

Inclusion or Exclusion? The Spatial Habitus of Rural Gentrifiers

Kyra Tomay and Viktor Berger

Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Pécs, Hungary

Correspondence: Kyra Tomay (tomay.kyra@pte.hu)

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Abstract

Several rural areas all over the world have experienced the inflow of the urban better-off. This rural gentrification takes various temporary and permanent forms, i.e., lifestyle migration, second-home ownership, or short-term visitors. Scholarly interest in rural gentrification is evidenced by the growing body of literature. Based on 105 semi-structured in-depth interviews conducted in two rural areas in Hungary, this article aims to explore the perceptions, motivations, preferences, and lived experiences of rural newcomers, their position within the community, as well as processes of inclusion and exclusion. We rely on Pierre Bourdieu’s concept of habitus and argue that it includes distinct spatial dispositions forming a “spatial habitus.” The interviews show that the middle-class rural gentrifiers’ (spatial) habitus is entangled with their cultural capital and represents a mixture of urban and “ruralising” dispositions. Their spatial practices are interpreted as the result of middle-class (spatial) habitus and middle-class symbolic distinction. At the same time, middle-class rural gentrifiers are active local agents who defy common notions of newcomers having to integrate into their communities of choice.

Keywords

Bourdieu; gentrification; Hungary; rural gentrification; spatial dispositions; spatial habitus

1. Introduction

This article aims to contribute to the growing body of publications addressing the experiences of inclusion of newcomers/immigrants in rural areas. Despite the relative abundance of studies on the implications of immigration for rural spaces (McAreavey & Argent, 2018), the lived experience of these immigrants concerning inclusion has so far received less scholarly attention. This article focuses on a narrower and relatively homogenous group, namely metropolitan middle- and upper-middle-class fractions relocating to small rural settlements, through an analysis of 45 semi-structured in-depth interviews conducted in two

case study areas in the framework of the research project *The Role of Gentrification in Rural Development*. However, it should be stressed that not all rural areas are affected by the inflow of the urban better-off: In the Hungarian context, the general tendency is that most villages are shrinking and ageing (Jelinek & Virág, 2020), and impoverished and ghettoised (Nagy et al., 2015; Váradi & Virág, 2015; Virág, 2010). Only a few (around 100 to 150 villages) experience the permanent or temporary migration of the urban better-off. Our analysis applies Pierre Bourdieu's concept of the habitus and the Bourdieu-inspired concepts of spatial dispositions and spatial habitus to gain a deeper understanding of the spatial practices of urban middle-class intellectuals. Drawing on Bridge's (2001) reconceptualisation of Bourdieu's habitus theory in the context of metropolitan gentrification, we adapt this modified concept to rural gentrification.

Migration is perceived as a relevant choice for the middle classes, since living in a rural setting affords them "quasi-upper-class" consumption patterns and higher living standards that are inaccessible in an urban environment and exceed their actual financial status. Another potential benefit associated with rural migration is its capacity to secure capital for launching a new activity or a "lifestyle enterprise" (Stone & Stubbs, 2007; Tomay, 2019). Presumably, rural gentrifiers are not exclusively guided by their urban spatial dispositions, as evidenced by the fact that they need to build local communities, as well as preserve and rediscover local values, and by the pre-eminence of dispositions stressing the benefits of rural life (tranquillity, proximity to nature, fewer people). This may influence the extent to which rural migrants see themselves as included members of local communities or strive for inclusion.

The purpose of this article is to examine how new residents with higher status are received in small villages, what characterises their perceptions of the rural milieu and community, and to what extent they are able and willing to integrate into rural society. The main question is how the differences in spatial habitus shape integration efforts and processes of inclusion and exclusion. Will a higher social status and cultural capital instil a sense of superiority and distinction into the habitus of rural gentrifiers (as suggested by Bourdieu)? If so, the result would be exclusion instead of the intended inclusion into the community. To answer these questions, the article will rely on an assessment of rural gentrifiers' perceptions, spatial dispositions, spatial practices, and their relations with "indigenous" inhabitants and other newcomers. It will also investigate whether rural "newcomers" deploy specific strategies of distinction from other (local or non-local) groups, whether consciously or not.

2. Theoretical Horizons

2.1. *Gentrification and Rural Gentrification*

The concept of gentrification was introduced by Glass (1964) to describe phenomena observed in London's East End. Following most definitions, gentrification denotes the inflow of middle-class people into working-class or lower-status inner-city neighbourhoods, and the resulting transformation of the area's physical, demographic, and social structure through redevelopment (Hamnett, 1991; Nemes & Tomay, 2022; Smith, 1996).

Bridge (2001) notes that during the initial stages of gentrification, the new residents have less economic and more cultural capital, to use the terminology of Bourdieu (1986), which explains the marked differences between the habitus of pioneers moving to (dilapidated) inner-city districts and that of middle-class suburban

residents. As argued by Butler and Robson (2001) in their study of gentrified neighbourhoods in London, besides financial opportunities, lifestyle expression is also critical for shaping residential choice: Gentrifiers generally prefer neighbourhoods populated by like-minded people. The pioneers of gentrification express this distinction consciously through the symbolic dimension of space. The purchase of dilapidated houses (besides their modest price) is a form of self-expression, as they can be rebuilt according to one's taste, which creates a distinctive gentrification aesthetic. In the subsequent phases of "expanding" and "adolescent" gentrification, the financial and public safety risks of moving downtown are reduced (Clay, 1979), making the neighbourhood "trendy" and safe to invest in, and triggering the inflow of predominantly well-educated and higher-income upper-middle-class groups. Finally, "super-gentrification" (Lees, 2003) refers to the phase when people with even higher economic capital enter pre-gentrified communities, resulting in the displacement of both the original population and the first-wave gentrifiers (Tomay & Völgyi, 2022).

It is important to highlight that urban and rural gentrification are not identical phenomena, despite some commonalities in the post-industrial transformation of urban and rural areas (Phillips, 1993). Rural gentrification is understood as the relocation of urban upper- and middle-class groups to settlements appreciated for their favourable social and natural assets, which increases their economic and social valorisation and results in the transformation of local assets (the built and natural environment) in ways that conform to the particular values, styles, and visions of urban consumers (Tomay & Völgyi, 2022). The gentrification of the countryside is closely connected to the "rural turn" in tourism, whereby a settlement with an attractive natural environment is valorised initially as a tourist destination, and second homes then increasingly become the primary residence of their new owners (Nemes & Tomay, 2022). Similar to gentrification in metropolitan areas, rural gentrification, due to its role in shaping rural spaces and restructuring residents' range of possibilities, is not without conflict. Compared to the "indigenous" rural population, the new residents have a relatively higher status, and this renders the question of inclusion and exclusion more complex than in the paradigmatic case, where migrants have no relative status advantage over locals and will therefore strive for inclusion into the community (Schuetz, 1944).

2.2. (Spatial) Habitus and (Spatial) Practices

Bourdieu's theory provides a useful theoretical basis for interpreting the gentrification of rural places by the middle classes, and the emerging processes of distinction, inclusion, and exclusion in rural communities. (Bourdieu, 1984, Chapter 3; see also Bourdieu, 2002). In the following, basic Bourdieusian concepts (social space, habitus, practices, distinction) will be reconstructed, and we argue that the habitus implies a set of spatial dispositions hereby defined as "spatial habitus." Spatial habitus and spatial dispositions generate spatial practices, guide perceptions of and affinities toward spaces, and contribute to socio-spatial inequalities.

Bourdieu's concept of "social space" (Bourdieu, 1984, Chapter 3; see also Bourdieu, 1985, 2002) refers to the totality of objective social relations between social positions. However, since humans are not automatons, objective relations alone cannot account for individual actions; hence the significance of the habitus, representing, on the one hand, a system of inculcated dispositions and, on the other, schemes of perceptions and appreciations generating actors' practices (see also Bourdieu, 2002). Consequently, habitus is not a mere reflection of an individual's class position but also encourages people to make choices or engage in practices that are attuned to their objective chances.

In *Distinction*, Bourdieu (1984, Chapter 3) analyses how the habitus as a set of dispositions conditioned by one's position in social space generates various practices (food, sports, clothing, taking care of the body and its presentation, music, literature, preferred types of art, etc.) that form relatively homogenous lifestyles. The habitus, practices, and lifestyles of social classes imply distinction in two ways. Some practices are, on the one hand, examples of “conspicuous consumption,” in that there is a conscious effort to create a distance to and establish superiority in relation to other classes, for example, members of the dominant classes tend to see themselves as having “pure” and “sophisticated” taste, as opposed to the “barbarous” and “vulgar” taste of the lower classes (Bourdieu, 1984, pp. 30–32). On the other hand, and more importantly, Bourdieu (1984, p. 483) also stresses that people's consumption and practices need not be conscious and conspicuous to be symbolic, since “goods are converted into distinctive signs” through the lens of the habitus—they are relationally perceived as signs not only of (refined or barbarous) taste, but also of (a higher or lower) position in social space. In this way, the various lifestyle practices generate symbolic distances between the dominant and the dominated classes and reinforce social inequalities on a symbolic level, thereby contributing to the reproduction of objective social structures (Bourdieu, 1984, pp. 483–484). Regarding middle-class migration to rural areas, this means that the gentrifiers' practices may involve conspicuous and unconscious forms of distinction to groups in their immediate physical proximity (e.g., locals) and others farther away (for instance, urban middle-class fractions).

However, the Bourdieusian concepts of habitus, dispositions, and practices are not only useful in the context of the consumption of goods and services or various other lifestyle-relevant practices but also concerning spatiality. Bourdieu (2018) highlights the mediating role of habitus in the process of inscribing objective social relations into physical space, resulting in a significant (albeit not perfect) overlap between social space and (appropriated) physical space. As Bourdieu (2018, p. 111) puts it: “It is the habitus that makes the habitat.” In other words, the habitus enables actors to “inhabit” (to take advantage of and feel at home in) a particular segment of social and physical space (cf. Németh, 2022, 2023, pp. 62–64; Zsinka, 2023). Further advancing Bourdieu, we interpret the specific set of dispositions that guide perceptions and experiences of spaces and generate spatial practices as spatial habitus. As we understand the terms, spatial dispositions and the spatial habitus—just like the general concept of dispositions and habitus (Bourdieu, 1984, pp. 170–172)—are twofold: They are (systems of) schemes of perception and appreciation and, at the same time, (systems of) schemes generating practices. Therefore, spatial habitus and spatial dispositions inform, on the one hand, how spaces are perceived and appreciated, and what spatial practices are favoured or rejected. On the other hand, spatial habitus also generates specific practices attuned to actors' (spatial) inclinations: the choice of where to live (if affordable), how to decorate one's home, what spatial routes to take and distances to keep, etc. It also should be stressed that spatial habitus, and the spatial practices it generates, may also imply distinction.

Exploring the habitus of middle-class rural gentrifiers is a key focus of our research. Their habitus is likely to reflect the specificities of middle-class fractions in the social space, i.e., they can rise as easily as they can fall (Bourdieu, 1984, Chapter 3; see also Bourdieu, 2002). Thus, these actors are assumed to be (consciously or unconsciously) driven by a need for self-assertion, as testified by their various strategies, including their choice of residence or setting up a business, the seed capital being the value differential gained by moving to the countryside. Regarding their spatial dispositions or spatial habitus, the objective is to examine what spaces and places they have affinity for, and what spatial practices and routines they feel comfortable with. Their spatial habitus and characteristic middle-class aspirations indicate different spatial practices, everyday spatial routines, and spatial action radiuses relative to the indigenous population.

Through the concept of spatiality and the ideas of Bourdieu, it becomes possible to distinguish between urban and rural habitus. Urban habitus is shaped by the metropolitan way of life (Simmel, 1950), i.e., an accelerated pace, high population density, relatively good accessibility of services, and increased spatial mobility connected to everyday urban life and urban spatial routines. Urban habitus is, thus, interpreted as a set of dispositions that generates these typical urban spatial practices and city-dweller's preferences for them, while also representing a form of "modernism" (cf. Bourdieu, 1966). Conceived this way, urban habitus is relatively universal or "cosmopolitan," in that its dispositions apply to a wide array of spatial contexts, not only the city one resides in (Jóvér, 2023, p. 80).

As pointed out by Jóvér (2023, p. 78, 84) in a meta-analysis of studies on rural residents from around the globe, rural habitus is invariably defined in its relation to and fundamental discrepancy from its urban counterpart. Moreover, the two are hierarchically related: Whereas urban habitus is associated with symbolic advantages, rural habitus has a lower prestige and undermines the accumulation of capital (see also Bourdieu, 1966; Bourdieu et al., 1966). Traditionally, a key factor shaping rural habitus, according to Jóvér (2023, pp. 80–81), is agricultural activity and the associated physical labour, with specific rhythms and constraints inscribed in the bodies of actors, distinguishing their physical appearance from that of urban subjects. However, one could object by arguing that this focus on agriculture is not relevant anymore, as processes of modernisation and industrialisation since the second half of the 20th century (Ragadics, 2023, pp. 14–15) have gradually led to a diminishing role of agricultural production in rural settlements in Hungary. In response to this argument, two points can be made. First, if having ties to agriculture is understood not in a narrow sense (as being an independent farmer or agricultural worker), but more broadly (including producing food for self-consumption, owning land, or having professional agricultural training), over 50% of Hungarian society had some ties to agriculture in one way or another in the mid-2000s (Kovách, 2012, pp. 42–45). Secondly and more generally, rural habitus is not only marked by agriculture but also by various other forms of physical work predominant in rural areas. Physical work (whether agricultural or not) inscribes itself in the body, creating a special form of bodily capital suited to the local context (Jóvér, 2023, p. 80). The asymmetrical power relation between urban and rural areas is also manifest in the fact that urban habitus is applicable in a multitude of contexts, while rural habitus is incompatible with urban areas, thereby limiting the ability of rural dwellers to accumulate the various forms of capital in urban areas (Jóvér, 2023, p. 81). Although certain spatial dispositions of the urban habitus are not applicable in rural contexts, this does not entail similarly great disadvantages for the accumulation of capital.

In summary, rural habitus relates to the dispositions of agricultural labour, backyard farming, subsistence work, and other forms of physical labour and practices in rural areas. It is also a form of traditionalism, in contrast to the urban habitus with its preference for "modern" lifestyles. The applicability of rural dispositions and rural habitus is much more limited than that of urban habitus, resulting in a reinforcement of social inequalities (Jóvér, 2023, p. 83). In the following, the urban/rural distinction will be instrumental for understanding the spatial habitus of middle-class rural migrants.

3. Materials and Methods

The present study is based on the analysis of 105 semi-structured in-person interviews conducted in two case study areas covered by the research project *The Role of Gentrification in Rural Development*. The interviews were conducted in several phases between 2019 and 2022, with a typical duration of 1 to

2.5 hours. Besides rural newcomers, indigenous locals, and entrepreneurs, recreational migrants were also interviewed. However, this article mainly focuses on 45 interviews with rural newcomers to understand and interpret their particular perceptions of the countryside, their spatial habitus and practices, and their experiences of inclusion and exclusion. Using the ATLAS.ti software, we analysed the new residents' gentrification narratives (background, motivations, choice of residence, prior expectations, arrival, experience of, and occupation of the new residence), as well as their perceptions of and relations maintained with native locals, the urban middle-classes, and various fractions of their own group, providing deeper insights into their self-assessment with other groups and its implications for inclusion and exclusion. The results of these analyses will be presented in Section 4.

One of the case study areas, Grapevine, is a small village in southwest Hungary, within the Villány wine region, while the other area, Stone Valley (both pseudonyms), encompasses seven villages, located near Lake Balaton. Although both areas flourish as rural tourism destinations situated in a beautiful natural environment and boast a distinctive architectural heritage, Stone Valley's tourism—in terms of scale and revenue—eclipses that of Grapevine due to the vicinity of Lake Balaton, while Grapevine strategically organises its tourism around events and festivals. The composition of new arrivals exhibits subtle differences as well: Stone Valley is characterised by a higher prevalence of second-home owners, whereas Grapevine experiences a more pervasive trend of permanent immigration. As both fieldwork sites have a long history of gentrification, our interviewees include gentrifiers who have resided in these rural settlements more or less permanently for several decades, as well as newcomers of the last five to 10 years, and even children of original gentrifiers who already grew up there (see Table 2 in the Supplementary File, for a more detailed description of the interviewees). The overwhelming majority of newcomers are domestic migrants originating from the Hungarian capital or regional cities, and akin to Benson's (2010) results, their integration is shaped by several factors, including their expectations and the receptiveness of the host community.

In both case study areas, urban artist-intellectuals acted as pioneers of gentrification, attracted by the idyllic environment, cheap old houses, and the possibility of a rural life, and they were followed by other members of the middle class: Lifestyle migrants seeking to valorise their capital assets through local hospitality and tourism businesses, turning both areas into popular destinations for rural tourism, with wine and gastronomy as the defining elements of their image (for a detailed discussion see Nemes & Tomay, 2022; Tomay & Völgyi, 2022). Pioneer gentrifiers in the selected rural settlements exhibited frictions between high cultural and lower economic capital, and their decision to relocate to a rural area was shaped by a desire to prevent downward social mobility. In line with the classical theories of gentrification in urban contexts (Clay, 1979; Zukin, 1987), members of middle-class fractions rich in cultural capital were the first to arrive. The subsequent wave of gentrification in Stone Valley was dominated by affluent middle-class individuals acquiring second homes. In Grapevine, a similar trajectory unfolded in the 2000s, with lifestyle entrepreneurs from middle-class families establishing small wine and tourism enterprises to complement their urban-derived incomes. While these second-wave gentrifiers still had a high level of cultural capital, they had more economic capital compared to the first-wavers. Several representatives of this second wave sold their higher-priced urban homes, giving them substantial financial capital for setting up various (lifestyle) businesses after purchasing cheaper rural property. Cultural capital is equally significant in the case of lifestyle businesses, as demonstrated by second wavers' confessed preference for establishing guest houses and wineries whose quality and style conform to their standards. The new guest houses and wineries offer their (predominantly urban) clients a pleasant and

peaceful rural atmosphere and a momentary respite from the anxieties of urban life—a certain kind of “rural idyll” that reflects middle-class ideals (Csurgó, 2014).

The third wave of rural gentrification, as reflected in the interviewees’ narratives, involved the inflow of “affluent people.” The contemporary landscape in both villages is marked by elevated property prices and tourism activities of higher standard that require significant financial capital to initiate. This shift is best explained using the concept of “super-gentrification” (Lees, 2003). Borrowed from urban gentrification theory, this term refers to the final phase of gentrification driven by the upper rather than the middle classes, whose more affluent members push out native residents as well as the early gentrifiers.

4. Results

4.1. Rural Gentrifiers’ Experiences of Inclusion and Exclusion

The rural migrants among our interviewees reported diverse experiences, which suggests that integration is shaped by the attitudes of both newcomers and the host community. In the following, we identify recurring topics and narratives in our interviews. Some of our interviewees encountered an open and welcoming attitude, typically those who have been permanent residents of their village of choice for a long time, having arrived at a time when few others moved in, which meant that the existing rural context had a decisive influence on their integration:

Here in the village, people were very open and really helpful, from showing us how to plant carrots or prune them [laughs], really, and doing some dibbling together, they helped a lot with the wine and the vineyard, and surprisingly, it wasn’t the younger generation, but the older people who we got along with really well. And they liked the fact that we were a little different. (interview 2)

The majority, however, described the locals as conservative, “uncultured,” and “envious.” Conservatism manifests in local customs and different life rhythms, as well as negative attitudes towards change and newcomers:

Well, it is a fact that they [the newcomers] are more easy-going than, say, a villager, who is like: “Ugh, get up, cos’ you have to wake up early in the morning, get things done, tidy up, everything, sweep the floor in the morning, if there are two inches of snow, it has to be swept away immediately, because if you don’t do that, you’re useless.” And this is where conflicts arise....The new neighbour will surely be met with hostility. Because they themselves could not live such a life...because it’s nice to sleep late and chill out and...and it’s not the end of the world if the lawn isn’t mown every three days. (interview 3)

The village isn’t welcoming, I can’t say that they hurt me or harass me, I get along with everyone, but still....We’ve tried to do something here, to organise social life in the village, but all our efforts were rejected. They have their own world that no one can enter. That’s just the way it is. If you came out to the street with me, everyone would greet me, I would know about everyone’s grandchild, I have absolutely nothing against them....They are the ones who don’t let me in, and I have given up trying. And I’m perfectly fine with that. (interview 11)

Envy is seen by many as fuelled by income and social disparities. Those who make their living from tourism are accused of “getting rich easily,” ignoring the huge amount of investment and work involved:

Initially, whether one was a native or a new resident was not an issue. But these days, we are experiencing many problems, so obviously indigenous inhabitants cannot stand newcomers and there's...a strong aversion. This has a lot to do with cultural differences, envy, and the huge polarisation of opportunities....This is quite difficult, as these people [the gentrifiers] sustain the whole community, from restaurants and wineries to catering, so those who still live here from the native population make a living from these activities one way or another, directly or indirectly. If it weren't for that, there would be nothing here but dilapidated houses, because there would be no job opportunities at all. (interview 12)

Among the indigenous population, narratives of amicable inclusion and complaints are equally prevalent; the issues and grievances are quite similar on both sides:

The people who move here appear to be friendly, I have nothing against them. They talk to me. They ask me where to find a shop, where this or that is better....They help me, they fit in like everybody else. It's not like they're bragging about who they are, where they come from, they seek harmony with the village. So, they seem to adapt. (interview 23)

You don't notice 90% of these people [the newcomers] in the village, they don't attend community events, they make no efforts to integrate into the rural atmosphere, they don't even socialise with the villagers....This angers me...and if they do nothing for the village, they should at least keep a low profile and remain in their little houses. (interview 15)

The ambivalence between inclusion and exclusion and the desirability and non-desirability of integration is also reflected in the nature of the social networks that the new residents create for themselves. Partly due to similarities in their culturally oriented habitus, immigrants from the first two waves socialise more easily among themselves and tend to form strong alliances against both the locals and the “rich” last-wave gentrifiers:

If we do not help each other and stand by each other, then who will? Nobody. We live in a beautiful area, hopefully our kids are happy to grow up in a beautiful natural environment, but we also need each other. Life can testify to that every day because each new day somebody needs something, and we have a list on our phone of those nine families whom we can call. I cannot request such a thing from a native. It is easier to find a helping hand among each other than among the locals, and I am not saying that we don't trust them, because some people are very helpful and friendly, but they are a minority. (interview 7)

As noted above, distinction primarily emerges in the local context, either from the residents of surrounding villages, the indigenous locals, or the latest wealthy gentrifiers. The following interview excerpts, point to a contradictory relationship with the locals or “natives.” On the one hand, several new residents stress their need for some contact with the locals, whom they try not to treat condescendingly, but at the same time, they notice the presence of a social division, maintained on both sides:

I know only some locals, but I like them, I like them a lot, and they also like me. Apparently, the fact that I come from Budapest and am still normal makes me valuable in their eyes. For them, it means I am someone who doesn't look down on them, who doesn't use a condescending tone or try to appear better just because I have a degree or let's say more money. (interview 4)

The last sentence of this interview excerpt indicates social division, precisely because it implies that a condescending stance toward locals is not uncommon. Not being natives, gentrifiers are convinced that the locals will never fully accept them; in the meantime, they distinguish themselves from the indigenous inhabitants whose tastes do not resemble their own, who show no interest in cultural practices deemed sophisticated according to their middle-class aesthetic standards. Bourdieu (1984, p. 178) characterises this essentialist tendency as a distinction from culturally "barbarous" taste, converting it "into a natural inclination simply by dissociating it from its economic and social *raisons d'être*." This is illustrated by the following excerpts:

Entering into contact with them? I am contacting them all the time, we even drink *palinka* [fruit brandy] together....I don't feel like [I'm] being isolated from them, but, generally, they show no interest in our activities. (interview 6)

Let's say you are at [X], having a five-course dinner with a concert for a considerable amount of money. But they consider this not a real dinner, but only fine dining where you are served micro-portions of food....They wouldn't understand what it is or what it's all about. (interview 5)

We "newcomers" agree that the local cultural level does not meet our expectations. (interview 6)

A common topic in rural gentrifiers' narratives is the discrepancy between their own cultural standards and cultural consumption and those of the locals. On the one hand, they bemoan locals' lack of interest in the cultural events organised by the lifestyle entrepreneurs; on the other hand, rural gentrifiers show clear signs of contempt for the culture preferred and consumed by the locals, scorned as being "terrible," "lamentable," and "of poor quality." Such discourses reflect the essentialist and naturalising distinction of middle-class fractions vis-à-vis the lower classes and their "barbarous" taste. This distinction implies a glorification of their taste, which they think of as naturally sophisticated:

Village Day?...Terrible! There's a stencil paper for the events, they have been copying the same thing for over ten years, last year they even forgot to change the date....So whoever does it, whoever is responsible for the culture here, I'm not even sure they have a high school degree. (interview 11)

The assessment of cultural programmes (whether organised by newcomers or locals) is characterised by mutual distrust and a lack of understanding of the other's point of view. While gaining new residents drives up property values and turns the sale of houses into a "good deal" for locals, gentrification and the associated tourism activities imply a serious confinement of their community space:

These [new, more expensive] places are shunned by locals. So, this is sad. And it's also sad that there is nowhere to go. One can gather in front of the local shop, have a quick drink there, but there is no pub, for instance, because it was converted into a restaurant, and the locals have nowhere to assemble and

organise a forum. That's what everyone truly misses. I can hear and sense that they feel like outcasts in their own village. (interview 14)

A further type of distinction is aimed at the newly arrived investors. Pioneers often feel threatened by the subsequent waves of gentrifiers, in contrast with the natives whom they regard as simply lacking refined taste and sophistication, without seeing them as an existential threat. Seeking authenticity and emphasising “quiet immigration,” first-wave artists and intellectuals implicitly distance themselves from later—specifically, the most recent—wave of gentrifiers, “the rich” who prioritise money over aesthetics. Their arrival in the villages, paired with the threat of material displacement (buying up property, rising prices) and a perception that they are destroying local values, is a recurring complaint in earlier gentrifiers’ narratives:

We are embittered by the arrival of these *nouveau riches* destroying everything like a tank. [For them] nothing has any value, and we still fuss over how to scrape off the old bricks so we can reuse them. (interview 1)

I think we arrived here ten years ago, and ten years ago...it didn't occur to us to change anything here, rather, we were respectful of the built environment and what previous generations sought to preserve, and we tried to adapt, and now it appears as if these rules have vanished, and the visitors who come here have material wealth, but no longer share these feelings. (interview 7)

These statements demonstrate an explicit desire for distinction from third-wave entrepreneurs. The tastes of these wealthy investors are viewed even more negatively than those of locals because they are not simply seen as uneducated, but as representing a whole new level of bad taste with their *nouveau riche* practices and activities perceived as destructive. The *nouveau riche* character of new investors is associated by earlier gentrifiers with ruthlessness, ignorance of perceived local values, and the exclusive prioritisation of crude financial interests—in stark contrast to how they perceive themselves: as being distinguished, sophisticated, and committed to the preservation of local (architectural and natural) values. This showcases the classic Bourdieusian pattern of distinction between the cultural and the economic fractions of the ruling classes in a rural context (Bourdieu, 1984). In rejecting the habitus and practices of the *nouveau riche*, the habitus of earlier gentrifiers is conditioned by and reflective of their objective possibilities and interests.

4.2. The Heterogenous Spatial Habitus of Rural Migrant Gentrifiers

Our interviews indicate the absence of a distinct rural habitus among our interview subjects, whose lifestyle is not centred on agricultural or local physical labour. Instead, their spatial dispositions can be described as a “ruralising” middle-class idealisation (as opposed to the reality) of rural life. These ruralising dispositions include a quest for/reconstruction of a “nostalgic rural past,” a (re)invention of local values, a need for local community-building, and others emphasising the benefits of rural life (tranquillity, proximity to nature, few people):

The people who come here usually feel attached to a tradition floating before our eyes, which we have never personally experienced, which we cannot precisely define, but one we can picture....All of us share the same idea of what this tradition was like. People used to do things together, there was feather-plucking and spinning and cornhusking and so on. The actual locals listened with disbelief. They

are aware of how the past was and even discuss what it must have been like....The generation that lives here has never experienced what we ourselves have never experienced either but are seeking to find. Unlike them. (interview 6)

Newcomers' ruralising dispositions—fuelling a quest for a nostalgic past that never existed—are thus contradictory to the actual rural habitus of “indigenous” rural inhabitants. What further distinguishes ruralising dispositions from rural habitus is a selective prioritisation of various aspects of agriculture. The rural habitus contains dispositions that render the typically intense and monotonous daily agricultural labour acceptable; by contrast, middle-class gentrifiers like to take things more “easy.” This tendency to distance themselves from monotonous work perceived as pointless is a recurring theme, as demonstrated by one of the interview excerpts mentioned. And even if they do engage in agriculture, the preferred activities will be those that conform to middle-class values and are aesthetically “sophisticated,” such as wine-making, organic farming, or horticulture. Invariably, this habitus diverges from the (traditional) rural habitus, creating an implicit distinction from locals:

I make wine, because my neighbour has a vineyard on the hilltop, so he knows how to do it, and then I bought a press and some tools, and it's the third year that we've been buying grapes to make wine...just for our own pleasure. (interview 4)

I have a garden now, I've started growing herbs and tomatoes, but not much. My garden is more like a sculpture park. It's full of statues. (interview 9)

A further distinctive trait of ruralising dispositions is their more stylised perspective on the rural way of life compared to the natives, whose lives are governed by the rural habitus. As a recurring element, our interviewees mentioned the peacefulness of rural life and its proximity to nature:

Well, I like being close to nature, the fact that we live just beside the forest. That people are more attentive, more relaxed. It's much more peaceful. (interview 8)

It's so wholesome here. This morning, for instance, I began working and noticed a large swarm of long-tailed tits in our backyard. Which is awesome. (interview 7)

Our interviewees prefer the distinctive traits of rural life: tranquillity, proximity to nature, an aesthetic physical environment, fewer people, greater freedom, etc. However, as pointed out earlier, these ruralising spatial dispositions are not identical to actual rural dispositions, the latter being less aesthetically oriented and more practical, defined for the most part by the cyclical constraints of crop and livestock farming (wheat, pigs, cattle), which the gentrifiers do not care for because they are at odds with their middle-class dispositions. It is also worth noting that the majority of rural gentrifiers were born in urban areas, a fact which, under “normal” circumstances, would be an indication of the urban habitus and a lower likelihood of seeking a rural life. Thus, the question arises: What led them to live in a rural community? Our interviewees' narratives and reflections on their biography are quite telling. Most of them reported childhood experiences that allowed them to enjoy a greater proximity to nature and to familiarise themselves with various aspects of rural life, as a counterweight to their urban spatial habitus. These include owning an apartment in an upscale residential area on the outskirts of Budapest; summer holidays spent with grandparents at Lake

Balaton; a plot of land in a forest not far from their urban residence. These aspects of non-urban life feed into their ruralising dispositions. Such experiences give rise to the emergence of spatial dispositions with an affinity for rural life. However, these ruralising dispositions arise without the constraints of a rural existence inculcating any actual rural habitus:

So, the good thing is that I can have rural life here, a sort of “river cottage” lifestyle, relatively close to nature, without being completely isolated from the world. There’s such a bustling life here in the summer that if you are a social person, or the type of person who likes to hang out with friends in a pub, there’s such a buzz. And still, you don’t have to be in Budapest, and what you see here are kind of select people. And there are certain times of the year when it gets very calm....So, how shall I put it, it has a certain cyclicity that I like. (interview 10)

By relying on their ruralising dispositions, newcomers take advantage of the perceived benefits of rural life. However, they also possess urban dispositions prompting them not to completely renounce the services and amenities offered by cities. From schooling to shopping and cultural activities, they continue to rely on urban services perceived as being of higher quality. Furthermore, as several of our interviewees mentioned, they sometimes find village life boring and need to get away, for example to a foreign country: “Well, there are so many advantages to rural life, I mean it’s a good thing, but, but I don’t know, I think it bores me to death, so anyway...this double life suits me” (interview 4).

Rural gentrifiers’ blend of ruralising and urban dispositions also manifests in typical spatial practices. Their spatial action radius generally exceeds that of the indigenous population. Their former lives also testify to this, which they describe as being constantly on the move. This extends into the present since they travel far greater distances than the “natives” on a daily, weekly, monthly, and annual basis (e.g., for work, shopping, children’s schooling, or leisure activities). This is both due to various subjectively imposed constraints, as their middle-class habitus prompts them to seek consumer goods and leisure activities that are more accessible in cities, and to their class strategy of investing significantly in their children’s education, which determines their choice of urban schools. This underlines the existence of a blended spatial habitus among rural gentrifiers: a mixture of ruralising and urban dispositions, which they seek to reconcile more or less successfully (as suggested by their personal accounts of frictions). Generally speaking, while the rural habitus is more place-bound (Jóvér, 2023, p. 81), this blended spatial habitus makes the gentrifiers’ urban dispositions compatible with the rural areas studied, thereby contributing to their accumulation of capital.

5. Conclusions

This study undertook an analysis of gentrification processes and the perceptions, patterns of distinction, inclusion, and exclusion of newcomers in selected rural settlements using the Bourdieu-inspired conceptual framework of (spatial) habitus. Spatial habitus was defined as a set of spatial dispositions that guide the perception and appreciation of spaces and generate spatial practices. Using the concept of spatial habitus in empirical investigations sheds light on how exactly actors appropriate physical spaces (Bourdieu, 1996, 1997, 2018; Reed-Danahay, 2020, p. 25).

Our findings suggest that it is not just a question of whether newcomers are welcomed and integrated into the communities by the locals, but also often a matter of rural gentrifiers’ willingness to integrate.

The narratives of immigrants with an urban middle-class intellectual background reveal that inclusion and exclusion—besides the openness or closedness of the community—are largely shaped by the habitus-driven anticipations, perceptions, and motivations of migrants about their settlement of choice and its inhabitants. Based on our interviews, rural gentrifiers appear not as passive receivers of local processes of inclusion and exclusion, but as active agents capable and willing to shape their living conditions and spaces. Theirs is a blended spatial habitus, a mixture of ruralising dispositions idealising rural life, and various dispositions of the urban habitus. In terms of taste, members of this group display typically middle-class traits: First- and second-wave gentrifiers, with their supposedly “cultivated” taste, seek to restore the nostalgic past of rural life in an aestheticising manner (ruralising dispositions). Rural newcomers are motivated by a desire to live in a peaceful and aesthetic environment, and to achieve self-fulfilment through their lifestyle; however, by virtue of their urban dispositions, they remain attached to the benefits of urban life (a varied social life, urban services, etc.). In the examined rural settlements, this blended spatial habitus seeks to maximise the advantages of rural and urban life at the same time. Each group of newcomers, informed by their ruralising spatial dispositions (as opposed to the actual traditional rural habitus), imagines rural life as anything but a peasant existence. This is manifested in the absence of livestock farming, or at least in a preference for breeding animals suited to middle-class needs (e.g., ponies), rather than typical rural animals (pigs, cattle, sheep). Besides differences in taste and an implicit distinction from the indigenous inhabitants, this is also due to the burdensome nature of animal husbandry, which would interfere with their need for space and freedom.

Rural migrants—by virtue of their middle-class habitus and conscious or unconscious distinction from the culturally barbarous, as described by Bourdieu (1984, pp. 30–32)—appear less inclined to integrate into the pre-existing local society, seeking instead to transform it into a kind of archaic, nostalgic image of the village and community life (typically out of tune with the modernisation needs of the rural community). This reflects their preconceived notions of a “rural idyll” and the value choices and aesthetic and cultural patterns of their middle-class dispositions. However, the pioneers display notable differences compared to other groups in terms of their need to integrate into rural society because they could not rely on a pre-existing local network of gentrifiers (Tomay & Völgyi, 2022). Further research is needed on the extent of homogeneity in the (spatial) habitus of individuals involved in different waves of rural gentrification, to establish whether the differences between those opting for urban versus rural destinations are more pronounced, or if the attitudes, habits, and lifestyles of pioneers and later gentrifiers are more similar to each other (regardless of their choice of urban or rural area).

Since space is a key factor in constructing identities (Dobai, 2020), the newcomers are actively engaged (for shorter or longer periods) in the construction of an “imagined village,” as they attempt to (re)shape the physiognomy, customs, and events of the village in line with their cultural capital and ruralising dispositions, which reflect their middle-class values, tastes, and aesthetic dispositions. However, their efforts are typically not well received. While the locals are (mostly) welcome to join this imagined community, if they are unable or unwilling to do so, inclusion comes to a halt, leading to the mere co-existence of parallel societies.

The (spatial) habitus and practices of gentrifiers create an implicit and explicit distinction vis-à-vis the “indigenous” local population. This is evident, on the one hand, in their recurring self-depictions as embodiments of authenticity and quality, while the preferences of locals are ridiculed for not matching their sophisticated taste. This dichotomy reflects the distinction drawn by members of the dominant classes

between “pure” and “barbarous” taste, as described by Bourdieu (1984, pp. 30–32). The spatial habitus of the gentrifiers turns them into dynamic agents in the transformation of their own space and the rural milieu. These processes are complemented by the relative closeness of the migrant group to indigenous residents in business and social life, providing them scant opportunities to participate in local entrepreneurial activities.

All this suggests that issues of inclusion and exclusion arise differently in the context of rural gentrification. Within migration, inclusion and exclusion are generally associated with the inflow of migrants seeking to become a permanent part of the life of a given community, where inclusion is vitally important (while exclusion indicates the rejection or failure of this aspiration). In this constellation, the host community has the greater agency and power. This, however, is far from evident if the newcomers are of a higher status relative to locals, as is clearly the case in rural gentrification. From the outset, middle-class gentrifiers strive to actively shape rural spaces according to their own tastes and interests, de-emphasising the need for inclusion. Accordingly, the local community does not represent the more powerful entity, demanding integration at all costs. Instead, the initiative shifts to rural gentrifiers who create spaces and conditions according to their spatial habitus, which does not necessarily require their inclusion into the local community. However, describing this as a mere reversal of asymmetrical roles, whereby the locals seek to be included by the newcomers, would be an oversimplification. Inclusion and exclusion are multilayered phenomena: For instance, while there is a clear dominance of newcomers in the local business sector and property market, this is not the case in interpersonal relations, where gentrifiers recognise that their outsider status will never grant them full admission among the locals.

In rural gentrification, both processes of inclusion to the local community and distinction from the locals are present. The (spatial) practices of rural gentrifiers appear to be signs of a “smart” class strategy to increase their space of possibilities. In this way, the blended spatial habitus of ruralising and urban dispositions, and the spatial practices they generate, contribute to the symbolic distinction between locals and urban fractions of the middle classes, whether consciously or unconsciously. All of this follows Bourdieu (1984, p. 483), who stresses the conversion of goods and practices into symbolic ones, thus creating the symbolic (and contributing to the actual) dominance of the ruling over the dominated classes. While our analysis focused on rural gentrifiers, our interviews with natives also allowed us to make some cautious observations about their experiences. From their point of view, urban settlers’ activities do not produce any major benefit, as they necessarily involve the partial displacement of indigenous residents. For instance, native residents frequently note that due to the significant rise in real estate prices, they find it increasingly difficult to purchase property. In addition, there is a growing tendency to sideline indigenous inhabitants’ rural habitus and repress typical rural spatial practices that contradict the gentrifiers’ ruralising spatial dispositions (e.g., banning the free movement of livestock on the streets). For native inhabitants, this arguably amounts to a fundamental experience of displacement. Again, social inequalities are inscribed into physical space and further reinforce them (Bourdieu, 1996, 1997, 2018). However, a radically new and interesting situation arises with the emergence of third-wave gentrifiers, i.e., affluent, upper-middle-class entrepreneurs with a surplus of economic capital. Whether the early gentrifiers will close ranks with the locals against their new common adversary is a question for future research.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

Data Availability

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon request. The data is not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

Supplementary Material

Supplementary material for this article is available online in the format provided by the author (unedited).

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About the Authors



Kyra Tomay (PhD) is an associate professor of sociology at the University of Pécs. Her research interests include urban and rural sociology, spatial inequalities, gentrification, and rural entrepreneurship. She is the principal investigator of The Role of Gentrification in Rural Development research project supported by the National Research, Development and Innovation Fund of Hungary.



Viktor Berger (PhD) is an associate professor of sociology at the University of Pécs. His research interests include sociological theories of space, spatial research, phenomenology of the online world, and history of sociological thought. He is a researcher of The Role of Gentrification in Rural Development research project supported by the National Research, Development and Innovation Fund of Hungary.