



## TRACING MULTICULTURAL CITIES FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF WOMEN'S EVERYDAY LIVES



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### Abstract

The article discusses everyday life in multicultural cities from a feminist perspective. It aims to engage, theoretically and through empirical research, with everyday life, a concept which brings to the foreground of inquiry a variety of urban experiences and reveals the mutual constitution of gender and place/space. Everyday life is connected to places where different women and men, as individuals, have to live, think and act (in terms of negotiation and/or reconciliation). They construct their everyday life, their personal identities and relations, drawing upon – and, simultaneously, negotiating with – existing macro-level spatial, temporal and discursive structures/meanings.

In the context of geographical debates, the study of everyday life starts from the subject's

everyday spatio-temporal practices and experiences, aiming to show not only *how* they are organized by socio-spatial relations and structures, but also *how* people's (everyday) actions (re)produce and (trans)form these relations and structures. In this line of thought, space/place is understood as particular constellations of social relations and practices, with local and supralocal determinants, meeting and weaving together in a particular locality. The article will discuss such relations and practices drawing from research in Athens.

**KEY WORDS** ★ everyday life ★ gender ★ Lefebvre  
 ★ neighbourhood ★ women

### Introduction

Cities are the locus of sweeping changes occurred in the context of what we today call 'globalization' and, simultaneously, they play an important role in forming processes related with these changes. Hegemonic discourses around the 'urban question', is articulated around the global–local dichotomy, in which a latent scalar hierarchy prioritizes the global. Cities are seen as nodes in global economic flows on the one hand, and on the other hand in regulatory networks of state power, and as sites of polarization, segmentation and differentiation, but also of important political struggles.

In mainstream theoretical formulations produced in these contexts, attention to wider/global processes and structures, to 'public' aspects of urban development, is often conceived of as the rational and universal inscription and as the main ground for

explanation. These processes are crucial for understanding urban development. However, 'it seems that the "abstract subject" which features in much of this work is in danger of losing its grounding' (Dyck, 2005: 234). What is missing is attention to spatial scales 'below' the level of the urban and of wider, 'institutional' practices, since they ignore scales such as the body, home, neighbourhood, and, consequently, social life and practice and its significance for urban constitution and explanation (Simonsen, 1997).

Most of all, such approaches ignore women's everyday activities, which are seen as 'natural' and given, rather as important social activities and practices. It is not accidental that urban analysis produced in these contexts is articulated around a number of dichotomies – such as public space/private space, paid employment/domestic labour, politics/home life – and focuses almost

exclusively on the first side of these dichotomies (Vaiou, 1992). Such dichotomies constitute the metaphor of the hierarchical opposition between male/female, which is based on biological differences – notably those that refer to the division of labour of procreation and reproduction – and operates as the ‘best founded of collective illusions’ (Bourdieu, 1990) for the formation of Western science/thought (Keller, 1985; de Lauretis, 1986, Harding, 1987; Bordo, 1990; Haraway, 1991).

In this article my aim is to go beyond a dichotomous conception, focusing on the different spatial scales at which the dynamics and diversities of urban life and urban development are constituted. I consider spatial scales as neither hierarchical nor reciprocal but rather as co-existing and complementary, since they are both the product and the component of multiple social relations and practices. My focus on the multiplicity of spatial scales derives from my engagement theoretically and through empirical research with *everyday life* in urban contexts and, concretely, through the research I have done in a neighbourhood of Athens, Petralona, in the context of my thesis, ‘Studying the City through Gendered Dimensions of Everyday Life’. In what follows, I discuss the theme of everyday life from a feminist perspective, drawing upon this research, in order to argue that gender and the city are mutually constituted, and to underline the significance of everyday life for the construction of categories which help to conceive urban space as both ‘peopled and gendered’ (Simonsen and Vaiou, 1996).

### Everyday life

In my work, I try to approach the city through two different perspectives: the perspective of gender, and the perspective of everyday life. These perspectives are mutually constituted and, thus, define the subject matter, my research questions, the method and the methodological tools which I chose to approach them, but also the mode of analysis and interpretation of the research material. Both are linked to beliefs derived from feminist ideas and practices which have demonstrated that gender hierarchies permeate all facets of social life, and also that this realization leads to a different

understanding of social and political life, revealing the gendered dimension of everyday life.

Of course, taking an everyday-life perspective is not something new. Everyday life has been constituted as a topic for social thought since the beginning of 20th century, and it is connected with the cultural innovations of modernity, but also with a different conception of social change produced in the first years after the Russian Revolution, when the concept of the ‘everyday’ was conceived as the ground on which the Revolution must be supported and founded – an approach which is closely connected with thoughts about the ‘philosophy of praxis’ and the critique of orthodox Marxism and social science (Coletti, 1982; Roberts, 1999).

In these contexts, the transformation of politics (political action) into cultural work gave rise to questions about culture, nation and gender. Alexandra Kollontai’s work exemplified these ideas, when, in the 1920s, she wrote about sexuality, marriage and everyday life (Kollontai, 1973; 1977). Gender dimensions of everyday life, however, remained absent from theoretical articulations of the ‘everyday’ until the 1970s.

From another point of view, but sharing the same interest in social change, Henri Lefebvre, aiming to develop a cultural analysis of space and time in modernity, focuses on everyday life in order to reveal both its misery and power, and in so doing he points to ‘everyday life’ as a vital vantage point from which to approach the urban (see, for example, Lefebvre, 1990; 1991a). Contrary to other philosophers, Lefebvre argues that it is a fundamental mistake to abandon the everyday as insignificant and inauthentic. Everyday life is not abstract. It is ‘real life’, the ‘here and now’, the meeting place of the individual and history (Lefebvre, 1990). Focusing on the ‘concrete’ and having always in mind a revolutionary plan which draws from the creative energy included in the everyday, Lefebvre opens the door for the unification of the philosophical discourse with real life, and the unification of the intellectual with the material. In this context, philosophy has a duty to change the everyday (Lefebvre, 1966). He calls ‘meta- philosophy’ the philosophy which has to undertake this duty, a duty which has to ‘start with the analysis of everyday’ in order to get the intellectual tools which every era needs for clarifying itself (Lefebvre, 1966).

For Lefebvre, apart from continuity and recurring series of events following each other, everyday life incorporates also the possibility for rupture, breakdown, crisis and renewal. People's everyday lives are characterized not only by continuous adaptations, but also by collisions with various structures of time and space. Such collisions are related to the contradictory everyday conditions which constitute the base of historical and social consciousness and thus the possibility of individual and collective emancipation. Arguing that people do have the possibility to overcome the alienation of everyday conditions within the very everyday, Lefebvre marks out the political dimension and the revolutionary meaning of the (concept of the) everyday, and underlines its power to influence, consciously or not, the socio-spatial evolutions (Lefebvre, 1991a). For him, the precepts 'change life', 'change society', mean nothing 'without the production of an appropriate space' and without changing the (places of) everyday life (Lefebvre, 1991b). In this context, urban space is understood as situated between the 'close order' and 'distant order' of the society, between the individual or collective practices and wider 'institutional' practices (Lefebvre, 1968).

My work is inspired by and draws more from Lefebvre's writings/ideas about the connection of the everyday and the dynamics of the urban. Moreover, in my analysis, I aim developing an understanding of the mutual constitution of urban space and gender relations. Following Henri Lefebvre, I argue for a concept of everyday life which expresses the ceaseless transfer between private action and a broader range of practices, among different types of action and different levels of consciousness and meaning. Everyday life contains these fluid and dynamic transfers. Thus, attention to the everyday is a way to understand processes and power relations producing diverse experiences and practices and operating at a variety of interlocking socio-spatial scales (Lefebvre, 1991b).

Consequently, the study of everyday life is neither the study of a constant and given situation (Rantalaiho and Heiskanen, 1997; Mavridis, 2004) nor does it necessarily lead only to micro-social level analysis (Vaiou, 2000). In other words, the study of everyday life does not limit theoretical work in the context of what is often considered as 'local' in

understandings of place as bounded and fixed, understandings which ignore the role of human agency in processes under which structural trends are formed and changed.

Unlike approaches which look into the everyday life in negative terms, as a repeated and unchanged grey routine which is not worthy of theoretical engagement, particularly to the extent that it becomes associated with 'feminine' spheres of experience and practices, I argue for a conception of everyday life that refers to the unification of the world of an individual who acts, in terms of consent or resistance, within a set of experiences and practices, within a large number of spheres and crossing spatial scales, from the body and to the global. In this context, the concept of everyday life transcends established dichotomies related to approaches which assume that social life is divided into two parts: the world of regulations and the world of everyday life (Smith, 1987).

Distancing ourselves from these dichotomies is different from placing one field over the other. Approaching the city through an everyday-life perspective is based on the recognition of the mutual constitution of the content of each field, and leads to an understanding of the power relations which define this content. One central issue here is that everyday life is the field of interaction between the unique and the universal, between the local place and the wider world in which it is set, between people's lives and the totality of their activities, practices and strategies, as these develop within the specific relations into which they have been involved during their life course and the social conditions prevalent in their generation and locality (Simonsen and Vaiou, 1996).

In these contexts, everyday life is more than a perspective. It is also a question of methodology. This methodology is connected with the decision to engage with the isolated subject and the socio-spatial structure/organization, and to look explicitly for the nature of their mutual relation. At the same time, this decision is connected with my interest in approaching urban space from a gender perspective, because both the isolated subject and the socio-spatial structure are very important for understanding the ways within which gender and other power relations operate, and the ways within which changes are formed (Scott, 1999).

## The neighbourhood of Petralona

Petralona grew in the interwar period as primarily a working-class residential area, close to a thriving industrial strip on the main road and train link between Athens and Piraeus. The railway line divides the area into two parts (east and west).

The urbanization of Petralona, as of many other areas in Athens, started mainly in the 1920s, through spontaneous settlement by lower-class people who left rural areas and started buying very small plots outside the town plan, where they built illegally. These people started to build illegal houses around the provisional shacks constructed by refugees of the Asia Minor Disaster of 1922 who tried to settle at Petralona and other parts of Greek cities and regions.<sup>1</sup> In this way newcomers managed to cover their own needs and also to establish a shelter for their children:

1922, when we came here, with refugees, Kallisthenous Street didn't have many houses, and all this area was outside the town plan ... At that time, my father had bought this plot for 9.000 drachmas, and he gave it to me as dowry. In the beginning, he made a wooden shack and, afterwards, he built it from inside. In this way, we had two rooms to stay ... Then, my father-in-law came here to make his home, like many others. (Key informant)

By the 1940s, a peculiar 'mosaic' of houses and diverse economic activities could be found in Petralona, whose function depended primarily on the labour of the refugees who settled in this area. Women were the majority of this population, since most of them came and settled in Petralona alone or with their children. As many of their husbands, fathers or brothers as managed to survive Turkish capture joined them after more than two years. By then, women refugees had already built their family shacks by themselves, and had started to work in the industries established in the neighbourhood or close to it, and/or to participate in every economical activity.

As in other parts of the city, the Asia Minor Disaster brought tremendous and long-term modifications to the employment patterns of local women, and generally to their modes of living:

As soon as those women from Asia Minor arrived, the first women of Petralona started to work out of home ... and gradually more women were drawn [in to paid work]. Thus, they started going out. Until then, it

was a shame for Athenian women who lived here to work in factories ... They would not appear outdoors. It was a shame for their men if women appeared outdoors or worked. You saw them only in church or every Sunday strolling in Trion Ieraxon Street. (Key informant)

Residential development in Petralona was again intensified after the Second World War, and especially in the 1950s, when the losers of the Civil War arrived from the Greek provinces (and also to other, more decentralized parts of the capital) in order to avoid the terrorist atmosphere which was maintained by the Right Wing in order to keep itself in power. During this decade, and especially after the construction of the urban railway station at Petralona (1954), increasing numbers of lower-income people came to settle in the area. They were driven by the hope of finding a job in the factories which were established there or in downtown offices and shops, and above all, by the expectation that in this underserved (and therefore cheap) area they would be able to realize the dream of that period: to become home-owners. Thus, the disadvantage of the lack of any infrastructure proved to be an advantage for these groups, making their access to housing feasible.

In the early 1970s development of land properties had already begun to intensify, and the area was attracting construction-oriented investments. Property values have since started to increase, something that had important consequences for urban growth and for the social composition of population in the area. Six and seven-storey apartment blocks started to replace the old family houses, and several people from the middle class started to buy flats in the greater area of Petralona.

Women who went to live in Petralona from the early years of its settlement, but also well after that, found themselves in an environment where the inadequacy of facilities and services made housework a hard and time-consuming chore. At the same time, widespread home ownership, combined with the tight and expensive housing market, made their move to other regions more improbable. Thus, the context of their everyday life was defined, to a large extent, by the jobs and services which existed in their neighbourhood.

Starting my inquires from mundane routine, taken-for-granted activities of women's everyday life

in the home, in the neighbourhood and in the city enables me to explore not only *how* their experiences and practices are defined by engendered socio-spatial relations and structures, but also *how* women's actions (re)produce or (trans)form these relations and structures (see Smith, 1987). The example of Petralona underlines those aspects of everyday life which are constituted around ephemeral daily concerns, the thousand little things that need to be done every day for oneself and for the others. It is in these concerns that I seek to identify the coping strategies along with the seeds of disruption of routine and repetition and negotiation of different daily activities and long-term arrangements, and to understand their role in the changing spheres of economy, politics and culture, at local and global levels; trying, thus, not to 'keep the moments and elements of social practice away from one another' (Lefebvre, 1991b: 366).

Attention to the 'local', therefore, provides a methodological tool for investigating individual action within a specific, spatio-temporally structured society; to understand the mutual relationship of the individual with the social, of the social with the spatial and of the local with the global, as well as to investigate the identities, modes of life and perceptions of the subjects of research, through the qualitative analysis of the material gathered in the field.

In this context, the choice of women's life-histories as a methodological tool is connected directly to the purpose of approaching the experiences, everyday practices, strategies and meanings of women who live in Petralona, and of studying these factors as important levels for the shaping of everyday life in this area and the city as a whole and, consequently, for the constitution of the area and the city itself. Thus, women's life-histories help me to approach and interpret social relations and processes connected to important urban questions such as production processes and their change over time, the geographical distribution of workplaces, of public services and social infrastructures, and the development of housing, commercial and leisure areas.

The decision to focus on women's experiences and everyday practices leads me to a methodological approach which proceeds through different levels of abstraction such as the description of women's lives, a qualitative analysis of their lives, focused on paid work, unpaid work (care for the family) and leisure,

and the development of conceptual dimensions by the help of which urban development and women's roles in the making of the city are approached and interpreted.

Theoretically this method is connected with an understanding of *everyday life* which comes close to Lefebvre's ideas: as a 'fundamentally political and historical, collective and social citation created by the continuous interaction between individual and collective history. Here, women (and men) are not conceived as isolated individuals exclusively – a conception which very often implies pathetic individuals – but rather through their integration along with global correlations, with the multiple social contexts along which the individual has to think, act and live. In this context, women are conceived of as 'a gendered and heteronomous subject (subject in the two senses of the term: both subject-ed to social constraint and yet subject in the active sense of maker as well as user of culture, intent on self-definition and self-determination) and [as] a subject that is initially defined by its consciousness of oppression (of multiple oppression)' (de Lauretis, 1986: 10).

## Women's experiences and everyday practices

### *Paid work*

Participation in paid work is an important category in women's lives, often connected with family needs. Paid work is a major element for the formation of their everyday lives, comprising not only a means for acquiring income, but also an important activity which acts as the base on which individual systems of meaning and personal identity are formed.

My family is very important for me ... but if I had no job I would be a half human being. (Elpida, interviewed in 2001, 39 years old, worker in local industry, married with two children aged 11 and 15.)

Young women today cannot imagine themselves without a job. The same holds for the women who were born, matured or settled at this region before the 1970s, during a period when lower-income groups were the majority of its population. These

women see the world around them struggling to create options, which can form a framework of security and help face future and unforeseen difficulties. In this world, the presence of the working mother is quite prominent. This helps women to shape a class consciousness and realize their position as women. It is not a coincidence that almost all the women who were born and raised in this region from the interwar period until the 1960s did not quit their jobs when they got married and had children. The survival strategies of these women are deeply rooted into the 'accumulated experience of the place'.

During the period of research (1999–2002), very few women did not have a job, while only one of them had never worked for pay until then. Almost half of them are involved in informal activities and forms of work. Some earn an income as salespersons, domestic helpers and childminders, or by teaching private courses at home. None of them declares herself as 'economically active', or has any transactions with the official tax and social security services.

Among those who do not declare themselves as economically active are included women who work in family businesses. The fact that these women do paid work was revealed through descriptions of their everyday life. Sometimes they explicitly stated it, by recognizing themselves as someone who is employed without enjoying any benefits.

If I worked the same hours elsewhere, I would have gathered a whole host of working days towards insurance and I would have saved my own money. (Nadia, interviewed in 2001, 45 years old, married, with two children aged 19 and 16.)

Another category of women who have informal jobs is homeworkers. Their employers are subcontractors and small manufacturers, some of them working in retail in the same area. More than half the women were occupied in this type of job for a long time, while one of them was still working in this way during the research period. These women believe that this type of job is the only solution to the problem of earning an income and at the same time taking care of their children. However, 'meeting production quota at home' is a painful, time-consuming and pressing job, hardly to be combined with the care of children. It is not

accidental that the woman who worked in this way during the research period used the help of her aunt, with whom she shared the care of children together with a large part of the piecework.

Women take an ambivalent attitude towards home working, and generally towards atypical and undeclared jobs. Even though they consider their paid work as an important part of their personal identity, and also recognize that the income they earn from it is essential for family survival, they consider such jobs as temporary, as something they do 'until they will be able to overcome the financial difficulties' of their household.

For women who do not have a paid job there is a great awareness of the impact of this fact on their position in the family, their ability to negotiate their relationship with their partner, and generally on how other members of their family evaluate and treat them. Although they acknowledge that quitting a job (or never having tried to find one) is a 'forced choice', they still have a clear view of the causes which legitimate their decision, and consider as most important the lack of (child)care services in the area.

I got married at the age of 18, so I did not have the chance to work. I do not regret about my husband. He is a nice fellow. But I feel that I have to ask his opinion for everything I do [...] From the moment you have children, you *always* think how to do the best for them ... How can I send them to kindergarten? Have you seen what the kindergartens of our neighbourhood look like? Prisons! No courtyards, no nothing ... with one carer to look after 35 kids, perhaps more ... You may tell me that when the children reach 18, you will be less than 40. But, can you do at 40 what you would have done at 20? On the other hand, the kids will always need your help. They will always be your immediate priority. This way, years will go by and I will not have lived my life for my self. (Sofia, interviewed in 2000, 27 years old, married, with two children aged 8 and 6.)

### *Family*

Most of the women's everyday life is dedicated to the children, especially when they are very young (under 10 or 12 years old) and need to be taken to and from school, or to various after-class activities not offered in public schools. Almost all the women undertake these escorting trips and help children

with their homework, while very few men are involved with such activities.

Individual responsibility for the upbringing of children is especially burdened by the inadequacy of child-care services, a fact which characterizes the area in qualitative and quantitative terms. Thus, the lack of appropriate spaces, the time schedules, and the conditions of operation of these services demand particular arrangements for child care when the mothers of very young children want to find an out-of-home job.

The majority of the women who participated in the research mentioned that they were the ones who were exclusively responsible for the housework, while in several cases the mother of the woman interviewed was sharing with her the responsibility and the house chores. In contrast to older women who have accepted that 'housekeeping is a woman's job', for the younger ones the gender division of labour at home is a subject of everyday negotiation.

I ask him to spend a little time with our son ... It is always me the one who has to remind him of his responsibilities. (Anna, 39 years old, interviewed in 2000, accountant for large private firm, married, with two children aged 10 and 14.)

In some households there is some division of labour, but when men undertake a task, this is usually a shared responsibility and not something they inescapably have to do. Usually, their role is supplementary: they just 'help' with things which are regarded as 'a woman's responsibility and obligation', and almost always, after they are asked to do so. This holds for household chores as well as for child care.

In higher-income households, women are led to the decision of hiring another woman to clean the house. Some women decide to send their children to private schools and day nurseries which offer longer time schedules and school bus transport. This decision does not depend exclusively on the financial situation of the family but also on the importance they attribute to paid work, an attitude which is not independent of the conditions which prevail in their generation and place.

However, most of the women have to rely on public services and on the help provided by their relatives who live in the neighbourhood. Household chores – like cooking, child care, washing clothes

and ironing – are often undertaken by their mothers, even when they do not live in the same house. In fact, to most of the women who participated in the research, proximity to their relatives and mainly their parents, along with property ownership or inheritance, are major factors influencing their choice to live in the area. It is characteristic that three women, even if they had the opportunity to move to a 'better' house in another area, would prefer to live in Petralona because of the help they could get from their parents.

This help is reciprocal: when parents grow old, they in turn need help from their daughters. The women who provide that help face many difficulties when trying to manage their everyday schedule to their advantage. This reciprocal relationship has different consequences in a broad range of these women's activities: from finding a 'normal' job to being totally excluded from social life and access to leisure.

### *Leisure*

For the women who participated in the research, 'leisure' as time free from paid work, is at best limited and at worst non-existent. Their perceptions about leisure time are full of contradictions and ambiguities, while at the same time these perceptions are largely defined by the constraints which are set by the devaluation of housework and the morality of care. For many women, 'caring for others' is a priority which limits their 'freedom' and consequently their access not only to paid work – to a 'normal' job – but also to 'personal leisure time'. It is not coincidental that almost all the women perceive their homes as a workspace, while some of them who are employed believe that they 'find their freedom' at work and regard their jobs as 'shelters' from the worries of home and family.

It was clear from the narratives of the women that their greater access to leisure time occurs after graduation from high school and before getting married. This period is very short since most women got married before they are 25 years old. Older women hesitate to go out especially after dark. Thus, when they have the opportunity, they exchange visits at the houses of their friends who live in the neighbourhood.

After marriage, going out alone or with personal friends is a decision scarcely taken. On the one hand, women's time is constrained by the responsibilities and obligations of their new household. On the other hand, their desire to amuse themselves by getting out alone or with their friends is discouraged by their partners, who indirectly or by using violence lead them to self-restriction at home. For women with children, the ways in which they use space and time are defined by their obligations at home and by the schedules of the children. It is characteristic that almost all of them regard outings with the children to the parks and squares of the area as an activity belonging to their own leisure time. At these places they meet other women who escort their children too. Thus, a local network of women neighbours is born spontaneously, where women exchange information and ideas for everyday issues and arrangements.

When the children grow up and do not need full-time care, their mothers have grown as well and have already become accustomed to the inertia of domestic life.

I don't ever remember when I last went out on my own or with my friends. When the kids were small, I did not have time. Now I don't feel like it. (Gianna, interviewed in 2000, 51 years old, self-employed, married, with two children aged 19 and 17.)

However, their husbands continue to go out with their friends, to visit the recreation spaces of the area, and to occupy themselves with their personal interests after they finish work. It is a usual sight when, every afternoon, all the coffee houses of the region are full of men who play cards or talk loudly. In these places it is a rare thing to see a woman alone or with her friends, and never on a working day.

Most of the women regard their difficulties to control their daily schedule and find 'free time' for themselves as the main reasons why they stopped (or never began) their participation in local activities and cultural organizations.

Many women said that in order to escape the monotony of everyday life, they choose to go shopping. This activity does not always need special scheduling, and at the same time it is acceptable in the social milieu since it is part of domestic work. However, this activity is often an occasion to meet other women from the neighbourhood, or to go

shopping downtown. For these women, shopping and consuming offer them the opportunity to enter and exercise their power in the much-frequented spaces of their area and the city, but mainly the chance to escape from home and develop their creativity and imagination.

I love to go shopping [...] It is a way to go out, to let go of family worries. (Georgia, interviewed in 2000, 39 years old, lecturer in technological institute, married, with two children aged 8 and 10.)

Access to public leisure places and spaces, to the crowded streets, to the cafés, the theatres and the shops of the area and, mainly, of the downtown, is a field of negotiation for all women. There they have the opportunity to develop alternative self-definitions and identities, and to expand their horizons beyond the restrictions which are set by their homes and workplaces. Besides, the city is not only a place of work, either at home or at the workplace. It is at the same time a space of opportunities, of anonymity and amusement, where women (some with more difficulty than others) have the chance to try new roles and to get involved in activities completely different to those which are connected to family and employment.

### *Crossing the boundaries*

Life-histories of women reveal that, despite their differences, they have in common the plurality of their everyday activities and of the ways in which they manage to combine them. The patterns of their everyday lives contain processes and relations which cannot be placed into the dualistic classifications – like workplace/home, work time/leisure and public/private – which permeate the established approaches of urban life.

Categories such as 'paid work', 'family' and 'leisure' are socio-spatial spheres which, in women's everyday lives are interwoven and directly and mutually influence each other. They were separately examined in order to reveal the conflicting realities of women, and the ways in which they try to redefine relations of dominance and subordination in each one of these realities.



Women's narratives clearly demonstrated that they are not passive victims, but individuals who struggle to cope with the constraints of their everyday lives and, at the same time, to change them. Attempting to combine, temporally and spatially, activities related to all the spheres of social life, these women develop strategies which are not only defined by the city, but at the same time constitute an important component of its development (Simonsen and Vaiou, 1996; Vaiou, 2000).

Women's strategies and everyday practices are not fixed and monolithic concepts. They are acts of resistance against hegemonic constructions which form the terms of women's access to paid work, public services of care, housing and leisure, to all aspects of urban life. Their location decisions are part of these strategies. These kinds of strategies are connected to certain traditions of home ownership and property, as occurs, for example, in the cases of women whose access to housing depended on their parents' decision to reconstruct their homes in order to make them suitable for settlement by future generations. Of course, strategies of housing acquisition are influenced by the urban housing market and the distribution of tenure types. But, at the same time, they influence these dimensions by the way in which families acquire their housing and seek to shape their environment in accordance with their changing needs.

The same is true for work strategies which are (almost) always closely connected to the family. In Petralona, a lot of women are or have been employed for a long period of their life cycle in irregular types of work, in order to organize the time of their everyday lives and to combine different everyday activities related to 'family obligations' (care and domestic work) with paid employment. This has to do partly with the dominance of small – mainly family – businesses in the urban economy, and partly with the poor provision of care. It is not a coincidence that S. Palco, the last factory to 'leave' Petralona, employed mainly women who lived in the area, a labour force which, through its low labour cost, offered to this factory and to many other local factories and small firms the possibility of resisting for many years the intense fluctuations of the economy and the increasing pressures of global competition. Thus, the local labour market is both a precondition and an outcome of women's work strategies.

In a similar way, strategies of care are both a precondition and an outcome of the family-centred model, which prevails in the Greek welfare system. By prioritizing monetary assistance to families, this system has left many services to be accommodated within the family; in practice these services are rendered by women, whose labour remains classified as love and not 'real' work. At the same time, such strategies contribute to the permanence of local networks, the presence of which was even stronger in the early years of neighbourhood settlement when (older) women had to share the difficulties of survival without even the most basic facilities and services such as water supply and electricity. However, these networks have limited the power of collective movements and activities demanding the right to social services of care, which is especially prominent in Petralona as in many other Greek urban neighbourhoods.

Women's strategies are defined by gender, geography and history, since they correlate to gendered institutional practices and the gendered constitution of a specific, spatially and temporally structured society. Certain strategies remain constant even when their objective conditions of existence are modified. Others are transformed or replaced by new ones, following broader, even global, changes such as those connected with restructurings of the global economy, the dominance of neo-liberal policies and the reconstitution of space at greater geographical scales. These changes contribute simultaneously to challenge and/or reproduce local cultural systems, and to redefine or maintain specific institutional practices, which are directly connected with the urban development.

## Conclusions

The example of Petralona indicates that approaching the city through a gendered and everyday-life perspective contributes to understanding the dynamic process of its constitution. In this process, socio-spatial and temporal practices and meanings of women and men interlock and interact with various socio-spatial and temporal regulations connected with urban development, within which women and men are involved in their everyday routines. In this context, gender relations and identities are

reproduced and reconstituted, together with the reproduction and reconstitution of the urban environment of which they are part.

Women who participated in the research draw upon different local culture systems as well as gender and class relations and ideologies, in order to give meaning to personal events, activities and relations. At the same time, they refuse to comply with traditional expectations – a fact which could be interpreted as a result of the multiplicity and heterogeneity of city life. In any case, the complex and contradictory sets of their experiences, their acts and meanings, their relations and hopes, related to changes and events which take place in different spatial scales (from the body and the neighbourhood to the global), have an important role to play. Gender ideologies and relations are continuously renegotiated and redefined. Renegotiation and redefinition can be a process of radical change, which is particularly important from the point of view of women who have to cope with what they seek to change while struggling to change it (Simonsen and Vaiou, 1996).

From the initial stages of the development of Petralona as a neighbourhood, women's experiences are practically and symbolically formed through their efforts to bridge public/private dichotomies, their struggle to change whatever in the area does not correspond to their changing priorities. It is characteristic that, between the interwar period (when Petralona started to be constituted as a neighbourhood) and the beginning of the 21st century (when the research ends), women's lives and identities have changed in many ways. In the 1920s we saw them claim their right to public space working outside the home, as women refugees did first. And, during the last years of the 20th century, we see that women's opportunities to be involved in the public life of the city are constantly broadened, mainly through activities which are more connected to paid work and education than to leisure and participation in community affairs. As a result, important redefinitions of women's (and men's) identities, of gender relations, of 'we' and 'others' and of the urban environment of which they form part, have taken place.

The neighbourhood of Petralona, like many other neighbourhoods, is 'an ever-shifting constellation of trajectories' (Massey, 2005: 151). It is in many ways open and provisional rather than bounded, fixed and

static. This kind of place is open to contestation and to different readings by individuals and groups who have differently constructed boundary experiences and preoccupations. In this 'sense of place' most places, and Petralona as such, are 'meeting places' of histories of multiple cultural groups, since 'even their "original inhabitants" usually came from somewhere else' (Massey, 1998: 171).

## Note

- <sup>1</sup> In 1922, 1.4m refugees from Asia Minor came to Greece as a result of the forcible exchange of populations which took place after the First World War. At the end of this decade, the population constituted one-third of the total population of Athens.

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