Controlling the urban fabric. The complex game of distance and proximity in European upper-middle classes' residential strategies

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Abstract:
Without challenging the validity of the analysis of processes of urban secession, or the importance of gentrification processes in contemporary European cities, this article argues that inter-group social dynamics in the urban space are generally more complex than extreme mutual avoidance, or the colonisation of neighbourhoods by the wealthiest groups. By analysing the residential strategies of urban upper-middle class managers in some European metropolitan areas through in-depth semi-structured interviews we argue that these groups develop complex strategies of proximity and distance in relation to other social groups. The development of these "partial exit" strategies takes place through specific combinations of practices which allow these groups to select the dimensions they are willing to share with other social groups, as well as those for which they prefer a more segregated social environment for themselves and their families. The responses of our interviewees are consistently more nuanced and complex than any simplistic theory about their drive to secede from society, forcing us to develop more sophisticated conceptual frameworks to account for the growing prevalence of multilayered identities and spheres of reference and solidarity; specific combinations of elective segregation and local involvement; and more active patterns of mobility combined with local embeddedness.

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This article deals with what has become a central question in urban research: which are upper middle classes' residential choices, and what consequences have those choices for cities and the urban fabric? Are they flying away into isolated gated communities, or are they colonising working class neighbourhood in city centres? Those questions are central to understanding the dynamics of inequalities and segregation, as well as the ways through which upper middle classes use their resources to shape cities and to exclude other groups.

Research on European cities has long stressed the making of bourgeois neighbourhoods and the long term influence and investment of upper social strata in city centres (Pinol, 2003; Benevolo, 1993; Berengo, 1999; Burtenshaw, 1991). This is in part linked to the fact that European cities have not been traditionally dominated by the working class, and the residential areas of subordinated social groups were in most cases located in the periphery. Although European cities, like their US counterparts, have also been changed by long term dynamics of suburbanisation (Phelps et al, 2006), the pattern of evolution of European cities has not been generally understood in terms of declining urban centres and massive suburbanisation. The processes of urban transformation clearly analysed in North-American cities (Ley, 2006) may not be taking the same form in Europe.

We agree with the gentrification literature that social segregation in European cities should be studied by focusing on the upper social strata, traditionally more segregated than other social groups. Following Lemaire and Chamboredon pioneering classic work (1970), and based upon an empirical research in three European cities (Paris, Milan, Madrid), we argue that upper middle classes tend to develop a plural and complex game of distance and proximity in relation to other social groups in order to select, control, and choose the dynamics of these interactions.

1. Secession, gentrification and "partial exit".

Influenced by the analysis of the experiences of segregation and secession of the wealthiest groups in the US (middle-classes flight, urban sprawl, strong segmentation along ethnicity and/or wealth lines, emergence of "gated communities", etc.), academic debates about the residential strategies of European urban upper-middle classes point towards the territorial concentration of these groups in certain areas, segregated from the rest of society. From Madrid to Stockholm,

evidence of upper middle class Europeans leaving city centres and settling in new suburban developments made of individual detached (or semi-detached) houses has been collected. At the outskirts of their cities these groups would have created a lower density, more socially and aesthetically homogeneous urban fabric, insulated from other social groups, where they could be and feel "among equals".

Running parallel, a different literature, without many interconnections to the previous debate, also stresses the trend towards the territorial concentration of the wealthiest groups, emphasizing in this case, however, the potential "re-conquest" of city centres by these groups through the emergence and consolidation of gentrification processes. In brief, gentrification could be triggered through different combinations of state (urban renewal policies) and market interventions (private initiatives aimed at cashing on the centrality and/or historical value of degraded urban areas), and quite often lead to the expulsion of the less affluent groups from those areas. In the most recent uses of this concept (Atkinson and Bridge, 2005, Butler 2005, Lees and Slater, 2008), gentrification is defined as a field of research aimed at linking the dynamic interactions between the transnational and globalized flows on the one hand, and more locally bounded social dynamics on the other.

The common element to both of those approaches is the depiction of upper-middle classes as "segregators", social actors aiming at distancing themselves from lower segments of society in search for the benefits of the cultural and relational capital accumulation which could derive (for themselves, but mostly for their children) from living among "peers" of similar (or even preferably superior) socio-economic position and status. Historically, the upper and middle classes in Europe have in fact demonstrated a strong capacity to choose where they live. More than a century ago, for example, English middle classes left urban industrial centres to live in residential suburbs. Pinçon and Pinçon-Charlot's work on France (1989, 2000) identified the "spatial stamp" of the bourgeoisie: a way of building and organizing "good districts" in cities, especially the largest ones. The mutual reinforcement in spatial terms enables this particular social class to deploy effective inheritance and reproduction strategies. As these authors point out: "Spatial segregation, pushed to the extreme, is in fact an aggregation, the choice of a social group, of a class, through which it is expressing its awareness of the group's deep community of interests" (2000: 54). This point is also stressed in Savage and Butler's research on the British middle classes (2003, 1995), particularly in relation to schooling and educational choices for children (see also Zunz et al 2002; Bagnasco, 2008; Oberti, 2008).

Because of the special role of the city centre in European cities, the most privileged social strata (that is, the cultural, political, and economic elites) remained living in city centres in most countries, with the clear exception of the UK which, historically, has the most pronounced suburbanisation processes. These groups maintained and reproduced their presence, and accumulated economic, social, cultural, and political capital using this spatial centrality. European elites and middle classes have thus not systematically deserted the centres of old European cities (as they did historically in the US), and their urban presence has indeed become more pronounced again since the 1980s, as the booming literature on gentrification shows.

However, these developments have taken different forms, the level of segregation shows diverse patterns, and a complex interplay between different social and political factors (from family network, to social housing policy) contribute to mediate and to change the nature of those processes (i.e., Butler, 2005; Musterd et al, 2010; Maloutas 2004, 2010).

New groups of managers and professionals (i.e., upper-middle classes) have generally followed the same logic, but they have settled less systematically in the centre, also moving to residential suburbs. In most European cities it is easy to distinguish those suburban local communities where there are concentrations of well-off households, including the richest.

This development benefits from the two movements of urban growth and sprawl, but has not generally led to the decline of city centres. In the European context we can observe parallel developments taking place: continuous "*embourgeoisement*", that is the renewed investment by upper and upper-middle classes in historical bourgeois neighbourhoods close to city centres, as well as the structural decline of the working class, as shown in Paris by Préteceille (2007); "gentrification", as middle classes push the working class out of central neighbourhoods (Pinçon-Charlot, 2000); and (to some degree) "suburbanisation", the making of more or less segregated upper and middle class communities, including even "gated communities" of the kind now common in the US; and the political construction of new neighbourhoods for upcoming upper middle classes close to business districts (the Docklands, Levallois in Paris, Milano Due), what Bruno Cousin (2008) calls the "refounded neighbourhoods".

Without challenging the validity of the analysis of processes of urban secession, or the importance of gentrification processes taking place in European cities, we argue that inter-group social dynamics in the urban space are generally more complex than extreme mutual avoidance

(constrained only by real state prices, urban policies, or the physical lay out of the city), or the colonisation of neighbourhoods. We try to show that most upper middle class households do not aim at living in isolation, complete segregation or absolute secession, and for them it is, most of the time, a matter of skilfully combining proximity and distance in relation to other social groups. Just like the middle classes studied by Chamboredon and Lemaire (1970) in social mixed neighbourhoods compensated their geographical proximity and neighbouring of working class people through complex strategies of distancing, we think that today's urban upper-middle class managers develop their own combinations of practices which allow them to select the dimensions they are willing to share with other social groups, and those in which they search for a more segregated social environment for themselves and their families.

Our hypothesis, complementary to the processes of secession and gentrification, suggests that upper-middle classes are distancing themselves from lower social strata, but this does not necessarily need to take the form of a complete physical segregation from those groups. They search to distance themselves in certain domains (but less so in others) by developing "partial exit" strategies that allow them to select the dimensions of the public sphere they decide to share with lower classes. These strategies of distance and proximity in relation to other social groups imply that upper-middle classes remain strongly embedded in the territory of their neighbourhoods and cities through their interaction with their dense social networks, their selective use of public services, or the frequentation of certain public spaces. In this context, their residential trajectories, in combination to the density and structure of their social networks, and their "partial exit" strategies, allow them to inhabit socially mix urban areas without having to renounce to their specific values and practices.

2. Renegotiating distance and proximity as a "partial exit" strategy.

In the urban sociology tradition, we aim to bring an urban and spatial dimension into mainstream sociology's understanding of social class. On reflection, this ought to be essential considering how territorialised European societies in fact are. In various works the English sociologist Mike Savage, following earlier work by urban sociologists Ray Pahl or Herbert Gans, identified what he called the "missing spatial dimension" of class analysis in the UK, in particular in the social stratification literature described by Favell and Recchi (2009).

Within urban sociology, numerous studies on gentrification and suburbanisation (in the UK, USA, and Australia in particular) identified socio-spatial dynamics of social mobility, exclusion or

inequalities in these terms (Atkinson and Bridge, 2005). In France, the dynamics of middle and lower middle classes working in the public sector were also shown to be deeply rooted within particular types of regions and cities (OCS, 1987). The local analysis of class is also relatively well rooted in the Italian tradition (Bagnasco and Negri, 1994; Bagnasco, 2008).

In somehow different research projects Savage, Butler and their colleagues have emphasised this spatial dimension of class, in particular for middle classes. Coming back on Savage's work, Butler (2005) argues that as societies become more complex and mobile, individuals become more privatised, but they still have to satisfy their need for belonging which is then channelled through their residential strategies. We are not following Savage's hard line (2005) which tends to suggest that residential choices are the uppermost mark of class distinction, and occupation is becoming irrelevant. We argue that upper-middle classes' status often results from both their occupation (as employment, or as professional community), and their residential choices or trajectories.

We are following Savage though in the hypothesis that the differentiation of spaces for interaction opens the field of the possible for individuals, in terms of belonging and of negotiating their involvement in a given space. Individuals are to some extent able to choose or negotiate their belonging to one political or social space or another, and their degree of investment and interaction. Mobility and individualization open the way to logics of choice. Reframing this issue within our argument, this means that the higher degree of freedom in choosing where to live, to shop, or to send children to school, in playing life at different scale levels, make "exit" or "partial exit" strategies easier to sustain.

We first developed the idea of "partial exit" in relation to the transnationalisation practices of upper middle classes. One way individuals can choose to "exit" from their nation state is to physically migrate, but this remains a relatively rare and extreme option, involving many costs (even in a Europe with all the barriers to free movement down) as Favell has shown in his study on the "Eurostars" (2008). Alternatively they can choose to "partially exit" in a variety of ways: in terms of consumption, friendships, job strategies, housing, children's socialisation and education, or financial investment. Thus, individuals belonging to these social groups may for instance choose to send their children to an international school or university (an "exit" option), or to avoid national public services (ie: health services), but to use some other services or to participate in national political associations. Clearly, the aggregation of these personal choices has very important effects at the collective level,

affecting the way public services function. The opportunity for "partial exit" would allow these individuals to (re)-negotiate their own position within the national social structure, for example, to concurrently protest against or escape high level of taxation, locate property or income outside the nation state, and actively campaign for a reform of the educational or health systems.

Individuals can also choose to "exit" from one dimension and not from another, creating a complex mix of choices which has to be analysed at different *scales*: local/urban, national, European, or transnational/global. Individuals can, for example, "exit" from national public health systems but engaging (voice) in the local *place,* being it the city or the neighbourhood. As it is well known from the urban literature, urban elites partly define who they are by *place* (the street, the neighbourhood, the district, the city, or the urban region) they choose to live in. One way to "exit" from the local level is therefore to choose to live in segregated places (ie: gated communities).

Conceptualised in this way, some social groups (upper-middle classes in particular) have a certain capacity for "exit", which can be exercised either against the city, or against the national society of which they are an integral part. In contrast, other groups have neither the resources, nor the potential, to escape their city or their district. Education, mobility, travel, occupational networks, and various social bonds give the former the possibility of "partial" (or temporary) "exit" from the social constraints associated with life in a specific city and/or neighbourhood.

In previous phases of capitalist development, bourgeois groups leaded the process of reshaping the city, adapting it to their own expectations and interests. The purpose of this article is to analyse how upper-middle classes are responding to the changes experienced by contemporary advanced capitalist societies in relation to their residential strategies and their interactions with the urban environments in which they live in. We find here the classical issues of gentrification or urban secession of certain social groups, but in our analysis we aim at going a little beyond that dualism, to focus more precisely on the interactions in terms of interactions, practices and representations of the neighbourhood and the metropolitan regions. By contrast to authors who stress the emergence of segregated groups in isolated suburbs (Donzelot and Jaillet, 2001), or groups of "new barbarians" (Angel 2000) who use their qualifications to free-ride on some public services while they rely upon the market to obtain other services (education, healthcare) in order to minimize their interaction with other social groups, we argue that many upper-middle class managers develop strategies of anchoring in their local and urban environments. Nevertheless, from those debates we retain the importance of distinguishing among the different dimensions in which we can disaggregate the

different components of the social behaviour of the members of these groups, including their use of public services, the frequentation of local spaces, and their residential strategies.

Our hypothesis points to the fact that the upper-middle classes, or at least some of them, are taking distance in relation to lower social strata, but not necessarily in terms of complete physical secession. They search to distance themselves in certain domains (education), but less so in others (public space). So our research aims at grasping (certainly in an experimental and incomplete way) how the upper-middle classes implement their strategies of distance and proximity in relation to other social groups, and how they justify their residential choices in terms of their trajectories, as well as their involvement in the social affairs of their neighbourhoods and cities of residence. In that sense, with a different research strategy, the paper explores some of the dimensions of "networked urbanism" put forward by Blockland and Savage (2008).

With that purpose in mind, we explore the interactions between the perceptions of the neighbourhood and the city, the social practices, the professional and residential trajectories, and the social capital of a group of upper-middle class managers through a large number of in-depth interviews in three European metropolitan regions (Paris, Milan and Madrid).

Table 1 around here

3) No exit: managers' selective inclusion in the urban fabric.

In our research we worked with managers living in four different types of neighbourhoods resulting from the crossing of two basic selection criteria: location, and social structure. The classic centre-suburbs dichotomy discussed in the urban literature raises the question of whether there exist differences in respondents' strategies, whether we can identify what David Lockwood used to call "the urban seeking", versus the "urban fleeing" middle classes (1995). For this reason, two neighbourhoods within the limits of the city and two outside the city (in more peripheral residential areas) were selected. The other variable orienting the selection of neighbourhoods was social structure: in each city, we selected two neighbourhoods with the highest concentration of upper social strata, and two neighbourhoods with a more socially mixed composition.

Table 2 around here

In the first instance we compared our interviewees living in central neighbourhoods with those living in suburbs. Table 3 and 4 do not offer particular surprises, and the differences among those groups are classic. The choice of suburban life is first of all related to the presence of children (who are said to be central in the choice of residence). We also perceive a small difference in the professional profile of the managers choosing the suburbs versus those who opt for the city, the former being more often engineers in the private sector.

Table 3 around here

We used a classic left right continuum to measure where managers situate themselves in ideological terms. Unsurprisingly, our managers do not support radical parties: a third is on the left or the centre left, a third on the centre, and a third on the right. Managers living in the suburbs are more right wing (the gap is about 13 points), and those living in the cities are more willing to express a more inclusive view of the city, with diverse ethnic and social groups. Nevertheless, what is less expected is that those differences do not translate much in terms of city use, of day to day urban practices, or of interactions with other social and ethnic groups.

Table 4 around here

Managers in our sample feel at home in their neighbourhood, their suburb or the whole metropolitan area. Tables 5 and 6 provide evidence that they use public services in a large proportion, and they regularly go out to enjoy the cultural and leisure infrastructures of the city.

Tables 5 and 6 around here

Those somehow crude numbers are clearly reinforced by the qualitative part of our research. The managers of our sample are not "retreating" from public or social services, and they do not emerge as "barbarians" showing no interest in the public sphere. On the contrary, a very large proportion of our interviewees have very strong views on public services, they want an improvement of their quality (in particular, of course, to respond to their specific needs), and they have strong views about the politics of public equipments. On average, there is little evidence of structural and systematic "privatism', or retreat from the public sphere.

3.1. Low on socio-political participation.

The rootedness of our upper-middle class managers in their urban social environment is in part investigated in this article through the study of the participation of our informants in local associations, organizations and/or initiatives, as well as through the analysis of their degree of involvement in local politics.

The literature on civic culture on the one hand, and on social capital on the other, highlights that those more likely to join associations are the middle aged, well educated, employed men in the labour market. We therefore should expect our respondents to be involved in associations in their cities and neighbourhoods. However, our managers do not take part in the activities of neighbourhood associations, or other kinds of social organisations (practically none in Milan, less than one in ten in Paris). Only around two of every ten respondents from Milan belong to other kinds of associations, mostly professional associations. A similar situation seems to emerge in the case of Madrid, and only about a third of Paris interviewees belong to some kind of association.

There is a strong contrast however between the suburban managers in the exclusive neighbourhoods of Milan and Madrid, who are less engaged and participate less than in Paris. By contrast, in the Paris case, managers participate to various political activities and associations as much as the rest of population. The differences between Parisian and suburban managers in this respect is very low.

Our managers are not retreating from political questions though, but show a mostly rhetorical interest in them. Most Milanese respondents declare to be rather interested in politics, to have voted in the last elections, and to have discussed of policy matters in the month prior to the interview. In

Madrid, most managers also express to have a relatively high interest in politics, and state to have participated in the last regional elections, although their interest in this dimension does not often go beyond discussing politics with some friends or colleagues. Our French informants declare to be very aware of political issues and to have participated in discussions about it. Their level of active involvement in politics is nevertheless quite low, with just a very small number of them declaring to be affiliated to a political party or to have been more actively involved in politics.

Managers feel part of the urban political life and if they participate far less than lower middle classes, they follow important questions and they may mobilise when their direct interest is at stake. These findings can be interpreted in two contrasting ways: on the one hand it could point towards civic disengagement, and be considered an indicator of the "partial exit" strategy of these groups. On the other hand, with a more prosaic interpretation, it can be considered just a consequence of the fact that our informants consider political involvement a very low priority within their busy lives marked by long working hours, professional trips and responsibilities, and family duties. Some previous research on Milanese managers already reported a lower degree of participation of these groups in associative life compared to the local average (Cesareo, Bovone and Rovati, 1979; Rovati, 1991), providing some support to the idea that, more than retrenchment, we could be in front of a persistence in a "non engaging" strategy.

3.2. Selective about their presence in the public sphere.

The upper-middle class managers of our research do not radically disappear from the public sphere obeying their self-segregation drives. If their modest degree of socio-political participation could indicate a relative retrenchment from the public sphere, their practices in terms of use of public services and participation in the city's socio-cultural life would somehow tell us otherwise. The qualitative data we collected points in the direction of a continuing involvement of our interviewees in local affairs.

Much unlike the middle classes of Manchester, and even those of London, the managers in our sample have a very territorialised social life, they go out regularly in their neighbourhood and city, and do not live in a privatized manner. They can afford to take advantage of the places to go out in the city, and they benefit from this opportunity on a regular basis, even if they live in the periphery. Thus, nine in ten of our informants had gone out to a restaurant for dinner in the month previous to the interview. Some seven in ten had gone to a bar for a drink. Half of our sample had gone to the

cinema, a similar share had visited a museum, and about a third had gone to the theatre. The main difference in this respect between the managers living in the centre and those of the periphery lies in the fact that for the former, the neighbourhood was more often the destination of those outgoing activities since the offer is more diverse in those areas. These findings hold for the three cities, with the relative exception of Milan, where the frequency of going out decreases a bit. About two thirds of our informants living in the city centres declare to go to peripheral areas of their metropolitan conurbation for social, leisure or commercial reasons. A similar share of those living at the outskirts of the cities says that they regularly go to the city centre for those same purposes.

The hypothesis of the systematic "exit" from collective services in general, and from local public services in particular does not hold for our upper-middle class managers which, similarly, cannot be equated to "new barbarians" openly deserting public services. In fact, very much on the contrary, all of the indicators we used point out in the direction of a relatively intense, although selective, use of the services of the Welfare State as well as of public facilities and infrastructures by these groups. They do not seem to behave according to a logic of retreat, and they regularly use sport facilities, public transportation systems, public schools, parks and libraries, particularly if they are closely located in their neighbourhoods. In this respect, a little difference emerges between those managers living in the city centre, and those residing in the periphery. Although around eight on ten use the local post office and consult their primary care doctor in their neighbourhood in both types of residential areas, the use of parks or public kindergartens appears to be a more common practice among the managers of the city centre than those of the periphery.

In the case of Paris, our respondents emphasise their participation in city life, as well as in social events in the neighbourhoods, and the vast majority declare to use the local equipments, schools, public transports, and in general the public services on a very regular basis. As a matter of example, the managers living in peripheral areas of this city express their satisfaction with certain public services they often use (like the public transportation system, or the public spaces), while they express their complains about those public schemes they would like to see working in ways more adapted to their own needs and worldviews. In this respect, their critique of the lack of adaptation of the public schools systems to the demands of an increasingly globalised society and economy, or to the needs of their children (reasons they often use to account for their choice of private or charter schools to educate their children), emerge as common element among our informants in all cities.

When inquired about their feelings of insecurity in their neighbourhood at night, upper-middle class managers deliver interesting and somehow paradoxical answers. In general terms, and within a general perception of relative security (only one or two in ten express feelings of insecurity in the area where they reside), those managers living in more mixed neighbourhoods show a slightly superior level of anxiety about the matter compared to those who live in more homogeneous upper-middle class areas. But when asked about whether they avoid certain areas of their neighbourhood because of that perception of insecurity, one in two Parisian managers living in the more wealthy areas respond affirmatively (while those in a similar position in the other cities responding in the same form were only one or two out of ten). In the case of those managers living in more mixed neighbourhoods, Madrid stands out with three out of ten expressing their avoidance of certain areas of their neighbourhood for security concerns (compared to two in Paris and Milan). These answers give us some clues about the feeling of relative isolation of upper-middle classes in homogeneous neighbourhoods (with a less busy street life), as well as about the relative uneasiness derived from their having to share the neighbourhood with groups of lower social extraction in the case of the managers living in more mixed areas.

Our empirical findings suggest that our respondents are strongly territorialized within their neighbourhoods, but manage their interactions with other social groups living in the same territory through a complex and shifting balance of distance and proximity that allows them to pursue their strategies of self-segregation without completely seceding from the social and urban spaces they inhabit. To sum up our argument we would claim that the more our managers live in a residential suburb or an exclusive city centre neighbourhood, the more relaxed they are about encountering people from other social and ethnic groups at the supermarket, the railways station, the swimming pool, the school, or the park. By contrast, the more they belong to a mixed neighbourhood, the more precise they become in trying to avoid the encounter with those groups, or to choose very precisely and to control the conditions under which that "mixity" takes place. Schooling or sport activities in Paris provide an excellent example of this. In a more exclusive neighbourhood, parents will trust the school in the public sector and, because managers are dominant in the area, they feel at ease with some level of mixity in the school. By contrast in more mixed areas, parents are fare more concerned and they quickly exit from the local school. These are classic results which match some of the research of Van Zanten in Paris (2009), Oberti in Paris (2008), Maloutas in Athens (2007), or Butler and Robson in London (2003).

"Relative mixity" under strict control is for us the name of their game. They enjoy the city, they feel part of it and they deploy their resources to use distance and proximity according to their norms, their pleasure, or their interests. In a way, using the Hirschman framework again, they do not "exit" from the city, they use some voice when needed, and some "partial exit" to protect it. The capacity to "exit partially" (from public services for example) allows them to renegotiate and to get more out of these services. In other words, the good news is that they are part of the city, our managers do not "exit". The bad news is, however, that they use their resources to maximise their interest, whatever that may mean for other groups.

4) Highly selective networks

Examining networks of acquaintances, friends and families, and more specifically looking at where those networks were physically located, is an important way to analyse the dynamics of the urban fabric and social exclusion processes (Andreotti, 2008; Andreotti and Le Galès 2008). We asked our interviewees to name the people with whom they interact on a relatively regular basis, inquiring them about some basic socio-economic characteristics of these persons (sex, age, place of birth and residence, marital status, education, profession, length of the relation, place where they met).[1]

<u>4.1. Good old class pals.</u>

The data we generated on the social networks of our informants shows that they have extensive networks of friends and relatives living close to their homes, with whom they interact quite intensely, meeting on a very regular basis. The friendship dimension of our interviewees has been analysed in terms of "*homophily*" (similarity between the informer and their friends in terms of age, education degree, profession, etc.), length of their relation, closure, frequency of contacts, and particularly the "spatial" dimension, which entails the different social circles where relations have been formed.

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[1] The collected information does not allow us to present a clear profile of the respondents' social networks. Nevertheless, the information obtained about the three friends, plus the information collected with the position and resource generator methods allows us to have a more precise image of the sociability patterns of our respondents.

Despite the complexity of the social fabric of the urban contexts in which they reside, although quite unsurprisingly though, our interviewees confirm the existence of a high level of "*homophily*", matching our hypothesis of urban distance and proximity with different social groups. Thus, a large majority of our respondents mentioned people with very similar socio-demographic characteristics to their own as the friends with whom they interact regularly. In Milan, the level of "*homophily*" is very high as far as education is concerned, while more dispersion seems to exist in relation to the profession of their friends. About four out of five of the friends mentioned by the interviewees have a university degree (mostly of the same kind than the respondents). The spectrum of professions is more articulated, as many friends are professionals working on their own, or with their own company. The ratio of educational "*homophily*" is even higher in Madrid than in Milan, since nine out of ten friends mentioned have university degrees (a majority of them in the same area as the interviewees), working within a wide range of professions. The case of Paris appears to be very similar since most friends seem to have been met through the education system. Four out of five friends mentioned during the interviews in Paris have comparable social position and educational background to our informants. The service sector appears as the main source of employment for the friends of our upper-middle class informants in all three cities.

In all three cases the educational trajectory of our informants seems to have played the key role in the development of their social networks of friendship, and few respondents mentioned workmates as friends, or declare to have met their friends in the workplace. In all our Milanese cases the most common way for friendships formation was through childhood relationships, basically in school (high school, but also primary school level), and in scout associations (quite widespread among children). By contrast, cultural or political associations and neighbourhoods are never mentioned as ways to meet friends. In fact, most of the present friendship relations for the Milanese respondents have been lasting for more than twenty years. This information portrays Milan as a place of old social networks, deeply rooted middle class friendships with intense and regular contacts.

Among the informants in Madrid the situation is quite similar, in particular in what has to do with the origin of the friendships, as well as the duration of those links. Thus, more than a third of the friends mentioned by our informants come from the times of their schooling (mostly from primary education, with some cases of kindergarten links), and nearly a quarter from their time at university. Friendships originating from the work environment account for less than one tenth of the total. The

remaining friendship connections come from leisure activities and, in contrast with the Milanese case, also from socio-political associations and organisations. Around two out of ten of the friends mentioned by our informants in Madrid refer to us to the origins of the interviewees outside of this city, and they reflect the character of this metropolitan area as a magnet for people from all over the country in search of better opportunities for educational and professional development. Our Madrilenian informants have a very intense social life, meeting quite regularly with their friends (mostly to go out to bars and restaurants), and keeping close contact through the phone and/or e-mail.

The case of Paris seems to be again slightly different to those of Milan and Madrid, but with many common elements as well. While most friends have been met through the education system, two other mechanisms seem to be operating as well: meeting friends at work (more specifically during training period after entering the labour market through a specific corporation), and through their children's schools (again people from a similar social and educational background). Most respondents in Paris meet on a regular basis with their friends, in particular for dinners. As mentioned, most friends are not childhood friends, something explained by fact that, as it happened in the case of Madrid although now at a larger scale (about half of our interviewees), many of our Parisian informants come from other places in France.

These conclusions contrast with the findings of Savage, Bagnall and Longhurst (2005) for the city of Manchester. These authors report that their respondents did not keep much contact with their best friends, and did not share with them regular activities, as they were also likely to live in other cities. The majority of our interviewees mention having very regular contact with their friends (the young respondents almost once a week, and the oldest ones around once a month). In the case of our Milanese informants the fact that more than half of the friends are living in the city of Milan, even in the same neighbourhood where the respondents and their friends have grown up, makes the interaction much more easy. This is quite true in the case of Madrid as well, and also to a lesser extent in the case of Paris.

Among the managers we interviewed, couples appear to come from very similar backgrounds too, with the spouse having a relatively similar level of education to our informants, even if there seems to be some disparity in the job situation (women may be out of the labour market taking care of their children and household). However, opportunities exist for highly educated women

in the three cities, and many couples (about half of our interviewees) have the income of two careers, which allows them to live in the selective neighbourhoods where they reside.

This trend towards homogeneity in the social networks of our interviewees is confirmed by the position generator analysis: high status tasks and functions representative of professionals and highly qualified positions are relatively accessible to our respondents, while that is not always the case for the less prestigious and manual jobs characteristic of the lower positions of the social structure. As might be expected, a very low number of Milanese interviewees declared to know a non skilled blue-collar worker. Among those who said they had access to people working in those functions, the connection came mostly though their professional environment, generally because of working in the same company. Things are hardly different in the other two cities. However, those who declared to know blue collar workers came typically from a more modest and/or provincial background.

Savage et al. stated that "maintaining friends require the persistence and the ability to be abstracted from time and space so it can endure over these two dimensions" (p. 242). The dimension of persistence and investment is clearly evident in our case studies (as well as time and space), although in a different way than in the Manchester case. The relations reported by the Milanese and Madrilenian respondents seem to be very well rooted in the local physical and social space when compared to Manchester (where friends appeared to live mostly in other cities). Paris appears as somewhere in between the case of Manchester, and the Southern European cities included in our study, since the rootedness of the social life of our Parisian informants seems to be considerably developed.

In the case of Milan, friends grew up and attended university together, and have selected each other, confirming this selection over the years. In the words of Savage and his colleagues, they developed a sense of belonging which is both inherited, and up to a point ascribed, but decisively reinforced by choice. In Paris, about a fourth of our respondents have the same deeply local and immobile background. In the French capital, though, the role of the "*grandes écoles*" (the elitist part of the higher education system), appears to be decisive in the socializing process, and in the making of best friends. Those educational institutions attract young people from all over the country (with an important proportion from the Paris region), but overwhelmingly from the same social background. The case of Madrid appears somewhere in between the deep rootedness of the Milanese upper-

middle classes, and the more dynamic processes of amalgamation of equals through higher education and the first steps in the labour market that we observed in the case of Paris.

The analysis of the proxy of the network closure (studied through the extent to which friends mentioned know each other) further contributes to understanding the sociability of our respondents, as well as that of their social environments. In nine out of ten Milanese cases, the three friends our informants mentioned knew each other. This feature of Milanese social interactions was already show by previous research (Barbieri 1996). To a smaller degree this was also the case in Madrid (eight out of ten informants stated that at least two of those three friends knew each other). The information on the Paris respondents seems to indicate that their degree of closure is considerably smaller, since those three friends more rarely knew each other. This information can have a dual reading: on the one hand it points to the embeddedness of the respondents in the local social context, as they do not mention dyadic and isolated relations; on the other, it points towards a close and self reproducing network which risks of having a prevalence of bonding features.

4.2. Family still conditions the attachment to the territory.

Family plays a central role in selecting the area of residence in all three cities. Unsurprisingly in the case of Milan (overwhelming majority of cases), very clearly in the case of Madrid and Paris (more than a third of cases), the choice of neighbourhoods is related to family ties. This influence takes different forms: inheriting a family house for more classic bourgeois families, choosing to live close to the parents (or brothers and sisters), going to a suburb close to where one of the spouses spent his or her childhood. Being close to one part of the family, one way or another comes out as a very strong reason to choose a neighbourhood.

A large portion of our interviewees state to have strong family connections with relatives living in the same city (or a neighbouring commune) to their own. Our interviewees interact on a very regular basis with their relatives, and often turn to them when in need of help to solve problems, or to facilitate daily life tasks. Some variation appears in between the different cities, partly due to the different degree of geographical mobility experienced by the group in the different urban contexts.

In the case of the Milanese upper-middle class managers, the degree of embeddedness in the family networks appears to be very high, with an intense interaction and very active solidarity networks which greatly contribute to solving the daily puzzles derived from the efforts to make compatible family life and careers for both partners (particularly after having children).[2] The status of Paris and Madrid as state capitals (political, administrative and bureaucratic power), as well as important economic centres within the economies of their countries, make these cities "escalator urban regions" (to use the metaphor used by Savage and his colleagues to describe the London South East). The case of Paris is additionally marked by the role played by the most elitist universities in those processes of upward mobility. In the case of Madrid a less important, although similar, role was played by certain universities offering specific degrees which could not be studied anywhere else in Spain (certain engineering degrees in particular).

The case of Madrid emerges as quite similar to that of Milan, with proximity to family networks as a key element in the process of selecting the area of residence. The intensity of the interaction, and relying on family for support, appear also as very important, as does the very low fertility patterns of our informants as a group (which reflect the general trend existing within Spanish society over the last decades). Nevertheless, the relatively higher geographical mobility that can be observed among managers in Madrid implies that some of them have lost the proximity to their family support and solidarity networks. In this case the interaction with their relatives remains quite high, but the telephone and frequent trips constitute the main mechanisms for remain in contact.

In Paris the level of interaction with the family is also very regular among our managers. The fact that about half of our interviewees come from different French provinces outside of Paris imply that their family ties have been strongly affected by their geographical mobility. The higher level of development of social protection policies in France have contributed to make relying on relative less necessary. Nevertheless, the level of interaction of our informants with their families remains relatively high.

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[2] The low fertility rates experienced by Italy over the last decades, also visible among our informants, reflect the difficulties of coping with the burdens of reproduction.

If price constitutes a central element in the definition of a residential strategy of our managers, particularly for those who live in mixed neighbourhoods, a very significant portion of our informants (a good third in the case of Paris, a large majority in the case of Milan) declare to have chosen their area of residence based on their family history and the physical proximity to close relatives. Although this aspect emerges as absolutely central in the case of Milan, where the density of ties within the family completely determines the organization of social life and the residential choices, we can see the important role played by traditional family networks in the three cities included in our comparison.

The main conclusion of this section is that our informants maintain important links with their families, and those connections remain strongly anchored in the local territory. Despite the self-segregation drives that our group may experience, family ties operate often as an anchoring element that pushes them towards articulating more complex strategies of distance and proximity with the different social groups that live in the same areas where their family networks are denser.

The differences between newcomers and long-term residents in a specific neighbourhood appear as quite interesting in this respect[3]. Newcomers tend to live far more often in the more exclusive neighbourhoods. By contrast, those managers who are born in the city are significantly more present within mixed neighbourhoods. Newcomers in a city do not have the resources to accurately control their interaction with other social groups, so they tend to play safe by choosing a neighbourhood with a high proportion of managers. By contrast, those who know the city and the neighbourhood well do not need to live further away to play the game of distance and proximity: they have the knowledge and networks to precisely select their encounters with other social and ethnic groups (in shops, bars, sport and cultural equipments, and especially in schools).

5. Conclusion.

In this article we present and review the hypothesis of the "partial exit" strategy of upper-middle class managers in relation to the urban space. We have identified the sociability sphere (friends, and family relations) as a good proxy for understanding how, and to what extent, these

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[3] This point has been specifically made by François Bonnet

individuals put into practice this game of distance and proximity with other social groups in their neighbourhoods and cities.

The analysis of the empirical evidence we generated in our research does not support the arguments that foresee a future characterised by the predominance of anomic behaviours among the wealthiest sectors of society. Quite on the contrary, our findings suggest that these managers keep a strong attachment to their area of residence, where many family members and friends also live. Our managers do not have contacts with their close neighbours, but have indeed an active social life in the city. Our results on this point differ substantially from the ones of Savage et al. for the city of Manchester, in which relations with friends were stated to remain more abstract than real.

The responses of our interviewees are consistently more nuanced and complex than any simplistic theory about their drive to free-ride or to secede from society, forcing us to develop more sophisticated conceptual frameworks to account for the growing prevalence of multilayered identities and spheres of reference and solidarity; specific combinations of elective segregation and local involvement; and more active patterns of mobility combined with local embeddedness.

The upper-middle class groups we studied remain profoundly rooted in their city and often in the neighbourhood in which they reside. They develop strategies to mix with other social and ethnic groups in certain domains, while staying away and increasing their social distance in some others areas. Most of our interviewees see their cities as resource rich environments in terms of services and networks of friends and families allowing them to follow successful professional careers, while raising a family, and having a dynamic social life. Having these processes in mind, the hypothesis of the "partial exit" strategy (selection and practices at the neighbourhood level, and not complete retreat from the local level) to account for the behaviour of these groups makes some sense.

Our informants are certainly not heroes of the cause of the urban social mix. They declare their desire to reside in communities with very high presence of managers like themselves, expressing in this way the existence of a powerful drive towards self-segregation which is, in any case, far from being accomplished. Those who live in more mixed areas tend in fact to like their neighbourhoods less, express their intention to move out more often, feel more insecure, are less involved in the local politics, and, above everything, declare more often to have chosen this area to establish their residence due to its affordability, and sometimes due to the existence of family ties. Most of the time, their choice of living in a more mixed area does not seem to be the result of a free

personal option, but rather a stage in their residential strategy. Thus, the desire to live in contact with more diverse populations does not seem to be the most common attitude among our informants.

Nevertheless, through their daily practices our managers participate in different types of activities, frequent of public spaces, and use a combination of public facilities and private services in the areas where they reside. They feel fully integrated into the city, and they even praise their participation (and that of their children) in the local dynamics and activities through the (controlled) exposure and interaction with other social groups in the public sphere. Our findings show that upper-middle class managers play quite skilfully the complex game of distance and proximity with other social groups, as the educational strategies of their children clearly exemplify: the more socially mixed their residential environments are, the more they will develop exit strategies from the public schools of the area (as Oberti or Van Zanten had already shown). Conversely, when they live in a very homogeneous environment, with a high concentration of upper-middle classes as themselves, the anxiety about social mix seem to decrease, and they become more likely to send their children to public schools.

Our managers do not seem to be in fact in secession from the urban space, but they try to use the available resources in the city and neighbourhood for their advantage while maintaining a distance with other groups. Beyond the logics of self-segregation or gentrification, these groups make residential choices that contribute to the formation of individual and collective identities while prioritising their social networks of friends and family. We should try to avoid the excessive simplification associated with a depiction of the "ghettoes of the rich", or with a hypothetical secession of the urban upper-middle classes. Instead, we should identify and locate those processes (when they exist) within a more complex continuum of situations ranging from total immersion within the local urban context, to the complete isolation and secession of the upper-middle classes from the society to which they belong.

In a context defined by the "partial exit" strategies adopted by these groups (reflected in different dimensions such as residential choices, leisure, work, sociability, or the education of their children), the density of the social networks reflected in our empirical evidence may provide the stability that Favell's informants so greatly miss in their lives as "Eurostars" (to the point of making them question the meaning of their life project abroad).

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Table 1. Methodological notes.

This study adopts a micro-level perspective, looking at the individual experiences, strategies, motivations, values and narratives of upper social strata living in European cities. The approach is predominantly qualitative and the sample is not intended to be representative, yet through this sample clear and revealing behavioural patterns can be identified.[4]

In order to explore the dynamics of self-segregation of upper social strata in European cities, dynamic metropolitan urban regions were the most appropriate locations for the research, so the cities of Paris, Lyon, Milan and Madrid were selected. Within each city, research was carried out in four neighbourhoods, with thirty interviews for each neighbourhood. A total of 120 semi-structured in depth interviews were carried out in each city, for a total of 480 interviews. The paper is based upon two thirds of the data base and does not include results in Lyon.

Interviews were based on a semi-structured questionnaire including both closed and open questions allowing interviewees to express their ideas on specific issues. Even in close answers, interviewees always had the possibility of explaining the meaning of their answers or the reasons of their choice. The grid of the interview was structured around their working and residential trajectories (special attention was paid on the choice of city and neighbourhood, their perception and appreciation of the neighbourhood), their formal and informal social relations (family, friends and acquaintances, as well as their effective participation in local, metropolitan or national associations and political parties), their daily practices (cultural consumption practices, leisure, etc.), their use of public services and frequentation of public spaces (use of city and neighbourhood services, schools, healthcare, etc.), and social representations (attitudes and values).

Different ways and sources were used to identify respondents according to the local context examined: we drew upon alumni associations, lists of former students from universities or *grandes écoles*, local and national associations of managers, as well as basic door to door sampling technique, or visiting schools where respondents might send their children.

The accounts of the interviewees allow us to understand to what extent these individuals mix practices of mobility with practices of rootedness, and to what extent these two dimensions structure their life (and their family) strategies.

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[4] For further details on the research design, see...

In our operationalization of the upper-middle class managers we some compromises and simplifications had to be made in order to identify comparable populations, even if we did not aim at using a statistically representative sample. This was partly due to the fact that the comparative nature of our research implied working with very different definitions and statistical treatment of these groups in the different countries included in our research. Two basic steps were followed in the design of our research: 1) identifying a social and statistical category which referred to the same position within the labour market structure in the three countries chosen for study (in this project, France, Italy and Spain); 2) within these national categories, identifying some further, more strictly defined criteria.

Using the International Standard Classification of Occupations (ISCO-08), we focussed on the manager category, restricting the attention on individuals working as employees, a specific segment of the upper-middle class social strata, living therefore aside the professionals and the entrepreneurs. Three other criteria were retained to make our interviewees more comparable: 1) level of education, selecting individuals with at least a university degree, most often at master's level; 2) autonomy at work, meaning the capacity to manage time, and the contents of work; 3) responsibility at work, for example, coordinating a team or deciding upon the careers and salaries of other workers. All 480 interviews carried out in this research fulfilled these criteria.

Table 2. Neighbourhood selection.

City	Social Structure	Central	Suburb
Madrid	Homogeneous	Almagro	Nueva España
	Mixed	Ibiza	Mirasierra
Milan	Homogeneous	City Centre	Arese
	Mixed	Lorenteggio Inganni	Vimercate
Paris	Homogeneous	Part of the 15th arrondissement Front de Seine Beaugrenelle	Le Vésinet
	Mixed	Part of the 17th arrondissement North east of Les Batignolles Part of the 10th arrondissement West of Gares du nord, gare de l'est	Fontenay Sous Bois

Table 3. Managers characteristics: city versus suburban (%).

	Central	Suburbs
Living in flats	98	49.5
Detached house	1	50.5
Home ownership	64	86
No children	38	21
Ownership of a country house	38	29
Use of car to go to work	48	74

Table 4. Managers and politics in the centre and in suburbs (%).

	Central	**suburbs**
1 Extreme left	1.2	
2	4.1	4.8
3 left	33.1	14.3
4	26.2	30.5
5 right	27.9	41
6	2.9	2.9
7 Extreme right		
8 Refusal to respond	2.9	3.8
9 No response	1.7	2.9

Table 5. Use of public equipments by managers (%).

	Centre	Suburbs
Kindergarden	17	12
Local doctor	80	89
Post office	89	88
Public transport	89	79
Public parks	75	57
Public sport infrastructure	64	59
Library	24	32

Table 6: Going out and using private services in the city (%).

	Centre	Suburbs
Restaurant (in the last month)	91	87
Hairdresser	82	77
Cinema (last month)	55	47
Sport event (last month)	19	19
Theatre	33	24
Concert	29	13
Museum	50	33
Spectacle dance	7	13
Not going out in bar (last month)	29	39