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Selling an Ideal Home and Neighbourhood: Municipalities, Disaster Law, and the Gentrification of Gecekondus in Istanbul[1]

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Urban conditions are constantly changing, evolving, and the regeneration of slum areas often reinforces existing inequalities in urban space. In Turkey, urban transformation projects have accelerated since the enactment of the "Disaster Law" in 2012. Today, Istanbul —the country's largest city — is undergoing a grand transformation. Along with the turmoil of construction, there have appeared simultaneously many forms of gentrification. Municipalities have obtained critical responsibilities in these processes. In this article, two densely populated districts are analysed, regarding the roles of local municipalities, the status of urban transformation, and the strategic use of digital media. Drawing on official promotional films produced by the municipalities, the study applies semiologic analysis to explore two main dominant and yet contrasting themes: fear of earthquake risk and the promise of a new lifestyle. These themes serve to market urban transformation for middle-class residents in slum areas where the population has a low-income profile by using the fear element of a natural disaster and leveraging disaster discourse as a tool for legitimation.
Keywords: Urban transformation, gentrification, local municipalities, semiology, promotional films, natural disasters.

Introduction

Urban renewal and gentrification have long been contentious issues in academic literature. Ruth Glass (1964) originally conceptualized gentrification as the displacement of lower-income groups by more affluent ones within urban neighbourhoods. Today, gentrification has become a key concept of neoliberal urban policy (Harvey 1989), as cities are reshaped into "gentrifying global villages" (Krase and DeSena 2020: 5).

Davidson (2008) argues that the new form of gentrification is not merely a disposition or displacement but involves much more complex dynamics that deepen socio-spatial inequalities. These are based on indirect and complex displacement, often through the formation of housing surpluses and redevelopment agendas. This, he argues, is one of the processes by which gentrification is brought about in neighbourhoods. There are examples of similar urban experiences in many cities around the world. For example, Davidson and Lees (2010) describe how in Aylesbury, Southwark (London), the local municipality rationalized the demolition of public housing on the grounds of structural insufficiency. In its place, 3200 new houses were built primarily for the new privileged middle class. This process underscores the active role of local governments in fostering gentrification.

Similarly, Pardo and Prato (2019) emphasise the importance of municipal legitimacy and trust in urban transformation. They argue that inadequate service in such housing projects

[1]This article is based on my M.A. thesis in the Sociology, Department of Istanbul Bilgi University, which was approved in 2019 under the supervision of Prof. Asu Aksoy Robins. The title of the thesis is "Semiotic Analysis of Urban Transformation Promotional Films of Municipalities in Istanbul". I would like to thank the *Urbanities* editorial team for their support and Prof. Italo Pardo for his significant contribution to bringing this article to publication.

leads to questioning their legitimacy and forming inequalities. In this way, urban policies become contingent through the ability of local governments to generate consent and manage legitimacy.

One of the most significant shifts in gentrification over the last three decades, as Hackworth (2002) notes, is the increasing intervention by local and federal governments in urban reconstruction. This intervention leads to a more open and ambitious process in urbanization than before (Hackworth 2002), often in partnership with private developers (Zukin 2009). This cooperation — central government, local government, and the private sector — has become a defining feature of urban transformation in global cities today. Istanbul represents a salient example, described by Keyder (1999) as "institutionalized" transformation. Turkey's housing policies have transitioned from informal to globalized systems under the influence of economic liberalization. Financial, real estate, and media sectors have become increasingly internationalized (Soysal et al. 2010), and the role of political institutions has been reshaped by global dynamics, and new imaginaries of urbanization.[2]

These global desires have significantly influenced the role of political institutions in Turkey and in strengthening the urban market; one of the sectors that has played a key role is the media — especially digital media, which has emerged as a powerful tool of persuasion and consent-building. In Turkey, this strategy mirrors that observed in London's Aylesbury case: local municipalities use promotional content to frame urban transformation as both necessary and desirable, particularly for middle- and upper middle-class residents.

This article focuses on the municipality's perspective on urban transformation in Istanbul's *gecekondu* (slum) areas. Specifically, it analyses how official promotional films reflect a convergence between state and private sector visions for the city. These films, produced by local governments, articulate and disseminate an urban imaginary, one that centres on safety, modernization, and a reconfigured middle-class lifestyle.

"Demolish illegal houses immediately!": Post-1980 Period in Urban Policies in Turkey

The urbanisation of Istanbul has been shaped by a series of significant developments within the scope of economic policies and administrative moves adopted after the 1980s. Keyder states that, during the 1980s, these temporal successes in the new urban moves in Istanbul reflect "the impact of globalization" in terms of the intense flow of capital, commodities, and so on (Keyder 1999: 143). Following the path of globalisation, new economic policies aimed at outward industrialization and liberalization led by the government of the period (Öztürk and Özyakışır 2005). These reforms contributed to new patterns of spatial development throughout the country, particularly in Istanbul. The city witnessed rapid physical expansion, with new business centres and large-scale housing projects emerging across its periphery. This growth has led to an increase in internal immigration to Istanbul from rural areas of Turkey, no doubt

[2]A new era started in Turkey's economic history with decisions made on 24th January 1980 with the military coup d'état. Since then, an open economy model that encourages exports has been adopted with a corresponding orientation of industrial production for export (Öktem 2011). Boratav et al. (2000: 2) describe this process as Turkey's initiation towards "integration with the world commodity".

boosted by the employment challenges in rural areas. In turn, *gecekondu* settlements swelled with new arrivals, creating pressure on an already limited housing stock.

The *gecekondu* — Turkey's informal housing type — became both a symbol of rural migration and a key element of urbanisation. Although there is no historical data to indicate when these shanty-type houses were first built, a study shows that in Ankara between 1928 and 1930, the illegal housing attempts marked the beginning of the slums in the city (Çakır 2011). The number has increased quickly and, by 1995, it had reached 10,000,000 from 5,750,000 (1980). This corresponds to 35% of the city's population (Türkün 2014).

While these areas were initially tolerated and, at times, regularised through zoning amnesties (particularly in the 1980s and 1990s), official attitudes toward them began to shift. From 1980 to 1990, the local municipalities initiated and led zoning permit improvement plans in *gecekondu* neighbourhoods. These "Zoning Amnesties" became permanent after the 1990s. However, the approach to slums was not as acceptable as before, as it was with the legal permits. For example, Recep Tayyip Erdogan,[3] the Mayor of Istanbul (2000), described *gecekondus* as "plunder" and called upon local municipalities to prevent slumming. (Türkün 2014: 105). In 2004, Erdogan also said, "demolish illegal houses immediately!"[4] In the same year, Kadir Topbaş, the then Mayor of the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality, stated that information about illegal construction was collected in the district municipalities and that these areas would be demolished in a planned manner (Türkün 2014). These policy shifts reflect a broader agenda: to redevelop low-income residential areas, expand the housing stock for middle- and upper middle-class groups, and open new avenues for real estate speculation and profit. Istanbul's urban transformation, therefore, must be understood not merely as an infrastructural project, but as a reconfiguration of class, space, and governance in the neoliberal city.

One of the key examples of this agenda was the Ayazma Urban Transformation Project, which initiated a process of large-scale displacement in 2000. Within the scope of this project, mass displacement was forced, and the people of the region were physically relocated. Residents were settled in apartments built by the state-owned housing institution in a different region (Uysal 2012). With the district's evacuation process, the region served as a laboratory where urban regeneration was tested (Türkün 2014).

After this "testing" period, the government targeted the highly populated slum areas to transform. Thus, the housing stock was planned to increase, helping the state and private initiatives increase their income. This culminated in the passage of a sweeping new legal instrument in 2012: the so-called Disaster Law, which would significantly alter the legal and institutional framework for urban transformation across Turkey.

The Disaster Law derives its legitimacy from Turkey's high exposure to seismic risk, given its location along active fault lines (Uslu and Uzun 2014). Urban transformation law, grounded in the discourse of disaster preparedness, reflects a broader mode of risk governance in which narratives of safety and resilience are mobilized to suppress political opposition and

[3] Mayor of Istanbul (1994-1998), Prime Minister (2003-2014), current President of the Republic of Turkey (2014).

[4] https://www.hurriyet.com.tr/kelebek/yigit-burda-belli-olur-38638047. Accessed 02 July 2025.

legitimize dispossession (Pardo and Prato 2024). This risk is used as the primary tool to justify urban policies in Turkey, with one of the main arguments for urban transformation being the need to rebuild earthquake-resistant buildings. The law creates a milestone in the future of the slums in Turkey as it addresses the difficulties encountered in urban transformation projects before 2012 and flags a large-scale construction permit. Thus, many areas in cities were announced as "risky areas" and started to be demolished right after the law was passed.

The content of the law describes the general idea of mass changes in urban space. It is essential to state that the law links urban transformation to the central government. The Ministry of Environment and Urbanization and TOKI[5] has almost every authority in the places it declares as "the area with disaster risk". Under the law, residents' acceptance is sought for legitimation. However, if no agreement is reached, an expropriation method can be used. It is possible to cut off electricity, water, and natural gas to high-risk structures during this process. In other words, if the government and the municipality were determined to start the renewal, it would not be possible to hinder it. Therefore, the role of local municipalities in the renewal of the *gecekondu* areas is as decisive as other institutions; municipalities may become one of the main actors in the urban transformation to the extent authorized by the central government.

The implication is clear: The process begins with the municipality proposing an area as "risky" to the Council of Ministers. Once approved, the Ministry evaluates structural conditions and authorizes demolition. Property owners are then notified of the evacuation orders. For instance, in the municipalities examined in this study — Esenler and Gaziosmanpaşa — the local Urban Design Directorates are tasked with managing expropriation, demolition,[6] and the coordination of new construction. The Ministry determines "right holders".[7] In this process, the municipality accepts the applications so that "right holders" can get a deed in the regions. Local administrations are the primary reference centres for organizing the deed distribution process. This process is fundamental in neighbourhoods with no zoning permits to initiate the urban transformation projects. Considering this, in the populated *gecekondu* areas with low deed percentages, municipalities seek to convince the locals so that these residents can apply to the municipalities. To exemplify again from Esenler and Gaziosmanpaşa Municipality,[8] one of their duties is promoting urban transformation to the locals in the risky areas.

To summarise, municipalities operate at the intersection of multiple actors: property owners, the area residents, private sector companies, and public institutions. Their responsibilities extend from technical and legal tasks to public relations and consensus-building. In this article, these dynamics are explored through the lens of official promotional films produced by the municipalities of Gaziosmanpaşa and Esenler, two of the most affected districts in Istanbul.

[5] Housing Development Administration. TOKI built 718,510 units between 2003-2018 (Arslanalp 2018).

[6] https://esenler.bel.tr/kentsel-donusum-mudurlugu-yonetmeligi/. Accessed 30 June 2025

[7] Turkish: *Hak Sahipleri.*

[8] https://www.gaziosmanpasa.bel.tr/userfiles/pdf/125-Stratejikplan.pdf. Accessed 30 June 2025.

In this study, two district municipalities in Istanbul were selected; Gaziosmanpaşa Municipality and Esenler Municipality. The primary reason for this selection is that the regions are densely populated slum areas with a significant resident population in Istanbul. Second, these regions are low-income living areas with low land registry records and widespread *gecekondu* settlements. Therefore, they have similar quantities. Third, the roles granted to municipalities within the framework of "Disaster Law" are applied in the urban transformations of these municipalities. Lastly, the official promotional materials they produce reflect similar perspectives and techniques, making them suitable for comparative analysis.

The selected areas are in the most populous peripheries of the city centres in terms of both population rates and location. They have an advantageous location that is proximate to transportation arteries. Like many *gecekondu* areas in Turkey, these areas grew through rural migration. Hence, they emerged as ad hoc solutions to the housing problem, as the rapid population growth created a housing deficiency beyond the city's existing neighbourhoods. Thus, these houses are mostly fast-built detached houses/apartments, and they are authentically designed and constructed. Their authenticity lies in the originality of their representation of informal housing and their use of locally available materials during the construction without having a professional method of building. They are thus changeable in different parts of the country/cities. For instance, Gaziosmanpaşa has relatively more one-storey *gecekondu* buildings compared to Esenler's apartment-type *gecekondus*.[9]

Gecekondu dwellers live in an integrated form of village culture and urban life. Life in a one-storey *gecekondus* consists of a small garden suitable for cultivation and caring for various animals such as chickens. Residents hang their laundry on the ropes they stretch in their garden. Their neighbour relations are intimate and socially intertwined. And apartment-type buildings were constructed by adding floors to the existing single-floor houses. They have seemingly similar lifestyles. With the transformation to multi-floor apartment buildings, neighbourhoods will be subject to radical differentiation and a complete rearrangement of daily life habits, considering the lifestyle of the people of the region.

Gaziosmanpaşa District is one of the residential areas of Istanbul located on the European side, which, until the 1950s, were sparsely populated. Today, it is one of the most densely populated districts of Istanbul. While the district population was 3847 in 1935, it became 635,000 in 2000. Gaziosmanpaşa's proximity to industrial facilities has been an important factor in rural migration (Güldüler 2010 and Istanbul Governorship Official Website[10]). The population's businesses consist of a high percentage of workers and small trade businesses (Güldüler 2010). According to the data of the Gaziosmanpaşa District Governorate,[11] 60% of the working population consists of small tradesmen, such as excavation and carpenters who are responsible for the retail or wholesale sale of construction materials.

[9]The ratio of 1 and 2 storey buildings is 12.38%, the rate of 3 storey buildings is 15.65%, the rate of 4 storey buildings is 25.12%, the rate of 5 storey buildings is 28.66%, the rate of 6 storey buildings is 13.71%, and the rate of 7 stories and above buildings is %4.49 (Gökbayrak, 2014: 96).

[10] Archive, Istanbul Valiliği Resmi Internet Sitesi, Sayılarla Istanbul Bilgileri.

[11] https://www.gaziosmanpasa.bel.tr/userfiles/pdf/125-Stratejikplan.pdf. Accessed 30 June 2020.

Gaziosmanpaşa is also one of the municipalities whose local elected functionaries belong to the same party as at the centre. In the 2019 local elections, AKP (Justice and Development Party; Adalet ve Kalkinma Partisi), led by Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, won by 52.21%, while the country's main opposition party (Republican People's Party) received 33.35% of the votes.[12]

Esenler, on the other hand, lies along a major transit corridor connecting to Fatih Sultan Mehmet Bridge and the Trakya Highway. According to the 2016 census, Esenler has more residents than the 38 provinces in Turkey in total. TSI data shows that, in 2016, 457.231 people lived in Esenler (Yulu 2017: 32). According to TSI data (2013), 53.4% of the population was either a primary school graduate or had not been to school; 24.3% were primary or secondary school graduates; 18.7% were high school graduates; and 3.6% were university graduates (Aydın, 2013: 74). As stated in a research conducted in 2013, 24.4% of the population did not have social security. The monthly income of 40% of the region was below 1.000 TL (558 dollars) in 2013, 33.8% was 1001-1500 TL (558-837 dollars), and 26.2% was above 1.550 TL (865 dollars) (Aydın, 2013: 75).[13] According to 2014 data, the number of registered houses in Esenler's construction was deficient, and the buildings were mostly 4-5 floors.[14] Esenler is similar to Gaziosmanpaşa regarding its political perspective. In the 2019 local municipal elections, AKP won by 65.48%.[15]

Two district municipalities, located in central locations on the European side of Istanbul, have many similarities: the distribution of age, education levels of the population, engagement in manual labour, the prevalence of fellow countrymen associations, the impact of internal migration from rural areas, the land registry rates and the election ratios. These factors contribute to a lack of large-scale public opposition to urban transformation initiatives in the districts. This political alignment is reflected in the promotional films produced by the municipalities, which often invoke the authority and legitimacy of the central government to justify transformation projects. As will be seen further, the central government is also used in promotional films as a tool for the acceptance and legitimation of transformation processes.

Producing Consensus through Promotional Films

Municipalities act as the executive branch in collaboration with state institutions. They are responsible for identifying "right holders", collecting necessary documents for the legalisation of property rights, managing demolitions, and overseeing the delivery of deeds. Alongside these organizational and legal tasks, they also have a range of symbolic, rhetorical, and

[12] https://www.sozcu.com.tr/secim2019/istanbul/gaziosmanpasa. Accessed 30 June 2025.

[13] In 2013, the dollar was 1.79 turkish liras on a yearly average, by 04.11.2021 the dollar was 9,72. According to the research of DIS-AR, the hunger limit was 1121 TL and the poverty line was 3544 TL in 2013. In this case, the average income of the region is on the poverty line (https://bigpara.hurriyet.com.tr/ and http://disk.org.tr/).

[14]The land registry status of Esenler is as follows: out of 26,527 buildings, only 5,116 are licensed, and the remaining 21,941 are unlicensed (Gökbayrak 2014: 95). The ratio of 1 and 2 storey buildings is 12.38%, the rate of 3 storey buildings is 15.65%, the rate of 4 storey buildings is 25.12%, the rate of 5 storey buildings is 28.66%, and the rest is 18.2% (Gökbayrak 2014).

[15] https://www.sozcu.com.tr/secim2019/istanbul/esenler. Accessed 30 June 2025.

communicative responsibilities. Promotional films are among the most notable of these strategies, as they play a persuasive role in forming the consent of *gecekondu* residents to the projects.

Municipalities initiate projects using various media materials, including symposia, panels, conferences, books, booklets, brochures, newspapers, mock-ups, social media broadcasts, web pages, and promotional films. The processes of dissemination are envisioned as a campaign in this sense. According to Tek (1990: 123), promotion aims to "create a positive environment" around the good or service being promoted and to do this in a way that convinces the target audience (Karabulut 2006). Thus, a positive environment persuades the target audience to access items that are considered difficult to reach, such as in promotions (Parsa and Sünbül 2014).

Promotional films play a central role in this process. These short videos — accessible through municipal websites and social media channels — often begin with the logos of the relevant state institutions and municipalities. In this article, four promotional films are analysed.[16] The opening scenes typically feature black-and-white footage from the 1999 Marmara Earthquake, including the collapse of buildings and images of injured citizens. In *Gaziosmanpaşa Urban Transformation*, the voiceover states, "Urban transformation saves lives", followed by images of rebuilt modern apartments.

These images, which have a heavy emotional load, are followed by then-Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan addressing a public gathering. His televised speech is shown being watched by a couple in their living room. He says: "Our main goal is not to demolish a building and construct a new one. Our main goal is to transform areas in a way that will protect life and property from the risk of disaster". At the end of this sentence, there are images of the same people watching their houses being demolished. The film continues with brightly coloured computer-generated renderings of the planned neighbourhoods. These images typically show families with children playing in parks, elderly people walking in green spaces, or young people strolling in commercial areas, passing by the modern mosques. The music shifts to a hopeful, upbeat tempo.

A second example, *Gaziosmanpaşa is Transforming for the Next Generation with Our Urban Transformation Project*, opens with the unveiling of the "We Haliç" logo alongside the Turkish flag. Strikingly, the opening scenes reference the attempted coup of 15 July: "On the night of July 15, we were united as one nation, hand in hand against the great danger that targeted our democracy. We defended our country. How proud we are". This political framing is then directly linked to urban transformation through images from the 1999 earthquake.

This is followed by images from the 1999 earthquake of people looking for help with a light underground. Several speeches by the President of the country are presented: "[…] If there were an earthquake, there are buildings that do not resist that earthquake. Let us demolish them

[16] The four promotional films are: Gaziosmanpaşa Urban Transformation; Gaziosmanpaşa is Transforming for the Next Generation with our Urban Transformation Projec; GOP Plevne Urban Transformation Project; and Esenler's Historical Project.

so that they are earthquake-resistant buildings. Unfortunately, we are faced with resistance in this regard. Come help us [...]".

The rest of the film presents animated plans for a future with eco-friendly buildings, a mosque accommodating 2,500 people, a school, a student dormitory, and abundant green and recreational spaces. Everyday scenes are imagined in idealised form; children playing around the parks, people happily shopping or going to mosques.

The third example, *GOP Plevne Urban Transformation Project*, released on 4 March 2017, runs for just under seven minutes and follows the familiar pattern of crisis-to-resolution storytelling. It opens with the municipality's official logo and quickly moves into imagery of earthquake devastation. Recep Tayyip Erdogan speaks, "Nobody has the right to blame people who build these unregistered buildings. Our aim is not to destroy the homes, but to provide our citizens with a safe and peaceful home". Later in the film, we see Istanbul Metropolitan Mayor Kadir Topbaş giving a speech: "Mr Prime Minister gave us an order. He said that we must create liveable spaces for our children. It will bring us to renewed cities, civilizations, and tomorrows".

After these scenes, the audience watches construction footage; governors and managers working together on the construction sites. The audience witnesses bridges, roads and newly built apartments in Istanbul. The scene connects with the *gecekondu* images in Gaziosmanpaşa. Evacuated buildings and empty streets are shown, while the voice over says the following: "Big transformation is about to happen. However, the years' burden was so great that it was impossible to renew the area at once".

Later, like other films, animation or stock images of planned future projects are produced. While a general view of the project is shown from a bird's-eye view, the voiceover explains the details of the project. The project consists of three stages on an area of 71,734 square metres, including 2,500 residences. Additionally, a 1,500 m² mosque and a new 6,750 m² school with 24 classrooms will be constructed. These numerical details, presented alongside architectural renderings, promote the vision and make it feel achievable and as if it is in the near future.

The fourth example, *Esenler's Historical Project*, released on 5 November 2015, opens with a metaphorical line delivered by a deep-voiced narrator: "The human body suffers pain in both mind and flesh. The pain that accumulates in a city's soul also weighs down its body — that is, its space". The municipality points out the insecure structures and land registry problems in this region. In most of the videos, there are animated images of the park and housing construction that will be built. The area subject to this video is the treasury land/state land that belongs to the Ministry of National Defence. From time to time, the audience sees the municipality's logo along with the title "City of Hope and Peace". The project aims to increase the social and cultural and educational buildings, green areas and health buildings alongside apartments.

Across all four examples, certain rhetorical and visual strategies are framed in a same way. Each film begins with urgent imagery of disaster — most often the 1999 Marmara Earthquake — paired with sombre music and authoritative voiceovers. Erdoğan, appears as

both the narrator of the problem and the guarantor of the solution. The visual transition from dark, chaotic streets to bright streets contains the promise of a new lifestyle. Colours shift to vibrant palettes, symbolising renewal. All in all, the films construct an urban imaginary through embedding urban transformation within a symbolic framework of national progress, security, and a form of obligation.

Drawing from Roland Barthes' approach to semiology (1985), this article examines these media materials to understand how they are strategically used to build consensus. Semiology enables the study of signs of linguistics and all objects, events, and narratives that become meaningful when they take the whole form (Bircan 2015). In this case, there is an institution — the municipality — producing the promotional material, a viewer— the local population — receiving it as a product, and a channel — web pages and social media accounts — through which the promotion is transmitted. Although semiotics investigates how meaning is constructed, it cannot be standardised.

Therefore, when analysing the relationship between the signifier and the signified, the methodology should not be approached from a fixed or habitual point of view. As seen in the municipalities' materials, promotional films contain interwoven signs in the form of visual images (photographs, animations, depictions of objects, and so forth) and oral texts (voiceovers, speeches, and similar elements). These materials are structured around two dominant and opposing thematic signs: the contrast between earthquake-resilient and earthquake-prone environments, and between the promised new lifestyle and the old, unhealthy one.

One of the most striking features across all the films is the manipulation of light and colour in depicting the "before" and "after" of the development. These binary colour schemes serve as an emotional persuasion strategy, shaping how viewers perceive the pre-project area and the envisioned post-project reality. Colours, as Öztuna (2007) notes, are "the expressions of shapes; they create an illusory space and may be used to describe or define things" (Sağocak 2018: 234).

The force and urgency of the development are presented through images and the colours shown in a binary contrast. Pre-development images stress darkness with shades of grey and black and evoke unhappiness and sadness. The grey colour emphasizes severity (Çeken and Yıldız 2015). In fact, in all the promotional films, the earthquake images are shown in grey tones, stressing both the disaster and an impending disaster.

In all the films, earthquake footage appears in grey tones, signalling both past and impending disaster. Post-development imagery, by contrast, is dominated by vibrant greens, blues, and yellows. Green connotes nature, fertility, and health, symbolising trust; yellow represents joy and vitality (Çeken and Yıldız 2015). Together, these bright tones evoke happiness, calm, and peace, directly countering the negativity associated with the darker palette.

In addition to colour, the films use voiceovers, music, and on-screen text to reinforce their messages (Barthes 1985). Barthes defines the word as a composite that produces multiple overlapping signifiers, and in these texts, recurring discourses become what he calls "myths".

Erdoğan's repeated statements legitimise the project and seek to establish a sense of trust, as seen in statements such as "Our main goal is to perform a transformation that will

ensure the safety of life…". Trust, here, is not merely emotional but political, as it points to the figure of the political leader. The second theme, along with the second promotional film, revolves around the threat and fear. "On July 15, we were the heart of the nation, hand in hand against the great danger that targeted our democracy. We defended our country. Now it is time to fight earthquake and bad construction, another insidious threat for our country". In his address, the President stressed the phrase "insidious threat". With this, the natural disaster and the coup attempt are evaluated together. As in the struggle against the coup on 15 July 2016, where people rose to resist it, here, people are being called upon to support the urban transformation project and not resist it.

Similarly, in the third film, the focus is on one question: "How long can we continue to wait for the earthquake in fear?" This is the first signifier. The fear of another earthquake, then, is presented as paving the way for the project to be started as soon as possible. The second signifier of this video is the former Mayor of Istanbul's statement: "Mr. President has given us directives. Let us create renewed cities, civilization, quality of life and living spaces for our future kids". The word "directives" explains that the implementation of urban transformation projects is an imperative directed by all levels of the state. And is particularly telling as it indicates the stress on the strong, powerful state.

In the fourth film, the video states that the current state of Esenler is congested and depressed and that its post-demolition will lead to a comfortable life. Here, it is said that the people of the region can change the irregular life in Esenler. The important word in the film is "soul". By defining the city with a soul, the land is given a living emotion. There is a connotation that urban transformation will save the city from its suffering, as the city is a living being. *Gecekondu*-style living is presented as painful, so that the city is suffering, and urban transformation is required to alleviate this pain.

These themes illustrate how the films operate within Barthes' framework of myth. Signs such as colour contrasts, repeated presidential speeches, and emotionally charged slogans move beyond their literal meanings to acquire connotations that naturalise urban transformation.

Municipalities Urban Imaginary

Municipalities embrace numerous responsibilities in the large-scale demolition of slum areas, even though the main stages of demolition and construction are organized by the central government and construction companies. As mentioned earlier, these projects embody various forms of gentrification, with goals such as increasing the housing stock and creating a new living space. Therefore, promotional films prepared by the municipalities for urban transformation serve not only to publicise the projects but also to reflect the municipalities' perspectives.

In the promotional films, two main themes are woven with binary contrasts, both visually and through speeches. The films reflect the urban regeneration policies in Turkey. As in the "Disaster Law", the destruction risk of the earthquake in Turkey is used as the legitimizing argument along with a new promise of upper middle-class residential life, rather than pointing out the improvement of the current lifestyle. These two main arguments are

expressed in promotional films by opposing themes. These oppositions are formulated as the "good code" and the "bad code".

Earthquake-resilience versus Earthquake-prone, as a Bad Code can be reflected through the readings of Gramsci. Gramsci (1992) states that there is a difference between the dominant and the ruler. The possession of power refers to "domination", and management's possession refers to the formation of the "governing". The relations of hegemony are based on differences between individuals and other individuals, intellectuals and non-intellectuals, rulers, and those ruled. As in Gramsci's differentiation of the groups, there is a contrast between the signs (visual and textual) on the promotional films. The perception of the "common" good refers to the "hegemony" created through consent. The ruling class determines what is "good" or "bad"; hence, the two concepts can be read as totalitarian. The main entities of totalitarianism are that it is based on fear (Sakman 2015). The creation of the "fear" theme in the promotional films comes as a totalitarian view. The standard "good" or "bad" perception has a functional role with the hegemonic apparatus (Bağbaşı 2010, Ayık 2014), such as promotional films.

"The ruling class" in the promotional films expresses that a new lifestyle can liberate from earthquake fear. By this, the fear policy transforms into a persuasion process and legitimates the urban transformation projects. To simplify, according to the films, it is necessary to approve the urban transformation to become fearless and restful. It should be noted that earthquakes are presented as a natural disaster with no political relation in Turkish urban policies. However, the possibility of a natural disaster is the key element of Turkey's urban laws/urban policies (Disaster Law), as mentioned before; hence, it is used as to legitimize urban change in living conditions.

In promotional films, the idea of "bad" represents the earthquake. On the other hand, "good" is represented with the discourse of a new lifestyle. The innovations presented with the project are a world of privileges. Urban transformation projects in promotional films highlight a new life and new standards. Although the concept of a new lifestyle is depicted with imaginary and animated images, it is presented as accurate. Thus, in line with Prato's (2009) critique of urban policies that promote cultural homogeneity, the promotional films construct a singular vision of the "ideal" urban citizen — socially mobile, compliant, and culturally aligned with the values endorsed by the state.

On the other hand, Ayşe Öncü (1999) states that global consumption cultures inform "your ideal home" myth. According to Öncü (1999), myths are expressions of what is depicted in contemporary TV, advertisements, or newspapers. Products are classified with intangible meanings, whereas "urban transformation" is idealized in urban transformation films. Therefore, it contains intangible terms, such as the discourse of "comfort". Öncü (1999), using the term "your ideal home", critiques the way an idealised world is presented for the mid-to-upper classes. It includes depicting sterile places, being away from the city's crowd, clutter, and traffic. In promotional films, there is this same idealistic world. The films express the promises as in terms of healthy living spaces, parks with sports activities, playgrounds for children, transportation facilities, parking lots, schools, religious areas, picnic areas, and opportunities to be with nature. All these are presented as rolled into one neighbourhood and area.

The "risky areas" are presented as the living spaces of low-income populations. Therefore, according to the institutions that aim to realize the projects, there is an opportunity for the lower classes to rise to the middle-class level by only approving the urban transformation projects. Hence, the myth sold is a promise of a class jump, even if, in fact, such a jump to an upper class is not possible, merely changing the elements of social living conditions.

Another crucial point is that the fairy tale expression of a new lifestyle is presented as reality. Baudrillard (1998) states that simulation is a concept of dreamy facts that belong to reality. The difference between "fake" and "real" or "dream" does not exist anymore in the simulation universe. Baudrillard (1998) "simulates" the image to be perceived as reality; he also defines "simulating" as presenting an imaginary object as if it is real, and the production of an artificial object with the "real" perception as "hyperreal/simulation". Therefore, in the postmodern world, individuals encounter promotional items in all areas of social life that reveal an imaginary world with the emotions of happiness, health, and natural living spaces. Signs that are produced by urban transformation projects are not artificial. However, the "good" phenomenon presented, referring to the "low-income" population, is expressed as a reachable dream. Given the impossibility of this situation and considering that these projects will raise the existing housing stock in the area, a class jump promise with animated images also shows how the inequalities are formed in the space. This reflects how neoliberal urban visions manipulate spatial justice by presenting social advancement as attainable while restructuring neighbourhoods to favour wealthier classes, thus blending opportunity with inequality (Pardo and Prato 2024).

Conclusion

Turkey's urban policy has been experiencing rapid change during the rule of AKP for the past 19 years. Through the legislation and the profit-oriented new urban project initiatives mentioned in this article, Turkey's cities have been exposed to urban transformations marked by the intensive and dominant participation of the state. The AKP's ambition to revive the economy through the real estate sector, as outlined in the Disaster Law, has become a manifestation of the state's central power and the government's dominant tendencies. In this sense, promotional films reveal both the extent of state control and its role in urban transformation by featuring Erdoğan's speeches that emphasize the earthquake risk. According to the dynamics of "institutionalism" and the adoption of global urban perspectives in local contexts, as Keyder (1999) refers to, local governments are an important yet often disregarded actor in the process of wholly operated urban change and gentrification. As Pardo (2000) notes, legitimacy in local governance is not merely institutional but hinges on the perception of moral responsibility and social trust at the neighbourhood level, which is often eroded under top-down urban transformation agendas. Pardo and Prato (2024) also argue that municipalities have a critical role because, by initiating urban transformation projects, they build positive relationships with residents and manage legitimacy crises in the region. In addition, Kayaalp (2024) highlights the role of anxiety and anticipation in shaping local perceptions of urban risk, revealing how emotional factors are manipulated during urban transformation campaigns.

Similarly, Yılmaz and Halman (2024) emphasize that major disasters, such as the earthquakes of 6 February 2023, expose governance spatial vulnerabilities, showing how political decisions and risk management activities directly affect trust and the view of legitimacy. They argue that the state of exception and post-disaster control tools illustrate the relationship between urban policy, social trust, and governance effectiveness. In alignment with these perspectives, this article aims to demonstrate the importance of municipal participation in these processes by analysing the official urban transformation promotional films of Gaziosmanpaşa and Esenler, which project (and dramatize) the damaged, neglected, and "open-for-improvement" areas in Istanbul.

Municipalities offer a lifestyle just like in an entrepreneur's advertisements, and even if they do not engage in sales marketing, they construct consent, persuasion, and such. While doing this, they adopt a policy proximate to the central government and draw attention to the inadequate housing in the region they have governed for many years. Throughout this time, by denigrating the areas, municipalities are trying to legitimise large-scale demolition and construction. Therefore, urban transformation in Turkey has more meanings and systems than only solving regional housing needs. This is why fear and new life themes are brought to the fore in promotional films.

As a result, two main local urban policies emerge through the films: first, the persuasion of audiences/residents of the region by employing the element of fear associated with natural disaster and presenting the authority as trustworthy; and second, the promise of upward class mobility conveyed to the local community after the project through the discourse of a new lifestyle.

Municipalities convey to the target audience (residents of the region) their promises of a new market-oriented lifestyle through promotional films that use the ruling class's rhetoric. This rhetoric unfolds the dominant persuasion policy of totalitarian governance. In this article, I have discussed how these urban policies were featured in promotional films and presented through publicity by local municipalities. In these films, discourses that include the promise of a certain "lifestyle" offer the prospect of class mobility relying on fear and authority as primary methods of persuasion.

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Landfills, Pizza Box and QR Code: Lessons from Waste in Montecatini Terme

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When did scanning a QR code become a normalized step in the waste governance of Montecatini Terme, Italy? This question and the reflection that follows emerge from a time-compressed ethnographic exercise conducted during the 2025 IUS Field Training School, an experiment deliberately partial yet revealing. While my descriptions of waste management remain exploratory, the real focus lies in the process of their making and what this reveals methodologically. This short-form ethnography, I argue, helps to embody the unavoidable realities of ethnographic practices, vulnerability, attention, joy and reflexivity. More than a pedagogical exercise, it opens angles from which to see the world from within, leaving us susceptible to serendipity. In Montecatini, this meant following rubbish as it accumulated in flowerpots, spilt from bins, and reappeared as taped citizen pleas to "keep the street clean". Most striking was a public poster pairing a waste app with a QR code, promising rapid removal through digital reporting. This encounter with trash, at once mundane and absurd, highlights how short ethnographic exercises can render tensions between official infrastructures, everyday practices, and civic responsibilities. In recounting this experience, I do not propose short-form ethnography as a replacement for long-term fieldwork but as a complement that opens discussions on methods, challenges our preconceptions, and reconnects us with the world around us
Keywords: Time-compressed ethnography, methods, waste governance, Montecatini Terme, civic duties.

Introduction

The present essay emerges from a report titled "*Waste.it*: A distanciation of domestic waste management?" presented as part of the IUS Field Training School and Research Seminar, held in Montecatini Terme, Tuscany, Italy, in July 2025 (https://www.internationalurbansymposium.com/events/2025-field-training-school/). This essay is not an exhaustive account of the convoluted dynamics of Italy's waste management, but rather framed as an exploratory ethnographic assignment, rooted in the specific context of the training school. Here, I aim to explore the methodological possibilities tied to the circumstances of its making; a process I describe as akin to flash ethnography (Stone and McGranahan 2020). Doing so, I find myself more interested in the value of the process than in the formulation of its conclusions.

For many reasons, doing ethnography in Montecatini proved challenging. In this town, previously unknown to me, attempting to use an ethnographer's gaze on a world distinct from my usual field unsettled me. And yet, despite this discomfort, I see value in the experience: not only to sharpen ethnographic skills, but also as an early step in establishing a research problem, one both destabilizing and heuristically productive. My eyes lingered on incoherence, perceived absurdity, and surprise. These observations point to real-world problems beyond literature. Whether they are worth pursuing remains uncertain, but reflecting on the possibilities of problematizing from the field has value.

This essay, therefore, unfolds in two main threads. First, I will reflect on the methodological value of time-compressed ethnography in a foreign context. Doing so, I will establish it not as a replacement for in-depth fieldwork, but rather as a pedagogical and reflective exercise, allowing us to welcome absurdity and serendipity as valuable research tools. Following this, I will offer my own impression of the practice through my partial understanding

of domestic waste management in Montecatini Terme and the potential avenues it led me to explore. In developing these inquiries, I close with an invitation: in a context where social science is increasingly critiqued for its disconnection from public concerns, might we make space for this kind of exercise — one that forces us to face the messy portrait of the everyday?

Context and Methods

As I mentioned earlier, this essay stems from a one-week ethnographic exercise conducted during the 2025 IUS Field Training School in Montecatini Terme, Tuscany. The program brought together 17 scholars of varying backgrounds to reflect on the challenges and possibilities of urban ethnography. Midway through the event, we were assigned a deceptively simple task: to explore the city and produce a 10-minute presentation based on our observations. The approach aligned with the school's emphasis on situated, contingent ethnographic practices where universal guidelines were considered inadequate (Prato 2012).

There were restrictions; of course, the temporal one foremost: a one-day limit to explore and write. Within such a short delay, ethnographic craft had to be rushed. The usual months of preparation required for research in an unfamiliar context (Prato 2012) were inevitably bypassed. Observation had to happen without the guidance of literature, background information, or — for most of us — even the bare minimum of language skills needed to navigate. We were left with little to rely on: instinct, chance and affect.

Reflecting on the experience, I cannot help but draw similarities between it and the contemporary practice of flash ethnography (introduced in Stone and McGranahan 2020): an intense, self-contained, and deliberately compressed ethnography that allows play, creativity, and precision. While flash ethnography is mainly a writing practice — where the author restricts themselves to under 800 words — a coherent ethnographic narrative does not necessarily involve compression of the fieldwork itself. Still, I found a resonance in the reflexive echoes of the practice.

First, there was an experience of vulnerability. Writing about flash ethnography, Ruth Behar compares the process to a child going down a slide, evoking the uncertainty of having no one to catch us. "We have to trust that what we're writing is coming from someplace that feels real and true, that will hold us up and keep us from falling" (2023: 485). In Tuscany, we were faced with the challenge of writing what we knew we did not have the necessary benchmarks to write (at least under the usual norms of our respective disciplines). Writing without those necessary guides forced us to consider where our writing was coming from: concrete knowledge or preconceptions?

Second, this exercise was also a practice of attention. How do you choose one object when everything around you is new? In Montecatini, the world itself was rich with unknowns. Yet, constrained by the boundaries of the assignment, each of us had to make a choice: to focus on a rabbit hole, to explore it, and to hope it would be enough to produce an interesting story — without pretending to be a holder of knowledge we did not have. The process of this choice, in itself, has value. There is something exhilarating in choosing a thread that might lead nowhere.

This exhilaration is the third element I wish to attend to. McGranahan and Craig, in a short essay, expand on this aspect of the practice: “Ethnographers conjure or create the form that's needed within this very small space. It is not predefined. This lack of default, of expectation, is exhilarating.” (2023: 353). Allowing ourselves to find wonder in the world around us is also a way to rediscover joy in scientific practice. Merton (2016) has touched upon how serendipity can be the source of great social science insight, forcing us to explore paths not yet mapped. In time-compressed ethnography, we write out of luck and out of interest, with no time to put those interests aside in the name of rational distance. Instead, we open ourselves to curiosity and to paths that may lead nowhere — making decisions, exhilarating or uncertain, about which direction might be worth pursuing.

This exhilarating aspect of flash ethnography comes with a necessary counterpart: the need to explain why our intuition leans in one direction rather than another. This brings me to a fourth element that such a practice helps us approach from a different angle: reflexivity. The importance of reflexivity in ethnographic practice is well established. Yet this kind of exercise confronts our own thinking differently from a long-term stay in the field. In Montecatini, even without wanting to, we had to interpret the world around us — not from the emic we did not know, but from our own minds. More than the challenge, it was the ease of the exercise that was most revealing. The rapidity with which the mind drew conclusions, making sense of what it could not truly understand, offered a striking overview of the necessity of reflexivity.

The experience of Montecatini was nevertheless more than a training exercise; it was also an overture. The day after our ethnographic endeavour, all participants returned to the seminar rooms to report our stories, doubts and insights. In this collective sharing, hastily formed thoughts crystallized into questions and perspectives. Together, they complicated not only our understanding of the city that hosted us, but also our own thought processes. McGranahan and Craig (2023) describe flash ethnography as a breath: a moment that does not offer certitude, but allows connections, dialogue, and community. For them, it is a practice of craft and commitment, a way to step down from the ivory tower of scientific inquiry and to submit raw thinking to realities in their plurality. This is my hope in sharing the following report. I share it as an invitation to connect, to disagree, and above all to reflect on the way early ideas catch our attention. That week, in Montecatini Terme, everyone’s mind landed on different things; mine stumbled on rubbish. What follows is the result of this encounter.

***Waste.it*: A Distanciation of Domestic Waste Management?**

There was a particular challenge in choosing an angle to explore for the exercise we were presented with in Montecatini Terme. Although the ethnographic workshop was announced early on, giving us a few days to brainstorm, the sheer number of possible directions — coupled with the subtle yet real risk of embarrassment in selecting an unfruitful one — led, in my case, to considerable hesitation. Here we can draw parallels to the vulnerability of flash ethnography mentioned earlier: that awkward fear of noticing the “wrong thing”. Yet, as the first day passed and the presentation drew closer, I felt the unavoidable obligation to focus on something. Randomly roaming the streets, I tried to project my mind outward, imagining problems in what

I was seeing. Struggling to make sense of the unfamiliar milieu in which I was situated, I first sought refuge in theoretical ideas I knew well. Walking past an olive oil field sign, I noticed the I.G.P. label in the bottom corner: here was something I felt comfortable with — terroir, heritage, creativity, trade agreements. I knew where to look to unravel this logo. But did I really have a question? On another day, while following a mountain path, I noticed *Arundo donax* and bamboo at the roadside. For a brief moment, there was a small exhilaration in being able to complicate this sight theoretically: invasive species versus ornamental plants, "imported" nature, ecological semiotics. And yet, while I was trying to apply deductively familiar frames of thought to the world around me, in hopes of producing a decent presentation, another question kept nagging at the back of my mind — one I did not quite know how to turn into a research problem: what about the trash?

Waste had come to occupy my mind not as a potential research question, but as a genuinely puzzling moment. Looking for somewhere to dispose of rubbish on my first day in Montecatini, I had discovered, in semi-absurd horror, the artisanal waste-disposal system lining the street that led to our hotel. The flowerpots aligned on both sides of the road, I noticed, were filled with the remnants of everyone's day — from gelato cups to cigarette butts. I am not sure why this moment stuck with me so much; I had seen trash where it should not be before. Maybe it was because I had just spent a year in Tokyo, where the disposal of public waste is drastically different from the Italian context. Or maybe it was the contrast between this beautiful Tuscan street — described by one of the workshop participants as "straight up out of a Wes Anderson movie" — and the somewhat ghastly contents of its flowerpots. Or maybe it was because, on the plane to Italy, I had read *Ordures! Journal du Vidangeur* (*Rubbish! Diary of a Waste Worker*, Paré-Poupart 2024) and had let myself be carried away by the multiple questions raised in this gruesome love letter that Simon Paré-Poupart addresses to the underworld of Montreal's trash labourers. It was probably a mix of all these things, but somehow, something made that moment stick.

As I kept searching for a potential subject in Montecatini, trash always seemed to sneak back: under the shape of overflowing bins, in the form of a discarded Peroni bottle hiding in the bushes, or through a hastily homemade sign asking passersby to better dispose of their pizza boxes. I did not really know how to work with my own attention to trash, but there is this moment when you start to notice something, and suddenly, you cannot stop noticing it anymore. I almost wish that, during that week in Montecatini Terme, olive oil production or ornamental plants had caught my eye instead. But there I was — unwillingly and exhilaratingly — looking at trash. So, unable in such a short time to look the other way, I decided to follow the waste, and in doing so, to answer Paré-Poupart's (2024) invitation:

> "All the crap that society produces, once it's out of service, no longer holds any illusion. It reveals the grim and harsh face of everything that is finished. Waste dispels mirages, it levels the playing field, it tells all, at least to those who know how to listen [translated from French by the author]. (Paré-Poupart 2024: 40)"

In Montecatini Terme, then, hoping to say something, I tried to listen to the trash.

Figure 1. Waste is not the most striking feature of Montecatini Terme. Yet, for some reason, my lens was skewed toward it, rendering what would otherwise appear ordinary hyper-visible.

Noticing waste is one thing; having something sensible to say about it is another. Without really knowing where to start, I decided first to look not at where trash was going, but at where it was supposed to go. In the comfort of my hotel's AC, I surveyed Montecatini's official city webpage to inform myself about the current system of waste disposal in the municipality. At first glance, nothing was striking. What seemed to me a logical dual system was explained clearly: the historical centre — with its narrow streets, heavy tourist presence, and convoluted urban density — was equipped with central bins, which I had noticed in the days before, where citizens could dispose of their domestic waste themselves. The outer areas, by contrast, were covered by a door-to-door pickup system. An apparently comprehensive disposal calendar was also provided, informing residents of which type of rubbish should be put out on which day. From the website, therefore, the system looked smooth, seamless, automated. Not fully invisible, but contained, in designated forms — waste bins, early morning truck runs — that allowed it to blend into the urban landscape.

The historical centre of Montecatini, though, was showing me a different picture. Trash was not contained; it was there in the street, in the bushes, and in the rapidly growing collection of "ethnographic proof" accumulating in my camera roll. Indeed, once you decided to look, you could spot a precarious tower of rubbish balanced in an overflowing public ashtray. Near the piazza, a ragged shirt filled the crevice of a historical stone wall, wedged into the gap where the mortar had worn away. My favourite scene was the bits of rubbish positioned just a couple of meters from a public waste bin: too far away to be accidental, too close for the thrower to have abandoned their quest for disposal out of impatience. It was probably the wind — or total indifference. Yet I could not help but smile at the absurdity of what I kept subjectively interpreting as small acts of civil deviance. But before getting carried away and reinterpreting illegal dumping as a subtle act of civil disobedience — an association I would be lying if I said I was not tempted to make in Montecatini — I had to remind myself of the broader importance of waste disposal in urban contexts.

While I could see a certain artistry in interpreting the affective discomfort of Montecatini's overflowing trash bins as a metaphor for reconnecting with the collective woes

of our postmodern existence, I tried to ground myself back in the streets of the city and in the perspective of those who live in it. The taped, makeshift citizen signs visible from the sidewalks reminded me that waste was, indeed, a problem. These passive-aggressive comments carried a kind of poetry that no ethnographer can pretend to reproduce, and more importantly, they forced a strict return to reality. Having rubbish around where you live is unpleasant. An Italian participant in the workshop, recounting to me the smell and sight of a recent strike among Rome's waste workers, reinforced the point. And, beyond the aesthetics of trash — or the lack of it — waste management surpasses the question of whether a city is pretty and welcoming. The long history of urban waste disposal points to a series of obvious public health and safety reasons that led our ancestors to put such systems in place in the first instance. While somewhat unoriginal, that train of thought was important to me. Because, as the taped signs reminded us, here waste went beyond theory: it was on the street, on people's minds, and taped to the trees.

Figure 2. On the right, Montecatini's central waste bins, part of the official disposal plan. On the left, a more informal waste management strategy: a sign reading, "To your kind attention. We kindly ask you not to leave objects such as drinks, pizza boxes, clothes, or other waste along this street. Please help us keep the area clean and tidy for everyone. Thank you for your cooperation!"

Where waste appeared to me that week as an anthropological problem — "an interest in the constitution of the social and biological existence of human beings as an object of knowledge, technical intervention, politics, and ethical discussion" (Ong and Collier 2007: 6) — the city streets suggested that, for those more entangled with the town, it was an actual problem: not a theoretical abstraction, but the roots of conflicts and tensions. This intuition was later confirmed in discussions that followed the initial presentation of this report. Ethnographers with far greater knowledge of Montecatini than I possessed informed me that rubbish had recently emerged as a point of contention. They described budding tensions among diverse actors: tourists, municipal authorities, and long-term residents. These strains were unknown to me at the time of drafting the first version of this essay, yet they were already visible in small

signs, in potential knots awaiting further examination. What was clear to me on the day, however, was simply the waste: surrounding me, and oddly impossible to ignore.

And without the proper background context, it was on the acknowledgement of this awkwardness that I decided to rest in order to pursue my investigation. I must say that I did not find my discomfort abnormal. Surely, our relationship to the semiotics of waste can be interesting, however, this was not the kind of endeavour I felt ready to tackle in half a day of reflection. For the moment, rubbish and its negative connotations were a black box I was willing to leave untouched. Still, there remained something to explore in my own discomfort with the waste around me: if detritus did not belong in my peripheral vision, then where did it belong? Indeed, it is one thing to argue that empty cigarette boxes did not belong in the pink flower bushes of Montecatini's historical centre, but where did they belong? Where was I expecting this waste to go?

So, again, I detoured into the glow of my computer and used the tools my interest in critical food systems theory and urban political ecology had accustomed me to. I searched for the network of trash — where it stretched and pulled, within and beyond the city. Doing so, I found myself deep in the database of the *Istituto Superiore per la Protezione e la Ricerca Ambientale* (Italian Institute for Environmental Protection and Research, ISPRA, 2023), looking at the waste disposal system for the region of Tuscany. There, I retreated into the comfort of statistical data to try to broaden my understanding of the rubbish around me. From this brief overview, I gathered that while various disposal processes exist in Tuscany, two of them account for most of the trash: MBT (Mechanical-Biological Treatment) and landfill. Part of the waste was sent to MBT automated facilities, where rubbish is sorted into categories and "cleaned" as much as possible. The other main portion was sent to landfills scattered throughout the region, one not far from Montecatini Terme. There, the waste was disposed of, laid to rest, and forgotten — or at least forgotten by me, and by others who, if the system functioned as intended, would stop noticing it in the streets of Montecatini.

This led to a somewhat common-sensical idea: waste does not vanish; it migrates. Sorting facilities, landfills, collection trucks — these are still places. People work in them, people live near them, and people are affected by them. Most of us know this, and yet it is often easier to set that knowledge aside, to sort it away like rubbish into a bin. Because it raises uneasy questions. While trash disposed of badly in the public space of a tourist city is easy to identify as a problem — something I could, at first, treat as a black box — rubbish disposed of "properly" in the places it is meant to go is far harder to point at. Which questions are we forgetting to ask about the larger processes designed to keep this infrastructure hidden? The rubbish, but mainly my discomfort with it, raised a crucial question: who has the privilege of disregarding this process?

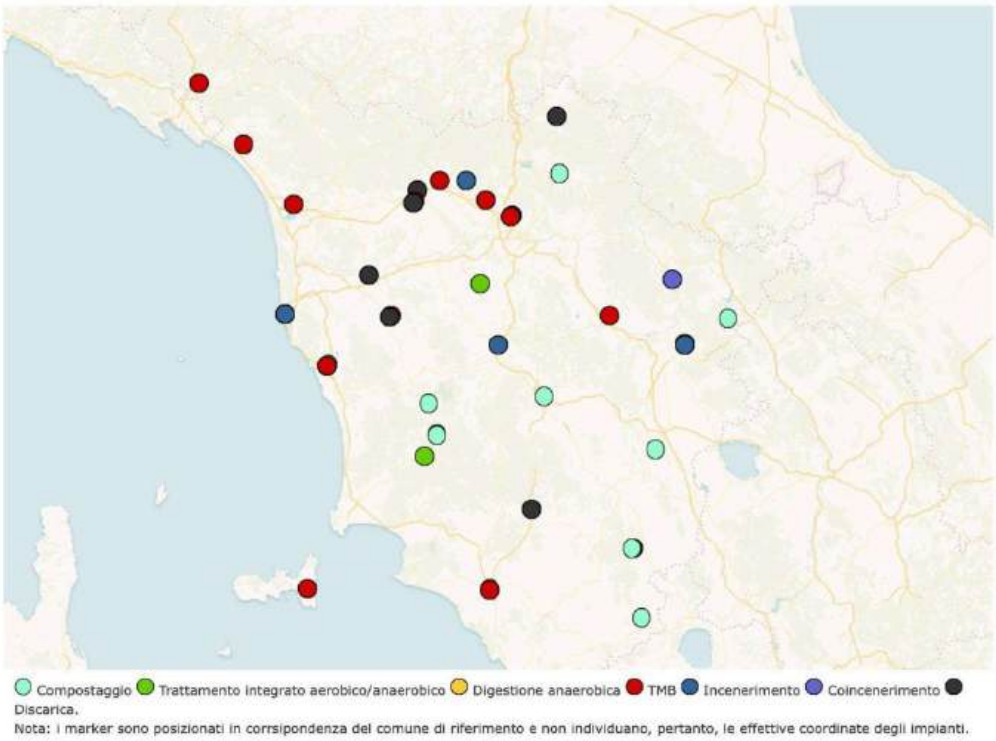

Figure 3. Waste treatment facilities in Tuscany (2023). Despite the range of treatment types distributed across the region, most waste is ultimately directed either to mechanical-biological treatment (MBT) or to landfills. Two landfills are located within close proximity to Montecatini Terme — one in Monsummano Terme (approx. 5 km away) and another in Serravalle Pistoiese (within a 10 km radius). Source: Istituto Superiore per la Protezione e la Ricerca Ambientale (ISPRA), Catasto Nazionale Rifiuti, 2023.

This question, along with many others tied to it, sparked in me a desire to explore further. This is one of the real advantages of rapid ethnographic exercises: they do not necessarily provide answers, but they resituate the questions and cultivate a willingness to explore beyond one's usual patterns; they nurture true curiosity. Indeed, I found myself wanting to learn more about the long infrastructural networks of trash, the situated milieus they inhabited, and the complex entanglements formed in their wake. I began (re)discovering various works on the subject. Rosalind Fredericks' (2018) vivid ethnography of Dakar's waste infrastructures; Myra Hird's (2021) account of the sociotechnical conundrum of Canada's waste distribution system; Robin Nagle's (2013) illumination of the lived realities of New York sanitation workers. Closer to Montecatini, I turned to the Italian context through the work of Italo Pardo (2011), who paid close attention to rubbish and tied it to his broader reflections on misgovernance. The curiosity ignited by this ethnographic exercise allowed me to engage more fully with this literature. The grounding in material observations made the ideas resonate more deeply. There is a particular joy in reading through genuine curiosity rather than as a means to an end. As Tsing (2015) shows us, scientific joy can be linked to a heuristically generative process of knowledge creation. Without pushing this point too far here, I would nonetheless emphasize that this curiosity — humble, understated, yet profound — was, for me, one of the most important benefits of this form of rapid ethnography.

But back to that day in Montecatini, when my interest in the vast field of critical waste literature was only just sprouting. While I could recognize the various processes of the waste disposal system as compelling and worth digging into, I was also aware of the limits of trying to catch up with an entire academic debate in such a short time. Once again, I forced myself back to the street to make sense of what I could actually see — or, more importantly, of what I could say. Or, more honestly, I forced myself to go on a run in a small attempt to clear my mind from ideas I did not yet have the materials to unpack. And it was there, coming down a hilly street in the northern part of Montecatini, trying to think of anything but waste, that I found myself staring at it: a poster, simple, almost unnoticeable, surrounded by many others on a bulletin board. And yet, through some twist of ethnographic luck, it felt as if it were screaming at me. The content in Italian was simple, which I could roughly translate as: "See trash? Download our app. Take a picture and report it. Give us 3 to 6 hours, we guarantee that we will come and remove it." I would be lying if I said this poster did not stir in me a dual sense of epiphany and existential crisis. Where have we come to, that picking up trash requires Wi-Fi and metadata? There, I decided: if I was going to unpack one thing in the seminar room the following day, it would be my own astonishment at this absurdity.

Now invested in the project of discovering the existential significance of a public waste collection application, I took a deeper look at the poster in front of me. Reading the Italian further confirmed my astonishment at this seemingly unusual public announcement. Sentences such as *"tenere la città pulita è un gioco di squadra"* (in English: "keeping the city clean is a team effort") took a satirical twist when superposed with the QR code of the application. Absurd images of citizens chasing trash like PokémonGO crept in, incompatible with the realities of makeshift signage written by neighbours asking others to please just pick up their pizza box. While the dadaism of the scene amused me, I knew I should probably go further in understanding what this platform was. I therefore turned to the two logos standing side by side on the paper: the Montecatini City Armouries — solemn and official — and *Alia Servizi Ambientali S.P.C.* — clean and trendy, but still unknown to me.

A rapid search helped me identify Alia as one of the major players in Montecatini's waste disposal system. The private company is one of the main subcontracting channels through which Tuscany's cities outsource their environmental public services. Once you know where to look, Alia's presence in the region becomes quite evident. Travelling through different towns afterward, I kept noticing trash cans and waste collection trucks ornamented with the company logo. Turning to a private actor for the management of public waste is not, in itself, an extraordinary move. As elsewhere in the world, outsourcing civic services — waste among them — has become common practice in Italy (Pardo 2023). While a full discussion of the neoliberal state rationales underpinning this shift, and of its consequences, goes beyond the scope of this essay, it must be said that such practices have raised important questions around governance, workers' rights, and social justice (Eckersley and Ferry 2020, Pardo 2023, Boeger 2024). This aspect was interesting to me, but I tried to stay focused on the question I had set myself for the stay. Why had it become necessary to put QR codes on trash cans?

I therefore turned to the Alia website, hoping I might be able to find some answers at the source. The website was crisp, corporate-coded, and strangely appealing for a waste management service. The mission statement presented Alia as working together with diverse actors in order "to close the loop of the circular economy", praising its increasingly digital and efficient services. In a paragraph below, the company explained how its deep care for the environment translated into "working to ensure the cleanliness and decorum of [their] territories". Once again, several questions rushed through my head. What was this circular economy? What about the apparent association between environment, cleanliness, and decorum? But unpacking the presuppositions behind the marketing slogans of a waste collection company, as interesting as it could have been, was not the question I had set myself to answer. So, I forced myself to put scepticism aside and look at the statement again, trying to make sense of what I could. Alia's mission was the environment, however vaguely they framed it. Nothing shocking there. They claimed to work in collaboration with diverse actors: citizens, cities and institutions. Plausible, and I had no means to verify it. Similarly, I lacked the context to evaluate the efficiency of Alia's services.

But even while I felt overwhelmed by my inability to truly interrogate this website, I remained strangely haunted by my initial problem. Why had the digital turn become necessary to perform a civic duty such as picking up trash? Why was an online persona now a prerequisite for disposing of waste in the centre of Montecatini Terme? Alia was closing the loop on the circular economy, fine — but why did that loop suddenly require a smartphone?

Unable to find the answers I was looking for on the Alia website, I decided to use the time I had left in the day to download the app myself and explore its functions. The process was fairly easy, barring a small issue: registration required an Italian fiscal code. I was able to bypass this by "borrowing" one from another participant of the workshop. Still, the prerequisite of this code was initially off-putting. It raised a wide array of questions related to surveillance, civic access and citizenship. What kind of implications did this process have for gatekeeping public services, especially considering that Montecatini's central trash bins opened digitally? Through later conversations, however, I learned that such requirements are actually quite common in Italy and apply to a wide range of situations — from paying utility bills to buying cigarettes. That discussion reached well beyond trash, and so I chose to let go of it, at least in the context of the ethnographic project at hand.

I focused on the app, and once the fiscal code was acquired, I found the process of registering quite accessible. Here, though, I should probably mention that I situate myself at the end of the generational alphabet. I grew up with the internet, smartphones and digital technologies. Accessibility, while not an issue for me, remains an important question: what does it mean for civic duties to require digital literacy — who does it advantage, who does it exclude? Keeping that in mind, I explored the digital interface, which I found, in all honesty, somewhat underwhelming. Admittedly, there is only so much one can ask of a waste collection app. In its digital realm, I could check my collection calendar, pay bills, consult frequently asked questions, or — as the initial poster suggested — make a signalization. Each function was simple, and some could even be considered useful. For those able to master the tool, there

is a certain value in the efficiency of paying bills online or quickly consulting a disposal calendar. Yet that value depends entirely on the actual performance of the app — and on that front, a deeper look at the app ratings revealed some contentious issues.

Figure 4. On the left, a public service announcement poster in Montecatini Terme. On the right, the AliaApp main page in the Apple Store

A rapid glance at the Apple Store display of the app revealed a 1.5-star rating (out of 5). Now, I must admit that I did not take the time to leave a review of my municipal trash collection app. I can assume that doing so requires a certain level of alienation toward it, which could bias the results. These kinds of statistical data, therefore, have to be considered carefully. Still, reading the comments attached to the reviews allowed me to capture some of the issues that might have led to such a rating. The problems described were multiple: recurring bugs, login failures and the impossibility of uploading photos in a system that required visual evidence. I could not help but notice the incongruities of a service framed as "efficient, digital, and environmentally conscious", yet whose tool was dysfunctional — and which, like most digital services, carried an undeniable environmental cost. And beyond all of this, I was still left searching for its necessity.

As the day drew to an end, I was forced to come back to the various data I had gathered and to wonder how to articulate it into a ten-minute slideshow. I reflected on how trash had first caught my attention in the streets of Montecatini. I thought about the contrast between the efficient system announced by the city and its subcontractor and the visible tensions scattered across the sidewalks. I wondered about our collective responsibilities in civic duties, and why some of us might find it easier to take a picture of a piece of litter than to bend down and dispose of it. I pondered care, individualism, the world around us and the kind of big questions that one-day endeavours inevitably generate. I thought about all of this, without drawing clear conclusions, turning the problems over in my head, and complexifying them further. I warned at the beginning of this paper that flash ethnography is more about learning to ask the right questions than about finding neat answers, and I will not betray myself here by ending this

waste exploration with a tidy conclusion. Yet, I will allow myself to open slightly toward the narrower frame in which I have since come to think about this exploration.

Trying to find a way to narrate my impressions of the trash in Montecatini, I could not help but think about them through the lens of Jennifer Clapp's (2020) idea of "middle space". In her iteration, Clapp uses the concept to describe the current realities of mainstream agro-industrial food systems. She explains how these systems increasingly create distance between their origin point (the farm, the production site) and their end point (the plate). This distance is physical — ingredients travel through more and more sites: a transformation plant, a border control room, a truck. But it is also cognitive — people understand less and less about the processes through which food ends up on their plate. It is this distance, managed and stretched by major players in the system, that she comes to emphasize:

> "These forces, as they have unfolded, have opened up a greater number of what I call *'middle spaces'* within that economy where control and influence over how it operates has become concentrated. […] It is within these middle spaces of activity where norms, practices, and rules that govern the world food economy are shaped by the very forces that are leading to its expansion" (Clapp 2020:14).

This idea of systems stretching from their origin to their endpoint resonated with me in the context of the Italian domestic waste distribution system, where what Alia called a "circular loop" seemed to be expanding through a digital space articulated by new intermediaries, tools, and power structures. The novel nature of this space implies a lack of transparency in the complexity of its dynamics — an obscurity that could become a doorway through which civil rights are transformed into profit margins.

Having said this, I do not have the proper data to make a clear judgment on the actual operations behind the making of such an application. More research is needed — and essential — because this impossibility of making a clean claim is precisely the danger embedded in middle spaces. The opacity of these spaces, while not in itself proof of amoral action, creates potential for misgovernance. The more layers that stand between us and our waste, the more opportunities there are for slippages and risks. When creating a new loop in such systems, we must weigh its potential costs against its potential uses, and that requires a clear view of the process and of all its externalities. This is especially true when the systems at hand are those dealing with our waste. Because — and it seems an obvious reminder — waste distribution systems are not self-enclosed theoretical entities. They are material. They are visible. They are smelly. And they are necessary. We need waste to be responsibly taken care of in our cities, but we should also be careful that, in their function of disposing of rubbish, these systems do not, at the same time, dispose of our possibilities for civic participation, or of our ability to point out the socially unjust vulnerabilities often embedded in the process. The streets of Montecatini do not necessarily reveal the multiple dynamics hidden behind domestic waste distribution, but they remind us of the importance of paying attention to the process. In the end, trash is there, in the street. We all produce it. Seeing it forces us to reflect on how, with whom, and to what extent we should come to deal with it.

Conclusion

So where does this leave us? As mentioned throughout this discussion, the conditions in which this essay was produced were quite specific. It emerged from a deliberately rushed process, conducted in a place where I lacked both preparation and familiarity. The words that result from such an exercise are not meant to conclude, but rather to inquire, to provoke, and, hopefully, to be helpful to myself or someone else in the context of future work. From a methodological perspective, though, this experience is worth reflecting on. There is, assuredly, pedagogical value in this kind of short-form, time-compressed ethnography. As explained before, it is a way to embrace the vulnerability of fieldwork. Having to produce, in a short time, any kind of insight, as partial as it may be, pushes you to sit with what is there, rather than what you came looking for. More than vulnerability, it is also a practice of reflexivity. Having to tell a story, and questioning your own ability to do so, reveals your cognitive reflexes, your blind spots, your assumptions — and it forces you to engage with your discomfort in ways no methodological field manual quite prepares you for.

Because when you must think fast, you can no longer explain away the incoherence of your thoughts with academic hedging. You have to say what you see — imperfectly, perhaps, but honestly. And in that honesty lies a different kind of rigour. It is not the performance of doubt as academic caution; it is doubt as a parameter of the field itself. Reflexivity becomes embodied, not just cited. In the early stages of developing a research question, this kind of exercise can be invaluable. It helps you see the obvious. It disarms your default analytical habits. It confronts you not only with what you know, but with what you very clearly do not. That confrontation, though uncomfortable, is fertile.

There is a third giveaway in this method: something about the act of noticing, about cultivating a mode of attention. A short time frame demands a narrow focus, and a narrow focus requires something solid to latch onto quickly. Without the usual academic scaffolding — literature, theory, background — you are forced to start with what is in front of you. You interrogate the world from within the world, not through a deductive lens, but through perception, chance and affect. And so, you begin to see things you might otherwise bypass. Sometimes you get lucky. Sometimes you do not. But it helps sidestep your thinking; others have discussed the importance of serendipity (Merton 2016).

Overall, I have come to think of this experience as a way to reconnect with curiosity, with attention and, perhaps most importantly, with joy. There is something freeing about allowing yourself to begin with confusion. To wander a city, stumble across a trash app, and ask why it exists at all. Short ethnography does not replace long-term fieldwork. But it can dislodge us from our habits. And sometimes, in that short span, something surprising appears — and stays with you longer than expected. As for me, it led to a camera roll full of rubbish and a newfound intellectual curiosity.

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Antisemitism in Greece and Jewish Cultural Heritage Preservation[1]

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After the Holocaust, in which 87 per cent of Greek Jewry was annihilated, communities confronted the challenge of survival with limited resources. In many cases, synagogues and communal properties were sold and demolished to support the surviving Jewish populations or to establish new institutions, such as the Jewish Museum of Greece. This process illustrates a critical social dilemma: whether the continuity of community should be ensured through the maintenance of living institutions or through the preservation of monuments as bearers of collective memory. But what occurs when members of the community object to leadership decisions or challenge institutional authority? This article examines the interplay between antisemitism and internal mechanisms of exclusion within the Jewish communities in Greece, and how these dynamics shape both communal identity and the urban landscape. Drawing on archival research and documentation of synagogues initiated by the author in 1993, it highlights the tension between assimilation and self-preservation expressed both socially and spatially. Traditional Jewish neighbourhoods, with their defensive layouts and gates, embodied a morphology of protection that reinforced boundaries while becoming landmarks within historic city centres in cities such as Veroia, Komotini, Kos, and Serres. The discussion situates the destruction and preservation of synagogues within broader patterns of urban renewal, reconstruction, and transformation, where redevelopment often erases valuable cultural heritage, and considers how such processes engage the voices that object to this erasure. Framed through the thought of Ricœur, Arendt, and Levinas, the argument also emphasizes the moral responsibility of the researcher, alongside that of community members, to act as a guardian of memory, recognising that the loss of monuments constitutes both an urban and existential rupture, with implications for present and future generations.
Keywords: Greece, Jewish heritage, synagogues, antisemitism, *herem*.

Introduction

> "The Jewish quarter also keeps hidden secrets, like the defensive urban layout. The houses are constructed close to each other, forming a protective wall around the central courtyard where the synagogue is located. Built in a corner, with the same materials and of similar scale to the houses, the synagogue was hardly recognizable to strangers and thus, perhaps, protected. In addition, secret passages, known as 'apanaksis,' connected the basements of the surrounding houses, enabling escape in times of danger. The quarter was accessible through two gates — one facing the city, along 10th Merarchias Street, and the other adjacent to the bridge. These gates would most likely close at sunset and reopen at sunrise. [...] This raises a question", the architect said to Emanuel, when the subject arose of how Jews assimilated into the broader societies within which they lived. [...] Did the gates of the Jewish quarter in Veroia close from the inside or the outside?" he asked. "Did the Jews close the gates to their ghetto from the inside, preventing assimilation with non-religious others while preserving their religion and tradition? Or were the gates closed from the outside by the authorities, aiming to isolate and control the Jews?" (Messinas 2025a: 85-86).

The Jewish presence in Greece, rooted in antiquity, has been subjected to manifestations of antisemitism throughout its long history. In times of turmoil or violence, Jewish communities were protected by the defensive design of traditional Jewish neighbourhoods, such as those of

[1] I wish to acknowledge the contribution of the Board of *Urbanities* to the revision process and Amanda Gann for the language editing.

Veroia, Komotini, Kos and Serres. In these neighbourhoods, houses formed a protective wall around a communal open courtyard, separating and shielding the community from the rest of the city by means of gates. In Veroia, the houses were interconnected by a system of doors — called *apanaxi* (Messinas 2025a: 85) — which provided a concealed escape route for Jews to flee to a secure location beyond the River Tripotamos in the event of an emergency. (Figure 1)

Figure 1. The defensive layout of the Jewish quarter in Barbouta in Veroia, accessed through a gate under one of the houses. The layout provided a safe space for the community and enabled it to disconnect from the city to maintain its cohesion and identity (© Elias V. Messinas, Elias V. Messinas Archive, 2017).

This article aims to provide a diachronic overview of antisemitism in Greece, from the Holocaust to the present, viewed through a human lens and supported by interview excerpts. It also examines the politics underlying the destruction of Jewish-built heritage, particularly synagogues in Greece, and their significance not only for surviving Jewish communities but also for urban identity, as the synagogues constitute important landmarks for the city and its inhabitants. The discussion considers the two extreme poles of seclusion — one imposed from outside and one arising from within the Community — as expressions of the Community's need to preserve its cohesion and identity vis-à-vis the often-hostile environment of the broader society. Despite the severe measures taken to silence internal criticism and the resulting demolition of Jewish monuments, enduring landmarks continue to strengthen the identity of the Community and its de facto presence within the historic centres of Greek cities.

The present study arises from my long-term research and documentation of synagogues in Greece, initiated in 1993. It examines the rare phenomenon of the coexistence of antisemitism and social exclusion — manifested externally and internally to the Jewish community, respectively — and how this dynamic influenced the fate of Jewish monuments, particularly the synagogues. An example from modern history illustrates how these extremes coexisted during a period when Jewish cultural heritage was endangered within a general climate of urban renewal and reconstruction of historic city centres. The post-WWII phenomenon of

reconstruction in Greece is neither exceptional nor isolated: similar processes can be observed in other historical cities such as Cairo, Istanbul, and Malta, among others (Salat 2011: 74).

Within this context, Jewish monuments in Greece are sometimes stripped of protected status, sold, and demolished to provide financial support for the surviving Jewish communities and to create new institutions, such as the Jewish Museum of Greece in Athens.[2]

According to urban planner Kevin Lynch (1990: 1-2), the city is a spatial construction with layers beyond what the eye can see, or the ear can hear. Exploring these hidden layers allows us to render the urban landscape more legible, revealing not only its current narrative but also the dark narratives of its recent past —principally through its historical landmarks (Prato 2022). If, as Ricoeur (2004) observes, every monument is a vehicle of collective memory (Prato 2022) and its loss creates a void in the very identity of a community, then crucial questions arise regarding a Community's decision to preserve or demolish its cultural heritage (Figure 2). The issue concerns not only the documentation or preservation of a material object, but also the safeguarding of a memory that establishes historical consciousness within the Community, a memory simultaneously called upon to stand against antisemitism arising from the external environment. In other words, without the monument there may be no material target for antisemitic vandalism, yet the very substrate of memory through which history is preserved is likewise absent.

Figure 2. The synagogue in Xanthi in 1993 prior to its demolition (© Elias V. Messinas, Elias V. Messinas Archive, 1993).

[2] One such example is the supposedly "justified" declassification, sale and demolition of the synagogue in Xanthi, undertaken in 1990 to support the purchase of a new building for the Jewish Museum of Greece in Athens (Messinas 1998: 248-249). Another is the "justified" demolition of the historic interior of the Yianniotiki (today Etz Haim) synagogue in Athens, carried out by the Jewish Community Board in Athens in 2006-07 in response to the wishes of a major donor who made significant contributions to the Community's activity and institutions. The renovation, which aimed to refurbish and modernise the synagogue's historic interior, was completed despite objections (Messinas 2006).

Drawing on my archival material and personal experiences, this study shows how Jewish leadership may decide to support living Jewish institutions by "sacrificing" their Jewish cultural heritage, and particularly synagogues, in cities where Jewish communities were deported and annihilated during the Holocaust. These decisions have long-term impacts on the urban experience of the city; in the absence of landmarks, collective memory is diminished, and the surviving communities' right to tell their story is weakened (Prato 2022, Messinas 2026). In moving from "existence" to "non-existence", the Jewish communities of Greece are ultimately led to question their historical connection with the places where they developed and to which they have contributed over the course of centuries.

Documenting the Jewish Monuments of Greece

During the Holocaust, 87 per cent of Greek Jewry was annihilated overall; in Thessaloniki, the percentage was 96. Based on archival documents and published sources, it is known that before the Holocaust, 99 synagogues operated in Greece across 31 organised Communities. Smaller communities (Messinas 2022a: 6-7), with or without community structures[3] such as a synagogue or cemetery, also operated near larger cities throughout Greece. In Thessaloniki, according to archival pre-war lists prepared by the Jewish Community itself, 58 synagogues[4] were recorded in 1930, and it is estimated that 57 synagogues functioned throughout the city in the early 1940s.[5]

In 1941, with the German occupation of Thessaloniki, the report[6] compiled by the "Sonderkommando Rosenberg" (Gara 2021) presented in detail the imprint of the Jewish presence in the city and throughout Greece, including the existence of synagogues. The Sonderkommando Rosenberg visited the Jewish communities, recording and seizing archives, Jewish libraries, books, relics and manuscripts from synagogues. Then, with the implementation of the "Final Solution" and the deportation of the Jews, the looting of Jewish treasures from Jewish institutions and synagogues, homes and Jewish businesses was completed by both the occupiers and locals. The Nazis also carried out the selective destruction of synagogues[7] and the "sale" and razing of Jewish quarters.[8]

[3] For example, the 50-member Jewish Community of Lagadas, near Thessaloniki, had a small synagogue but no cemetery. They used the Thessaloniki cemetery for their burials (Papastratis 2024).

[4] The detailed table in archive Salonika 336/1930 by the Jewish Community of Thessaloniki lists 56 synagogues and their addresses, but, for an unkown reason, fails to include synagogue Yeniserli-Larissinon, established in 1913, and Ohel Yossef Sarfati, established in 1921. Both synagogues are recorded in subsequent documents.

[5] Of the synagogues operating in Thessaloniki in 1930, two — Lisbon Yashan and Adar Kodesh — ceased to operate. The latter was located in a barrack of the Angelaki quarter, which was demolished in the early 1940s. In later lists, however, the Talmud Torah Hirsch synagogue in the Baron Hirsch quarter is recorded as operating. Thus, we can conclude that 57 synagogues were operating in Thessaloniki in the early 1940s, prior to the deportation of the Jewish community.

[6] The report in German, dated 15 November 1941, was reviewed from a copy in the personal archive of Dr Mark Mazower at the Weiner Library in London. I take this opportunity to thank Dr Mazower for giving me access to this document.

[7] More examples follow, in Thessaloniki, Corfu and Volos.

[8] After the deportation of the Jews of Thessaloniki, the Baron Hirsch quarter was purchased by a certain Pericles Nikolaidis — identified by Mazower as an agent of the Germans and the Gestapo — "at a

After the Holocaust, with the end of the war and the return of survivors, a process of reconstruction began. The published reports of Kanaris Konstantinis' visit to Larissa in January 1946 concerning the condition of the Jewish communities in 1945-46 (Konstantinis 2015) describe the first years of reconstruction and the efforts to reclaim Jewish properties. They present a bleak picture in which the annihilation of Jewish communities was followed by the destruction of communal property, particularly the synagogues and community institutions such as Jewish schools and cemeteries. Konstantinis' recording, with extensive or brief descriptions and a few photographs taken either by himself or by members of the local communities, provides an important account of the fluid situation at that time, when emigration left the few surviving synagogues orphaned and closed, either due to damage or the absence of a *minyan*[9] required for their function. As Kanaris Konstantinis reports, first on his visit to Preveza in January 1946, and later Larissa:

> "The [Jewish] population [of Preveza] today consists of four families in total [...] a total of eight souls. Community property: synagogue and a complex of buildings in its courtyard, all in good condition. The synagogue was used as a warehouse for the Agricultural Bank, we requested its return and the relevant official expressed doubt, thinking that the key had been delivered, but the question arose as to whom it would be returned since the only Jew in Preveza, Moses Solomon, was to leave the next day. The question remained pending the return from Athens of President Geni Moses. Sacred synagogue utensils: nothing was saved, books and sacred Scrolls were destroyed, a piece of papyrus a few centimetres long, which we took with us, is the only thing saved from the destruction. Only the damaged Bimah of the synagogue was saved in the basement[...] also, as should be noted, the synagogue seats used in a cinema [...] The synagogue keys, after further actions, were handed over to Sarina Matsa, in the absence of anyone else to receive them." (in Konstantinis 2015: 108-109).

> "There were two Synagogues [in Larisa]. One of them has been destroyed and there can be no discussion of its reconstruction at the moment. The second has suffered very great damage and deterioration, given that, among other things, the Germans used it as a stable during the persecutions. [...] Today, the service is held in a small room of this Synagogue under miserable conditions. Of the sacred utensils, only two Sefarim, 1 Parochet, 10 Tefillin and a few prayer books have been saved." (Konstantinis 2015: 96).

After the Occupation, individual and organised antisemitic episodes were recorded, including by survivors who returned to find their homes requisitioned and requested their restitution. One such case was that of Esther Cohen from Ioannina:

bargain price". After demolishing the buildings of the quarter, except for the Vardar synagogue, Nikolaidis sold the plot (Mazower 1996: 58, and Fromer 1998: 159).

[9] The presence of ten adult men necessary for the service to take place (Emmanuel 2016: 67).

> "The first blow for Esther was terrifying. Arriving in Ioannina, she went straight to her family house at 1 Gennadiou Street. "When I was about to go inside, a stranger appeared on the first step and asked me 'where are you going'? 'To my house', I answered him. He says, 'don't go ahead, I have something to tell you.' I say, 'here you go.' 'Do you know if your mother had an oven in the kitchen?' I'm all for it, I replied: 'of course we baked bread, I don't know my house?' 'Well, since the Germans didn't burn you, I'll burn you if you dare come in,' he said to me. What was that? A Greek to burn me? Me? My God..." Esther fled her home, driven from it, and as she says, she never returned, nor did she see the stranger again. Apparently, he was one of those whom the authorities had settled in Jewish houses, after their owners were deported to Auschwitz" (Tzimas 2020).

After the war, the abandoned private properties were administered by a legal body known as the Organization for the Restitution of Greek Jewry after the Second World War (henceforth OPAIE).[10] By Ministerial Decree, the abandoned synagogues and communal properties were placed under the management of the Central Board of Jewish Communities (henceforth KISE) to care for and rehabilitate the surviving Jews of Greece.[11] With the cessation of Communities' operations from the late 1950s and especially after 1970, the sale of their remaining properties followed. At that time, synagogues were often sold or transferred to local associations[12] in an effort to preserve them, although many such efforts were unsuccessful. In a few cases, Municipalities purchased the properties and have preserved them to this day (Messinas 2025c: 68).

Figure 3. A rare photograph of the interior of the synagogue in Didimoteicho in 1960, taken by architect Shemtov Samuel (1939-2009). (© Elias V. Messinas Archive - Courtesy of Shemtov Samuel Family, 2023).

[10] *Οργανισμός Περιθάλψεως και Αποκατάστασης Ισραηλιτών Ελλάδος* (Organization for the Care and Rehabilitation of the Jewish Communities of Greece), established in 1949 as issued in Gazette 79/A/29.3.1949 to manage the abandoned private Jewish properties of Jewish owners who were deported and annihilated, as often there were no heirs. From the website of KISE - https://kis.gr/index.php/arthra/evraikoi-organismoi/o-p-a-i-e. Accessed on 15/9/25.

[11] The Ministerial Decree was published on 15 October 1947, number 265716/706, by which the Central Board of Jewish Communities of Greece (KIS or KISE) was named the "temporary administrator of abandoned Jewish properties" (Karypides 2021: 19), while awaiting the publication of the Royal Decree.

[12] See, for example, the donation of the ruined Greka synagogue to the Philarmonic Association "Skoufas" in Arta, following the dissolution of the Community in 1959 (Messinas 2023: 47).

A previously unknown documentation of synagogues by the late architect Shemtov Samuel (1939-2009) from Volos has recently surfaced. Samuel photographed and surveyed several synagogues throughout Greece to present them in a lecture entitled "The Synagogues of Greece" (Samuel 1961) in February 1961 as part of Prof. Nikos Moutsopoulos' Morphology course. This rare archive of architectural documentation — recording synagogues later demolished — was unexpectedly discovered and entrusted to me for study and publication. Samuel left in his archive an invaluable legacy and the only accurate evidence for synagogues in cities such as Drama, Patras, Volos, Didimoteicho, before their demolition[13] (Figure 3). In each synagogue that he visited, Samuel left a brief account of its condition and a short description of its architecture. For example, in Kavala, he wrote in his notes:

> "Since then [the synagogue in Kavala] has remained in the same condition and today. It presents a sad appearance. The then new paints, the marbles, what remains, clearly appear to have not been used, but have been covered by a lot of dust and earth. A part of the ceiling has almost fallen and from there the decayed skeleton of the roof is visible. The roof, in addition to the walls, rests on four wooden columns that have been stuccoed and painted in faux-marble. Between them, on the ceiling, a large pseudo-dome is formed. […] Under this dome, the marble pedestal of the rabbi is located (the Bimah). Opposite it, on the eastern side, is the Holy Ark (the Heikhal), a construction that is clearly of later date. An inscription is carved on the front of the Heikhal. The women's section is located in the northern part of the synagogue. Internally, it is much higher than the floor and the entrance, but externally, the slope of the ground makes it a ground level and allows for an entrance directly from the north. Also, an extension of the women's gallery appears to have been made on the western side. […] An interesting element of this synagogue is perhaps the high wall of the courtyard that isolates its entrance from the street and its heavy door." (Messinas 2024: 86-87) (Figure 4).

Figure 4. Interior of the synagogue Beth El in Kavala in 1960-61. The synagogue was destroyed by the occupying Bulgarian forces that, after deporting the Jewish community, looted and destroyed the synagogue. (© Elias V. Messinas Archive — Courtesy of Shemtov Samuel Family, 2023).

[13] With the support of the survey and documentation of Shemtov Samuel, and with the application of digital technologies, it is possible to reconstruct synagogues that have been widely unknown, such as the synagogue Beth El in Kavala, which was demolished and little evidence had been published until today (Messinas 2025b: 211).

Two decades later, in the 1980s, the photographic documentation of Jewish monuments and synagogues in Greece was undertaken by Nikos Stavroulakis, then director of the newly established Jewish Museum of Greece, and photographer Timothy DeVinney. They created a photographic record of all Jewish monuments extant at the time, as well as of damaged synagogues later demolished, such as Beth El in Komotini (Figure 5) and those in Xanthi and Patras. Their photographic material, published in 1992, now enriches the Museum's archival collection (Stavroulakis and DeVinney 1992) (Figure 6).

Figure 5. The remaining foundations of the synagogue Beth El in Komotini, after the demolition of the synagogue in 1994. In the foreground, the foundations of the Holy Ark, following the first enlargement of the synagogue. In the background, the Byzantine walls that surrounded the Jewish quarter (© Elias V. Messinas, Elias V. Messinas Archive, 2022).

Figure 6. The demolition of the synagogue in Xanthi in 1995 (courtesy of © Dimitris Kasapidis Archive, 1995).

In 1993, I began a comprehensive documentation and study of all synagogues in Greece to create a detailed record of those that survived the Holocaust. The study also uncovered documentation that enabled the reconstruction of demolished synagogues, whose previous existence was supported by evidence such as photographs and topographic maps, despite the absence of any surviving physical trace. The aim of the work was to safeguard an important historical chapter in the architectural history of Greece against future loss. With the

encouragement of Prof. Nikos Moutsopoulos, I submitted the study as a PhD thesis at the National Technical University of Athens, under the supervision of Prof. Giorgos Sarigiannis. My conversation with Prof. Moutsopoulos is worth quoting:

> "We talked for a while. Then he asked me: 'And who are you doing your PhD with?' I was surprised by the question, but since others had asked it to me with whom I was discussing the progress of the surveys, I replied: 'It's not a PhD. It's an independent study that I'm doing, simply because I'm interested in the subject.' He looked at me for a moment and asked me again: 'Then why not do it as a PhD?' I smiled. 'You know, I'm an architect, I don't care about getting a PhD, because I'm not interested in research or an academic career. All I want to do is design buildings.' I didn't seem to have convinced him. Not even myself, because, in addition to architecture, I eventually got involved in research and pursued an academic career. He didn't insist. He changed the subject. He asked me about my studies at Yale and Jerusalem, and when it was time for us to part, he went to his library and got a copy of one of his publications. He put it in an envelope, wrote a name and a phone number on the outside, and gave it to me. 'Now that you're back in Athens', he told me, 'I want you to go and give it to my friend Professor George Sarigiannis at the National Technical University of Athens. His phone number is written right here on the envelope. Of course, you'll show him your research and give him my regards'. 'Of course, I'll be happy to', I assured him and said goodbye."(in Messinas 2024: 26).

The research was based on published sources as well as on the archives of the Jewish Museum of Greece, KISE and OPAIE, while abroad on the Central Archive of the History of the Jewish People and the archives of the Alliance Israélite Universelle and the Joint Distribution Committee. At its inception, the project to document Jewish synagogues throughout Greece received the support of the Board of Directors of the Jewish Museum of Greece, particularly through a donation from the late Minos Mordechai. Subsequently, it provided rare material for exhibitions of international scope, such as those held at the Catholic University of the United States, Yad Vashem in Israel and the Goethe Institute and the Jewish Museum in Thessaloniki. During 2022-23, it contributed to the enrichment of the Integrated Information System of the "Archaeological Registry" (Greek Ministry of Culture 2022) of the Hellenic Ministry of Culture and Sports. As a consultant to the Directorate for the Management of the National Archive of Monuments of the Ministry of Culture and Sports, I incorporated more than 270 Jewish monuments in Greece into the national digital story map, each accompanied by precise location data and a concise description.

Antisemitism: Definition

According to the non-legally binding operational definition, antisemitism is "a specific perception of Jews, which may be expressed as hatred of Jews. The rhetorical and physical

manifestations of antisemitism are directed against Jewish or non-Jewish individuals and/or their property, towards Jewish community institutions and religious facilities."[14]

The most extreme expression of antisemitism in modern history is the Holocaust, where 6 million Jews, including 58,886 Greek Jews, were killed by the Nazis and their collaborators[15] — in crematoria, synagogues, tobacco warehouses, schools, and on the streets of the cities where their ancestors had lived for centuries. In a climate of fear, indifference and isolation from the rest of society, thousands of Greek Jews were removed from their homes, transported by trucks or commercial wagon, and taken to death camps. The void they left behind was followed by the looting of their homes, shops and businesses. The easy enrichment of some undoubtedly fuelled and intensified antisemitic sentiment among the broader population. Nata Gatenio-Osmo recalls:

> "On the evening of June 9, 1944, all the Jews were gathered in front of the fortress. The mob entered the Jewish quarter and robbed and looted houses and shops. The police did nothing. Our neighbours looted our homes." (Karababas 2022: 180).

Before the Holocaust, and for many generations, Jewish communities were targets of antisemitic incidents that also entailed the vandalism of private or communal property, such as the destruction of the synagogue in Halkida during the antisemitic violence on Easter 1846 (Karababas 2022: 144).

One of the most extreme examples was the razing of the Campbell quarter, which the Jewish Community purchased in 1928 in the Municipality of Horio to house needy Jewish families in the Hamidiyeh district, east of the historic city centre. During the attack on the night of 29 June 1931, eleven shacks sheltering 54 families, as well as the synagogue, school, pharmacy, rabbi's house and settlement offices were destroyed.

With the German occupation of Thessaloniki, antisemitic incidents increased, culminating in the forced assembly and brutalisation of Jewish men in Eleftherias Square on 11 July 1942, an act that targeted and permanently isolated the ancient Jewish community in Thessaloniki from the rest of the population. Soon afterwards, approximately 300,000 tombs were erased from the city's landscape, on the site where the Aristotle University now stands, following 6 December 1942. Before the deportation of the community, the Beth Saul and Beth Israel synagogues were blown up (Messinas 1997: 97). In Corfu, the Nazis destroyed the Apulia synagogue (Karababas 2022: 175), while in Volos they placed dynamite inside the synagogue's Holy Ark, causing the collapse of its eastern section (Messinas 2024: 60).

Throughout their long presence in Greece, Jewish communities, integrated within the life and fabric of the cities, lived through times of harmonious coexistence with their fellow

[14] A practical definition of antisemitism by IHRA, approved by 31 countries members of the International Holocaust Rememberance Alliance on 26 May 2016. Source: https://holocaustremembrance.com/resources/%CE%BF-%CE%BB%CE%B5%CE%B9%CF%84%CE%BF%CF%85%CF%81%CE%B3%CE%B9%CE%BA%CF%8C%CF%82-%CE%BF%CF%81%CE%B9%CF%83%CE%BC%CF%8C%CF%82-%CF%84%CE%BF%CF%85-%CE%B1%CE%BD%CF%84%CE%B9%CF%83%CE%B7%CE%BC%CE%B9%CF%84. Accessed on 20/8/25.

[15] Hagen Fleisher calculated that in 1941, with the invasion of the Germans, in Greece, there was a Jewish population of 71,611 people, of which 58,886 were annihilated (Fleisher 1995: 289-343).

citizens, alternating with periods of tolerance, tension and mob-led persecution. They shared the common urban space of the marketplace while also living separately in their own traditional neighbourhoods. In these parts of the city, Jews lived in defensively built quarters surrounding shared courtyards, where for centuries they enjoyed periods of safety punctuated by the need to defend themselves from threatening uprisings.

In Veroia, for example, as in other cities, individual acts of solidarity and protection coexisted with indifference, hostility, and even participation in the looting of Jewish property following the deportation of the Jews (Messinas 2022b: 86).

In the cities where Jews had lived for centuries, some of their neighbours and fellow citizens demonstrated morality, respect, and selflessness — the true character of the Greek society that had lived and developed alongside its Jewish communities. The following quotes are telling, the first from an interview with lawyer Theocharis Vadivoulis in Arta:

> "You know, my grandmother Koula was a very difficult person, but I loved her very much," the lawyer replied. "She never told me fairy tales. She never liked myths. I felt as if she was cut off from people. She kept her feelings to herself and seemed not to be touched by anything." He paused. Then he continued: "However, there was one thing that she kept talking to me about, each time bursting into tears. When she heard that the Jews were deported, she left the house, covered in her apron, as it were. She ran two streets down, to where the Jewish quarter began. She stood in the middle of the street. The houses were empty. The silence was terrifying. The open windows were banging in the wind. Doors were closed. A void." He paused again, then said: "Their loss was unbearable to her." (Messinas 2023: 60).

The second quote from the interview with George Tziras in Didimoteicho:

> "[My name is] George Tziras, I am a gymnast. I have photographs that were saved by Nikos Merikoglou and are now in his family's possession. A large and valuable archive. When the Jewish houses were looted, others were grabbing things. In contrast, Mr Merikoglou was collecting the photographs and albums. He took as many as he could, to save them. Some concerned the Jewish school and the students, and others were for entertainment. Some were probably distributed among friends and therefore we have duplicates. These are the only things preserved from the looted Jewish houses here in Didimoteicho. Others acquired alarm clocks for the first time back then, as they took them from the Jewish houses." (Messinas 2023: 196-97).

Antisemitism is a timeless phenomenon that manifests in religious, social, political and racial forms of prejudice against Jews. From medieval anti-Judaism to modern racist antisemitism, Jewish communities have often been confronted with exclusion, violence and marginalisation (Katz 1982; Wistrich 1991). This social exclusion, which also led to the extermination of Jewish communities in Greece during the Holocaust, was accompanied by the need to maintain the internal cohesion of communities to withstand hostile external conditions. These challenges persisted both immediately after the Holocaust and in subsequent decades, marked by the mass exodus of

survivors, the Civil War, and the prolonged restitution process for Jewish property, to name a few. The defensive architecture of the neighbourhood was not merely a protective measure but a way of life — a physical expression the functioning of the community itself.

Antisemitism and Jewish Monuments

Manifestations of antisemitism, especially in recent years, are expressed primarily through the desecration of Jewish monuments, most often in the form of graffiti or vandalism targeting cemeteries and synagogues. Cervinkova and Golden (2020) discuss such desecrations in the Polish city of Wroclaw at different historical periods, examining subsequent restoration projects carried out by some local actors and noting that, even today, "the Jewish heritage sites to which the work of our interlocutors is tied are frequently targets of anti-Semitic attacks" (Cervinkova and Golden 2020: 141). Messages defacing these monuments often reproduce stereotypical claims and false accusations of alleged Jewish global power, which perpetrators invoke as a pretext for "punishment". A typical example is the recent antisemitic graffiti on the streets of Athens, where slogans such as "kill Zionists, save lives"[16] constitute an overt incitement to violence and clearly qualify as an antisemitic act. In such cases, the propagators of this propaganda arbitrarily define both the "accusation" and the "punishment", enacting them through monument vandalism and calls for violence against Jews.

Recently, in the aftermath of the Hamas attack on Israel on 7 October 2023, and the ensuing war in Gaza, antisemitic messages often intermix with anti-Zionist slogans. The conflation of Theodor Herzl's Zionist vision of the creation of a Jewish homeland with Israel's military response to the Hamas attack offers fertile ground for propaganda that perpetuates stereotypes of Jewish omnipotence and domination. Invoking the same logic of "blame" and "punishment", groups have even mobilised in ports, attempting to prevent cruise ships with Israeli tourists from docking in Syros[17] and Rhodes.[18]

The antisemitic upsurge after October 2023 is particularly revealing. Due to the complexity of events, antisemites frequently confuse the Israeli with the *Israilitis*[19] (Greek

[16] In response to the comments of the Israeli Ambassador Noam Katz, the mayor of Athens Haris Doukas, insulted the Ambassador instead of doing his duty, as a mayor, to clean up the city, in respect to all the citizens. See "H. Doukas: Harsh response to the comments by the ambassador of Israel" (Greek), in *«K»* (3/8/25). (https://www.kathimerini.gr/politics/foreign-policy/563748541/ch-doykas-skliri-apantisi-stis-diloseis-toy-presvi-toy-israil-stin-k/. Accessed on 23/8/25) and Messinas, E. (2025). "Mayors serve their Citizens" (Greek), in Opinions in *Ανιχνεύσεις.gr* (8/8/25). (https://www.anixneuseis.gr/%ce%b7%ce%bb%ce%af%ce%b1%cf%82-%ce%bc%ce%b5%cf%83%cf%83%ce%af%ce%bd%ce%b1%cf%82-%ce%bf%ce%b9-%ce%b4%ce%b7%ce%bc%ce%b1%cf%81%cf%87%ce%bf%ce%b9-%cf%85%cf%80%ce%b7%cf%81%ce%b5%cf%84%ce%bf%cf%85%ce%bd/. Accessed on 23/8/25).

[17] Zafiropoulos, K. 2025. Syros had raised the flag of solidarity to Palestine (Greek), in *Εφημερίδα των Συντακτών* (23/7/25). (https://www.efsyn.gr/ellada/koinonia/479837_i-syros-sikose-ti-simaia-tis-allileggyis-stin-palaistini. Accessed on 23/8/25).

[18] «Rhodes: Tension and adductions for the arrival of the cruise ship with Israeli tourists», in *Καθημερινή* (28/7/25). (https://www.kathimerini.gr/society/563738746/rodos-entasi-kai-prosagoges-prin-tin-afixi-toy-kroyazieroploioy-me-toys-israilinoys-toyristes-vinteo/. Accessed on 23/8/25).

[19] *Ισραηλίτης* (Israilitis in Greek), as opposed to *Ισραηλινός* (Israilinos in Greek) that is, Israeli Citizen.

Jew), the Greek Jew with the Zionist — that is, one who supports or has supported the establishment of the State of Israel. As a result, anti-Israel propaganda emanating from Hamas and the Greek Left is readily and indiscriminately directed against both Israelis and Greek Jews. The Jewish Communities of Larissa and Volos, ancient communities that have been Greek speaking since Byzantine times, have long been well-integrated into Greek society. These communities follow events in Gaza and elsewhere, along with the rest of the country's population, yet they receive "accusations" of responsibility for the war in Gaza, a stance that reflects a clearly antisemitic foundation.

A representative example of this occurred at the inauguration of the renovated Etz Chaim synagogue by the Jewish Community of Larissa. This major cultural event for one of city's important monuments was marred by gatherings on bans and by antisemitic graffiti defacing the renovated synagogue's walls.[20] This stood in sharp contrast with the atmosphere that accompanied the inauguration of the renovated Yavanim synagogue by the Jewish Community of Trikala just three years earlier, on Saturday 15 October 2022, [21] when the city and state leadership, along with the wider public, flocked to the ceremonial and cultural events, creating a joyful celebration for the entire city (Figure 7).

Figure 7. The festive services and ceremonies at the inauguration of the restored synagogue Yavanim in Trikala on 15 October 2022, a work undertaken by the author and his architectural team (© Elias V. Messinas, Elias V. Messinas Archive, 2022).

[20] "Larisa: Alarm in Police for the reopening of the Jewish synagogue – Ban on demonstrations in the city center" (Greek), in *in.gr* (14/6/25). (https://www.in.gr/2025/06/14/greece/larisa-synagermos-stin-el-gia-ta-egkainia-evraikis-synagogis-apagoreysi-diadiloseon-sto-kentro-tis-polis/ - accessed on 23/8/25), and KISE. 2025. "Shameful Graffiti at the Synagogue of Larissa. Condemned by the Municipality and the Jewish Community" in KISE website (23/6/25). (https://www.kis.gr/index.php/koinotites/larisas/eidiseis/ntropiastiko-nkraphiti-ste-synagoge-larisas-katadikasan-o-demos-kai-e-ebraike-koinoteta - accessed on 23/8/25).

[21] "The reopening of the Synagogue of the Jewish Community of Trikala was celebrated with emotion and solemnity" (Greek), in *Δήμος Τρικκαίων* (16/10/22). (https://trikalacity.gr/me-sygkinisi-kai-episimotita-ta-egkainia-epanaleitoyrgias-tis-synagogis-tis-israilitikis-koinotitas-trikalon/ - accessed on 23/8/25).

Equally characteristic was the extreme antisemitic action at the University of Thessaly on 24 March 2025, when a group demanded the cancellation of an official university event awarding scholarships funded by donations from the Jewish Community of Volos. The event was to include my lecture on the history and architecture of the synagogues of Greece as part of the university's celebrations for the national anniversary of the Greek Revolution (25 March).[22] Despite the group's demands, I advised the community not to cancel the event altogether, so the lecture was ultimately held at the Jewish Community Centre.

Antisemitic incidents are not new, either in Volos or in other Jewish Communities in Greece. In January 2009, synagogues in Volos and Corfu were attacked, while the Jewish cemetery in Ioannina and the Holocaust Memorial in Corfu were desecrated. In Rhodes, a year earlier, in August 2008, a plaque commemorating the Holocaust was desecrated by students who filmed their actions and uploaded the video to the internet. The Mayor and the Prefecture condemned the attack, and, after lengthy discussions with the Secretary General of the Ministry of Education, the students agreed to lay a wreath at the Holocaust memorial in the centre of Rhodes on the National Day of October 28 (ECRI 2009: 53).

Today, Greece is once again experiencing an upsurge of antisemitism directed towards its Jewish population, ostensibly motivated by opposition to the Israeli government's political decisions regarding the Gaza war. Previously, during the 1990s and early 2000s, Greek Jews were also subjected to intense antisemitism, including graffiti and desecration of cemeteries. It remains an open question whether this resurgence was linked to Israel's first war with Lebanon in 1982, to the first government of Andreas Papandreou (1981-1989) with its explicitly pro-Palestinian stance, or to attempts by locals to appropriate Community property belonging to Holocaust survivors.[23]

As I reported (Messinas 2023: 47-48) in my interview with the late Josepis and Koula Saba — survivors of the concentration camps bearing the numbers 18268 and 77005, respectively, engraved indelibly on their arms — the following recollections are particularly revealing:

> "We lived harmoniously here in Arta," Josepis and Koula said. "We lived in three neighborhoods. In Ochthos, Tsimenta, where the school on Filellinon Street was, and in Roloi. We had two synagogues. The "new one," "Poulieza," was donated to the Municipal philharmonic orchestra after the war and later sold, demolished, and turned into apartment buildings.[...] "There was also the old synagogue, the "Greka", which was in front of the Castle, in Makrygiannis Park and had two palm

[22] "Under the weight of major reactions for Beo and Gaza, an event at the University of Thessaly was canceled" (Greek) in *ΓΕΓΟΝΟΤΑ* (24/3/25). (https://gegonota.news/2025/03/24/ypo-varos-megalon-antidraseon-gia-beo-gaza-akyrothike-ekdilosi-tou-panepistimiou-thessalias/#goog_rewarded. Accessed on 23/8/25).

[23] An example is the actions of the Municipality of Ioannina and neighbours, who tried to appropriate the land of the ancient cemetery of the Jewish Community, taking the Community to court and desecrating the cemetery, especially, after 2000, as it was covered in the local press: "Who desecrates the Jewish Cemetery in Ioannina?" 2021. https://antifa-ngt.espivblogs.net/?p=3211. Accessed on 24/8/25.

> trees in the courtyard. Palm trees, not cypresses," she emphasized this. "It was demolished and turned into a public park. When it was still a ruin, a donation was made by the Community to the "Skoufas" Association. [...] "There were other synagogues in Arta, but nothing has been saved", Koula added. [...] The Jewish cemetery was on a mountain on the hill of Peranthi, next to the Barracks. King George I granted it to the Community. They built houses around it, but a section has been saved where there are also remains of graves. However, many tombs were stolen. There used to be a guardhouse and a morgue, of which only part of a wall survives. I remember seeing a lady in a nearby house washing with a bucket on my brother's grave! I don't remember if I went in to talk to her. [...] Josepis' eyes welled up as he recalled the scene [...] 'When the Germans deported us, they took everything from us. They entered our homes, our shops. They took our property. Nothing was left. The Germans deported 372 people. Only 12 returned. The synagogue didn't function, because we didn't have a 'minyan'." (Messinas 2023: 47-48)

There is no doubt that, in a climate marked by antisemitism and the desecration of Jewish monuments, Jewish communities are compelled to reinforce community cohesion and a sense of security, often through extreme decisions. It is as though the social exclusion engendered by antisemitism from the outside generates an intensified need for collective self-preservation from within, sometimes leading to the application of *herem* (censure or shunning) as a mechanism of cohesion and protection against what community leaders may perceives as an internal form of "threat". This raises the question, how do these two extremes of social exclusion — antisemitism from without and *herem* from within — function and relate to one another?

The Bipolarity of Extreme Phenomena: Antisemitism and *Herem*

The example of the Barbouta quarter in Veroia illustrates the Jewish community's need to lock itself from within to avoid the twin dangers of antisemitic violence and assimilation. As younger generations sought greater integration and circulated more widely amongst the surrounding non-Jewish community, this inward turn was both symbolic and necessary for the community's survival. The community developed internal mechanisms to guard against the threat of the mob and against ideological influences perceived as undermining cohesion — sometimes resorting even to the extreme measure of *herem*.

The coexistence of these two phenomena — external exclusion through antisemitism and internal exclusion through *herem* as a form of communal control — reinforced the self-enclosure and resilience of Jewish communities, producing strong identities that could resist external pressures (Yerushalmi 1982).

Yet this dual condition also produced contradictory effects. On the one hand, it ensured the survival of Jewish communities in hostile environments; on the other, it fuelled stereotypes of Jews as belonging to "closed" or "insular" communities. Such stereotypes were readily exploited by antisemites to reproduce negative images and further isolate Jewish populations. The intersection between antisemitism and *herem* thus illuminates not only the strategies of

resistance and cohesion that sustained communal life, but also the tensions that accompanied the historical experience of the Jewish people more broadly (Sachar 2006), and of Jewish communities in Greece in particular.

Herem (חֵרֶם), according to Emmanuel, "is the greatest religious censure that marks expulsion and exclusion from the Jewish community and is equivalent to excommunication" (2016: 125). It was a form of disciplinary and legal-religious practice within the Jewish communities, originating in the rabbinic tradition and evolving into a form of communal excommunication or exclusion. *Herem* served to protect the community from internal threats, heretical teachings or violations of collective morality (Baron 1952), functioning as a powerful disciplinary instrument to maintain cohesion, moral boundaries and authority within the community. Through this mechanism, the Jewish community strengthened the boundaries of its identity and cultivated a sense of collective survival. Among the most famous individuals to be excommunicated by *herem* were Baruch Spinoza and Leon Trotsky.

Baruch Spinoza, the 17th-century philosopher placed under *herem* by the Jewish community of Amsterdam, was simultaneously constrained by the antisemitism of 17th-century European society, which regarded all Jews with suspicion whatever their philosophical stance.

In Greece, we have record of the communal exclusion of the poet Yossef Eliyah (Yossif Elias Kapoulias, 1901-1931) who was placed under *herem* by the Jewish Community of Ioannina, owing to his leftist ideas that challenged the Community leadership. This experience is embodied in the figure of Sabbethai Kabilis, the hero in the eponymous chapter in Greek author Dimitris Hatzis' *The End of our Small Town*. In Hatzis' narrative, the isolation imposed on Eliyah was dramatic:

> "With a sure hand, Sabbethai Kabilis uprooted the wild sprout. It was not difficult. Yossef was soon expelled from the school of the "Alliance Française". All doors were closed to him, first the Jewish ones, then all the others. The few lessons he had left were cut short - the children suddenly fell ill or the parents' finances suddenly ran out, and they could no longer pay. He lived entirely in poverty, he was hunted in the way they know how to hunt in the provinces — he was persecuted. And a little later he died, still very young, somewhere far away in Macedonia. Little Jerusalem once again lost its prophet." (in Hatzis 1963).

Eliyah's work, which bridged tradition and modernity, through both poetry and criticism, as well as through translation of Hebrew texts, particularly biblical texts such as the *Song of Songs*, *Ruth* and *Psalms*, introduced modern Jewish poetry to Greek readers. Following his self-exile from Ioannina, Eliyah moved first to Kilkis and later to Athens, where he died in July 1931 (Kourmantzi 2017).

The Example of the Xanthi Synagogue: The Researcher as a "Detached" Observer?

During the research on the synagogues of Greece that I initiated in 1993, archives were searched for records of synagogue histories — those written by the Communities that built and maintained them, and later, after the Holocaust, by the Communities that sold them. The goal of the research was knowledge, and the goal of this knowledge was to provide the most accurate

representation possible of the narrative and history of the synagogues, both as monuments and as living organisms that served their Jewish communities. Yet, when modern historical narratives raise substantive questions, the researcher's position becomes divided between passive observation and urgent action.

In the archives of KISE and OPAIE, documents were retrieved concerning the sale and demolition of synagogues, such as that of Xanthi.[24] The synagogue of Xanthi, designed by architect Solomon Cohen, was built by the Jewish Community of Xanthi on land purchased from the heirs of Stavrou Hadzistavrou, measuring 1,350 sqm. It was located at the intersection of Anatolikis Thrakis and Stavrou Hadzistavrou streets. The synagogue and the Jewish community centre, which also housed the Jewish school, were built on the plot. Their construction was completed in the summer of 1926. On 4 March 1943, the Jewish Community of Xanthi — 526 people — was arrested and locked in a tobacco warehouse at 1 Salaminos Street (Exarchou 2001: 98) and then deported to the Treblinka concentration camp, from which only six Jews survived. During the Occupation, the synagogue was converted into a stable.[25] After the war, it was used by Christian organisations as a catechetical space and theatre run by the "Three Hierarchs" association. Although the surviving community was active after the war, it never again used the synagogue. With the dissolution of the Community in 1958 (Chronika 1996: 142), in January 1963, the building of the Jewish Community Centre and School was sold to the Greek Scouts and subsequently demolished. In March 1992, the synagogue itself was also sold to a contractor who demolished it, and an apartment building was erected in its place (Exarchou 2001: 78).[26]

In the 1980s, the Municipality of Xanthi proposed purchasing the synagogue for use as a cultural centre, as had occurred with the Kahal Shalom synagogue in Kos, which was purchased by the Municipality and preserved as a cultural venue for the local non-Jewish community (Messinas 2023: 95-98). The Municipality's offer of 27 million drachmas for the building, then classified as a protected monument by the Ministry of Culture,[27] would have ensured the preservation of this important monument. However, the Municipality's offer was rejected. Instead, a lawyer undertook to have the building's protected status removed to facilitate its sale — and ultimately the demolition — at twice the offered price. The synagogue was demolished in 1995.

The decision by Jewish leadership to sell properties belonging to Jewish Communities destroyed in the Holocaust, ostensibly to support the surviving ones, came at a heavy cost to the cultural and religious heritage of Greek Jewry. The Greek State's decision to declassify a Jewish monument — despite its value not only for Judaism but also for the cultural heritage of the city and its urban fabric as a historic landmark — raises questions about the choices made by Jewish institutions and the pressures exerted on State institutions to pursue such outcomes. These actions are particularly striking given that they occurred only forty years after the Holocaust, within the strongly antisemitic climate of Andreas Papandreou's government.

[24] Folder "Xanthi", Archive of KISE.
[25] Interview of Louis Koen with the author on 20/3/95 and 7/4/95.
[26] On the "changing use" of religious buildings/monuments see (Komakhidze 2022).
[27] Gazette 162/B/7.4.83.

Did antisemitism itself give rise to the need to strengthen Communities' finances and to silence any Jewish presence in Greece's border cities? Would the disappearance of Jewish monuments with Jewish symbols reduce friction and diminish anti-Jewish sentiment? Or would it simply contribute to disappearance and oblivion, as Hesse and Laquer characteristically point out with reference to the ancient necropolis of Thessaloniki, where 300,000 marble tombs were demolished and the cemetery disappeared, leaving few elements to remind us of its existence for centuries and to tell its story? (Hesse and Laquer 2005).

Another question then arises: what should the researcher's response be when discovering the imminent destruction of a monument? Is he merely a witness, or does he become the bearer of a deeper responsibility? The ICOMOS Ethical Principles, ICOM Code of Ethics for Museums, 1954 Hague Convention, and the 1970 UNESCO Convention and Law 3028/2002 establish clear codes of conduct for the researcher. Yet beyond these codified norms lies a more fundamental dilemma: whether to remain a detached observer in the name of scientific "objectivity" or to obey one's conscience, which calls for action. The monument, as a material trace of memory and collective identity, confronts the researched with a moral test in which silence can be equivalent to complicity. The philosophy of science has repeatedly highlighted the boundary between observation and intervention, where the researcher becomes both critic and defender, responsible for protecting that which underpins further inquiry and, ultimately, for safeguarding the memory of generations: a memory that, once lost, cannot be regained.

Arendt (2003), in her reflections on the "responsibility of the witness", highlights the individual's obligation not to remain silent in the face of an injustice, even when this conflicts with one's professional role. Silence can amount to complicity in the act of destruction, in this case of a monument. According to Ricoeur (2004), every monument serves as a bearer of collective memory, and its loss creates a void in a community's very identity. For the researcher, therefore, the preservation of a monument is not only an act of documentation or physical preservation, but also a defence of the memory that sustains historical consciousness. Levinas (1969) adds a further ethical dimension with his notion of "responsibility towards the Other", where the researcher, as an eyewitness, is responsible not only towards the object of study but also future generations who have the right to access their cultural heritage. The preservation of that heritage, therefore, becomes an ethical responsibility inherent in the research itself. In other words, intervention is not a simple personal choice, but a moral imperative that goes beyond the limits of the role of research. The researcher becomes, often unwittingly, a guardian of memory and a defender of History against oblivion and loss, against a decision made without his or the Community's consent. At times, his intervention may be the last chance to prevent the destruction of a monument. Cervinkova and Golden (2020: 130) discuss a similar engagement through their own work in Wroclaw, Poland, which grew into "preservation and educational efforts" related to Jewish heritage.

What, meanwhile, should have been the position of the Communities themselves and their members? Should the sale of the Greek Jewish cultural heritage have concerned them directly? If so, should they have remained silent, appealed to the leadership to influence its

decisions, or requested assistance and intervention from State bodies? If, across Greece, the reconstruction and modernisation of cities routinely involved the destruction of historic monuments — and if broader society did not adequately respond — why should Jewish communities have acted any differently when it came to the fate of their own monuments?

These questions remain unresolved, as there was no opportunity for genuine dialogue, consultation,[28] or participatory decision-making between the Community and its leadership. The absence of a substantive dialogue and the silencing of the Community's sporadic objections may also reflect a broader antisemitic climate, in which Jewish voices were often ignored or marginalised. As a result, individual reactions were silenced, and monuments lost, which stands in stark contrast to restoration initiatives taken by some individual actors in Wroclaw, as discussed by Cervinkova and Golden (2020).

The demolition of the Xanthi synagogue was followed by that of the Beth El synagogue in Komotini and, later, between 2007 and 2008, by the destruction of the historic interior of the Ianniotiki synagogue in Athens (renamed Etz Haim), built in 1906, and its complete renovation in a neoclassicist style incongruous with its original form and historical character.[29]

In the cases of Xanthi, Komotini and Athens, Community cohesion prevailed: the need to maintain the status quo and uphold communal decisions was non-negotiable, even when it entailed the "punishment" of dissenting members. The few voices raised in protest were silenced, even when their arguments rested on principles of religious and cultural heritage preservation and a moral duty towards a Community decimated by the Holocaust — a Community obliged to safeguard its history and identity in the face of external pressures questioning its historic legitimacy (Pardo 2000, Pardo and Prato 2019). Such pressures continue to cast doubt on the long-standing presence of Jews in Greece and their contribution to the economic and cultural development of the cities in which they had thrived for centuries before the Holocaust.

Conclusions

The foregoing examples provide an initial presentation of the complex manifestations of antisemitism in Greece and the alternation of roles between those who "accuse" and those who are "accused"; of those who strive to preserve monuments and those who seek instead to preserve living Jewish communities and new institutions — such as a Jewish museum — through the sale of heritage properties belonging to communities now disappeared; of those who consider that silence and "absence" are preferable to presence (with the exception of museums and Holocaust monuments) and those who insist on maintaining the authentic material legacy of Jewish life through a commitment to historic buildings that stand as integral parts of urban landscapes.

[28] Today, the Jewish Community of Athens has established mechanisms for public participation with its members in a range of Community decisions, building channels of open dialogue between the community and its leadership. This process has fostered trust and cultivated a climate of dialogue and transparency in the management of communal affairs. Unfortunately, such a climate was established only recently, long after the events described in this study had taken place.

[29] Ministry of Urban Planning and Environment, Gazette 545D/17.5.93.

Historically, the newspapers of the Jewish Communities served as channels of communication, informing members about the actions and decisions of their leaders. Today, through the research and digitization of these documents, we are gradually uncovering the post-Holocaust fate of Jewish monuments and synagogues (Jewish Estia 1950: 1).[30]

Many of the questions raised in this article may yet find answers as research progresses and access to digitized archives and future publications expands.

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Spa Tourism and Urban Transformation: The (re)imagination of Montecatini Terme[1]

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When we first arrived at Montecatini Terme, our summer school kit included a brochure of the city, recommending where to go and what to see. The Tettuccio Terme, with its grand presence, graced the pages and caught the attention. We planned to visit the Terme as tourists eventually, during our stay. However, when we were asked to capture "what the city tells us!", the place became the starting point of our fieldwork. The reason being: knowing Montecatini seemed quite implausible without knowing the Terme.

Across the globe, there are cities whose growth and development remain intricately connected with the nature of tourism that they offer. Consequently, these cities derive their identities from such specific socio-cultural spaces, which not only provide insights into their past, but also their imagination of the future. In this short article, we attempt to map the transitions in the visions related to the thermal establishments in Montecatini, which in turn shaped and reshaped the city. The discussion is divided into three parts. The first section engages with the broader discussions on thermal tourism and spa cities. The second section captures the empirical understandings drawn from the fieldwork. The final part emphasises the analytical themes for further research.

The Growth and Evolution of Thermal Cities

One of the earliest examples of thermal tourism can be found in the town of Spa in Belgium which, according to Kelly (2017), attracted Romans because of its health-related benefits. However, it was not until the 17th and 18th centuries that a tourism industry centred around "healing" with the use of thermal, mineral and sea waters, started to form in central Europe. Following this, by the end of the 19th century, the areas around the Alps in Europe became essential sites for spa and mountain tourism. Across different communities, spas became symbolic of essential practices that focused on "health" and "leisure". In more recent times, there has been a change of discourse towards spa tourism, whereby the aspect of leisure receives greater emphasis, especially with the mushrooming of spa facilities in hotels (Kelly 2017). Ideas such as "self-care" and "pampering" in spas dominate contemporary understandings, as opposed to the earlier approaches to the curative functions of these spaces. Consequently, cities

[1] This article is based on a one-day field trip conducted as a part of the Field Training School and Research Seminar organised by the International Urban Symposium-IUS in July 2025. It is limited in its scope due to the paucity of time, access to planning documents and difficulties in communicating with some of the respondents, as the researchers are not conversant with the local language.

that once revolved around these former practices, also encounter pressure to reinvent themselves, to cater to the demands of the market. This has also been the case in Montecatini Terme which has undergone similar transitions over the years.

The earliest records on Montecatini as a Spa Town, already frequented by the Romans, dates to the 13th century with the first facility, the Bagno del Tettuccio, being founded in 1370. The urban centre of Montecatini Terme was developed under the initiative of the grand Duke Leopold of Lorainne in the 19th century (*The Great Spa Towns of Europe*, UNESCO 2021).

Similar to developments in other spa towns, in Montecatini Terme, between 1890 and 1930, the idea of "Ludic Thermalism" was predominant and the spas were largely visited by the aristocratic elite. This period also witnessed the construction of the Pineta Spa Park and the restructuring of the Tettuccio Terme. This further led to the creation of new infrastructure and services, like the funicular built up to the town of Montecatini Alto, and tramways to nearby centres like Monsummano, Lucca, and Pistoia (Lux and Tzortzi 2025). The period between 1945 and 1970 can be classified as "Social Thermalism" in which spa facilities became more accessible to the masses. In the Italian case, in the 1970s and 1980s, another phase can be identified in which treatments were partly subsidized by the national healthcare system, thereby enabling even broader segments of the population to participate. However, the sharp acceleration in privatization and the subsequent crisis of the healthcare sector in Italy had a negative impact on this trend, as fewer people could afford treatments. This resulted in a decline in attendance (Becheri 2006) and a crisis of the thermal-oriented tourism and the economy of Montecatini Terme.

Recognizing the cultural, medical and touristic value of spa towns, in 2021, UNESCO included eleven European towns with historic spa facilities in its World Heritage Conservation initiative, underlining their central role in Europe's health and leisure culture.

Looking at Montecatini Terme today, seven of the once-thriving nine spa facilities have been closed, leaving only two operational. According to Lux and Tzortzi (2025), this decline in the popularity of thermal tourism can be attributed to the growth of other spa locations in the region and the overall changes in global tourism. These developments had made the city rethink its future and restructure its spaces. The following section centres on these contemporary developments in Montecatini Terme. The choice of field sites was the Tettuccio Terme and the adjacent Pineta Park. The section is based on focused observations and informal conversations with some tourists and residents, besides the review of secondary sources, which highlights imminent plans regarding the city.

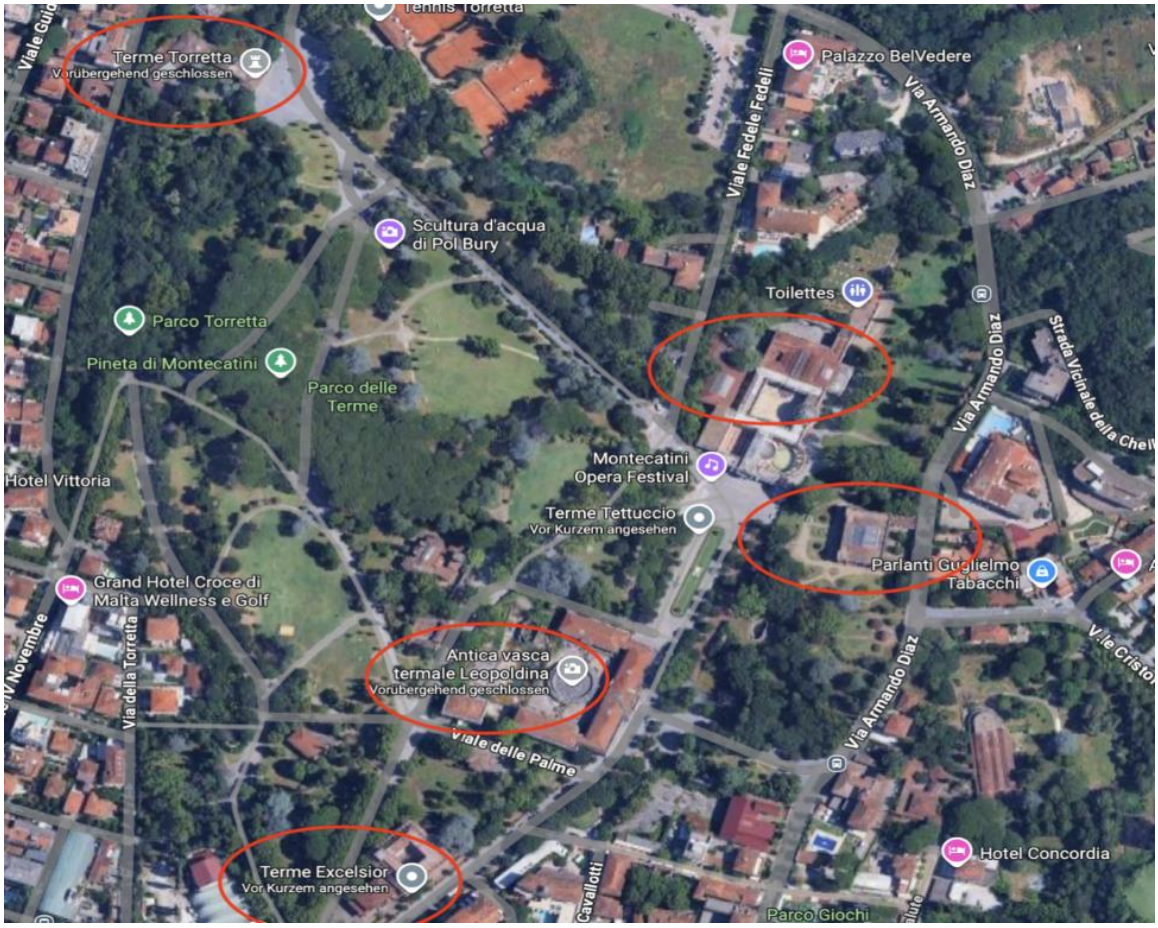

Figure 1. Map showing the different spa facilities in Montecatini Terme. Photograph by the authors.

The (Re)imagination of Montecatini Terme

Speaking to people on the current state and development of Montecatini Terme, one person told us, "People usually stay in Montecatini Terme for a period of 2-3 days, on their way to other major destinations like Firenze or Pistoia" (Resident of Monsummano Terme). For us, this prompted the questions: Is Montecatini Terme a city for passers-by? As a primarily tourism-based city, how is Montecatini Terme planning to regenerate itself?

Lux and Tzortzi (2025: 16), in their study on Montecatini Terme, state that a new Strategic Plan has been drafted by the local government, which concentrates on concepts like "well-being landscapes" which aspire to create "an oasis of tranquillity, where contact with nature, physical movement, and meditation become tools for improving quality of life." Against this backdrop, we ventured into the field focusing on the Tettuccio Terme and the Pineta Park.

For this research, we visited the Pineta Park at two different times on the same day, during the morning and in the evening, to undertake a comparative understanding of its spatial use. When discussing the plan for creating a wellbeing park, we received a clear answer from a resident, who said, "We have never thought of any changes in the park."

The response resonated with our own observations in terms of how the park is a stomping ground for people of all ages and is already considered a wellness space, used for

different activities. During the morning hours, when the residents were occupied with their work commitments, there were more elderly people resting, reading books, or listening to music. We also witnessed a mother playing with her children, youngsters playing football and having a picnic, and someone leisurely sunbathing. In the evening hours, the park was more lively — with children playing, couples walking their dogs, families gathering, people jogging, cycling, or simply chatting. Our respondents also expressed their affinity for the park in terms of the frequency of their visits saying, "When we don't have to work, we come here up to four times a week, for a picnic or other things".

Figure 2. The Pineta Park in the evening hours, July 2025. Photograph by the authors.

Concerning the thermal establishments, while our main focus was on the Tettuccio Terme, we also examined the unfinished project of Terme Excelsior and the closed-down structure of Terme Torretta. Focused observation of the various spots within the Tettuccio Terme revealed the hyper-commercialisation of the space. The Terme itself assumed a shopping mall-like appearance, promising different forms of retail experiences — some more connected to a spa experience (for example, stores containing various bath products), and some completely dissociated from the same (for e.g., generic clothing and accessory stores). Interestingly, the Terme is also home to a real estate office and a modern art gallery. Incidentally, following our

morning visit to the Tettuccio Terme, we were presented with the rare opportunity to visit the place at night on the same day, when it hosted the performance of a symphony orchestra.

Figure 3. Retail stores inside the Tettuccio Terme, July 2025. Photograph by the authors.

Figure 4: Estate Agent inside the Tettuccio Terme, July 2025. Photograph by the authors.

Discussion

The empirical insights gained from the field experience raised several questions that can be further pursued. Given the present context, is the park's "redevelopment" plan necessary? Sociologist John Urry (2002), in his work on *The Tourist Gaze*, speaks of how emotions underline landscapes and connect the "social" with the "material". From our observations, the park already fulfils these objectives. In fact, the more interesting question that remains is whether the redesign of the park will contribute to the urban regeneration of Montecatini Terme. Moreover, while the city orients itself towards reviving its value as a tourist destination, are the needs and requirements of its residents being fulfilled?

As mentioned in the field observations, the Tettuccio Terme has experienced the infiltration of private capital. The "Società Terme", which owns the thermal establishments in the city, has attempted to auction off the property due to its own bankruptcy, without any result (Lux and Tzortzi 2025). Upon further investigation, it was also discovered that Terme Torretta establishment was earlier converted into a nightclub, adding to the list of failed initiatives, and its eventual closure in 2008. As mentioned earlier, several competing factors have led to the decline in thermal tourism. However, the constant pressures generated by the ever-dynamic neoliberal consumption practices also challenge how the cultural heritage can be preserved.

While acknowledging the difficulties involved in the upkeep of grand properties like the Tettuccio Terme, the invitation to private capital to manage such spaces may lead to transformations that can affect their socio-cultural and historical relevance. And in a larger sense, of the city.

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Events Reports

IUS School 2025
The 2025 IUS Field Training School and Research Seminar on Urban Ethnography and Theory

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This Field Training School, organised annually by the International Urban Symposium-IUS in collaboration with an international interdisciplinary group of scholars from leading universities, was held in Montecatini Terme (Italy) on 21-27 July (https://www.internationalurbansymposium.com/events/2025-field-training-school/).

The 2025 IUS School was a successful intensive exercise attended by 17 postgraduate students, doctoral and postdoctoral scholars and academics from Australia, Belgium, Canada, Finland, Germany, India, Italy, Taiwan and the USA.

The School's teaching staff included sociocultural anthropologists, qualitative sociologists, architects and urban planners. They were, in alphabetic order: Gary Armstrong (City St George's, University London, UK); Nathalie Boucher (Organisme Respire, Canada); Hana Cervinkova (University of Maynooth, Ireland); Jerome Krase (Brooklyn College-CUNY, USA); Karolina Moretti (National Technical University of Athens, Greece); Smoki Musaraj (Ohio University, USA); Italo Pardo (University of Kent, UK); Giuliana B. Prato (University of Kent, UK); James Rosbrook-Thompson (City St George's, University London, UK); Matthew Rosen (Ohio University, USA).

The School offered an interactive learning environment and opportunities to discuss the rationale and practices of traditional and new research methods and mainstream debates. The primary aim was to train participants in the "art" of conducting ethnographic fieldwork and develop the link between ethnographically-based analysis and social theory with specific attention to legitimacy and legitimation; governance; stereotype and stigma; application and challenges of digital technologies; sport and health; migration; vernacular landscape; contested urban spaces; adolescents' life experiences; overtourism; informal urbanization and cultural history.

Work started in the morning of Monday 21st July and ended in the evening of Sunday 27th July, with a farewell reception, which was attended by the Mayor of Montecatini Terme, Mr Caludio Del Rosso, and dinner. Social events included visits and evening concerts at the historical Terme Il Tettuccio, a World Heritage site.

The School's Programme included thirteen 80-minute teaching seminars led by the teaching staff; two targeted observational field excursions, one in the medieval hamlet of Montecatini Alto and one in Montecatini Terme; one full-day session dedicated to participants' reports on their field observations, two of which are published in this issue of *Urbanities*; and

a full-day Research Seminar Session during which several participants presented their own work. Presentations included:

Tannishtha Bhattacharjee (University of California Santa Barbara, USA), *Hagiographic Practices and Place-Making by Subaltern Guru-cults amongst displaced Sylhetis in post-Partition Shillong*.

Núria Codina (KU Leuven, Belgium), *Bottom-up Literary Production on and of the Margins. Confluences of Political and Literary Participatory Practices in Barcelona*.

Ava Crofford (University of Cincinnati, USA), *Equity Mapping: Broadband, Fiber Subscriptions, and Environmental (In)Justice Index*.

Charlotte Gagnon Lewis (University of Ottawa, Canada), *Growing a Good Life: Understanding (Neo) farmers' Motivations in and Around Tokyo Metropolis*.

Debapriya Ganguly (Savitribai Phule Pune University, India), *Plastic Pollution and Climate Governance: Mapping the Impact of Urban Living in an Indian City*.

Miles B. Jordan (Louisiana State University, USA), 504-907: *A Visual Ethnography of Southern Louisiana and Interior Alaska*.

Solmaz M. Kive (University of Oregon), *The User of Hostile Design*.

Peian Lin (National Cheng Kung University, Taiwan), *Narratives of Now/Then Cities: The Role of Local Organizations in Creative Urban Development*.

Monserrat Ramirez Ruvalcaba (Carleton University, Canada), *The Well-Adapted Immigrant": Exploring the Relationship Between Acculturation and Wellbeing.*

Sanjana Santosh (University of Melbourne, Australia), *Legitimacy of Informal Care for Major Illnesses in a City.*

Hongchi Shiau (Shih-Hsin University, Taiwan), *The Dynamics of Gayborhood Shifting in Taipei*.

IUS Workshop 2025
Managing Without Guarantees: Between Getting-by and Enterprising

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This 3-day International Workshop was organised by the International Urban Symposium-IUS in the Tuscan Spa town of Montecatini Terme, Italy, on 29-31 July 2025 (https://www.internationalurbansymposium.com/events/2025-conference/). The Workshop addressed variations of the socio-economic, fiscal, legislative and political forces that define the condition of the "guaranteed" and that of the "non-guaranteed" and examined the efficacy and legitimacy of both policy and political rhetoric.

Across the democratic world, there is an outstanding difference between the guaranteed and the non-guaranteed in the socio-economic field. Traditionally, the former enjoy secure employment, trade-union protection and the attendant ramified benefits (sick leave, maternity or paternity leave, paid holidays, pension rights, and so on); the latter must fend for themselves, enjoy little or no protection and deal daily with the existential jeopardy of not having a steady salary and with the personal and collective consequences of persistent uncertainty. Things get worse for those who work informally only and are faced with an organisation of society that contributes to making precariousness their state of being — with no formal income, one will have trouble buying a car, getting a mortgage, obtaining credit, etc. This difference stands today, although in some countries the status of the secure employed is weakening as a consequence of the drive to deregulation.

Mainstream studies based on an in-depth understanding of on-the-ground activities have brought out complex and ramified interactions between formal and informal activities in the economic field and evidence on actors who are guaranteed but also engage in moonlighting, performing economic activities that are the traditional remit of the non-guaranteed. In view of the substantial contribution that ethnographically-based analysis can make to our understanding of this complex field of human action, we invited scholars from the social sciences to participate in this event with ethnographically based papers to address key topics in this field.

Anthropologists and qualitative sociologists have convincingly investigated the difference in the way in which the traditionally precarious/non-guaranteed and those who have newly joined such a status — from industries that hitherto were considered guaranteed monthly payers to the emerging digital fields — cope with their newfound socio-economic reality. This line of analysis contributes significantly to the current discussion on work, employment, formality and informality, legality vs legitimacy, and on how digitalisation, algorithmic management and AI applications are reshaping work and the job market.

Not all the "non-guaranteed" are, of course, underprivileged and downtrodden. For example, successful self-employed professionals or entrepreneurs may happily bear the lack of guarantees in exchange for their independence, freedom of action and financial rewards. Still, at the lower socio-economic level, the traditionally non-guaranteed may often feel and are treated as second-class citizens.

Work started in the morning of 29 July and ended in the evening of 31 July with a farewell reception and dinner.

Revised papers are under consideration for publication in an edited volume for the Series Palgrave Studies in Urban Anthropology

See also, *Francesco Giovinazzo interviews Italo Pardo* https://www.facebook.com/share/r/14G2xrhPHoz/?mibextid=wwXIfr

Speakers and Participants

Gary Armstrong (City St George's, University of London, UK), *Re-Inventing the Game: Founding and Sustaining Walking Football*.

Z. Nurdan Atalay (Bandirma Onyedi Eylül University, Turkey), *Surviving Under the Crisis Economy in Turkey: Between Debt and Over-debt*.

Judith DeSena (St. John's University, USA), *Living with Uncertainty Through the Years: The "Indigenous" Residents of North Brooklyn*.

Francesco Giovinazzo (Ospedale San Camillo, Italy), *Between Scarcity and Inequality: Healing in Limbo through Unequal Access in Healthcare*.

Cristina Mackerron (University of Essex, UK), *UK Freelance Professional Dancers: Injury and Precarity.*

Karolina Moretti (National Technical University of Athens, Greece), *Small-Scale Businesses and Global Tourism: The case of Athens' Commercial Triangle*.

Smoki Musaraj (Ohio University, USA), *"You Either Have Airbnb or You Do Airbnb": The Double Life of the Short-term Rental Economy in Marseille and Tirana*.

Benedetta Panchetti (Mercatorum University, Italy) and Marcello Mollica (University of Messina, Italy), *Urban Spaces and the Challenges of Asylum Seekers' Integration Under the Italian Humanitarian Corridors Programme*.

Italo Pardo (University of Kent, UK), *"Help Yourself and God Will Help You": Chronicling Entrepreneurial Managing Without Guarantees in Naples.*

Giuliana Prato (University of Kent, UK), *Changing Job Markets & Flexible Skills Programmes: Work between Right and Duty*.

James Roosbrook-Thompson (City St George's, University of London, UK), *Getting By in "Superdiverse" London: Informal Networks and Understandings of Class and Ethnic Difference.*

Matthew Rosen (Ohio University, USA), *Tirana Year Twenty-Five: Staying, Coping, and Making Do in a Changing City***.**

Enkelejda Sula Raxhimi (Saint Paul University, Canada), *Insecurity and Informality in Haiti Amidst Disasters, Violence and Climate Change.*

Nathalie Boucher (from Canada) and Sara Zanini (from Italy), who attended the Workshop but did not present a paper, actively contributed to the discussion of individual papers and to the plenary debate.

Workshop on Public Health and Healthcare

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This international multidisciplinary event focused on the present state of public health policies and health care services across different medical fields with the aim to stimulating reflections on future directions in this field. The Workshop took place on 7-9 November 2025. The multidisciplinary approach brought together professionals from different fields in the medical sector, academic research and urban design. Speakers discussed interrelated topics on how to

reduce healthcare costs and improve patients' access to health services; public health policies; environmental aspects and their impact on health; the risks and benefits of the application of digital innovation and AI in health services. Presentations addressed The occupational realities of hospital Chaplains (Gary Armstrong); Cooperation and conflict between citizens and physicians (Z. Nurdan Atalay); Continuity of care, including digital healthcare and access to primary care (Simon Bailey); Investing in territorial programmes and prevention to improve services and reducing costs (Carlo Benvenuti); Planning of health architecture for sustainable healthcare (Evangelia Chrysiku); Improving health population, focusing on health inequalities and socio-economic, cultural and environmental determinants of health (Lindsay Forbes); Reducing healthcare costs and improving access in general and oncology surgery (Francesco Giovinazzo); Digital transformation, research and development of digital parameters, including telehealth, homecare technologies, AI implementation (Hadas Lewy and Refael Barkan); Urban planning and green buildings strategies (Elias Messinas); Therapeutic landscape design and healing gardens in hospitals (Radu Negulescu); Impact of misgovernance and bad legislation on public health and healthcare(Italo Pardo); Integrated care systems, digital health and the ethnical, social and legislative implications of AI applications (Giuliana B. Prato); Tackling recreational drugs through a multidisciplinary and multiagency approach (James Roosbrook-Thompson); Prevention and the role of education (Antonia Stefanelli); Prevention and innovation to reduce costs in podiatry (Daniel Weisz).

This Meeting will be followed by the International Multidisciplinary Conference on *For a Better Public Health and Healthcare: Multidisciplinary Solutions*, to be held in Montecatini Terme, Italy, on 13-15 March 2026. Details are available at: International Multidisciplinary Health Conference 2026 | International Urban Symposium – IUS.

See also Forthcoming Events in this issue of *Urbanities*.

Forthcoming Events

International Multidisciplinary Conference
For Better Public Health and Healthcare: Multidisciplinary Solutions
Montecatini Terme, Tuscany (Italy), 13-15 March 2026

Good Health and Well-being is one of the 17 UN Sustainable Development Goals, closely interconnected with social challenges, such as poverty and inequality. Avoidable poor health and inequalities in health and access to healthcare persist across all countries, while healthcare costs continue to rise. This conference aims to stimulate multidisciplinary thinking and action to develop solutions that grasp the opportunities offered by technological innovation, while tackling the socio-economic determinants of health and the effects of environmental challenges.

Sustainable healthcare solutions and effective public health delivery require more than just stated commitments — they demand concrete action, innovative thinking and sustained collaboration across sectors to enable a good patient experience and ensure efficient and sustainable health services.

This International Multidisciplinary Conference is organised by the International Urban Symposium-IUS, the University of Kent and City St George's University of London. It will bring together actors in the interconnected fields of public health, health care and environment to investigate the state of health policies and services across different fields.

A key objective is to develop synergies between academic research, the management of the physical environment, public health delivery, health providers, public and private investors and policy makers. The aim is to stimulate an integrated approach to address both immediate challenges and long-term sustainability goals, improving efficiency, resilience and service accessibility to all community members, while promoting a greater focus on reducing demand upstream through appropriate preventive approaches in the physical, economic and psychosocial environment.

The Conference will develop through workshops and plenary sessions focused on three core areas and the complementary ways in which they impact the efficiency and resilience of public health policies and healthcare systems, and people's health and wellbeing in a holistic sense. The **three interconnected Core Areas** are:

1. ***Tackling Systemic Healthcare Costs and Healthcare Access***.
This framework addresses two critical aspects of health: (i) a holistic approach to health and wellbeing that takes into account the embodied, experiential, emotional and spiritual dimensions of care; (ii) the complex dynamics between private and public healthcare systems. Often, public funding proves insufficient to cover healthcare costs, necessitating innovative public-private partnerships. The focus is on:

- Prevention and Health Education initiatives (good parenting and early-age education, formal and informal education and activities, raising awareness of the impact of social media and digital information);
- Public-Private Partnership models to cut backlog and long waiting lists, and stimulate collaboration between research, health services and industry;
- Integrated Health System Design and Care. Enabling better collaboration between primary, acute and social care services (e.g., home-based and community-based programmes), and spiritual and emotional dimensions of care. Key roles of primary care — management of chronic disease, care of the dying.

2. ***Public Health and The Physical and Socio-economic Environment***.

This framework emphasises practical solutions to creating healthier living environments that can reduce the need for health and social care services. The management of the physical, economic and psychosocial environments significantly impacts both public health and healthcare system efficiency. We invite abstracts discussing:

- Health in public policy at the national, regional and local level;
- Healthy and environmentally sustainable workplaces and infrastructure: urban design, buildings, sanitation, transport, green spaces, etc.;
- Upstream approaches to tackling inequalities and key determinants (e.g., socio-economic factors) of population health.

3. ***Digital Health Innovation and Responsible AI in Health Systems***

The digital component of the framework focuses on two key issues: leveraging technology to enhance healthcare delivery and the ethical and social implications of digital and AI technologies, contemplating how legislation may deal with this challenge and the attendant security issues. It will address:

- Telehealth implementation;
- Responsible AI: AI-powered clinical management support systems (their usefulness and potential biases or misuse);
- Health data interoperability solutions.

Deadline for Paper and Panel proposals: Wednesday 7 January 2026.
Proposals should be sent to the Scientific Committee at: healthconference2026@gmail.com
Full Details are available at: International Multidisciplinary Health Conference 2026 | international urban symposium - ius

International Conference

Spatial Changes and Social Opportunities in the 21st-Century City

Athens, Greece, 27-29 May 2026

This International Conference is organised by the Commission on Urban Anthropology, the International Urban Symposium-IUS and the University of Athens. It will be held on 27-29 May 2026 at the University of Athens, Greece. This event is grounded in the perspective of the social sciences, aiming to explore the complex and evolving relationship between urban spatial transformations and emerging patterns of social opportunity, inequality and inclusion in contemporary cities.

In the face of globalisation, technological innovation, and shifting demographics, cities have become both arenas of profound spatial reconfiguration and sites of intensified social challenges and potential. Social sciences are uniquely positioned to interpret these transformations, critically examining how urban space shapes, and is shaped by, economic practices, cultural dynamics and political structures.

This conference invites researchers, academics, professionals, and students interested in issues of urbanism, social justice, spatial policy and participatory planning. We welcome paper presentations, theoretical contributions, and practice-based insights that address questions of access, mobility, governance, and the right to the city in diverse urban contexts across the globe.

Topic areas:

- Urban Inequality and Spatial Justice
- Governance, Participation, and the Right to the City
- Digital Cities and Technological Urbanism
- Environmental Change, Sustainability, and Urban Space
- Migration, Mobility, and Urban Belonging

Abstract Submission Deadline: February 2026
Abstract Length: Up to 300 words
Conference Language: English
Submission Emails: Dr V. Papadopoulou (vas_papadopoulou@yahoo.com),
Dr D. Mareta (dimitra.mareta@gmail.com).
Further details available at: https://www.facebook.com/commissionurbananthropology/

2026 IUS Field Training School and Research Seminar
Urban Research Theory and Methods

Montecatini Terme, Italy, 26 July–1 August 2026

This annual Training School is organised and hosted by the International Urban Symposium-IUS (https://www.internationalurbansymposium.com/) in collaboration with an international interdisciplinary group of senior scholars from leading universities.

More than half of the world's population now lives in cities, and this proportion is expected to increase to two-thirds by 2050. Urbanisation proceeding at such a pace has meant increases in the number and size of cities, but also continues to alter the social fabric of urban centres. The socio-economic, political and cultural ramifications of these multifaceted contemporary urban changes highlight the need to understand what is going on in our cities; hence the importance of ethnographic research, and the attendant methodological and theoretical questions.

This 7-day Field Training School is aimed at postgraduate students, postdoctoral scholars and early career academics interested in research in urban settings and in empirically grounded analysis. The primary aim is to train participants in the "art" of conducting ethnographic fieldwork and develop the link between ethnographically-based analysis and social theory with specific attention to legitimacy and legitimation; governance, urban diversity; stereotype and stigma; informality; application and challenges of digital technologies; health; public space; vernacular landscape; heritage.

The School offers an interactive learning environment and opportunities to discuss the rationale and practices of traditional and new research methods and mainstream debates. It will provide an opportunity to become part of an international network, establishing long-lasting connections with both other participants and the teaching staff.

The School Programme will include:

- Teaching Seminars led by international senior scholars, who will use a wide range of ethnographic, methodological and theoretical expertise to address topical issues.
- Targeted Observational Field Excursions. These structured city walks and observational field excursions will supplement the in-class work. Participants are expected to produced brief reports which will be presented during a dedicated session.
- Research Seminars. With a view to honing and developing junior scholars' skills as future professionals, the research seminar will give participants the opportunity to present their work, engage in academic debate and benefit from expert feedback from the teaching staff. Feedback on how to revise oral presentations for publication will be offered. Expanded and revised versions of select Seminar papers may be considered for publication in the open-access, peer-reviewed journal *Urbanities-Journal of Urban Ethnography*.

Teaching and seminar discussions will be in English.

Work starts in the morning of Sunday 27th July and ends in the evening of Saturday 1st August. Participants are expected to arrive in the afternoon of Saturday 26th July and leave in the Morning of Sunday 2nd August.

The School will include social events, taking advantage of the centrality of the location within easy reach of Tuscany's world-renowned iconic places.

Contact emails: Prof. Italo Pardo (i.pardo@kent.ac.uk) and Prof. Giuliana B. Prato (g.b.prato@kent.ac.uk).

Full details and updates available at:
https://www.internationalurbansymposium.com/2026-field-training-school/

BOOK REVIEWS

Lynch, Erin E. 2023. *Locative Tourism Applications: A Sensory Ethnography of the Augmented City.* London: Routledge.

Locative Tourism Applications invites readers on a sensational odyssey through the multifarious world of locative media. Erin Lynch, the author and itinerant ethnographer, delivers a compelling exploration of the interaction between site-specific technology and tourism based on extensive multi-sited research with a series of applications across 12 cities. This research takes place at the intersection of worlds (both physical and digital) and assesses the many sensations, mediations, and glitches that occur when producing and presenting cityscapes for tourist consumption.

The book first provides readers with a firm theoretical grounding in the main scholarly lineages underpinning the research, namely the sociology of tourism, cultural geography, urban studies, anthropology of the senses, and new media studies. These fields help provide a framework for the book through key concepts (gaze, performance, construction, and perception) and inspire a series of research questions pertaining to authorship, the tourist experience, maps and meanings, and the urban encounter. Sensory ethnography provides a fruitful method, Lynch argues, for assessing the locative tourism application as "techno-sensory prothesis" (p. 25 in reference to McLuhan 1964) and for locative media studies more generally. Her experiences of "sharing in the sensible" (p. 26 in reference to Laplantine 2015) were coloured by the many tourists, guides, narrators, and app developers that moulded the ethnographic encounter. As Lynch repeatedly notes, the experience of co-creation became one of the defining features of the ethnography focused on participant sensation and "sensing the city with others" (p. 160).

The book proceeds to describe research conducted in 10 different cities across 4 continents before providing an extended discussion of two specific sites: Montreal and Christchurch. Data was gathered by touring and walking with others, conducting interviews, and accessing diverse media such as documentaries, artist statements, and news releases. Lynch intricately weaves discussions of time travel applications, gamification, urban branding, and authenticity of experience into her analysis. Other significant considerations include the role of surveillance and security in ubiquitous computing and locative media, as well as questions of authorship amid contested histories and the erasure of Indigenous voices. Lynch contemplates what it means to prioritize certain voices over others within the world of an app working to obscure its own authorship and maintain an air of institutional authority.

Enduring questions and key tensions that characterize the ethnography include the toggling back and forth of awareness, the unscripted elements and people that inevitably make their way into the tourism experience, and the liminality users experience when touring between two worlds. Lynch uses such moments to highlight the unpredictable nature of sensory experience produced through locative tourism and the variability of

tourists' experiences of space. The most compelling ethnographic data and analyses dig into these "gaps and seams" that form between the digital and real on the "shifting stage" (p. 30) of locative tourism. For example, what happens when the internet is down, the in-person projections are not synced up with your app, or the building over which you are meant to overlay an image is no longer standing? Transitional cityscapes, unpredictable infrastructure, and glitches and discordances provide fodder for a critical reflection on the mediated tourist experience.

This research ultimately leads Lynch to argue that locative tourism applications allow users to experience the city in "surprisingly multisensory ways" (p. 66) that have gone largely unexplored to date. She surmises that applications call attention to the "sensory entanglements of tourism" and "unevenness of practices of augmentation" (p. 156), points well supported by the sensory variability and technological hiccups described in her ethnography.

The coherent structure and clear prose provide a smooth ride for readers touring the world of locative media, and Lynch's "sensuous scholarship" delivers all the texture and atmosphere of her ethnographic encounters. Readers can easily imagine *being there* in the field — sipping a strong cocktail and hunting for ghosts in New Orleans or taking in the engrossing night-time projections accompanying Montreal's *Cité Mémoire* app. *Locative Tourism Applications* will appeal to scholars working in tourism studies, cultural geography, urban studies, new media studies, and those with an affinity for evaluating the sensory. Additionally, the book may appeal to travellers, locative media users, and locals living in tourist destinations who are interested in learning how the stories of a city are produced, mediated, and experienced.

Through this work, Lynch does her part to remedy the regrettable paucity of literature on "techno-centric tourism practices" (p. 9). Her "sensory ethnography of the augmented city" contributes to an emerging interest in augmented and mobile technologies, urban sense-making, and the urban encounter more generally. As Lynch succinctly puts it: "[i]t is time to put locative tourism studies on the map[!]" (p. 18).

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Pardo, I. and Prato, G. B. eds. 2024. *Forms of Inequality and Legitimacy of Governance, Volumes 1 and 2.* Cham: Palgrave Macmillan.

These two volumes, published in the Series "Palgrave Studies in Urban Anthropology", are a thought-provoking collection of research studies about legitimacy and worldwide inequities written by international scholars. The cases employ fieldwork and multi-modal methodologies and focus on different geographic areas

around the globe. The books in this series are also organized thematically.

The works are well-timed analyses in global anthropology and the social sciences in general. Their objective is to develop critical debates and construct new theoretical paradigms. In general, the contributions investigate governance, governing bodies, and urban change while discussing ordinary people's rights. In addition, they demonstrate the significance of ethnographic and autoethnographic (see Krase in Volume 2) research.

The main argument is that citizens ostensibly have constitutional rights, but (in actuality), these rights are unprotected. The tension presented in this theme flows throughout the volumes. In-depth ethnographic and qualitative studies are presented from Africa, Asia, Europe, the Americas, and the Middle East, with a view on people's responses to older and "newer" forms of inequality: social, economic, political, as well as by age, gender, and religion.

Both tomes begin with an introductory chapter by the editors, Pardo and Prato. Volume 1 is divided into sections by topics on governance, work, and risk. In the very first chapter, "Forms of Inequality: Legitimacy, Governance, Work, and Risk," the editors ask about the present state of equality and assert that "equality of opportunities, where everyone has an equal chance at success, of access to resources, to compete, to develop and activate own potential, to achieve by merit continues to be largely a utopia, worldwide" (p. 1). The chapters that follow are framed under "legitimacy of governance" and explicate the contradictions between haves and have nots, rulers and ruled, elites and masses, and reveal not only the existence of inequality in societies proud of their "openness", but indicate that the rhetoric serves to muddle reality which results in the persistent and insidious growth of inequality among populations.

Legitimacy in social institutions involves exercising power by influencing and controlling others. In its everyday usage, legitimacy refers to what is lawful, just, and appropriate under a particular system of government. Legitimate power is authority, according to Max Weber (2009), who discussed different types of authority that, over time, can convert from one type to another. Authority is a response to the need for social order. Under rational/legal systems, the populace, leaders, and those in power presumably follow laws. Misconduct is punished under the law, and laws can be reworked to address social change. Revolutions and/or insurrections occur when those governed think differently. Authoritarian regimes are another source of dissatisfaction and change. The contributions presented in the collection portray inequality, trust or distrust, and legitimacy, or the lack of it, as well as tension/conflict between and among classes of citizens.

The chapters further illuminate these arguments. Pardo, a proficient scholar of Social Anthropology, argues that in Naples, Italy, the population is unequal. The differences between ordinary people and ruling elites "pollute[s] ordinary people's lives" (p. 2). There is a lack of assurances for ordinary citizens, resulting in distrust for

those in power. This class tension in Naples appears to be unrelenting over time.

In Bamafele Mali, Koenig also addresses the issue of trust between government and its citizens. In examining their relations, trust improved somewhat with a development and resettlement plan while inequality became more obvious to ordinary people.

With governments' safety measures in many places during Covid-19, Prato contends that the post-pandemic "new normal" reveals increased inequality. The formation of e-governance and the growth of Artificial Intelligence applications have surged, which is presently a focus of business news reports. Their proliferation has created more cracks in social institutions that ordinary people fall through, perpetuating, worsening, and producing new types of divisions. Moretti's essay adds that Covid-19 caused political and economic chaos, which continues to the present day. In general, poverty and inequality have grown, as well as citizens' lack of trust and confidence in government policies. This is evident in shifting world leadership through recent elections.

Work as an institution is also investigated in Volume 1. In Greece, according to Spyridakis, "soft skills", as well as "hard skills", are evaluated as part of the hiring process by small and medium employers. The governing and decisions about prospective employees are made by employers. The author describes the process as a "kaleidoscope" approach while recognizing and considering soft skills as part of the candidates' promise. As more employers around the globe use Artificial Intelligence to review applications and to conduct initial interviews, the future of work and the quality of employees remain uncertain.

Different kinds of work in the cash economy are also studied. Rosen reviews outdoor book markets and the selling of second-hand books in Tirana, Albania. Jaatsi presents another kind of street work in Finland, "canning." The author examines the labour of those collecting cans and bottles for income. Like in many cities around the world with expanded recycling laws, deposit amounts on these items are compensated upon return. Both types of street work (book selling and canning) are not unique to any one country; however, these instances raise a question regarding the legitimacy of street work. Are they examples of ingenious and inventive employment or a social burden and scourge on "legitimate" businesses? In addition, should societies applaud the initiative, embrace the services and offer worker benefits?

Korean women workers in Dongdaemun, Seoul, are considered by Hwang. Factory work lifted these operatives and their families out of poverty in the 1970s. Women workers were politically active and challenged authority, but were often quashed, marginalized, and arrested. This situation changed when much garment work moved to other parts of Southeast Asia, with global restructuring, which produced increased inequity. Moon, a garment worker and activist, told the author,

> "In the 2000s, the garment industry became increasingly small, and as a

result, there were no young people willing to learn the job, so you could clearly see the industry was ageing" (p. 198).

Hwang concludes that the remaining workers are a few select ageing women artisans.

An inquiry into a football club, the Blades, in Sheffield, UK by Armstrong and Bell "provokes debates around the issues of governance and legitimacy" (p. 214). This analysis is another example of the administration and management on an organizational level. The authors trace poor decision-making in the 1970s regarding manager and player recruitment. They report that rich clubs "got richer" through "unscrupulous investments". The authors reckon, "whom might we trust to challenge this state of affairs?" (p. 230).

Through fieldwork in London boroughs, two practical approaches to reducing urban violence are examined by Rosbrook-Thompson: principles of risk management and public health. Risk was represented by gang members, while a public health approach views violence as a contagious disease and "treats" high-risk individuals using outreach workers. The perceptions of gangs are socially constructed based on race and social class. The author notes that biases are systemic but are left unnoticed and unappreciated in the forces of urban violence. This ultimately creates uncertainty and doubt considering social policy approaches to resolution.

Volume 2 continues an examination of legitimacy and governance with a focus on inequality and urban dynamics. Like in Volume 1, the first chapter is an introduction by the editors, Pardo and Prato.

Zhao explores Citizenship as Reward: City-Making and the Politics of Migration in a Chinese "New Area". The author focuses on a new development for high tech, finance, and urban infrastructure in the southern outskirts of Chengdu, China. The new area was achieved through top-down planning and spatial segregation. Peasants were relocated from scattered villages to apartment buildings. Entitlements were unequal and "built on socio-economic divergences" (p. 37). Citizenship is seen "as a locality-based, negotiable reward given to the qualifiers" (p. 37).

"Mapping Differences and Inequalities on Urban Residential Patterns" by Channa centres on Old Delhi and New Delhi in India. The author indicates that unfair segregation is an integral aspect of the development of cities. Old Delhi was based on a caste system and contained families from the old aristocracy, while New Delhi was post-colonial and built by the British with high-end apartment buildings. In both, divisions are dispersed. Channa emphasizes that there are new forms of inequality, primarily economic, and notes that the mental "map is not static; it is continuously redrawn by the impinging forces of market, gentrification, political and globalizing influences" (p. 53).

A discussion of community governance is offered by Krase in "Discovering Community in Urban Society: Autoethnography of a Journey". The author describes a view into his activism as a graduate student and later, a resident of Brooklyn and participant in

Prospect-Lefferts Gardens Neighborhood Association. The author states,

> "The end product of my ethnography was a collection and analysis of accounts of doing community and perceiving community" (p. 69).

The author's journey continued with the decentralization of New York City into Community Planning Districts. Krase shows that residents (citizens) take control of their community through community organizations. Unlike other essays on governance and authority, this one indicates a bottom-up paradigm.

The urban theme continues with a shift to Marseille in "Reclaiming the Mediterranean City: Contesting the Legitimacy of Urban Renewal Projects and the Airbnb Economy" by Musaraj. The author initiates this ethnographic study by informing readers that a building collapsed in the centre of Marseille, which triggered protests and demands that the mayor resign. The legitimacy of the municipal government was questioned, revealing a crisis. The mayor was eventually ousted. Years later, residents did not see much change and continued to distrust the state. They voiced concerns about gentrification and the unregulated Airbnb economy. Combined with neglected housing, these matters are intertwined and raise a question regarding the residents' right to the city. Musaraj resolves that fair governance is absent for vulnerable populations.

Part 2 of Volume 2 considers public space and crisis management. In the first chapter, fair governance and citizen participation are implicit in Emmanuel's paper titled "The Other Public Space: Questioned Legitimacy and Highlighted Inequalities Underneath an Overpass." The author perceives spaces under overpasses as "alive". The case considered is underneath the Paolo de Frontin Bridge in Rio de Janeiro. The urban dynamics at work here are policy experts vs. residents. Emmanuel states,

Crisis management is another topic discussed. There are two research articles addressing earthquakes in Istanbul, Turkey, and the Turkish-Syrian border. In "Anxiety, Anticipation and Housing Crisis in Istanbul," Kayaalp argues that housing costs (sales and rentals) and earthquake risk influence decisions made by those of low and middle income. Realistic life choices are considered by those unable to afford moving, and they persevere with ongoing risk. Thus, according to the author, social class differences are perpetuated. The middle- and upper middle-class residents are "people who can afford to be anxious" (p. 137). Some opt for seismic evaluations, while others refuse inspections for fear of demolition. Still others either relocated within Istanbul or departed for other cities. Ultimately, the earthquake's fault shapes both the housing market and ongoing and intensifying inequality based on social class. The second essay on the social ramifications of earthquakes is "Beyond the Disaster: Vulnerability of Governance in the Turkey-Syria Earthquake" by Yilmaz and Hallman-Tomaka. The chapter includes photographs of the aftermath of the disaster taken by the authors who assess disaster management in Antakya. The answer to an assessment of government management is summarized by a survivor's response,

> "We took our children out with our hands from the collapsed apartments; there was no construction equipment, no team, no electricity; it was cut off, and there were noises in the middle of the night" (p.157).

Natural disasters in cities like this one continue to be difficult to confront. In both papers on earthquakes, the questions posed, "Can anyone hear my voice?" and "Is anyone out there?" remain relevant and poignant and are clear evaluations of the failure of authorities.

Part 3 of the volume is organized under the label, "Stigma, Education and Choice." Esteinou opens with a research paper about a stigmatized group of people with dwarfism, titled "Legitimacy in Interaction: Hierarchical Dynamics and Social Moral Dilemmas." This is a micro-level analysis in a high-end Mexican nightclub in Polanco in which the employees have dwarfism and serve as entertainers. The artists are met with disparaging responses which are "indicators of societal norms linked to broader societal biases" (p. 170). Protective laws are not commonly enforced which highlights an erosion of government legitimacy.

The volume turns to an essay addressing education in Poland. Cervinkova and Rasinski present "De-privatizing the Public in Poland: Education, Inequality, and the Legitimacy of Governance." The article discusses how non-public schools were formed with non-governmental organizations. These schools maintained their same physical location with many of the same teachers and students. Conditions, however, changed in that parents were expected to contribute more financial support, teachers were paid less, and testing was integrated, therefore reinforcing inequalities. Teachers resisting Catholic ideology in the classroom faced consequences. Finally, in lieu of school attendance, children with disabilities were home-schooled. This essay arrives at specifying a lack of legitimacy through "the state's efforts at legitimation" (p. 203).

Book 2 finishes with a chapter on "Class Legitimacy and Individual Choice: An Ethnographic Study of Indian Urban Middle-Class Intimate Relationships." Romanowicz examines the different types of intimate relationships practiced among the urban, middle-class: arranged, practiced informal relationships, and individual choice. In the last type, individual choice, pressures and influences regarding intimate relationships are quieted. The research indicates intersections of individual choice, inequalities, and legitimization of governance.

These two volumes arrive at a suitable juncture as the world witnesses attempts at regime change. The contributions illustrate a crisis of legitimacy. Legitimacy and democracy have eroded and are shifting to "a new world order". The globe is facing social change, which includes increasing unequal dealings regarding differences of race, social class, religion, gender, gender identity, as well sexual orientation and those with special needs.

In general, the volumes are thoughtful and of high quality, timely and timeless, given the persistence of declining social institutions and their authority, and ever-increasing inequities in diverse settings.

The contributions are noteworthy in that they are global in scope with thematic commonalities and methodological use of long-term, ethnographic and qualitative research.

In using inequality, legitimacy and governance as central organizing concepts, the lens of the authors shifts to daily events. Every day, around the world there are reports of increasing discontent among ordinary people with those in power from a variety of political perspectives. This dissatisfaction is igniting grassroots protests of assorted types. The editors have seized this occasion to highlight the conflict between elites, masses and governance. The volumes are unquestionably a contribution to social science with the ongoing development of theory.

There are mostly strengths in this collection. Being familiar with the high standards of scholarship both crafted and produced by the editors, Pardo and Prato distinguish themselves again and have accomplished outstanding quality here as well. These books will appeal to scholars and students interested in a global approach in the fields of anthropology, economics, history, political science, sociology, urban studies, ethnography and qualitative research, as well as policy makers involved in social reform and social change.

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FILM AND VIDEO REVIEWS

Sama in the Forest. 2023. Directed by **Carlos Gómez**. Documentary Educational Resources. 76m, in Maithil and English.

The documentary Sama in the Forest, directed by Carlos Gómez, explores the rich narrative tradition of the women of Mithila, India, in collaboration with members of the local community in Madhubani, renowned for its artistic heritage. Set against this backdrop, the film recounts the story of Princess Sama, intertwining folklore with interviews with women and the creation of narrative paintings to offer a nuanced portrait. It highlights how women use the Madhubani art tradition to tell stories and shows how this art form serves as a fundamental tool for cultural preservation and personal expression. Through their paintings, the women not only illustrate the myth of Sama but also depict their own realities, desires, and social critiques. The documentary focuses on the power of female storytelling and cultural adaptation.

Margaret Mead and Gregory Bateson, pioneers of visual anthropology, focused on the use of photography to analyse Balinese culture in their 1942 work *Balinese Character: A Photographic Analysis*. Similarly, Carlos Gómez, in *Sama in the Forest*, employs Madhubani painting as a form of storytelling and cultural analysis. The film avoids the typical observer–observed relationship and is presented as a collaboration. The interviews with the women function as dialogues that probe the complex relationship between myth and real life. This creates a polyphonic narrative in which the women's voices are central rather than merely an addition to the director's perspective.

The documentary can thus be situated within a hybrid and collaborative ethnographic cinema, similar to that of Rouch (Miotti 2020), who sought more active collaboration with his subjects by allowing them to participate in the creation of the film. *Sama in the Forest* achieves this through the dramatization of Sama's story by members of the community themselves. The director aims to show that stories and myths are not relics of the past but living, dynamic tools that women use to navigate the challenges of a constantly changing world. The cinematography in *Sama in the Forest* is observational: it does not pursue a fictional film aesthetic but rather seeks to capture the lived realities of women and their environment in Mithila.

The film's cinematographic choices, its generally long takes, natural lighting, and observational style, produce a rhythm that allows everyday actions to unfold organically, while simultaneously granting authenticity to the scenes. These extended shots linger on details of artistic creation, such as hands at work painting, or on the subtle expressions of the women, capturing not only aesthetic gestures but also the lived texture of social relations. By juxtaposing myth and reality in its visual narrative, the documentary transcends the limits of artistic representation: it situates women's creative practices at the intersection of personal memory, collective identity, and the urban environment of Mithila. In doing so, *Sama in the Forest* demonstrates how cultural heritage and artistic expression become vehicles for negotiating contemporary urban transformations, making the film particularly valuable for urban anthropology. The act of painting is

revealed not merely as a cultural performance but as a way of inhabiting and redefining urban space, where women's voices challenge traditional hierarchies and inscribe alternative narratives into the social fabric of the city.

Unlike documentaries that are based on a central conflict, *Sama in the Forest* is more of a portrait than a story. The portrait shows how women use their traditions to express themselves, challenge gender roles, and find their own voice. It is a story of subtle but powerful empowerment, the power of women in a rapidly changing world.

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The Intersection (Le Carrefour). 2021. Directed by **Jessamine Irwin** and **Daniel Quintanilla.** 32 min.

The short documentary *The Intersection (Le Carrefour)*, directed by Jessamine Irwin and Daniel Quintanilla, offers a compelling lens for examining the intersections of language, migration, and urban transformation. Set in Lewiston, Maine, a post-industrial city shaped by multiple waves of immigration, the film focuses on the friendship between Cécile, a Franco-American woman reconnecting with her French-speaking heritage, and Trésor, a recently arrived Franco-Congolese asylum seeker. Their deeply personal encounter illustrates not only the personal dimensions of identity and belonging, but also the broader sociolinguistic and urban dynamics that frame immigrant experience in small American cities.

Historically, Lewiston was a textile hub that attracted large numbers of French-Canadian workers in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. These Franco-American communities preserved French as a domestic and community language but also faced stigmatization and pressure to assimilate into an English-speaking society (Roby 2004). By the mid-twentieth century, as the factories closed and economic decline set in, both the physical urban fabric and the Franco-American linguistic presence began to erode. In this sense, Lewiston's post-industrial landscape is marked by the traces of an earlier migration wave, whose linguistic and cultural contributions remain partially submerged within collective memory (Langellier 1999).

The Intersection situates the arrival of a new group of Francophone migrants, African asylum seekers, within this historical trajectory. Mukendi's journey to Maine embodies contemporary global migration flows, in which displaced populations arrive in secondary urban centres rather than traditional gateway metropolises (Simone 2004). These new residents reshape the city, not only demographically and economically, but also linguistically. The shared medium of French becomes an unexpected bridge across temporal and cultural divides: it allows Cécile to reanimate the suppressed language of her childhood, while enabling

Trésor to negotiate his place in an unfamiliar urban environment.

Language here functions as a medium of both memory and negotiation. For Franco-Americans, French signifies continuity with ancestors whose labour built the city but also invokes painful recollections of marginalization in schools and workplaces (Woolfson 2017). For African migrants, French is simultaneously a tool of mobility — allowing communication and access within an anglophone context — and a marker of difference that complicates integration (Heller 2011). By foregrounding conversations between Cécile and Trésor, the film illustrates how linguistic exchange operates as a practice of urban belonging, generating new solidarities across diverse immigrant populations.

The urban dimension is critical. Cities like Lewiston, once structured around manufacturing economies, now rely on migration for demographic vitality and economic survival (Singer 2015). Yet the success of this transformation depends in part on whether urban institutions — schools, services, cultural organizations — can accommodate linguistic diversity. *The Intersection* shows that such accommodation is not only institutional but also interpersonal: through mutual recognition and everyday linguistic interaction, residents co-construct new forms of community. Cécile's personal journey toward embracing her heritage parallels the city's potential to revalue its multilingual past and present, thereby reframing urban identity in more inclusive terms.

In sum, *The Intersection* provides more than a portrait of two individuals; it dramatizes the entanglement of language and migration in processes of urban change. By linking Franco-American history with contemporary African migration, the film reveals how linguistic practices carry the weight of memory, shape experiences of belonging, and mediate transformations in post-industrial cities. It suggests that urban revitalization is inseparable from linguistic and cultural recognition and that the future of cities like Lewiston may depend on its ability to embrace the multiplicity of voices that inhabit it.

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Where Can I Get Lost? 2023. Directed by **Mattijs van de Port**.

In *Where Can I Get Lost?*, Dutch anthropologist and filmmaker Mattijs van de Port offers his most personal and introspective film to date. Set in Bahia, Brazil, the film follows his quest to understand what it means to "get lost" in the wilderness, in madness, in love, and in faith. Through this journey, van de Port places himself among the "misfits, outcasts, desperados, heretics and perverts", those who long for a world larger than the one they know.

The film unfolds as both an ethnography and a self-portrait, where van de Port's camera wanders through the sensory, affective, and spiritual landscapes of Bahia. Rather than documenting Candomblé or local practices in a detached, anthropological manner, he invites viewers into a world of porous boundaries between belief and disbelief, reason and imagination. This fluid perspective constitutes one of the film's strongest features: it destabilizes the observer's position and replaces the authority of explanation with the humility of wonder.

A particularly compelling dimension of *Where Can I Get Lost?* is its visual and narrative intimacy. Scenes of street vendors, devotees, and ritual life are interwoven with the filmmaker's own reflections on alienation, colonial heritage, and the constrictions of modernity. In doing so, van de Port resists the "voice-of-God" narration so characteristic of essay films. Instead, he foregrounds his uncertainty, questioning both his role as ethnographer and the very notion of cultural authority. This strategy turns the film into a subtle critique of Western epistemologies that still frame the Global South as an object of knowledge rather than as a partner in thought.

From an urban studies perspective, the film contributes a valuable meditation on the city as a space of loss, encounter, and transcendence. Bahia's urban landscapes — markets, backstreets, religious terreiros — are shown as living archives of displacement and resilience. In portraying individuals who inhabit the edges of modernity, the film sheds light on forms of social life that challenge the rational order and material constraints of the contemporary city. Van de Port's sensibility thus aligns with urban anthropology's current interest in affect, embodiment, and the politics of presence.

If the film has a weakness, it might be its tendency toward aestheticization — moments where beauty risks overshadowing analysis. Yet this tension seems deliberate, part of van de Port's ongoing inquiry into what it means to see, feel, and know through images. The result is a poetic ethnography that moves beyond documentation, inviting the viewer to experience disorientation as a form of insight.

Where Can I Get Lost? will appeal to anthropologists, visual researchers, and anyone interested in the intersections between film, faith, and urban experience. It stands as both a deeply personal reflection and a rigorous challenge to the certainties of modern knowledge, a film that, true to its title, asks us not only where we can get lost, but whether we are still capable of doing so.

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Previously Published:

I. Pardo & G.B. Prato, Eds. 2025. ***Forms of Inequality and the Legitimacy of Governance***, 2 volumes

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Palgrave Studies in Urban Anthropology

Half of humanity lives in towns and cities and that proportion is expected to increase in the coming decades. Society, both Western and non-Western, is fast becoming urban and mega-urban as existing cities and a growing number of smaller towns are set on a path of demographic and spatial expansion. Given the disciplinary commitment to an empirically based analysis, anthropology has a unique contribution to make to our understanding of our evolving urban world. It is in such a belief that we have established the Palgrave Studies in Urban Anthropology series. In the awareness of the unique contribution that ethnography offers for a better theoretical and practical grasp of our rapidly changing and increasingly complex cities, the series will seek high-quality contributions from anthropologists and other social scientists, such as geographers, political scientists, sociologists and others, engaged in empirical research in diverse ethnographic settings. Proposed topics should set the agenda concerning new debates and chart new theoretical directions, encouraging reflection on the significance of the anthropological paradigm in urban research and its centrality to mainstream academic debates and to society more broadly. The series aims to promote critical scholarship in international anthropology. Volumes published in the series should address theoretical and methodological issues, showing the relevance of ethnographic research in understanding the socio-cultural, demographic, economic and geo-political changes of contemporary society.

M. Bell & A, Armstrong. 2021. ***A Social History of Sheffield Boxing.*** 2 volumes.

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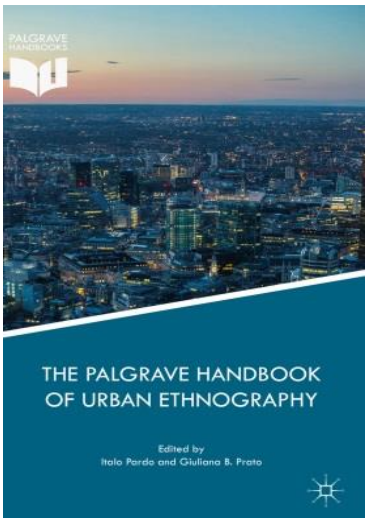
A. Vailati & C. Rial, Eds. 2016
Migration of Rich Immigrants: *Gender, Ethnicity and Class*

I. Lindsay, 2014
Living with London's Olympics: An Ethnography.



Italo Pardo and Giuliana B. Prato (Eds), *The Palgrave Handbook of Urban Ethnography*

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- Encourages reflection on the significance of the anthropological paradigm in urban research and its centrality to mainstream academic debates
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