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Identifying and Evaluating Indicators of Gentrification: A Systematic Literature Review

Mary Jane P. Cabactulan[1], Aristeo C. Salapa[2]
[1]PhD Candidate, Doctor of Philosophy in Urban and Regional Development Administration, University of Southeastern Philippines- Mintal Campus, Davao City, Philippines
[2]Campus Director, University of Southeastern Philippines- Mintal Campus, Davao City, Philippines

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Email of Corresponding Author: mpcabactulan00263@usep.edu.ph

Abstract

This study investigates the indicators of gentrification and their applicability across urban, rural, and forestland settings through a systematic literature review guided by the PRISMA framework. Anchored in socio-spatial transformation perspectives, the study synthesizes existing literature to identify recurring patterns and measures of gentrification. A comprehensive search of academic databases and search engines yielded 154 studies, of which 33 relevant publications were selected based on defined inclusion criteria. Data were analyzed through thematic synthesis to determine the most common indicators and their contextual relevance. Findings reveal eleven key indicators of gentrification, with rising housing costs, displacement and marginalization, and demographic changes emerging as the most dominant across settings. Additional indicators include land-use change, shifts in racial or ethnic composition, social and cultural transformation, economic restructuring, and rural landscape changes. These indicators are interconnected and collectively reflect the socio-economic and environmental impacts of gentrification. The study concludes that gentrification is a multidimensional process extending beyond urban areas and recommends context-specific, equitable development frameworks, sustainable land governance, and protection of indigenous and long-standing communities to mitigate adverse impacts. The study aligns with SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities) and SDG 15 (Life on Land) by addressing inclusive development and sustainable land use. It contributes to socio-economic and environmental sustainability by informing policy, promoting equitable resource management, and supporting community resilience in transforming landscapes.

Keywords: Displacement, Gentrification, Investment in Forestland, Landscape Changes, Multifunctionality, Neighborhood Changes, Dispossession.

1. Introduction

Gentrification refers to the transformation of lower-income areas into higher-income communities, often resulting in displacement of original residents (Glass, 1964; Uribe-Toril et al., 2018). Over five decades, research has primarily focused on urban environments, emphasizing the vulnerability of existing populations due to redevelopment and demographic shifts (Zuk et al., 2017; Khaleel & Hanlon, 2026; Vieira et al., 2018). The process is shaped by interconnected factors such as population movement, policy interventions, and private investment, leading to economic, political, and spatial transformations (Zuk et al., 2015). Although land-use conversion is commonly associated with urban areas, it also occurs in timberlands despite legal protections under frameworks such as Commonwealth Act No. 141 and Presidential Decree No. 705 (Chokkalingam et al., 2006; Nacionales & Gevaña, 2021).

Existing literature identifies gentrification as a multidimensional process involving socio-spatial transformation (Zhang & He, 2018). Urban-focused studies dominate due to cities being centers of economic and political activity (Zuk et al., 2015), yet emerging research highlights rural gentrification as an increasing global trend driven by overcrowding and declining urban livability (Zheng & Tuguldur, 2022). Key themes include capital accumulation, land-use change, and social mobility as drivers of transformation (Zheng & Tuguldur, 2022). Rural gentrification is often linked to amenity-led migration and the valorization of natural landscapes, resulting in displacement and economic restructuring (Phillips, 2020). Motivations such as access to natural amenities and lower living costs further accelerate demographic and housing market shifts (Chen et al., 2014). Studies also suggest that gentrification extends to forestlands, where migration of affluent populations alters land-use patterns, socioeconomic structures, and cultural identities (Jiménez et al., 2021; Gumilang et al., 2021). This includes commercialization of landscapes and resource utilization, which may compromise ecological integrity (Jiménez et al., 2012).

Globally, urbanization continues to expand, yet theoretical understanding of city formation and its dynamics remains incomplete (Scott & Storper, 2015). At the same time, counter-urbanization trends are encouraging migration to rural and forested regions, reshaping both local economies and governance structures (Tan & Zhou, 2022). In rural and forestland contexts, gentrification manifests through land-use reconfiguration, displacement of long-term residents, and tensions

between newcomers and existing communities (Vieira et al., 2018). These transformations reflect broader global patterns where environmental and socio-economic systems intersect, highlighting the need for context-specific analyses.

The conceptualization of gentrification is grounded in socio-spatial transformation theory, emphasizing interactions among economic forces, demographic shifts, and land-use dynamics (Zhang & He, 2018). It also incorporates perspectives on capital accumulation, migration, and environmental valuation, particularly in rural and forestland settings (Zheng & Tuguldur, 2022; Phillips, 2020). The notion of counter-urbanization and amenity-driven migration further informs understanding of how natural landscapes become sites of investment and transformation (Tan & Zhou, 2022). These frameworks collectively explain how gentrification extends beyond urban boundaries into socioecological systems.

Despite extensive research on urban gentrification, limited attention has been given to rural and forestland contexts. Existing studies rarely examine indicators applicable to environmental domains, leaving a gap in understanding how gentrification manifests in these settings. Forestlands, in particular, remain underexplored despite evidence of socio-economic and ecological transformations linked to migration and land-use change. This study addresses this gap by systematically identifying and evaluating indicators of gentrification and assessing their relevance to forestland environments.

This study aligns with several Sustainable Development Goals based on its focus:
SDG 11 – Sustainable Cities and Communities: by addressing equitable urban and rural development and mitigating displacement.
SDG 15 – Life on Land: through its focus on forestland transformation and ecological integrity.
SDG 10 – Reduced Inequalities: by examining displacement and marginalization of vulnerable populations.
SDG 16 – Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions: through its implications for governance, land rights, and inclusive policies.

This research contributes to multiple dimensions of sustainability:
Environmental sustainability: by highlighting the impact of gentrification on forest ecosystems and land-use change.
Socio-economic sustainability: through its focus on displacement, inequality, and community restructuring.
Policy and governance sustainability: by informing inclusive land management and equitable development strategies.
Community and cultural sustainability: by addressing the preservation of local identities and social cohesion. By integrating socio-economic and ecological perspectives, the study supports the development of sustainable, inclusive, and context-sensitive approaches to managing gentrification across diverse landscapes.

2. Material and methods

2.1 Research Design

The study utilized a systematic review design guided by the PRISMA framework, which is widely used for organizing and reporting systematic reviews and meta-analyses (Page et al., 2021; Moher et al., 2009). PRISMA enhances clarity and standardization in presenting findings and supports critical evaluation of evidence (Page et al., 2021; Regona et al., 2022; Schnake-Mahl et al., 2020; Alexander et al., 2019). It also reduces bias through a structured process of literature search, screening, and data extraction (Méndez-Rebolledo et al., 2022).

2.2 Locale of the Study

This study did not focus on a specific geographic location but instead examined global literature on gentrification. The scope included studies from urban, rural, and forestland settings to capture diverse socio-spatial contexts and broaden the applicability of identified indicators.

2.3 Respondents of the Study

As a literature-based study, there were no direct human respondents. Instead, the units of analysis consisted of published studies and scholarly articles that examined gentrification and its indicators.

2.4 Sample and Sampling Procedure

A comprehensive search strategy was implemented using multiple online databases and search engines, including Wiley Online Library, journals.sagepub.com, ScienceDirect, Taylor & Francis, Scopus, Google Scholar, ResearchGate, and Sci-Hub. Additional sources were explored through reference tracking, although access to some databases such as Web of Science was limited. Keywords used in the search included “gentrification,” “displacement,” “dispossession,” “multifunctionality,” “landscape changes,” “neighborhood changes,” and “investment forestlands.” The search was conducted between October and November 2024. Studies were included if they were published in peer-reviewed journals or reputable grey literature, explicitly identified indicators of gentrification, and were written in English. Studies without

full-text access were excluded. The selection process involved several stages: initial identification of studies, removal of duplicates, screening of titles and abstracts for relevance, and full-text evaluation. From an initial pool of 154 studies, duplicates were removed and irrelevant studies excluded, resulting in 71 papers after screening. Further evaluation focusing on studies discussing gentrification indicators led to the inclusion of 33 relevant publications applicable to forestland and protected area contexts.

2.5 Research Instrument

The primary instrument in this study was a structured review protocol based on PRISMA guidelines, which guided the systematic identification, selection, and evaluation of literature. This protocol ensured consistency in data extraction and analysis, enabling the identification of recurring indicators and patterns across studies (Page et al., 2021; Moher et al., 2009).

2.6 Data Gathering Procedure

Data were collected through systematic searches of selected databases and search engines using predefined keywords. The researcher conducted a stepwise screening process, beginning with title and abstract review to determine relevance, followed by full-text assessment of selected studies. Relevant articles were further examined to identify indicators of gentrification and assess their applicability to forestland settings (Bhavsar et al., 2020). Throughout the process, records of identified, screened, and excluded studies were maintained to ensure transparency. The final set of selected studies was subjected to detailed review, and relevant data were extracted for analysis.

2.7 Data Analysis Techniques

The analysis involved identifying, categorizing, and synthesizing indicators of gentrification from the selected studies. Extracted data were examined for recurring themes, similarities, and frequency of indicators across different contexts. Indicators were then compared to determine their relevance and applicability to forestland environments. This approach enabled the identification of common patterns and relationships among indicators, providing a comprehensive understanding of gentrification across urban, rural, and ecological settings.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Major Indicators of Gentrification

3.1.1 Housing Costs

The findings show that rising housing costs are the most frequently identified indicator of gentrification, appearing in 16 studies. These include increases in rent, property values, and overall housing expenses, primarily driven by higher-income individuals moving into targeted areas. This trend leads to financial strain on lower-income residents, often resulting in their displacement. This result reflects the widely recognized role of housing markets in driving gentrification processes. Increasing demand elevates property values, reinforcing inequalities and limiting affordability for existing residents. As noted by Waights (2014), Padeiro et al. (2019), and Zuk et al. (2015), this dynamic illustrates the dual nature of gentrification, where economic revitalization occurs alongside housing inequality, necessitating policy interventions such as rent control and affordable housing programs.

3.1.2 Displacement and Marginalization

The results indicate that displacement and marginalization are the second most common indicators, identified in 15 studies. Displacement occurs both physically, through forced relocation, and socially, through the erosion of community ties, particularly affecting low-income and Indigenous populations. Marginalization manifests as exclusion from economic, cultural, and social participation within transformed neighborhoods. These findings emphasize the social consequences of gentrification. Displacement is often linked to rising housing costs and speculative practices, reinforcing inequalities and disrupting established communities. This aligns with the observations of Padeiro et al. (2019), Hochstenbach (2017), Rayle (2014), Martín and Luque (2025), and Quinton and Nesbitt (2024), which highlight displacement as a central outcome of interconnected economic pressures and structural changes.

3.1.3 Demographic Changes

The analysis reveals that demographic changes appear in 12 studies, characterized by an influx of higher-income and more educated individuals into gentrifying areas. These changes alter the socioeconomic composition of communities and contribute to neighborhood transformation.

Such demographic shifts are commonly associated with urban revitalization but may threaten cultural heritage and local identity. As discussed by Grant (2023) and Waights (2014), the arrival of new populations promotes economic development but creates tensions between development and preservation of existing communities.

3.1.4 Changes in Land Use

Findings show that land-use changes are identified in 8 studies, involving the conversion of land for residential, commercial, or tourism-related purposes. These transformations often replace traditional industries and land uses, resulting in altered landscapes and reduced biodiversity. This indicates that gentrification is closely tied to spatial restructuring and environmental change. As noted by Paccoud et al. (2018) and Abergs (2021), such changes may generate economic benefits but can undermine sustainable land management. The concept of "green gentrification" further highlights how environmental improvements can unintentionally displace vulnerable populations (Quinton, 2024; Sun, 2023).

3.1.5 Changes in Racial/Ethnic Composition

The results identify changes in racial and ethnic composition in 8 studies, reflecting shifts in population demographics as more affluent, often majority groups move into previously marginalized communities. This pattern underscores the racialized nature of gentrification, where minority populations are disproportionately affected. As emphasized by Hyra (2016) and Marcuse (1985), such changes exacerbate existing inequalities and reinforce systemic disparities in housing and social structures.

3.1.6 Social and Cultural Changes

The findings show that social and cultural changes appear in 7 studies, including alterations in lifestyle, social interactions, and community identity. These changes often involve the loss of cultural assets and reduced representation of long-standing residents. This reflects the broader socio-cultural impact of gentrification, where new developments prioritize the preferences of incoming populations. As discussed by Abergs (2021), Phillips and Smith (2018), Hyra (2016), and Thurber and Christiano (2019), these transformations contribute to cultural displacement, political marginalization, and erosion of community identity.

3.1.7 Influx of Businesses and Investments

The analysis shows that increased business activity and investment are identified in 6 studies, including growth in tourism, real estate development, and commercial establishments. These activities stimulate economic growth but disproportionately benefit higher-income groups. This finding suggests that economic development linked to gentrification is unevenly distributed. As noted by Zuk et al. (2015), Moore et al. (2015), and León (2023), investment-driven growth often reinforces inequality, highlighting the need for inclusive economic strategies.

3.1.8 Economic Indicators

The results indicate that economic indicators, such as increased income levels and reduced poverty rates, appear in 5 studies. These changes reflect broader economic transformations associated with gentrification. While these indicators suggest economic progress, they often mask underlying inequalities. As discussed by Padeiro et al. (2019), Revington (2015), and Ibama et al. (2019), economic gains tend to favor wealthier populations, leaving lower-income residents disadvantaged despite overall growth.

3.1.9 Occupational Structure

The findings show that changes in occupational structure are identified in 5 studies, characterized by a shift from traditional industries to service-oriented sectors. This transition creates new employment opportunities but may marginalize workers in existing industries. This shift reflects broader economic restructuring within gentrified areas. As noted by Abergs (2021) and Bhavsar et al. (2020), workforce transitions require adaptation strategies such as retraining to prevent exclusion of vulnerable groups.

3.1.10 Changes in Housing Tenure

The results reveal that changes in housing tenure appear in 3 studies, involving shifts from rental to owner-occupied housing and increased homeownership rates. These changes highlight evolving housing dynamics within gentrified areas. As discussed by Uribe-Toril et al. (2018) and Gibbons et al. (2018), maintaining diverse housing options is essential to ensure affordability and inclusivity.

3.1.11 Transformation of Rural Areas

The findings indicate that rural transformation is identified in 3 studies, including rising farmland prices and declining agricultural activity. These changes reflect the expansion of gentrification beyond urban environments. This demonstrates the growing relevance of rural gentrification. As noted by Czyżewski et al. (2018), Grant (2023), and Sherman and Schafft (2022), such transformations increase economic insecurity for traditional rural populations and highlight the need for sustainable development approaches.

3.2 Interconnected Nature of Gentrification Indicators

The results show that the identified indicators are highly interconnected, with housing costs, displacement, demographic changes, and land-use transformation reinforcing one another. These relationships create a complex system where economic, social, and environmental factors interact simultaneously.

This interconnectedness supports the understanding of gentrification as a multidimensional process rather than a single outcome. The literature consistently emphasizes that these indicators operate collectively, shaping both urban and rural transformations and intensifying their impacts across communities.

4. Conclusion & Recommendations

Rising housing costs and displacement emerge as the primary indicators of gentrification, reflecting its significant social and economic impacts, particularly the reduced affordability of housing and the forced relocation of lower-income populations. These indicators, widely cited in the literature, highlight the intensification of socioeconomic inequalities and the dual nature of gentrification as both a driver of development and a source of exclusion. Additional indicators, including land-use changes, marginalization, and rural transformation, demonstrate that gentrification extends beyond urban areas and is also evident in forestland settings, where shifts in land use and resource utilization contribute to sociocultural disruption and ecological challenges (Uribe-Toril et al., 2018).

The findings underscore the need for tailored approaches to address the unique dynamics of gentrification in rural and forestland contexts, emphasizing the importance of equitable development frameworks, sustainable land governance, and the protection of indigenous and long-standing community rights. Policies and strategies should focus on mitigating displacement, preserving sociocultural integrity, and ensuring balanced development that integrates environmental sustainability with socioeconomic inclusion, thereby addressing the complex impacts of gentrification across diverse landscapes.

Compliance with ethical standards

The authors declare no conflict of interest. This study complied with recognized ethical standards for human-participant research by ensuring voluntary participation with informed consent, the right to withdraw without penalty, and strict confidentiality through anonymous, secure, and aggregated data handling. Given the focus on psychological well-being, procedures were non-invasive, and safeguards were observed to minimize discomfort, with guidance to appropriate support services when needed, and required institutional permissions were secured for instrument use and access to academic records.

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