared with the population pyramid of private renters who moved into the Pentagon from the rest of Brussels or Belgium between 2000 and 2001. A clear contrast stands out from this comparison, for children, middle-aged adults and elderly people are numerous among long-time renters in the Pentagon, whereas young adults between 20 and 34 greatly prevail in the ranks of recent in-movers.

One-person households still predominate in both of these groups of migrants (Table 4). However, the shares of married couples with children and of lone-parent families are notably higher among out-movers who had previously been renting in the Pentagon for more than 5 years. Conversely, proportions of men living alone and of childless couples of unmarried partners are significantly lower in this group. These contrasts suggest that long-time private renters who eventually moved out of the Pentagon include diverse types of households, notably older women living alone, lone-parent families and families with children. The much larger proportion of households of three persons or more among long-time renters in the Pentagon suggests that many families among them
are of immigrant origin. Moreover, long-time renters in the Pentagon generally show much lower education levels, with most of them holding secondary school diplomas at best. Differences are less pronounced as far as occupational profiles are concerned since employees in the private sector are predominant in both groups and the share of workers is only slightly larger among out-movers who had previously been renting in the Pentagon for more than 5 years.

In sum, empirical evidence suggests that statements about the displacement of vulnerable groups from Brussels’ historical core in the early 2000s cannot be simply swept away. Obviously, it is a limited component of the migration dynamics of the Pentagon, for long-time private renters in the area who eventually moved out account for only one-fifth of all renters who left the Pentagon. Yet, figures presented indicate that many among these previously long-time private renters in the Pentagon—although evidently not all of them—do meet the characteristics of displaced households repeatedly highlighted in other empirical contributions to the gentrification literature, that is, apart from their tenure mode, less-educated persons, families with children, elderly people or lone-parent households. We argue therefore that displacement of vulnerable groups from Brussels’ historical core is likely to be a limited but actual constituent of the migration dynamics in the area in the early 2000s. This pattern remains hidden if considering aggregate figures only since the intense turnover of young adults moving in and out of the Pentagon is predominant.

Figure 4. Population pyramids for long-time private renters in the Pentagon who eventually moved out, and for private renters who recently moved into the area

Sources: 2001 census and Population Register.
Table 4. A comparison of the demographic, socioeconomic and tenure profiles of long-time private renters in the Pentagon who eventually moved out and of private renters who recently moved in the area

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Renters (private landlords)</th>
<th>Out-movers 2001–02 who arrived before 1996</th>
<th>In-movers 2000–01</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of individuals</td>
<td>401</td>
<td>1374</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of households</td>
<td>174</td>
<td>981</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentages male</td>
<td>51.4</td>
<td>56.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Household type (percentages)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Man living alone</td>
<td>35.1</td>
<td>48.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Woman living alone</td>
<td>28.2</td>
<td>27.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married couple, no child</td>
<td>8.6</td>
<td>4.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unmarried couple, no child</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>6.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Un)married couple with children</td>
<td>14.3</td>
<td>3.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lone parent</td>
<td>11.5</td>
<td>6.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Size of the households (percentages)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One-person</td>
<td>63.2</td>
<td>76.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two-person</td>
<td>15.5</td>
<td>16.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three-person</td>
<td>6.9</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Four-person or more</td>
<td>14.3</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education level (percentages)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower education</td>
<td>27.4</td>
<td>13.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upper secondary education</td>
<td>29.9</td>
<td>20.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher education</td>
<td>28.2</td>
<td>60.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No diploma or no answer</td>
<td>14.6</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional positions (percentages)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contract staff in the public sector</td>
<td>7.8</td>
<td>5.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statutory staff in the public sector</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>11.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Head of company</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employee in the private sector</td>
<td>42.6</td>
<td>40.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worker in the private sector</td>
<td>17.0</td>
<td>13.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-employed</td>
<td>9.9</td>
<td>12.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other professional positions</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>5.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No answer</td>
<td>13.5</td>
<td>8.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: 2001 census and Population Register.

We come here to the limits of a basically quantitative analysis of population movements to or from a gentrifying area, for individuals’ motivations to move out (or in) can only be speculated upon. The last section is dedicated to an investigation into other effects of gentrification in Brussels’ historical core.

4.5 Other Impacts Beyond Displacement?
Evidence reported in the gentrification literature frequently suggests that housing market dynamics play a major role in mediating forced out-migrations from gentrifying areas (for example, Slater, 2004). In Brussels, such
dynamics relate first to the evolution of rent levels in the private rental market. Since the distribution of tenure modes remained stable over the 1990s, the effects of conversion of rental units into owner-occupation are apparently very limited in the Pentagon.

Rent levels have been increasing rapidly in Brussels over the late 1990s and early 2000s (for example, +48 per cent for two-bedroom flats between 1998 and 2002, in constant Euros; Deny, 2003). The lack of historical data series on rent levels at the neighbourhood scale prevents this trend from being precisely measured for the Pentagon. Yet, comparing rents paid in 2001 by renters who moved in recently and rents paid by residents who settled down some years earlier provides useful information (Table 5).

Newcomers who moved in after 2000 generally pay higher rents than residents who took a lease before 1996. Hence, it is ever more difficult for low-income households to find affordable accommodation in the Pentagon since vacant or new housing units are being let at higher rents (i.e. exclusionary displacement). There is also no significant difference, as regards rent levels, between long-time renters who eventually moved out of the Pentagon between 2001 and 2002 and those who did not move.

The rapid population turnover in the Pentagon, referred to earlier, is a key catalyst for rising rent levels. This relates to the lack of any state regulations on rents in the case of vacancy of a rental unit. How the new rent is worked out once a tenant leaves and a new lease is concluded is entirely left to market forces within the framework of individualised negotiations between the landlord and would-be renters. In Brussels, about one in four renters has a one-year lease (de Keersmaecker, 2006). Moreover, landlords have ample possibilities for ending a lease before its term (for example, for owner-occupation purposes or for the implementation of substantial renovation work). It is therefore very practical for landlords to upgrade the characteristics and pricing of their housing portfolio in order to meet educated young adults’ rising demand for comfortable rental units in the central city. In this context, gentrification in the rental sector is a mechanism through which low-status households are directly confronted with rising competition for residential space. Put another way, the high residential mobility rate of educated young adults swelling the ranks of gentrifiers in Brussels’ historical core (and other inner neighbourhoods) allows a rapid increase in rent levels.

Accordingly, the position of poorly resourced households in the inner-city housing market is severely jeopardised even in the absence of any massive transfer of private rental units to owner-occupation. This in turn results in

Table 5. Rent levels for three categories of inhabitants in the Pentagon in 2001 (percentages)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than 250</td>
<td>18.6</td>
<td>32.4</td>
<td>31.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between 250 and 500</td>
<td>61.3</td>
<td>53.2</td>
<td>57.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between 500 and 750</td>
<td>13.6</td>
<td>7.6</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between 750 and 990</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than 990</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No answer</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>5.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: 2001 census and Population Register.
harmful consequences for lower-class residents, not only in terms of displacement of those renters who cannot afford the new rents and move out, but also—and seemingly more critically—in terms of deteriorating living conditions of those renters who do not move away. In this respect, a survey conducted in 2004 has highlighted that tenant households ranked in the last three deciles of the income distribution (i.e. the categories most represented among the Pentagon’s incumbent population) are restricted to barely 4 per cent of the Brussels’ rental housing market—if considering a theoretical threshold of 25 per cent of earnings devoted to housing costs (de Coninck and de Keersmaecker, 2004). Evolution over the 1990s was spectacular since a similar survey conducted in 1994 reported a proportion three times higher. Accordingly, these figures stress that low-income renters must devote a large (i.e. very much more than 25 per cent) and growing share of their earnings to housing costs. These households are therefore reduced to cutbacks in other key budget items such as education or healthcare—while most often still being restricted to sub-standard housing units. Hence, housing costs are now a major fuel to further the impoverishment of poorly resourced renters in Brussels. Unsurprisingly, then, local community organisations in Brussels’ inner neighbourhoods (in the Pentagon especially) now have many stories to relate about the increasingly poor housing conditions of low-income tenant households (such as housing overcrowding, insalubrious living conditions) (Béghin, 2006).

These elements eventually suggest that assessing the impacts of gentrification should not be limited to evaluating whether and to what extent a pattern of direct displacement of vulnerable groups out of gentrifying neighbourhoods can be brought out. Rather, exclusionary displacement (Marcuse, 1986) and ‘in-situ impoverishment’ of low-status renters (i.e. when staying in the gentrifying neighbourhood incurs heavy costs) are two other, probably even more pronounced, effects of gentrification in a city like Brussels.

5. Conclusion

This paper has sought to contribute to a deeper understanding of the migration dynamics of gentrification, a well-acknowledged but paradoxically underinvestigated aspect of contemporary upward neighbourhood trajectories. It has focused on Brussels, a rather ‘non-traditional’ setting for gentrification research, with the hope of highlighting new insights in this field by offering a view from a city wherein current rounds of middle-class reinvestment of inner urban space operate under circumstances that partially contrast with those reported from more prominent global cities.

Our findings first stress that educated young adults at the start of their professional career, who swell the ranks of (marginal) gentrifiers in Brussels’ historical core (known as the Pentagon), take the lion’s share of both in- and out-movers to and from this area. In addition, they settle in the Pentagon primarily as private renters and for generally short-term periods. This indicates that a rapid turnover of private renters, mostly young men living alone, is the main constituent of the migration dynamics in the Pentagon in the early 2000s. Expressed another way, this outcome strongly suggests that residing in a gentrifying neighbourhood in a city like Brussels is for many post-student young professional people a transitional step in their housing career. Residential careers are then very likely to proceed elsewhere in the wider urban environment as these young adults become parents and older professionals.

On the other hand, incumbent residents in the Pentagon and those moving in the area make up very contrasted population groups as far as their respective sociodemographic or socioeconomic profiles are concerned—also
when considering only private renters in both groups. Comparisons also suggest that the displacement of vulnerable groups from Brussels' historical core is a limited but actual constituent of the migration dynamics in the area, for long-time renters in the Pentagon who eventually moved out generally meet the characteristics of displaced households repeatedly emphasised in the gentrification literature, but account for only one-fifth of all renters who moved out of the Pentagon. This pattern remains obscured, when considering the whole set of in- and out-migrants, by the quantitative importance of the rapid turnover of educated young adults in the private rental market. However, the position of poorly resourced households in the housing market of Brussels' inner neighbourhoods is also jeopardised by two other, seemingly more important, mechanisms. On the one hand, the ability of low-income households to move into Brussels' historical core is clearly decreasing (exclusionary displacement). On the other hand, living standards of incumbent tenant households are deteriorating since the share of their earnings devoted to housing is rising rapidly (in-situ impoverishment). These results suggest in turn that current rounds of middle-class reinvestment of the central city still lead to harmful consequences for low-income urban-dwellers even in a city like Brussels. These impacts, however, operate here under specific circumstances that contrast with more traditional case studies dealt with in the gentrification literature. Rising rent levels in the existing large stock of old dwellings let by private landlords is the predominant process at play in Brussels’ inner neighbourhoods. In this sense, the rapid population turnover of educated young adults in the Pentagon fuels a process of marginal gentrification in the rental sector. Middle-class young adults moving in gentrifying areas take over mostly from other, similar middle-class young adults moving out, but also from different types of out-movers, including families of immigrant origin, lone-parent households and elderly people. Hence, although the term ‘marginal’ may appear to soften the significance of changes under way, by no means can this be used to indicate that this kind of process does not result in harmful consequences for less well-off urban-dwellers.

Gentrification in Brussels is gathering steam because of the complete lack of state regulations on rent levels once a current tenant leaves. In this sense, the Brussels’ case displays obvious similarities with many other cities, notably in the North American context (Slater, 2004). It is therefore essential to acknowledge the critical importance of regulatory mechanisms in the housing market—as well as of public housing provision—in order to maintain decent living conditions for poor households in gentrifying districts, even in a city like Brussels wherein aggregated rent levels and housing market values are much lower in comparison with other European metropolises. The unregulated play of housing market forces in previously disinvested inner urban environments is everywhere a divisive and polarising force, whether gentrifiers are affluent home-buyers or mobile and (still) modestly earning renters.

Notes
1. Typical actions in these cases are, for instance, producing most of the advertising material in English or intensifying promotional campaigns in the EU district.
2. According to a recent survey, about one in four renters in Brussels has been in his/her current housing for less than one year (de Keersmaecker, 2006).
3. Accordingly, the share of young adults living alone in the city had jumped from 10.7 per cent of the total number of households in 1981 to 15.0 per cent in 2001.
4. For instance, representations of these areas as gentrifying places are now explicit in tourist brochures published by Brussels International—
Tourism and Congress, the governmental body in charge of the promotion of the city as a tourist destination.

5. It has now been renamed the Delegation for the Development of the City (Délégation au Développement de la Ville/Afvaardiging voor de Ontwikkeling van de Stad).

6. Of the rest, 14 per cent of the households in the Pentagon are tenants in social housing and 13 per cent are tenants in properties let by the municipal authority at quasi-market rates.

7. Moreover, the population pyramids for immigrants to the Pentagon between 2000 and 2001 (not shown here) are almost identical to those for the 1996–2001 period.

8. Interpretation is hampered here by the lack of more detailed information on occupational profiles as well as by the significant proportion of undetermined occupations.

9. Unfortunately, data allowing a direct assessment of migrants’ income levels are not available because of legal restrictions intended to protect privacy.

10. It does not make much sense to compare nationalities here since available data are largely blurred by the impact of automatic access to Belgian citizenship for children of non-Belgian parents born in Belgium. Household size is a better proxy for ethnicity since fertility rates are generally higher for working-class foreign immigrants.

References


