

# Acknowledging gentrification through media art

## A bibliometric review and research agenda

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### ABSTRACT

Gentrification has gained significant attention in recent years due to the noticeable demographic, economic, social, architectural, and infrastructure changes occurring in urban areas. These transformations are often driven by an influx of people with higher socio-economic status, who may completely or partially replace the working-class population. Media art has emerged as an important medium for representing the complex social and cultural processes associated with gentrification. This study examines the research landscape of media art concerning gentrification by conducting a comprehensive bibliometric analysis of the field over the past 30 years, supplemented by data visualization. The analysis of the 80 data consisting of high-quality peer-reviewed publications retrieved from the Scopus and Web of Science databases reveals that this scientific field is relatively unexplored but has gained a growing international interest during the past decade. This interest is reflected in the attention given by various international journals, conferences, and books. Results also suggest that seven countries are leading the development of the field worldwide, accounting for more than three-quarters of publications. The evolution of themes on the subject is identified for distinct periods, and key themes are discussed according to their relevance and development degrees, concluding several future research directions that need critical international attention to advance this scientific field.

### KEYWORDS

Gentrification, media art, co-creation, art-based research, community

## Introduction

### Gentrification and local community

Gentrification has come to the fore in recent years through the representative occurrence of demographic, economic, social, architectural and infrastructural changes in urban areas occupied by the influx of people with higher socio-economic status, replacing or displacing (totally or partially) the working class (Raya-Tapia et al., 2024). The original term *gentrification*, coined in 1964, is attributed to the British sociologist Ruth Glass (1912-1990) as a process of changing the urban landscape by the occupation of the middle and upper middle classes in the center of London through the expulsion of the local community, mainly the working class (Smith, 1982, 1996).

This process has been consolidated as a social phenomenon, based on the analysis of Scottish geographer Neil Smith (1954-2012), who argues that the arrival of high-income earners in some urban regions is due to the private interest of capital investment in the respective geographical areas, coming from various financial organizations, such as construction companies, as well as real estate, commerce, among others, in the process of inverted calculation, that is, it is first devalued to later become an investment that focuses on attracting residents that enable increased financial returns (Alcântara, 2018).

American sociologist Sharon Zukin (1982) combined the *sociocultural* and *economic* perspectives in this context by investigating the transformation of old warehouses and industrial buildings in New York's SoHo into residential lofts and studios by various personalities in the arts (among other intellectuals). The author observed that SoHo would become one of the most valued areas in New York, following the process of requalification of the buildings by changing the usability of the spaces, following the expansion of tourism and the property sector (among other potential investments).

On this basis, gentrification is a complex urban process that involves the transformation of neighborhoods, generally more degraded or working class, into areas of greater socioeconomic value. It can be considered a phenomenon that is not only restricted to changes in physical space but also causes a reconfiguration of local communities' social, cultural and identity dynamics.

In this context, the intersection with media art, as a form of contemporary expression, could play a crucial role in the way gentrification is represented, experienced, understood and interpreted.

## Media art as a tool for socio-community representation

Through media art and design in the most diverse formats, such as digital productions (interactive installations, sound art, video mapping, performances, animation, generative art and extended realities), it is possible to give visibility to gentrification parameters often invisible or underestimated in conventional discussions.

Art and design not only serve as means of communication and publication but also as tools for critical reflection on the impact of gentrification on the populations affected. Documentaries such as *The Pruitt-Igoe Myth* (2011), by Chad Freidrichs, record the history of the collapse of social housing in St. Louis (Missouri, USA), which like many other urban housing areas, both past and present, is being torn between property speculation, gentrification and the desire to live in the city. *Dystopia* (2021), by the director Tiago Afonso, follows the urban transformations in the city of Porto over thirteen years (2007-2020), with the expulsion of different groups from the city, such as the Bacelo gypsy community, the population of the Aleixo neighborhood or the vendors of the Vandoma Fair. Also, the book *RENOVICTION: The True Cost of Gentrification* (2024), by Myles Bradley, explores the social consequences of the process in several global cities, are examples that explore urban transformations and their consequences for the local residents of the areas involved, often highlighting the struggle to preserve memory and cultural identity. At a national level, Portuguese artists have also created works for Porto's Ribeira that are a reflection of the social inhalation of local communities, such as the *Ribeira Negra* tile panel (1986) by the painter Júlio Resende, located at the end of the Ribeira tunnel and the sculpture *Cubo* (1983) by José Rodrigues, located in Praça da Ribeira, as well as the tile mosaic *À Cidade* (1998) by Porto painter and architect Fernando Lanhas, located at the top left of the Ribeira tunnel. More recently, some social media works, in platforms such as Instagram, Facebook and YouTube have been used to promote social activism and the creation of participatory spaces to reflect on the theme of gentrification (Barbosa & Lopes, 2020; Polson, 2022).

Media art contributes to broadening the debate on gentrification by connecting with the issue to aid cultural resistance, community empowerment and the creation of inclusive spaces. By exploring gentrification through art and design, media offers a form of symbolic resistance, highlighting the social and economic complexity of urban transformation.

Media art has proven to be important for representing complex social and cultural processes such as gentrification. According to Fiske (1990), the mass media, which convey messages aimed at the general public (such as the press, radio, television, and posters, among others) are not a simple

reflection of reality but rather a territory of debate between dominant and alternative narratives, in which artistic insertion can be representative from the point of view of the visual arts, performing essential values in the construction of meanings about gentrification.

Gentrification, which is often invisible or distorted in its official representations, finds a *stage space* in media art, which allows the inherent problematisation to be raised. The work of artists, designers, filmmakers, directors and photographers, among others, who portray the realities of gentrified neighbourhoods, can contribute to a more critical reading of the process.

## Research frame

The present study is framed as an initial stage of an emerging action research project based on art-based methodology, aiming to provide an overview of the scientific literature production on gentrification and topics addressed through a media art perspective over the years. To this end, a bibliometric technique was undertaken for being widely recognised by the scientific community to investigate the evolution of manifold topics associated with arts and humanities by analysing related scholarly literature (Hoai et al., 2021). More specifically, the following research questions frame this study: 1) How has scientific production related to gentrification and media arts evolved over the years?; 2) What are the main themes addressed in this scientific field by the international scientific community?; and 3) What are the most important themes and future trends linked to gentrification and media arts?

This paper is organised into four sections. After the introduction with a brief literature review on gentrification and media art, it is presented a detailed description of the data source, sample, research tools and methods. Next, the bibliometric analysis results are presented in detail, focusing mainly on the overview of the scientific production, primary sources of publication, thematic evolution and thematic map of the field. The paper concludes with the main findings and implications, along with a discussion of the limitations and suggestions for future research to advance this area of study.

## Methodology

For this study, bibliometric methods were used together with the Bibliometrix R-toll software to enhance data visualisation and reveal a holistic view of scholarly production in the scientific field of media art and gentrification. This methodology was selected for its globally recognised effectiveness and acceptance in visualising several research fields' qualitative and quantitative evolution (Aria & Cuccurullo, 2017).

The data collection process took place in January 2025 and consisted of several steps. Initially, the keywords to include in the research equation were carefully considered based on other studies published in the field, to ensure a comprehensive search within the study's main topics, resulting in the following research equation: "gentrification" AND ("art" OR "arts" OR "artist\*") AND ("technolog\*" OR "media"). Next, the data was sourced from SCOPUS and Web of Science (WoS) databases, well-known and widely used in academia, including arts and humanities (Zhu & Liu, 2020), for their representativeness and relevance to the subject under investigation. Given that the main goal was to provide a comprehensive overview of the field, both in terms of core research areas and temporal range, it was decided not to restrict the search in terms of temporal space, document type, language, or subject areas. This process enabled the identification and creation of a database of 110 publications, comprising 69 from SCOPUS and 41 from WoS. After that, 28 duplicate records and two editorial publications were removed, resulting in a final database of 80 publications suitable for the bibliometric analysis.

## Results

By analyzing the final database (n=80), the results show it encompasses 69 different sources, involving the contributions from 130 authors, of which 46 are authors of single-authored documents. This last aspect reveals that more than one-third (35.4%) of the scholarly publications in the field were not accomplished collaboratively, scoring an average of 1.64 authors per document. Among the 64.6% of the publications with more than one author, it is noted that the international co-authorship rate is only 6.25%. Furthermore, each document is 7.06 years old on average, accomplishing an average number of citations per document of 15.89.

## Overview of the scientific production

Figure 1 presents the temporal evolution of publications by document type and yearly evolution. Although the first article on this topic was published in 1992, it is evident that until 2006, there were almost no publications (n=3). An increase in the number of publications (n= 24) occurred between 2007 and 2017, corresponding to 30%, but it was from 2018 onwards that it was registered a considerable advancement in this field (n=53 publications), representing about 66% of the scientific production. During this period, it should also be noted that a peak of publications (n=13) was registered in 2024, and 2022 was the year with the lowest number of scientific outputs (n=3). On average, the annual growth rate between 1992 and 2024 was 8.35%, demonstrating an increasing global trend of scholarly publications in media art linked to gentrification issues.

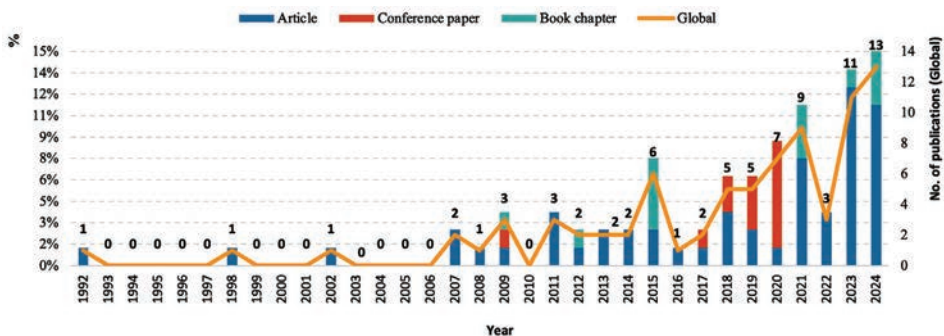


Figure 1 – Yearly evolution of publications by document type and total publications.

In addition, when considering the type of the documents published (i.e., articles, conference papers or book chapters), it shows that the vast majority of publications over time represent articles in journals (66.3%), 17.5% are book chapters, and 16.3% are conference papers. It should also be highlighted that conference papers and book chapters were only to be published in 2009, after more than 15 years since the first publication in this scientific field. Moreover, there has been an evident growth of these two publication types in the last ten years (since 2015), with the last indexed conference papers being published in 2020.

Still concerning the analyzed scientific production, it was also identified a total of 24 countries related to scientific production, representing the following the top 5 countries with a larger volume of publications: United States of America (32.5%), Canada (11.3%), United Kingdom (8.8%), Germany and Spain (representing 7.5%, each), and Australia and Netherlands (each country representing 5%). Collectively, these seven countries represent 77.6% of the total output. It is stressed that no publications regarding media art and gentrification were registered in Portugal – where the action research project is being developed, representing this paper as the first national publication in the field to the best of the author’s knowledge. Among the most relevant institutions working in this area are pointed out: the University of British Columbia Vancouver (Canada, eight publications), the Universidad Complutense de Madrid (Spain, four publications), the Erasmus University Rotterdam (Netherlands) and the Capital Normal University (China) both with three publications.

## Main sources

The most representative sources, with a higher number of publications on the subject of media arts linked to gentrification, are presented in Table 1, accounting for approximately 23.8% of the sampled scientific indexed outputs. Among these eight highly relevant sources for the field, two are books, and the others are journals, indicating that any academic conference stands out in this specific area.

The “International Journal of Urban and Regional Research”, with an impact factor (IF) of 2.7, was the leading source contributor to research in the area since 1998, presenting, however, only four articles. Next, the “Space and Culture” international journal (IF=1) had three publications since 2021, followed by four other international journals, each with two articles: “Cities” (IF=6), “Urban Studies” (IF=4.2), “City, Culture and Society” (IF=4), and “Street Art and Urban Creativity” (IF=1.63). Concerning the books, there were registered two publications in both the “International Encyclopedia of Human Geography” and “Sonic Rebellions: Sound and Social Justice”.

## Thematic evolution

Figure 2 illustrates the thematic evolution of the scientific field, organized according to the most representative periods of scientific production discussed before. From its analysis, it can be noted that the first ten years of publications (i.e., between 1992 and 2002) covered terms mainly relating to “city” and “cultural” aspects. As previously mentioned, the publications began to become increasingly frequent during the next 15 years, and between 2007 and 2017, the prior central terms converged into “media”, adding a new one related to “public”. In its turn, the scientific field of gentrification and media arts began to further develop between the years 2019 and 2021, resulting in four thematic clusters deriving from earlier concepts: the “media” topic unfolds into “urban”, “spaces” and “rights”, while the thematic linked to “public” branched off into “urban” and “analysis” topics. From the year 2022 forward, publications in the scientific field developed under nine new themes, indicating not only the growing interest in the subject within the scientific community but also

Source	Source type	Publications (n)	Impact Factor (IF)
International Journal of Urban and Regional Research	Journal	4	2.7
Space and Culture	Journal	3	1.0
Cities	Journal	2	6.0
Urban Studies	Journal	2	4.2
City, Culture and Society	Journal	2	4.0
Street Art and Urban Creativity	Journal	2	1.63
International Encyclopedia of Human Geography	Book	2	—
Sonic Rebellions: Sound and Social Justice	Book	2	—

Table 1 – Most important sources, number of publications and impact factor.

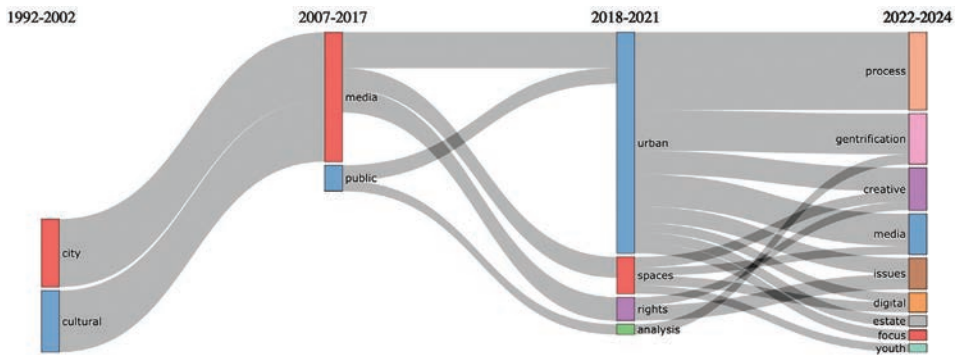


Figure 2 – Thematic evolution diagram of the field (1992-2024). Source: Bibliometrix R-tool output.

its progress to distinct extents, focusing above all on themes concerning: “process”, “gentrification”, “creative”, “media”, “issues”, “digital”, “estate”, “focus” and “youth”.

## Thematic map

A thematic map was created using authors’ keywords to provide an overview and analyze the primary themes that drive advancements in the field of knowledge. This map reveals 12 key clusters (C), as illustrated in Figure 3, whose size is proportional to the frequency of keywords of the analyzed documents. It is important to note that some clusters overlap and are not visible in the figure, which will be discussed in further detail next.

From its analysis, it becomes evident that 3 clusters represent the motor themes having dominant importance to the progress of the research domain, namely: (C1) “placemaking”, “urban transformation”, “urban regeneration” and “Chinatown”; (C2) “urban art” and “Madrid”; and (C3) “gentrification”, “art”, “creative city” and “tourism”. Regarding this last theme (tourism), it should be highlighted that the authors’ research revolved essentially around the impacts that tourism and overtourism have been having in several geographies, as well as on promoting different forms of tourism, such as urban tourism, cultural tourism, creative tourism and mural tourism (also known as street-art tourism). Three other clusters, with high centrality but less development, appear overlaid in terms of relevance and development degrees, encompassing the following themes: (C4) “social media”, (C5) “DIY – Do it Yourself” open design trend, and (C6) “Poland”.

Additionally, six different clusters are positioned in quadrants representing lower degrees of relevance despite their degree of maturation. For the case of niche themes located in the upper-left quadrant, it can be concluded that (C7) “public space”, “participation”, “place” and “public

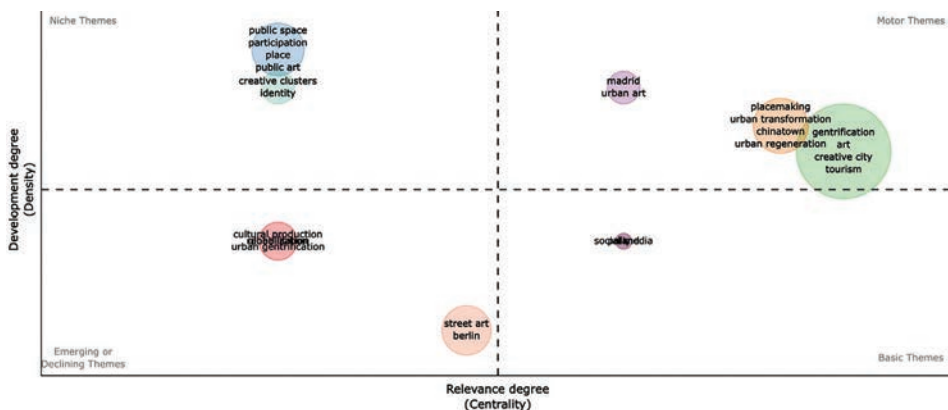


Figure 3 – Thematic map with the resulting 12 clusters from the screened scientific publications. Source: Bibliometrix R-tool output.

art”, and (C8) “creative clusters” and “identity” subjects represent very specialized themes linked to media art and gentrification. Conversely, four clusters are positioned in the quadrant of emerging or declining themes, namely (C9) “street art” and “Berlin”, (C10) “cultural production” and “urban gentrification”, (C11) “rehabilitation”, and (C12) “globalization”.

## Conclusions

This study evaluated scientific literature on the topic of gentrification from the perspective of media art, providing a comprehensive analysis and understanding of this emerging field.

To the best of the authors’ knowledge, this topic has not been previously explored through bibliometric analysis, providing multiple theoretical insights and future research hotspots that can advance the discussion and the emergence of new research and artworks about gentrification in the context of media art.

First, the descriptive analysis conducted concerning the scientific production allowed to conclude that the first article on this specific topic was only published in 1992, despite the debate on gentrification dating back to the 1960s. Compared to other topics in the broader field of media arts, and considering that research started to gain some traction just in 2007 and significant progress after 2015, it reveals that this area is potentially still in its infancy, although the past five years evidenced a growing international interest from the scientific community. This is also verified when analysing the number of publications by document type, concluding that articles in journals (mainly in the *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, and *Space and Culture*) represent about 66.3% of the total publications, and two recent books showed to be references in the field (i.e., *International Encyclopedia of Human*

Geography, and Sonic Rebellions: Sound and Social Justice). However, the lack of international collaboration was evident and is potentially a critical factor explaining this area's slow development.

Next, when investigating the key topics worked internationally, it was concluded that the main themes addressed have evolved over the years, focusing until 2017 on aspects linked to cities, culture, media and the public. More recently, since 2018, the focus has shifted towards urban spaces, rights, gentrification, issues, processes and media, among others less expressive.

However, from a broader perspective, the leading themes for advancing the scientific field were gentrification, art, creative cities, tourism, urban art, placemaking, urban transformation, and urban regeneration. It was also concluded that specific regions served as a focus for research themes, namely Chinatown, Madrid, Berlin, and Poland. Nevertheless, two themes showed being very important for the field's progress but not well developed (i.e., social media and DIY – Do it Yourself), therefore representing the first (1) suggestion for conducting future research linked to gentrification and media arts. As part of this study's conclusions, other suggestions for future research impose for generating a more prolific global impact on the field: (2) develop further studies with more extensive collaboration between scholars and institutions, both on national and international levels; (3) adopt participatory methodologies to promote the community participation, co-creation and the inclusion of their insights and living experiences regarding this topic; and (4) investigate which artistic forms are being used to capture the impacts of gentrification on local communities and the urban landscape.

Although the results from this study, some limitations should be acknowledged in interpreting them. The sample of publications included is limited to two scientific databases (Scopus and Web of Science), which, despite being considered among the most comprehensive in the field of arts, may overlook relevant records not indexed within them, leading to an incomplete understanding of the global panorama. Another limitation typical for studies of this nature regards the search terms, though carefully pondered by the authors to achieve a broad overview of the field. Lastly, it is stressed that bibliometric analysis focuses mainly on quantitative indicators, which limits the understanding of the details and complexities of the subject, so the next stage of the research will encompass a qualitative analysis of the article content.

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