

TITLE: LOW-INCOME POPULATIONS AMID GENTRIFICATION IN ATHENS: SAFEGUARDING HOUSING RIGHTS & COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

THEME: HOUSING & HABITAT

1/3

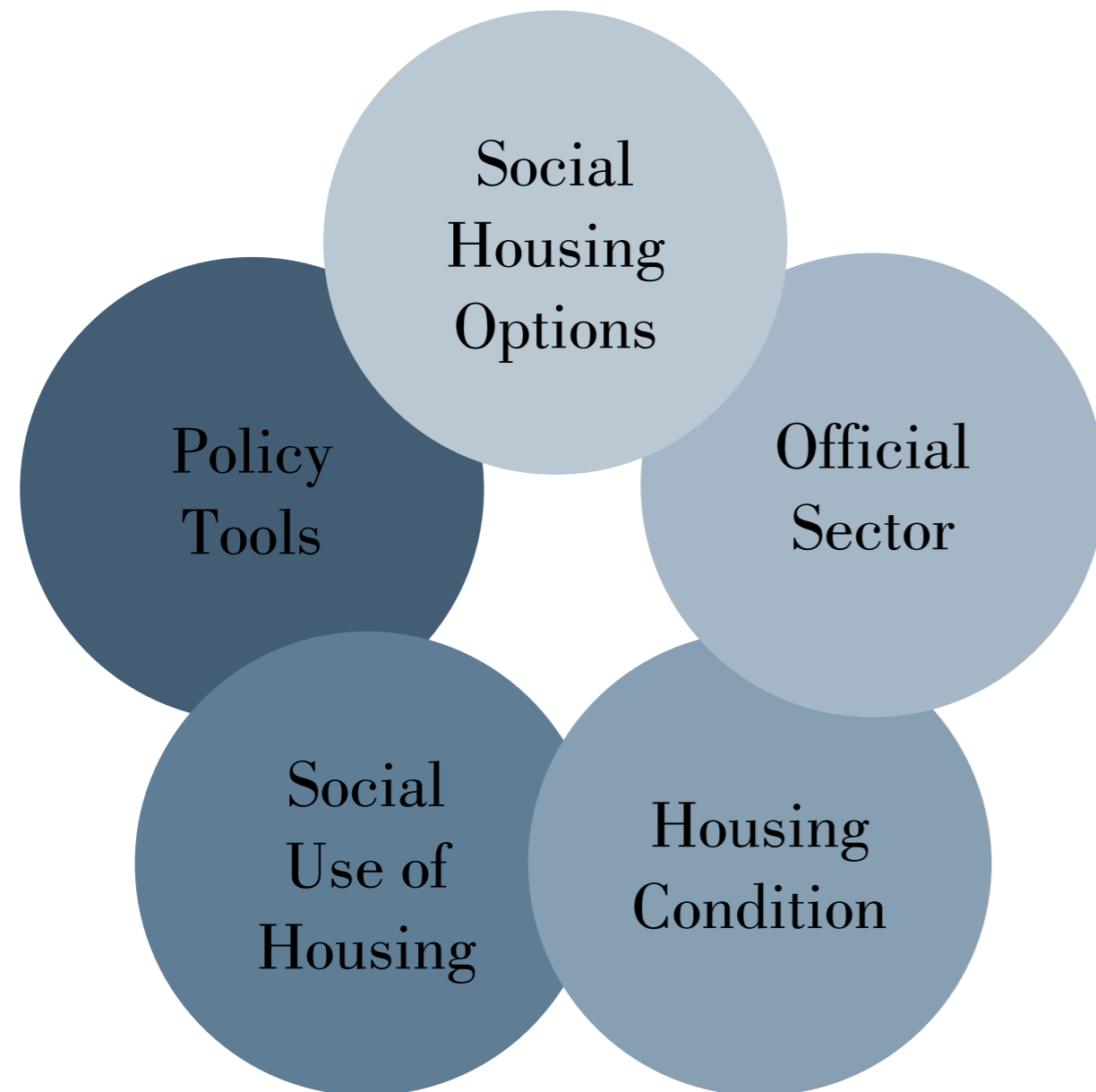
Yuanrou Wu

MSc. Urban Strategies

Edinburgh College of Art

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CONTEXT & CHALLENGES



Key problems of "residual" model in Athens.

In the aftermath of the 2008 global financial crisis and the ensuing Greek debt crisis, Greece implemented harsh austerity measures that cut social services, exacerbated unemployment and reduced household incomes. Then came the influx of tourism and digital nomads, and rents and house prices skyrocketed. The challenge of accessing affordable housing was exacerbated by the proliferation of short-term rental platforms, represented by Airbnb, which led to a sharp decline in homeownership. Recent initiatives for energy upgrades through retrofit programs have inadvertently created upward pressure on housing costs. Low-income residents face being forced to move out of urban areas or into housing in deplorable conditions.

These processes mark the gradual completion of the gentrification of Athens, which has brought about an increase in property values, the displacement of low-income residents and changes in the housing stock, and the community aesthetics are being affected by it. In this scenario, planning and implementing effective social housing policies and regulating the housing market became difficult. However, the right to housing, access to public spaces and services, inclusive citizenship, participation in urban governance and freedom of cultural expression are inherently residents' "rights to the city". Fundamentally, gentrification implies the contestation and exercise of power over urban spaces and communities, which is intrinsically linked to the rights and aspirations enshrined in the concept of the "right to the city".

Housing affordability is part of the right to housing, which means that housing costs should be at a

level that does not jeopardize the enjoyment of other human rights. In Greece, there is no official definition of social housing and no further relevant policies, but the allocation of affordable housing policies follows a "residual" model. In the Greek context, the "residual" model of affordable housing focuses on temporary or emergency housing solutions rather than comprehensive long-term social housing strategies. Secondly, the Greek residual model decentralizes social housing and avoids the concentration of highly deprived communities. However, the problems of such an institutional and regulatory mechanism are also evident:

1. Failure to provide adequate social housing options for the housing needs of the broader low-income population.
 2. The absence of a social rental housing sector.
 3. Declining housing conditions due to lack of maintenance resources.
 4. Weak identity restrictions on secure housing, with units changing hands and security housing for sale gradually losing their original social use.
 5. The lack of strong housing policy tools, institutions and expertise makes it difficult to develop effective new social housing strategies.
- In addition, residents are losing their connection to community relations. They do not have the means to use their voices to influence the development and change of their communities, they struggle to enjoy community opportunities in the desired manner, and, more importantly, inferior and unequal habitat conditions compared to the direct beneficiaries of middle-classification.

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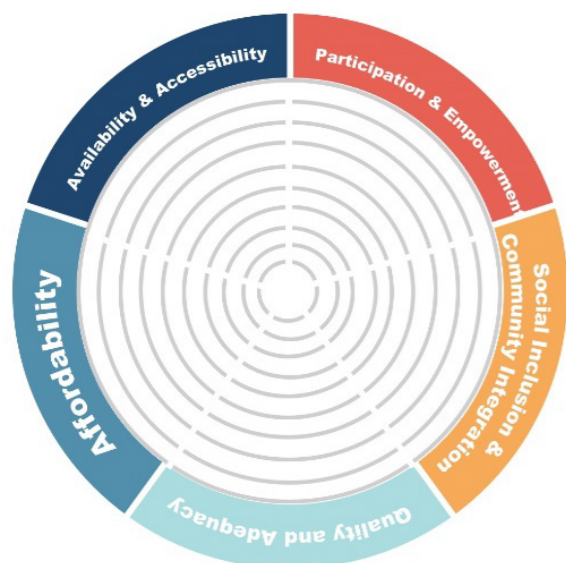
PROCESS & DEVELOPMENT

Affordable housing and community governance in Athens are complex systems that are jointly planned and managed by the Ministry of Environment Energy and Climate Change, the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, and the Ministry of Infrastructure and Transport. Inclusion is achieved in these systems through legal frameworks specifically designed to support individuals who cannot afford housing, project-led public engagement initiatives, and strategies specifically targeted at victims of the housing crisis. Based on the thrust of inclusion and existing research, IAHI-Athens Tool and Community Regeneration Tool are created for evaluating housing affordability and inclusive community governance within Athens. The IAHI-Athens Tool identified the Kypseli community in the city of Athens as facing housing

quality and affordability challenges. Positively, Kypseli makes good use of urban renewal resources to serve the community, reflecting the importance of inclusive design and community engagement, balancing development with community needs. The outcome shows Petralona's culture of informal commerce fosters social cohesion, but challenges remain in terms of rising housing costs, infrastructure adequacy, and public space maintenance. The Community Regeneration tool noted that the Kypseli community's initiatives were broadly in line with the principles of democracy, human rights and good governance, with positive results in terms of legitimacy, social cohesion and localization. Its very significant strength lies in the fact that, as an area that has been in the process of gentrification,

for a long time, it has succeeded in harnessing the resources brought about by it and evolving them into services for the people through a democratic and human rights-respecting approach. As a partially middle-class gentrifying community, Petralona currently appears to have no strong mechanisms for inclusion of low-income populations, as well as difficulties in sustaining a commitment to democracy, human rights

protections and good governance practices. The experience of Athens highlights the importance of community engagement and adaptive governance to address urban challenges. Cities need to prioritize ensuring equitable access to affordable housing for diverse populations and promoting socio-economic vitality.



IAHA-Athens Tool



Community Regeneration Tool



IAHA outcome of Kypseli



IAHA outcome of Petralona



Community regeneration tool outcome of Kypseli



Community regeneration tool outcome of Petralona

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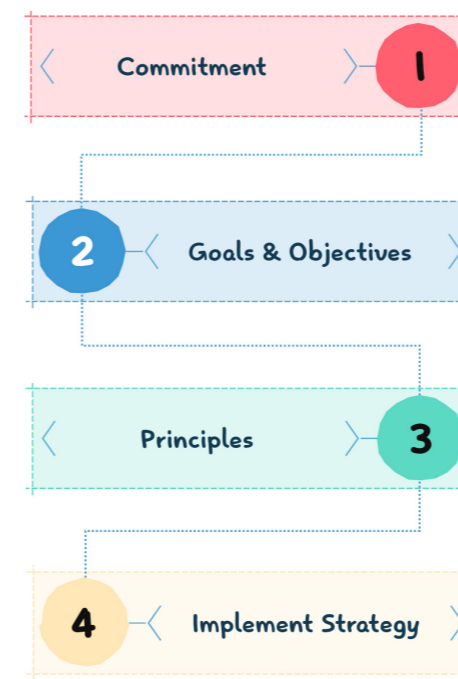
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PROCESS & DEVELOPMENT

1	<p>Advocacy for mixed-income and socially integrated communities</p> <p>A core commitment lies in discouraging the formation of segregated low-income enclaves while advocating for mixed-income housing developments. This approach aims to foster social cohesion and integration among residents across the socioeconomic spectrum, promoting an inclusive urban fabric.</p>
2	<p>Advocacy for Supportive Policies and Financing Mechanisms</p> <p>The guidelines underscore the necessity for supportive policies and financing mechanisms that foster collaboration among individuals, communities, non-profit developers, and investors. This collaborative approach aims to catalyze the development and long-term sustainability of affordable housing initiatives through synergistic partnerships.</p>
3	<p>Participatory planning process prioritization</p> <p>Prioritize active participation of residents in decision-making and design processes. This participatory approach aims to cultivate a sense of ownership while ensuring solutions are tailored to the specific needs and aspirations of vulnerable groups. Ultimately, such inclusive governance promotes equitable representation and empowerment.</p>

3 Key Commitments



Strategy Component

Objects

- Ensure the availability and increase the accessibility of quality affordable housing for low-income Athenians at all life stages and household compositions.
- Create inclusive communities that promote socio-economic integration and eliminate spatial segregation.
- Implement inclusive governance processes that empower residents' voices in housing and development decisions.
- Preserve and utilise Athens' cultural heritage and community identity in the design of affordable housing projects.

Objects of the Strategy

The following section outlines a strategic guide to represent a strategy aimed at addressing one of the inherent biases and suboptimal outcomes observed in the housing sector of the city of Athens, to help planners to realize the rights of the disadvantaged groups in their housing planning, in the hope that Athens will become a city where everyone city where all can stand equally above the fertile ground of middle-classification. Its process encompasses key commitments, strategical goals, guiding principles, and implementation programs.

The commitments advocate for mixed-income and socially integrated communities, Supportive Policies and Financing Mechanisms, and Participatory planning process prioritization.

The Guiding Principles set out six requirements, namely:

1. Diversity Integration - Broad engagement, with a special focus on low-income groups, working with local organizations.
2. Inclusive Design - Implement universal design principles that incorporate community culture and history.
3. Early and Sustained Engagement – Maintain community participation throughout the project and establish a feedback mechanism.

4. Democracy & Legitimacy - Keep the project transparent, update the information regularly, and evaluate the engagement strategy.

5. Capacity Building & Empowerment – Empower low-income groups to participate through education and training.

6. Accountability Monitoring – Establish accountability mechanisms and monitor assessments using community-based metrics.

As a safeguard for the principles, the guide advocates encouraging and supporting community advocacy groups to ensure that community participation remains a priority for all housing projects. This is followed by a series of six steps to ensure that community participation remains a priority for all housing projects through Regulate the use of housing, Adaptive Reuse, Provide Opportunities for Integration, Building Intergenerational Communities, Prioritize projects that integrate affordable housing into the market rate, and Localization of Gentrification Products. In doing so, it ensures that a range of stakeholders, including the Government, the Private Sector, Professionals and the Community, fulfil their obligations.