OFFERING "MORE"?

HOW STORE OWNERS AND THEIR BUSINESSES BUILD

NEIGHBORHOOD SOCIAL LIFE

Vorgelegt von

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Geboren in München, Deutschland

von der Fakultät VI – Planen, Bauen, Umwelt

der Technischen Universität Berlin

zur Erlangung des akademischen Grades

Doktorin der Philosophie in Soziologie

- Dr. phil -

Genehmigte Dissertation

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Tag der wissenschaftlichen Aussprache: 10. August 2016

Berlin 2017

Author's Declaration

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis and that this thesis and the work presented in it are my own and have been generated by me as the result of my own original research. In addition, I hereby confirm that the thesis at hand is my own written work and that I have used no other sources and aids other than those indicated. The author herewith confirms that she possesses the copyright rights to all parts of the scientific work, and that the publication will not violate the rights of third parties, in particular any copyright and personal rights of third parties.

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This thesis was not submitted in the same or in a substantially similar version, not even partially, to another examination board and was not published elsewhere.

Berlin, 12/23/2016

Acknowledgements

My thanks go to the International Graduate Program "The World in the City" at the *Center for Metropolitan Studies* at *Technical University Berlin* as well as to my colleagues and the affiliated professors for providing such an inspiring and stimulating working environment and immense emotional and financial support for the last four years.

Secondly, I thank my three advisors, Sybille Frank, John Mollenkopf, and Dietrich Henckel for their manifold support, inspiration, and patience. You brought me back on track whenever I was losing my way or thinking about giving up and you have my deep thanks for that.

Thirdly, many other scholars have given me inspiration and support on my long way to this thesis' final submission: Hartmut Häußermann, John Mollenkopf, Christine Hannemann, and Susanne Frank sparked my love for urban research and introduced me to urban studies and sociology at Humboldt-University and the CUNY Graduate Center. Frank Eckardt, Sybille Frank, Uwe-Jens Walther, Martin Kronauer, Bettina Hamann, Talja Blokland, and Dorothee Brantz employed me while supporting the further development of this thesis.

My incredible fellows at the CMS, particularly Emily Bereskin and Christian Haid, gave this work its final (interdisciplinary) direction. Thanks for widening my (research) horizon, inspiring me, helping to reflect on my thoughts and experiences, and bringing forth this project. I learned so much from you, also beyond our common academic work.

Particular thanks are also owed to the interview partners, who gave me so much of their time and insights and allowed me to dip into their life-worlds.

And last but not least, I'd like to sincerely thank my beloved family and friends, who provided their enormous emotional support and generous rear cover throughout the process.

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1. Introduction

The idea behind this dissertation has a long history. It was inspired less by my academic work than by my family life and side jobs. It is the result of living in and moving between urban and rural neighborhoods as a child, teenager, and student. Growing up in the 1980s, my family lived in inner-city Munich; like most families there, we lived in a small apartment. Gentrification has a much longer history in Munich than in Berlin. Our neighborhood began experiencing gentrification in the 1980s, and it is now one of the most expensive areas in Munich. The lack of space is one reason why we, like many people in Munich, spent a lot of time in beer gardens. There my parents, my younger sister, and I made many friends. We would meet old friends and make new ones, drinking and eating along the common tables or playing at the beer gardens' playgrounds in the afternoons and evenings. When my mother became pregnant with my second sister and we couldn't find a larger apartment that we could afford in the city, my family moved to a smaller town outside of Munich. There my parents bought a house with a garden in a neighborhood that consisted of single-family houses on one side of the street and public housing complexes on the other.

Despite the larger residential space, my parents, sister, and I struggled to get to know our neighbors and make friends. Most people spent their leisure time with friends and relatives in their homes, enjoying their private gardens and terraces. And there were no beer gardens. Hence, lacking the beer gardens and cafés of Munich, it took much longer to make friends. In the absence of these public spaces, the nearby corner shop, a franchise grocery store, gradually became the place where we got to know the neighborhood, neighbors, local codes, and of course, hear a lot of gossip. The neighbors got to know us, also through the two chatty but caring saleswomen: Even before we had spoken to anyone in the neighborhood, we were known as the "new Munich family" - the "city people." While we never made any friends at the local shop, it was the place where we came into contact with the other local people.

As a student in Berlin in the early 2000s, I worked for several years as a waitress and bartender. My longest job was in a Kreuzberg bar that had a lot of regulars, most of whom lived in the surrounding neighborhoods. They trained me not only how to pour a perfect beer, but also taught me how to listen and care for these regulars even during busy times. I knew where and how to keep their keys, packages, notes, cigarettes, and other belongings, and remembered each guest's special wishes. In return, without even leaving the bar, the patrons let me know about most of the hidden, interesting, special, and useful

places and people in the neighborhood. [1] News about upcoming construction sites, new buildings, closing and opening stores, changing opening hours of local businesses, available apartments, and police and public order patrols was always available, not to mention the latest gossip about who was fighting with whom, which couples split up or got back together, which neighbors were in court and who got a new dog. Although that work ended in 2010, former colleagues and regulars still update me on the latest news. And whenever I need help, I know where to get it. Exploring my new city through its commercial places, I felt at home for the first time when the waitress at my regular café set my *Radler* (shandy) on my table even before I ordered it.

These anecdotes motivated me to study how local businesses help to generate neighborhood social life. The less personal motivation for this thesis is a strong interest in inquiries about everyday social life and the often neglected, ordinary places where urban dwellers come in contact with each other. Following Sharon Zukin's (2012: 2) idea of urban cultural ecosystems, I consider this local social life as being:

> formed by ordinary city dwellers interacting in vernacular spaces. Historically, the most important of these have been markets of various kinds (Agnew, 1986; Low, 2000). Today, they are often public spaces where men and women engage in social practices of prolonged and habitual consumption: the ''third space'' of local pubs, cafés, and barber shops (Duneier, 1992; Oldenburg 1989), and the casual ''sidewalk ballet'' of local merchants, shoppers, and passers-by (Jacobs, 1961).

For Zukin, everyday street-life on ordinary shopping streets, their markets, cafés, and stores, is the mainspring of a shared public social life, where strangers intermingle. With this I assume this local level of everyday social practices produces "more" than just exchanging money for goods or services – it fosters processes of socialization, negotiation, and eventual mutual understanding (cf. Amin/ Graham 1997).

As important as this relationship is, micro-level ethnographic studies of everyday urban social life have rarely generated theory about how it works. No studies have delved into these public spaces as important contact sites, defined by Zukin (1995: 260 f.) as:

> [P]rimary sites of public culture; they are the window into a city's soul. […] Public spaces are important because they are places where strangers mingle freely […] As both site and sight, meeting place and social staging ground, public spaces enable us to conceptualize and represent the city – to make an ideology of its

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[1] Over the years, these included a copy shop that is open late and a bench in a cemetery with free wireless internet. Through these networks, I also found a carpenter, a coat rack and other furniture, a selection of Franconia brand craft beer for free, and a free bike as well as a social organization that repaired the bike for free.

receptivity to strangers, tolerance of difference, and opportunities to enter a fully socialized life, both civic and commercial.

Building on this reading, this research study considers the small retail and gastronomic businesses located on shopping streets as critical sites, where both unacquainted and acquainted urban dwellers interact with each other. As Zukin says, "in contrast to either the intimate interiors of shops and cafés or the exterior focal points of public squares, local shopping streets are seldom recognized as important public spaces in their own right" (Zukin 2012: 2). My study thus also takes a relational approach by paying attention to how a shopping street contributes to neighborhood social life through the micro-interactions in local businesses.

Figure 1: Market day on Karl-Marx-Straße[2]

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[2] All photographs are my own, photographed between October 2012 and May 2016. The few photographs and maps that are courtesy of other people or institutions are so indicated. If not otherwise framed, the pictures serve (merely) as illustrating examples to convey a more visual impression of the street, the businesses, and their social life.

1.1. Research Gap: "The World in the City"[3] and "The World in a Store"

This section sets forth the sociological case for studying everyday contact places like local businesses and shopping streets. It then presents the concrete research question, design, and procedure. Global and local economic development, increased mobility and individualization, globalization, urbanization, migration, and other demographic forces have fundamentally altered the basis for social interaction in urban areas. They have increased cultural and ethnic diversity in urban areas and heightened disparities in income, education, and training (e.g. Häußermann/ Siebel 1987; Marcuse 1989; Mollenkopf/ Castells 1991; Dangschat/ Fasenfest 1995; Siebel 2012; Krätke 1997). As a result, the experience of ethnic or lifestyle diversity has become an everyday phenomenon in the contemporary city. As Stuart Hall (1993: 361) observes, "the coming question of the 21st century" is thus "the capacity to live with difference."

Becoming part of this diverse urban atmosphere and understanding its symbolic power and collective meaning, makes these urban sites "into a magnet attracting further immigration, further diversity and difference, for creative classes and creative milieus – the stuff that makes for 'cosmopolitanism'" (Mayer 2012: 3). The local character, as well as the social life it produces, has become an asset for promoting not only single blocks or streets, but entire neighborhoods and cities in the competition for investment, tourists, and so-called human capital:

> Diversity has become the new orthodoxy of city planning. The term has several meanings: a varied physical design, mixes of uses, an expanded public realm, and multiple social groupings exercising their "right to the city" (Fainstein 2005: 3).

Within this new metropolitan landscape, the question of local social life remains. In which concrete spaces or contact sites do people interact with strangers or partial acquaintances? What consequences do these encounters and interactions have for social life in urban neighborhoods? If concrete actors stimulate such social exchanges, who are they and what are their practices? These initial research

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[3] "The World in the City: Metropolitanism and Globalization from the 19th Century to the Present" was the research theme for the International Graduate Program (2012-2015) at the Center for Metropolitan Studies at Technical University Berlin, in the course of which this thesis was developed. See more at Institut für Kunstwissenschaft und Historische Urbanistik (2016). http://www.kwhistu.tu-berlin.de/fachgebiet_neuere_geschichte/menue/dfg_graduate_research_program_2012_2016/, accessed 04/05/2016.

questions led me to focus my research on Karl-Marx-Straße, one of Berlin's more socio-economically, ethnically, and architecturally "ordinary"[4] and diverse shopping streets.

Figure 2: Public life on one of Karl-Marx-Straße's corners

Suzanne Hall (2012) claims that students of ethnic diversity, belonging, and feeling of home in diverse metropoles often overlooks the importance of routine practices of forms of difference, as well as the sites and spaces in which we live, manage, and negotiate these differences. The guiding assumption of this thesis, therefore, is that the social and physical construction of these spaces shapes the type and quality of social interactions which occur within them. Ash Amin (2002: 3) argues that the negotiation of difference takes place through every day experiences and encounters at the quite local level:

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[4] I understand ordinary places as providing the settings for people's daily lives. Ordinary places are physical settings that do not have important landmarks or major symbolic structures; rather they are the places where routine urban life takes place. Here the individual subjective social construction of place is especially important. Ordinary places are constantly under social construction by people responding to the opportunities and constraints of their particular locality. Ordinary places are thus those urban settings that facilitate routine encounters and shared experiences (Knox 2005: 3 f.).

> My emphasis, in contrast, falls on everyday lived experiences and local negotiations of difference, on micro-cultures of place through which abstract rights and obligations, together with local structures and resources meaningfully interact with distinctive individual and inter-personal experiences (Amin 2002: 11).

This thesis therefore focuses on urban "micro-publics" (Amin 2002: 2) and the micro-geographies of interaction and encounter: the semi-public spaces of local businesses, which are some important ordinary spaces that diverse urban dwellers frequent almost every day.

This study also focuses on local businesses because they reflect the ways in which larger socio-spatial changes are reorganizing the ways that commercial activities influence neighborhood residential and social patterns. This has wide implications for the neighborly co-existence. While all kinds of leisure and work activities take place outside the home, everyday shopping remains a pivotal activity that routinely brings people together.[5] Scholars thus need to pay much more attention to how consumption activities influence the social contact and connections between and among various groups of residents and how these practices affect urban communal life generally.

Network research has shown that even though individuals' social networks reach well beyond district, town, and country borders, metropolitan residents still spend a significant part of their work and leisure time participating in neighborhood social networks. Neighborhoods thus continue to play an important role for the creation of local bonds - even if these bonds are secondary to primary relationships with family members and friends (e.g. Wellman 1979; Wellman/ Leighton 1979; Fischer 1982; Sampson 2012).

Not only can neighborly social relations integrate people into an environment, they can also supply emotional support and practical assistance, thereby helping people cope with daily life and enabling even vulnerable people from experiencing isolation and exclusion (Wellman 1979; Kasarda/ Janowitz 1974; Herlyn et al. 1991; Oelschlägel 1996; Sampson 2012).[6] Particularly in more disadvantaged urban areas, residents often rely strongly on their neighborhood environment, as their social networks are less likely to reach beyond neighborhood boundaries. However, the degree to which residents maintain contacts with their neighbors depends, among other things, on their socio-economic and socio-demographic characteristics and on personal traits. The elderly, young families, and the disabled all tend

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[5] Even if so-called e-commerce is increasingly changing local commercial structures, consumption, and shopping practices and vice versa (see Chapter 2).

[6] Of course, local social capital and community building might also have negative outcomes such as strong social control, exclusion of others, enforcement of constraining norms and values (Portes 2000: 15; cf. Wacquant 1998)

to develop and maintain an above-average number of contacts in the local environment (e.g. Fischer 1982; Sampson 2012; Logan/ Spitze 1994; Wellman et al. 1988). For all groups, having a large number of diverse local social contacts, even if superficial, contributes to a pleasant and safe neighborhood atmosphere (Jacobs 1961) and fosters collective trust (Blokland 2003). In other words, more social networking may yield a certain degree of social cohesion[7] (Durkheim 1893), which may in turn support "collective efficacy" (Sampson et al. 1997) and social inclusion.

Network analysis has tended to focus almost exclusively on narrow and well-integrated primary relationships (such as those between family and closer friends) among neighbors and do not necessarily take a wider neighborhood perspective with less tight secondary ties into account. As a discipline, urban studies widely neglected how the comparatively loose, everyday interactions in public spaces contribute to communal social life in urban neighborhoods.[8] This study fills that gap by exploring micro-interactions between strangers and distant acquaintances at a local level.

Urban sociology and planning have also ignored the role of local small and medium-sized businesses (SMEs).[9] Few scholars have considered the wide range do functions the type employees of such

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[7] The question of whether social cohesion is created through the practice of shopping is still to be examined. Social cohesion is a very ambivalent and normative term and, as such, has many meanings. Originally, the sociological term goes back to Émile Durkheim who described social cohesion as a sort of mutual solidarity of shared values and norms (1893). Durkheim argues that social cohesion plays a major role in social bonding and in the creation of a well-functioning society, in which solidarity is displayed between individuals and by the collective consciousness (Durkheim 1893).

[8] However, the ethnographic methodological approach as well as considering the restricted available resources being a single researcher, it was not possible to statistically detect wider social effects among shoppers or neighborhood residents as resulting from their spontaneous random interaction in and around shopping places. Due to the fact that these "weak interactions" are relatively modest and infrequent and therefore hard to detect, the thesis gained 'only' an ethnographic understanding of the range of responses by means of participant observation and subsequent interviews with only few random customers (neighborhood residents). Nevertheless they will be chosen to provide a range of possible consequences, if they are in line with the observed social practices.

[9] *Small and medium-sized establishments* are defined according to their number of employees and amount of revenue. In this sense, the examined businesses on Karl-Marx-Straße are "small" or "micro" enterprises. According to the German Federal Agency for Statistics, so-called microenterprises have up to 9 employees and revenue of up to two million euros, small enterprises have up to 49 employees and revenue of up to ten million euros, and medium-sized enterprises have up to 249 employees and revenue up to fifty million euros. (German Federal Agency for Statistics (n.d.). Kleine & mittlere Unternehmen (KMU), Mittelstand, https://www.destatis.de/DE/ZahlenFakten/GesamtwirtschaftUmwelt/UnternehmenHandwerk/KleineMittlereUnternehmenMittelstand/KleineMittlereUnternehmenMittelstand.html, accessed 04/06/2016). For this research project, small enterprises are further classified into food industry (*Gastgewerbe*), retail (incl. reparation), and services (cf. IHK Berlin 2012). Since it is difficult to find a uniform term identifying neighborhood stores that include all three types, I use and interchange the terms "stores", "shops", "commercial establishments", "businesses" as synonyms referring to all three types of establishments. These terms do not speak to the type of ownership of the

establishments serve in their respective neighborhoods, such as providing local services and employment, and more indirectly, social well-being (cf. Everts 2008). Among the few empirical studies that do consider such factors, most have examined neighborhood businesses in the context of new consumption patterns, where shopping becomes "an urban or metropolitan experience" through which urban population groups distinguish themselves from one another (e.g. Zukin 2012, 2011, 2009, 2008, 2004, 1998; Bridge/ Dowling 2001). This thesis goes beyond the material qualities and appeal of the selected businesses.

And lastly, most neighborhood studies focus on residential choices - especially in the context of neighborhood change and gentrification - or resident interactions with local civic institutions and organizations. Few have focused on the primary source of neighborhood interaction - everyday shopping on the local commercial streets, as I argue - and even less research has been done on the everyday practices of shopping,[10] the micro-geographies of different kinds of businesses, the micro-interactions which occur within them, or their potential consequences (cf. Hall 2012). This thesis begins to fill that gap by exploring the patterns of how people who live or work in the neighborhood (intentionally or not) run into each other in local businesses and how the respective merchants' social practices shape those interactions (deliberate or not). In other words, the study analyzes the consequences of social interaction during consumption.[11] Shopping is not just an interaction between sales clerks and consumers, it generates social externalities that have important consequences for neighborhood life.

In short, this thesis addresses three main questions: First, how, in what ways, and why do workers in local businesses foster social interactions and ties among neighborhood residents? Second, how do the different material qualities of businesses support the development of certain forms of interaction? In other words, what material qualities of a business might allow it to generate greater versus less positive social externalities in terms of senses of belonging, home, or attachment eventually emerging among

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respective establishments. However, the main focus is on small and primarily individually- owned retail and gastronomic establishments.

[10] From a sociological perspective, shopping or consumer behavior as such consists of three sets of practices: shopping, buying, and consuming (cf. Tauber 1972: 46, Featherstone 1991). By contrast, in German, the practice of *einkaufen* encompasses all three practices, whereas *shopping* refers more to a leisurely and lifestyle related practice and an event-oriented activity. The thesis conceptualizes "shopping" following the German meaning of *einkaufen*, as an everyday activity without an a priori lifestyle reference.

[11] Different people have different motives for shopping, some of which are more or less unrelated to the actual buying or consuming of goods (e.g. seeing and being seen, etc.) (Tauber 1972). However, these motives are not the focus of this thesis; rather the focus here is on the (perhaps integrative) social practices and socio-spatial settings that affect local social life.

customers and neighborhood residents? And third, by considering the businesses as part of the larger whole of the shopping street and surrounding neighborhood, the thesis deals with the question of how urban renewal policies for the neighborhood affect the businesses' survival, the store owners' social practices, and thus also the social life surrounding these businesses. Simply put, this study aims to find out how do local businesses link people together, why, and under what circumstances.

1.2. Conceptual Framework, Research Design, and Procedure

This thesis investigates social interactions in and around an "ordinary" metropolitan shopping street as its field site. It explores the interactions between staff and customers as well as those among customers. An analysis of consumption practices in inner-city neighborhoods can enhance our understanding of how neighborhood residents and business people interact and interweave in the course of everyday routine activities. It further argues that businesses serve as important contact sites for friends, casual-acquaintances, and strangers in urban settings. It conceptualizes these meaningful interactions as "more" than simple commercial transactions. The "more" also stands for the social processes and concrete practices that sometimes happen as the (perhaps unanticipated) byproduct of the economic exchange or are purposefully sought or stimulated by the different participants in the businesses. Another way of putting this is that urban shopping can generate positive social externalities. My goal is to analyze how (and why) shop owners' social practices and customer-to-customer interaction generate a socially meaningful "more" for the place's participants, wherewith in turn also may serve for more than simply serving as a place for local supply or service provision.

In order to answer these questions, the dissertation takes the following steps:

Chapter two provides a detailed discussion of the development of the field site street from the 18th century until today. It provides the geographic, historical, and socio-economic context for the stores as the concrete research objects. This discussion spans from the distant past to current urban renewal programs and their aim to make a commercially "more successful" future for Karl-Marx-Straße.

Chapter three addresses three sets of sensitizing concepts that inform the sampling process and the ethnographic data generation and analysis. The first set is on „public characters" (Jacobs 1961) for a more conceptual framing of the role of store owners as well as for a typology of their social practices that might be seen as generating "more." Jacobs' ideas help us to identify the social practices that might

create a social "more" for customers. Here, Oldenburg's concept of "third places" (Oldenburg/ Brissett 1982; Oldenburg 1999) provides an analytical lens that can further help us understand how these features support the creation of social relationships during time spent in the businesses.

The second set of sensitizing concepts supports the data generation and analysis regarding customer behavior and staff practice. Here I use Goffman's (1959; 1963; 1971) and Lofland's (1972; 1973; 1989; 1998) elaborations and concepts on public behavior to inform my analysis of potential dimensions, aspects, and meanings of the social life in and around the businesses. The final set of sensitizing concepts refines the understanding of social processes, i.e., the ties and senses of attachments generated by the businesses and their owners. These are the dominant ideas, concerning senses of belonging, home, and community, encompassed by the superior and more everyday understanding of social life.

The *fourth chapter* details the thesis' methodology, starting with the theoretical sampling process, which was informed by the gradually included sensitizing concepts, but moreover, by the previously generated data, working with a Grounded Theory Method approach (GTM). Hence, the subsections justify the decision for using certain GTM tools, such as a specific type of a more empirically grounded data generation, analysis, and circular interpretation (switching back and forth between the data and the theories). Moreover, this section discusses the concrete methods that I followed, mainly in-depth interviews with store owners and local officials, and extensive participant observations (and the wider literature analysis of secondary material on the street and the businesses).

The *fifth chapter* presents the findings on the material space and social context of the sampled businesses in order to ground the social life worlds in and of the stores. This chapter presents initial findings with regard to each business' design, as well as their histories, owners, staff, and customers. This detailed catalogue serves as the basis for the further discussion of the social practices and resulting socio-spatial features in the subsequent chapters.

With a praxeological perspective (Reckwitz 2002; 2003), *chapters six* and *seven* then address the manifold ways in which the businesses and their owners offer more to customers. The sixth chapter focuses on the socio-spatial features that support diverse social interactions in the businesses and the seventh chapter presents the ethnographic findings on the store owners' social practices and their impacts on sociability and sociality.

The current urban renewal processes represent the "embedding bracket" for the discussion of the social processes in the businesses. The findings from the interviews with the local officials and their published material are examined and presented as complementing or contrasting the social practices of the store owners throughout the thesis, but are more to the fore in the chapter on Karl-Marx-Straße (2), the store owners' practices (7), and the synthesizing last chapter (8). The final chapter brings together the different aspects of the found social practices, the social life in the stores, their socio-spatial features, and the framing of urban renewal. It aims to ground therein a (small-range) theory on everyday social life and the respective places where community is practiced.

2. The Meso-Level: Social Life and Trade on a Metropolitan Shopping Street

If one walks down Karl-Marx-Straße in the Neukölln district of Berlin, for example observing the street life at the busy crossing of Rathaus Neukölln, the intersection of one subway line and several bus lines, one can see shoppers, residents, local employees, and commuters on their way to work or nearby schools squeezing out of the subway exits. Most sidewalks are heavily crowded with people, whereas others are almost empty. At second sight, one might also notice that the lively sidewalks host a variety of smaller and medium-sized stores of many kinds: bakeries, flower stores, hair and nail salons, grocery stores, butchers, several takeaways, diners and restaurants, cafés, textile and shoe stores, cell phone stores, as well as chain stores, bank branches, and supermarkets; the opposite sidewalks host block-long chain stores or vacant warehouses. This observer of the people strolling up and down Karl-Marx-Straße might also ask why these people choose - perhaps unconsciously - particular sidewalks. Taking a third look, the observer might discover that many passersby greet and nod to people inside of the stores, waving their hands through the stores' front windows, while others focus more on the products in the displays on their way to work or home or back. A look through the stores' front windows into the salesrooms and gastronomic spaces presents an even more differentiated picture of not only who uses the street and its spaces, but also in what ways and for what purposes: abridged, supply, or social exchange.

This short observation of Karl-Marx-Straße's sidewalk life introduces the businesses' urban context. Streets are more than just places of economic and social life. Many cities and neighborhoods are identified by their main streets, whose respective characters reflect local populations, their needs and lifestyles. These main streets also represent the populations' perceptions of the city, the neighborhoods, and their character and how people relate or identity with them. Main streets are often shopping streets. These are the places where abstract concepts, such as globalization and diversity, take a concrete, local form. Shopping streets are thus places of everyday encounter, where the practice of shopping allows strangers to meet and face one another in (often) routine, familiar, and thus safe environments (Shamsuddin/ Ujang 2008).

In Berlin, the major streets most associated with the city's image are the prestigious four-lane, tree-lined boulevards such as *Unter den Linden* or *Kurfürstendamm.* But likewise important are the city's radial thoroughfares, crowded shopping streets that form the cultural, social, and commercial hearts of Berlin's many districts. Four of such streets are *Müllerstraße* in Wedding, *Schloßstraße* in Steglitz,

Turmstraße in Moabit, and *Karl-Marx-Straße* in Neukölln.[12] These streets typically have a mixed housing stock, with commercial spaces on the ground floor and rental apartments on the floors above. Most of the buildings are pre-war, although scattered in between are public housing developments from the 1960s, 70s, and 80s. Commercially, one might find street vendors, niche and specialty stores, franchise and chain stores, as well as small shopping centers. All have high car, bike, and pedestrian traffic.[13] These streets are important for Berliners, not only as places to buy everyday supplies and specialty items, but also as historically significant socio-cultural strongholds. However, due to their increased promotion in guidebooks, travel blogs, and city marketing materials, these streets are also becoming important places for tourists. Previously only interested in Berlin's grand boulevards, city visitors are increasingly spending their time on the district shopping streets. [14]

Figure 3: Map of three of Berlin's 'main shopping streets', incl. Karl-Marx-Straße

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[12] Within this dissertation, "Neukölln" is used to refer to the whole district and "North Neukölln" refers to the neighborhoods surrounding the field site street.

[13] According to the planning office's preparatory examination of the retail development along Karl-Marx-Straße, the majority of the street's users come from the neighborhoods immediately surrounding the street and to a slightly lower extent from the southern parts of the district and the adjacent district of Kreuzberg.

[14] For the city of Berlin's categorization of main shopping streets as well as further descriptions of each street, see: Berlin (n.d.). Einkaufsmeilen in Berlin, https://www.berlin.de/special/shopping/einkaufsmeilen/, accessed 04/06/2016.

Whereas *Schloßstraße* and *Friedrichstraße* have experienced substantial upscaling and residential turnover in the recent decades, the populations of *Müller-, Turm-* and *Karl-Marx-Straße* remain highly diverse in terms of ethnic, income, and age groups even in spite of recent upgrading developments. Following years of disinvestment and store closure, new urban renewal programs have rebuilt these three streets socially, culturally, physically, and commercially. These changes have attracted international capital and investors as well as new, more affluent, residents.

This chapter thus provides the historical background of my field site – Karl-Marx-Straße. For the detailing of its urban, retail, and social developments in the next parts, I start with an ethnographic anecdote on the re-opening of Karl-Marx-Straße's central square.

On the sunny spring afternoon of April 28th 2014, after years of extensive renovations and construction, the new central square of Karl-Marx-Straße finally opened to the public with a big event. The street and opposite sidewalk was crowded with shoppers, families, and cars - a typical Saturday afternoon. On the square itself, a crowd of around one hundred people lazed on benches before a stage or waited in line for a *Bratwurst* or an ice cream, chatting and observing each other. The same sidewalk theater could be observed once again at a festival on May 23rd. The district administration erected a central stage that loomed over a handful of small stalls. Within these booths, "local entrepreneurs"[15] offered Mediterranean and German food, while local cultural and social institutions - such as kindergartens, day cares, community, and senior centers - distributed information materials and free sweets. Religious groups and local party representatives also handed out brochures and booklets. On stage, a puppet theater delighted children with a play featuring local policemen, the mayor, and an urban developer.[16] Nestled in the first few rows of the benches, the children cheered and shouted toward the stage. Afterward, young girls in colorful costumes climbed shyly onto stage to perform a Ukrainian folklore dance. They were announced by the head of the municipal development office, who spoke in a thick Neukölln dialect. Children ran among the benches in front of the street, while hipsters gathered in front of the new coffee joint, drinking organic lemonade and locally micro-brewed beer. The plaza itself is covered with a variety of differently colored stones in the floor, forming a triangle and offering only a few new, modern benches in a very clean style, a couple of young trees and only some garbage cans on

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[15] These entrepreneurs did not necessarily come from the local shopping street, but from the entire district of Neukölln, most of whom were of German origin.

[16] State Secretary Engelbert Lütke-Daldrup, District Mayor Heinz Buschkowsky and City Councilor Thomas Blesing declared the street's "new centerpiece" open for the public, cf. Senatsverwaltung für Stadtentwicklung und Umwelt (n.d.). Eröffnung des Alfred-Scholz-Platzes in Neukölln, http://www.stadtentwicklung.berlin.de/aktuell/kalender/kalender_detail.php?id=3749, accessed 08/25/2014.

the border to the high trafficked street. Sitting on the modern benches, women and men of different age groups and ethnic origin relaxed next to one another, chatting and commenting on the performances. All had very skeptical looks on their faces throughout both events.

Figure 4: Re-opening of new square on 5/23/2014

Karl-Marx Straße was once stigmatized by a bad reputation for too many vacant lots, cheap "ethnic" stores, "one-sided offers," low purchasing power, run-down appearance, and high traffic pollution (urban planner, l. 733 ff.). However, the celebrations for the new central square exemplify the shift in attention now given to the street on behalf of the district government, the media, and people living outside the area. Different Berlin and Neukölln daily newspapers as well as the two local television channels promoted and praised the opening of the new square as a "new place that invites guests to stay and can be used for different events", "the residents are enthusiastic", "for Neukölln people, a welcomed investment"[17], which is in line with the local speakers, the district's mayor, the heads of the urban planning department, the *City Management,* and the local steering committee.

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[17] TV Berlin (04/29/2014). Eröffnung des Alfred-Scholz-Platzes gefeiert, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9rtCiqn1VZo, accessed 06/23/2014.

The district authorities had postponed the opening of the new central square several times, leading to an unbearable traffic situation for many commuters and pedestrians, and causing grief for the surrounding businesses. The construction site affected the three small surrounding streets, cutting them off from both car and foot traffic. For more than two years, the entries were blocked to a neighboring pharmacy, a bar, a warehouse, a bank, a language school, a bike shop and a café. Despite having received some compensation, these business owners suffered from decreased traffic. Speaking of the end result, the skeptical locals on the benches said, "this place is not for us;" "no shade at all;" "only for young people;" and "too noisy." On the other hand, some mothers with strollers praised the new sidewalks, saying they eased pedestrian traffic on the busy street.

The newly built square created a bigger space (2500 m^2) for local events and festivities (offered by the local authorities, not by private initiatives) than before, when it was more or less an extended sidewalk, crossed by car traffic to the side-streets. As the result of a local art competition, the enlarged pedestrian area was covered with eight differently-colored bricks in a triangle pattern; the colors, however, are difficult to distinguish. During both festivities, visitors searched (partially unsuccessfully) for the ground mosaic said to have 67.8% grey stones for the German population, 13.6% basalt stones for the population groups from the Near and Middle East, 9% for Eastern Europe, 4.4% for Western Europe, 1.1% for Africa, 1% for the Far East, and 0.9% for the US.[18] The mosaic, however, does not accurately represent the diversity of the local population living around the new square. Whereas Neukölln has 325,716 inhabitants from more than 160 nations, most of those who come from other countries live in the northern part of the district around Alfred-Scholz-Platz and Karl-Marx-Straße.[19] Fifty-three percent of North-Neukölln's population comes from outside of Germany: 11% from Turkey, 9% from the Middle East[20] (mainly from Lebanon, Syria and Palestine), 5% from Poland, 4% from the former Yugoslavia, and 2% from the former USSR.[21]

The following maps indicate the high diverse proportion of people with migration backgrounds as well as people with a non-German passport around Karl-Marx-Straße. In the first map, the dark red color

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[18] Aktion! Karl-Marx-Straße (05/2014). Was bedeuten die Steine? http://www.aktion-kms.de/files/2014-05-20_infoasp_2-seitig.pdf, accessed 04/09/2016.

[19] District Administration of Neukölln. Statistics for 12/31/2014, http://www.berlin.de/ba-neukoelln/ueber-den-bezirk/zahlen-und-fakten/statistische-daten/einwohnerzahlen/, accessed 04/07/2016.

[20] Members of Arabic League are Egypt, Algeria, Bahrain, Dschibuti, Iraq, Yemen, Jordan, Qatar, Comoros, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Mauretania, Oman, Saudi-Arabia, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates, and the Palestinian areas.

[21] District Administration of Neukölln. Statistics for 12/31/2013, http://www.berlin.de/ba-neukoelln/migrationsbeauftragten/bevoelkerungsstruktur.html, accessed 06/23/2015.

indicates areas with more than 25% of "foreigners"; in the second map, the red refers to "people with migration background."[22,]
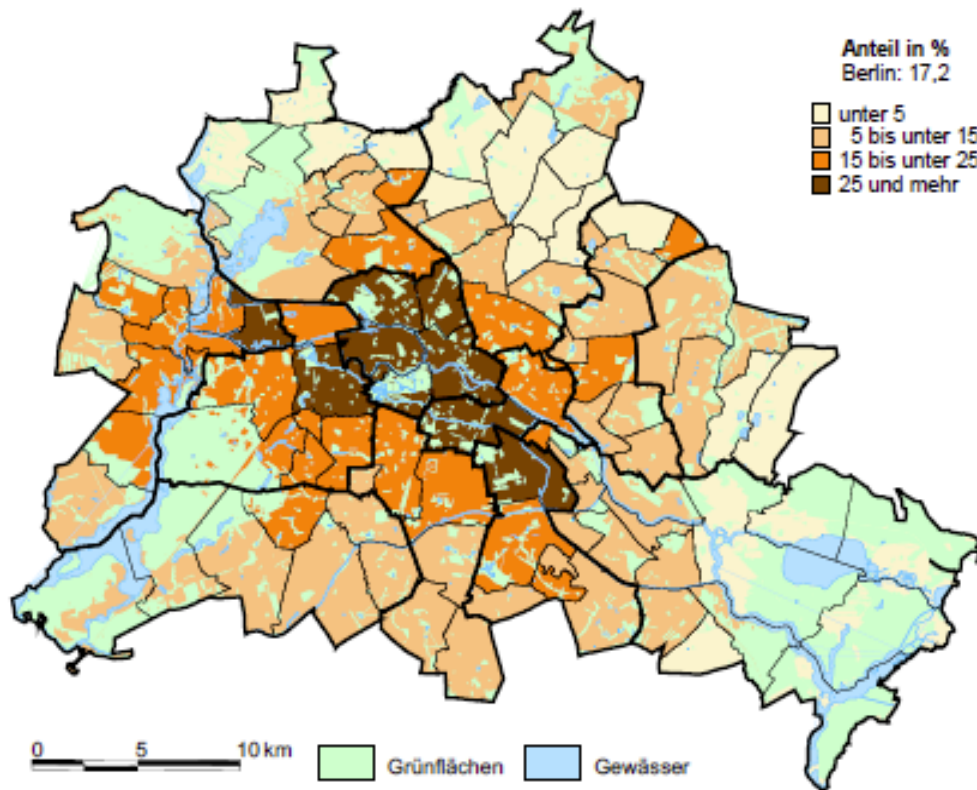
Figure 5: Percentage of "foreigners"[23] compared to Germans living in Berlin

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[22]. Statistik Berlin Brandenburg (n.d.). Statistische Berichte for 12/31/2015, https://www.statistik-berlin-brandenburg.de/Statistiken/statistik_SB.asp?Ptyp=700&Sageb=12041&creg=BBB&anzwer=11, accessed 04/07/2016.

[23] The German Federal Office of Statistics (2011: 5) defines *foreigners* as all persons who are not German within the meaning of Art. 1, paragraph 16, 1 GG, this means, all persons who do not hold the German nationality. These include the stateless persons and persons with undetermined nationalities. Germans, who hold also a foreign nationality at the same time, are not part of the so-called foreign population. In other words, foreigners are people with a non-German passport. Cf.
https://www.destatis.de/DE/Publikationen/Thematisch/Bevoelkerung/MigrationIntegration/AuslaendBevoelkerung2010200117004.pdf?__blob=publicationFile, accessed 04/18/2016.
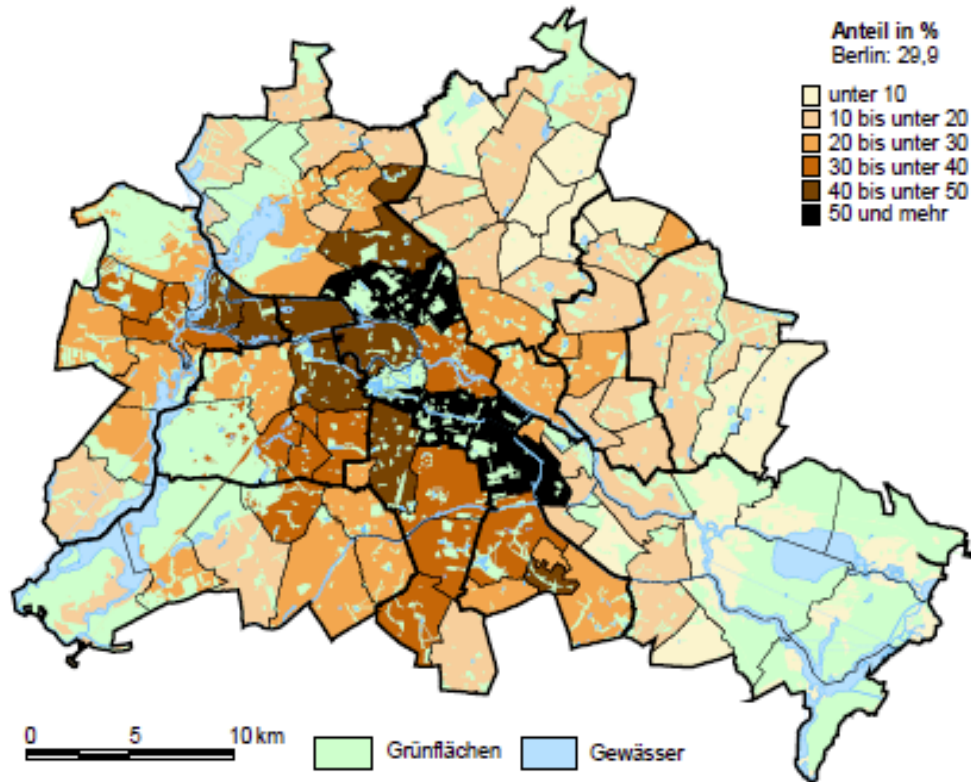
Figure 6: Percentage of "people with migration background" among all Berlin population according to the Berlin districts

For the local authorities, the long-awaited re-opening of the public square was meant to be the "coronation" of the local urban development program *Aktion Karl-Marx-Straße*.[24] This program aims to transform the street into a "young, dynamic and international" corridor, with open spaces for "encounter, experience, action." The amenities of the new street were meant for both the local population as well as for tourists.[25] The renewal programs offer many social and physical measures[26] designed to "improve" the area, such as traffic guidance measures, street and façade refurbishment, social networking opportunities, language and family-care classes, and other educational and qualification programs. Nevertheless, ethnographic observations at the two events reveal significant fears on behalf of local residents and business owners concerning rising rents, displacement, and increased alienation from their places of residence and work.[27] For instance, the prices of the micro-

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[24] Notably, upon its reopening, the plaza was renamed from *Platz der Stadt Hof* to *Alfred-Scholz-Platz* in honor of the districts' first Social-Democratic Mayor of the district, a man deposed by the Nazis in 1933.

[25] Aktion! Karl-Marx-Straße (n.d.). News, http://www.aktion-kms.de/projekte/alfred-scholz-platz-frueher-platz-der-stadt-hof, accessed 06/23/2014.

[26] The local *neighborhood management programs* deal more with social changes, whereas the local *City Management* and *Aktion Karl-Marx-Straße* are in charge for the more physical measurements.

[27] See for further projects Aktion! Karl-Marx-Straße (n.d.). Projekte. http://www.aktion-kms.de/projekte/, accessed 08/18/ 2014.

brewed beer and focaccias on offer exceeded most visitors' wallets and thus didn't match with the needs of the local population groups, leading to the aforementioned sense of alienation.

The celebration itself was promoted as a "multicultural" event, with a program and gastronomic offer designed to mirror and capitalize on the diversity of local ethnic groups. Nevertheless, at the event itself, no local longstanding businesspeople were present, and only few guests seemed to have a migration background. Again, the people on the benches seemed alienated from the happenings on stage as well as with the changes made to "their" street: "I cannot connect with this" was one of the main statements I heard at both events.

This event description underlines the controversial and contested nature of Karl-Marx-Straße's current outlay and appearance. In an atmosphere of heightened economic competition, rising commercial and residential rents, and a high media coverage of recent gentrification, long-term residents and business owners show highly skeptical and hesitant behavior toward any new construction site, business opening, and street marketing measure. On the one hand, as gentrification hot-spots still not yet fully gentrified, the street and its surrounding neighborhoods are being accused (by residents, outsiders, journalists, and politicians alike) of being a "ghetto" and of hosting "parallel societies" (cf. Friedrich 2012; 2013). On the other hand, many such stigmatizing discourses particularly affect local migrant populations and social-disadvantaged residents by marking them as a political "problem" (Friedrich/ Schultes 2013). These discourses encourage urban renewal programs designed to create "better" social and commercial mixtures. This could create community empowerment, but more often, the discourses have a racist and exclusionary undertone.

2.1. The Street's Physical History

The following narrative of Karl-Marx-Straße's residential and commercial histories that is constructed uses written accounts as well as personal - often nostalgic - oral accounts from business owners, city officials, urban planners and residents (old and new). These histories vary considerably depending on who is speaking and to whom they are addressing - in this case, always myself. I also draw on as many perspectives as possible, using newspaper articles, (non-) academic books on district's history, as well as on the statistics from municipal and federal administrative bodies. My aim is not to present one complete history, but rather to uncover the aspects of local residential and commercial histories that

have contributed both to the present-day aggregation of commercial facilities and to the current challenges of urban renewal and neighborhood change. This description of the field site street provides an important meso-perspective of the city, where interactional practices between diverse people "are refined within a distinct area" (Hall 2015: 28). This allows for a further in-depth analysis of the concrete interactional or contact sites on this street, the sampled businesses.[28]

The description of Karl-Marx-Straße, as the meso-level context for the subsequent analysis of the businesses, follows Jennifer Robinson's (2006: 3) call for grounding urban studies in a greater diversity of cosmopolitanisms: It is essential that researchers account for the great diversity of everyday experiences found in the lives of urban dwellers. Researchers should therefore follow their research subjects to their everyday places and through their everyday routines. Hence, Karl-Marx-Straße is one of these seemingly unspectacular and "ordinary"[29] places in Robinson's understanding.

Karl-Marx-Straße was originally a three-kilometer *Hauptstraße* (*Main Street*) that connected the villages of *Britz* and *Rixdorf*[30] to the city of Berlin. In the 18th century, it was surrounded by fields and acres. By the early 19th century, the street was a location for merchants, workshops, and two-to-three story houses, many with late-classicist facades. The street developed into a thriving shopping street by the end of the 20th century, and then, by the early 21st century, into the current neighborhood with a widely known residential and commercial diversity.

In the 18th century, the street was called *Berlinerstraße*, indicating its linkage to the city center, and then *Bergstraße* due to the nearby Rollberge hills, the latter of which still gives the neighboring public housing complex *Rollbergviertel* its name. By the late 19th century, Bergstraße had become Rixdorf's main commercial street, home to many longstanding businesses. Many, including the pharmacy studied

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[28] Thereby, the methodological challenge is to relate the city, the street and then the concrete business sites as both bounded and connected spaces, gathering information on all three levels from various sources. All maps, pictures and statistics present only a single moment in time, but I try to recognize also the rhythms of change over longer periods that together transform the street and its residential and commercial composition (Hall 2015: 28 f.).

[29] Robinson (2006: 1) describes the world as comprising a huge variety of ordinary cities, which "are all dynamic and diverse, if conflicted, arenas for social and economic life". The ordinary-city-approach takes this world of ordinary cities as a starting point to and "attends to the diversity and complexity of all cities". By understanding cities as ordinary, she argues, research needs to follow the diversity of urban experiences on the ground and thus to ground urban theory more therein (This is one of the reasons why this research works with a Grounded Theory Method Approach, see Chapter 4).

[30] Rixdorf was the old village core around which Neukölln developed. Protestant refugees from Bohemia settled in the village of Rixdorf around 1737. Most of the remaining village-like buildings and farm houses were built by the late 18th century and circle around the settlement's central square, Richardplatz. For more, see: Neukölln im Netz (n.d.). Berlin-Neukölln, http://www.neukoelln-online.de/denkmale/rixdorf/start.htm, accessed 04/22/2016.

in this dissertation, still exist today. [31] Industrialization and the construction of working-class housing estates increased the street's everyday social and commercial life. The contemporary narratives and images of the street are still influenced by its industrial built, cultural, and social heritage as well as its history as a "proud working class area." The *Gründerzeit* street was also popular for its numerous entertainment facilities, such as *Saalbau Neukölln* (today a theater, café/restaurant and concert venue), the adjacent party halls in today's *Passage* (today an art house cinema, café/restaurant and opera), and other large taverns and restaurants.

Figure 7: Berliner Straße (today Karl-Marx-Straße) 1910[32]

The construction boom that took place from 1900 to 1913 filled the street's vacant lots with the "classic" Berlin five-story perimeter block development; this gave the street its still-current look and design. In the same period, the district's city hall, administration buildings, and post office were built, all of which likewise contribute to the street's historical character. Throughout the first and second world

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[31] The store owners repeatedly mention a luggage store in the interviews, often as a symbol for the popular image of the street as a shopping destination in the 20th century.
[32] Source: Friedmann, F. (10/13/2011). Zeitreisen. Mythos Karl-Marx-Straße, http://www.neukoellner.net/zeitreisen/mythos-karl-marx-strasse/, accessed 04/15/2016. Courtesy: Museum Neukölln

wars, the Social-Democratic Party (SPD) and the Communist Party (KPD) held the majority in the local district assemblies, resulting in tremendous district-wide physical demolitions by the Nazis in 1933. After the Nazis occupied the district's city hall that year, they forced many longstanding Jewish businesses to close down and leave the district. Despite the vast demolitions that followed the bombing of the city during the war, the majority of the district's perimeter developments have survived until today.

The street was renamed as Karl-Marx-Straße (1947) during the Soviet occupation, connecting the terrible memories of the national-socialist regime with the district's long history as a vibrant working class neighborhood (Hentschel/ Blokland 2015: 123). (The district ended up mostly in the Western part of the city, however.) In the 1950s, under the new land-use plan, the street was developed as the main supply center for the southern districts of West Berlin: New commercial buildings filled in the bombed-out lots and new warehouses added to the street's commercial functions. The building of the Berlin Wall in 1961 cut off nearly half of the street's customers, employees, and suppliers. The Wall also caused the street to lose its function as a public traffic line and a major thoroughfare. In spite of these problems, the local business people managed to maintain the street's commercial character. Businesses nevertheless did suffer because of the Wall, and many residents left the area, causing many longstanding businesses and cultural institutions to close down over the next decades. This paved the way for new migrants, many of the so-called "guest-workers" from Turkey and Italy, to move into the area.

Until 1989, Karl-Marx-Straße was Berlin's third-strongest (in terms of popularity and customer numbers) shopping street with more than 260 different retailers, service providers, and gastronomic facilities - both individually owned and chain operated (Hüge 2010: 41). At the time, the majority of these businesses were owned by ethnic Germans,[33] whereas in 2008 around one-third of the business were owned by migrants from Turkey, Poland, China, Vietnam, and the Middle East (Kayser et al. 2008: 34 ff.). And since then, ownership diversity has increased in terms of the educational, ethnic, and socio-economic backgrounds of the owners. The local urban renewal commissioner frames the structure of businesses in the following way:

> and this patchwork rug [of ethnic businesses], well, they all also speak German well, of course, but the flag is missing, so we had around **50 different languages** and also almost everywhere [along the street], the **entire big density** was represented. Is it now ethnic retail just because they sell German shoes, which are

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[33] "Ethnic German" describes someone born in Germany of those of German descent. This term is not applied to returning migrants of German descent.

probably made in China and get their label in Italy and then are offered in a German store and [with] a Turkish vendor, I mean **what is ethnic trade**?! (l. 180 - 185)[34]

While the commissioner is aware of the diverse ownership, he depicts the street's diversity in a way that doesn't seem to affect his work with and for the business people.

2.2. "Trade is Change"[35] – The Street's Retail History and its Current Changes

Retail and trade are constantly undergoing structural changes as a result of intensified competition as well as demographic and socio-cultural changes (Hangebruch/ Krüger 2014: 6). In the 20th century, individually owned specialty stores, such as those offering groceries, clothing, shoes, repair services and other daily goods prevailed on the Karl-Marx-Straße, making it an attractive shopping location for West Berlin's southern and eastern districts. As a commercial location, Karl-Marx-Straße changed significantly after fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. Initially, the street received more shoppers from the East, but then saw a significant downturn in the mid-1990s. This was caused by area unemployment, the out-migration of the employed working-class and middle-class families, and competition from nearby new shopping malls.

This loss of potential and regular customers challenged many longstanding businesses (Hüge 2010: 23 ff.), many of which had to close down. The independently owned specialized retailers in particular faced significant closures. Until the mid-2000s, the new businesses that opened in their place were predominantly franchise and chain stores as well as discount shops. The street has seen a 50% loss in sales since the fall of the Berlin Wall for all the remaining retailers and service providers, and as Berlin's third strongest shopping street, it still faces comparatively high vacancy rates (Hüge 2010: 42).

The local district authorities designed several urban renewal programs to tackle the street's decline. The programs, which initially focused on physical improvements, aimed to reverse the buildings' and sidewalks' dilapidation as well as improve the negative reputation of the whole district as a place of vandalism and crime. Klaus Engeln, the former head of the urban renewal working group *Aktion Karl-Marx-Straße*, framed the street's situation in the late 1990s and early 2000s as "all in all: no

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[34] I translated all quotes from my interview partners. In order to best represent the voice of the interviewees, the translations are direct, rather than free or interpretive. T The indicated lines refer to the German transcriptions attached to this thesis.
[35] "Handel ist Wandel" (Hangebruch/ Krüger 2014: 6).

economically and consumption friendly atmosphere. It should surprise nobody, if one or the other internally departs from Neukölln" (Klaus Engeln 2001 in Hüge 2010: 42). During this time, the ethnic German owners of small independent shops, in particular, criticized the decline of the formerly thriving street and threatened to move their businesses to another district. A butcher interviewed for this thesis, who owns one of the businesses that barely managed to survive this low point, describes the neighborhood situation in the mid-2000s in the following way:

> [T]he **bottom point of the development in Neukölln for me personally was in 2004, 2005**[36]**,** when it really was on the rocks, because too many regular customers died out or moved away, **many moved away** [they] were scared of other nationalities or were worrying and said noooo, I won't send my kid to a kindergarten or in a school where 90% of the school mates have foreign roots, this won't lead to nothing. And of course also the **negative media coverage,** many just moved then and said, no we need to move to better city districts, or we want to go away from here, we can't stand this anymore, this is too noisy, this is too dirty, this **is too too too foreign, right.** And then [they] just moved away […] So particularly in Neukölln, you **realize immediately social cuts**, at least in conversations, because many **people that live here are affected by it** [the social cuts], right, this is still a working-class district, where only people live, who work in simple activities, who are **low wage workers** and they kept their savings back and that just made life for us difficult […] but starting with 2006 it [turnovers] surged. **2005 we really hit bottom rocks**, that was the **very first time that I had to dismiss two employees** because of a lack of revenues, this has never happened to me, not before and not later on. (l. 90 -148.)

Many other interviewees, including both business people as well as local officials, similarly described late 2005 and 2006 as a bad period for the area and a time they seriously considered leaving the neighborhood. Most stayed, either hoping for better times, or because they felt rooted in the community, or simply due to lack of resources. Other problems that the street faced were the closure of two local major warehouses, a terrible traffic situation, and a lack of parking. The local officials described the sidewalk as unwalkable, narrow, and overfilled with merchandise and signage from stores looking to drum up business. This downturn, with increased unemployment, poverty, and vacancy rates continued until the late-2000s (Hüge 2010: 38).

The street's everyday life has been affected not only by demographic change and urban renewal (see Chapter 2.3.), but also by shifting local investment strategies and changing shopping patterns. Just as many inner-city shopping streets, and despite their acknowledged function as provisional centers, Karl-

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[36] While the butcher sees his personal low-point in 2004/2005, he considers 2006 as the low-point for the entire North Neukölln area.

Marx-Straße is also affected by a decline in economic activity due to disinvestment and the low local purchase power in some of the rather deprived neighborhoods, when middle and higher income residents moved out of these neighborhoods (Häußermann 2011: 274, Häußermann/ Kapphan 2002).

Furthermore, the rising numbers of chain stores and discounters that have high revenues affect the smaller suppliers' sales, but also increasingly displace them in most inner-city neighborhoods, including Neukölln. In the most recent survey of the street, conducted by the City Management (the district's commercial support agency), between the train stations Hermannplatz and Neukölln, Karl-Marx-Straße has 38 take-away-food stores, 20 fashion stores, 15 bakeries, 14 cell phone stores, 14 pharmacies, 14 call shops, 13 one-dollar-stores, 13 bars, 12 banks, 11 jewelers, and 11 hair salons, and a handful of flower shops, banks, grocery stores, nail salons, and hardware stores, most of which are franchise of chain stores (cf. Hentschel/ Blokland 2015).

In general, the German retail and local supply sector is characterized by stagnating or declining sales on the one hand and the expansion of retail space on the other. Higher competition, rising commercial rents, shifting consumer preferences and shopping behaviors, all further affect the decline of many of the traditional and small-scale specialty stores.[37] However, on Karl-Marx-Straße this holds true only for the strip of shops around the city hall, where the majority of chain and franchise stores are located.

Resulting from these factors, independent businesses are increasingly displaced by chain stores, which often offer a less localized range of products and which also depend less on local knowledge of the neighborhood and its residents. Since many of the chain stores' employees work in different branches all over the city, they often do not develop a sense of connection with the neighborhood or the local regular customers. In addition, due to the more standardized operational sequences, the chain stores' employees often offer less space for social interaction that goes beyond the economic transaction than many of their individually owned counterparts.[38] The loss of affluent residents along with other more corporate retail developments over the last decades has contributed to the domination of chain stores accompanied by shop vacancies on Karl-Marx-Straße and many other inner-city shopping streets.

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[37] The interviewed business people name rising commercial rents, demographic changes and the respectively different shopping preferences, the local shopping mall and chain stores as well as the far-reaching construction sites as their main business threats. The local officials state shifting consumer preferences and increase in sales spaces along with the unwillingness to upgrade their businesses as the main reasons for the smaller businesses' struggle (e.g. urban planner, l.561 ff.; urban commissioner, l. 146 ff.).

[38] This is according to interviewed local officials, who cooperate mostly with the managers of the chain stores.

Figure 8: The chain stores' main block on Karl-Marx-Straße

Put together, today, the individually owned businesses on Karl-Marx-Straße are challenged by the loss of their customers due to the disinvestment in the past years and the subsequent out-migration of many previous customers. At the same time, they must also cope with the recent re-investment, shifting demographics, new corporate competitors, and rising commercial rents.

In addition, e-commerce has also greatly affected retail and shopping practices, which in turn, has further led to changes on the street. After years of continuous structural changes such as new organizational structures, new distribution chains and marketing alongside an increased demand for bigger sale space, comprehensive offers at any time of the day, and a more lifestyle -oriented event experience, stationary retail is now challenged by increasing online purchases and consumption: Whereas e-commerce made up 7.3% of all retail in 2009, in 2015, that figure had already moved to 11.7%. The goods most often purchased are clothing, books, and electronic devices. Only very few groceries and drugs are ordered online in Germany at the time of writing.[39] One can see this change mirrored in the patterns of store closures on the Karl-Marx-Straße. Most of the stores that have closed

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[39] BEVH (2015). Aktuelle Zahlen zum Interaktiven Handel. Auszug aus der bevh-Studie "Interaktiver Handel in Deutschland B2C", http://www.bevh.org/markt-statistik/zahlen-fakten/, accessed 04/07/2016.

offer precisely these types of products: electronic devices, books, and clothing. Those retailers who remain offer mostly supply products and services, which are less threatened by the rise of online shopping, such as grocery stores, bakeries, butchers, flower stores, cell phone stores, and eating places. E-commerce also changes customer-staff-interaction, since most staff knows that many customers only frequent stores to get informed about new products, but buy them online. In addition, shopkeepers may not depend exclusively on stationary trade for their sales and thus might reduce consultation for and interaction with customers in the stores.

Figure 9: A local supermarket offers online shopping and delivery services

The challenges posed by e-commerce do not affect only Karl-Marx-Straße, but impact all shopping locations in Berlin and Germany: According to the *German Association for Trade (HDE)*, many inner-city retailers complain of declining customer traffic. Current structural changes force the stationary retailers to "play to their strengths," bettering the physical, material, and spatial aspects of the shopping experience. A 2014 survey of city retailers indicates that in order to do this, most business owners depend on customer events (54%), an experience-oriented store design (52%), and innovative stock

(40.3%). However, according to the *HDE*, retailers must nevertheless combine online and offline trade in order to keep their businesses afloat. [40]

Those suppliers on Karl-Marx-Straße who have remained open have had to adapt their business strategies to compete with the online market and new consumption patterns, offering online services or at the very least, maintaining an online presence. One of the local butcher shops, for instance, has a successful online shop that takes and fills orders for its sausages from all over Europe. The butcher started online services in 2006, the year the neighborhood hit rock-bottom and the business needed to enlarge their clientele in order to survive. Even if only to use the internet to advertise, most of the Karl-Marx-Straße shops had to expand online to contend with their larger, corporate competitors. The restaurants, in particular, try hard to promote their spaces online (often for family or business events) to balance customer loss or low turnovers by promoting online their spaces. But the interviewed owners also return to extended consultations in order to make on-spot shopping more attractive.

In order for their businesses to survive, it is important that owners offer "experience-oriented" shopping spaces for customers who pursue shopping as a leisure activity.[41] One would imagine that events on Karl-Marx-Straße, such as the aforementioned festivals, would be valuable for drumming up local business; however, many retailers abstain from participating because they disagree with these events as well as the measures taken by the city to improve the street's overall shopping experience. For one, many of these comparatively formal events are aimed at target groups incongruous with their own clientele, e.g., late night shopping or cultural events such as *48h Neukölln* or *Nacht und Nebel Neukölln* that draw primarily younger, lifestyle-oriented visitors. Secondly, participating in the beautification, event measures, and other more experience-oriented shopping events are often too costly (in terms of financial and time resources) for many of the smaller retailers and service providers:

> [For the late-night-shopping] **they ask us to keep [the store] open for a longer time**, first **nobody asked me in advance if I'm able to do this**, **no artist would come to us** [anyway], so why should I keep the business open? Because the people won't schlep themselves with a flower bouquet through the streets at 10 pm […] **they are not paying attention** that the small businesses, not mine necessarily, it could be the

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[40] HDE (2014). Handel setzt im Strukturwandel auf Einkaufserlebnis, http://www.einzelhandel.de/index.php/presse/aktuellemeldungen/item/124465-handel-setzt-im-strukturwandel-auf-einkaufserlebnis, accessed 08/22/2014.
[41] GfK (2015). GfK-Studie zu den Rahmenbedingungen für den Einzelhandel in 32 Ländern Europas, http://www.gfk.com/de/insights/press-release/einzelhandelssituation-in-den-europaeischen-krisenlaendern-verbessert/, accessed 11/25/2015.

> pharmacy, that they get performances. **We can't afford** to pay 500 or 1500 or 5000 Euro for such a weird
> light installation (Flower store owner, l. 444 - 451).

Many businesspeople therefore prefer to rely on their own experience and knowledge, repeating measures that have previously proven successful. One flower store, for instance, threw a backyard party, for which the owner also invited the local officials, neighboring business colleagues, and interested customers (cf. l. 613 - 618).

On the other hand, the adjacent local shopping mall continues to increase its customers and sales numbers with its regular and widely-promoted events, most of which are partially supported by the local authorities and the urban renewal programs. The mall and its retailers compete thus with a structural advantage, while the other shop owners as well as some of the local officials argue that attention must be given to create a balanced branch and tenant mix and to ensure their compatible integration into the urban space. Otherwise, the power and economic relations that already favor the corporate chain stores will produce further incompatibilities for the independent businesses. The independent businesses also mourn the closures of the warehouses, such *Quelle* or *Hertie,* which once stood as anchors on Karl-Marx-Straße, attracting shoppers from all over Berlin. Whereas the warehouses worked with the smaller businesses to improve the street as a whole, the shopping center's events seem to exclude small businesses and problematically draw all the customers inside the mall. This problem is not just limited to events, however: The shopping center routinely directs customers away from street-front stores, particularly when temperatures drop and the weather turns rainy:

> if people decide to shop in the center because they find a parking spot there or because they feel disturbed
> by the rain, I can't help it, **but the street's diversity, the [shopping] center can't compensate this diversity**,
> but the **comfortableness** and they [the shoppers] are so **lazy**, **this is a serious problem for us** (Pharmacy
> owner, l. 155-159).

The competition with the shopping center, the discounters,[42] and e-commerce has forced store owners to recognize that the social aspect of shopping in brick and mortar stores is unique and desirable. Thus,

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[42] Most store owners name the falls of the wall as a crucial point in time for changes in shopping behavior and the local commercial structure. However, in the 1990s, discounters started to cover Neukölln, Berlin and other German inner-city and rural areas, evermore changing shopping patterns. However, Krüger et al. (2013: 27 f.) also found for all stores of daily supply, regardless if corporate (chain, discount, franchise, etc.) or individually owned, that inner-city residents decide primarily for those stores that are in the close surrounding of their residential places (and even more for single households and particularly senior households), have a wide variety of offers, and attractive prices. Atmosphere, design and friendliness and patience of the employees follow the primary criteria

many owners focus on promoting these desirable qualities in their daily operations, sometimes to the extent of creating distinct marketing or business strategies. For instance, some shops make stronger efforts to engage their senior clientele, who depend on neighborhood facilities for their daily shopping needs; these owners offer specific products, targeted advertisements, and even provide special services, such as benches, restrooms, and specially trained staff.[43] Likewise, some pharmacies tailor their offers to address common maladies in the neighborhood. One pharmacist, for instance, related in an interview how she regularly offers free blood-pressure readings as well as special lessons on managing cholesterol, high blood pressure, rheumatism. She also arranges for Turkish translation when she offers special sessions on children's diseases in order to reach local parents without German language skills.

One of the primary motivations for frequenting brick and mortar shops is the social component. Customers thus desire shopping environments, infrastructure, and design that facilitate meeting friends, acquaintances, and neighbors (Feinberg et al 1989: 61). In my observations, it became clear that families, for example, tend to primarily frequent cafes, restaurants, and shops that offer play corners, diaper-changing areas, and child-friendly atmospheres. These facilities make it easier for parents to visit with their friends and to initiate interaction with other parents. So from this perspective, Karl-Marx-Straße's consumers seem to request a high variety of high quality products in (but not necessarily) close proximity, just as the promoted products and services outrank proximity for all kinds of urban residents. However, as reported by the store owners, the local higher income groups may also travel and shop to wherever the high quality products are offered.

All in all, the street has experienced waves of investment and disinvestment. Global and national structural changes have changed its residential and commercial composition over the course of the 20th and early 21st century. While the signs of impending decline stretch back to the 1980s, they are also related to broader changes in retail practices as well as to changes in the investment strategies of urban renewal and retail developers.

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for the selection of a particular shopping location. In this context, social interaction with staff and personal service as well as small or flexible offers are particularly important for senior customers (Krüger et al. 2013: 28 ff.).

[43] Some of the sampled businesses take part at the "Seniorensiegel" campaign, which labels businesses that offer special shopping conditions for senior customers, including offering benches and other facilities to sit down and take a rest, customer restrooms, trained and specialized personal, parking spots for handicapped people, et cetera.

2.3. "This is the free market. We set only the political framework."[44] The History of Local Urban Renewal

The decline around Karl-Marx-Straße started in the 1970s with deindustrialization; the first working group dedicated to street renewal was founded in 1979. Until the 1990s, this group of local actors aimed to increase the street's attractiveness by organizing street parties, planting trees, and fighting for sidewalk extensions and other beautification measures.

Figure 10: Crowded sidewalk with construction site on Karl-Marx-Straße

In the 1990s and early 2000s - and despite the skepticism of many longstanding retailers - local authorities considered developing shopping malls in a last-chance effort to "save" Karl-Marx-Straße. In his support of the shopping malls, the then Neukölln mayor said," who doesn't participate in the change won't survive the next millennium."[45] Thus in 2007, Karl-Marx received its first shopping mall: the *Forum Neukölln* (today *Neukölln Arcaden)*, with over 60 businesses and a square footage of 27,000 m^2. The

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[44] Urban planner, l. 281 f.

[45] Fuchs, C. (07/08/1998). Das Forum Neukölln soll die angeschlagene Einkaufsmeile aufwerten Eine Chance für die Karl-Marx-Straße, http://www.berliner-zeitung.de/archiv/das-forum-neukoelln-soll-die-angeschlagene-einkaufsmeile-aufwerten-eine-chance-fuer-die-karl-marx-strasse,10810590,9452340.html, accessed 7/25/2014.

Forum was considered to be supporting the urban planners' measures to increase the street's appeal as well as its customer numbers. However, the majority of the street's smaller businesses rejected and protested against the establishment, fearing the heightened competition. Indeed, as the local business owners feared, simply expanding the amount of available retail space did nothing to increase the local people's purchase power and led to the negative redistribution in the favor of the chain stores and shopping mall.[46] However, as reported by the interviewed store owners, many smaller businesses managed to survive by providing to both local and city-wide customers. The street did already enjoy the reputation as a city-wide shopping destination for clothing and shoes, repair services and groceries up until the main urban renewal programs started in the mid-2000s.

During the late 1990s and early 2000s, Neukölln was widely also considered Germany's most deprived district. With the economic decline immediately after the Wall came down, the government stopped subsidizing the local industries and Neukölln lost 20,000 jobs within ten years. The urban renewal programs under effect targeted primarily the eastern Berlin districts and not Neukölln. In addition to the new shopping mall, local and national planning authorities therefore developed several "regeneration" schemes aimed at transforming the area and upgrading its commercial structure. Various programs were developed, some focusing at different scales (city, street, neighborhood), and some focusing on different outcomes, often labeled as revitalization, upgrading, or renewal. Until today, the concrete urban interventions of the subsequent urban renewal programs cover particular streets, such as Karl-Marx-Straße, Hermannstraße, or Sonnenallee, or single *Kieze*[47], or entire neighborhoods or districts. Hence, the city spent the 1990s and 2000s concentrating on renewal in other parts of the city and widely neglecting Neukölln. The neighborhoods around Karl-Marx-Straße remained among the few areas in Berlin where housing prices stayed at a lower level than in the already upgraded eastern and northern inner-city neighborhoods (such as adjacent Kreuzberg, or Prenzlauer Berg, Mitte, and Friedrichshain), but also where the local purchasing power decreased due to the loss of jobs (Huning/Schuster 2015).

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[46] Treichel, T. / Paul, U. (10/31/2002). In Berlin sind zahlreiche neue Shopping-Center entstanden. Zu viele, meint der Einzelhandelsverband, http://www.berliner-zeitung.de/in-berlin-sind-zahlreiche-neue-shopping-center-entstanden--zu-viele--meint-der-einzelhandelsverband-viel-platz-zum-einkaufen-15485868, accessed 04/19/2016.
[47] Berliners use the term "*Kiez*" to designate small neighborhoods within city districts. Importantly, the term indicated an area with a commonly accepted identity and sense of belonging among its population. Residents have a sense of tangible natural or built boundaries, and are often named after their main streets or squares. The surrounding Kieze of KMS are *Donaustraßenkiez, Richardplatz Kiez, Rollbergkiez, Reuterkiez, Körnerkiez*, but the interviewees and planning authorities also describe KMS as one Kiez itself.

In 1999, the Berlin Senate Administration for Urban Development and Neukölln's district authorities began implementing different urban renewal schemes (including the *Neighborhood Management programs* (*Quartiersmanagement*)), in several *Kieze* around Karl-Marx-Straße, choosing neighborhoods based on socio-demographic and socio-economic statistics as well as smaller-scale traffic units.[48] In 1999, its umbrella program, the *Socially Inclusive City Program* (*Soziale Stadt*) also started. Local, federal, and national authorities further implemented programs responding to the area's physical decay; two of the most notable are *Urban Restructuring West (Stadtumbau-West)* and the implementation of *Rehabilitation Zones* (*Sanierungsgebiete*), aimed at the consolidation of the urban socio-spatial structures.[49] In 2011, the field site Karl-Marx-Straße along with the street Sonnenallee, which runs from in a southeast direction from Hermannplatz, has been designated as one such rehabilitation zone.[50]

In addition, the senate administration along with the district administrations also implemented the *Active Centers Program* (*Aktive Zentren*) in order to grow urban centers into an "attractive economic city or district centers" in 2008. One part of this program are the local *City Management* teams, who are in charge for the development of the *Active Centers'* commercial structures (Huning/ Schuster 2015: 744 f.). Karl-Marx-Straße's particular program is called *Aktion! Karl-Marx-Straße (Aktion KMS)* and is in charge of the street's economic and commercial development. These urban planners work closely with the urban renewal commissioner and planning departments responsible for organizing the local rehabilitation zone and other urban restructuring programs. Of all the urban planners working for the different programs, it is the *City Management's* employees who interact most with the local business owners; however, as I will argue later, these employees focus the majority of their attention and resources on the owners of corporate chains and franchises (see Chapter 7).

Hence, following decades of decline and with the onset of these programs, the district suddenly "became an option for young starter households and middle-income groups who could no longer afford

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[48] The traffic units build the base for most of the German urban development and social programs. They were established in 2006 on the basis of the previous concept of *social environments* (Sozialräume) and are now called *life-world oriented spaces* (Lebensweltlich Orientierte Räume/ LOR). They aim to cover a spatial unit with a homogeneous life-world or milieu. See more on LORs: Berlin.de (n.d.). Planung Stadtwissen und Daten, http://www.stadtentwicklung.berlin.de/planen/basisdaten_stadtentwicklung/lor/, accessed 02/24/2016.

[49] Berlin.de (n.d.). Sanierungsgebiet Neukölln – Karl-Marx-Straße / Sonnenalle. http://stadtentwicklung.berlin.de/staedtebau/foerderprogramme/stadterneuerung/de/karl_marx_str/index.shtml , accessed 02/19/2016.

[50] For the reasons to turn Karl-Marx-Straße in a rehabilitation zone and target of the active center programs, see Aktion! Karl-Marx-Straße (n.d.). Ausgangslage, http://www.kms-sonne.de/ausgangslage-und-ziele/ausgangslage, accessed 02/19/2016.

to live in areas such as Kreuzberg, Mitte, and Prenzlauer Berg, where rents had already been rising from a much higher level" (Huning/ Schuster 2015: 745, cf. Holm 2013). In 2012, the physical renovations began on the street: they began at the southeastern end and will continue to the northwest in the direction of Hermannplatz; the final reconstruction phase is scheduled to beginning in 2020. Right in the middle of the planned reconstruction zone, urban planners began, simultaneously in 2012, to redesign the Alfred-Scholz-Platz.[51]

Figure 11: *Active Centers* **areas of Karl-Marx-Straße and Sonnenallee, divided by Donaustraße**[52]

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[51] Aktion! Karl-Marx-Straße (n.d.). Meilensteine der [Aktion Karl-Marx-Straße], http://www.aktion-kms.de/files/akms-imageflyer2012-barpdf.pdf.pdf, accessed 02/19/2016.
[52] Source: Aktion! Karl-Marx-Straße (n.d.). Karte, http://www.kms-sonne.de/files/karte.html, accessed 03/30/2016. Courtesy: BSGmbH.

All of the aforementioned programs belong to a wider framework of "*integrated urban development concepts* (ISEK[53])," a framing concept/mechanism/program that structures the funding as well as the socio-political and daily working context for the urban planners assigned to these projects. The staffs of the programs work under a shared motto that summarizes their vision of the street: "Young, colorful, successful – trade, encounter, experience (*Jung, bunt, erfolgreich - handeln, begegnen, erleben*)." This motto indicates a vision of the street that is clearly designed towards different demographics and businesses than its current commercial and residential diversity. In addition and despite their different foci, measures, budgets, and target groups, all planners and municipal employees share this common vision and goal to "upgrade" (urban planner, l. 252) the street.[54]

In the late 2000s, the urban renewal program *Active Urban Centers*[55] (*Aktive Stadtzentren)* conducted an analysis of the street's strong and weak points, opportunities, and threats (*SWOT*), in order to determine their future work on Karl-Marx-Straße. In this analysis, the writers argue that the street suffers primarily from heightened competition with nearby shopping locations (interestingly, also by the local shopping mall) and from a negative retail development characterized by high vacancy rates, low residential purchasing power, a disproportionate presence of discount stores, and a lack of anchor businesses, upscale gastronomic facilities, and independently owned businesses. Within the document, the planners celebrate the street's ethnic diversity and its success as both a place of trade and residence; however, predict further downturn and bemoan the population's low social status and the lack of acceptance and interaction between ethnic Germans and migrant groups. Finally, the planners concluded that in spite of the first signs of (apparently welcomed) gentrification, the area still suffers from a negative image, and a lack of networking among the business owners and landlords. With these

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[53] ISEK as *Integriertes Stadtentwicklungskonzept* represents the orientation framework for the long-term development of Karl-Marx-Straße and Sonnenallee with its main planning goals. *See more:* Aktion! Karl-Marx-Straße (n.d.). Integriertes Stadtentwicklungskonzept, http://www.kms-sonne.de/files/141009_isek-plan_kms-sonne_ausdruck_barr.pdf, accessed 02/19/2016.

[54] As mentioned by all urban planners and their material, e.g. for *Aktion KMS*, see: Aktion! Karl-Marx-Straße (n.d.). Umbau der südlichen Karl-Marx-Straße, http://www.aktion-kms.de/projekte/umbau-karl-marx-strasse/suedliche-karl-marx-strasse/, accessed 02/24/2016.

[55] This program was established in 2008 on order to improve the economic and structural situation of selected urban shopping streets. Thereby cooperation with local retailers and retail associations is seen as key to the street's development. The selected Berlin shopping streets are Karl-Marx-Straße/Sonnenallee, Marzahner Promenade, Müllerstraße, Turmstraße, City West, Wilhelmstadt, see Berlin- das Hauptstadtportal (n.d.). Förderprogramme und -strategien für lebendige Quartiere, http://www.stadtentwicklung.berlin.de/staedtebau/foerderprogramme/aktive_zentren/, accessed 08/25/2014.

concerns in mind, the planners developed their concepts and plans for the street's upgrading, which began in 2008 and continues until today.[56]
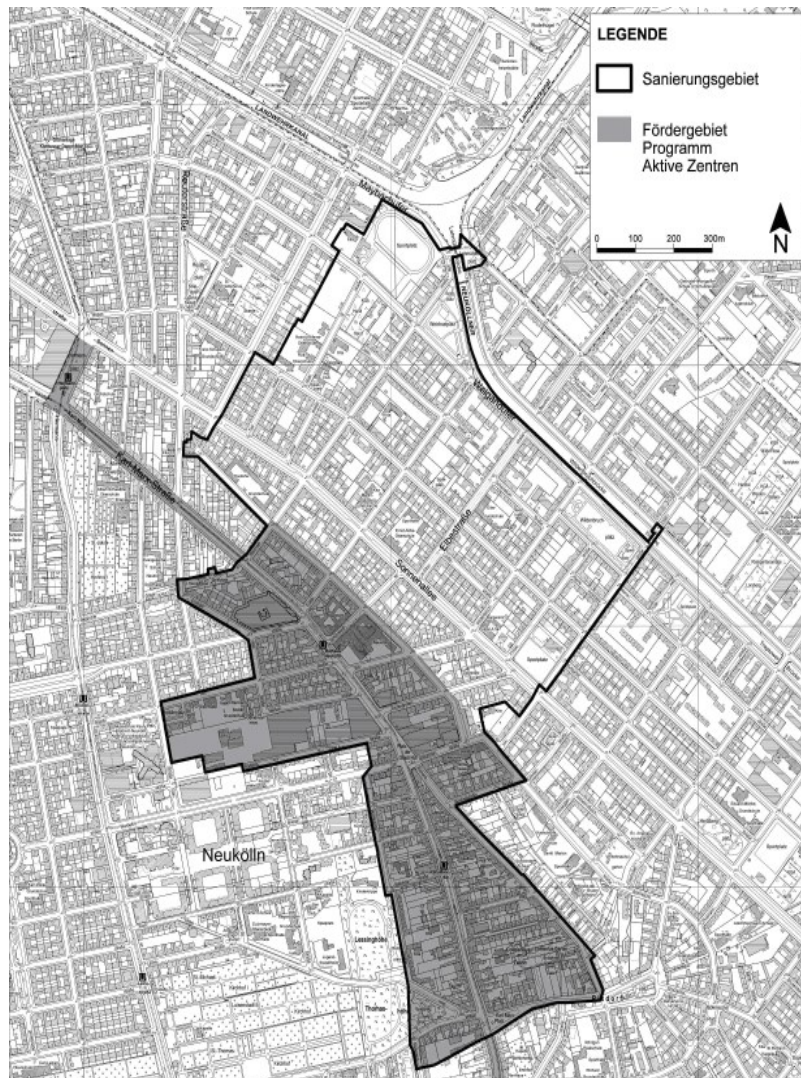
Figure 12: Redevelopment area Karl-Marx-Straße/ Sonnenallee[57]

In the context and framework in which the business people work and live, this means that after the first phases of structural measures, the larger reconstruction moves gradually toward the city hall and Hermannplatz. When interviewed, the project's head planner confirmed that the program's plans may present certain "challenges" for many of the smaller businesses, but firmly rejects the idea that their

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[56] Cf. Aktion! Karl-Marx-Straße (n.d.). Der aktuelle Newsletter der [Aktion! Karl-Marx-Straße], http://www.aktion-kms.de/sanierung/bereich-karl-marx-strasse/konzepte-bis-2007/, (2008: 3), accessed 07/25/2014.

[57] Source: Senatsverwaltung für Stadtentwicklung Referat IV C – Städtebauförderung / Stadterneuerung (2011): Zwölfte Verordnung über die förmliche Festlegung von Sanierungsgebieten und Festlegung und Ergänzung von Städtebaufördergebieten, p. 9. Courtesy: BSGmbH.

measures also threat them: "This is the free market. We set only the political framework" (l. 281). In 2011, the Berlin government and the Senate extended the funding phase by fifteen additional years. To date, the *Active City Center* with its *Aktion KMS* is the current main urban renewal program for Karl-Marx-Straße. It aims to further improve the street's public space (such as the aforementioned Alfred-Scholz-Platz) and to beautify the local sidewalks and places. Further, the project hopes to improve the commercial offers, the traffic situation, and in particular, the cooperation with house owners and selected business people.[58]

2.4. "Now we go through a new change, now the employed […] come back"[59]- The Current Gentrification of Karl-Marx-Straße

The vast changes that have occurred on Karl-Marx-Straße since the mid-2000s have spread beyond the analyses of local urban development offices to reach the local, national, and international media. The media tends to depict Neukölln as a district of extremes. One the one hand, it is a run-down, high-crime neighborhood home to a socio-economically deprived population and low-quality (migrant owned) businesses. On the other, Neukölln is shown as an up-and-coming area with beautifully restored *Gründerzeit* apartment blocks, quality boutiques and galleries, and niche stores; it is a desirable area where, in recent years, avant-garde artists and new middle-class families and entrepreneurs have come to settle. The latter narrative is the one preferred and used by the district authorities. For instance, in their quarterly magazine *Broadway Neukölln* (Autumn 2015)*,* the renewal agency describes Karl-Marx-Straße as follows:

> **You can see Karl-Marx-Straße's change even in the dark**: Where they used to fold up the sidewalks at 6 pm, **you can now see people strolling on the street after dark**. And not only during the festival 48 hours Neukölln.[60] Along with its cultural highlights, the **street also attracts people with its gastronomic offers** […]

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[58] Aktion! Karl-Marx-Straße (n.d.). Der aktuelle Newsletter der [Aktion! Karl-Marx-Straße], http://www.aktion-kms.de/sanierung/bereich-karl-marx-strasse/vorbereitende-untersuchungen-nach-141-baugb/, accessed 01/10/2016.

[59] Urban planner, l. 531 ff.

[60] *48 hours Neukölln* is a festival for artistic projects from all of Berlin's art scene's sectors. The festival promotes art that addresses current social issues. As a festival for contemporary and political art, the goal is to broaden the understanding of art away from something that is only displayed in galleries and museums to something that connects, communicates, and has a social concern. Both formal and informal places of art production and exhibition in Neukölln take place; however, the majority of those that take part are the newer galleries, cafés, bars, and show rooms. In recent years, the festival has turned from an art festival to a more nightlife-oriented

> Who walks through the Neukölln center [Karl-Marx-Straße] will discover a lot: from the old-Berlin corner bar to the scene bar, from the Turkish vegetables store to the puppet-theatre-museum. **Life on Karl-Marx-Straße is diverse** and exciting.[61]

Here the authors are celebrating the positive changes they have implemented on the street since 2008 as well as the future changes they envision will continue to increase the street's attractiveness. In this publication, the authors from the urban renewal office repeatedly note that the district administration had already acknowledged the "bad condition" of the street in 2004, noting in particular its high vacancy rates and its lack of "attractive" businesses and anchor stores. At this point, they claim that they could thus start "sufficiently early" to apply for funding in order to remodel the street and develop the area according to their vision of a dynamic social and ethnic mix. Over the following years, and in cooperation with corporate networks, the district administration has widened the street's southern strip, added bicycle lanes and parking facilities, installed new lightening and façade decorations, and rebuilt and renamed the central square. All of these changes have paved the way for new gastronomic businesses, brands, and chain stores.

But upgrading the street also attracted comparatively more affluent home owners and renters. According to their publications in late 2015 (*Broadway, Handelsnewsletter*), the urban renewal agents in the local planning office and district administration felt satisfied with steps achieved toward developing their envisioned "young, colorful and dynamic" street. However, despite their honorable aim to develop the street for - and with - "all" the people working and living along Karl-Marx-Straße, the question remains if their conception of "all" also included the local business people—and if so, which ones, why, and how? (See Chapter 7.2.).

This gentrification had already begun years earlier. In 2010 – in line with the late 2000's statistical changes of the local population's socio-demographic structure - the Berlin newspaper *Tagesspiegel* wrote:

> *Neighborhood Report Neukölln. District of Extremes.* Neukölln is well known for social problems, violence, and a lack of integration into the rest of Germany. But yet: There's more optimism than ever before. And also more hype than ever before.[62]

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festival, involving much more consumption than the mere public exhibitions and performances in 1999. See: 48 Stunden Neukölln (n.d.). Mission Statement, http://www.48-stunden-neukoelln.de/en/page/mission-statement, accessed 02/11/2016.

[61] Aktion! Karl-Marx-Straße (2015). Broadway Neukölln, p. 2 f., www.aktion-Karl-Marx-Straße.de, accessed 04/12/2016.

A year prior, in an article entitled, "Neukölln: Beyond the Hype," the English-language magazine *Ex-Berliner* asked: "[…] what is Neukölln really: colorful melting pot or Hartz IV[63] ghetto [?]."[64] Most public attention focuses on Neukölln's "thriving" night life and the influx - of international artists and students (e.g. *Timeout magazine*: "Neukölln: The Best Bits of Berlin's Hippest 'Hood"[65], *NY Times*: "A Berlin Hub's Arty Spinoff,"[66] *TAZ*: "Wandel in Nord-Neukölln: Gentrifizierung? Hier Doch Nicht!"[67], *Tagesspiegel:* "Gentrifizierung in Berlin: Hip, Hipper, Neukölln"[68]).

Since 2006,[69] Karl-Marx-Straße and the areas to its north have caught the attention of young entrepreneurs, who have opened their first businesses there, most often bars and other nightlife spots. This set in motion new waves of investment and media coverage that saw even more residents move to the area and even more new businesses taking root. As a result of this influx, the area has seen a rise in commercial and residential rents. The media coverage along with the district's self-promotion attracted further investment, residents and business people as well as tourists. For instance, the local administration's magazine for the renewal area around Karl-Marx-Straße is called *Broadway Neukölln*, and reports and advertises the new businesses, galleries and arts events. In an interview with the future district mayor Franziska Giffey (2015), both the mayor as well as the journalist argues that the current construction sites are necessary to develop Karl-Marx-Straße into a new "Broadway": "Karl-Marx-Straße should become Neukölln's Broadway, more space for pedestrians and bikers will be created." In addition, the mayor, showing the journalists around Karl-Marx-Straße, only visits the new businesses, such as the café (opened 2014) on the central and new designed plaza.[70] However, in contrast to 6 km

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[62] Guthke, J. / Vogt, S. (04/15/2010). Kiezreport Neukölln Bezirk der Extreme - Neukölln ist bundesweit Synonym für soziale Probleme, Gewalt und Integrations-Defizite. Und doch: So viel Aufbruch war selten. Und so viel Hype auch nicht, http://www.tagesspiegel.de/berlin/kiezreport-neukoelln-bezirk-der-extreme/1764120.html, accessed 06/25/2014.

[63] *Hartz IV* is the German unemployment benefit paid after the first 12-18 months of unemployment.

[64] Exberliner (05/20/2009). Neukölln: Beyond the hype, http://www.thelocal.de/20090520/19411, accessed 09/02/2014.

[65] Clack, D. (10/15/2015). Neukölln: your guide to Berlin's hippest 'hood, http://www.timeout.com/berlin/en/things-to-do/navigating-neukoelln-your-guide-to-berlins-hippest-hood, accessed 04/11/2016.

[66] Wilder, C. (18/09/2009). A Berlin Hub's Arty Spinoff, http://www.nytimes.com/2009/09/20/travel/20surfacing.html?_r=0, accessed 04/11/2016.

[67] Brandenburg, K.W. (3/13/2012). Gentrifizierung? Hier doch nicht, http://www.taz.de/!5098498/, accessed 04/11/2016.

[68] Frenzel, V. (11/30/2011). Hip, hipper, Neukölln, http://www.tagesspiegel.de/berlin/gentrifizierung-in-berlin-hip-hipper-neukoelln/9152496.html, accessed 04/11/2016.

[69] 2005 and particularly 2006 are repeatedly named across all interviews as the neighborhood's nadir.

[70] RBB: Abendschau (02/05/2015), http://www.rbb-online.de/abendschau/archiv/archiv.html), accessed 03/31/2016.

long Karl-Marx-Straße, New York City's Broadway runs 25 km long from the South of Manhattan up to the Bronx (and then an additional 29 km beyond the city borders), and has several very differently structured commercial strips. Broadway's strips target mainly tourists and other city visitors and the main shopping parts host almost exclusively big chain stores with highly overcrowded sidewalks in the front and very busy car and bus traffic and few marginalized bike lanes on the street space. This comparison of Karl Marx Straße with Broadway reveals the exaggerated and unrealistic expectations of the journalists and their vision.

As the district's urban planner argues:

> Well, I consider the current store owners as, those actors that are now here and occupy this space right now. But **we plan strongly focused on the future**, to around 15 years from now and **we develop the coulisse or a space for activities**. **We explicitly don't serve the local actors but we have a development vision**, we don't make improvements 'how to keep the street clean' or 'how to deal with security issues', [...] the development task is to **generate a new vision of a space that takes over totally different functions** [than now] and now there was a new profiling, where we reflected on a guiding vision, where we are become aware [...] which measures will be implemented and within a circle of indeed planners and experts we then tried to construct a guiding vision [...] trading, experiencing, encountering this means **something different than in the past**, where the street primarily had a shopping focus [...] (Urban planner, l. 243-250).

> Well, **we want distinct commercial structures** or we **want them to change** [...] what we want is to change something in the sectoral mix, if we can, but this doesn't work via the traders but **this works first of all via the land owner** (Urban renewal commissioner, l. 146-150).

In the framing of their jobs and the programs' working goals, the two urban renewal agents emphasize their support for the increase in wealthier residents and new businesses. They also make clear that their vision of the future Karl-Marx-Straße may have to be developed without the cooperation of the current retailers. However, surrounded by talk of gentrification and an increase in anti-gentrification events, only few commercial establishments considered to be typical markers for gentrification have actually opened a shop on Karl-Marx-Straße itself (Hentschel/ Blokland 2015: 128).[71]

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[71] From 2012 until April 2016, I counted four new bars, one club and gallery on Karl-Marx-Straße, but many more (ca. 10) had also opened in the nearby vicinity.

According to the city's rental market reports, from 2009 to 2015, the rents in the street's postal code area increased 81%.[72] Despite the dramatic rent increase and the changing population, those living in North Neukölln still have comparatively low incomes. Although unemployment rates have decreased over the last couple of years, as of March 2016, Neukölln continued to have an exceptionally high unemployment rate (15.2%), including a high percentage of both long-term and youth unemployed. In addition, Neukölln has a large number of residents (20.3%) who receive welfare despite being employed ("*working poor*").[73] In fact, more than fifty percent of the area's children and teenagers grow up in poverty.[74] Important for my study, this means that those who live in the area have a restricted purchasing power. Many residents depend strongly on local daily supply businesses and do not frequent any of the newer nightlife spots or boutique shops. This is the reality in this area despite being depicted in the media as "trend-setting" and "the center of all things hip."[75]

Most newcomers to Neukölln have higher educational backgrounds and incomes than the area's current population. More often they come from Germany or Western Europe as opposed to many of the current residents who have often Turkish, Arabic, or Polish roots (cf. Chapter 2.1.). The shift in demographics is reflected by the new construction sites and the types of new businesses opening up in the area: organic stores, lifestyle cafés, upscale restaurants, galleries, and designer boutiques. The local business people also remark on these changes:

> **Many young people are coming**, well students, now […] yes! I already realize that **there is so much just in the move**. Which is beautiful, of course, who will then some time, yes eventually they will stay, when they **earn money later** in the future (l. 214 - 218). [the neighborhood] **has changed** but when you're here every

[72] Berliner Morgenpost (n.d.). Berliner Mieten seit 2009 – Wo sich die Preise verdoppelt haben, http://www.morgenpost.de/interaktiv/mieten/article136875377/So-stark-steigen-die-Mieten-in-Berlins-Kiezen.html?config=interactive, accessed 02/06/2015.

[73] Bundesagentur für Arbeit (n.d.). Arbeitsmarkt im Überblick – Berichtsmonat April 2016 – Neukölln, JC, https://statistik.arbeitsagentur.de/Navigation/Statistik/Statistik-nach-Regionen/SGBII-Traeger/Berlin/Neukoelln-Nav.html, accessed 04/12/2016.

[74]Berlin – das Haupstadtportal (n.d.). Die Entwicklung der Quartiere in Neukölln im Vergleich zu anderen (Teil-)Bereichen der Stadt Berlin in den Jahren 2007 bis 2009, http://www.berlin.de/imperia/md/content/baneukoelln/2009pdf/qm/nklgutachten190711.pdf?download.html, p.1, accessed 08/14/2014, and
Berlin – das Haupstadtportal (n.d.). Die Entwicklung der Quartiere in Neukölln im Vergleich zu anderen (Teil-)Bereichen der Stadt Berlin in den Jahren 2007 bis 2009, http://www.berlin.de/imperia/md/content/baneukoelln/flyer/sozialdaten_bericht_final_august2012_1.pdf?download.html, p. 5, accessed 08/14/2014.

[75] Clack, D. (10/09/2015). Neukölln: your guide to Berlin's hippest 'hood, http://www.timeout.com/travel/features/1277/neukolln-the-best-bits-of-berlins-hippest-hood, accessed 09/02/2014.

day, then you don't necessarily see that [change] anymore. **Sure, it was better the old days**, but everything was better in the old days and better is also very relative, right, these were different times and hmm, **we can't regret bygone times, we need to cope with it**. Sure this was, when I started her 17 years ago, there were banks around my business and the [long standing renown] luggage businesses and the book store, yes these long standing businesses, and they aren't here anymore, of course, and that's the way it is and it's okay. It's also because of the **loss of the customer clientele**, of course, and it changed. Oh well, **we have to stick it out** (Flower store owner, l. 498 - 503).

2.5. Summary: "The main focus is on the site's development"[76]

The previous subchapters presented the major changes that have occurred in the physical, commercial, and demographic structure of Karl-Marx-Straße as well as the development of the local urban renewal programs. Further attention was paid to the question of how local independent retailers and service providers have tried to adapt to changes in retail, trade, and shopping patterns. The discussed changes form the meso-context of Karl-Marx-Straße. I have also shown how the shop owners have been affected by the area's demographic and socio-economic changes and the recent urban renewal programs. Retail and local supply must address the new consumer expectations that have shifted as a result of e-commerce, shifting time structures with longer working hours for customers and business employees, the presence of shopping centers. The planners support the opening of new gastronomic facilities, with more and more people looking to dine out rather than eat at home.

All of these changes result in increased demands for *comfortable* shopping experiences. Customers desire a spatial and commercial infrastructure that eases running errands. They prefer services to be in close proximity to one another so that they can visit doctors, grocery stores, post offices, banks, and other shops all near their home. They want shopping to be a leisure activity, a sensory and haptic experience that they can enjoy during their limited free time. Since online shopping fosters new trends and fast-paced products, customers now desire shopping locations that offer a similarly large variety of (specialty and niche) businesses. Customer want stores to have long opening hours, and a large up-to-date stock that includes fresh, organic, and sustainable products (food and non-food products both)

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[76] Urban planner, l.564 f. The city manager wants to "bring potential" to the street, "to develop" the street and its "potential" (l. 253, 373).

within one - lifestyle appealing - location.[77] Due to these new demands, many smaller stores on Karl-Marx-Straße are now struggling to survive economically.

Put together, the retail and gastronomic facilities along Karl-Marx-Straße face the challenge of changing neighborhood demographics and consumption patterns. This has, resulted in a shift toward a more lifestyle-oriented shopping experience that is also supported by the local urban renewal program. Many other factors threaten their survival: comparatively low purchasing power of the long-term residents), the urban renewal's numerous construction sites along the street, the heightened competition through e-commerce, adjacent shopping malls and chain stores, and rising commercial and residential rents.

Certainly these factors, and the others discussed in the chapter, are only some of the factors that challenge and frame businesspeople' everyday life and daily work operations on Karl-Marx-Straße. This chapter has outlined those challenges most often cited by the interviewed retail and planning experts and local shop owners. So while the district administration's main urban planner admits that his and his colleagues' "main focus is on the site's development" (l. 564 f.), this focus also holds true for the interviewed store owners. Hence, it is in this contested socio-spatial context of contemporary Karl-Marx-Straße, that independently owned businesses, gastronomic facilities, retailers, and other service providers are trying to align with the long-standing motto "trade is change" in the face of state-supported gentrification. Store owners frame change as something "natural" for cities and something that they must adapt to, or at least, that they have to "stick out" (flower store owner, l. 503). But the urban renewal actors use the term "trade is change" to further discriminate against some of the smaller businesses, by downplaying the challenges that they face. Nevertheless, my research shows how - against this backdrop of ongoing business threats and neighborhood change - local owners work for the *development* of the street as their common business *site* and as the "centers of their lives" (e.g. flower store owner, 781 ff.) through their everyday social practices. In chapter 7, I present specific examples of business owners using everyday social practices to contribute to the development of Karl-Marx-Straße as an important, yet ordinary urban hub that secures integrated everyday life for all ethnic and social residential groups. The next chapter introduces the sensitizing concepts that guided my case-selections: public characters and third places, interaction in semi-public or public spaces, and community building/ senses of belonging.

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[77] HDE (2013). German Retail. Facts and Figures. p.12 ff.,
http://www.einzelhandel.de/index.php/presse/zahlenfaktengrafiken/item/110175-derdeutscheeinzelhandel.html, accessed 04/20/2016.
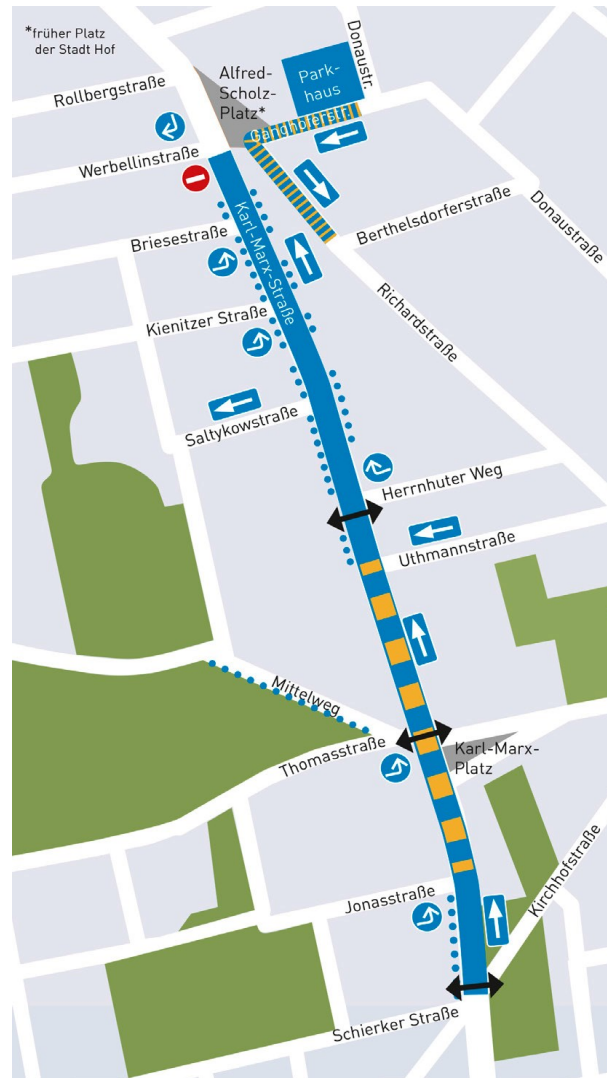
Figure 13: Map showing the construction phases of Karl-Marx-Straße[78]

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[78] The map indicates the different construction phases with the arrows indicating the new traffic directions and the orange color marking the construction site in 2014. In 2016, the construction site covers the entire blue colored strip. Source: Aktion! Karl-Marx-Straße (n.d.). Handels-Newsletter Juli 2014, http://www.aktion-kms.de/files/handelnews_juli2014_barr.pdf, accessed 03/31/2016. Courtesy: BSGmbH.

3. Theories of the Ground: The Sensitizing Theoretical Concepts

Having established the historical and structural context for Karl-Marx-Straße's contemporary daily life as well as for local businesses' survival, this chapter elaborates further on the underlying theoretical concepts that informed the selection process of certain businesses along Karl-Marx-Straße in order to explain why businesses are special sites for interaction and what kinds of interactions occur there. Subsequent chapters will explain the sampling of the specific types of businesses that constitute social life in Berlin-Neukölln.

This study works with a *Grounded Theory Method Approach* (GTM) (Glaser/ Strauss 1967 [German translation 1998]). Although a detailed discussion of this methodology appears in Chapter 4, it is important here to focus on an understanding of *sensitizing concepts* and their use in elaborating the iterative and cyclical process model of Grounded Theory Method here. GTM weaves together data collection, its analysis, the sensitizing theoretical concepts and the emerging theory. Crucial to this process are the initial data selection procedures that are particular to GTM: Neither principles of representativeness, nor the paradigmatic position of the data to be collected, nor its uniqueness are important. Rather, data is selected on the basis of analytical questions raised by the respective state of research and the state of theory formation – thus the term *theoretical sampling* (cf. Strübing 2008: 30). This process is defined as follows by Glaser and Strauss (1998: 53):

> Theoretical sampling means the process of data collection that is aimed towards the generation of theory, during which the researcher parallel collects, codes and analyzes her data, and decides what data should be collected next and where to find them. This process of data collection is controlled by the nascent - material or formal - theory.

As such, the observation positions and interview partners were chosen on the basis of "sensitizing concepts"[79] (as theoretical and practical knowledge), whereby the selection criteria change according to the state of theory formation over the course of the research process, whereby turning ever more specific.

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[79] "A definitive concept refers precisely to what is common to a class of objects, by the aid of a clear definition in terms of attributes or fixed bench marks […] A sensitizing concept lacks such specification of attributes or bench marks and consequently it does not enable the user to move directly to the instance and its relevant content. Instead, it gives the user a general sense of reference and guidance in approaching empirical instances. Whereas definitive concepts provide prescriptions of what to see, sensitizing concepts merely suggest directions along which to look." (Blumer 1954: 7)

The sensitizing concepts themselves are deployed as interpretive devices, as starting points for the qualitative study, as markers of the important features of social interaction as practices, as guidelines for research in specific settings, and also as indicators for the selection of the cases themselves.

A literature review of potentially relevant concepts was undertaken before entering the field. It seemed appropriate not to follow Strauss and Glaser's suggestion to enter the field without having previous scientific knowledge on the research subject, because theoretical specification helped frame the selection of businesses to be studied and provided structure for the interview questions and participant observation. Further concepts were added with every new theme that developed out of the empirically generated data.

For the selection of appropriate sensitizing concepts (before and during the data generation and analysis process), the relationship between the sensitizing concepts and the theoretical sampling process deserves increased attention (the sampling process is discussed in detail in Chapter 4.1.): At the beginning of the research process, a first case is selected on the basis of the first sensitizing concepts (see Chapter 3.1., "public characters" and "third places"), which are supposed to reveal first tentative questions and possible perspectives on the phenomena under investigation. Successively more criteria for additional data selection evolve from the respective theoretical and conceptual conclusions of the existing material (Strübing 2008: 31; Blumer 1954; Bowen 2006: 2 f.). This deliberate selection of interviewees and observation spaces is accomplished by means of theoretical criteria derived from the sensitizing concepts, whereby no attention is paid to representativeness, but rather to the respective types and structures. Consequently and gradually, the research project's sample is thus formed on the basis of the initial analysis on the one hand and the search for further theoretical insights through additional expected data sets on the other hand.

In short, the general question in theoretical sampling is: Which people, events, and social practices should be investigated further during the data collection and to what end? In this process, data collection and analysis of maximum contrastive categories (e.g. varying store sizes or 'hang-out' qualities, self-service, need of consultation, etc.) expands to include more minimum contrast situations (e.g. same type of business, of salespeople, etc.). In particular, by including extreme or dissimilar case, the theory consolidates and becomes richer and more multi-faceted (Flick 1995: 443).

Ultimately, three sets of sensitizing concepts in this study formed the conceptual framework, linking the various concepts and functions as an impetus for theory formulation.

The first set (which also sparked the search for an initial research question and inspired the entire research process in anticipation of entering the field site), was Jane Jacob's concept of a "public character" (1961: 68). A public character is understood as a neighborhood figure, who keeps their street safe and supports local social life and cohesion. An underlying research interest was to verify if these somewhat romantically described figures do exist on an urban neighborhood level and what makes such an individual a public character. The second sensitizing concept that was examined and operationalized before fieldwork began was Raymond Oldenburg's concept of a "third place" (with Brissett 1982; 1989; 1999; 2001), a highly sociable place beyond the boundaries of the "first" (home) and "second" (work) places. In particular, his concept informed the research on the social practices that make a business sociable and in particular, on the businesses' material features.

The second and third sets of sensitizing concepts developed in the course of the intertwined processes of data generation, data analysis, and the generation of increasingly more dense and solidified theoretical concepts. These latter concepts were derived through an extensive literature review centering on specific themes, such as sense of belonging and community building, public as well as neighborly interaction and behavior, the role of businesses and their owners for local social life, public spaces and urban retail development, shopping and consumption patterns, and the sociability of semi-public spaces. This reviewed literature along with the themes which emerged from the interviews and observations brought about my major argument that store owners' everyday practices in the course of their business operations contribute to community building and senses of belonging, and becoming socially significant places for some of the users. As such, a methodological focus emerged over the course of data collection that emphasized particular conceptualizations that consider community building and sense of belonging, but also neighborly interaction and public sociability as something that is practiced in the course of daily life, and thus underpin how neighborhood social life unfolds. Applied to independent retailers and gastronomic facilities, the nexus among these theoretical concepts is examined not only for the evolving sampling process, but also as the theoretical backbone of the whole research process. Put together, the conceptual framework for the study included three sets of sensitizing concepts, *sense of community/ belonging, public interaction* and *third places/public characters*, all of which provide the analytic frame, serving as points of reference and as guides in the data analysis (Bowen 2006: 3 f.).

3.1. Sensitizing Concepts I: *Third Place* and *Public Character*

This is a study of sociability on the very local micro-level – respectively the (semi-) public places where sociability, mainly among neighborhood residents, is generated. According to Georg Simmel, all forms of association comprise sociability, but pure sociability is the play-form of association, the opposite of purposeful association. The sphere of pure sociability might seem as an artificial world cut off from the real matters of life, and indeed Simmel describes pure sociability as a superficial world, offering a "flight from life". Yet, the world of sociability is highly attractive, for in it "we construct and experience the meaning and force of [life's] deepest reality but without the reality itself." (Simmel 1949: 261) So as per Georg Simmel, sociability is

> a distinct social form that distills out of the realities of social life the pure essence of association, of the associative process as a value and a satisfaction [...] Sociability extracts the serious substance of life leaving only ''togetherness,'' the sheer pleasure of the company of others. [...] Freed of connection with the serious contents of life, sociability is truly a social game, and end in itself. (Simmel [1911] 1949: 255)

In sociability, the form can become disconnected from content: people talk simply for the sake of talking and yet these interactions are socially meaningful and highly important for the individual's well-being. Extending Georg Simmel's work on sociability, Raymond Oldenburg (1989; 1999; 2001) analyzes the places in which sociable associations tend to take place. He calls one group of these social settings "third places" and defines them as, ''a generic designation for a great variety of public places that host the regular, voluntary, informal, and happily anticipated gatherings of individuals beyond the realms of home and work'' (Oldenburg 1989: 16).

For my research, the concept of the third place (Oldenburg 1989; 1999; 2001, and Oldenburg/Brissett 1982) was used primarily to generate early assumptions about the kind of places that might engender higher levels of sociability among only very categorically known (Bahrdt 1969) or completely unknown people on a neighborhood level, to develop observational categories and to inform the empirical research into the businesses themselves.

Therefore, third place attributes served as an important variable in the sampling process, contrasted against businesses that are also not delineated in Oldenburg's work (focusing on bars). Although Oldenburg rarely conceptualizes the role of store owners, or of bartenders and other employees, here too his concept helps to distinguish the different sets of practices that generate sociability and sociality in businesses.

For the carriers of these social practices (and as such, the actors of this study), Jane Jacobs' idea of "public characters" (1961: 68) is also used as part of this first sensitizing concept on the specific features of the places – the businesses – and their legal owners. Furthermore, Jane Jacobs' book "The Death and Life of Great American Cities" (1961) inspired and still informs the whole research project: Her understanding of "public characters" (1961: 68) and "eyes upon the street" (1961: 45) are examined in detail in Chapter 7 which discusses my findings on the role of store owners on Karl-Marx-Straße. While I am aware of her very nostalgic and normative ideas of what neighborhoods and sidewalk life are supposed to look like, and that her work is based on her own personal (instead of scientifically systematic) observations and public interactions in her neighborhood of Greenwich Village in New York in the 1960s, this critique does not take away from her analytical insights. Similarly, her idea of the public character, which emerged from her own interactions with and observations of the store owners in her neighborhood, carries a continued validity despite its nostalgic aura. Her reoccurring description of them (e.g. the butcher or the superintendent) emphasizes that they do not only watch out for the streets and their sidewalk lives, but also take over key exchanges and other little services, including the care of local children. These public characters with their manifold roles for the neighborhood could also be counted on to, for instance, let the parents know if their children were getting out of hand on the street, or to call the police if an odd stranger was hanging around for too long: "Storekeepers and other small businessmen are typically strong proponents of peace and order," Jacobs explained, "they hate broken windows and holdups." As per Mitch Duneier (1999: 6), she also modeled these public figures after persons like herself, who distributed petitions on local political issues to neighborhood stores, spreading local news in the process. However Jacobs (1961: 68) did not fully define her concept:

> A public character is anyone who is […] sufficiently interested to make himself a public character. […] His main qualification is that he is public, that he talks to a lot of different people. In this way, news travels that is of sidewalk interest. Most public sidewalk characters are steadily stationed in public places. They are storekeepers or barkeepers or the like. These are the basic public characters.

On this somewhat vague definition she also bases her observation that all other public characters on the street, as well as the social structure of the street as a whole, "hang partly" on these public characters, insofar as "the social context of the sidewalk is patterned in a particular way because of the presence of the public character: his or her actions have the effect of making street life safer, stabler, and more predictable." (Duneier 1999: 6) As per Jacobs this occurs because the public characters have "eyes upon the street" and take care of what happens outside of their businesses (Jacobs 1961).

Certainly, Jacobs' early 1960s Greenwich Village (Hudson Street specifically) does not share many commonalities with 21st century Karl-Marx-Straße in terms of the residential and commercial structures, municipal building, but also shopping and mobility patterns, and business operations and so forth. Nonetheless, her work on public characters is fundamental to our understanding of the sidewalk as the site where the practices of particular actors – namely storekeepers – develop a sense of mutual support among the more or less acquainted people who populate them. Furthermore, Jacobs emphasizes the role of mutual respect for the creation of appropriate limits on interaction and intimacy in the production of that social contact – even if this is something that cannot be taken for granted on a highly diverse shopping street in the 21st century (Duneier 1999: 7).[80]

Beyond the notion of "public characters," I also draw on Raymond Oldenburg's ideas of public sociability (1989, 1999, 2001, Oldenburg/ Brissett 1982) that he defines through a detailed account of the kinds of interaction that happen in "neighborhood places" (Oldenburg 1997: 9). While my research is rooted in his original ideas on public sociability, I would argue that that a much broader range of businesses, from small neighborhood shops to occasionally even corporate chain stores, franchises, and shopping malls, can (and do) function as places of sociability for customers – depending on the physical attributes of the place, and the social practices of its owners, employees and customers. Furthermore, Oldenburg's work lacks a precise empirical analysis of his assumptions on third places and their important function for the social cohesion of US American cities, including the question of scale of the places under discussion (are they blocks, neighborhoods, villages, towns, cities?) – a lacuna that this present research intends to correct. [81]

Oldenburg's work builds upon the 19th century theorist/ sociologist/ thinker Ferdinand Tönnies' (1887) concepts of *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* which he used to describe the types of interpersonal relationships and networks created in a rapidly industrializing and urbanizing society – the former as a real, organic, and specifically private social formation; the latter as a mechanical, ideal, and specifically public social formation (Tönnies 1987: 4). Tönnies' main concern was the loss of community as "Gemeinschaft" in larger industrializing cities, where residents live under the threat of losing their

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[80] See Chapter 7 for more information on the definition of the concept as well as on the concrete sets of social practices that make a store owner a public character.

[81] Oldenburg focuses mainly on bars and restaurants in his elaborations of the sociability and sociality of third places, although he originally also included other semi-public and public spaces such as main streets or libraries: "The tavern, the bar, is without doubt the dominant third place in our society and we are not unique in this. Be it the saloon, cocktail lounge, pub […] – the bar is nonetheless at the core of the institution (Oldenburg/ Brissett 1982: 269). By contrast, I include businesses of daily supply or daily services in my analysis, since they also function as third places and display third place characteristics.

identity, intimate relationships and emotional support, due to a lack of both informal and formal gathering points. Expanding on Tönnies' work, Oldenburg suggests that people require informal public places (outside the bounds of home or work places) where they can regularly go to for the sake of relaxation and conversation, in order to remain "healthy" as well as to maintain their sense of *Gemeinschaft*. He defines these (semi-) public places of sociability as third places, "public place[s] that host[s] the regular, voluntary, informal, and happily anticipated gatherings of individuals beyond the realms of home and work" (Oldenburg 1999: 16).

For Oldenburg (1999), third places are essential places in urban dwellers' lives along with their first place (home) and their second places (work). While all three are important for conviviality, a more homogeneous and more selective sociability exists/is created/is engendered in the first and second places. These cafés, bars and shops as semi-public spaces bring about and hold together communities. They are the places that function as a substitute to the traditional historical urban market place – the social settings that encourage regular, but not necessarily trivial, interaction between customers, where urban residents spend their leisure time, while simultaneously providing them with food, drink, or the goods and services needed to supply their homes. What makes third places and the community formations therein so special is that there are no mutual obligations between the visitors – they come and go (and purchase or consume) as they please, which allows for a greater sense of relaxation and relief than in first or second places, where people expect each other to act according to their respective roles.

Railing against shopping malls, which he calls non-places, Oldenburg embodies a nostalgic and intellectually conservative standpoint, praising little shops for functioning as community information centers, providing homeliness and comfortable sensual experiences (Mikunda 2004: 5) – alongside the goods for sale. For Oldenburg, socializing and the search for *Gemeinschaft* or community is thus of primary interest to people coming to these places – and thus the primary activity.

Paralleling Robert Putnam's critique of the loss of social capital in "Bowling alone" (1995; 2000), Oldenburg (in his early work with Dennis Brissett) laments the steady decline in people's sense of responsibility and control, caused by the narrowing range of available arenas for social participation to the two-stop-model between home and work place (Oldenburg/Brissett 1982: 265 f.). They further bemoan that the neglect by scholars and planners alike of the role of third places in creating a sense of community, has further decreased the opportunities for congregation outside of first and second places. Fundamentally, the main problem of the American society is the loss of specific spaces where people

can interact without the pressures and expectations typical for social interactions at home or at work. As such third places act as "get-aways" or a "home away from home." Moreover, he argues that if these facilities and public spaces are endangered, and urban environments become incapable of providing opportunities for social relationships and diverse social experiences, the overall social fabric of a neighborhood or society is endangered as well (Oldenburg/Brissett 1982: 267; Oldenburg 2002).

Emerging out of their predecessors – German beer gardens, English pubs, French cafés, and village/ town market places – these third places are free or inexpensive establishments, often serving food and drinks, and highly accessible (e.g. a walking distance) for most of their visitors, and who frequented these places on a regular and habitual basis. Further, third places provide a welcoming and comfortable atmosphere, making it easy to congregate there, make new friends meet old ones. These places provide a home away from home, without the constraints and role expectations as to be found in places of work and residence, resulting in a quite playful mood. Nonetheless, customers most often only know each other casually in their role as acquaintances in a bar or restaurant. Oldenburg does not go into a definition of home or community or how the two are perceived and practiced by staff or customers themselves. His thoughts remain very superficial and based mainly on the observed conversations in, and a historical literature review of, selected third places. Furthermore, his sampling remains very unclear: the discussed examples are most often longstanding neighborhood taverns and diners with customers of different gender and age groups, but most often with the same ethnic and racial background. In addition, all his discussed facilities are family-owned and owner-operated places on or near main streets in American cities.

Although Oldenburg is aware that key ingredients often remain elusive, emergent, or subject to shifting lifestyle patterns, he does ascribe rather narrowly defined characteristics to his model third places as places of public sociability (1999: 20 ff.): Third places offer neutral ground, where visitors have little to no obligation to be there, none of them has to act as host or guest. In addition, customers are not committed to the place financially, politically, legally, or otherwise – they are free to come and go as they please. Further, third places place little to no importance on the visitors' social status. Their socio-economic background does not matter in these facilities in terms of permitting entrance, participation, or special attention by other actors in the location. Rather, participation and congregation in third places is based on a greater or lesser equality of all visitors with a sense of commonality for the length of the stay. These low expectations of customers often extend to the space as a whole – third places are characteristically "wholesome," with a homely feel and lacking pretentious or snobby salespeople and

customers, but also extravagant and grandiose décor and attitude (Oldenburg/ Brissett 1982: 270). My observations as well as other ethnographic studies on bars and coffee places contradict his utopian view: In practice most dining and drinking facilities are structured by gender, class, and ethnicity. This happens most often in informal ways and often through self-selection; furthermore, some places actively select a particular type of clientele though door policies.

In situations of pure sociability, one enters, according to Georg Simmel (1949), into the most purely democratic experience life can offer, where people "are truly different but truly equal" (Oldenburg/ Brissett 1982: 271), since a person's status does not inherently matter in the maintenance of human fellowship. Yet, Oldenburg's ascribed characteristic of third places being a "leveler," setting no criteria for social inclusion, is rather utopian, since most businesses and particularly dining and drinking facilities are highly structure by gender, class, and ethnicity (cf. Share 2003: 11). Despite the "feminization" of many public places in the course of the 20th century, bars and many nightlife facilities remain often highly masculine and thereby highly exclusionary places. His most prized of "leveling" third places, the neighborhood tavern, fundamentally excludes certain population groups by dint of the fact that alcohol is sold there. Today's metropolitan areas – such as the neighborhoods around Karl-Marx-Straße – have ethnically and religiously diverse populations, many of whom do not drink alcohol and do not visit places where alcohol is sold because of their beliefs.

However, the core of Oldenburg's delineation of third places (and for him the most obvious of all opportunities within such places) is the possibility of pure sociability. Referring to Georg Simmel (1949: 254 ff.) this pure sociability goes beyond special and immediate purposes and brings people together. According to Simmel, people need this kind of pure sociability in addition to other forms of associations in the "outside world," (defined as associations entrusted for a specific purpose, subordinated to the required roles and organizational criteria) (Oldenburg/ Brissett 1982: 271). Third place sociability, by contrast, means fully playful, "humorous" and "happy" face-to-face conversation are the main activity, although topics can vary and getting more serious over time and also might be accompanied by other activities. In his enthusiasm for the "great good neighborhood places," Oldenburg seemingly ignores the fact that talk can also be used as an instrument of oppression. He often defines the mood of places as determined by a playful conversational tone without serious tensions or hostilities (Oldenburg 1999: 31).

Another important feature of third places as places of sociability, according to Oldenburg, are the regulars themselves, who not only give the place its tone and contribute to the mood and verbal climate

of the space, but also attract other customers and influence how other (first time or non-regular) customers perceive the space and its inclusivity. Ostensibly, it is not the surroundings or even the service that make a third place attractive, but the other customers, where the ultimate goal is to become a regular, and thus to develop a mutual relationship of trust. Here, Oldenburg does not go into the role of shopkeepers, bartenders, and other third place employees. For him, public sociability evolves rather as something natural among regular customers, not directed or fostered by any "formal" owners of the place. I, on the other hand, doubt that interaction among customers, no matter if related or not, develops without direct or indirect incentives from the employees (and owners), since they set, frame, and govern the behavioral and interactional rules for the places.

Another important attribute, as per Oldenburg, is a third place's easy access and accommodation by means of its (ideally) walkable location and physical design, including a décor, lighting, furniture, and its arrangement, as well as other artifacts such as play toys, newspapers, or bar games, all of which please and match with the needs and desires of its clientele. These details do not appear sui generis, but are clearly crafted either purposefully or accidentally by store owners and employees. In that sense, it becomes clear that the impact and social practices of store owners and employees are much more important than originally argued by Oldenburg: They build, design, and decorate the place, they decide where to put up tables, combined with a specific lighting system, how to promote offers; they choose the kind of music and the volume at which it is played, and so on in order to order to generate an atmosphere and a design to fit their business ideals, concepts, profit expectations, and daily operations.

Oldenburg focuses on the spatial location rather than the interior physical qualities of third places. He decries American planning regulations that too often exclude such places from urban and suburban areas, and pleads for easy accessibility that requires a high number of third places across the cityscape and within residential settlements. Their quantity and presence do matter, but more so do Oldenburg's outlined benefits of third places: the provision of an atmosphere of familiarity, feelings of possession, belonging and intimacy, the constitution of a home away from home, but not far away from home. Even if close to home, the defining feature is that these places are <u>not</u> home, yet the atmosphere and feelings of homeliness affect how people move and behave in third places, in that they engage in practices such as taking off shoes, scratching themselves, or marking newspapers and discussing private issues without high levels of secrecy (Oldenburg/ Brissett 1982: 271 ff.). With Oldenburg, the underlying assumption for the current empirical inquiry is that businesses as everyday places receive an ever-shifting variety of locally resident and/or working individuals and sometimes even "external" visitors, who are all granted

participation by virtue of their co-presence in the course of routinized everyday life. In third places, people of different professions, milieus, and origins might end up next to each other; whereas at home or at work, interactions are not only highly regulated and standardized, but also occur mainly among people of very similar and selected backgrounds (Oldenburg/ Brissett 1982: 274 f.). Further potential benefits of the participation in third places are, according to Oldenburg (1999), that people find emotional relaxation there, since they are freed from their role expectations and can thus express a higher level of emotion – but nevertheless dependent on the respective business' behavioral codes and corresponding atmosphere. Third places in Oldenburg's estimation are often very loud and lively places, where emotional conversations are common, where people discuss very private topics specifically because of the lack of strong ties between the customers. Revealing private issues just serves the purpose of personal release not available when discussing these issues with someone more related. This leads to another benefit of third places: perspective. As per Oldenburg, third places help to overcome social isolation and foster mutual support. Frequenting third places enlarges customers' social networks, but further, visitors to third places might end up sitting next to a plumber, who could be hired for a repair, or someone who rents out an apartment, someone who knows a good doctor or nanny. These relationships, even if confined to the length of stay in the business, might thus help to overcome situations of need (Oldenburg/ Brissett 1982: 280 f.). In addition, with this "incomplete integration"[82] (Bahrdt 1969: 86) or the only partial knowledge of others in the place, third places provide a responsive arena for the individual reality construction for each customer. According to Oldenburg, a healthy measure of role distance becomes important in the retention of mental perspective (Oldenburg/ Brissett 1982: 282).

Having characterized the main features of third places, Oldenburg admits that mere participation in third places does not guarantee "anything," which I interpret as no guarantee of sociability or of personal happiness. Certainly, he and Brissett see many positive elements in third places, such as the discussed sociability, leveling, and community building. However, they consider the positive consequences as emergent and rarely linear, while providing users access to social experiences and relationships that are increasingly unavailable outside these places in society at large (Oldenburg/Brissett 1982: 273). It also remains unclear if membership in these places extends to the "outside" world, if customers maintain and sustain their third place acquaintanceships or friendships

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[82] As per Hans Paul Bahrdt, incomplete integration means that only one aspect of the personality is introduced in the respective interaction, while other aspects are ignored or hidden. By participating in the 'market' (as the central urban space), a person is integrated in a system of exchange, but this integration is not aimed at the whole person, wherewith Bahrdt calls this integration incomplete (Bahrdt 1969: 86 f.).

outside of the businesses in question, and as such, if the sociability of third places actually leads to higher integration and participation in broader society.[83]

Another critique concerns the increased self-marketing of businesses as third places, which erases the commercial aspect inherent in running a business by making it disappear behind a mask of sociability. For instance, the Starbucks Corporation actively promotes its chain coffee stores as third places, pretending that the sociability – the warm and welcoming atmosphere of these cafés – matter more to the company and its employees than selling pricy coffee and baked goods.[84] Starbucks advertise their third places as "safe," "comfortable" and "nonthreatening," referring to the same discourse of homogeneity and notions of safety and comfort that find their material expression in highly segregated and gated residential communities, as well as in the widespread deployment of police, security guards, and electronic surveillance systems in malls, parks, and other public settings. Starbucks did not begin to promote their stores as third places until the mid-1990s, when they began to capitalize on the social and interactional desires of their overworked middle-class customers with a nostalgic narrative of "community life" (Gaudio 2003: 678). Similarly, other dining and drinking institutions also see an opportunity to capitalize on the concept of third places by marketing themselves as such or even by making it an essential part of their brand (Crick 2011: 2 ff.). The function of retailers and dining facilities is – of course – first and foremost to sell and create profit. Since third places represent a seductive experience, they often draw on these "third place experiences" in order to increase attention levels, length of stay, and subsequently their sales. Through "mood management" or "convenience entertainment," emotions become a value-added in the consumption experience, linking "true, big feelings" to the shopping environment, the salespeople, or the products sold (Mikunda 2004: 6 ff.). I am highly aware that the small businesses' owners and salespeople along Karl-Marx-Straße might also use such techniques to bind customers to their business, increasing the length of their stay and the number of goods purchased, as a means of pro-actively defending against the competition, while increasing their

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[83] For these questions it becomes obvious that Oldenburg's conceptualization lacks empirical data and evidence.
[84] See Mikunda 2004: 5; Starbucks (n.d.): "Your Starbucks experience is so much more than just coffees. It's the conversation you have with a friend, a moment of solitude at the end of the day, a quick stop on the way to the movies. And in the tradition of the coffeehouse, it's also the chance to immerse yourself in eclectic and enduring music while you sip your favorite coffee" (Starbucks (n.d.). Our Heritage, http://www.starbucks.com/about-us/our-heritage, accessed 04/20/2015). Dave Olsen, Vice president of Starbucks also wrote in the introduction of "Starbucks passion for coffee: A Starbucks coffee cookbook (Sunset Books 1994: 8)": "Today, as they first did more than 700 years ago, coffeehouses offer a delightful diversity of experiences. You can chat with friends, join in heated discussions or read in solitude. You can study, sketch or write. You can listen to music or hear poetry recited. You can play cards, checkers, backgammon, chess. As an unsung Viennese wit once put it, a coffeehouse is 'the ideal place for people who want to be alone but need company for it.' All the while, whatever you choose to do, you can sip and enjoy one of the world's great pleasures."

own profitability. In a nutshell, generating a third place and sociability becomes a concrete business strategy.

Despite the danger of being capitalized or turned to account, Oldenburg's concept of (semi-) public places that are used as private habitats, draws attention to the previous and ongoing restrictions on spheres available to urban residents for social participation. These restrictions are mostly due to structural changes, longer working hours, as well as a turn to the more exclusive sphere of family during the scant leisure time. Both work and home places are highly predictable and homogeneous in terms of ethnicity and lifestyle. Third places, by contrast, expose their visitors to diversity and novelty, and thereby represent fertile ground for practicing the 21st century diverse metropolis (cf. Chapters 1 and 2).

Building from Oldenburg's notions of neighborhood places and Jacobs' ideas about neighborhood figures, this present research expands the line of inquiry to investigate how the physical design of the stores alongside the social practices of the store owners and other staff, coupled with the often unknown yet repeating mixes of people that share the space at a particular time, are responsible for a more inclusive or exclusive, good-spirited or strict, familiar or new atmosphere that supports (or does not) the generation of a sense of community, home, or belonging.

Hence, these are the main assumption derived from third places and public characters as the first sensitizing concepts, which subsequently informed the empirical inquiry into Karl-Marx-Straße. While Oldenburg's third places encourages interaction and familiarity among all its participants, the sampled businesses and their owners might foster interaction for only some or none of their customers, some businesses might not have a regular or already acquainted clientele at all. Nonetheless, just as Jacobs' public character idea polishes the analytical lens for the social practices of store owners, I chose Oldenburg's third place model because it reveals the potential for discovering the relatively uninhibited sociability among mainly unacquainted others – sometimes strangers – in (semi-) public spaces.

Some of the operational research questions seek to expand on Jacobs and Oldenburg's models: first, in order to include other – non-gastronomic businesses – as the most visited places of everyday supply, and second, to include the role of the individuals working in these businesses. Are they aware of the 'third place functions' the business fulfills, do they practice third place intentionally, and why? How do businesses and their staff affect customer interaction? How does the respective physical design of the businesses represent, prevent, or support third place 'qualities'? If Karl-Marx-Straße's businesses are

indeed a type of third place, for whom are they so? What role do these businesses as third places play for the neighborhood and broader society?

Within this context, I considered business space size, type, accessibility and location, as well as customer mix (especially the presence of regulars), and the overall atmosphere and mood in the businesses as variables in the course of my theoretical sampling process. Since visitors can never fully predict the social mix and atmosphere of a third place, due to variable factors such as the time of day and week, other potential customers and their moods, and furthermore because strong ties do not seem to be the dominant type of relationship in these semi-public places, the benefits of third places depend strongly on particular time-space settings. I thus presumed in this research that much interaction takes place between more or less acquainted individuals and even complete strangers. Their only commonalities might be their place of residence in the vicinity of the respective business and their co-presence therein during a specific time of the day and week. Hence, most interaction in these – third or not – business places is first, interaction in (semi-) public space and thus second, interaction among "strangers."

3.2. Sensitizing Concepts II: *Interaction in Semi-Public/ Public Spaces*

Karl-Marx-Straße, as a diverse metropolitan shopping street is, among other things, a "world of strangers" (Lofland 1972; 1973) and so are its businesses. These little worlds of strangers are populated by urban residents (but also visitors) who are likely unknown to one another (Lofland 1972; 1973). Since the businesses may work as contact sites for both strangers and already acquainted people, the second (set of) sensitizing concept(s) my research grows from the concept of interaction in semi-public and public spaces, which is analyzed by means of various analytical categories, including Lofland's scheme of private, parochial, and public spaces, as well as the notion of public life as theater.

As Lyn Lofland (1972) argues, sociology has mostly ignored the relationship among strangers and acquaintances.[85] Whenever sociology addressed the general relationships among urban dwellers, the main focus has been on primary and secondary relationships – relationships in which the interacting individuals already know each other. This is likely to have produced the widespread sociological assumption that interactions among strangers in public spaces are not real or socially meaningful, and thus – cyclically – that these interactions and encounters were not of interest (Lofland 1972: 106).

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[85] However, there are few exceptions, such as Georg Simmel's work also focuses on the relationship between an individual and to a group than between individual strangers themselves.

Stemming from this lack of research on public space and the sociability therein, Lofland develops a new differentiation between the private, parochial, and public realms and their respective behavioral forms, in order to outline how widespread, common, and meaningful interactions between unrelated people or only categorically related (cf. Bahrdt 1969) people in urban settings are. The public realm as a social territory is "the unique social and psychological environment provided by urban settlements" (1998: xii), while public settings are those

> regions in a community which, as Goffman (1963: 9) has said, are 'freely accessible to members of that community'. I refer to this part of urban world […] as 'any street, alley, park, public building, any place which is open to public view or to which the public has access.' (Ann Arbor, Michigan Ordinance Code 1957: ch. 108, Paragraph 9: 61) (Lofland 1972: 107)

Yet, public settings do not necessarily belong to what she calls the public realm. The public realm is defined as the non-private areas of urban settlements where individuals when present there tend to be strangers to one another or know each other only in terms of the relevant categories, such as in their professional role or in what they currently practice (Lofland 1989: 454). From this follows that the businesses along Karl-Marx-Straße – as Lofland would describe them – are parts of the parochial realm, even if they consist of public spaces and places. Lofland's categorization of certain spaces as public, parochial or private stems from the types of relationships and behavior that are to be found in those locations.

In this research, I follow her conceptualization and consider the studied commercial facilities as public or semi-public spaces, which, according to the observed forms of behavior and ties, are then sub-categorized as either public, parochial, or even private realms.

	Public Realm	Parochial Realm
Locale[86]	City Center Plaza	Newly Trendy Ethnic Restaurant in a Stable Neighborhood
Location	Private Home, Territory Bar in City Center	Neighborhood Bar

Figure 14: Chart on public and parochial realms, derived from Lyn Lofland's original[87]

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[86] "A locale is where people with similar values and identities are likely to be found" or bounded portions of non-private space in which people are likely to be similar. By contrast, a locale is a place or "street that draws to itself different sorts of populations" as a space in which people are likely to be strangers, or dissimilar or only categorically known to each other (Lofland 1989: 456).

It must be noted that the "lines" between these categories are often blurred by the everyday practices of salespeople and customers alike, who, depending on their personality, mood, relationship with other people present, their perception and sense of ownership or belonging of the place and the like, constantly switch between the respective behaviors. As such, a clear assignment of the interactions in the businesses to each of Lofland's categories becomes difficult. But Lofland also describes all "real" places as existing in a continuum between private and public, private and parochial and between parochial and public. In non-private spaces, people may only be known to each other by the categories they visually present as (race, gender, religion); but life in public spaces is nonetheless thoroughly social (Lofland 1989: 457). This might seem to contradict Oldenburg's elaborations on the intimacy of third places, displaying closely-knit relationships between customers, but must be understood as a continuum in reality, where these places also facilitate the integration of new and unknown visitors into the familial setting. Hence, the second theoretical starting point for the examination of sociability in businesses along Karl-Marx-Straße is interaction with (eventually) unknown others – in settings that are "public" or open to the public, but not necessarily used as public places.

In the development of my early assumptions and observational categories for the empirical field work, this research also drew upon the work of Erving Goffman (1963; 1971) as a means of studying this continuum of social interaction (as social practices) in public places, as well as of the (semi-) public spaces themselves, and to help conceptualize these interactional types of behavior. According to Goffman, the fundamental characteristics of interactions between more or less known individuals in public settings are a complex production of social order, the gradual integration of individuals and their practices into a pattern of mutually understood cooperation, such as "techniques that pedestrians employ in order to avoid bumping into one another. These seem of little significance. However, they are constantly in use and they cast a pattern of/in street behavior." (Goffman 1971: 6) The crucial question for the study of interactions within individual businesses is then how this order emerges and how participants consensually interact without irritations.[88] In order to conceptualize these interactions (and other meaningful social practices) among widely unacquainted people in such public settings, Lofland's work (following Goffman) also helps in our understanding of social life in public spaces (just as in all societal spaces) as both following specific rules, and depending on human relationships.

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[87] Source: Lofland, 1989: p. 456.
[88] The only commonality among people in public spaces, such as in some of the businesses along Karl-Marx-Straße, might be that they occupy the same territory at the same time.

These rules represent a set of "techniques-tactics" with which people can cope with strangers (Lofland 1972: 94; 1989). They need these techniques or rules in order to maintain their self-esteem, to protect and guide themselves, competently through these public settings (Lofland 1972: 95). The three main principles are *civil inattention* (in reference to Goffman 1963), *audience role prominence*, and *civility towards diversity* (Lofland 1989: 461). Goffman (1963: 83 f.) conceptualized *civil inattention* as follows:

> When persons are mutually present and not involved together in conversation or other focused interaction, it is possible for one person to stare openly and fixedly at others, gleaning what he can about them while frankly expressing on his face his response to what he sees – for example, the 'hate stare' that a Southern white sometimes gratuitously gives to Negroes walking past him. It is also possible for one person to treat others as if they were not there at all, as objects not worthy of a glance, let alone close scrutiny. Moreover, it is possible for the individual by his staring or 'not seeing' to alter his own appearance hardly at all in consequence of the presence of the others. Here we have 'nonperson' treatment, it may be seen in our society in the way we sometimes treat children, servants, Negroes, and mental patients.
>
> Currently in our society, this kind of treatment is to be contrasted with the kind generally felt to be more proper in most situations, which will here be called 'civil inattention'. What seems to be involved is that one gives to another enough visual notice to demonstrate that one appreciates that the other is present (and that one admits openly to having seen him), while at the next moment withdrawing one's attention from him so as to express that he does not constitute a target of special curiosity or design.

As per Lofland (1989: 402), whether or not civil inattention is exactly as Goffman describes it, there can be no question about the existence and power of this first rule of public behavior: "It is, perhaps, the absolute sine qua non of city life," (Lofland 1989: 402) and as such we become aware of it only in case of interruptions, exceptions, and variations – for instance, if people stare at each other in the subway or if someone intrudes on another's privacy by getting too close.

Civil inattention is the first form of "cooperative motility" (Lofland 1998: 29) and does not imply complete inattention. The less public a place is perceived and practiced, the more friendly people recognize each other. For instance, on a neighborhood level or within neighborhood stores, people greet each other, by a friendly nod, a short greeting, often including the other person's name and questions about their well-being, whereas in the "real" public, people instead perform civil inattention by avoiding body contact and/or excessively friendly or attentive looks into the other person's eyes. Even though Lofland ascribes neighborhoods and neighborhood places to the parochial realm, I argue that public behavior and therewith civil inattention, audience role prominence, and civility towards

diversity are practiced in semi-public or parochial places as well, depending on, among many other factors, the sense of ownership, belonging, and familiarity with the place and other co-present people. However, all behavior in the public and parochial or semi-public realms takes place in a specific setting, and consequently adapts to it.

The second rule, *audience role prominence*, notes that all public behavior takes place with the awareness that there is an audience - other people present in the space. Lofland derives this rule from Goffman's work on public life as theater life, in which the front stage equates to the public and the back stage symbolizes the more private spaces. Working from this metaphor, the individual person acts in public as an actor does, always aware of his or her audience, relaxing and "performing" less as soon as he or she leaves to a more private space - the back stage. How many theatrical performances are available for the voyeuristic pleasure of the audience depends on the type of settlement, the social setting and time - ranging from love and fight scenes, nurturing babies or body care, to commercial and sexual exchanges - creating a "public ballet" where the dancers walk, sit, sleep, read, make oneself up, hug or watch each other (Lofland 1989: 263 f.). Restrained helpfulness or so-called public aid also stem from audience role prominence: being aware of the other people present, one can reasonably expect small favors from them, such as telling the time, opening a door, or asking for directions. The more parochial and less public the place, the higher degree of helpfulness is expected and exercised. For instance, on a neighborhood scale, or within local businesses, parochial aid ranges from small services such as accepting personal deliveries, transferring goods from one customer to another, taking care of pets, plants, keys, or even children for a limited time (Kusenbach 2006: 291).

Public behavior is a balancing act: If the public realm seduces its participants into getting too involved in other people's affairs, audience role prominence supports the ignorance of each other's affairs. The more parochial or private the realm is, the more attention or proactive care is desired and expected of other people against potential threats or discomforts (Kusenbach 2006: 294). Here, proactive intervention means extended helpfulness in contrast to public aid. The more proactive the intervention, the more people watch out for one another, the less public the place used is. For instance, in a local grocery store, people might secretly gaze into other people's shopping bag, but commenting on the chosen goods or their quality would be an intervention that exceeds the rule of audience role prominence for public settings – but is nonetheless a common interaction in many neighborhood businesses.

Lofland's last principle for public settings, *civility towards diversity*, refers to face-to-face interactions between very different people in a public space. Confronted with people of different ethnic and social backgrounds, with different styles, demeanor, and sexual preference, "urbanites", as per Lofland (1989: 464) (most often) act decently vis-à-vis this diversity in public spaces. However, this rule of urban public behavior does not necessarily mean that this kind of civility is inherently nice or polite. Referring back to Georg Simmel (1903), who similarly described urban residents as distanced, indifferent, and even blasé in order to handle the coexisting and loaded interactions in urban settings, Lofland argues that this civility towards diversity is actually indifference without mutual appreciation. However in semi-public or more parochial settings, participants rarely express complete indifference towards other people's differences, or conversely, the level of indifference that is expressed depends on the particular situation, practices, and people involved. Difference might be praised and welcomed in some situations; while in others, it is experienced as a threat. At different junctures, complete ignorance might be a suitable response, whereas at different times, only full inclusion and attention would be considered as appropriate (Kusenbach 2006: 297). In local retail and gastronomic facilities, much of this civility is thus determined by the owners' or salespeople's practices, allowing for membership in the place or not, setting the boundaries for tolerance, attentiveness and appreciation. In cases of conflict, deviant behaviors or attributes might cancel all membership rights; or, they might increase the sociability and inclusion of the place. Put together, these normative, implicit, and explicit rules of indifference along with audience role prominence, (including restrained helpfulness as public aid) and civil inattention guide individuals' behavioral conduct, avoiding chaos and dissonance, and finding different expressions depending on the degree of perceived publicness (Lofland 1989).

Along with the three principles of public behavior, the second ingredient in Lofland's conceptualization is that of human relationships. Public space can only be thoroughly social if its participants relate to each other. As an explanation for the (self-managing) behavior in public realms or settings itself, Lofland (972: 99 ff.) further offers a more detailed insight into how all public space users try to protect their rather fragile selves by employing a variety of survival skills, which generally results in a peaceful coexistence in public. By reducing or even avoiding their involvement with others, they support the existing social order. The management of the self follows specific sequences of approaching these public settings, but also the development of specific styles to cope with them. Lofland thus distinguishes three types of relationships that are most common for public spaces: *fleeting, segmental* and *unpersonal/bounded* relationships (Lofland 1989: 466).

Fleeting relationships have only a very brief duration and generally do not involve a spoken exchange beyond that of an inquiry/reply. This type of relationship is the most representative association form in the public realm and micro-manages the encounter of large numbers of strangers. However, fleeting relationships are continually transformed into more sociable forms: For example, a daily morning nod in the bakery may lead to a more personal conversation about daily schedules and so on (Lofland 1989: 466 f.). In my research, I assume that most contact building in businesses was of this fleeting kind, which occasionally develops into more committed relationships, even if only for the time of the stay in the business.

The term *segmental relationships* refers to relationships between people who only know each other in regard to limited segments of the self, such as by an occupational role. For instance, customer/salespeople interactions typically consist of segmental relationships. Other emotional aspects or segments of themselves are left out and are not necessarily relevant during the course of a usually short-lived interaction. This is also what Lofland addresses when she talks about categorically known people in public or parochial spaces – the people only know each other in terms of the relevant categories, such as in their professional role or in what they currently practice. However these segmental relationships can also easily develop into more personal relationships, when more emotional and biographical elements are integrated or interactions between the same segmentally know people repeat or take place on a regular basis (Lofland 1989: 467 f.). I therefore consider segmental relationships as particularly important for the conceptualization of customer-salespeople relationships, and of interactions where individuals begin to interact exactly because of a partial knowledge or recognition of a certain attribute in the businesses (for example, wearing a uniform, pushing a stroller, using a walking cane).

The third type of relationships that is common in public spaces is *unpersonal[89]/bounded relationships*, which are neither intimate, nor fleeting, nor segmental. These relationships are simultaneously characterized by closeness and social distance, in which personal information is shared, but with the understanding that no relational intimacy is implied. These impersonal relationships are friendly and sociable, but do not necessarily leak over into the private or parochial realms (Lofland 1989: 469). For Lofland, typical examples of such relationships are customer interactions in dining or drinking facilities, laundromats, or clothing retailers. For the local businesses along Karl-Marx-Straße, I consider unpersonal/bounded relationships as necessarily constituent in the maintenance of the local social

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[89] "Unpersonal" is the precise term Lofland uses (1989: 468).

order and relaxed atmosphere, and concerning the business people, as a common interactional practice to smooth business operations or even increase revenues and customer loyalty.

Lofland's ideal-typical differentiations of behavior and relationships serve in this project to highlight where, how, and under what conditions meaningful interactions and relationships between people in (semi-) public spaces can occur. Depending on the respective relational type, the space can then be distinguished as a more publicly or privately used space as part of Lofland's scheme of public, parochial, or private realms. The relationships themselves change constantly: fleeting relationships become unpersonal/ bounded, and vice versa, home spaces disintegrate, whereas segmental relationships might begin to involve sentiment and so forth (Lofland 1989: 470). This applies in particular to spaces such as businesses, where formal ownership may be private, but which are open to the public, and thereby offering opportunities (and hidden corners) for more private behavior and intimate relationships, as well as for the (only fleeting or more committed) intercourse with complete strangers.

Lofland's detailed categories are particularly helpful for ethnographic observations of the customers in businesses and how they accommodate themselves in the respective public setting. For example, when an individual approaches a crowded setting made up predominantly of strangers, they cannot make an entrance unobserved, since the other customers have already secured their positions in this setting and the salesperson is trained to pay attention to any newcomers. Hence, the entering person needs to observe and "if necessary, rearranges his [or her] body presentation to make certain nothing in his [or her] appearance will jar the image he [or she] wishes to convey." (Lofland 1972: 99) This is why most people take care of their outfit and hairstyle, and make last-minute adjustments to their presentation, before entering such settings. The business becomes a front stage setting, where these readiness checks are practiced within the view of at least a few strangers. They spend only a few seconds on this backstage behavior in order to be prepared for the front stage performance. When they enter the business, they take a reading of the setting in order to familiarize their selves with the space's physical layout and to avoid errors such as walking into walls or private rooms, stumbling over furniture or waiting at the wrong end of the line. Herein, the importance of self-management in the maintenance of a space's social order becomes clear. As per Lofland (1972: 101), the act of assessing a physical layout can demand different levels of attention, from taking off outdoor clothing or sunglasses, reaching for a cigarette, shivering or sighing, or just taking a look around, to – least intensively – avoiding any reading at all by blindly following other customers. The final step of approaching a public setting is to reach the final position: In my business cases this could be achieved by, for instance, securing a table, sitting down

with the ordered goods at a chosen location, joining the cashier's line, stopping at the counter and so on. The more the participants have read the space, the more alternatives exist as to where to come to a halt. Securing a position within the space signals the beginning of a new phase in the individual self-management among strangers, in which the individuals are then able to take a more frank appraisal of the setting (Lofland 1972: 105 f.).

Most people one encounters on streets, in parks, in businesses, subway stations and so forth, are not personally knowable, but at least identifiable as representatives of a category (gender, employment, age, etc.). Armed with this information, one knows how to act toward these strangers: one can live as a stranger in the midst of strangers, since the gleaned knowledge dismantles some important elements of the strangeness (Lofland 1973: 15). Individuals gain this knowledge and ability to order strangers from their own experiences, and their socialization. This categorization of a stranger is based on observation – gaining partial information on their status or role from their utterances, physical appearances (body presentation, clothing, and hairstyle), and physical location. Lofland (1973: 27) calls the first *appearential ordering* and the second *spatial ordering*. These two principles of ordering help the individual, a stranger themselves, to behave competently among other strangers in public spaces.

As the knowledge of a particular space increases, so too does the familiarity of a space as well as its participants – which might eventually allow for such a setting to be used for private purposes as well. The more individuals develop knowledge of social categories, the less they perceive a place as strange or alien, and the more the space begins to seem like home for them. With a certain (high) level of knowledge, individuals then also behave as if they are in a private place, occupying, colonizing, and creating a home territory, but also developing attitudes of property in these nonetheless public spaces (Lofland 1973: 122 ff.). This corresponds to Oldenburg's idea of third places and the respective behavior: The ordering of the space and its participants enables private behavior and intimate interaction with nonetheless unknown people in a public space.[90] The ability to categorize thus serves as a basis for action – for social practices that foster feelings of belonging and community.

Put together, these principles of public behavior, the types of public space-relationships, and the concept of self-management allow for a deeper understanding of the ways people interact in the public and semi-public spaces of businesses, and furthermore, how these businesses might be turned into more private spaces through distinct social practices by staff and/or customers alike. Ultimately,

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[90] The type of knowledge and subsequent practices decide about how the space is perceived and practiced and thus these public spaces are often turned into semi-public or private settings.

Lofland's and Goffman's work explains how city life, if we define it as living together with largely unacquainted strangers with the regular experience of anonymity, is enabled. Nonetheless, both authors insist that living in full anonymity would be intolerable. As such, the fine line between more or less personal relationships, even in its shortest and most fluid form, is crucial for the well-being of an individual in cities (Lofland 1973: x f.).

To turn directly to the topic at hand, this research applies Lofland's and Goffman's rules, categorizations, and behavioral principles as a second set of sensitizing concepts for my analysis of the privately owned (semi-) public spaces of businesses on Karl-Marx-Straße. On this very local level, shopping as well as consumption involves concrete and real interactions with other real human beings, constituting an important snippet of everyday social life. Following Lofland's and Goffman's elaborations on public behavior, in the moment of interaction of two or more involved people, they act according to these addressed rules and expected roles. For the local businesses along Karl-Marx-Straße, the roles that involve most of the interactional social practices are most likely those of customer and salesperson. Nevertheless an assumption derived from Lofland and Goffman's elaborations is that people in these businesses act in multiple roles and conduct different social practices simultaneously. Hence, participation in these places requires different types of roles, and social practices, as well as rules and related their negotiations.

To conclude this subsection, the concept of public behavior and its modification for semi-public or parochial spaces as the second set of sensitizing concepts forces greater attention upon the micro-interactions and micro-geographies of interaction between two or more people in these semi-public or public spaces and reveals how these practices are themselves guided by rules and respective relationships. This further supports the theoretical sampling by guiding my attention to the physical outlay of businesses – how they are divided into different front and back stages, who and what kind of actors perform on the stage and who and what kind of audiences exist there, how strangers become familiar with the place and its people, how they turn these spaces into (more) 'private' spaces and practice (public) familiarity, and how these processes are fostered and negotiated by the owners and their staff's practices, how people observe each other and gain categorical knowledge of each other, and more generally, how civil inattention, audience role prominence, and civility towards diversity are practiced, what kind of relationships – fleeting, unbound or segmental – are typical for these (not necessary third) places.

3.3. Sensitizing Concepts III: *Community Building/ Senses of Belonging*

As outlined by means of Lofland and Goffman's work, the type of relationships and interactions define if a place is used as a public, private or mixed space, and thus help to reveal a business' respective potential for inclusion, integration, or community building. In that vein, the final set of sensitizing concepts to undergird my argument that the material qualities of a business along with the social practices of business people contribute to a socio-spatial setting that fosters feelings of belonging and community for their customers are the concepts of "community building" and "sense of belonging" themselves. These concepts are interrelated and I consider the latter as a vital component of the former.

For an ethnographic study of a shopping street and its businesses, the notion of neighborhood and its relationship to community and belonging are clearly crucial. Urban sociologists such as Logan and Molotch (1987: 108) argue that neighborhood and community are not synonymous, but are implicitly connected with each other, defining neighborhood as "a shared interest in overlapping use values (identity, security, and so on) in a single area." Essentially, neighborhoods become meaningful to their locals (residents, but also people who work or otherwise spend a significant amount of time there), because of both the numerous social interactions in them, and the eventually shared 'values' and interests. Hence, neighborhoods – as physical or geographical sites – encompass not only a variety of interactions and exchanges that form a complex set of social and economic relations, but are also practiced and socially constructed themselves. Consequently, the problem that the physical boundaries of neighborhoods remain unclear seems to be inherent to the very nature of neighborhoods as socially constructed – in particular places at particular times, never specific or fixed. Yet, as the basic context and setting for everyday life, these socially constructed neighborhoods have real material consequences for the people who live and work in them (Martin 2003: 732).

The same ambiguity exists with the concept of community. Despite the fact that community has a longstanding prominent status and is a widely researched topic in urban studies, it remains unclear what community actually means:

> [D]espite the legendary ambiguity of the concept of community, previous overviews largely agree on three basic components that have dominated definitions of community in the past: first, the presence of a shared territory; second, the presence of significant social ties; and third, the presence of meaningful social interaction (Kusenbach 2006: 280 f.).

Here Kusenbach underlines the linkage between the two concepts of neighborhood and community but also their differentiation. As the third sensitizing or theoretical concept for this project, I thus argue that a local community needs a shared space and mutual relationships, but is first and foremost something that is practiced on the level of everyday life. This argument follows Kusenbach's critique that most community studies have prioritized the territorial and geographical notion of community - neighborhood, town, or city - and the "relational" which was concerned with the "quality of character of human relationship, without reference to location" (Gusfield 1975: xvi), over the third element, namely social interaction. But also Durkheim (1964) has already observed in the late 19th century that "modern" society develops community around interests and skills more than around locality, whereas some of the newer concepts equally apply to territorial communities (neighborhoods) and to relational communities (e.g. professional, spiritual, et cetera).

Regardless if the definition of community is based on a shared geographical location, social networks, or interaction, community is not necessarily an all-inclusive concept. As such it is often used to muffle political opposition, and as a critique in the name of civility (Staeheli/ Mitchell 2006). Inasmuch as I claim that some of the businesses serve as the heart of the community for some residents - or essentially as a community center - community seems to be an appealing alternative to public life (within a privately owned space). The concept of community promises to provide the pleasures of public sociability without the discomforts of the unfamiliar, hinting at the exclusionary dimensions of community (Kohn 2004: 193). By contrast, a full public implies challenging encounters and confrontation with random and different people, whereas community emphasizes commonality, smoothing over or even excluding difference. The reference to community can thus collapse the differentiation between the private and the public by incorporating appeals to private life, such as family, identity, security, but also forms of control (Staeheli/ Mitchell 2006: 978; Kohn 2004: 193). Civility, orderliness, responsibility, and conformity are at the center of community and community building. Hence, whenever I describe the practices of the chosen businesses and their employees' as contributing to community building, I am very aware of the exclusionary and disciplining nature of community that may decide over the quality and type of social practices and relationships in the businesses or the range of speech and allowed participation (Staeheli/ Mitchell 2006: 980).

However, businesses that act as the centers of their local communities do not always blend the public and private with the intention of increasing sales and the locale's overall profitability, even if the primary function of retailers and gastronomic facilities is consumption. In contrast to Lynn Staeheli and

Don Mitchell's work (2006: 981 f.) on shopping malls as new community centers, I doubt that owners and employees of small retailers and gastronomic businesses use the notion of community as a disciplinary strategy in governance and regulation. As publicly accessible but private properties, owners and employees do decide what types of social practices are considered as 'civil' and thusly 'tolerated' and accepted, but sometimes customers practice community and occupy the businesses outside of the control of the employees. Further, the parameters for allowed practices in the businesses are less standardized than in shopping centers or chain stores and may change, depending, for instance, on the owner's personality, mood, daily turnover or customer mix. For more corporate businesses, the "communal" phenomena of consumption are widely recognized and part of daily business practices. Business owners and marketing experts actively attempt to increase the social link or "linking value" between customers and the respective product or service (Cova 1997: 297). Today different modes of consumption exist next to each other, such as traditional consumption, mass consumption, or individualized consumption (Cova 1997: 302). Combined with a changing landscape of communities, the many consumption modes as well as the many forms or modes of community (as social links), can be experienced by one person in the course of one day. Corporate rather than individually owned and smaller businesses often try to strategically capitalize on the assumed lack of local or social community outside of consumption places and thus "compensate" for this lack by developing and promoting a social link between their offered products and services and the customer, giving the customers (an illusion of) belonging to a certain place and consumer community (Cova 1997). The businesses thus become the linking places.

For the individually owned businesses along Karl-Marx-Straße, the enacted community at certain times of day might also include the owners and employees themselves, whereby the norms of community may be changed and diluted. Nevertheless, the concept of community is inherently exclusionary, as it is based on the construction of difference. Communities are rooted in some element of commonality, which are recognized and accepted by their members, simultaneously reifying the differences are created – among the members, but first and foremost between members and non-members of a particular community. Hence, whenever community is generated or practiced, exclusionary processes and practices are likewise at work (Staeheli/ Mitchell 2006: 981). The small life worlds or communities of each sampled business also might be exclusionary towards certain individual customers or whole groups; not only on the basis of the social practices within the businesses, but also prior to entry, on the basis of the types of products and services sold, their lifestyle appeal, and price range.

Akin to the critique of the definition of community itself, the notion of a "sense of community" suffers from a similar lack of studies into the interactional or practical dimension – which then presents another avenue of analysis in my research. McMillan and Chavis (1986), for instance, propose four criteria for the definition of sense of community – membership, influence, the integration of needs, and shared emotional connection. The first element is *membership*, as the feeling of belonging or the perception that a sense of personal relatedness is shared. Membership is a feeling that one has invested parts of oneself in order to become a member and therefore has a right to belong. Here 'sense of belonging' is located within the concept of "sense of community" (McMillan/Chavis 1986: 9). Certainly, this membership has boundaries – along lines of class, gender, ethnic background, language, or lifestyle symbols (e.g. clothes, languages, jewelry, food). As a common symbol system these define who is in or out of the perceived community ("we" vs. "them"). For instance, the locally spoken dialect in Neukölln (regardless of the ethnic background and further accents or dialects) serves to mark membership in the neighborhood and knowledge about its history in most businesses. These boundaries also serve to delineate whom to trust, thereby establishing the basis and structures for emotional safety, as well as a sense of belonging,[91] leading to personal investments which provide a feeling that one has earned a place in the group.

The second element, *influence*, is a sense of mattering or of making a difference to a group and vice versa. These two forces – a push for conformity by the group and a push for cohesion by the individual – work in concert, generally balancing the conflicts around group cohesiveness and conformity. However, conformity does not necessarily mean a loss of personal choice for the individual, if the communities in question appreciate individual difference. Conformity derives out of a feeling that a group member either can directly or indirectly exert some control over the community (McMillan/ Chavis 1986: 10).

The third element is a feeling that members' *needs will be integrated* or met by the resources accumulated through group membership. In order to maintain the sense of togetherness, the individual-group association must be rewarding for its members. The possible reinforcements that bind people together into a close community can be, for instance, the status of being a member or shared values.

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[91] As per McMillan and Chavis (1986: 10) "The sense of belonging and identification involves the feeling, belief, and expectation that one fits in the group and bas a place there, a feeling of acceptance by the group, and a willingness to sacrifice for the group. The role of identification must be emphasized here. It may be represented in the reciprocal statements "It is my group" and "I am part of the group." I use this as a first definition for "sense of belonging."

Shared emotional connection as the commitment and belief that members share a common history, place, time together, and similar experiences (and will continue to do so in the future) rounds out the fourth element. On the basis of the so-called contact hypothesis (which states that "the more people interact, the more likely they are to become close" (Allport 1954)), a shared connection is developed by the quality of interaction (the more positive the experiences, the greater the bond), the closure to events (group cohesiveness is curbed if interactions are ambiguous), shared events (the more, the better), constant investment (the greater the investment, the more important is the community's history and current status are to members), honor/humiliation (making community membership attractive or repulsive to the individual), spiritual bonds (prevalent in religious groups or cults but to some degree in all communities) (McMillan/ Chavis 1986: 13 f.). The concept of shared emotional connection functions similarly to Tönnies' (1957) notion of *Gemeinschaft* as a social unity based on locale. However, even if *Gemeinschaft* is conceptualized as the village-type or the small-town community, shared emotional connections do not require a small-scale local community. McMillan and Chavis (1986: 14 following Kasarda/ Janowitz 1974: 388) argue that increased population size and density do not significantly weaken local community sentiments, and as such, that communities are not necessarily bounded by location. According to them, shared emotional connection seems to be the definitive element for "true community."[92]

In short, McMillan and Chavis propose that a "sense of community" is a feeling of belonging, a feeling that members matter to one another and to the group, and a shared faith that members' needs will be met through their commitment to be together (McMillan/Chavis 1986: 9; see also McMillan 1976). Despite its operational character, this definition still focuses primarily on the perceptional and emotional level and leaves out the interactional element of community. I argue that community is something that is practiced on an everyday level, whereas a perception or sense of community derives out of interaction with other (potential) community members.

As we can see, the dominant definitions for both community and sense of community use either territorial or relational descriptors. Whereas research emphasizing the territorial (especially within social network theory) has long diagnosed and bemoaned the decline or loss of community (cf. Putnam 1995; 2000), the research on relational aspects has begun to understand community as transformed, liberated, or even saved (cf. Wellman 1979; Wellman/ Leighton 1979), arguing for a "radical

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[92] McMillan/ Chavis (1986: 15 ff.) further argue that there is a high dynamic within and among these elements of sense of community, yet with the core element of shared emotional connections.

despatialization and individualization of the concept" (Kusenbach 2006: 281). In between these two research streams that either overemphasizes the spatial or (individual) social ties, I use "community" only as a sensitizing concept and argue for the spatial reality of social ties in face-to-face interactions.

In the empirical part of this thesis, the definition of community has been left up to the interview partners and not the interviewer (myself). Community ("Gemeinschaft") is as a very strong or even archaic term in German, denoting very strong and tight ties, and is therefore rarely used in everyday language. But if conceptualized as something that is practiced over the course of daily life, the respective community building practices and utterances can be observed empirically. Following McMillan and Chavis' definition of sense of community - highlighting the individual's subjective sense of rather than a fixed list of characteristics for community -, these are practices and utterances around membership, belonging, mutual mattering, and trust that needs will be fulfilled in the community. I assume that the doings and sayings do not always match, for instance, that more or less customers belong to a business' social world (Honer 2011; Hitzler/ Honer 1991) than the store owner mentions, or that the strength and spectrum of membership in local communities is differently framed than observed. Whenever community building practices or practices that foster a sense of belonging are observed, it remains unclear what sense of community means to its members. However, the focus of this study lies on the store owners and salespeople's practices that create the social spaces and foster senses of home and belonging and consequently feelings of community and not on the meaning of these community memberships for the customers themselves – even if this would be highly interesting and socially significant.

Hence, community is conceptualized as social conduct as "communal interaction." According to Lofland (2003: 939 f.), if one considers the city as the interactional context for community building, primary relationships are still as plentiful in urban as in any other settings. Despite the concerns of both dominant research streams, secondary relationships do not replace family and neighborhood ties; rather, they supplement them. If primary and secondary relationships exist next to each other in the city and beyond (due to new means of communication and transportation) the question remains where or in what environment and between whom they still are practiced *in situ*.

I argue that within the city as an interactional context for community, Karl-Marx-Straße represents the contact zone and the local businesses the concrete contact spaces for face-to-face interaction that enacts some kind of (time/space-bounded) community. More precisely, much of this face-to-face interaction that builds community in the course of routine life takes place in the most used and

frequented local spaces and places, namely the local shopping streets and their amenities. Whereas residential and work places[93] encompass already existing community ties among already familiar (but preselected) people, in these parochial, semi-public, or public settings, unfamiliar or only partially known individuals are encountered. Through social interactions in these spaces, membership in some kind of community might then develop. Although the concepts of community or a sense of community remain vague, deploying McMillan and Chavis' operational definition, and the open process of letting interview partners and research subjects define community (even if the term is not used at all) as part of their "home," as sensitizing concepts, draws attention to the potential benefits or positive outcomes of the store owners' practices on Karl-Marx-Straße.

Nevertheless, as noted earlier, inclusion in a community implies exclusion as well. Membership in a community might also carry negative consequences in the form of social control or the imposition of a set of values and rules that prevents integration into wider society. For the businesses on Karl-Marx-Straße, the creation of a social life world in one place might be geared to the exclusive social circle of local residents, to the exclusion of others, e.g. along class, gender, ethnicity, and lifestyle lines. Using community only as a sensitizing concept (versus as a normative value) further allows for an awareness of the negative consequences of the business people's practices.

Weaving together Oldenburg's list of third place attributes, Jacobs' concept of public characters, and Lofland's conceptual framework of private, public, and parochial spaces and the respective (Goffmanian) urban relationships and behavioral forms, I argue for the inclusion of the everyday practices in urban retail and gastronomic businesses in our understanding of community creation and maintenance. As everyday places, they reveal a high proportion of non-institutional and low-threshold interactions between residents with diverse socio-economic and ethnic backgrounds. Treated as socially insignificant for a long time in urban sociology, I hypothesize that these fleeting, segmental, and unbound interactions and relationships in public and semi-public spaces, might nonetheless add up to (a sense of practiced) community and feelings of belonging, no matter how ambivalent the outcomes.

To conclude, I conceptualize community and belonging as something that is practiced on a routine daily level and as a set of interactive practices that characterizes a neighborhood as a type of parochial territory (Lofland 1973; 1989; Kusenbach 2006: 282). Even in their most superficial and ephemeral form, physical and verbal interactions in local businesses form a crucial ingredient in the development of

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[93] These are the first and second places in Oldenburg's interpretation (Oldenburg/Brissett 1982).

community and a sense of belonging for some customers and staff. The in-business social interaction (as a set of social practices) thus represents the smallest building block of any type of community – the social component. It is therefore essential to research these interactional spaces in which community is practiced in a nuanced way, as in this case presented here, where the businesses themselves represent a significant micro-sociological community place – the spatial component of community (building) on Karl-Marx-Straße.

3.4. Summary and Use of Sensitizing Concepts for the Sampling Process

A grounded theory is generated by initial themes that then merge with themes developed from the data during analysis, capturing the essence of experiences derived from different contexts and situations. Consequently, theory generation requires sensitizing concepts but no research hypotheses. In line with its inductive nature, grounded theory as qualitative research instead involves the researcher's attempts to detect, understand, and interpret the emerging themes in the research process. Sensitizing concepts thereby help to discover, organize and understand experiences and situations (Bowen 2006: 2 f.). The three sets of sensitizing concepts draw attention to important features of social interaction and of the respective contact sites, and thus lay the foundation for an analysis of research data, but also provide guidelines for the empirical research in these specific settings.

For Karl-Marx-Straße, the three sets of sensitizing concepts are used as interpretive devices and as a starting point for the ethnographic study of a select number of businesses that exemplify the wider commercial structure and its respective local social life. Even if the concepts of third place and public characters, public behavior, and community building represent only background ideas that inform the overall research problem and process, they may "deepen perception, they provide starting points for building analysis, not ending points for evading it. We may use sensitizing concepts only as points of departure from which to study the data" (Charmaz 2003: 259 f.).

Accordingly, these three sets also form the conceptual framework, serving as an impetus for the later formulation of theory, including the basic argument of this thesis, that business people's everyday practices in the businesses on Karl-Marx-Straße foster interactions that might lead to a sense of belonging or community for some of the customers.

4. Realities on the Ground: Sampling Process and Methodology

The context and direction for this study was guided by the premise that storekeepers are important figures in neighborhood life, from which the three sets of sensitizing concepts were derived to help set the context and direction for my study. I combine the concepts of public characters and third place and use the nexus between them. It is often public characters, or owners, that perform "public character practices" to a certain extent, and who operate third places. But not all owners of third places act as public characters, nor do all public characters necessarily operate businesses that serve as third places. However, these concepts provide an analytic frame and serve as a point of reference as well as a guide in the analysis of data and, in particular, in the selection of the cases (cf. Bowen 2006; Glaser/ Strauss 2009).

4.1. Theoretical Sampling

Theoretical sampling lies at the core of developing a "grounded theory": Essentially, the credibility of a theory cannot be dissociated from the process by which it has been generated (Glaser/ Strauss 1967; Strauss/ Corbin 1998). The term "grounded" stems from grounded in the data from which it was derived, insofar as the sampling process has a "theoretical" orientation and is directed towards the generation and development of a conceptual theory. In this case, theory is gradually derived from the data and the data's recourse to the mentioned theoretical concepts of third place/ public character, community building and (semi-) public interaction. In the course of the inquiry the emerging theory progressively focuses the data collection in order to refine and integrate the theory (Glaser/ Strauss 1967). I am aware that Glaser and Strauss's approaches differ widely. For the sake of this research, their ideas are rather treated as a set of tools and approaches to ground an emerging theory in empirical data, gained through interviews and observations. However, I systematically follow their elaborations on a theory driven sampling process, which can be broken down into stages of open sampling, relational, and variational sampling, as well as discriminate sampling (Strauss/ Corbin 1998, suggesting a different way of data processing), which correspond directly to their stages of open, axial, and selective coding (Glaser/ Strauss 1967). Axial coding involves the application of a so-called coding paradigm in order to identify conditions, context, action/interactional strategies, intervening conditions, and consequences. For this reason I apply for each code the questions of why, where, who, how, what, for what and under what conditions.

Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss (1967: 45; 2009) originally defined theoretical sampling as

> the process of data collection for generating theory whereby the analyst jointly collects, codes and analyses his data and decides what data to collect next and where to find them, in order to develop his theory as it emerges.

Hence, the aim is to discover a maximum number of variations among concepts and to densify categories in terms of their properties and dimensions.

The theoretical sampling process begins with an initial data collection and analysis. The open coding of raw data generates first codes that in turn stimulate the ongoing data collection. In the early stages of analysis, codes are rapidly generated. By means of a joint process of theoretical sampling and memo writing, codes are corrected and edited, as well as continually adjusted to the data. Memo writing enables the conceptualization of each category's boundaries and properties and points to potential gaps in the emerging theory, and thus highlights where (and what) to sample next and for what theoretical purpose (Glaser 1978). The continual comparison of codes generates a further set of conceptual categories, from which in turn new categories emerge. Continuously new incidents are adjusted and readjusted into existing categories.

Accordingly, the very first business was selected on the basis of the sensitizing considerations of daily life and its respective commercial spaces of everyday supply, and then in a second step therein, on everyday social practices that might contribute to the creation of "home," "belonging," and "community" (as a space, as feelings, as practices). In that selection, the first guiding concept was Oldenburg's idea of third places, while maintaining a critical distance to its very narrow definition of third place characteristics and Oldenburg's emphasis on gastronomic facilities versus local amenities more generally. Further, a review of the literature on Jacobs' notion of the public character (such as well-established shopkeepers and barkeepers) lead me to question both authors' quite narrow, unsystematic, and piecemeal sample cases to prove their claims.

Consequently, I searched for an initial case that was ostensibly outside the bounds of both Oldenburg and Jacobs' assigned characteristics. On the basis of their work, my guiding consideration was to wonder if the residents – who actually and regularly shop and consume in their local surroundings – might name completely different places with different types of ownership than those that fit into Oldenburg's and Jacobs' typology. The guiding thought was that there were likely to be differences but also similarities between the academically ascribed third places and public characters and the locals' own use and ideas

about these places and their business owners. These could also comprise places that were not small and individually owned businesses, but locations such as public benches, parks, libraries, self-made third places, franchise or chain stores, or even entire shopping malls (Manuel/ Thompson n.v.:2). During the search for an appropriate first field entry case, I increasingly began to question Jacobs' and Oldenburg's typology after witnessing its increased application as a (self-attributed) marketing tool of the store owners.[94] For the first case selection, I nevertheless used the lack of a "classic" third place in combination with the lack or presence of public character attributes (e.g. shopkeeper's long-term presence, the performance of caring, support and generally attentive practices, local knowledge and local social networks) as the main selection criteria.

As the sampling process moved toward more contrasting cases, I used the presence of features such as playfulness, the presence of regulars, easy access, "lower" prices, and type of shopkeepers, as further selection criteria – all of which, of course, were constructed very subjectively on the basis of my local knowledge and perception. These initial conceptualizations helped me make sense of the data, but also design a clear procedure for selecting further cases. Upon beginning the analysis, I then identified the conditions, context, action/interactional strategies, intervening conditions, and consequences for each emerging theme.

4.2. Sampling Process

After a literature review on the street's development, but before I started the search for a first case study, I conducted an exploratory expert interview with the head of the local planning agency in order to gain a better understanding of past developments as well as of the current status of Karl-Marx-Straße's commercial structure. This expert interview also served as the very first field site entry contact. The planning office acts as *City Management*, supervising the development of the street's trade, by means of its own institutional expertise garnered through interviews, surveys, and studies on the local commercial structure and relationships with long-term and newer local businesspeople.[95] In this

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[94] Particularly in the US, where for instance 'third place' is more commonly used and where increasingly more businesses, housing and community developers recognize the role of third places for their goals. But also in Germany businesspeople promote their stores by using references to the local community and the important role of local economy.

[95] For further information see Aktion! Karl-Marx-Straße (n.d.). Citymanagement der [Aktion! Karl-Marx-Straße], http://www.aktion-kms.de/akms/ansprechpartner/citymanagement-der-aktion-karl-marx-strasse/, accessed 03/10/2016.

interview, I planned to ask about shop owners that are particularly strongly linked, engaged, and socially rooted in the street and hence could potentially be considered public characters (from the perspective of the expert).

Before I had even begun to ask my questions about potential public characters among the shopkeepers on Karl-Marx-Straße, the interviewed urban planner mentioned – to my surprise – a long-standing and individually owned, but very small, flower shop. The urban planner's recommendation to visit this store in particular, since the owner had a deep well of local knowledge, startled me since flower shops do not necessarily fit to Oldenburg's typologies of a third place, insofar as it is an uncomfortably cold place, without the space for socializing, and the vegetation on offer cannot be classified as part of daily supply. However, the way the owner's network was described fit into Jacobs' definition of the public character. Based on this interview, I began my empirical fieldwork by approaching this store, despite the fact that on my own local knowledge would have suggested a different set of stores. I also decided to examine this business as my first case study, because after numerous unsuccessful attempts at contacting the other stores along Karl-Marx-Straße (defined roughly as those between the two subway stations), the flower store owner was the first to respond positively to my request for an interview. Unexpectedly, and despite the chilliness and lack of space to "hang out," the tiny flower store and its owner serve as an extended living room for the longstanding elderly residents from the surrounding buildings. [96]

However, after linking back the collected data on this first business case to the theoretical concepts of third place, community and particularly public interaction, concerns about the high homogeneity in terms of gender, class and ethnicity led to the selection of a second case that hosts a more diverse clientele and maybe contrasts the first case's public character and third place attributes.

With this experience in hand, I then looked for a second business that served a broader clientele, where different degrees of public or private behavior were displayed and where different age, lifestyle, and income groups could be found. I ultimately encountered a restaurant, used mainly by price-conscious local workers and businesspeople, but also tourists and shoppers, for lunch, which also catered to a gourmet-oriented city-wide clientele on specific event evenings.

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[96] My first interview and subsequent observations revealed that these customers depend strongly not only on the flower store, but also on other, very local amenities, since most of them are unable to cover more the distance of a block on foot. In short, their circumscribed life world and the majority of their social interactions are deeply linked to the flower store and its owner, and as such, the shop does act as a third space, and the owner as a public character.

From this second business (always returning to the research question and the sensitizing concepts), the sample gradually grew to encompass an ever-widening spectrum of business types (including design and size), and customer and salespeople characteristics. I also conducted observation in the local shopping mall as well as more corporate chain stores in order to discover processes and practices that contribute to community building and a sense of belonging in these rather standardized spaces; however, the core sample includes only individually owned and owner-operated businesses. Hence, I sampled both for theoretical similarity and difference in regard to third place/public character, public behavior, and community building, in order to illustrate the properties of each category, and to saturate all categories until finally a core category emerged (Glaser/ Strauss 1967).

On the one hand, the sample was also supposed to mirror the current commercial structure of the street in terms of branches, ownership, and appeal, but on the other, the sample was supposed to offer a maximum of variations within and across already existing categories, while also allowing for the potential inclusion of new concepts. Unfortunately, most business people declined to take part in the study, despite numerous attempts to contact and convince them.[97]

The initial problems in finding interview partners and potential cases mirror the concern about when to stop data collection. Because of the inductive nature of theory generation, the theoretical sampling should come to a point at which sampling will cease, controlled by the emerging and increasingly more consistent theory. Put in other words, Glaser and Strauss (1967; 2009) consider the theoretical sampling as finished when a point of theoretical saturation has been reached – when categories and their properties are considered as sufficiently dense and when the data collection no longer generates new derivations. The point of theoretical saturation does not imply that everything is known, since theoretical sampling does not aim for a fully descriptive coverage of the data, but that enough data has

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[97] After making an initial list of all businesses between the two subway stops *Rathaus Neukölln* and *Karl-Marx-Straße* and categorizing them into branch and length of business residence, I sent out emails and parallel formal letters to at least two businesses within each branch, asking for their participation in the study, or an interview. Due to an overall weak response rate, I then called the businesses, and also walked into many of the sampled businesses and tried to convince the business owners and salespeople face-to-face. The high reluctance and opposition of the street's business people crystalized in accusations of being a "spy" for competing businesses or the local authorities (particularly the tax office), or of researching the competition before opening my own business. Many of the participating business people still tested my local knowledge and my intentions in the meetings and interviews. I assume that this high level of skepticism and suspicion stemmed from the heightened business competition, the increasingly authoritative and controlling or even exclusionary behavior of the local authorities in the course of local urban renewal, the overall fear of neighborhood change, and previous negative experiences with local authorities and "researchers." Some mentioned (with shame) that they are struggling to survive and therefore were too busy to meet with me. On the phone many shopkeepers also asked for help, but still rejected my offer to meet with them during opening hours.

been collected that the developed categories not only have high explanatory value, but also integrate the core variables grounding the emerging theory. My greatest concern was not when to stop collecting case studies,, but rather when to end observations in the already sampled and "interviewed" cases, since most of the field site visits still revealed new aspects and new variations of already identified themes.

The resulting case studies have played a decisive role in Karl-Marx-Straße' transformation over the late twentieth and early twenty-first century, mostly hidden from the view of dominant society and local politicians and authorities. They have been at the forefront of urban change, increasingly satisfying gentrifiers' tastes for ethnic and social diversity (Zukin 1987), despite having contributed for decades to the area's diversity of social, commercial, and cultural practices. Many struggle to keep their businesses alive, and experienced financial losses due to the current reconstruction of the street. Along with the long working hours required of owners of small independent owned stores, I acknowledge the business people's high level of skepticism and distrust in talking to me. This is why I am particularly grateful to those – even if fewer than planned – owners who introduced me to and included me in the small life worlds of their businesses.

4.3. The Core Sample

The core sample (defined as those businesses that generated the most material, in terms of participant observation protocols, other type of field notes and in-depth interviews) of businesses on Karl-Marx-Straße's main strip comprises

- A long standing[98] flower store, owned by a woman of German descent
- A newer "German food"[99] lunch restaurant, owned by a man of German descent
- A long-standing café/bar/restaurant, named café I, owned by a man of Turkish descent
- A long-standing café/bar/restaurant, named café II, owned by a man of German descent
- A long-standing pharmacy, owned by a woman of German descent

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[98] I categorize "long standing" as more than ten years, "newer" as more than five years and "new" as less than four years of business residence (despite the fact that the sampled new businesses' length of residence is less than two years) (effective March 2016). The concrete opening dates are also mentioned in the detailed case descriptions in Chapter 5.

[99] The second and seventh case businesses offer so-called ethnic cuisine, whereas the other gastronomic facilities have a less clear ethnic menu.

- A long-standing butcher shop, offering lunch, owned by a man of German descent

- A newer "Turkish" café and bakery, owned by two men of Turkish descent

- A new organic grocery store, owned by two women, one of German, one of Polish descent

These seven are discussed with a focus on their spatial and social qualities in Chapter 5 along with a summary of extra cases. The core sample consists of two types of businesses broadly defined – those that necessitate a longer stay or greater need for advice, and those that are associated with a straight exchange of goods (retail, (non-gastronomic service providers). The latter type of businesses also offer professional advice, but to a lesser degree. Other businesses where I spent a significant amount of time and talked to customers and salespeople, but not in a systematic and recorded way, and thus do not form part of the core sample, are:

- A long-standing bar that closed permanently during the course of my field work, owned by a woman of Hungarian descent

- A new "hip" café, owned by a man of Turkish descent

- A long-standing fruit and vegetable store, that closed permanently during my field work, owned by a woman of German descent

- A long-standing hair salon, owned by a woman of German descent[100]

- A long-standing beer garden/restaurant, owned by a man of Italian descent

- A long-standing kebab take-away, unclear ownership

- A long-standing chain drug store

- A long-standing shopping mall hosting mostly new franchise stores

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[100] The owner agreed to an interview, but only by telephone. In the course of the conversations, she mentioned the difficult business situation and shame as the reason for her withdrawal from an in-person interview. This business welcomed predominantly elderly residents and was afraid of losing its clientele due to demographic changes (also caused by gentrification).

Figure 15: Businesses' main locations along Karl-Marx-Straße

Since very little has been written on interactions between differently stratified urban dwellers in the (semi-) public spaces of businesses in German cities, the sample also focuses on business spaces where an ethnically, demographically, and socially diverse clientele shops and consumes. The existing literature mostly focuses on the mapping of so-called ethnic businesses (with owners, salespeople, and customers most often of Turkish descent) and their economic contribution, but almost nothing has been said about the social and cultural dynamics and contributions of multi-ethnic neighborhoods, shopping streets, and their "remarkable, yet often invisible and unrecognized contributions to urban cultures and economies" (Kuppinger 2014: 141) and social life. The studied businesses operated by an owner with a migration background are not defined as ethnic businesses in this research, as their entanglement with family and community networks is no different from their "ethnic German" counterparts. In addition, I avoid the term ethnic entrepreneur or ethnic business, since with the exception of the urban renewal program actors, none of the interview partners described themselves, or their own and anyone else's businesses in that way.[101]

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[101] Just as with all small and/or individually owned businesses, so-called ethnic entrepreneurship is rooted in a structural context or state regulatory regime, as well as in resources and support mechanisms derived from the

With the core sample, I thus focus more on small and "ordinary" (Hall 2012) businesses, due to my early assumption that they also accommodate more "minute cross cultural encounters which are crucial for the creation of inclusive urban cultures" (Kuppinger 2014: 141) than their more expensive, lifestyle-oriented, and branded chain store counterparts. With the exception of the main café, the businesses that are not owned by so-called ethnic Germans belong to second-generation immigrants. In contrast to the first Neukölln generation of business-owners, who focused exclusively on the import of so-called ethnic products (particularly foodstuffs, religious goods, and clothing) for the immigrant market (e.g. Halal meat for Turkish migrants, but which was then also purchased by non-Turkish Muslim families) and filled not only a commercial niche but also the many vacant business spaces along the street, today's second (and third) generation immigrant owners have a keen understanding of their surrounding socio-spatial environment, the respective residential and customer composition, and the neighborhood's and consumption dynamics. In this context, they know that in order to survive economically on the street with its increasing rents and changing shopping patterns, they need to expand their offerings and services to the biggest possible population group and thus serve a multi-ethnic and highly diverse clientele. For this reason, they also work much more than chain stores or lifestyle stores and their predecessors as so-called cultural brokers or "middlemen"[102] (Bonacich 1973), who bridge local cultural and social gaps (Kuppinger 2014: 148).

To summarize, having begun this process with the flower shop because of its pre-ascribed role as a public character (although its physical or social features did not necessarily that hint at a third place), the second business (the lunch restaurant) was selected because first observations therein revealed higher levels of public sociability, (semi)-public behavior, and therewith third place attributes (in particular more space and seating facilities to spend time in the business and potentially socialize), but even if the owner acted less as a public character. The third case study, the additional café I (that is also a bar and restaurant), sought to capture a more classic third place in the sense that the exploratory observed business operations and seating facilities seemed to foster public sociability and interaction.

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entrepreneur's social networks, which, at least in this case, are not ethnically specific, but rather mediated by class relations. In the vein of Kloostermann et al. (1999) and the businesses' "mixed embeddedness," I also rail against the reduction of "immigrant entrepreneurship to an ethnic phenomenon within an economic and institutional vacuum." Just as all business people do, immigrant entrepreneurs rely on social networks and draw on family support if needed, particularly in situations of heightened capitalistic competition or other economic issues.

[102] As per Bonacich (1973: 583), the principal peculiarities of these middlemen are "the economic role they play. In contrast to most ethnic minorities, they occupy an intermediate rather than low-status position. They tend to concentrate in certain occupations, notably trade and commerce […] They play the role of middleman between producer and consumer, employer and employee, owner and renter, elite and masses."

Focusing on the emerging themes in the interviews and observations, the third case study also provided a more ethnically diverse clientele, both in terms of ownership and customers. The main themes after these three cases coalesced around urban community building (but with insufficient knowledge of the participants and their selection), urban renewal as challenging the business survival and community practices, and discrimination (for both sides - person discriminating, and the individual being discriminated against). Thus for the fourth case, I searched for a minimally contrasting option, convincing the owner of the adjacent café II to talk to me and to conduct observations in the business. Whereas the clientele was as diverse as in the previous café, the majority of customers' overall consumption patterns and physical appearances hinted at a higher socio-economic background than in the three previous cases. Here, on-site observations revealed that interactions between staff and customers and among customers crossed a greater number of class and milieu lines than elsewhere. In both café/bar/restaurants, urban renewal seemed to be a less important theme (at least in terms of how often it was mentioned by owners and their staff), but this is not unexpected, since gentrification brought many of the newer customers to these businesses in the first place.

In order to include a more "rationalized" and less "hang out" space, the fifth case is a local pharmacy, where seating is restricted to one or two customers who need to rest, conversations are in a low tone and the atmosphere less "social." This case was selected on the available theory but also on observation-driven assumptions that pharmacies both provide substantial and comprehensive consultation and service (therefore supporting public interaction). A further assumption was that they are places that are routinely integrated into everyday life – especially for the elderly – and that as such, they are also affected by urban renewal as well as a change in demographics. The second guiding assumption was that people do not spend more time than necessary in a pharmacy due to its highly professional or technical atmosphere, distanced conversations, and a setting full of references to disease and illness. However, because of the (often very intimate) found conversational topics, I deduced that the salespeople might have formed a trusted network at least with their regular customers, as well as with local doctors and other related medical institutions, and thus might act as public characters to a certain degree.

Since the previous cases were all more or less long-standing institutions, the fifth case was supposed to be a business that had opened only recently, where the relationship to customers and neighborhood might still be limited and the business space did not show the same level of routine practices by either employees or customers. Hence, the new organic grocery store represented the next business,

combining seating facilities (for its lunch and coffee offerings) with third place features such as daily supply. Daily supply was also the focus for the selection of the subsequent case, a local butcher, which whose consumers were expected to be less conspicuous or less "conscious" than in the organic store, and, because of the refrigerated products, a very local clientele. Since the butcher's shop showed surprisingly high levels of public sociability among a surprisingly regular and surprisingly diverse and sociable crowd of customers, despite its physically uncomfortable environment (cold and bloody), the last case in the core sample was included to emphasize a more classic third place type of business, a bakery that also functions as a café. Throughout the sampling process, I also participated at business owner and community meetings, conducted observations in other chain or franchise stores, the shopping mall and individually owned businesses along Karl-Marx-Straße in order to get a fuller picture of the current commercial and ownership structure, its past and current development, but also to recruit potential interview partners and business cases for further observation.

The portraits of the selected cases' social and material space in chapter 5 convey a first but lasting impression of the history, design, appeal, and atmosphere of the business space, the character, personality and operational style of the owner and the employees, as well as the regular and random customers. These portraits form the basis for the first conceptual ideas about the core sample's social life and daily rhythms, as well as about the spatial and social variables that foster or prevent sociability and public familiarity in the stores and/or hint to the businesses' roles for the street and/or certain customers, before the core analysis began. These portraits were based on both the insights from the in-depth interviews with the owners, chats with employees and some customers, as well as numerous participant and non-participant observations in, and in front of, the businesses.

4.4. Methodology

In order to process the identified samples, their significance, as well as the consequences of social interactions and other social practices that occur around shopping locally, Grounded Theory Method (GTM) was chosen, for its empirically justified, conceptually compressed and internally-consistent theory generation. As a qualitative urban study, this research design focuses on the empirical inquiry – systematically collecting and interpreting social facts or factual findings (Atteslander 2006; 2008). The aim is to describe social phenomena and to make statements on correlations between different phenomena und possibly to test these statements or claims. Ideally, qualitative social research ideally

aims to acknowledge and understand phenomena of human experience in a holistic and integrated way and from within (subjective). Finally, qualitative research aims to generate hypotheses or theories at the end of the process (Friedrichs 1990). In order to develop theoretical constructs for the respective phenomena at hand, qualitative social research often uses open and non-standardized methods of inquiry, as well as interpretative evaluation and analysis methods.

Qualitative social research typically begins with a rather imprecise research question (see Chapter 1.2.), but is then guided and sharpened by the sensitizing concepts (see Chapter 3), and by the step-by-step acquired empirical data and findings – always cycled through the lens of the sensitizing concepts, theoretical concepts, and emerging theoretical ideas. The entire process of data collection is characterized by a high degree of openness, whereby the researcher is in the field, in close proximity to the research subject. This approach also undergirds the decision for a social life world approach (defined in Chapter 4.4.1.), interwoven with a more GTM-driven sampling, inquiry, and analysis. By combining these two approaches, this research hopes to bridge the current lack of a theoretical understanding of the role of small businesses in the local social life (cf. e.g. Lofland 1998). Field work was thus aimed at the generation of a theory that describes and explains – as closely and densely as possible – the interactions and social processes in and around the local shops and eateries, the role of the social (owners) and material (businesses' socio-spatial setting) aspects, and the effect of these socio-spatial practices on local social life on Karl-Marx-Straße.

In the remainder of this chapter, I will first explain the decision to base the ensuing theoretical concepts in the empirically acquired data, and for deploying social life worlds as the methodological framework, before presenting the concrete forms and types of inquiry utilized, a discussion of the respective methodological and practical challenges of being in the field and having such a close proximity to research subjects, and finally, a description of the design of the data analysis.

4.4.1. Working on the Ground: Grounded Theory Method and Small Social Life Worlds

Instead of implementing the Grounded Theory Method (GTM) approach as a fixed method with fixed rules, Anselm Strauss' and Barney Glaser's development of grounded theory as a collection of proposals for the elaboration of a "theory founded in empirical data" (Strübing 2008: 13). Particularly their suggestions for "theoretical sampling" (primarily in the initial selection of cases and interviewees), coding, and the analysis of the collected empirical data, as well as their suggested focus on "core

concepts" and the production of systematic relationships between the phenomena offer a useful framework for the empirical investigation inherent to this project. GTM generates a theory by systematically obtaining and analyzing data, and then generating patterns or "categories." From these patterns, conceptual categories or "core concepts" are developed to represent the theoretical framework's components (Glaser/ Strauss 1998). The GTM approach develops an empirically based theory through a constant dialogue between me, the researcher, and the collected data, as well as between the theoretical thoughts and empirical evidence, in which the story of social interactions during shopping emerges. Simply put, GTM's main purpose is to develop an empirically "grounded" theory (Glaser/ Strauss 1988).

In this study, the first core concept was constructed to represent the research subjects' (primarily the salespeople, but also the observed customers') concerns. After the core concepts were defined, attention was turned towards an understanding of why and through what kinds of social practices stores' owners imbue their businesses with additional meaning (Rosenbaum 2006: 64; 2007).

The fieldwork itself followed Hitzler and Honer's ethnographic "life world analysis" (*Lebensweltanalyse*; Honer and Hitzler 1984; 1986; 1991; 1995; 2003), which emphasizes the inner perspectives of the observed social life worlds of local businesses. This approach helps to reveal not only inner perspectives, but also the inner micro-logics and micro-geographies of everyday life[103] and to focus on those social practices in local businesses that generate and nurture them.

Originally, the project was conceived around a comparatively closed research question (and thus a more "classical" sociological framework) of "How and in what ways do local businesses contribute to the creation of local social capital, and on a neighborhood level, to social cohesion?" The initial idea was to frame and explore social interactions during shopping through the lens of social cohesion (Durkheim 1988) and social capital (cf. Putnam 1995, 2000; Coleman 1988; Bourdieu 1986) - both prominent and popular theoretical concepts in the field of sociology. During the course of my empirical inquiry, I soon discarded them in favor of a more open-ended and impartial methodology in order to avoid both a narrow focus on these social interactions as a singular type of social practice and the quite normative view of these two concepts on social life in urban settlements. However, the research on social cohesion and in particular on the different definitions and concepts of social capital during the first four months

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[103] "The World in the City" – the focus of the International Graduate Program at the *Centre for Metropolitan Studies* at the *Technische Universität Berlin* – was interpreted in this thesis as including the numerous and sometimes overlapping small (social and/or ethnic) worlds that can be linked to specific social and physical places.

of my research still proved to be fruitful for the conceptual structure of this story and revealed possible directions and maybe so-called grand theories, with which the empirical results could be interpreted. In addition, it could be conceivable that one of the core concepts of the empirical data *is* local social capital.

To return now to GTM, there are two main variants that have been developed since the 1960s: Anselm Strauss's (1998 [1967]) pragmatic version, rooted in the epistemological and socio-philosophical tradition of American pragmatism of the Chicago School; and Barney Glaser's (1978) more "empiricist" or more inductively working version, popularized by the so-called "just do it!" positive-functionalist school at Columbia University (Strübing 2002: 320). Despite their difference, the crux of both types of Grounded Theory remains the constant repetition of the recognition-steps of induction, abduction, and deduction, which generate, test, and eventually discard and/or modify ever-new theories and hypotheses (Strübing 2008).

Working within the specific iterative mode offered by the GTM, with a view to a maximum of analytical openness, this research more closely follows the approach and research tools offered by Anselm Strauss' version of GTM with an "activist, through action, i.e. working, revealed meaning of objects" (Strübing 2008), and links it to the idea of the businesses as the local spaces where (different) social worlds might intersect, be maintained or nurtured, or be newly generated. In line with the ethnographic research approach (which also stems from the Chicago School), these approaches help to describe the overlapping and new generation of social interactions within the small social life worlds as densely as possible. In the course of this process, description and analysis are not treated as dichotomous poles, since the act of describing (both in my observation protocols and data collection, but also in the descriptions given by the interviewees themselves) is inherently a process of understanding that offers in its final written iteration an explanation of the observed social processes.

Within life world analysis, the second intrinsic research process aims to describe (and thus explain) small segments of social experiences in order to discover, describe, and analyze as many aspects of so-called "part-time world of senses" (*Teilzeit-Sinnwelt* by Hitzler/Honer 1995: 382) as possible – each with its own rules and routines, which, put together, create everyday life. As such, small social life worlds are the most effective way to interrogate the small social formations of a socially-constructed world of experiences generated by the everyday practices of shopping (buying and selling), consuming, spending leisure time, and working. The underlying assumption for this project is then that businesses represent one location where different social life worlds are concretely experienced and (re-)constructed on a

neighborhood level. Only by focusing exclusively on the subjective perspectives and interests of the research subjects (and not on my interests as a sociologist), is it possible to capture these small social life worlds. Put in other words, the main methodological task was to change perspectives and discover the research subject's world through their eyes. This fundamental change of perspective affects not only the analysis, but also the data collection, forcing a reconstruction of the research subjects' subjectively constructed social life worlds (cf. Hitzler/ Honer 1995).

Ultimately, GTM and life world analysis (as opposed to other qualitative social science methods) share many points of emphasis: the expectation that the relationship between researcher and research subject will continuously evolve; the processes of describing and explaining; and the parallel, mutually interdependent, and ostensibly perpetual, sequences of data collection, data analysis, and theory generation. Through this dialectical process, a theory is developed that is at once heavily influenced by the subjectivity of involved actors and specific conditions, but also can take the form of a general social theory (Strübing 2008: p 14 f.). For instance, the first interview and first two days of observations in and around the flower store (the first empirical case) pointed to the themes of emotional and social support, mutual assistance, business-friendships, and sense of community as created in the business. These emerging themes were then tested and contrasted with, expanded, limited, or rejected with each data acquisition, becoming 'thicker' or 'stronger' with the addition of detail and dimension. For this specific sampling process in GTM, no special accommodations were made for any paradigmatic position or uniqueness of the data to be collected, or principles of representativeness (Strübing 2008: 30). The main features of ethnographic life world analysis and of GTM complement each other since they mutually reinforce their explorative and investigative nature and support the reconstruction of the (assumed) little social life worlds in and around Karl-Marx-Straße's businesses.

The highlighted aspects of the intertwined approaches of GTM and life world analysis also help to understand the role of my own person in the progression of my ethnographic field work, which was neither objective nor external, but influenced my research subjects throughout the observational process. The combined approach helped to disentangle the researcher's own (subjective/biased) positionality while working in the field. Working ethnographically de facto involves the researcher acting in (an on) a concrete social environment, so it was imperative to consider my position as an immediate participant throughout the research process.

My own positionality became more apparent the more time I spent on Karl-Marx-Straße, and the greater number of interviews and observations I conducted. First, the majority of Karl-Marx-Straße's

businesses are operated by men, who often cater to a predominantly male clientele, or are engaged with more men than women during certain times of the working day. Second, the street hosts a lot of businesses operated by people with a so-called migration background. Whereas some stores cater to specific age or lifestyle groups, others (often framed as "ethnic businesses") predominantly welcome people of the same (regional, national, or city/village) origin as the owner and/or selected employees, and where the conversations take place in foreign languages. The named examples represent spaces in which my appearance was often conspicuous or exceptional, and by entering some of them, I immediately drew attention to myself. With every interview and observation, it became clearer to me how much my personal attributes mattered in the conduct of fieldwork.

By way of example, I gained my first exploratory expert interview with relative ease due to my privileged position as a formal member of the academy, my German ethnicity, social background, my (professional) language skills, field and interdisciplinary professional knowledge (in this particular case, the logic, the vocabulary, and rhetoric of urban planning) and Caucasian appearance, with which I gained a great deal of trust and internal information that was not necessarily accessible to others. In contrast, during other moments in the data collection process, exactly these same attributes became obstacles to my research: In particular, my profession, my gender, my age and physical appearance led to incidents of distance, mistrust, and distrust[104] (Sztompka 1999). Many of the business people I approached were skeptical about my intentions and the purposes for studying them; most of them suspected me of working for the tax authority or for a new or soon to open competitor (which paralleled many owners' fear of rising rents and eviction, or of having the whistle blown on underhanded sales tactics or tax fraud).

In some of the businesses, if the conversational or service language was for instance Turkish, Arabic, or Polish, I could only observe the types of interactions, the gestures, tones of chats, and facial expressions. In parallel, due to my Caucasian appearance, people often observed me observing them, no matter how much I tried to play the role of regular customer. Further, some customers – most often men – were visibly disturbed merely by my presence.[105] However, in the context of my own buying, ordering, and consuming practice, none of the businesspeople paid more attention to me than to any

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[104] Social trust is defined as the belief that others in society can generally be trusted, and leads to positive outcomes in exchange situations – such as the participation in an interview. In contrast, in a situation with a lack of clear expectations, one hesitates to commit oneself; creating a situation more of mistrust, where trust and distrust are suspended or where trust or distrust are withdrawn (Sztompka 1999: 26 f.).
[105] This is also the reason why I either switched off or did not use my recorder at all during conversations with customers.

other unfamiliar customer, which, for instance, mimics their routinized interaction with unacquainted customers with eventually diverse ethnic backgrounds.

My own and the interviewees' positionalities also played a role in how store owners and planning experts framed and described the street's users: For instance, the urban planner in the local planning department assumed that I favored the same type of new businesses that he welcomes and enjoys in the area, with a preference for the same aesthetics and offerings. This was one reason why he, for instance, felt comfortable with talking openly about the renewal plans to get rid of some of the current (migrant owned) businesses.

In part, my early research on the commercial and residential structures of Karl-Marx-Straße, conducted before entering the field site, colored my first perceptions and impeded the required change of perspective. The often stereotyped perspectives of store owners and planning experts shaped my initial observations of customers, local residents, and street users. To move beyond frames located in the socio-economic and demographic statistics of Neukölln, it was crucial for me to encounter every single individual as a total stranger and not to make any assumptions based on their physical appearance. Fundamentally, the challenge was to see the world through my respondents' eyes. From the first observations and interviews, it was obvious that each business attracts, receives, and serves a diverse group of customers, varying by ethnicity, age, income, and gender. It was a continual challenge not to enact and fix constructed identities based on these ethnic, gender, or social status categories in my fieldwork (following Neal et al. 2015). While at the research sites, my field notes on social practices and interactions revealed differences between or commonalities among the observed people (and me). However, memo writing removed much of the nuance, reducing individuals to their most visible characteristics, and thus highlighting these differences on a (visible) basis. Looking at the physical (e.g. skin or hair color) and the cultural (e.g. dress and accessories, spoken language or dialect) aspects of a person is neither enough nor appropriate to ascribe an ethnic or lifestyle identity. It reduces individuals to racialized sets of identification. Without interviewing people directly and asking them about how they construct their identity and background, the observer has only unverified and highly subjective impressions. Thus, my fieldwork was marked by many efforts to avoid stereotyping on the basis of the interviewees' and my own observations, yet it leaves me with an uncomfortable concern that my insights might still be influenced to some degree by an objectified and biological-essentialist seeing (Neal et al. 2015: 467).

Conversely, the direct, highly participatory, and dialogic engagement of fieldwork often helped me to avoid the ethnographic gaze. My study goes to "the thing itself," directly focusing on the social practices of the storeowners in an effort to corroborate – or set aside -- my initial impressions, public statistics, or official characterizations of the neighborhood (cf. Valentine 2013).

4.4.2. Inquiry Methods: Interviews, Participant Observations, Secondary Material

My inquiry into the social and material aspects of the businesses along Karl-Marx-Straße and their role in local social life used a multi-method or triangular approach, involving in-depth interviews and participant observation in the sampled business sites and expert interviews with the three main actors of the local urban development programs. The thesis' mix of methods thus attempts to generate a more attentive, dynamic and reflexive practice that privileges the interviewees' and other co-present participants' voices and social practices, not the researcher's preconceptions. While larger data sets were mined on the meso-level for the historical and current socio-demographic and economic portrait of Karl-Marx-Straße, providing "a lens on patterns of locality" (Hall 2015: 27), micro-level research revealed the nuances and dynamics of the everyday interactions and related social practices in the businesses. Only ethnographic work – by means of in-depth interviews and participant observation – can illuminate the local social life in these urban settings, especially in the ostensible final frontier of micro-geographies of local businesses. This multi-method approach thus allows the researcher to live up to the "topological complexity of lives lived within and between a number of urban locales" (Hall 2015: 27) – the businesses, the wider street and neighborhood, the city and beyond.

Interviews

The one-to-one interviews with store owners and employees took the form of "shopping interviews" – a play on "walking-interviews" (Neal et al. 2015: 466) or "go along-interviews" (cf. Kusenbach 2003). Concretely, this meant that during the interview, staff and owners continued to serve customers, which increased the potential access to some of the ephemeral and reflexive aspects of lived experience in situ (Kusenbach 2003). They also showed me around their business, pointing out important people, tools, artifacts (Reckwitz 2003) or locations within the business that have a special meaning for them or for selected customers, or for interaction between and among them. The interviewees were either fully focused on the interview or on the individuals who approached them – customers or colleagues, serving or replying, opening the interview or discussion to them, but also readdressing the interview when they

were gone, or cutting them off to continue the interview. With the exception of the flower store owner's mother who listened and interjected several times, in no other interviews, was anyone else sufficiently involved to disturb or change the course of the interview or the owners' answers.

Anonymity was offered to all interview partners. In practice, however, all gave their informed consent to use their own or their business' names. While this study uses pseudonyms, such as *café I* or *main café*, or avoids names altogether, the detailed information provided here about the street, the businesses, and their staff still would enable the determined reader to identify the research objects and subjects. [106] For instance, the maps of Karl-Marx-Straße can easily be evaluated for postal codes and house numbers, and from that basis, the vast array of the working individuals can be found as well. As representatives of their urban planning office or renewal program, the names of the interviewed local officials and their programs could not be anonymized.

The interview guidelines (see attachments) had a more or less standardized design, with the main focus on the self-description of their everyday work on Karl-Marx-Straße, interactions with customers, and "business survival strategies," and perceived neighborhood changes. Starting with a simple question about when the owner(s) began operations, it was easy to lead the conversation to topics of change, role for the neighborhood, and if they offer "more" to their customers, their motives for doing so, and to their relationships to (regular) customers and other business people. The interviews with the owners were conducted exclusively during business hours and while the owner of the pharmacy and butcher's shop took me to their back offices, all the other interviews took place in the sales spaces, behind or across the counter. However, owners suggested interview times during hours when business is usually slower. Even when interviews were conducted in the back, conversations continued in the front rooms. Sometimes staff also directed me to the business entrance and outdoor spaces, most often to the front sidewalk in order to point out changes, people or places. And again, since the interviews were conducted during operating hours, I could immediately match the narratives of the owners about selected customers or employees to both their actual behavior towards them and to my own observations (e.g. style, personality, frequency of business visits, preferred goods or services or seats, etc.). The primary intention was to match happenings and utterances contemporaneously, to hear and see more and "better," to absorb the multiple relationships and connections between the interviewee, the other individuals present, the space, and me as the researcher. The ethnographic work was

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[106] For the publications all additional information and in particular the locational information on the businesses are altered or cut out.

repeated; these regular observations and conversations in the businesses allowed for a further engagement with the spaces' atmospheres, practices, uses, daily rhythms, sounds, and smells.

At the center of this research design was the attempt to develop a familiar but non-intrusive relationship between the interviewer and interviewee (Neal et al. 2015). The relationship to the interviewed store owners was based on the repeated contact and dialogue during the field visits, but also on staying in touch with the interview partners outside of the visits and observations in and around their stores. By means of "just being in" the locations and in doing the interviews during the normal opening hours, the businesses with their concrete spatial materiality were themselves embedded in the research process and design.

The in-depth interviews' guidelines and conduct used elements of narrative, focused, and semi-structured interviews, but also of a problem-centered interview, with plenty of space for biographical anecdotes. Due to the dynamic and often conversational style that also allowed for the involvement of material artifacts and moving around or changing position or space, even those owners who showed the most distrust before or early into the interview seemed to forget theirs suspicions, comfortable in their familiar setting and their routine roles as businesspeople. The development of trust and ease was also enabled by my efforts to immerse myself as much as possible in the field, developing "embodied ways of feeling, seeing and understanding" (Gieryn 2006: 6).

The fieldwork began in late 2012. Although the first exploratory interviews with the head of the urban planning office in charge of *City Management* in and around Karl-Marx-Straße and the first store owner interview were conducted in December 2012, the complicated sampling process took time to complete. Beginning in autumn 2012, I wrote letters and emails to around 30 businesses on and near Karl-Marx-Straße, also calling several times and dropping by half of them. Unfortunately, fewer than expected agreed to take part in the "formal" interviews. Ultimately, eight business people took part in the formal in-depth interviews (between 1.5 and 3 hours in length), whereas four owners agreed to talk to me only informally. Ultimately, it was possible to speak with all of the businesses in the additional cases described in Chapter 5.6., but most of the data used comes from interviews of the core sample. In those cases where the opportunity for a comprehensive interview was limited, I tried to observe more comprehensively. Although it was possible to describe the social practices of customers and salespeople in the businesses in detail, it was hard to measure the social meaning of shopping in these places to the customers observed, which was unsatisfying. In addition, without being able to interview the customers, my descriptions of age, socio-economic status, ethnicity, place of residence, and real motivations must

necessarily remain superficial and speculative. This gap could be bridged somewhat by talking informally with individual customers and by listening to their conversations.

Concerning the customers, though these methods allowed me to gain insights from approximately 15 shoppers in different stores, the inability to conduct formal interviews together with the presence of other people, language issues, and the press of time limited what could be learned. Nevertheless, to the extent they could be captured, these conversations and social practices were noted in my observation protocols, often in very detailed and dense way. Particularly important were their motives for spending time in or frequenting certain businesses and what they expect to happen there.

Participant Observations

The second main research tool applied was participant observations in the businesses. Unlike everyday observation (so-called "people watching"), scientific observation is characterized by a special focus and methodological control. The basic idea of qualitative observation is that the researcher – through the proximity to the research subject – is able to capture the inner perspective of the observed subject. Participant observation is particularly suitable when the subject is embedded in a social situation, when the subject area is difficult to see from the outside, and whenever the research question has a more exploratory and theory- or hypothesis-generating character (Lamnek 1993). These aspects apply to the current study about Karl-Marx-Straße's businesses, where the owners and their staff are inextricably linked to and embedded in the social situation of their businesses and these businesses are in turn embedded in larger social and commercial processes of the street.

The combination of participatory and non-structured observations was once the exclusive purview of anthropology and ethnology. But urban studies, where the city becomes the study's object and venue at once and where the city acts as the "empirical referent for analysis and the physical site where investigation takes place" (Gieryn 2006: 6), and, in particular, for an ethnographic urban studies thesis, such as the one at hand, have also become appropriate venues for participant observation (Gieryn 2006; Lüders 2008). Finally, participant observations also represent the most appropriate and fruitful method for my inquiry of urban social life, since the significant feature of the qualitative observation is the use of the natural world of the subjects (Lamnek 1993).

During participant observation, the data is collected in the process of by participating in natural situations and in face-to-face interactions. Hence, through the direct experience of situations, aspects of acting and thinking become observable that would not have been during discussions with experts, the

owners, or other groups, or by reading documents on these interactions or situations. Simply put, the characteristic of this method is the personal participation of the researcher in the interactions with people, but applying participant observation is also a switch to and from the field, from proximity (participation) to distance (observation). Thereby the distance is essential to enable the necessary scientific reflection to analyze the observed interactions (Lüders 2008; 2001).

The observational criteria are developed either before entering the field and/or throughout the research process. After some preliminary "test" observations but without a fixed set of observational categories, I sharpened the categories with each additional observation. However, each of the observations had a different focus. Therefore I did not follow a general observation category catalogue until the end of the fieldwork. In the beginning, I tried to make sense of the spatial qualities in the business and at what concrete points they enabled interaction or increased the likelihood of interaction between acquainted or unfamiliar people. Subsequently, my attention was drawn to the spatial qualities as front or back stages (Goffman 1959; 1963), spaces that "belong" to the customers or employees, or spaces that blur these lines. I also looked at background features, such as music or TVs playing, smells or noises, the overall temperature, and atmosphere (following Kazig 2007; 2012). Following Reckwitz (2003; 2003) and Kazig (2007; 2012) and their praxis-oriented perspective, I understand shopping or consumption as a practice or set or chain of practices that can be realized in numerous ways, including the gathering of information before entering the store, the actual visit and consultation in the store, the purchase and immediate consumption, or transportation of the purchased goods to the customer's home. This is linked to the so-called shopping atmosphere, because "the subjective mood of a person can change depending on the surrounding" and "this change in mood can be expressed in the mode of attention, motor behavior, or emotionality" (Kazig 2012: 64). Simultaneously, the surroundings, in which shopping takes place, have different qualities. These can affect the customer's mood, and the completion of the purchase, shopping, or consumption act in many ways. The focus in the observations was thus also on the atmospheric characteristics of the businesses.

Beyond material and interactive qualities, the focus shifted in the second phase of observation to the people in the store, their physical appearance, and social behavior. These observations were more interested in social practices and their carriers (Reckwitz 2002; 2003), their performance (Goffman 1959; 1963), and less in the concrete spots or micro-geographies of these practices (since they were the focus of the first observational phase), before moving finally to an examination of the social practices/

actions, behaviors and the impact of these. Just as in the interviews, the main challenge was not to describe the actors in a stereotyped, racialized, or biological-essentialist way.

Generally speaking, my individual observation methods can be distinguished along the following lines: Open versus hidden observations – the owners knew of my presence, but not the customers. Whenever someone noted my longer-than-usual presence in the business, I introduced myself as a researcher working on social practices in Karl-Marx Straße's businesses. Participatory versus non-participatory – I interacted with the researched subjects and within in the research subject. I actively participated in the socio-spatial setting, performing or carrying out the same practices as other customers during the observation. The observations did not follow a structured and detailed observation scheme, but were structured – in those cases where field notes were taken – after the visit, comparing the notes and contrasting them to previous observation protocols (following the GTM idea of looking for minimum and maximum contrasts in order to underpin or discard the emerging themes and aspects) (Bortz/ Döring 2013). I was present in all businesses for a minimum of five separate occasions and even more often in the gastronomic businesses with seating. Seating facilitated observation and immersion in the field, whereas in the other businesses "hanging out" was much more complicated after the purchase and eventual consumption.

In those cases where the possibility of comprehensive observation was limited, I tried to expand and refine the interviews, reaching toward a greater level of detail and narrative from the interviewees, focusing less on knowledge oriented questions, interviewing and talking to them during shopping interactions or normal business operations. Furthermore, my interviews took place during all opening hours: weekdays and Saturdays, morning, midday, afternoon and evening hours, as well as nights for the bars and restaurants.[107]

Bortz and Döring's (2013) six typical steps of qualitative observation guided the conduct and analysis of the participant observations:

The first phase consisted of planning and preparing the observations and time in the businesses. During this phase, I tightened up the investigation topic, tried to operationalize my research question and to collect first experiences in the field, looking for a suitable place, table, corner, as well as most important actors in the business. The second step was to enter the field, where I also addressed the field subjects

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[107] Sunday is not a shopping day in Germany. None of the sampled businesses is open on Sundays, but some bakeries, flower stores, and kiosks also open on Sundays in Neukölln and Berlin.

and expanded my social contacts to recruit more interview partners (in and outside of the businesses) and developed first thoughts on the ethical issues and risks of losing the distance due to the potentially confused role as a dedicated and committed participant observer. The third step was to reconsider my behavior in the field. Here, I tried to constantly rethink my own role and my "effect" on the social interactions that are observed, supported by the fourth step of writing a field diary. Unfortunately, I did not manage to write it in a consistent, extensive, and detailed way as would be required in the classic style of qualitative observation. The notes and documentation materials were complemented by photographs, if the situation allowed. Hanging out in the businesses was accompanied by different degrees of difficulty, not only in regard to taking notes. Particularly the very small businesses, the very busy ones, and the ones where it became clear that I was not a regular or where only the "real" daily customers stay for a chat, whereas others enter the business only briefly for the purpose of buying a certain good or product (e.g. in the butcher's shop), complicated observations.[108] For most stores, I also had to consider the so-called exit from the field as penultimate step. Having been a regular customer for weeks or months in some of the businesses, certain salespeople or waitresses noted my absences and asked about my whereabouts on certain days when I did not show up as before. It was not easy for me to tell them that the study was almost over and thus there were fewer opportunities for me to spend as much time on Karl-Marx-Straße, but that I would try to come back as often as possible, thereby gradually preparing my field exit.[109] The sixth and final step for participant observation is to evaluate the gained data across and within the observation notes. In order to do so, I looked first for regularities and rules, which were then summarized descriptively. Similar themes were represented as accumulations of the information in a matrix of topics, also linked to the transcriptions from the interviews.

Expert Interviews

For urban studies (and particularly the planning disciplines), expert interviews represent one of the most common access points for research: Because they hold formal positions that convey the prerequisite of certain competencies and expert knowledge, urban researchers often seek such experts for the provision of information on a certain topic that is not accessible through other methods or individuals (who are understood to lack the necessary expert knowledge). Although it is assumed that all people are

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[108] Despite my aversion to constant consumption, I spent a large quantity of money buying many small items for fear of "discovery" or exploiting the staff; although I told the owners and all other people who asked that I was doing research on Karl-Marx-Straße. Still, each of the observation days cost approximately ten Euros.

[109] For some of the businesses and staff members, I deeply regret of not being able to come back as often as I would have wished, having built relationships with them and having enjoyed the inclusion in their small social life world at least for the time of the field work.

experts in certain things, the subjective ascription of an expert status to a single person complicates the selection of the appropriate 'expert' for the research in general. There is no general expert status – if someone really *is* an expert is an empirical question that must be refined and critically reflected upon over the course of and after the interview in question (Eckardt 2014: 149). Hence, I selected three experts on the basis of the assumption that each of them knew something about urban renewal and commercial development on the street that was inaccessible to me otherwise. The three experts showed competency on technical processes and interpretative knowledge in their designated fields. As such, their expert knowledge should not be understood as systematic or reflective of specialist knowledge, but rather as practical knowledge, whereby the expert has the opportunity to implement their ideas and orientations (Eckardt 2014).

The main fields of action for the interviewed "experts" were the concrete planning processes and physical reconstruction of the street (including the development, implementation, and supervision of individual measures and their promotion and communication), commercial development (including the development of a new street image as a shopping, leisure, cultural and tourist destination), the promotion of the street and its commercial changes, the support and management of the commercial facilities, and the lastly, urban renewal as the combined umbrella program and processes.

Since all involved agencies have webpages – in line with their aim of presenting a transparent and public urban development – I searched for those individuals who hold formal positions with decision-making power for those planning aspects that could most affect the businesses and business owners' everyday practices.

The expert interviews took place in their respective offices in Berlin, two of which are located on Karl-Marx-Straße, each lasting between an hour and two. The guidelines (see attachments) followed the same principles as the guidelines for the store owners, allowing for personal narratives, anecdotes, and the involvement of material (e.g. published material, such as the tourist and shopping guides, which were often included to underline the success of their work or the material output of the programs). I purposefully tried to cover similar thematic blocks in order to compare and contrast the different experts' statements in the analysis.

Before meeting with them, I contacted the three experts via regular mail, email, and telephone, but since all three had worked together with academics and *Technische Universität Berlin* researchers before, they seemed familiar with the inquiry, the interview course, and general situation. All

immediately agreed to meet. However, while the *City Management* head suggested a meeting in the week after my initial request in 2012 and before having entered the field, the two other planners postponed the interview dates several times.[110] In addition, they seemed to doubt my own expert knowledge (having worked in urban planning before) and tended to explain basic planning information to me that sometimes interrupted the course of the interview. On the other hand, they were highly skeptical about the research project and applied methods, but also the validity of doing research on businesses they considered of being either "low quality" (urban planner l. 177) or unlikely to survive in the long run. Just as the in-depth interviews and participant observations, the interviews were recorded, transcribed, and I took notes on the setting and progression of the interview.

Additional Data

Additional data was collected from maps, statistical material produced by the local urban renewal programs, national, city, and district census data, the renewal and urban development plans and their other publications, promotional leaflets and publications from the businesses themselves, policy documents, and zoning laws as well as newspaper and magazine articles.

Before entering the field, but also in the course of the field phase, I constantly collected and re-verified collected additional data. Once a week between January 2013 and January 2016, I searched online for new newspaper and magazine articles about Karl-Marx-Straße, the *Active Centers* and *City Management* and *Aktion Karl-Marx-Straße* programs, new or closing businesses in the neighborhood, as well as neighborhood events along the street. In addition, I researched the programs' homepages for new publications and announcements every three weeks and collected all their material, combining the material with my own and other local and city-wide actors' comments and thoughts about them.

The statistical material and maps were used mainly in the beginning of the fieldwork and to make sense of the neighborhood's residential and commercial composition before the ethnographic work began. Fortunately, I convinced the head of the *City Management* program to send me the preliminary report on Karl-Marx-Straße, including an examination of the customers and their origins (within the district, the city and beyond, their shopping patterns, and their likes and dislikes about Karl-Marx-Straße) and an almost complete list of the existing businesses in 2011 with the name of the owners, type of business, and if available building owners and length of business residence (this list is available to the public).

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[110] However, the head of the *City Management* knew me from a previous collaboration with the Senate for Urban Development, in which we both participated, which is probably why she agreed to meet much faster than the two other planners.

These documents helped a great deal in the development of a first grounded sense of the street, its residential and commercial past, and the dominant current urban development issues.

The majority of the information on the local urban renewal programs was gleaned from the programs' own homepages and the Senate Department for Urban Development and the Environment with their numerous documents on the local processes and planning visions. [111]

Beyond the general information on Karl-Marx-Straße' users and customers that I gained out of the preliminary examinations of the *City Management* and *Aktion! Karl-Marx-Straße* and the umbrella program *Redevelopment Area Karl-Marx-Straße/ Sonnenallee*, I also followed randomly chosen visitors of Karl-Marx-Straße on the street's main strip between the metro stations Hermannplatz and Karl-Marx-Straße, noting what routes they took, where they ran into other people, where they stopped for a break or to meet others, which stores they frequented and for what product/service. Furthermore, I also spent four afternoons in 2013 and 2014 walking up and down the street and the shopping mall, taking notes on physical, commercial, and demographic changes as well as on the wandering construction site.

The combination of this diverse material along with the in-depth interviews and observations allowed me to research the street and its businesses from very different perspectives and thus to cover the manifold dimensions and often simultaneous and linked processes occurring therein, and thereby to do justice to the complexities of ordinary metropolitan social life.

4.4.3. Design of Data Analysis

The data gathered within GTM becomes increasingly focused as the researcher engages in data analysis while collecting further data. Again, the simultaneous involvement in the data collection and data analysis aims to develop a theory (Charmaz 1996: 34). Furthermore, with this inductive method, the data was generated in concert with the interviewees (or observed people), always trying to work out the underlying structures of meanings for their behavior and statements. Permanently linking the emerging theories, the sensitizing concepts, and the theoretical concepts and the data, my research attempts to make these meanings explicit. The emphasis on what people do and say and how it "leads to understanding multiple layers of meaning of their actions" (Charmaz 1996: 35), comprising, in this case,

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[111] See their publications on: Berlin- das Hauptstadtportal (n.d.). Pressemitteilungen, http://www.stadtentwicklung.berlin.de/, accessed 03/16/2016.

the store owners' stated explanations of their actions, the unstated assumptions about them, the intentions to engage in them, their effects on other people (particularly the customers) and the consequences for further practices and relationships (cf. Charmaz 1996).

All interviews were transcribed in detail, including non-verbal expressions such as laughter or groaning, but without following a hermeneutical, socio-lingual, or phonetic transcription system (with the help of the transcription program *F4)*. Following a GTM approach, the majority of interviews were transcribed immediately after the interview and partially coded for emerging themes, before searching for the next case. The purpose of coding is to make the major themes of the emerging data evident. I therefore created codes in the course of studying the data that acted as the pivotal link between the data collection and an emerging explanatory hypothesis (Charmaz 1996: 37).

After the first two interviews and transcriptions, the search for contrasts and similarities, as well as for correlations and other linkages began in earnest. This process and the line-by-line coding continued for all in-depth interviews with store owners until a sufficient density of dimensions, characteristics, and manifestations were found for each emerging theme. Manual coding thereby helped to curtail the number of categories (a common symptom of digital GTM coding programs). Simply because of the limited number of available colored pencils, I decided to develop no more than 25 categories, out of which I extracted and worked out four main themes or main codes. With each new interview, its transcription and coding, I searched for new insights or manifestations until the "point of saturation" (Glaser/Strauss 1967; 1998) was reached.

Although a digital program might have allowed for a more comprehensive overview of all the early codes, their development, and combination with the main codes as well as acting as an overview, manual coding allowed for a more integrated approach, analogous to the ideas of Strauss and Glaser, where data generation and theory generation are deeply intertwined and the latter emerges step by step out of the newly generated or updated data (Glaser/Strauss 2009; Strübing 2008). Although it is easier to find individual references to "belonging," "home," "community," "gentrification," "neighborhood," etc., with a coding software, manual coding allowed for the discovery of more subtle references, relationships, correlations, tropes, indirect metaphors, allusions and ambiguities, elucidating the subtleties and subtext of the store owners and renewal agents' narratives about the neighborhood and the street's urban renewal, vision and physical transformation. Since these terms are not all part of everyday German speech and imply a sense of commitment and emotion that is often too intense for a description of the stores' micro-processes, it seemed easier to dismantle the metaphors and allusions

while interpreting them with manual coding. The term "cell phone stores," for instance, carries numerous meanings for the urban renewal agents, all with a pejorative connotation, but which are individually used for very different purposes, such as describing the neighborhood's past, an unsuccessful commercial structure, a store that will not survive, store owners that were unwilling to cooperate, store owners that were incompetent business people, or stores the urban renewal agents would never frequent. Manual coding helped to dismantle the different structures of meaning that turned out to be more or less the same for all three urban planners, for instance.

The main questions for the coding of the interviews and observation material were: What is going on, what are people doing, what are people saying, why are these practices and statements taken for granted, and how does the context or the structural background affect these actions and statements Later, I searched for the underlying or explicit processes and their cause, consequence, actors, and conditions.

After each transcription, the texts were searched for information that was not available through other sources, but more importantly for the subjective structures of meaning for each interviewee. Basically, how did they assign meaning to their everyday practices in the business and their role in their business? I thereby tried to reconstruct these meanings, the social contexts in which they developed, and any similarities, differences or correlations/ linkages to previously generated data.

In a parallel process, since participant observations and interviews took place during the same time window (between November 2012 and November 2015, often on the same day as the interviews), the observation protocols as texts were coded in the identical way.

Finally, from the many emerging themes and categories, the four main themes or codes that evolved out of the combined data were: the material qualities of spaces that foster interaction; the social practices (mainly of stores owners) that support interaction and generate ties; the social practices of store owners which "make the place" of the business as well as of the street; and broadly said, the notable influence of neighborhood change on social life in and around these businesses.

These themes are clearly linked to the sensitizing concepts and the literature review before and during the empirical research phase. However, the data analysis's open and explorative design should have enabled further themes unrelated to the sensitizing concepts to come to the fore. Lofland (1972; 1973) and Goffman's (1959; 1963) ideas about public behavior helped to disentangle social practices for the business (as more intrinsic, less strategically performed practices or business survival strategies) and

social practices <u>for</u> individuals (owners and customers, as more routine daily and less strategic social interactions).

By contrast, the main themes emerging from the expert interviews centered on the ongoing urban renewal process and the role of store owners therein. Hence, this data analysis did not generate a new theme or code, but rather condensed the fourth main code and added tangible manifestations and features.

Hence, the five main steps of GTM inspired the entire empirical inquiry and analysis process, even if not all ideal-typical steps were taken. The research started with theoretical sampling - switching between the data and its interpretation and links to the sensitizing concepts and new emerging theoretical concepts -, went on with theory-oriented coding - linking and integrating the concepts and categories -, and permanently compared the new and previously generated concepts, supported by the memos that were written in between the research steps on each case. I also looked for the relational patterns between the data and concepts, but also between the inquiry, the coding, and the memos.

Memo writing formed a crucial part of the process, as an intermediate step between coding and a first data analysis, helping to elaborate the social processes, correlations, practices, conditions, and contexts as well as the assumptions that were incorporated into each code. Therefore I constructed charts that categorized interview quotes under each of these aspects as well as under the theoretical concepts,' in anticipation of the findings chapters preparation (Charmaz 1996: 42 f.). These charts also supported the interpretation and writing process, since interview quotes were already at hand for each subcategory of the main codes.

Ultimately, most material was coded for dimensions of material aspects (conceptualized with help of Oldenburg's third places) and for the social aspects important for the generation of in-store interaction, combined with the role of store owners for the street and neighborhood (conceptualized with the help of Jacobs' public characters) and for neighborhood change as setting the framework within the three latter dimensions occur (conceptualized with placemaking).

Before moving to a discussion of my findings, the next chapter discusses the businesses in an explanatory and detailed way, drawing on interviews, observation, and secondary literature.

5. Grounding the Social Life Worlds – The Material Space and Social Context of the Case Businesses

The following subchapters provide background and contextual information on each of the investigated businesses. In order to understand the social space, the social processes that occur within the space, and their actors, a description of the business design and spatial outlay is provided. The different parts intertwine each case's description with first explanations about the actors, the internal social life, and the way these businesses are operated. Using material gathered through interviews and observations, they also address the owners' motives for starting and operating their businesses. These descriptions thereby help to establish those practices which create and make the places, and those which make a business owner a public figure.

5.1. Organic Store

Background Information on Business Founding and Location

The two female owners of this business opened their store in late 2012 with the aim of offering organic products to the local community. As long-term Neukölln residents, they were tired of driving around Berlin in search of organic food and products. Both women had a long-standing interest in nutrition and one had already been trained and worked in the organic food field. They opened the business "because we live ourselves in Neukölln, because we eat a healthy diet, predominantly organic, inasmuch as possible, this was difficult here for a while and because we simply, I think, had also an interest in giving something to others" (l. 23-26). Because they wanted to ensure enough drop-in customers, they looked for a big space on a highly trafficked street. And because they both have a migration background, they aimed explicitly at providing healthier options to a multi-ethnic clientele. Their goal was to open a "multicultural organic store" (l. 73 f.), which provided enough space to gather, meet, relax and hang out. Being able to accommodate parents with strollers and children was also an important factor for them, as one owner had worked for many years in the social sector with young children.

Although they were initially looking for a business location in a more northern part of Neukölln near Kreuzberg, they happened to find an appropriate and affordable business space on Karl-Marx-Straße. In spite of the fact that they describe their business as thriving and as receiving more customers than

hoped for, both complain about the hustle and bustle and the often unfriendly and tense people on the street. Because of this, they hoped to open a friendly, welcoming place to in which customers could find calm in the middle of or after an exhausting shopping trip or work day. Unlike many organic stores, their idea was to create a bigger and more open space. They wanted to offer organic products as an option without forcing any customer to buy exclusively organic. "Well, the idea was to create a community center, a store, a meeting point, shopping with a feel-good-character, that's how we called it"(l.107-113). They combined their savings, a loan from the bank, and the savings of some of their families and friends; and after only after few years of preparation, they opened for business.

Figure 16: Front window of the organic store decorated with advertisements for their supplier farms, environmental events, and workshops

Physical Layout and Design

The organic store is located in the most highly trafficked section of Karl-Marx-Straße, where the street has more lanes and the opposing sidewalk is wider than in the rest of Karl-Marx-Straße. The traffic here is usually congested and drivers fight for the few free parking spots. Because of this concentrated car traffic, bikers tend to ride on the sidewalks, which creates a crowded and confusing traffic situation for pedestrians. The shop is located on the ground floor of a 19th century building between a cell phone

store and an inexpensive shoe store. Measuring about 80 m^2, it is bigger than typical individually owned health food or organic stores in Berlin. The store's glazed façade is branded with a red banner bearing the business' name above the words "organic store and café." The two owners, along with a team of friends and craftsmen, renovated both the exterior and the interior of the space before opening; and during my first visits in 2013, the store indeed looked and smelled new. They added interior shelving, floor tiling, furniture, and a service counter. The glass front is placarded with posters promoting their organic products and suppliers, events, and tastings, as well as local cultural events, political events (that they support ideologically), and the organic certifications of their suppliers. Next to the entrance, current promotions and sales are written on a billboard. During the warmer months, two or three tables are set out in front of the shop for customers. However, because of the congested sidewalks (due in part to the street construction in front of the store) few customers used them during my observations from mid-2013 until 2016. Some senior citizen passers-by did, however, sit at the tables to rest.

The sliding door opens to what the owner describes as an "oasis of peace." She has trained her employees to remain calm and friendly, regardless of their—or their customers'—moods or problems; and the business is indeed quite a quiet place where people talk to each other in low, friendly tones.

Figure 17: Organic store's salesroom and counter, view from the seating area

The furniture's color scheme is light brown, white, baby blue, and rose lacquered wood. As seen from the entrance, the product shelves are located in the front and along the right side of the space, and the café is located in the front left-hand corner. On a bulletin board and shelves along the front wall, local residents can leave flyers and advertisements for events, childcare facilities, local programs, jobs, apartments, and the like. This community bulletin board seems well used: The posted flyers are constantly changing and information strips are often taken from such flyers. A red carpet leads from the door towards the center of shop. To the right, baskets and shelves are stuffed with fresh fruits and vegetables, allowing for enough space to peruse the aisles with a shopping cart (a row of which are located next to the entrance) or a stroller. Many customers, however, simply park their strollers in the front near the entrance, trusting that no harm shall befall their children. Some customers even leave their handbags and computer bags there.

Figure 18: Bulletin board and shelving with flyers for local businesses and events

To the left, the coffee corner comprises five wooden tables with four chairs each; a bar with barstools runs along the front window. The left wall opens to the stairways with glass blocks, allowing for additional daylight in the shop. Along this wall, the owners have placed newspapers, local and city magazines and guides, and children's books for their customers to read during their coffee or lunch

breaks. The current lunch menu is written on a board behind the counter. Selected gourmet cheeses and pastries are in display cases in front of the counter, and bread and other baked goods rest on racks behind the counter. Despite the café furniture, the shop doesn't offer public restrooms; however, whenever customers or passers-by ask, they can use the private one in the back room for free.

Unlike most other independent organic stores, the shop is organized like a regular supermarket. In the grocery section of the store, fruits and vegetables are followed by cosmetics and household items, sweets, cereals, honey, coffees and teas, and other breakfast ingredients. Canned, refrigerated, and frozen goods are in the back. While the prices are slightly higher than in other organic stores in Neukölln, regular customers get a discount membership and the store offers more personalized and expert service.

Owner(s)

Before opening the shop, one owner worked as a kindergarten teacher and social worker and had volunteered in organic stores. The second owner was trained extensively in organic food and nutrition and had worked in similar stores before opening her own. Both emphasize their long standing commitment to social and environmental issues: They consider themselves as living vegan, and profess to care a lot about the environment and the sourcing and processing of healthy foods. Tired of losing time biking around the city to different smaller organic stores to buy their own natural groceries and other household wares, they came up with the idea of "becoming business women" themselves.

One owner is more of a public figure and actively promotes the store locally and across the city. She is probably in her early 40s. During my visits, her younger (and less talkative) partner worked behind the counter or in the store. Both have short hair; and unlike their often very stylishly dressed customers, they wear rather practical clothes like jeans and t-shirts (often from organic or fair trade brands, as they mention), along with common green store aprons. Neither speaks with a Berlin or Neukölln accent. In the shop, they both enjoy chatting and serving their customers. They particularly care about making their senior and immigrant customers feel welcome, and they offer service in different languages as needed. According to my observations, both seem to enjoy the presence of children in the shop: They would often give out fruits and (sugar-free) sweets to the children and offer space for parents to park their strollers. Parents also seem to enjoy that their children can play and move around freely in the shop. It is clear that families with younger children are one of their main target groups. Because of the

owners' connections to kindergartens and child care facilities,[112] they were able to convince these local establishments and the children's parents to also order their daily food supply from the organic store. These sales secured their revenue in the first months after opening.

Further, these two self-confident business women are well trained, educated, and prepared with a comprehensive business plan. This plan, as well as their extensive networks to the local authorities and relevant institutions, give them the confidence to believe that they will know how to survive even the tougher times (including the street's reconstruction phase). And, by satisfying their customers' needs, they can enhance loyalty to their business.[113] Their professional experience and networks built from earlier jobs also facilitate interaction and bonding with very different customer groups.

The owners also project their convictions about certain political topics and have a clear idea of what kind of behavior is appropriate in the store. They also hold strong political and social convictions and hope to have built a space where those beliefs can be lived out. As one of the owners explains:

> Well, I believe this theory that people need encounter and people need bodily encounters (l. 1016 f.). My favorite word is, where all say about me that I'm such a do-gooder, and yet I was originally a punk and squatted houses, but such an 'awareness', I don't need to kick your knee if I don't know you but if I know you and there's something I don't like, I can kick your knee and say, well, you know, I don't like this, so this kind of [social] connection (l. 1047 - 1050).

For instance, they allow homeless and mentally ill people to spend time in the business without buying anything. They only require that all people in the store are respectful of one another and that customers are not disturbed.

Despite the success of the shop, in our interview, they framed their decision to settle the business on Karl-Marx-Straße in negative terms. They seemed to dislike the physical and social condition of the street and both owners suggested that they avoid spending more time on the street than is necessary. They also claimed not to like the street's current commercial structure and regret the absence of

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[112] These networks mainly derive from the owner's previous job in the social sector and both owners' local roots in the organic and vegan sector.
[113] Both owners took classes at the Chamber of Commerce and one went through a three year apprenticeship to become a self-employed organic dealer. By providing extensive consultation - even if a customer is only willing to spend a small amount of money - and offering discounts to returning customers and those who have standing orders, remembering their names, diseases or allergies, and private backgrounds, they achieve a high customer retention and satisfaction.

"good"[114] stores, which offer "good" books, meals, or flowers. They are happy when they can leave the area for some quieter neighborhoods:

> Well, spontaneously I have a negative vocabulary [for the street] in my mind, which I'd prefer to leave out. I would simply say it is indeed also adventurous, yes, and by all means such a challenge here, if you walk from the shopping mall back there along [the street] and find five things that were good for you and if it's only these different people here, then you know that it wasn't boring and then you can decide if you want to walk along here again or if you leave it with that (l. 975 - 981).

Although both enjoy networking and exchanging information with customers, neighbors, and other local business people (during work hours), they rarely extend these (yet homophile[115]) "business contacts" to their private space and time. Indeed, they have built their own little world within their shop. A common theme of the therein included people is that they are conspicuous consumers and environmental healthy, and as the observations have shown, distinguish themselves from the street's longstanding residents and businesses. Conversations of customers and staff often circle around the wish for more "new," "higher quality" businesses and how happy they would be if more businesses like the organic store open on Karl-Marx-Straße.

Employees

During the first few months of my observation period, the store had two full-time and two part-time employees and a cleaning person. The owners, however, hired more employees over the following months due to the high sales volume and ever growing customer base. As per the owner, half of the employees have a migration background from other (mainly northern) European countries. My observations noted that the employees were mostly from Anglo-Saxon countries or Germany[116] and I observed conversations and interactions between owners, staff, and customers in seven different languages.[117] There are both "male" and "female" employees, most of which are students in their early 20s to mid-30s, and all of them are fond of and well-versed in organic products. Their physical appearance can be described as casual and alternative. Most employees live in the neighborhood and already knew many customers from other contexts. Their behavior emulates that of the owners

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[114] The term "good" refers here to the quality of satisfying their subjective tastes and needs. It generally also refers to more selected and thus often more expensive goods.

[115] Social homophily, as the love of the same, is the tendency of individuals to associate and bond with similar others (Lazarsfeld/ Merton 1954).

[116] See the methodology chapter (Chapter 4), where I discuss the difficulty of describing owners' and customers' background appropriately without stereotyping.

[117] These were English, French, Swedish, Danish, Turkish, and Arabic.

inasmuch as they also interact with customers in a familiar - including casual physical contact - yet professional way. However, apart from selected regulars, the staff seems to make the closest connections to rather like-minded or demographically similar customers (close in age and lifestyle). They also offer special assistance to senior and migrant customers, but not to the same extent or with the same dedication as the owners do. In general, the employees exhibit more or less expertise with organic foods depending on their training and how often they work at the store.

Customers

The owners explicitly welcome customers with different ethnic backgrounds, not only because of their own so-called migration backgrounds, but also because they have generally always favored spaces where different ethnic groups come together.[118] The store offers memberships, which cost different amounts depending on customer income level.[119] Because of this membership system, the organic store has a high percentage of regular customers and a smaller percentage of drop-in customers, among which are increasingly more tourists, as per the owner. Organic products tend to be more expensive than non-organic ones, and most customers must therefore either have higher incomes or, as per the owner, save money for this specific form of consumption. The interviewed owner also describes their customers as having a higher educational background; and because of their often daytime shopping hours, most customers seem to be students or self-employed.

When asked about their customers, the owner exclaimed, "everybody, actually everybody," (l. 285) and emphasized that a much wider clientele than the "typical LOHAS (Lifestyles of Health and Sustainability)" (l. 267) frequent the store. During my observations, I noticed customers representing a wide range of ages and ethnicities. I saw men and women,[120] seniors, students, young people, families, couples, tourists, and local business owners and employees shopping and lunching in the store. Nevertheless, the high prices and conspicuously different design of the business mean that the clientele definitely does not attract or include "everybody." As mentioned, the majority of the customers seemed

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[118] The interviewed owner proudly informed me that she and her co-owner come from Persian and Romanian backgrounds before I even asked the first interview question. Arabic and Romanian are also two of the local more common languages, so their own migration backgrounds help them to serve their non-German-speaking customers.

[119] However, both memberships seem expensive, particularly considering the fact that customers must pre-pay for a year, which would be difficult for people who receive social welfare. Low earning or unemployed people therefore most likely don't shop in the store.

[120] It was my general feeling from my own experiences that there are more "female" customers than "male" in other organic stores. I was therefore initially surprised that the local organic store has an almost 50 % male clientele, not only among the grocery shoppers, but also in their café.

to have a high level of education (according to the store owners and concluded from conversations that I observed in the store). The majority also seemed to be German or from western or northern European countries and between the ages of 25 and 55. In addition to this "middle-class core customer group," more diverse drop-in customers intermingle in the store. According to the owners, tourists mostly come during their visits to Neukölln for a coffee or lunch after having read about the shop in food blogs or tourist guides. In contrast, most Turkish and Arabic customers come in search of organic halal products or because of family allergies. Local business people and employees frequent the store to buy lunch or a snack during their working hours, or they come to buy basic kitchen products for their offices' kitchens.[121] As a deliberately child-friendly place and because many parents want a healthy diet for their children, parents with younger children gather in the store every weekday, often around the same time. There are usually at least three strollers parked next to the entrance. As per the owner, most customers live on smaller side-streets of Karl-Marx-Straße and come to the store by bike or foot.

5.2. Main Café

<u>Business Founding and Location</u>

The café and bakery opened on Karl-Marx-Straße in May 2011, after the two Turkish-German, male owners renovated the space (which used to be two businesses) into one 100 m^2 sized café and bakery.[122] At the time of the opening, the owners considered their decision to open such business a quite risky one. They worried about the difficulty of raising financial support for their (back then rather new) business concept. The idea of a "tea[123] house" comes from Turkey, where tea houses are common meeting places in which "women and families are also allowed,"[124] in contrast to the rather male-orientated and alcohol-selling *kahvehane*, as coffee or tea houses, where mostly men meet. Their business concept was based on the idea of serving a wide variety of Turkish baked goods made with the highest quality ingredients. The owners are proud of their expensive, high-quality ingredients used in

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[121] Unlike the often pricier organic grocery products, the lunch counter offers snacks and hot beverages at a comparably reasonable price.

[122] I refer to the business as a café, although it also functions as a self-service bakery.

[123] "Tea" is used here to cover descriptions that hint to the café's name, but also stands for the most consumed product in this kind of café. This is why such businesses are often called *kahvehane* (coffee house) or *çayhane* (tea house) in Turkey.

[124] Again, all quotation marks indicate quotations from the in-depth interviews with one of the owners (August 12th, 2013) or informal interviews with customers during my field work.

making the many various baked goods and pastries that are available in the café's self-service boxes. I describe the business as a sort of "Germanized" mixture of a coffee and tea house. The café offers not only pastries, but also hot meals; however, it does not serve alcoholic beverages and is only open for business during the day.

The owners chose to locate the store on Karl-Marx-Straße because they considered the street to be the center of the ethnically mixed neighborhood of Neukölln. As such, they believed that the area would provide a potential customer base that was either already familiar with the concept or was easy to convince of it. Locations where

> predominantly Germans are, that is risky and this would have been risky for us, hence if one would have
> had enough money, then it probably wouldn't have been a problem, but every business comes with risk
> and one tries to make money as possible and that's why Neukölln, as a location, where many migrants
> are, fitted for our plans (l. 31 - 35).

The interview partner frames the surrounding neighborhood and his locational decision as "simply because here is such an oriental culture and that ah…. It's also a question of money and that's why it's a risk to open [a business] somewhere else, yes where predominantly Germans are, this is risky" (l. 30 ff.). He and his business partner intentionally decided to locate on this particular street in this particular neighborhood because it promised to provide a significant amount of potential customers – Turkish residents.

In addition to the presence of people of Turkish descent, the presence of "self-confident women" (l. 19 - 20) was also important for him, since they form the main base of customers in such tea houses.[125] The café attracts a variety of ethnic, age, and lifestyle groups depending on the time of the day (business people in the early mornings and during lunch breaks, mothers with young children in the mornings and late afternoons, and students and seniors in the afternoons). The owner initially described their business as meeting place ("Begegnungsstätte"), not just for women, families, or the local Turkish community, but rather for the "local community" in general—a meeting spot for all locals, embedded in the street (l. 15). The owner feels a strong responsibility to, linkage with, and dependence on Karl-Marx-Straße, and considers himself and his business to be part of the street.

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[125] He frames "self-confident women" as women moving around independently and spending time outside their apartments. Indeed, women of Turkish and Arab descent without male companions represent the (slight) majority of the café's clientele.

> **[I]t's our duty** and we want that it is for all people yes […] **we are part of it,** because we don't feel like strangers in this street, yes **we feel as a part of this street and we came here to be together** with them and they together with us, that's what we do (l. 61 f., 128 - 132).

Nevertheless, he complains that the street can appear uncared for. He has a negative view of the heavy and uncoordinated traffic (l. 555 ff.), the "bad" and low-income people who hang out on the street (l. 543 f.), and the bad district administrations (l. 6637, 235, 64, 579). However, he also admits that these conditions have improved since he opened the business. The longer he operated their café, the more he appreciated the idea that nowhere else people can sit "so long without buying something" (l. 511). Despite bemoaning some of the street's physical and social characteristics (trashy businesses, deviant behavior, low purchase power), he doesn't regret his choice of Karl-Marx-Straße—his sales are good and the business is always crowded with customers.

Compared to the other cafes and bakeries on the street, which include chain stores and self-service bakeries, as well as independently owned businesses, in the sampled café the prices for food and beverages are quite reasonable, particularly given the high quality and freshness of their ingredients.[126] The café offers some hot meals such as Turkish lentil soup, *manti* (pasta), omelets, salads, *kumpir* (baked potatoes), as well as full breakfast menus, pastries, buttercream cakes, and a few desserts— none of which cost more than five Euros. Tea starts at less than one euro; a cup of Italian coffee is around 1.50 euros. Customers can either take their orders to go or to stay.

Physical design and layout

The owner described the interior of the business as a hybrid of "traditional Turkish tea house culture" and German "modern" design. This design is rather typical for such tea houses in Berlin.[127] He considers the "modern" elements in his shop to be the faux-leather benches and restaurant-standard tables and chairs. The "traditional" elements, in his view, include the bigger tables, the ornamental details and photographs of Turkish harbor cities on the walls, the Turkish pop music playing in the background, the chandeliers, as well as the selection of baked goods and the way they are offered in self-service boxes. He also notes the presence of female service staff as more "traditional." The owner told me that he is a

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[126] The customers mention the reasonable prices as one main reason why they visit the café regularly (often every day as per my observations).

[127] I also conducted participant observations in similar tea houses on Müllerstraße, Wedding, Kottbusser Tor, Kreuzberg, and Turmstraße, Moabit in order to gain a better general understanding of this type of establishment.

trained architect[128] and that he has renovated the shop and his private home himself. He's proud of the interior design, which the owner hopes will please "both" of his main customer groups - Turkish and German people. As a "family place" (l. 12), the café provides enough space for strollers in the dining room and offers a diaper changing table and accessible restrooms.

Figure 19: Main café's self-service station and dessert offerings

The shop's outdoor signage is written in a calligraphy-style font. Although the name of the café is a Turkish term, the words "tea and breakfast house" written below the name in German communicate the core operations of the business. In the business' third year of operation, the owners also installed an English subtitle on top of the door: "Indispensable address of Turkish tea and [...] culture," seemingly targeting the increasing number of tourists and new residents. The shop's fully glazed façade affords passers-by a view inside, and five communal tables sit before it on the sidewalk. Entering the business through the glass door, a shelf on the left displays Turkish newspapers, free magazines, a small bulletin

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[128] Later in the interview, he mentioned that he takes evening classes at an institute of higher education. I question whether his previous training was really in architecture, because he also mentioned a few times during my visits that he does not come from a high educational background.

board, and cutlery for takeaway customers. A flat screen TV programmed to play Turkish pop music videos sits atop the shelf. An L-shaped self-service counter with showcase boxes displaying different pastries is opposite the doorway. The counter ends with the checkout, which is next to the entrance on the right, and often results in a confused confluence of customers. The big oven is within view behind the counter, as is the entrance to the kitchen, the coffee and tea machines and samovars, as well as a long blackboard describing the current selection—again with Turkish names but described in German— in a rather "Orientalized" font (cf. l. 30). Sweet and salty baked goods are available in the self-service boxes. These goods include various sesame pastries, sesame rings, and bigger, filled pastries. Next to these compartments, non-self-service treats like baklava, Turkish sweets, and cookies are displayed. The display cabinets also include rather 'Germanized' offerings (e.g. Turkish-style rolls with German-style toppings) with German names such as *belegte Brötchen* (sandwiches). To the left of the cashier is another glass cabinet, which presents the big buttercream cakes, tiramisu, and Turkish rice pudding to passers-by on the sidewalk.

Because the kitchen door is always open and the oven is located in the salesroom, the business always has a smell of freshly baked goods that wafts out into the street. The café is quite noisy during peak times. Turkish pop music from the TV (tuned to *KRAL POP*, a popular Turkish music video channel), conversations in different languages, waitresses shouting orders into the dining room, crying and playing children, cell phones ringing, cooking and eating sounds, and table and chair sounds blend together to create a bustling atmosphere. The television turns the dining room into a living room-like assemblage, as people stare at the screen whenever their conversation pauses or they need a distraction.

The dining area is comprised of ten freestanding tables and a long bench along the wall, which accompany additional bigger tables for six to eight people. A smoking room in the back has two additional bigger tables and two smaller tables. The tables are made of plain dark wood; as are the chairs and stools, which have burgundy faux-leather seats. The bigger tables are the most desired, in part because the comfortable faux-leather benches along the wall afford a good view of the social life in the café. The walls are painted dark red with gold trim and ornamental designs. There is one wall painted completely gold. An expansive chandelier hangs from the ceiling in the smoking room. Each table in the front room has a small, rather modern lamp; and lights in and around the counter illuminate the goods on offer. Despite the front window, the café lacks light in the back. The observations show that the lack of light seems to please couples and other customers who want to share private

conversations. Next to the self-service counter is another rack for returning dishes. On the opposite side, customers use the electronic outlets to charge their cell phones, only randomly checking if their cell phones are still plugged in (but obviously trusting that their phones won't be stolen). The restrooms are on the other side of the small smoking room, as are the stairs to the basement, where the owners have their tiny offices and other storage rooms, and the back entrance to the kitchen. Paintings of Turkish cities decorate the hallway to the downstairs level.[129]

Figure 20: Main café's counter display

The Owners

One of the owners is more visible to the public and tends to be more involved with the promotion of the business. He therefore also acted as my interview partner. The other owner works more as the manager in the back office. I estimate them to be between 50 and 60 years old. Both are well dressed in casual, yet expensive-looking clothing. When he arrives at the shop, the main owner[130] honks the horn of his

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[129] While standing in line for the restrooms in the hallway, customers chat with employees passing by on the way to the kitchen or taking a rest in the small space outside of the kitchen.
[130] He is also my main interview partner and spent significantly more time in the café's front spaces throughout my observations than his business partner. He is thus the focus of my discussion on ownership.

BMW, which he usually parks in front of the café, double parking if no parking spot is available. He speaks with a much stronger Turkish accent than his waitresses do, most often talking to them in Turkish; and while he knows many customers, his employees seem to know more.

Despite his (increased) satisfaction with Karl-Marx-Straße, he has no interest in living in Neukölln.[131] His image of the street is a negative one, with its "cheap one euro stores," many "foreigners," "bad behaviors," and "pollution from the traffic" (l. 555 f.). He does, however, view the local business people and his own employees, all of whom live in Neukölln, positively. He insists that he knows more people in Friedrichshain, where he lives, but more people at his place of business know him, where he also spends most of his time. He enjoys the well-known status on Karl-Marx-Straße:

> Yes, sure, I'm a business person here and then they all come to this place, those come who are befriended and other people yes, if only a part of them would see me every day, they recognize my beautiful face, that's so easy (laughing) (l. 615 - 618).

While his image of Neukölln is improving, before he opened the business, he had a poor view of Karl-Marx-Straße:

> I thought there is a **criminal with a knife and a weapon in the hand at every corner and always problems** and that's how I thought, such a general image, so I thought that it is **not very fine** […] ah yes **with these cheap stores I always felt embarrassed** by them, yet my neighbor from Friedrichshain, she likes it. That you can buy for five seven Euros flip-flops or so. She thinks this is good and with enthusiasm she buys here and [other] things I don't know [laughing] (l. 523 f., l. 637 ff.).

Despite his affable personality, he is upset about the current state of Karl-Marx-Straße: The tense traffic and parking situations, along with the "too lively" (l. 539) and overcrowded sidewalks (due to the reconstruction site in front of the café), affect the café's sales. He also complains about the local shopping mall, which he thinks destroys neighborhood social life.[132] However, his biggest concern is the local administration, which he feels systematically disadvantages, excludes, misunderstands, and

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[131] He lives with his wife and two children in Friedrichshain, because it's more his "milieu" and fits his preference for a "little bit of a calmer corner." There, he has organic stores "so groceries, I don't buy [them] here, for these I have my organic store" (l. 637 ff.), less cheap stores, and better schools for his children.

[132] The owner told me that he only has a basic education compared to the educational background of those in the administration or urban developers, so he feels disadvantaged and not respected by them. Despite his broken German, he tries hard to speak in a sophisticated way and to underline his knowledge of architecture and urban planning.

disrespects him. When asked what he would like to change for the street, he shouts, "to demolish the committee first […] and then have new elections" (l. 653).

Unless he is thinking about the local administration or misbehaving customers, the owner is a calm, friendly, and generous host. Both owners are well-respected persons in their place of business, teasing and chatting with employees and customers alike; however, if they aren't satisfied with their employees' work, they tend to use a harsh tone in their criticism. Because they are not as well-versed as their employees in the sales procedures and customer interaction, they sometimes interrupt the working routines and orderly working system behind the counter or in the kitchen.

Customers and Employees

According to the owner's statements and my observations, the majority of customers at the café are of Turkish or German descent. Some customers are of Arab descent or of other European origins.[133] Customers vary widely across age, income, and milieus. The owner and employees regularly donate food to local poor people and don't push customers to make purchases (e.g. l. 405 f.).[134] For instance, salespeople and owners are aware that some customers collect leftovers or drink the milk on the counter that is supposed to serve those who buy coffee:

> Yes sure I also saw people who took away the milk for coffee or so from the pot, an employee also told me
> that, and then they share the milk among them and drank it and so. I also saw this and then I donated it,
> hence, I mean this is me, my character, I gave them something for their table (l. 405-08).

Nevertheless, they force beggars to leave the business immediately and they sanction loitering at the outdoor tables.

Customers include not only local business owners and employees, but also people working in offices in adjacent areas. Conversations with customers and the owner reveal that the customers range from salespeople and doctor's assistants to teachers, bank managers, business people, and lawyers; most work on Karl-Marx-Straße. They frequent the place mainly in their coffee and lunch breaks, searching for a quick but high quality meal, as they told me. Further, the local business people appreciate having a

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[133] In recent years, there has been an increase in Italian, Spanish, and US American residents in the neighborhood. There is also a language school adjacent to the café. Because of these factors, the owners have noticed an increase in such customers at the café, particularly during school breaks and afternoons.
[134] The staff knows that many customers live in or close to poverty; therefore, they don't want to raise prices or tell people to leave when they're not consuming.

convenient place to eat and use the café's larger tables for business meetings.[135] The café's owner takes pride in and appreciates the business people's patronage. Teenagers and students usually visit the café during the afternoons or lunch breaks and most often come in small groups. Some also study or do homework in the café. The lack of free wireless internet might be the reason why few customers use their laptops in the café (as compared to the other cafés along Karl-Marx-Straße). Most often, if working, customers will spread out writing materials, cell phones, and tablets on the tables. Senior customers also frequent the café for a coffee klatch or to treat themselves to a coffee or tea and a piece of buttercream cake in the company of other senior acquaintances and the waitresses in the afternoons.

Families with small children receive special attention from the owners and employees.[136] Because the children receive so much attention from other customers and employees, and because the strollers demand others to move out of their way, families represent the most likely group to interact with other customers or salespeople.

The employees are mainly young women of Turkish descent and most speak both German and Turkish fluently. As one employee emphasizes, they all pay attention to their appearances in terms of makeup, fancy nails, and hairstyles. They wear aprons, not uniforms, and very few of the employees wear hijabs. They describe their clothing as "Neukölln fashion" or "Muslima fashion," meaning trendy, formfitting clothing that covers the back, arms, and legs.[137] All of the women work part-time; some of them are also completing their education or have additional jobs. The cook and baker are middle-aged men who also wear the café's standard apron. They both speak German less fluently than their female colleagues; but generally, they also interact less with customers. Occasionally the female employees take over all jobs in the café. While these different jobs can be physically demanding - with the heat in the kitchen and around the ovens or just running around the sales and back rooms, winding through the crowded rooms, carrying the heavy trays—as one waitress jokingly told me, they all are well-trained and in good physical shape.

In summary, the café receives customers ranging widely in age, ethnicity, education, and income—a

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[135] Particularly business people of Turkish decent frequent the café with business partners from Turkey because of the "high quality" Turkish pastries and teas.

[136] In an attempt to make the café a special family-friendly destination, the owners had planned to open a second floor space with toys for kids. The local administration, however, rejected the proposal. They do, however, make sure that mothers get hot water to warm the baby food and that crying toddlers get cuddled and treated with sweets rather than disciplined.

[137] During quieter times and their breaks, the employees often discuss the "local style" and their style in particular. They used these style descriptions, when I asked about the styles' meanings.

much more diverse clientele than in the other investigated businesses. A slight majority is of Turkish descent and the employees seem to interact with these customers in a slightly more intimate way. Most regulars are local residents and business people, often of Turkish descent. German seniors also make up a large part of the regular crowd. However, the clientele differs greatly according to the time of the day and the day of the week, as do the employees.

5.3. Pharmacy

Business Founding and Location

The pharmacy is most likely the longest standing business (more than 110 years) on Karl-Marx-Straße and is renowned among many long-term residents and business owners. It has been run by the same family for more than 60 years: The owner took over the business from her father, who inherited it from his father. The family originally located the business in a building further south on Karl-Marx-Straße. When that building was demolished in WWII, however, the current owner's grandfather opened an emergency pharmacy inside of an adjacent business. Later, her grandfather and father moved the pharmacy to a location across the street from the business' current location. They were then forced to move to their current location when their previous landlord tripled the rent. As a result of this long history, the pharmacy, the owner, and her family have themselves experienced most of the demographic, social, political, and physical changes in the neighborhood over the course of the 20th and early 21st century. Indeed, the owner herself expressed her surprise at how much the street had changed when she came back to work there.

Figure 21: Sidewalk in front of pharmacy

The current owner has a strong interest in her family history and the history of their business in the neighborhood. During WWI, her grandfather owned a pharmacy in Eastern Europe. When he was forced to flee his home, he came to Berlin where he settled in the neighborhood and found a job in the (mainly destroyed) local pharmacy. His son, the current owner's father, took over the pharmacy after his WWII imprisonment and pharmaceutical studies. The current owner did not immediately take over the business after her pharmaceutical studies. Instead, she remained for a while in academia. But when she decided that she wanted to have a family, she felt it impossible to combine with her research position. Her father then fell ill, at which point she decided against opening her own pharmacy and started working in the family business instead:

[T]his is not meant to sound negative […] but you know **there's no vision behind**, but there are certain restraints behind or conditions, not restraints, but **you jump into it, we're a family clan**, family works for us, but this has **consequences on how I understand my job,** and generally, **how I understand the entire life here** and yes, that's how I ended up here […] and this is why I said back then yes**, I invest into here I stay here, I continue here and we renew here** this pharmacy and then we equipped it with latest technology and **this was a decision for Neu**kölln and for our common [enterprise] (l. 49 - 65).

The owner did not decide where to locate the business, but rather followed her perceived family duties and restraints. The family's history thus shaped not only her professional future but also that of her business.

Physical Design and Layout

The business is located at the southern end of the liveliest part of Karl-Marx-Straße in one of the street's most impressive 19th century stucco mixed-use buildings. It is squeezed between two buildings from the 1960s, one housing an inexpensive fashion store and the other a low-price café with gambling machines.[138] The pharmacy owner complained about her commercial neighbors throughout the interview, saying their "shabby" (l. 754 f.) window fronts, business signs, and decoration distract from her own business and would lower the value of all the neighboring businesses. The pharmacy has a limited window front and a small entrance in the narrow building. The entrance is framed by white door frames and topped with a big pharmacy sign and the name of the business. The owner has spent a substantial amount of money to make her business more visible, even installing a sign advertising her business on the street clock facing the storefront.

Inside, the long, narrow, 20 m^2 salesroom leads to the back storage room and a stairwell up to an apartment on the upper floor. The salesroom has white shelves on both walls; the counter runs along the left wall and can serve three customers at once. However, because the space is so narrow, customers cannot wait in line. This enables customer interactions, particularly during the more crowded times. The shelves on the right are stocked with self-service wellness and cosmetic products, teas, and vitamins. The shelves on the left display commonly sought over-the-counter drugs such as medications for coughs and colds, muscle stiffness, and the like. Compared to other pharmacies in the adjacent

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[138] The ownership and type of business in this particular space seems to change every few months. During my field work, the space has held a wholesale off-brand perfume shop, a kebab take-away, a casino, and currently a gambling café. The—as per the pharmacist "unwelcoming"—clothing store closed in late 2015 and has been vacant since then. The reconstruction of the street also forced the owner to disassemble her exterior pharmacy sign and advertisement. In late 2015, the sign was moved ca 30m down the street.

districts, the self-service shelves display fewer luxury or organic products (e.g. organic cosmetics, sweets, or teas). These products, as per the owner, would demand a higher local purchase power. Most of her clientele frequents the store instead for urgently needed or prescribed pharmaceuticals.

A carpet runs the length of the salesroom, which along with the narrow window, the setback entrance, and the window's decoration amounts to a dark but comfortable and calm atmosphere. This interior darkness and the rather narrow entrance mean that only knowing passers-by or people in search of a pharmacy would easily discover the business. But once inside, the bright ceiling and well-lit shelving easily guide customers through the salesroom and highlight the product selection. A little glass case displaying various tests (for blood and cholesterol levels, for example) is next to the entrance and covered with posters offering advice on nutrition, products, and events. There is no built-in seating, but a few chairs are available for waiting customers.

Figure 22: Pharmacy entrance

The back storage room is outfitted with an automated system that delivers the requested prescription drugs and products to the salespeople. This elaborate but quick system allows the salespeople to spend more time with the customers. The stairwell up to the apartment and the apartment itself are

decorated with little tin figures collected by the owner's father and pictures of Karl-Marx-Straße (from around 1900 until today). According to the owner, her father regularly invited other local business people to these private rooms for afternoon drinks. However, back then, the pharmacy had a two-hour lunch break. Today, the owner and her employees use the back rooms for their (much shorter) breaks and to do the paper work. She also stores decorations and furniture there. The apartment has three rooms, a small kitchen, and a bathroom. The space fosters interactions among staff and contributes to the development of ties among them. For instance, the sofas, wall unit, and coffee table (decorated with fresh flowers) allow them to drink coffee and share cake in a seemingly private living room during their lunch breaks. Inasmuch as the front room lacks privacy and offers a clean, standardized, respectable shopping atmosphere, the back rooms convey a more private and intimate, and thus more family-atmosphere. The owner and her employees also receive private guests and solicitors there, as well as celebrate holidays and staff birthdays there.

Owner

The owner is an eloquent and educated ethnic German woman around 60 years old, who speaks with a slight Berlin accent and dresses in a pharmacist's white coat during working hours. She is a self-confident and successful business owner, and she talks proudly about her business, her family, her employees, and how she operates the pharmacy. She can describe the changes in the neighborhood in great detail and is nostalgic about the independently-owned specialty stores which used to make up a larger part of the business community. However, she also emphasizes that for her, change is a necessary part of cities.

Working in a consultation-intensive business, she puts a lot of emphasis on social interactions with her customers and trains her employees to do so as well. She thus has comprehensive knowledge of her customers and their needs, financial means, family situations, and other background information. For instance, she is aware that many local residents avoid visiting doctor's offices (due to lack of health insurance or money or time). She emphasizes that her pharmacy offers consultations for all people, even though intensive consultation does not always strengthen sales volume or customer loyalty. "Well, there's nothing better than to walk into somewhere and to be able to say hi, because you recognize each other [and their needs], I think that's wonderful, yes" (l. 831 f.).

She feels a strong obligation and commitment to the local population that transcends her business interests. Because of this commitment, she often offers specials on medications that address locally

dominant diseases such as diseases related to poverty or old age. Given that she is used to and admires the local ethnic diversity, she takes time to explain all products, ingredients, and potential side effects to non-native speakers in a particularly patient way, as the observations show (compared to other local pharmacies). Her business' new homepage also promotes the pharmacy with the slogan "listening - understanding - helping" in seven languages. Because of her local roots and business history on the street, she appreciates and praises the diversity and liveliness of the street, which she considers enriching. She is a curious and open-minded person and the observations show that she seems to approach all customers and passers-by without prejudice, regardless of their ethnic background, addiction, income, or spending behavior.

However, when it comes to the neighboring businesses, she harshly criticizes the dominance of what she perceives to be cheap, franchise stores - which are often immigrant-owned. By contrast, she praises the arrival of higher-quality, independently-owned businesses - often with "German" owners (l. 169 f.) - such as the newer organic store. She further complains about the adjacent shopping mall and cell phone stores: The first draws customers and diversity away from street, the latter decrease the value and (commercial) diversity of the street.

Compared to her well-connected father, she is only familiar with a few other local business people. But since she is a representative of the German Pharmacist Association, she is well-networked within this country-wide association. Her strongest ties on the street are with the owners of the organic store and the flower store where she shops regularly. Like her, these owners are also business women with local roots and higher educational backgrounds. On her days off, she spends her free time with her family close to her residence in southwestern Berlin. There, her husband takes care of the shopping during the workdays.

Although she spends almost all her time in Neukölln in her business, her networks rarely go beyond her business' building. She has only closer connections with its other residents and those of adjacent buildings, as well as with many customers, framed in the following way:

> [I] **want to do something for the people, I do this job really with my heart and I want to be there for them** and I have the sense that we have unbelievable deficits, also because the doctors have their back to the wall […] and this or that falls by the wayside (l. 379 - 384).

She thinks that the more (publicly insured) patients the local doctors receive, the less time they have to treat them. For this reason, she talks with and counsels her customers all the more. The character of her

ownership can best be described as highly engaged with Neukölln, defending it as a "big melting pot" and a place which "[offers] incredible opportunities" (l. 455 f.). She accepts, welcomes, and cares about all kinds of people who might seek her advice or support, including marginalized groups such as addicts, homeless, or poor people. She sees her business as a neighborhood place:

> where people maybe have simply a little more time, **interact a little bit, nicer, well this would be my ideal and this is what I try to live here**, well **you will definitely hear that we are so ostensibly amicable**, this sounds always so commonplace, but I come in here and for the ten hours that I spend here I'm in a good mood, even if one has sorrows […] such a smile opens 1000 doors (l. 399 - 404).

> [T]his **matters to me**, my customers must be well off, my employees must be well off, and also my family (l. 961 ff.).

Employees

The owner encourages all of her assistants and pharmacists to treat customers the same way:

> I follow seriously […] '**people come first'** and I'm a specialist for pharmaceuticals and **I take this very seriously and I select my employees depending on whether they take that seriously as well** and work on a high level (l. 86 - 89).

According to the owner, her neighbors and the local doctors appreciate her pharmacy's five full-time, well-trained employees. In addition to their regular training, each employee also has an area of expertise, including one employee who is the expert in veterinary science and another in natural pharmaceuticals. One employee is of Arabic descent and another is of Turkish descent. The owner hired them not only for their technical training and skills, but also because she considers their language skills to be particularly important for her local customers. She also views the diversity on her staff as enriching for her own and the business' "cultural background" (l. 219 f.).

Most of the employees live in the neighborhood. They are all younger than the owner, mainly between 20 and 45 years old. Some of the female employees, usually dressed in white coats, wear headscarves. During my observations, the employees often visit other local businesses for their lunch or coffee breaks and are thus well informed about local shops and changes in the neighborhood. The owner admits that the employees also tend to have more diverse and stronger local networks than she does. All of the employees speak with the local accent, which seems to facilitate chats with local customers, particularly seniors. Hence, the employees have strong roots in the neighborhood, which they also use to bond with

customers and to ease social interactions and work in the business. The employees as a group can be described as friendly, calm, and welcoming women. They offer sensitive and caring consultation; for instance, they often recommend cheaper alternatives to expensive medications (if available) or give out promotions and free gifts to customers who seem to live with financial restrictions. They greet many of the senior customers by name and gladly assist handicapped customers in and out of the store. During quieter times, they enjoy chatting among themselves or with customers.

Customers

As per the owner and confirmed by my own observations, the majority of customers are seniors. Parents in need of medication for their children do not represent a dominant customer group yet; however, they are considered a new and growing customer group (because of the neighborhood's demographic changes). According to the owner, more than 40 percent of her customers have a Non-German background (l. 229).[139] Most customers are of Turkish or German descent, followed by customers of Arabic and East European descent. [140] This matches my own observations of the clientele. For the owner, the regular customers "[reflect] the street and what I like so much is that regarding the Turkish population that is the third generation here, yes, if you start with the [19]60s" (l. 271 ff.). The clientele has changed over the course of the business' long history from being predominantly German and Turkish middle-aged and senior clientele to a more ethnically and demographically varied clientele. As per the owner, the business increasingly receives more "younger people" (l. 426) among the drop-in customers and from the residents and neighbors of the pharmacy's building. The staff describes the younger customers as being more hurried, thus often limiting interaction and information exchange.

The owner reported that most of her customers live, work, or shop on Karl-Marx-Straße. A few long-term customers, who moved to other districts when the neighborhood was experiencing a low point, still come back to visit the pharmacy. Observations showed that elderly customers mostly frequent the business in the mornings, whereas working people come in during the afternoons. The owner confirmed these observations. She also thinks that, in general, fewer customers come in on Fridays and Saturdays compared to other districts, where the fully employed people can only come in after work or on the

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[139] The owner emphasizes that "foreign" customers prefer on-spot pharmacies like hers rather than online shopping due to their lack of German language skills and their need for more face-to-face consultation.

[140] The pharmacy offers index cards for all their revisiting customers. The cards include information about the places and dates of birth. With this and because of the extensive consultations, the owner thinks that she can assess pretty exactly her customers' ethnicities. It is not necessary to be a long-term regular customer in order to register all information important for the prescriptions and use of drugs. Because of this policy, the staff has a good sense about the local dominant diseases and health problems.

weekends. Instead, the pharmacy receives customers mainly during the week and work times (matching my own observations of the waves of customers). Handicapped, elderly, and migrant customers appreciate the extensive and patient service and thus prefer this pharmacy over the many others along Karl-Marx-Straße, as per the owner and the local officials.

Compared to many of the other (often franchise) local pharmacies, the investigated pharmacy seems to have found a good business model to serve most local population groups as well as random drop-in customers. The owner respects the neighborhood's changing demographics and actively responds to her customer's special needs. The family's long-term engagement with Karl-Marx-Straße, its businesses, and residents, seem to make the store an anchor for the neighborhood.

5.4. Flower Store

Business Founding and Location

This little flower shop has been in business since 1936. The current owner took over the business in 1985. The owner frames the business as a longstanding and renowned specialty shop. She decided on this location in part because she was born and raised on Karl-Marx-Straße and thus had and has a good understanding of the street, its residents, and the past and potential future economic climate. Her workplace is conveniently located near her current residence in southern Neukölln and she often refers to Karl-Marx-Straße as her "home." Even before having introduced myself and the research, she invites me into her private back room, explaining that

> **it's always like that**, the bakery, the newspaper stand, the flower store, that's always like that, right, yes, **somehow they all come over and ask 'have you heard' or 'do you know' or (**laughs) […] Yes, [a neighborhood hub], generally yes. 'Have you heard, this and this guy has died' (laughs) or 'do you know when the funeral is' and so on (l. 4 - 11).

She considers her business to be a social hub, and is proud of her extensive networks with other local "German" (as she emphasizes) business people. She enjoys describing her business colleagues much more than talking about her own business, because she thinks her comparatively smaller business is too small to matter economically for the street. Therefore she also downplays her (extensive) business and neighborhood knowledge. On her business homepage and during the interview, the owner repeatedly

points out that her business is a "one-woman-business", meaning that she crafts the flower bouquets and runs the business "with her heart and hand" (as described on her homepage).

Physical Design and Layout

The business is a tiny (around 35 m^2) shop on the southern end of Karl-Marx-Straße near the eponymous subway station. It is located on the ground floor of a 19th century building, adjacent to a Turkish barber shop[141] to the right and a convenience store, also immigrant-owned, to the left. Its decoration and selection vary with the seasons. During my first visits in December 2012, the shop offered primarily hardy plants adorned with Christmas decorations. However, it also offers fresh cut flowers, small flower pots, floral arrangements, and other little souvenirs, gifts, and decorations all year long.

Figure 23: Flower store's winter window decoration

In front of the green tiled storefront, the small outdoor space is also stuffed with goods. A wooden bench in front of the store invites passers-by to rest. I regularly observed seniors and parents with children taking a seat for a couple of minutes before continuing with their shopping trips. Depending on

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[141] The business sign says „Turkish barber shop" and "men's hairdresser".

the season, the bench is surrounded by other little trees, wreaths, baskets, seeds, and boxes with seasonal flower arrangements. In this way, the tiny store not only extends its sale space to the street, but also enhances its public visibility.

The narrow shop window's decoration also changes with the seasons. During Easter, for example, spring colored bunnies and eggs adorn the window; during the winter, glittering white candles and blue lights promote the seasonal selection. Throughout the year, the owner fills her front window with floral arrangements, which she exchanges every two weeks.

The exuberant decoration continues in the small but fully-used sales space of the two room business. Narrowly opening to the street, the entirely decorated glass door and front window prevent sunlight from illuminating the sales room (which is in part a tactic to protect the fresh flowers). The high walls are painted dark red and the ornamented ceiling is painted white. Plants, decoration, and single flowers in vases frame the little free spot in the middle of the room. This empty space in the middle of the salesroom allows customers to move or turn around and examine all the kinds of flowers on offer. For special occasions, like when the owner receives particular regular customers or friends or exhibits special flowers, she might also set up a table with a few chairs in the middle of the sales room (usually she invites her favorite regular customers to the backroom, which features a coffee table). The space can hold at most five customers, yet even fewer customers can produce an overcrowded situation.

To the left side of the front room, overstuffed shelves display seasonal potted flowers. During Christmas time, pink and purple flowers and premade decorated pots in white and silver dominate. To the right side, the owner places a little "altar" for each of the Christian holidays or gardening events. At Christmas, for instance, this altar is adorned with Saint Nicholas stockings, Christmas trees, snowmen, angels, flying mushrooms, stars, and other tiny porcelain decoration dolls. During the summer time, potted plants in bright colors are decorated with butterflies and bees. At Easter, the altar is stuffed with decorated eggs, bunnies, and more spring-like flowers like yellow daffodils.

Figure 24: Christmas decoration in the flower store

The wooden counter is tucked behind this altar so the customers can have enough space to look around. It is covered with tied bouquets, single flowers, and other greenery. Across from the counter, another old wooden shelf is filled with empty flower pots and dolls. A greeting-card-stand sits opposite the counter. Taken in one sweep, the dark, tiny, and crowded salesroom fits the owner's taste and style, conveying the impression that it is a private rather than public space.

Behind the showroom, the back room provides more space to prepare the flower arrangements. Both rooms are kept at a low temperature in order to preserve the quality of the flowers and plants. In the back room, half visible from the front space, the owner has set up a wooden commode to the left, which is loaded with all kinds of paperwork, a radio, invoices, orders, and newspapers. Many postcards of different styles decorate the wall above the desk. To the right is a large work desk with bottles and plastic cans below and colorful single flowers for bouquets or other flower arrangements above. In front of the desk, another big plastic bin is filled with water for cleaning the dishes, which the owner and her visitors use for her daily meals and coffees.

Squeezed diagonally opposite the work table between the commode and a big wooden wardrobe is another lower coffee table covered with a lace table cloth. The day's newspaper and promotional leaflets, breakfast sandwiches, a coffee pot and cups, cutlery, a purse, lighters, pens, a crossword puzzle, a mobile phone, and other personal items are piled up on the table. Two chairs stand next to the coffee table. One is a larger armchair, comfortably covered with lambskin, where the owner usually rests; the other is a folding chair for guests. Another chair is hidden under the desk for hosting additional visitors. The homey decoration and furniture conveys the impression that the owner not only spends most of her time in the business, but that she pursues both work and leisure activities in this one space. Her many personal items suggest that the store is the spatial center of her work and social life. In addition, the dining area suggests that at least two people regularly sit to have a chat and a cup of coffee. A big old wooden wardrobe sits behind the dining area and no doubt holds further personal and work items.

An old glass and wooden door leads from the back room to the village-like backyard, where outdoor furniture, dried flowers, and decorations are piled up. An 18th century farmhouse is hidden in this backyard. According to the owner, the house is increasingly gaining interest and recognition in Neukölln and beyond, due to its recent promotion in local newspapers. Hence, she and the farmhouse have received more visitors in recent years.[142] She also uses the courtyard about twice a year for seasonal events. These events include a little botanic Christmas market in the winter time and a summer barbeque for family, friends, and local business people and residents. The door to the backyard is only closed during the colder months. During the summer, the social life of the business expands from the sidewalk through the sales rooms to the backyard.

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[142] The house is owned by the district, whereas the backyard is owned by the landlord, but mainly used by the flower store owner. Because she is very proud of the secret architectural icon in her backyard, she agrees to guide visitors there for free.

Figure 25: Flower store's outdoor decoration and goods

The Owner

The owner is a trained florist and had worked in other floral shops in Berlin before opening her own shop. Her family also has a history in the gardening industry. During each of my visits, both the owner and her mother were present in the shop. Because the owner's mother helps with deliveries and cleaning around the shop and spends time chatting with customers and friends, she acts as a second, "informal" owner of the business.[143] The owner is a resolute and tough character, probably in her late 50s, quite tall, and has a short haircut. She is wrapped in several layers of work clothing, as it can be quite chilly inside the shop. The mother is a small, wiry, short-haired woman, who enjoys smoking and, despite her advanced age, is in good physical shape. Both the mother and daughter speak in a strong local dialect and are proud of being "real Neuköllner[s]": "A neighborhood kid ("Kiezkind") from the beginning to the end" (l. 493). The daughter proudly mentions that she was born and raised on the street, close to Hermannplatz. Both lived on Karl-Marx-Straße for decades before moving to southern

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[143] The owner and her mother both live in southern Neukölln, which has a more suburban and residential character. Both mention that they have more social ties, interaction, and relationships on and near Karl-Marx-Straße than in their place of residence, where they only know some of the immediate neighbors. The mother often comes to Karl-Marx-Straße in order to cultivate her local contacts and help her daughter with the shop.

Neukölln. Today they live in Neukölln's less diverse, quieter, and more residential part, which allows for an easy public transport commute to Karl-Marx-Straße and beyond.

Whereas the mother was skeptical of my presence and worried that my questions might disturb her routines and interrupt her private time with her daughter, the owner responded in a welcoming, open, and trusting way. Immediately after I entered the store, she invited me in to her backroom and gave me a tour. She also introduced me to many of her customers during and after the interview. Her character and appearance might be described as hearty, open, and somewhat talkative. She expresses herself freely and straightforwardly but always pays attention to keeping up her desired image of a respected and important merchant running an honest and reputable business. She clearly takes pride in serving important local people, such as the owners of bigger businesses and local officials.

At first sight, her behavior toward customers fits squarely within Jane Jacobs' description of the merchant as a public character (1961: 68 ff.). She has an entertaining personality, a strong sense of humor (a typical Berliner mother wit), and a wide local knowledge that she's willing to share for the sake of the neighborhood. She remains polite and friendly toward me and the frequenting customers, but also reacts in direct and honest way when she has a differing opinion or when she observes inappropriate behavior in her business or on the street. She always keeps an eye on the street while working, not only to monitor her outdoor goods, but also to stay informed about what is happening outside. She uses her impressive personality and physiognomy to underline her statements, particularly when she talks about her role in the development of the street and her role as a business woman.

As a native Neuköllner, she feels entitled to level direct criticism. Particularly when she talks about the street and its merchants, customers, and residents, she doesn't hesitate to communicate her opinions. She laments over some of the current urban developments, the business practices of many of her "neighboring immigrant business owners" (cf. l. 76 f. 82 f.), changing shopping practices of newer immigrant customers and "the foreigners" (l. 539), and her often "lower" sales. While she describes the local people with a migration background often in a xenophobic or racist way, during the observations, migrant customers were served in the same friendly and open way as the ethnic German customers.

However, she is proud of where her business is located and proud of how she fends for herself while operating the store. Although she is aware that her little flower shop only plays a minor economic role and although she bemoans the decreased sales due to the construction site and different shopping preferences of the current street users, she describes her business in an ideal typical way. During the

interview, I observed many of the owner's interactions with customers that contradicted her idealized description of the business. Although she clearly has a narrow focus on the "important" local business people who come in as customers, she also happily and politely serves people of all kinds. She frames her business as a "typical longstanding" one (l. 32) and herself as a competent, honest, hardworking, and respected business person. She readily shows how seriously she takes her role in the neighborhood and her status as a public character, information trader, care taker, and gatekeeper. Even if she tends to idealize her role in the neighborhood, she demonstrates the devotion with which she pursues her job, offering only "high quality" (cf. l. 525 ff.) products and services, caring for the preferences of her customers, and offering discounts to people who she thinks may have financial problems.

> Well, as I said, **like the center of somewhere or so, a mouthpiece for** [the people] right left or for the customers or something like this, right? But I always think to myself, this is probably the same, **this doesn't work differently on other streets or somewhere, if you are a longstanding** [business person], somehow. Well, I guess, I don't know, but **if you work somewhere for a longer time then you always develop contacts** to the right left or you just know each other there, if you go quickly shopping or they come over and get their flowers or […] I think this works like that in other neighborhoods, too. I mean, you might not expect this here, because this is always very fast-paced, Karl-Marx-Street, yes (l. 243 - 250).

For her, social networking and mutual support is something natural that comes with the length of business residence. She also provides broad support, even if only for selected local businesses, and she considers herself to be an honest merchant and frames these aspects of her business as "normal" and "traditional." Her definition of "normal" characterizes the activities of "substantial," "typical," "longstanding," "old Neukölln" (l. 617 f.) businesses. She considers these practices not only part of her own approach, but also as an ethos routinized into the daily life of the other businesses. Nevertheless, it is clear that such categories as "German" (l. 34), "old Neuköllner" (l. 617), "traditional" and "honest/respected," apply only to a small and selected group of stores along Karl-Marx-Straße. For her, "traditional" businesses operating in a "typical" or "honest" way, "network" with and "support" other local (traditional) businesses. But she only assigns these attributes to local businesses owned by long-standing ethnic Germans. With this, she seems to accuse her migrant business neighbors of working in a less honest fashion and being less supportive and less well-networked:

> I'd say for the real business people, I mean the Germans […] they are better networked with each other than with the foreign colleagues. For instance, [with this foreign owner] to the right, with him it is like that […] well, we [Germans] we talk more to each other (l. 33 - 41).

<u>Customers</u>

The owner emphasizes her strong ties with other local "German" business owners (l. 34 f.), residents, and homeowners, and claims that mostly elderly, long-time residents make up her regular clientele. However, my observations attested to a much more diverse clientele. While the majority of customers are middle-aged and senior women, not all of them are of German descent. The ethnic background of the younger customers varies even more. From the owner's perspective, the clientele hasn't changed widely over the years, but as my observations show, her regular clientele aged along with the owner. Interestingly, the owner did not emphasize her drop-in clientele in the interview; however, during my visits, most of the observed customers belonged to this category. The owner thinks that all of her customers live on or close to the street and flower store, or visit the street because of work or appointments. This conclusion was also confirmed by my discussions with customers.

Another customer group, which includes local businesses, offices, and residents, shops via regular orders. These customers frequently order flower bouquets or arrangements for their work spaces or festivities. Because of the regularity of such orders, the owner believes that she has a good feeling for these local needs and tastes:

> These are, well, **I would say 80% German and among which certainly 50% can afford themselves a little bit,** well, I'm not a cheap store and no mass-produced goods or so and this comes at a price and one or two cannot afford this or not in large measure or yes, howsoever, and yes, the rest is then maybe an impulse purchase or so […] **and many young people come, students or so, now** (l. 205 - 209).

The customers do not physically appear to belong to a specific class or income level. On the basis of their spending habits and clothing styles, most drop-in customers and some regular customers do not seem to have a lot of money, but reward themselves with the little luxury of having fresh flowers at home. As per the owner, younger customers and customers with limited financial resources often prefer "cleaner" and "naked" (l. 553) flowers. She thus provides more "simple" or "natural" flowers compared to the bigger and more expensive flower bouquets her competitors sell in wealthier neighborhoods. I concluded from my observations and conversations with customers that many buy simple flower bouquets because of their taste and stylistic preferences and not because of their limited resources. They regard the owner's displayed flower arrangements as rather kitschy, fussy, and old-fashioned; however, they praise the arrangements and the business' design for its nostalgic feel and authenticity.

Despite the owner's irritation toward many of the demanded items with their puristic styles, she is willing to and serves any customer, regardless of their ethnic background, financial means, or tastes.

There are around two to four senior residents who visit the business once or twice a week with the clear expectation of socializing in the store. One woman, who comes in almost daily, deserves a more detailed description. Mrs. B is a 90-year-old (in 2012) woman who lives in the corner building next door to the shop. Her family owns the building and the music store located on the ground-floor of the building just a few meters down the street, which is operated by her sister-in-law (who is also over 70). Even before Mrs. B. enters the shop during one of my visits, the owner, acting as an honorable merchant, talks about her reverently and respectfully. Her customer's family has run the music store for 100 years and has strong roots on the street and in the neighborhood. The flower store owner is clearly proud to have Mrs. B not only as a customer, but also as a part of the shop's regular social circle (l. 56, 116 f.). She feels vindicated as Mrs. B. enters the store during my first visit. She proudly greets her customer, nodding at me to confirm her prior statements about her good networks with the longstanding business community. She treats the other members of her regular social circle in the same way. The owner describes these women as "venerable Neukölln people" (l. 662 f.), who were born and raised on the street and are either current or former building or business owners.

Mrs. B. is well-dressed and dignified, but old and feeble. During my first visit in early December 2012, she came to pick up a flower arrangement that she had ordered. She was supposed to pick it up the day before, but had not felt well, so she wanted to pick it up now (l. 115 ff.). According to the owner, her visits always follow a routine procedure. Whenever Mrs. B. ordered flowers arrangements in recent years, she picked them up late and steered the conversation toward her physical health. When she drops in without having pre-ordered, she usually surveys the shop for new flowers and plants, seemingly knowing most items already, and chats with both the owner and her mother about the local news. In part due to her advanced age, she never seems to be in a hurry. The social exchange between the owner and Mrs. B. conveys the impression that the chat is as important to this regular as the purchase. When she discovers me, she shows high level of interest in my visit, while considering me as a disturbance to the usual atmosphere and business interactions. She eyes me suspiciously and curiously. Despite her slight irritation at my presence, she chats to the owner and indirectly to me about her physical condition for a couple of minutes before exchanging the local news and gossip.

In addition to elderly women like Mrs. B. who make up the core of the flower store's regular clientele, the owner describes her customers as mainly ethnic German and more affluent. In her opinion, people

buy flowers either as presents or for their own homes, thus qualifying such purchases as luxury goods. In the same vein as she stereotypes and generalizes different categories of business owners and street users, she also distinguishes between "Germans" and "foreigners" (l. 34, 82, 539) for the street's customers. She identifies her customers as wealthy and "German." The main categories she uses to differentiate between customer groups are "German" and "foreigners" and "people that can/cannot afford something" (l. 206), "longstanding" and "new" customers, and "young people," whom she describes as "students" (l. 209). She sees the young people as the source of neighborhood change, which she seems to like due to her expectation that the "newcomers" will potentially soon earn enough money to spend it more in her own business (l. 216 ff.). Students/young people are signifiers of neighborhood change for her. However, so far she doesn't consider them a substantial market segment, as they tend to only buy single flowers.

In summary, the flower store's clientele can be sorted into a few groups: the long-term regulars, who are older ethnic Germans and have a long history on Karl-Marx-Straße; local businesses, who place regular orders; and drop-in customers from various ethnic, age, and income backgrounds. The most intimate interactions occur between the owner and her regular customers; however, her reputation as a caring person or neighborhood figure also expands to other local businesses and residents, who approach her as a source of information.

5.5. Butcher

Background Founding and Location

The investigated butcher's shop has been in business for over 70 years. The current owner came to the store as an apprentice in 1997 and took over the business in 2007 when the previous owner fell ill. Although the apprentice had only just finished his three-year training, he had convinced the former owner of his talent and was thus asked to take over the business. However, he was only 22 at the time and had no management experience. His main goal was simply to keep the business going and keep its staff in secure jobs. As he recounts:

> I already knew this store, I knew what happens here, what moves here, that the **store is deeply rooted in the neighborhood. Certainly, very importantly, we have many many regular customers, who live around** here. We had and still have a **very good reputation, also Berlin-wide,** and that's why I thought to myself,

this can be something, this wasn't like I tediously had to work out a new circle of customers, but **I could draw on an existing circle of customers** and yes, this has encouraged me then to take this step and in the course of the years, it's already 16 years [2013] ago and through the years the **clientele has changed, of course, has further developed**, the old ones passed away, new ones appeared. The **whole district has experienced enormous change since then and I managed it throughout** all these years, to still work successfully (l. 53 - 63).

The business is located just a few steps away from Karl-Marx-Straße on a historic cobblestoned square that leads to the historic "village" of Rixdorf. A farmer's market takes place twice a week in the square and draws many visitors into the shop. But the butcher and his staff consider themselves part of Karl-Marx-Straße, as does the media and other business people. The store attracts mostly the same local clientele that frequents the stores on Karl-Marx-Straße.

<u>Business Design and Physical Layout</u>

The butcher's shop has a glazed façade and door. A blue and white striped awning is printed with the name of the business and protects the salesroom from too much sunlight. On the sidewalk in front of the shop, a display board announces the lunch selection (two or three warm meals for around three to five euros, mostly typical German comfort food such as stews and fricassees). Additional signage taped to the windows promotes the butcher's catering and party services as well as their current sales, local cultural events (e.g. theater, neighborhood meetings), newspaper articles about the shop, and various awards. The entire salesroom is, however, still visible from the street.

Inside the 30 m^2 salesroom, the white tiled walls are decorated here and there with old paintings of pig heads, billboards, and certificates. Smoke-dried sausages and hams hang from racks along the walls. On the right, further shelves display canned and bottled goods and mixed spices made at the shop. The counter and display case run along two of the three walls and display a huge variety of meats and sausages. Raw meats are displayed on the left side, and sausages, salads, and processed meat products are displayed in the middle. The around 40 different products include liverwurst, black pudding, white pudding, salamis, blood sausages,[144] bologna, Vienna sausages, pork roast, and roast meat sausage, as well as house-made potato and pasta salads and eggs from a local farm. Along the right wall, three standing tables are decorated with napkins, tablecloths, and little blue and white flowers. These tables are most crowded at lunch time.

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[144] The butcher received quite a lot of media attention after winning a prize for his blood sausage. Since then, chefs and private individuals from all over Berlin and beyond frequent his business and order his sausages online.

Figure 26: Counter in the butcher's shop

The back wall opens to the back rooms, where workers prepare the sausages, hot meals, salads, and other processed goods. In addition to the spacious preparation rooms, the butcher's office, where he and his colleague do the paperwork, receive orders, and manage the online shop, is also in the back. The office is stocked with folders, calendars, papers, and notes. My first impression from the observations was that the business is making good money and the owner received several calls concerning his online shop and pending orders during the interview.[145] The owner spends most of his time in these back rooms, preparing meat and sausages, receiving telephone orders, ordering his own ingredients, and supporting his staff.

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[145] During these calls, he allows me to listen in on the speaker phone. The phone and in-person customers don't only ask about product information, but also for recipes; and the owner always answers patiently and in detail, despite his big work load. It is clear that he takes pride in his products and his shop's popularity.

Owner

Unlike the owners of the other investigated businesses, the owner of the butcher shop "grew" into the ownership. Over time, he earned the title of master butcher and learned how to operate the business. However, the owner admits that although he grew up in a butcher family, it was not his childhood ambition to become a butcher. The owner is in his 40s. He is slim and sporty and speaks with a light Berliner accent. He is friendly, witty, self-confident, and proud of his business and well-trained employees. He also has a strong sense of Neukölln, its history, and its reputation in the media. In my first telephone conversation with him, however, it was hard to convince him to meet me for an interview. He told me that he had had bad experiences with journalists and academics writing about "his" district, since most of the coverage tended to reinforce the bad reputation of the neighborhood. He remained somewhat reluctant and skeptical until after our first meeting and he continually made it clear that he is tired of the negative perspectives on Neukölln. He is upset that other parts of Berlin look down on the local population and he strongly defends the neighborhood. He thinks he is one of the few local business owners who is proud of the neighborhood's ethnic diversity and is sympathetic toward the local poorer population groups. He perceives the neighborhood as still being a working-class, residential area. He knows that most locals manage with little money; nonetheless some are still willing or save money to treat themselves with fresh meat. He is also aware that the neighborhood is changing rapidly, and that many "students," "young persons," and "job starters" (l. 166 f.) are moving into to the neighborhood because of rising rents in other parts of the central city. He likes that the "wonderfully beautiful" old buildings in Neukölln are "still affordable" (l. 192). As a business man, he welcomes any new resident as a potential customer, and many of the newcomers contribute to his revenue.

In sum, he actively defends the neighborhood as a much less conflicted, but more "attractive" business location than many other parts of the city.

> [**H]ere, it is about togetherness** […] because they [migrants] have settled here, partly also in different generations and this is the attraction of this area, right. **I always perceived this as attractive these different people** this is sometimes also really **funny,** right, also **these different mentalities**, right, this serenity, right, we could cut a piece off from this southern - or even better - from this African serenity sometimes, **really lovely, just lovely.** And I don't need to go away on a trip to get to really know other cultures, because I have them in front of my door […] [in the other districts] you only get the touristy [life] to see while **here, you get to see the full life of people in everyday life on an everyday basis** (l. 394-405).

During our first phone conversation, he continually tested my intentions by probing my knowledge of the neighborhood and asking many ("gotchya") questions. His kind openness and laid back nature therefore surprised me when we first met in the shop. And unlike his tone made him seem in our telephone calls, he turned out to be a nice, comforting, and trustful interview partner. However, during the interview, he continually pushed the conversation in other directions than my questions, despite my attempts to direct the process.

The owner himself lived in the neighborhood during his training in the 1990s and has only good memories of this time, the local people, and the living conditions. However, he also mentions that tensions became aggravated and the neighborhood hit a low point around 2003 until 2005, when many residents left the neighborhood for "better" and "finer districts" (l. 96). The remaining residents shopped less and many businesses around his shop closed down. Despite his fondness for Neukölln and his own residential history in the district, he now lives in an upper-middle-class and less ethnically diverse district in West Berlin. He moved there in 2003, when he had children and needed more space. Since he had always planned to own a house, he bought one in a "calmer" and "greener" (l. 619 ff.) district with savings from his extended family. He says his home's location near green spaces and lakes allows him to take little vacations despite his intense work schedule, which prevents him from going on longer trips out of town.

Employees

The butcher's shop has ten employees (2013), most of whom have worked there a long time, some of whom even for the previous owner. To have the same faces at the front counter and the same reliable cook enables the owner and his staff to maintain a feeling of stability, loyalty, and closeness with regular customers:

> They **all know the peculiarities the customers also know in detail the peculiarities of the saleswomen**, this is still [butcher's name], the face behind the sausage, this old guy. Even I belong to the inventory there, the sausage tastes the same as it did last year, as five years ago, as ten years ago, as 20 years ago, this is smoothly made the same way. Here, **the mirror is crooked, the tiles are chipped, right, the counter is ageing, but that is exactly what the customer like, that matters for the customers**, yes they really say that. We made a customer survey, '**it should remain exactly like it is', right**, this counter is such an energy guzzler, nobody builds something like this anymore today. And **this is why this [shop] is a real anchor**, if you had a bad day or if you consider everything is in motion […] **Humankind strives after stability**, he just needs such a **few stable [meeting] point** […] **they desire a piece of stability that is first and foremost a**

home, right, and then such businesses like ours, **it doesn't change** […] and **this is our success recipe** if you ask me (l. 293 – 309).

Like the business front, the signs, bags, and wrapping paper likewise sport a nostalgic design. The owner feels that his customers like the old-fashioned design and atmosphere of the store and would reject any changes (e.g. 279, 297 ff.).

During all of my observational visits to the shop, at least two or three saleswomen were working simultaneously, with one behind the meat counter and one behind the sausage counter serving the lunch customers. They are well trained, have extensive knowledge of each of the products and their ingredients, can recommend recipes, and provide storage advice. They also provide personal recommendations. All of the salespeople speak in the local dialect and most are in their 50s and 60s. They wear white butcher's aprons. Their behavior can be best described as a rough politeness. They are direct and straightforward; and their service is fast and attentive. Their interactions with regulars always involve teasing and humorous comments from both sides, particularly between the male lunch customers and the female staff. The saleswomen already know what their lunch regulars will order and ask their regular and returning customers (after greeting or a small chat) if they'll have "the usual," or "as always," "the classic"? These interactions reaffirm the customers' status as regulars and reinforce the long-term relationship with the business. The saleswomen told me that they are proud of knowing their customers' preferences. They also enjoy ironic and teasing conversation with new and less frequent customers. They call most female customers, including me, "young maidens" (regardless of their age) and ask for customers' "desires."

Like most employees of the long-standing businesses on Karl-Marx-Straße, the saleswomen become more rough and blunt when customers dawdle or are unsure of their order (except when dealing with their older, regular customers). This practice is widely accepted among regulars and returning customers, but irritates many new (and non-Berliner) customers. Nevertheless, their interactions with customers reveal their caring nature, often asking questions about the customers' dogs, families, children, physical state, jobs, and so on. Their chats also show that they worry about (regular) customers, for instance, if they haven't been in the store for a while or if they look to be in bad shape.

Most of the saleswomen and the (male) butchers started working for the butcher's shop as young apprentices. They have thus known each other and many of their customers for years and even decades. They chat with each other almost always during my visits, continuing their private chats and laughter

when customers enter or are co-present. This practice adds to the private atmosphere of the butcher's shop.

Customers

The customers range widely in ethnicity, age, and income. According to the butcher, one third of the customers are long-term residents who live near the store and arrive by foot or bike. However, gourmet customers and tourists also frequent the business because of its high profile and acclaim. Women mostly frequent the store during mornings and afternoons, whereas male customers tend to visit the store during lunch and in the late afternoons. Regardless of ethnic background, most speak with a Neukölln accent, which indicates a long-term residence in the neighborhood. For the owner, a "classic local has a diverse background," no matter if in the first or fourth generation. Although many long-term customers left the neighborhood during the latest phase of neighborhood decline in the mid-2000s, they continue to visit the store on a regular basis. Together, these more distant shoppers make up another third of the clientele.

While many customers have aged along with the store, the shop also attracts the newer and younger residents. The owner says that 30 percent are "students" and "young people," who, have often grown up in the southern parts of Germany (where people are more able, willing, and used to spending money on high quality food, such as traditional hand-made meat products). These customers appreciate the wide selection at the butcher's shop. Even if they cannot afford to buy as much or as often as some of the elderly customers, "by now", the younger customers "ensure a lively exchange among the customers" (l. 196 f.).

The owner and sales staff pay particular attention and offer special service to senior customers and lunch customers, whom they often know by name. They consider these two groups to be their main regulars. They are also familiar with these customers' educational, professional, and family background. Most lunch customers are men who work in the area or live alone in the neighborhood (e.g. students, retirees). Among them are white-collar and blue-collar workers, designers, artists, and local business owners. Most of them know each other from their workday visits and interact routinely with each other and with the saleswomen.

Figure 27: Butcher's shop counter and a regular customer

5.6. Additional Cases and Conclusion

The above presented five extensive case studies constitute my core sample of businesses along Karl-Marx-Straße. Selected by a theoretical sampling procedure (Glaser/ Strauss 1998, 1967), they include gastronomic and retail facilities of smaller and larger sizes. Some offer seating and the invitation to spend more time in the shop and some do not; they include both longstanding and newer businesses with different degrees of local networks; they are owned by people of different gender, ethnic, and age groups; and the owners show varying senses of social responsibility for their businesses' local

environments.[146] This sample is by no means inclusive of all of Karl-Marx-Straße's past and present commercial establishments.

In addition to the detailed business cases described above, the field work also included three other core cases and surveys of several cafés and restaurants (which prima facie seem to fit Oldenburg's "classic" third place types), grocery stores, and the local shopping mall. In-depth interviews with almost all of these secondary case study store owners as well as extensive participant observation inside and in front of the businesses were conducted. Findings from this additional research serve to provide a context for and validation of the in-depth analysis presented in chapter 6 and 7.

The following summary provides background information on the businesses examined for this extended case material including details about the type of ownership, spatial design, staff, and customers. These descriptions give first insights to the ways in which business owners act as public characters and how their in-store social practices turn the businesses into third places (e.g. in terms of included customers, duration and strength of ties, and so on). Three of these businesses closed down during the time period in which I conducted my field work. This fact underscores the precarious situation that many small-business owners find themselves in over the course of urban renewal.

Cafés

Both cafés, which I will here call café I and café II, are owned by men. The owner of the first café is of Turkish descent and the owner of the other café is of German descent, and both have lived and worked on the street for many years. The owner of café I took over the business in 2007, at the time relying on customer networks that he had built in local restaurants where he had previously worked. The owner of café II took over the business in 1990, when the district government, which owns the building, decided to rent the café space to a public charity. Being a member of such a charity, the owner won the contract.

Both businesses are located in the cultural heart of Karl-Marx-Straße, in the same major 19th century building complex as the local art-house cinema, opera, and theater. The businesses receive many customers by way of the cultural institutions and often organize after-show or pre-show events. Both businesses offer breakfast, lunch, dinner, and bar menus and remain open from the late morning through the evening and into the night. Foods and drinks tend to be cheaper here than in the newer

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[146] Again, the sampling process was driven by the three sets of sensitizing concepts. The concepts of third place, public interaction, and public characters are thereby reflected in the key dimensions of the business types and their physical outlay.

bars, restaurants, and cafés in the area, partly because the district rents out the spaces, partly because the two owners want to serve primarily the local people, who they think are less wealthy than most visitors of the cultural institutions. Both cafés are on the ground floor of the rear buildings in this complex and both offer outdoor seating in their backyards, shaded from the sun and the noise of Karl-Marx-Straße.

Figure 28: Patio in front of café I

Both cafés are about 100 m² with windows facing the backyards. Aesthetically similar, both cafés have dark golden painted walls, 19th century coffee house stylistic references, dark leather benches, wooden interior furniture, and cozy artificial lighting. The atmosphere can be described as comfortable and relaxing. Many customers can be observed reading, studying, working, meeting business colleagues, or engaging in quiet conversations. Café I gets less sunlight and has fewer windows than café II and conveys a more sealed off impression.

Figure 29: Counter in café II

Compared to the other sampled businesses, both cafés benefit in different ways from their web presences. Both cafés have their own webpages and are also reviewed on numerous German and international gastronomic and tourist review websites (e.g. yelp or TripAdvisor). Therefore, some customers already have a good idea of what the cafés are like and how they foster or allow working, chatting, and so on.

Both café owners emphasize that they depend on visitors to the cultural institutions for their evening sales volume. Local residents and workers make up the majority of daytime customers. Many lunch- and coffee-customers also work in the building complex' opera, theaters, and cultural offices. These customers include designers, actresses, and technicians who do not only eat lunch in the cafés, but also frequent the cafés for meetings with colleagues during the afternoons and late mornings. In the evenings, theater and cinema-goers (often from other Berlin districts or beyond) frequent the cafés before or after the show. Compared to other local cafés, the clientele is more international. Tourists and newer residents (mostly from the US and Western or Northern Europe) mingle with locals, who mainly have German, Turkish, Polish, and Arabic backgrounds. The owners speak proudly of their educated customers, such as journalists, professors, or arts workers, some of whom have higher income

backgrounds. However, a higher educational background does not imply higher spending habits, as per the owners.

The members of the service staff usually work part-time and either study or have a second job in addition to their regular hours in the cafés. They therefore tend only to be familiar with those customers who frequent the businesses on "their" days. Chatting and mutual teasing with colleagues and familiar customers are, however, still among their favorite practices. One owner (café I) jokingly describes his café as a "contact market" (l. 775), not only referring to couples that met in the café and later married, but also to his employees, who sometimes chat for more than 20 minutes with the customers instead of getting back to work. Employees and both owners have extensive local networks and are good friends with some of the customers. The owners know many local business people by name and regularly chat with them about work and family issues. They also host bigger events such as weddings or parties of other local businesses, which further expands their local networks. Due to their quasi-hidden location, these two owners have fewer complaints about Karl-Marx-Straße, its commercial structure, and the renovations than the other business owners located directly on the street. Both also appreciate the influx of new residents and "higher quality" businesses, hoping that the influx will result in a higher sales volume in their own businesses.

Lunch restaurant

I will call this establishment the "lunch restaurant" because it does the core of its business during lunch hours. The restaurant opened in 2009 when the workers' union, a provider of social services that owns the building, decided to open their own training restaurant rather than rent out the space. The restaurant has eleven employees (as of 2013), all of whom have or had a handicap and receive training from the workers' union for working in the food service industry. As a result, a comparatively high number of handicapped people also frequent the restaurant as customers. The business operations, however, are just like at any other restaurant.

The owner used to live in an adjacent neighborhood before he moved to a suburb in northern Berlin. He commutes to the restaurant five days a week. During his commutes and his emergency shopping trips to Karl-Marx-Straße, he frequently runs into customers. He considers these encounters beneficial for his business and his good mood. He is a socially responsible person, putting much effort into maintaining a friendly atmosphere in and around his restaurant. His elderly and handicapped customers receive particular attention—he spends time with them at their tables and helps them into or out of the

restaurant. He goes so far as to call regular customers or their relatives, if the customer hasn't shown up for a while. Despite his long working hours, he takes his time for every customer in need. He can be observed reducing the price for (mostly non-regular) customers who do not have enough money to pay their bill. He also enjoys his role, which he describes as an "almost social service institution", gladly accepting packages, personal items, or keys for neighbors. This is how he keeps up to date with the local news and gossip. He is also well connected with neighboring shops and local business owners and uses these networks for additional business. The restaurant, for example, regularly delivers lunch packages to an adjacent business and caters their business events. These connections are for the owner, however, strictly business. He rarely spends his free time in the neighborhood. He complains that the area is too highly-trafficked, has too many low-quality businesses, and has a too homogeneous commercial structure. While other store owners see the local urban renewal measures in an ambivalent light, he generally welcomes the current urban renewal program.

Figure 30: Lunch restaurant's front window and sidewalk

The restaurant is located on the ground floor of a renovated early 20th century building on a side street just a few steps away from Karl-Marx-Straße. The front window allows for a good view of the street and the adjacent square in front of the Neukölln town hall. The façade is designed in red and white colors

and posters taped to the windows announce the weekly menus and special events, such as the monthly gourmet dinner. During the warmer months, the restaurant opens to a quiet 50 m² back patio. Local employees and residents often meet there in the late afternoons and evenings for an after-work drink or dinner. The restaurant offers mainly traditional German food, made from local and seasonal products. The owner describes the lunch dishes as healthy and high-quality fast food.

Depending on the time of day, different customer groups can be found frequenting the restaurant. Employees from the local town hall and local offices, as well as some senior residents, come in smaller groups or by themselves during lunch time. Local residents tend to visit during dinner time. For the gourmet evenings, customers who are able and willing to spend money on good food come "from all over Berlin" (l. 286, 500) to the restaurant. The customers have diverse ethnic backgrounds; however, during lunch time, most of the customers are of German or Turkish descent, as per the owner.

The vast majority of lunch customers is regulars and is often greeted by name. The staff members know the background information such as family issues, place of residence, food preferences, educational, and job backgrounds on nearly all of the regular lunch customers. According to the owner, the restaurant receives more and more "young people," "young entrepreneurs," and "students" (l. 92 ff.). The staff members tend not to know these newer customers as well, but consider them part of the changing neighborhood scene.

The restaurant receives only very few customers after lunch during the afternoons. During the busiest times of day—the limited time during local employees' lunch breaks—the main activities practiced by customers in the restaurant are eating, drinking, chatting. The observations show more extended and open-ended interaction during dinner times. The restaurant also hosts regular meetups, for instance for union members, colleagues, or language students. During such events, participants focus more on conversations and less on the food and its consumption.

Fruit and Vegetable Store

The fruit and vegetable store changed ownership three times during the course of my field work. Operated by the owners of the adjacent "Turkish"[147] grocery store, both businesses had to finally close in early 2014, when the Turkish supermarket's lease was terminated and the building began undergoing

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[147] The business sign says Turkish supermarket. In Berlin, this type of grocery store usually sells (halal) convenience and fresh groceries and household wares made in Turkey and Germany. There are both chain and individually owned so-called Turkish supermarkets, most of which employ predominantly people with a Turkish migration background.

renovations. The owners of the early 20th century building had hoped to find commercial tenants who could increase the value of the building.[148]

Figure 31: Fruit and vegetable store building prior to renovations

Figure 32: Building under construction

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[148] In spring 2015, the ground floor was still unoccupied, although the renovations were finished. Since the owner of the building couldn't find an "appropriate" tenant, a German-Turkish chain-store finally took over the new business space and opened in May 2015. The upper floors were remodeled into loft-like apartments with new balconies. As of March 2016, some of the apartments on the upper floors as well as the former ground floor space of the fruit and vegetable store are still vacant, while the new supermarket seems to thrive.

Figure 33: Upgraded building with new supermarket

The owner, who operated and worked in the shop until a few years ago, is the granddaughter of the couple who originally opened the store in the early 1950s. Back then, the business was a movable market stand which they parked a few meters down the street. The owner's parents took over the business in 1969 and expanded it to include other stands and permanent locations along the street. The owner joined her parents in the main business space when she turned 18 and finally took over the entire business when her parents fell ill in the early 1990s. At that time, the store had 16 fully employed and long-term employees (mainly women). On weekdays, the entire staff sat together for a two-hour long lunch break, during which they ate and shared both private and business information and news. The business could be best described as a "traditional" family business; the employees were considered extended family members. The employees grew older with the business itself and most lived on the same block or very nearby.

Most regular customers also lived within walking distance: The majority was so-called stay-at-home mothers and women of German descent, who purchased fresh products in the mornings and afternoons to prepare lunches and dinners. Additional drop-in customers shopped during their commutes, often changing from the subway to the bus line that stopped in front of the building. When so-called guest

workers[149] moved to the neighborhood in the 1970s, the owners added Turkish and Mediterranean product lines. Their increasingly multi-ethnic clientele often exchanged recipes and cooking advice in the store; for special occasions, such as birthdays, regular customers brought cakes or cookies and regularly enjoyed a cup of tea or coffee with each other and the staff in the store. Before discount supermarkets and shopping malls changed the local grocery shopping patterns, the family business was renowned in southern Berlin. As per the owner, customers traveled from other parts of the district and city to get fresh fruits and vegetables specifically from the store.

However, when the owner took over the business from her parents, she faced increasing competition from discounters and chain supermarkets popping up in its immediate surroundings. This change was accompanied by an increasing demand for longer opening hours and a larger variety of fresh goods. Soon, the owner felt she could not stand up to these business challenges. Having grown up in the neighborhood with so many of her regular customers, she also felt a high level of social control when moving around in the neighborhood. Although she had always enjoyed interacting with customers, running into them on the street in Neukölln and in other districts, she couldn't stand the high level of social control, the exhausting work, and long hours, despite the customers' loyalty to the business after her parents died. Hence, when the local shopping mall opened and the bus line in front of her store was rerouted, she sold the business and moved to a North-Berlin suburb. She now takes care of her two children and supports her husband's unrelated business.

She still speaks proudly of her time as a business woman and considers herself a "real Neukölln person" (l. 524). She also keeps in touch with some of her former regular customers. However, she dislikes the current commercial landscape of Karl-Marx-Straße and only comes to the neighborhood to visit her remaining relatives and the building she still owns. She bemoans the loss of the big department stores and specialty stores, the opening of the shopping mall, the traffic situation, and the neglected appearance of the street. Being a building owner, she welcomes the influx of new population groups, but is also highly skeptical of "yuppies," (l. 779) even if they might signify higher revenues for her.

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[149] Germany had a guest-worker program, starting in the in 1960s until the recruitment ban in 1973. This program led to many Turkish workers moving to Germany and Berlin. Many settled in Neukölln in the following decades (Foroutan et al. 2015: 19 ff.).

Figure 34: Fruit and vegetable store

She sold the business in 2012 to the owner of the adjacent Turkish supermarket, who used the space to expand his shop. Her successor took over her few remaining employees, who continued to work there until they retired. From 2012 until late 2014, the clientele seemed to mirror the neighborhood's demographic structure: men and women of different ages, ethnicities, and lifestyle groups, many of whom came to the business on a regular basis. The salespeople's interactions with their regular customers did not change under the new ownership; they still greeted senior customers with a handshake, accepted postal deliveries for their neighbors, and the like.

Figure 35: Fruit and vegetable store

Bar

The bar, which closed in early 2014, was familiar to me even before I began my field work in 2012, because I had worked as a waitress in a nearby bar and restaurant for years.[150] The bar was a somewhat hidden, small, corner bar. It was located on a narrow, tree-lined side street with the majority of buildings from either the pre-war era or the 1950s. Very few other businesses have been located on this street in recent years: a wine bar (that had to close down due to rising rents and a lack of foot traffic), a nail salon and a car repair shop (that both moved out when a new landlord increased the rents), a kindergarten, and an insurance office. However, the street is closely connected with the business and traffic hubs at Karl-Marx-Straße and Hermannplatz.

The bar had holiday lights strung between the sidewalk trees and the entrance. One bigger and one smaller window looked out onto the street. There were three rooms inside. The main room was comprised of the bar and three little tables with bar stools. The second room had four tables decorated

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[150] In 2009, when our bar had to close because the landlord did not renew the lease, we looked for a temporary new space in the same neighborhood. Because we couldn't find an appropriate and affordable space in the first months, we looked for a place where we could maintain a weekly regulars' table in order not to lose our loyal, regular customers.

with lamps, 1960s-style tablecloths, plastic flowers, and menu cards. The third room was the largest, and had an antique pool table surrounded by six other tables. The restrooms were located behind the third room. The walls were painted green; and the furniture had a black and red color scheme. The antique, massive bar was painted red and crammed with all kinds of old-fashioned liquor bottles and an old porcelain tap. The ceiling was covered with stucco. The walls were covered with all kinds of decorations: porcelain dolls, harlequin masks, fans, paintings of befriended artists, self-drawn pictures, postcards from all over the world, photographs of regulars, concerts, and events dating back to the 1970s, photographs of the owner with local celebrities, and little presents the owner had received over the years. A corner of the bar was reserved for old records and books that were for sale, most of which are from the 1970s and 1980s. The owner and her husband were huge music fans, and the bar used to have weekly concerts and jam sessions, that gradually decreased in regularity over the years. The bar continued to occasionally host concerts until it closed, most of which from bands that were invited by regulars or partly consisted of regulars. The owner was also acquainted with most of the local record store owners, who visited the bar as well.

When we met, the owner was a confident, agile, and somewhat obstinate woman in her late 70s.[151] Being a proud smoker, she had stopped riding the subway when the local transportation authorities prohibited smoking in 1974. She always had a cup of (mostly cold) coffee and a glass of tap water or alcohol-free beer in front of her as well as several crossword puzzles, leaflets, letters, postcards, and other paperwork. Born and raised in Budapest, Hungary, she fled to Switzerland and southern Germany in the late 1950s and finally moved to Berlin in the 1960s, where she started to work as a tailor. She had four husbands over her lifetime, some of whom died and some she divorced. She found her much younger, beloved, last husband in Berlin in the early 1970s. He died about ten years ago and she suffered this loss until her own death. His photograph decorated one wall of the bar, along with all kinds of souvenirs of him. She mentioned him in almost every conversion and it is clear that he was the main figure in her and well as the bar's life.

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[151] My former bar colleagues and I stayed in touch with her, even after her business closed in 2014, until her death in autumn 2015.

Figure 36: The bar owner's last birthday party in the bar before the business closed.

The two opened the bar together in the early 1970s and rented the apartment in the back, where they both lived. She gave up her previous job and started managing the bar's kitchen (selling classic Berlin bar food), and supporting her husband, who managed the bar in the front. Because she and her husband kept the bar open more or less every day for almost four decades, they almost never left the block. Even when her own mobility decreased, so many people came to the bar to share their information with her that she knew more gossip (about the residential and commercial changes and the local neighborhood news) than probably any other local.[152]

Most of her customers were locals. Some long-standing customers had moved to other neighborhoods, but many returned on a regular basis. The owner was well connected within the building as well, residents of two apartments in the building would often visit the bar and support the owner with little

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[152] She knew the answers to questions like who opened what kind of business, who pushed whom out, which local politician was seen where and why, what kind of concerts take place where and when, where robberies and other crimes happened and by whom, where the new construction sites were, who the newcomers were and where they came from. Since she didn't use this information for her own everyday life due to her immobility, she mostly forwarded it to other customers whom she thought might need it.

services such as going shopping for her. Former building residents also returned on a regular basis to visit the bar.

In the later years of the bar's operation, the owner employed a couple of waitresses and a cleaning woman (she wasn't paid, rather she helped at the bar out of friendship), who supported her with the bar's management and distributing drinks to the tables. The building was sold to a new real estate company that raised the rents and started to convert rental apartments into condominiums in late 2013. All businesses and tenants were forced to leave if they weren't able to buy their spaces. Operating the business as a single senior woman without savings, the owner was finally forced to give up her bar and retire. Afterwards, her health declined dramatically. [153]

New café, shopping mall, hair salon

Last but not least, my field work included spending a good deal of time in a recently opened (2014) "lifestyle" café, the local shopping mall, and a local hair salon. However, the owners of these establishments did not allow me to conduct interviews.[154]

"New" Café

I have deemed this new café a "lifestyle" café, because more or less the same lifestyle group frequents the establishment: The customers seem to belong to the same age group and seem to have the same aesthetic preferences and clothing styles. The café is busiest from the late mornings until the early evenings. The customers visit the café to eat lunch, to meet with friends or colleagues, and, above all, to study or work with their laptops. As per the waitress, the customers are men and women of mainly German, US-American, Turkish, and West and North European descent with similar educational backgrounds and consumption practices. They are generally between 20 and 40 years old. According to the waitresses, most customers are university students, who reside in the neighborhood, and so-called young entrepreneurs, who work locally in design or arts-related businesses. Tourists increasingly make up a larger part of the customer base. They mainly come for breakfast or brunch on the weekends.

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[153] Officially, the business is now a moving and liquidation business, but it practically served as a club café for Turkish men after the closure of the bar. In early 2015, the business was turned into a Greek men café. Only some of the former regulars found a new meeting place. After her death in 2015, I talked to some of them and they are still bemoaning the loss of their "living room," "center," "where it all came together." Most don't go out as often as before due to the lack of a new regular space or their difficulties to become a regular in a new bar.

[154] I also conducted limited participant observations in a local kiosk, a kebab takeaway, and a cell phone store. However, the reluctance of the owners to participate in the study and the spatial design of the stores did not allow for extensive observations without the permission of the owners and staff.

Figure 37: View of the new café from the back room

The café is one of the first on Karl-Marx-Straße to offer free Wi-Fi and appeal directly to an English-speaking target group.[155] The menu is written in English with German subtitles. They offer mostly German and Turkish food and beverages, which are priced slightly higher than in the adjacent cafés and bakeries. They also offer mostly vegetarian, vegan, and organic options. The business opens to the street with a window front, along which a table and bench allow customers to be watched from and to watch the street while they consume. This is a major difference from the other two investigated cafés that are either set back from the street in backyards or open to the back.

The café has three floors, which, along with the country-style furniture, give off a feeling of a private apartment. In 2014, the bar presented itself both to the street and in social media as a "soul food restaurant." They advertised their Mediterranean menu, vegan and vegetarian selection, catering, and special events held at the café. The owner is of Turkish descent. He explicitly targets the growing number of tourists and international users of the street. Although customers tend to spend a significant amount of time in the business, I rarely observed unplanned encounters or interactions with other

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[155] On a restaurant review homepage, customers describe the business as "pioneering," "hip," "newly designed," and "chic." And "I see, another stylish hipster-shop in Neukölln (at least on Karl-Marx-Straße, wherewith they show a little pioneering spirit)" (01/22/2014).

customers. Most customers appeared to be preoccupied with their work or friends. However, during lunch time, regular customers chat familiarly with the employees. The staff is mostly female and between 20 and 30 years old. Most work only part time in the café and live in the adjacent neighborhoods. Despite the relatively short business history, the staff and owner have already developed ties with regular customers and vice versa.

Shopping Mall

A major anchor for the Karl-Marx-Straße commercial district is a shopping mall constructed in 2000 (see more in Chapter 2). With around 27,000 m^2, it houses more than 50 businesses on five floors, most of which are chain stores that sell clothes, shoes, books, electronic devices, home decorations and furniture. Several fast food restaurants, cafés, bakeries, a bigger supermarket, a postal office, banks, and drug stores are also located in the mall. The upper floors contain additional franchise and chain businesses, a parking garage, a municipal library, a fitness studio, and a multiplex cinema, which draw additional customers to the mall. As mentioned, Karl-Marx-Straße was home to several large department stores in the distant past (cf. Chapter 2). Throughout the 1990s, the district government of Neukölln debated about whether to support the new shopping mall instead of the local warehouses. Finally in September 2000, the mall opened, despite the resistance and critique of local small business owners. Due to the low purchase power of local residents and the mismatch between what the shops in the mall initially offered and what the residents could buy, the mall was resold and remodeled in 2003. Since then, it has begun catering more directly to residents of Neukölln and the adjacent neighborhoods.

An expansive bar and community garden also opened on the roof of the parking garage after much encouragement from the local urban renewal program, *City Management*, and mall management in June 2013. Promoted as an "artistic and cultural roof garden" with a spectacular view of the entire Berlin cityscape, the bar also occasionally hosts events such as concerts and dance parties. This "hipster bar" draws additional customers (who differ from the usual mall users) to the shopping mall.

Figure 38: Shopping mall, as seen from the outside

After the rooftop bar opened in early summer 2013, tourists and nightlife visitors frequent the mall more often. As per my observations, the everyday shoppers mostly use the main door next to the subway stop, whereas the bar guests seem to use mostly the back door that leads directly to the elevators. Therefore there is little interaction between these two customer groups. Rather, interactions occur mostly between the bar guests and library users, car drivers, and senior customers in the spacious elevators.

Local teenagers and senior residents also hang out at the shopping mall, a practice which is widely accepted by the mall's security guards. The mall is particularly crowded during the colder months and rainy seasons, to the disfavor of the other business owners along Karl-Marx-Straße. The mall also participates in local cultural events. For example, it provides exhibition space and also sponsors an

annual fashion show for local designers and artists. The owner of the mall sponsors some of these events and also pays its staff overtime hours to work at these local community and business meetings. This logistical support gives the mall a structural advantage in these meetings compared to individual business owners who must attend on their free time, often without a direct financial benefit. The mall's managers spend a significant amount of time lobbying for the interests of the mall and have successfully worked together with the local district authorities, the urban renewal program and particularly the local *City Management* team.

Figure 39: Screenshot of rooftop bar's homepage[156]

Hair salon

The hair salon was originally opened in 1955 on a side street of Karl-Marx-Straße. After two moves, the business settled in its current location on a different side street, just a few steps from Karl-Marx-Straße, in 1973. It is currently owned and operated by the daughter of the original owners—a well-kept woman around 60 years old, who, despite being the full owner and spokesperson of the salon, constantly mentions her husband as being the one who makes the business decisions. All of the members of the

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[156] Courtesy: Neuköllner Kranichgesellschaft mbH.

family used to work together in their salon until the owner's sister and her son opened their own businesses in other Berlin districts and the grandparents retired.

The store can be best described as a classy, old-fashioned salon. The wall décor is neat and tidy; beige and gold carpets line the floors; the seating is leopard-print; and the shampoos and cosmetics are high-quality and expensive. The well-groomed employees call their business "exquisite" and converse in the old, cultivated way, which seems to please the observed customers. Customers are served with coffee and snacks during their appointments and chats are common between the regular clientele and long-term employees. The owner places high value on her business' long history in the neighborhood and proudly speaks of her customers, many of whom are male workers in the local administration, politicians, or business people, and their wives. According to my observations, most are of German and Polish descent. According to the owner, the salon also attracts wealthier customers and particularly local business people of Turkish descent, so she also employs hairdressers of Turkish descent.

During my observations, most customers stayed for at least for 30 minutes, regardless of whether they got a haircut, a hairstyle, or just came for a chat or to make an appointment. These customers were mostly well-dressed women over 50, who spoke with the local accent and sported elaborate hairstyles (e.g. teased perms).

The staff is well trained and offers excellent service; however, the products and services are more expensive than in many other local hair salons. Compared to the other local hair salons, this salon also specializes on "traditional" haircuts and other services (e.g. classy pinned-up hair styles or perms). In my phone interview with the owner, she said that her business struggles to maintain its clientele, since many senior customers have already passed away or moved away to retirement homes. She also claimed that the new customers in the neighborhood seem to prefer cheaper or more "hip" hair dressers.

Figure 40: Window of the hair salon

Although we had already talked several times on the phone, the owner canceled our interview shortly before we were supposed to meet in her store. She sounded hesitant, shy, and suspicious on the phone, even though I had known her to be an outgoing person and a leading local business woman. She explained that she had talked to her husband and that they both decided that they were not willing to meet for an interview. But first and foremost, she mentioned that their business is experiencing troubles "due to all these changes here" and that she has "some serious problems." My understanding of the competing businesses (so-called 10-Euro, "Turkish," and hip "lifestyle" hair salons, also named by the owner) suggest that mainly the store's aging regular customers and old-fashioned design mean a loss of sales (despite the well-trained and up-to-date staff) rather than the street's bad reputation. When I asked about the kind of problems and offered my help to her, she repeated "Yes <u>this</u> kind of changes that are going here, our business is not running well, and things get broken." She was reluctant to go into further detail and sounded desperate. She asked if:

the interview [is] about Karl-Marx-Straße? I don't want to add to that. It doesn't help us. I'm afraid that I can read my name somewhere in a published text. This is too much of insights into my business. I am afraid that I lose even more by talking to you. I am so sorry. But I am afraid. We really struggle.[157]

She also refused to allow me to conduct further observations in her business—in part because she seemed ashamed of the loss of customers and in part because she feared that my writing might turn off any remaining potential customers. However, we did have several, comprehensive conversations on the phone, which revealed that she is not coping well with the demographic changes in the neighborhood. She is unwilling to adapt to new customer demands or to reduce her prices; and she fears she will need to lay off some of her long-term employees. However, she welcomes the installment of the *City Management* program and considers it as helping her to further operate her salon successfully - neglecting the *City Management's* focus on new "hip" cafés, restaurants, galleries and boutiques, and their gastronomization of the street. She does advertise her business locally, particularly in the urban renewal program's published material. However, these advertisements highlight features that do not necessarily match the taste and demand of the long-term low-income residents or the new residents.

Conclusion

The sensitizing concepts of "public interactions" and the "public realm" (Lofland, Goffman), "third places" (Oldenburg), and "public characters" (Jacobs), as well as other dynamics that may generate "community," led me to examine different kinds of businesses, ranging from chilly, small places to warm, comfortable, large ones. Data from participant observations and in-depth interviews provide not only a historical and geographical tour of the selected businesses, but also a broader understanding of the people who work and consume in this commercial district.[158]

Because most Neukölln households do not own an automobile and there is very little need to visit other districts (whether for employment, schooling, or leisure), many residents around Karl-Marx-Straße spend much of their time locally.[159] The average amount of time customers spent in these businesses

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[157] I offered anonymization to all of my interviewees (with the exception of this owner, all rejected). Although I repeatedly reassured her that neither her nor her business' name would appear in any published material, she replied that she feels too embarrassed to let anyone into her formerly renowned and prosperous salon. However and to my surprise, after my calls, she gave an extensive interview and allowed photographs of her and her salon to be included in the local *City Management's* publication.

[158] I consider working and consuming to be the two "main" or most obvious, but not only, social practices.

[159] Less than 200 of 1000 inhabitants own a car in northern Neukölln. See: Berlin – das Hauptstadtportal (n.d.). Berlin Verkehr in Zahlen 2013,

varies widely depending on the type of business. These time frames range from two hours or more in the bar or the main cafés, to 30 minutes in the lunch restaurant, butcher shop (during lunch time), or flower store, to less than ten minutes in the pharmacy and vegetable store. As shopping increasingly becomes a means to express one's identity, men are more likely to visit businesses that used to be occupied more with female shoppers (e.g. cafés, shopping malls, grocery stores). The observations and the owners' descriptions of their customers show that men seem no less consumption-oriented than women. On the other hand, in the past, many bars or pubs in Neukölln[160] imposed strong customary barriers to participation by (single) women (Walters/ Broom 2013: 197). Other reports from the interviewees (and my own observations in the early 2000s) suggest that most local businesses were largely the realm of women in their daytime manifestations, whereas male sociability used to dominate the bars and nighttime consumption places, with strong norms of behavior evolving around the consumption of beer until the 2010s (cf. Walters/ Broom 2013: 189).

Now, however, such bars receive as many women as men, according to my observations and the businesses' staff. Today, with the exception of the flower store, none of the businesses receive significantly more women than men. However, as the portraits reveal, the stores are still gendered places at certain times of day. For example, the butcher shop tends to be male dominated during lunch time and the flower store is female dominating not only during the coffee klatch. The increase in single households and employed women has also generated more customers for the here examined grocery stores, butcher shop, and main café.

In sum, the social phenomena of daily shopping, eating, and drinking have become widespread across lines of gender, class, ethnicity, and age on Karl-Marx-Straße. With this said, the descriptive-explanatory portraits of the sampled stores serve as the socio-spatial and narrative context for the following analysis chapters on first, the businesses' features that increase the in-store interaction and sociability and their origins in practice, and on second, the store owners' social practices that affect the building of this social "more."

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http://www.stadtentwicklung.berlin.de/verkehr/politik_planung/zahlen_fakten/download/Mobilitaet_dt_komplet t.pdf, accessed 04/27/2016.

[160] Most long-standing bars can be best described as typical working class neighborhood bars or corner bars, in other words, places for sociability among male (blue-collar) workers. The bars that opened after 2006, the date to which most interviewees refer to as the start of gentrification, pose not only less physical or social barriers to women, but target them directly as an important and potentially affluent clientele (e.g. offering drinks, lighting, music, furniture and a behavioral codex that the respective staff perceive as conducive for women customers).

6. Businesses as Spaces that Generate "More": The Socio-Spatial Features for "talking about everything," "coming down," and "staying in touch"[161]

This chapter analyzes data from interviews and observation with regard to the precise features that make businesses sites for interaction, and eventually, for community. More precisely, I aim to determine the distinct material and social features that support sociability and interaction among customers, staff, and owners. The data and concepts generated from interviews and observations are thereby analyzed using the features Oldenburg ascribed to his so-called third places as a conceptual lens. In addition, the characteristics that Lofland (1972; 1973; 1998) and Goffman's (1959; 1963; 1971) (and partially Kusenbach 2006, 2008) assign to (semi-) public behavior are also useful to my analysis of the social life in the businesses. Disentangling the different practices allows us to holistically understand how they merge together to create an easy-going atmosphere that often supports networking and community building practices. In contrast to the sites that Oldenburg (mostly bars and restaurants) and Lofland and Goffman (mostly public places and cafés) investigated, this chapter reflects on the comparatively broader business sample used in the entire study.

Oldenburg's ideas about third places and their importance for neighborhood life are discussed in section 3.1. Here, I aim to tailor his work into an operationalized sensitizing concept in order to guide my own empirical research. Therefore, this chapter first offers a brief recapitulation of Oldenburg's main arguments and my critique thereof. I then use the features found in my case-studies to present an "updated" argument about third place attributes. To this end, Goffman and Lofland's elaborations are also included in order to conceptualize the practices observed and how they may (or may not) relate to other socio-spatial features, and how they reveal perceptions and usage of the business for more public, parochial/semi-public, or private aspects. Different degrees of publicness also influence the social life in the businesses. This conceptual framework, derived from the sensitizing concepts, in turn enables me to develop own conceptual statements about the practiced communal social life and enacted senses of home or belonging in the respective business.

According to Oldenburg (1989, 2001), being neither places of residence (first) or work (second), third places allow for communities[162] to develop through the gathering of people and the discussion of a broad range of topics. However, Oldenburg's analysis (and that of his followers) of neighborhood bars,

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[161] Quotes from owner of Café I (l. 287, 159, 212).
[162] Oldenburg never clarifies what he means with community, whether of shared geographical location, shared interests, or shared practices.

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taverns, and cafés is methodologically unclear and seems to lack empirical evidence. Moreover, he fails to plumb the depths of the rules and norms of the micro-interactions in these businesses.[163] Oldenburg's study further suffers from his restricted focus on gastronomic facilities. From his investigation of this very restricted sample, he derives the following third place attributes: "neutral ground;" an "egalitarian ideology;" "conversation as the main activity;" "easy accessibility" (ideally by foot); a certain number of "regulars" who develop a set of specific behavior for the place; "playfulness"; and a "particular type of freedom" that creates a sense of "homeliness" but with a portion of "novelty" that one could not find at home (1999: 22 f.). These attributes, according to Oldenburg, allow people within a given place to generate and sustain generalized friendships and habits of association (Oldenburg 1999: 43 ff.).

Despite my critique of Oldenburg's methodological unclarity and his narrow reliance on US American neighborhood taverns, his list of features and respective terminology serve as a point of departure to categorize and conceptually enhance my interview and observation findings (cf. Chapter 5).[164]

My field site and business sample typify "ordinary" (Hall 2012) inner-city (for most part pre-war) spaces and ordinary mixed-use shopping streets common to German cities. The street and the businesses are more ethnically, socially, and functionally diverse than most of Oldenburg's cases. Since the 1980s, when Oldenburg first applied his communitarian idea to businesses, inner-city and suburban neighborhoods have changed dramatically; as have shopping patterns and retail districts (see Chapter 2.2.). Furthermore, as discussed, the recent increase in information and communication technologies (ICTs) has changed the ways shoppers and retailers buy and sell and other leisure-oriented consumptive practices (Memarovic et al. 2014). In his 2009 edited volume, Oldenburg denigrates bar games, books, laptops, and smart-phones[165] as being too distracting from the playful conversations that make a business a third place. However, as will be shown in the following subchapters, ICTs can also invite personal conversations, as well as virtual conversations with those not present; therefore, they may perhaps create a new contemporary third place characteristic.

Over the course of his career, Oldenburg's writings reflect a shift in his focus from the "abstract" atmosphere of third places to more concrete social aspects (e.g., in his 1999 book *The Great Good*

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[163] See for instance the collection of third place case studies in Tjora/ Scambler (2013), focusing on cafés and coffee houses.

[164] If the findings are coherent in different businesses, I present only some of them as examples in order to avoid redundancies and repetitions.

[165] These are summarized under the term *Information and Communication Technologies* (ICTs) in this thesis.

Place). More recently (in Tjora/ Scambler 2013), Oldenburg also highlights the practice of "hanging out" as one of the main "functions" (p. 10 ff.) of third places. My analysis reveals more detailed and more praxeological findings that show that Oldenburg's "hanging out" provides only a social basis, but is alone insufficient for further networking and interaction between diverse people. The following sections argue that hanging out depends on a specific spatial design, on the availability of furniture, and on the acceptance of behavioral norms that prioritize a particularly social kind of consumption that may differ from everyday commercial transactions. This undermines Oldenburg's deterministic language of "functioning" and "functions." While examining each of Oldenburg's ascribed socio-spatial features in turn, the discussion below draws particular attention to practice-related aspects. My research showed that owners' practices are the most important in shaping the social lives of the businesses; therefore, the owners' special role for the generation of a social "more" is discussed in detail in Chapter 7.

6.1. "The idea was to create a meeting point"[166] - *Neutral Grounds* or Inclusive Publicness

In accordance with the urban studies literature on placemaking and the production of space, my observations and interviews indicate that there is no such thing as a neutral space, as a space without power relations and meanings (e.g. Fainstein 2005; Lefebvre 1991; Smith 2010). For instance, the **flower store** owner's social practices create clear hierarchies. Whenever she hosts her regular customers for a coffee meeting beyond the purchase, she decides the seating plan and moves her customers to their respective folding chairs, while she makes herself comfortable in her lambskin-covered, pillow-stuffed chair, pouring out coffee out and serving her guests. It is solely the owner who starts conversational topics and she freely interrupts others if they bore her or if she disagrees with them; she also often prevents her customers from fully expressing their opinions. Whereas the flower store might serve as a "neutral ground" (Oldenburg 1997: 9; 1999: 22 f.) for drop-in customers and all customers that are able to afford fresh flowers, the exclusive coffee table is less neutral. The coffee parties raise distinct (role) expectations and obligations, such as showing up regularly, bringing cookies or cakes, consenting to the owner's opinions, and so on. Whereas third place customers are free to come and go in Oldenburg's model, the flower store owner decides whether or not to set up a coffee table and who is allowed to participate. The clear differences in status between the host and the guests/customers structures conversational topics, service, furniture placement, and (im)personal interactions, all of which go

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[166] Paraphrased quote from organic store owner (l. 107): "The idea was first to create a meeting point."

beyond commercial exchange. Thus the flower store's ground cannot be considered neutral as in Oldenburg's conceptualization.

Power relations between staff and customers are comparatively more balanced in the **butcher's shop**, or, at least, they are not as obviously differentiated. Employees do not act like hosts as in the coffee table setting in the flower store. Furthermore, even if they serve the regular customers with an intimate and aligning gesture, the employees almost never leave their positions behind the counter. Hence, the front room belongs solely to the customers. The staff of the butcher shop does indeed foster open social exchanges, sometimes initiating personal conversations; however, they never dominate these conversations as long as other customers are present. The owner has set a behavioral code and a standard for hard work that prevents staff and customers from pursuing such conversations if other customers are waiting in line. The owner also limits open exchange whenever he thinks it is slowing down sales or business operations. However, customers and staff do discuss a variety of private topics during lunch time, sometimes ending up in heated debates. Customers come and go as they please, but other lunch customers and employees may tease them if they haven't shown up in a while. The butcher shop's "neutrality" (Oldenburg 1999) thus comes with loose strings attached.

The neutrality of all the sampled **cafés**, whether new or old, is directly related to their spatial setting. The cafes all have multiple tables and chairs, where customers can exchange private information or engage in small talk against the murmuring background noise, without having to worry that other people will listen or interrupt. However, if customers or employees realize that others are watching or listening, they immediately quiet their conversations. Since the main practices in cafés besides eating and drinking are talking to others or interacting with electronic devices (often still in the presence of others), the comparatively neutral ground seems to place few limits on what can be discussed: everything is allowed so long as the conversations is appropriate in volume and gestures. Because of this easy-going atmosphere and the primary practices of selling, serving, and purchasing/ consuming, less self-confidence and performance (in the sense of Goffman 1959) are needed. This supports and encourages low-threshold participation.

For instance when I entered the **main café** for the first time, and particularly when I was watched by the other people in the store, I (and I assume all other newcomers) had to immediately discern the implicit and explicit rules of the café's space and how things "are to be done." This included figuring out how orders are placed (self-service or waiters?), which products are where - and if one is allowed to touch them, what volume is appropriate, where the line for the cashier or the counter begins and ends, where

the free tables are, and so on. Taking the atmosphere and ambiance into account, I had to decide quickly how to act in that social and material environment.

Hence, my own experience as well as my ethnographic observations show that the decoration, lighting, background noise and music, furniture arrangement, the (physical and symbolic) display of the merchandise, and the presence of other people all have a strong impact on how customers act and interact in these spaces. This is in line with Goffman and Lofland's observations, but it diverges from Oldenburg's idea of neutrality: The café's ground is anything but neutral; the atmosphere and the degree of familiarity determine if the café is used as a public or as a semi-private space.

Furthermore, the social life in the sampled cafés can be framed as a dynamic "business ballet" (to borrow from Jacobs' "sidewalk ballet"): The image of the ballet refers to the constant movement of bodies and material—a dance that is confined to the café space, the duration of the stay, and the respective social setting. The dance is always changing, involving different dancers in different *tempos* and styles depending on the available space and time of the day or week.

An analytical look at this ballet provides insights into what exactly the businesses might mean for the neighborhood. As micro-publics (Amin 2002), the cafés[167] blur the lines between public and private. To understand how this works, it is useful to imagine the business as a stage, divided by a "curtain" into front and back stages. In the café, the front stage/ space could be considered the sales area and dining room, where as the back office, the kitchen and the space behind the counter might be the back stage/space. At a different spatial level, we could also think about the street as a front space and the business as a back space.

Intimate behavior and private relations can be found in all these spaces, which are nonetheless rarely neutral. So, too, do we see the "performances" that Goffman (1959) ascribes to public spaces (an individual's activities in front of a particular set of observers) in all spaces. Both spaces are performative and are not neatly aligned, but often with different audiences and different senses of familiarity. Since the different public and private settings in the cafés have different audiences, the actor (e.g. the waitress or customer) must alter their performances for each setting. In the front stage, the performance defines the social situation to the observers. However, the front stage, which is not necessarily restricted to sales or dining rooms or public sidewalk, is where customers and employees

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[167] Observations indicate that the same processes and phenomena of blurring lines of public and private spaces can be found in all gastronomic businesses and the flower store, but not the lunch restaurant.

formally perform and adhere to specific conventions that hold meaning for the "audience", i.e., the other people present in or around the business. The performer knows that he or she is being watched and acts accordingly (Goffman 1959). The primary practices of selling, serving, buying, and consuming ease the performance and invite further interaction and conversation. For instance, one actor, the owner of the **main café**, uses the performance to give meaning and identity to himself, to others, and to their common situation. When he greets or hugs certain customers as they enter the business, he enacts and reaffirms their esteemed identity as regular customers or members of his social circle. At the same time, the owner reinforces his status as the owner, as the one who can decide who is "in" and who is "out" of that special circle of regulars. Significantly, the performance is enacted for the benefit of all the other customers and staff. However, these social settings (*social scripts* as per Goffman) sometimes become institutionalized, creating (abstract but also often concrete or stereotyped) expectations about how the owner should behave or interact in that situation. If the store owner does not continue to greet a customer in such a warm way, the customer may feel disappointed and excluded as a result of this moment of abstraction. This, however, applies to both customers and staff: If either one takes on a new role or task, they might encounter several already well-established fronts among which they will be forced to choose (Goffman 1959).

My ethnographic fieldwork in the main café thus reveals that the business' everyday ballet comprises both frontstage and backstage behavior, and the two are often blurred. Performers alternate between confident, purposed frontstage performances that are directed specifically toward an audience with more relaxed, muted, and intimate interactions. So if we imagine the main café as a theater, wherein the frontstage is mainly confined to the dining room, sales room, and the furnished sidewalk, one can observe the actions and performances in the front and the back interlacing in a dance.

However, Oldenburg's plea for neutral grounds does not address power relations in public or private or front and back stage spaces and how these relations result in specific behaviors. Rather, he explores the alleviation of the roles and relationships required in first and second places, i.e., mother-child, wife-husband, employer-employee. Since the customers do not own the businesses, nor are they responsible in the same way for other people as they might be in "first" or "second" spaces, the places of businesses are comparatively more neutral for customers. The dominant actor groups are owner, customer, and server in the cafés, but observations also revealed amicable interaction between them. In addition, since owners and staff in all the cafés only approach regular customers whom they already know in a friendly and particularly intimate manner, these employees do not change or interfere with the content

of the observed customer-to-customer interactions. Usually, the volume and seriousness—but also the playfulness—of conversation topics increases as the day grows later and increasingly more alcoholic beverages are consumed. [168]

However, a comparison of the observed interactions across the gastronomic facilities (main café, additional cafés/restaurants, the lunch restaurant and the bar) reveal that each place has its own norms and codes with regard to both public and private behavior: For instance, during one of my visits, a regular customer entered the **lunch restaurant** during the early afternoon, and the owner engaged here in the following terse, churlish exchange, conducting a transaction in a tone that sounded more like they were trading barbs than negotiating a transaction:

> Owner: Hunger?
> Guest: Yes, hunger, hunger.
> Owner: Hunger. What else?
> Guest: What's left?
> Owner: Bean stew with lamb. Yummy.
> Guest: Yummy?
> Owner: Yummy.
> Guest: Yes (nodding) […] if you say the daily special is agreeable, is good, then I take it (l. 304 - 320).

In any of the other restaurants and businesses, such a gruff exchange would be considered inappropriate and would create discomfort. For instance, in the **café II,** when a customer shouted into his cell phone for a couple of minutes, the surrounding customers cleared their throats and rolled with their eyes to signal him to calm down. Finally, the waitress went over and asked him to lower his voice. He then complained to the person on the phone about the rude service, so the waitress reacted in a harsher way and stopped serving him for the rest of his stay. So even if the café is open to any paying customer, it is not neutral toward inappropriate behavior: The staff decides if customers are served or asked to leave.

However, in the "hunger?"-social exchange above, between these two well-acquainted men, such a tone and style binds them together as "partners in crime." By "speaking the same language," they are reinforcing their relationship, as they told me when they saw my puzzled face.

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[168] The main café does not serve alcoholic beverages. Two of the three cafés that are open into the evening and night increase the volume of the background music at sunset. In the new café, which many customers use as a "public office", employees make sure to keep the tone and volume of conversations much lower in order to not disturb working customers.

The **bar** offers a neutral ground so long as customers want to consume alcoholic beverages before closing. There, men and women of various ages and ethnic backgrounds discuss an incredibly broad range of topics with acquaintances as well as with total strangers. At the counter, the owner moves in and out of conversations, sensitive as to whether her opinion is or is not wanted by her customers. Customers discuss very personal issues; they cry and moan - usually apologizing in embarrassment to others immediately thereafter. The bar thus functions also as a private space. However, the owner does not universally allow all kinds of topics or behavior and will ask customers to stop or leave if she does not like what they are saying or doing.

The two examples show that the business space is thus only a neutral ground as long as those conversations happen out of sight of the owner or staff or remain in line with their norms and codes.

The degrees of neutrality within the **pharmacy** play out first and foremost in professional behavior of the staff. The staff services a wide-range of clients and engages in a variety of conversation types. They comfort, consult, diagnose; they tease and chat with the customers; they celebrate holidays and birthdays – but always maintaining a professional distance in order to create a neutral ground that will allow their customers to raise their concerns, needs, and sorrows. Customers, after all, come first and foremost to receive help. Hence, conversation stems from and circles around health-issues and is conducted in hushed tones. This formal and professional way of speaking maintains privacy and avoids any performance that includes a wider audience. Nevertheless, employees and the owner repeatedly welcome long-term customers with a hug or a pat on the shoulders, acting as more than a pharmacist, but as a friend or helper. Despite the place's emphasis on discretion and the customers' purchasing needs, the pharmacy's salesroom also serves as a ground within which to discuss topics beyond health issues. Customers and staff exchange words on neighborhood change and neighborhood gossip; in these conversations, the staff acts in a more open and less commandeering way than the bar owner.

The limited physical space in the (now-closed) **fruit and vegetable store** (FVS) and the fact that customers cannot serve themselves means that employees were always involved in interactions with customers about their purchases. Because the store, as piled up boxes with fruits and vegetables in a gateway to the 19th century building, opens to the sidewalk, the business has a more public appearance than some of the other shops, and seems even to be perceived as part of the sidewalk. Customers stand and chat in the entrance threshold just as on the sidewalks. Being constantly exposed to passers-by increases the perception of the business as part of the public sphere. The absence of a host or symbolic owner fosters the neutrality of the space. The salesperson seems to welcome any potential customer

and almost any form of conversation. Many customers continue to talk on their phones, or to address their children or to engage in similar "distracted" social practices while looking for fruits and vegetables in the open store. For these reasons, the business space seems to be more public than private, and in that regard is more "neutral."

My findings therefore indicate that in comparison to the home or the workplace, where age-, position-, or relationship-based hierarchies determine whose opinion or norms dominate social interactions, the stores are comparatively more neutral partially because of the perceived or practiced publicness of the spaces. Nevertheless, the stores' owners and their employees formally hold power over the space and the conversations held therein. So the observations of the behavior in the businesses, which range from "public" to "private" (in the Goffmanian sense), indicate that the spaces function as more public or private spaces for individual customers and staff with high levels of sociability. However, a higher degree of publicness and public behavior in business does not necessarily increase the businesses' neutrality. So it remains unclear what Oldenburg means by "neutral ground" as a feature of business that fosters sociability. If Oldenburg only means some kind of "openness" or "publicness," given that these businesses are all public accommodations (Feagin 1991) or semi-public/parochial places (Kusenbach 2006; 2008; Lofland 1998), the businesses I am studying can be conceptualized as third places.

They are also "public" in the sense that the law prevents private owners from refusing entry to any would-be customer (with a few small exceptions) (Britton 2008). The neutrality of these public places is limited both by the different domiciliary rights of their owners and by their implicit and explicit "house rules." In practice, the sampled businesses play with physical arrangements and legal statuses, but also different patterns of social interaction.

For instance (and detailed further below), customers and staff "privatize" the (semi-)public space, by turning the front rooms into non-neutral or more private spaces. The changed design and socio-spatial features of public accommodations and semi-public spaces then ease encounters among strangers. Further, if Oldenburg's neutral ground requires a balanced role among owner, staff, and customers, my observations show that one kind of actor (usually staff and owners) always remains "responsible" for, or "serves" the other, even if different nuances of (mutual) dependency exist.

So as Oldenburg (1999; 2001) notes, the occupants of third places have little to no obligation to be there; they can come and go as they please and are not tied down to the locale financially, politically,

legally, socially, or otherwise. This holds true for the businesses along Karl-Marx-Straße insofar as neutral ground refers to the publicness of the business spaces. Depending on their physical outlay, the social practices in the store simultaneously wander between the poles of public and private. Nevertheless, they are still less-rigid than in family or work situations, where participants need to fulfill more hierarchically-structured roles.

Hence, in comparison to the home or office, the businesses' socio-spatial settings often allowed for more neutral exchanges, even if the level of neutrality was limited. According to Oldenburg, neutrality should foster the development of a broad interactional web. But while the interview and observation data does not support Oldenburg's general notion of neutrality or neutral grounds, they show that the sampled businesses offer a ground for a high variety of social exchanges, for people with diverse backgrounds and equally diverse opinions and worldviews to meet without being constrained by having to play a particular role; that is, as long as they follow the formal owners' behavioral rules. Even though my data shows that there is no such thing as a purely neutral ground, the next subchapter discusses how the businesses level differences between the customers.

6.2. "We are committed to all and we also want the store to be for all"[169] -Businesses as *Levelers*

According to Oldenburg (1999: 22 f.), third places "level" and balance social inequalities; they are spaces without specific criteria for inclusion, e.g., specific educational or income background, lifestyle, subculture, or age group. Although the majority of sampled businesses offer quotidian products, they still take customer lifestyle considerations into the account when deciding how to deliver goods or services.[170] One would think, for instance, that the **flower store**, a small localized "regular" shop, would appeal to anyone who could afford flowers (even though flowers are still luxury goods). The owner mentions, however, that since most customers are not in urgent need of a bouquet as they pass the store, their decision to enter is influenced by the window (and outdoor) display. She thinks that most customers already have preferences about which flower store they like, a statement confirmed by my (walk-along) observations of the customers on Karl-Marx-Straße. Taste, aesthetics, and lifestyle all

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[169] Paraphrased quote by owner of main café (l. 66 f.): "We are committed [to everybody] and we also want {the business] to be for everybody."
[170] Everyday supplies are increasingly becoming lifestyle products, such as (organic) cleaning products or take-away food.

influence the decision to purchase flowers or home decorations. Hence, market segmentation along these lines restricts the degree to which a flower store, as a luxury good provider, can be a leveler (cf. Chapter 3.1.).

Being included into the social life of a business levels some of the socio-economic or educational differences between customers or between customers and staff - even if only for the time they are in the store or eatery. For instance, the flower store owner approaches all drop-in customers, regardless of their ethnicity, age, income-level, or spending habits, in the same polite yet perfunctory way. However, esteemed customers receive benefits such as service-based extras like item reservation and pre-orders, as well as social benefits like empathetic listening or the exchange of interesting newspaper articles and magazines. But only customers, who have developed a relationship with the owner and her mother, especially those who receive the regular coffee invitations, are truly included socially in this store. In this case, social inclusion means a "business-related friendship," from which both owner and customers benefit. Through some of her services for her customers, such as going shopping for the elderly women, exchanging local news, and delivering or picking up goods for regular customers, the owner endows the customer with a status equal to her own. She also acts respectful to the long-term venerable women who frequent her business (many of whom own local buildings or are wives/widows of honorable businessmen). For the owner, the benefits of the "business-related friendships," include distraction from her work-days, a transformation in her own social status, and an emotional fulfillment that comes from being needed. The observed conversations reveal that although the regular customers appreciate and respect the owner, they nevertheless still consider themselves as having a higher class background than the (younger and still-working) owner. My question about their former employment was answered with irritation: "Nooo, we never had to work!" The "we" refers to two of the coffee table regulars. That they didn't have to work is supposed to underline that they were always sufficiently well off. Few of the senior women had a career and many consider their status as non-working wives or stay-at-home-mothers a luxury allowed by their husbands' high incomes, whereas the owner still has to work long hours. Hence, despite the owner's efforts to use special treatment to balance her status with that of her customers, the flower store owner does not successfully level the different backgrounds between her customers and herself. Hence, in this regard and despite the manifold attempts on behalf of the owner, on her willingness to offer "more" through caring for and socializing with her regulars, she is not rewarded with a "levelled" status.

While in the flower store, customers only stay for a chat and take a seat, if the owner invites them to do so, the employees in the **main café** invite customers to sit as long as they like, as long as they have purchased an item, be it either a full meal or just a cup of tea (according to the owner and my observations). Elderly people can stay the whole day while having only one or two small cups of tea (for around 80 cents). Staff approach both familiar and unfamiliar guests with the same polite tone and customers are treated even more "equally" in the self-service or checkout lines. Due to the limited size of the café, the cramped sales space is packed with furniture and fast-moving people; making physical contact and interaction is therefore likely and acceptable. For instance, when the waitresses enter from the backroom with hot meals in their hands, they shout the name of the meal into the dining room in order to get the customer's attention and to secure free space through which to move. This call may also be a performative attempt to gain respect for how hard they are working. They then push through the crowded room, directing customers out of their way. They "dance" while carrying the meal to the table. They often tease the customers that their body size is preventing them from moving forward. If they have a free hand, the servers may lightly touch the customers in a friendly and familiar way. Usually, further verbal and physical interaction evolves out of this contact: customers tease the waitresses in return or comment on the meal they are balancing. Never during my observations, did any of the customers react with irritation to the rather intimate contact initiated during this small ritual.

The owner states that even if the saleswomen and owners chat more with regular customers and provide special service to the elderly, all customers receive the same consultation and treatment. As a matter of principle, professional service thus levels socio-demographic differences - the business is "for all people" (l. 61). Even though the owner trains his waitresses to serve all customers in the same polite and open way, more extended conversations were observed mostly between Turkish or German speaking customers. Given that the employees speak Turkish and German fluently and have decent English, their treatment of the different groups in the café does not seem deviate because of ethnicity. The cafe has low prices and a standardized business design that makes only few aesthetic references to the Turkish origin of the owners and staff. Rather than appealing to a specific ethnic or lifestyle group, the café's hybrid design aims to appeal to multiple inclusive lifestyles or milieus, according to the owner. The observations show that the café receives customers from most of the local income, age, and ethnic groups. The owner is proud of his diverse clientele and considers each new person as a potential repeat customer. He has trained his employees to serve everyone equally and has designed his store in a manner that appeals to a broad range of people.

> [The employee] needs to have little **bit of a good tact and sensitivity** […] she also has to want the customers, because **you want to encounter the customers and exchange with them and how beautiful is it when you get greeted and if you can order „the usual"**, then this means that [the other person] remembers, that the **customer has a history** [with the business] and **that is important and you feel at home, you feel that you're in good hands**, yes this is not the case everywhere (l. 330 - 336).

For him, a good employee is someone who treats all customers with the same respect and level of service, thereby levelling potential (status or ethnic) differences between them, this being an "unanticipated gain" (Small 2009) of frequenting the café. Hence, the café works hard to mitigate differences among customers, in particular ethnic differences, and these levelling practices support the social inclusion and the sense of belonging in the business.

If the **butcher shop** works as a leveler, it is only for people who eat meat and sausages[171] and can afford its slightly higher prices than those found in the local (discount) supermarkets. However, the observations show that during lunch, customers in both blue- and white-collar positions exchange news at the four standing tables. This observation aligns with the statements from the owner that his customers have very diverse incomes and occupations. While observing the shop I noticed that everyone present is a hungry lunch customer and is treated as such: Employees serve them in a quick and friendly manner, occasionally initiating conversations with both familiar and unfamiliar customers if time allows. They serve all customers in the same perfunctory manner, regardless of how much money they spend. If anything, seniors receive the most attention and patience, even though they only buy small portions of sausage and meat. When an employee perceives that a customer is slowly becoming a regular, the saleswomen takes the time to introduce this new guest to the more established regulars. However, often this introduction is unnecessary as most often the "new regulars" are welcomed in by the older ones themselves. Interactions between customers emerge spontaneously regardless of how long they have been coming. Any new customer is welcomed as long as he or she does not interrupt the routinized order of the lunch breaks. During opening hours, lunchtime is the most inclusive time due to the presence of the lunch regulars, at other times of day, fewer customers occupy the sales space, so most social exchange happens between saleswomen and customers and without the stimulation of other already familiar customers.

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[171] Most German sausages and meat products are made from pork, so many local observant Muslims, Jews, or Buddhists will not shop at this store.

Both my observations and interviews show that in the **organic shop**, the leveling that does occur happens partially through formal membership and partially through the social skills of the owners. As a comparatively expensive store, its customers seem to be primarily well-off people who care about organic nutrition, which already restricts the shop's customer base significantly. According to the owner, the majority are well-educated people with German, West-European, and Turkish roots. The employees cultivate social relationships with customers across these ethnic lines. Employees work in both the front and back spaces, intermingling, hugging, teasing, laughing, helping, and chatting with customers, blurring the distinctions between the roles of employee and customer. However, based on my observations, the staff and customers largely belong to more or less the same social milieu and staff behavior makes customers feel all the more equal to one another. The dynamic and informal way in which the business is operated further levels the few differences that do exist both among customers as well as between customers and staff.

By contrast, in the **new café,** the **lunch restaurant**, and the **hair salon,** the employees and customers retain distinct and easily distinguishable roles. This separation is emphasized by the businesses' spatial layout and the way people move within the store. Back spaces, counters, and certain corners belong exclusively to staff; customers use only selected places and furniture in the businesses (where they are seated). In this regard, these business spaces also convey a less private sense than the other stores. In the hair salon, regulars and customers who request more expensive services receive special treatment: They are served coffee and invited to use the massage chair. Drop-in customers (most often men) are seated on the regular waiting chairs and receive nothing to drink. In contrast to the main café, the new café and the lunch restaurant only treat daytime customers the same as long as they consume an appropriate amount - meaning that they need to buy more than one or two cups of coffee if they want to stay the entire day. But so long as customers are hungry, thirsty, and able to pay, employees serve them regardless of gender, income, age, and lifestyle. However, in all gastronomic businesses the employees do respond better to those who tip as a reward for special service. Sometimes only with a smile and thankful look, but I also observed that some waitresses and waiters will give extra attention and improved service to customers who are known for their generous tipping habits, particularly in the lunch restaurant and in café II. Regular customers also receive special attention, but only if employees consider them "good" customers.[172] The lunch restaurant staff welcomes customers with a consistent

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[172] Waitresses, waiters, and other gastronomic personnel tend to complain about customers, regardless of their frequency, spending, and even to a lesser extent their tipping habits. Stated simply, "good" customers do not require or demand extensive or special services; they appreciate the employees' work without demanding too

performance: greeting them at the entrance, guiding them to tables (if they don't place themselves on their favorite tables), presenting them the daily menu, and chatting with the regulars about weather, local politics, and their orders. Observations did not indicate any differential treatment based on the customers' professional backgrounds (which are most often known by the employees). This also holds true for the fruit and vegetable store, where the sales personal serves all customers the same way, even if they are only purchasing few items.

The **pharmacy** employees also seem to offer the same consultation and medication to all customers, even knowing that many are short on money. Since they have lived in the neighborhood for a long time and have watched it change, the pharmacy staff has a good idea about the socio-economic background and medical conditions of both the established and comparatively new customers. The owner and her employees are highly dedicated to providing care, and therefore they do not let socio-economic or ethnic differences among the customers affect their service and consultations. The professionalism and staff, as well as the training they received, accounts for the levelling of differences among the customers. As both groups reside and socialize in the neighborhood, customers and employees often speak in the "same language," meaning that consultations and further conversations often include teasing "Neukölln wit"[173] (a certain type of gentle teasing) and dialect. This localized language blurs the diverse backgrounds of customers and employees, and thereby serves as a leveling agent.

The types of interactions that Oldenburg describes as "levelling" are also used by staff to cultivate customer loyalty. "Every paying customer is a good customer," as one of the butcher's employees told me. These interactional "rituals," according to Goffman (2005: 57), therefore are not solely hospitable, but are also used to smooth working routines and increase customer satisfaction. Such ritualized performances that show "personal deference" (Goffman 2005: 72 f.), include salutations, invitations, and compliments. They ease staff-customer interactions and are part and parcel of any business dependent upon customer-service. However, this "host" and "servicing" behavior affects the "leveling" qualities of the businesses (e.g. where waitresses do not seem to be full-time professionals, they often re-ascertain the customers' orders and move around in a slower and less ballet-like way than in the other cafés). A certain degree of friendliness can smooth the social exchange of selling and buying with a stranger. When made routine, this results in a shared socio-spatial and physical setting where sales persons and customers do not intrude on each other's comfort zones (seen exceptionally strongly in the

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much of their time; and, they do not have allergies or "special" desires. Generally they are "easy to handle" as they told me.

[173] Both the owners of the flower shop and the pharmacy mentioned this in the interviews.

pharmacy). Most simply, the performed or strategic "hospitality" means providing food, drinks, and accommodation (Bell 2009) but as a rather commercial exchange between the owners and staff as "hosts" and the customers. These hospitable exchanges include publicly performed, routinized, and trained social practices, which help also to "civilize" and "manage" potential "strangers" and thus foster more structured relationships (Bell 2009). This is in line with Goffman and Lofland's analysis of public behavior as a means of managing everyday life (together with strangers) in public settings. Hence, the serving practices level not only paying customers, but they are also used to manage difference or diversity by alternately excluding, tolerating, or welcoming particular customers. If guests or customers want to continue to patronize the business, they must follow the place's behavioral codes.

So again, according to Oldenburg (1999: 22 f.), third places "level" and balance social inequalities; they are spaces without specific criteria for inclusion. However, the aforementioned examples have shown that customers are expected to purchase something if they are to remain (physically present and feeling socially equal) in the store. The degree to which leveling occurs depends primarily on how the staff behaves toward customers. Customers frequently enter businesses on Karl-Marx-Straße to window shop or get information, yet unless they purchase something, they are not welcome to linger. My observations have indicated that the more formal training the staff has received, the more consistent and polite they are toward the customers, regardless of status. Not only do stores from the outset exclude people unable to purchase something, but they routinely pay special attention to affluent customers and extravagant spenders. This preferential treatment reveals an important limit to the role of third places as levelers. The only ones who are leveled, who are included, and who are accepted are the ones who can pay. Consumption, not the space, is the ultimate leveler and in spite of all other actions, this means that there remains a social disparity based on economic level. To repeat the saleswoman in the butcher's shop, "all [paying] customers are good customers."

6.3. "They are pulling my leg a lot"[174] – The *Conversations*

The (conversational and interactional) practices and behavioral rules that level customers also affect how conversations unfold in the shops and stores studied. According to Oldenburg (1999: p. 26), face-

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[174] Paraphrased quote by owner of café I (l. 233): "They are pulling my leg a lot, also in front of other guests" With this the owner refers to the constant teasing practices between customers and owner and the playfulness of their conversational tone.

to-face conversations are the most basic and most fundamental social practices that take place in third places:

> The conversational style of third places embodies the spirit of pure sociability. A person must not remain silent, nor must he dominate conversation. In the free and uninhibited atmosphere of third place fellowship, conversation is remarkably democratic. Everyone seems to talk 'just the right amount' (Oldenburg/ Brissett 1982: 272).

This assertion about a balanced conversational style rests on Oldenburg's assumption about the leveling-function of third places: conversations are freed of power dynamics only if the place successfully levels all customers.[175] Oldenburg (1999: 22f.) considers conversation as a main focus of activity in third places, in which playfulness and wit are collectively valued. He does not discuss whether this desired "playfulness" might simply be the result of more general (or culturally-specific) behavioral codes and practices. I translate his so-called playful conversations into teasing and joking elements in the observed interactions. However, more serious conversations and discussions also took place in the businesses, which Oldenburg does not consider. The physical layout of the place might also deter the discussion of more serious or contested topics. So, this section explores the conversations, their participants, spatial and social circumstances, and their (eventually *playful*) contents.

My ethnographic work shows that power relations and differential roles remain salient in all observed conversations; and moreover, the main activity is consumption rather than conversation. Social exchange is thus only a by-product - and sometimes an unanticipated or anticipated gain - of shopping and eating out. It is not a *necessary* component of everyday life and work in Karl-Marx-Straße (cf. Small 2009). Interviews and observations across all cases demonstrated that customers come first and foremost for food, drinks, and services, and that conversation and interaction are only secondary concerns (even though both are mutually related).

> Owner: One lady, she comes almost every day, I know her more, more than ten years, I know her from another business [on Karl-Marx-Straße], where I worked before [as a waiter] and now she comes over again and again […]
>
> Why does she come?

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[175] Oldenburg does not discuss the carriers of interaction and largely excludes staff involvement, particular types of customers, and the ways in which people are stratified. Reckwitz (2002; 2003) argues that social practices are performed by their so-called carriers.

O: For everything, everything. Well, sometimes only for coffee and tea, sometimes only tea, sometimes only for a short stay, because she has to do something over here [in the area] and just wants a brief break, or [she comes] for a pastime with me and reading and such things and then because we know each other so well, right, and that's why she knows when she comes over she doesn't have to necessarily buy something or so, but can simply rest briefly, because she is really almost every day here and frequently consumes, but there are also days […] where she doesn't eat […] and then there are other colleagues or regulars that come over briefly on their way home after work and only have one for the road and then quickly home and so (Owner Café I, l. 130 - 145).

The owner's statements underscore the aforementioned point that only a limited number of regulars or "special" guests are allowed to spend time in the business without purchasing anything and that their presence and conversations are always welcomed and appreciated. [176] Certainly not every customer or staff person puts the same level of importance on interaction. For instance, interaction seems very important for customers that meet regularly for lunch, dinner, or a beer. "Regulars" at a given business greatly value interaction with staff, just as much if not more so, than interaction with regular customers. For non-regular customers, conversations with employees seem less important, but whenever the staff initiates conversations, customers seem to enjoy them and respond with sincere, active engagement. On only one occasion did a customer in the main café turn down the exchange started by a saleswoman, apologizing that he was in a hurry.

The observed conversation topics range from small talk and teasing to heated political debates. People use these spaces for professional work meetings as well as for intimate dates. Sometimes fights break out, mostly between couples or friends or acquaintances. Digital co-conversations occur simultaneously - people chat and send texts, check emails, staying glued to their devices while in these businesses. In short, while Oldenburg describes conversation as the main practice for his early 1980s third places, in all the observed businesses along 2010s Karl-Marx-Straße, work, recovery, leisure, care, and most notably individual consumption practices are as just as common and more important than conversational practices.

These research findings contradict Oldenburg's claim that customers, particularly regulars, are not attracted to third places because of the products they offer, but rather because they want to interact with their fellow customers. In the visited shops, customers do not refuse to use, as Oldenburg asserts,

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[176] Among the examined businesses, the main café is the only place that allows people to stay without buying anything and this also depends on the customer's physical health and personality.

ICTs, newspapers, TVs, and games, considering them to be distractions from the main goal of conversation. Rather, in the Karl-Marx-Straße shops, the use of electronic devices coincides with on-spot conversation with digital or telephone conversations. Often ICTs invite further conversation as well.[177]

Nevertheless, conversations remain a significant social practice, leading to, as previously mentioned, the leveling and social inclusion of certain customers (conversation can also make customers "regulars"). Yet, staff and owners and not, as in Oldenburg's work, other present customers initiate and carry out the majority of these leveling and conversations in the sampled businesses. For instance, the owner of **café I** describes that customers will initially approach him, and then if he includes other customers into the conversations, they might all continue chatting without him. He is very proud of the fact that two customers whom he introduced to one another are now a couple. Both continue to visit the café, either alone or together, and always chat for a while with the owner. As he says:

> Yes, **he really tells a lot and she tells a lot**, too. Of course, she is also [employed], she travels a lot and so and yes **when they have problems, then they talk about it, that's for sure**, not so much family stuff but rather things related to work or how much they have to do or if less is to do and […] well, yes **we definitely talk a lot** (l. 153 - 158).

The café owner initiates and conducts conversations with his customers that range from teasing to mutual support.

> Certainly, **greeting each other, I find that definitely good**, well, I find **this is courtesy, because to keep contacts warm is very important** in my opinion. [*why?*] Why? Because **this is always giving and taking**, **I could need him one time**, no, it is definitively not the case that he has to come over and has to eat something or so. […he gets] these **kind words from me**, but rather that one shows, well, as a restaurateur, **they are important for** me, these guests. And how they are doing and **if everything is okay with them** and so and if they don't show up for a couple of days, one says, long **long time no see** and yes, lot of work, or this and that, or did something happen, right, while I was away or so. I mean, I have no idea, I'm also not here for 24 hours and that's why it [the **conversation] is very very important** for me as well as for the regulars, definitely (l. 189 - 201).

Conversations develop over the course of the customer's stay in the café and thus the extent to which they unfold depends strongly on the length of time they spend there.

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[177] This difference in activity between my observations and Oldenburg's may also result of the more than thirty year difference between his study and mine. However, most of the side activities, such as watching TV in bars or reading newspapers in cafés have also been common practices in many 20th century gastronomic facilities.

> Sometimes so [they rest], sometimes so [eat and go], certainly [they come] more for sitting and so, **for gossiping, talking, laughing and everything** and …. But also **some come indeed to eat quickly**, particularly those who work here […] half an hour break or so they have to eat quickly and to leave quickly, but […] the **rest comes in order to sit and eat calmly**. Of course, we shouldn't forget the opera guests; they have no time at all (Owner Café I, l. 562 - 570).

Customers approach him to discuss their love lives, family issues, and work complaints. They let him know when they are in need of certain things; for instance, when they are looking for an apartment in the neighborhood. Just as many of the other interviewed owners, the café owner puts customers in touch if they think customers might be able to help each other out with something. For instance, the café owner mentioned that he referred customers (looking for a specific book) to a particular local bookstore employee who also frequents his café. Another time, he referred a sick customer to another customer who was a medical specialist.

In the **flower shop**, the most intimate, "playful," and serious conversations take place between the owner and her circle of elderly customers who visit regularly for extended coffee chats. These same women also frequent the business for quick purchases, and then, small chats sometimes evolve into longer conversations. The women support each other emotionally, keeping account of each other's health conditions and seeing to it that people are looked after should their partners have passed away. The women also help one another with grocery shopping and collecting deliveries. They trade newspapers and keep one another informed about things such as upcoming funerals, street repairs, and supermarket offers. Beyond her "inner circle," the owner also includes certain other customers in her conversations. Drawing on her local humor and generous personality type, she likes to downplay her role for playful conversations but also, and more importantly, her role in the neighborhood as a main information hub:

> Well, just like it usually is, right, the baker, the newspaper store, the flower store, it's always like that, well, yes **somehow they all come and then they ask and did you hear or do you know** [laughs] [A: If something has happened, or …?] Yes, in general, yes. Have you head already, such-and-such has died [laughs] or do you know when is the funeral and well, such things. [A: Do you know so many people around here or how does it come?] Yo! Actually, yes (l. 1 - 15).

The owner's mother adds, "She is now already 17 years in this store. Word gets around" (l. 21). Beyond her "inner circle," the owner also includes other customers in her conversations, often in a more balanced way. If familiar customers meet each other accidentally in or in front of the store, the owner

enjoys joining their conversations; however, she also emphasizes that in order for her business to survive, it is important that people do not coming only for the interaction, but first and foremost for the purchase: "No[oooooo], well, they also buy flowers. Well, [they come] not only to chat, for god's sake, I wouldn't have that much time" (l. 109 f.). Even if the owner enjoys playful and serious conversations with her customers, as a business woman she must secure steady revenue for her shop. This, as already stated, applies to all other owners as well. Some owners push conversational topics toward a purchase or try to close down conversations (especially when they are busy); others take a more relaxed approach, trusting that customers will inevitably purchase something - indeed, few leave without purchasing at least one item, be it a cup of tea, some sausage, or medicine.

The one benefit all interviewed owners and employees reported gaining from conversing with customers was information exchange. The regular sharing of information eases everyday life in different matters from housing and job searches to looking for bargains at local stores. Some of the information helps the business owners survive the challenges caused by the local urban renewal projects. The florist, for instance, was able to make use of information that she gained from her customers about upcoming street repairs. The owner, and her regular customers who also live on Karl-Marx-Straße and given their different statuses as renters, home owners, or local business people, were all given different information material. Thus, only together could they build a comprehensive picture regarding what was going to happen along the street and who would potentially be affected (l. 422 f.). The flower store owner was able to make plans to close her store for an extended period, because with the help of her customers, she knew well in advance that massive construction would begin in January of 2015. She knew from customers living further south on the street that the construction site would stop nearly all traffic, resulting in a huge loss of passersby, customers, and delivery trucks in the months of January and February 2015. Therefore it was in her better interest to close her store during this phase and go on vacation.

Another example of an owner who benefited from his customer's local knowledge through the conversations was the owner of the **main café.** His business strongly depends on the availability of parking spots for his own and his suppliers' cars. His business neighbors, who visit his café for their lunch breaks, provide him with information on the current location of the shifting construction sites, the parking spots currently available, upcoming delivery problems, and so on. All owners complained heavily about the lack of information communicated by the local authorities, saying that as a result, they only rely on word-of-mouth updates traded among customers. In the café, conversations between staff and

customers were mostly concerned with information exchange about the street's or neighborhood's changes, including the opening or closure of nearby stores and potential competitors.

Other conversations between staff and customers included more private issues, such as funerals, weddings, or updates on relatives and neighbors. The conversations among customers seems comparatively more "playful," (more laughter, more joking), although a certain amount of teasing or joking exists between customers and staff as well. The owner of cafe I said to me, "they [the customers] are pulling my leg a lot" (l. 233).

In the cafés, a diverse array of furniture, seating arrangements, and lighting support conversations strongly affect the level of the "publicness." For instance, tables in the middle of the salesroom expose café or restaurant customers to many would-be-listeners, whereas dim lights and sofas encourage more private, intimate conversation. Most customers also consider cafés a place for relaxation, because of the special physical features allow for eased conversation. During my observations, it appeared that the café visitors who choose to sit at an exposed table were aware that they were being observed, and they responded in turn by fooling around, using large big gestures and engaging in stage-like behavior (Goffman 1959). Those customers, who preferred the more hidden tables with dimmed lights, usually seemed to have more subdued conversations with friends or family members. However, other customers relaxed alone: without direct social exchange, they observed the social scenery and seemed pleased if a staff member or a familiar customer stopped at their table for a short social exchange. It seems to be the friendly atmosphere and playful conversations that foster this relaxation. During my ethnographic work, customers also mentioned the relaxation qualities of the place (along with product quality) as one of the main reasons for their visits.

Oldenburg fails to account for the various types of sociability one can experience being alone. He argues that public sociability is central to third places. But customers in the gastronomic facilities along Karl-Marx-Straße often enjoy solitude in public without participating in playful—or any—conversations. This, I argue, in no way undermines these places' function as third places. Public solitude refers to the search for an abstract "invisible community" (Henriksen et al. 2013: 94), based on personal traits such as religion, gender, ethnicity or lifestyle. The observations convey the impression that customers seeking public solitude in the sampled businesses, and most of all the cafés, seem to enjoy the public surrounding of people. In the more homogeneous business settings such as in the new café or the organic store, it seems that customers enjoy also the presence of people that belong to similar milieu (regarding their similar clothing styles, age groups, food preferences, etc.) As per Henriksen et al. (2013:

94 f.), people who enjoy being alone in public are trying to escape the problematic aspects of a more intimate social world by entering a more public world whose networks or ties are loosely knit, if at all. Hence, one reason people may choose to be alone might be that public solitude represents an escape from established (and eventually demanding) social relations, while being provided with enough social interactions to prevent boredom or loneliness. In the cafés, bars and restaurants on Karl-Marx-Straße, public solitude is sought by both occasional and regular customers. Customers practice public solitude in different ways: Whereas some apparently enjoy observing other guests, others stay concentrated on their work—the din of other customers perhaps serving as a pleasant and stimulating background noise. Some customers seem hopeful for interaction with other customers or staff members.

Another way in which my analysis departs from Oldenburg's is in his dismissal of electronic devices (ICTs). Even in his more recent work (2013), he dismisses the idea that electronic devices often invite further on-spot interaction and playful conversation. As mentioned above, this was incongruous with my findings. In the **main café**, for instance, cell phone chargers constantly occupy the limited number of available outlets. Since there are only few tables around the outlets, unacquainted customers often ask one another to mind their cell phones while they eat or drink at tables further away. During one of my visits, for instance, a teenage boy's particular cell phone model attracted the attention of a student in her late 20s reading at the table adjacent to the outlet. When he plugged in his phone and asked the woman if she could keep an eye on it, she quizzed him about the technical details of the new phone, its pros and cons, and if he would recommend it. Finally, the boy took a seat at her table and the two began discussing their experiences with this and the other cell phones. This impromptu conversation between two strangers turned more casual, with the two making jokes on other topics as they continued to discuss cell phones. The phone, therefore, as a catalyst, generated more social interaction and inclusion to the business' social life world. Other examples include customers playing together with one cell phone, fellow students meeting with their laptops while discussing their work over a cup of coffee, business people checking emails during their lunch breaks, and other customers talking on and off on their phones while often including the other person seated at the table in the phone conversation.

Furthermore, just like the customers, all owners of the sampled businesses use their smart or cell phones during work. They too draw the attention of other people as they play new games or show people text messages from common friends. They use phones to discover common music tastes, complaining or joking about too loud music. Only in the **butcher's shop** do staff and owners not use

their phones while working behind the counter (mainly for hygienic reasons). And in the organic store, staff and the two owners place value on the maintenance of a relaxing and quiet atmosphere that doesn't welcome the obvious use of cell phones and tablets in the store. So for them, cell phones would take away third place qualities: relaxation and face-to-face interaction. Therefore, the employees and owners only use their ICTs if no customers or if only regulars are in the businesses.

Along with the newer ICTs, "older" devices also play a part in cafe life. In the **main café**, the television hanging from the ceiling plays Turkish pop music and is mostly ignored by customers. Customers sitting alone may pay attention to the music videos from times to times, but otherwise the television does not seem to distract from personal conversations as Oldenburg assumes it does. In fact, the background noise of the television often bridges uncomfortable pauses between conversation partners. It also gives customers sitting alone a fixed spot (or alibi) to concentrate on when they get caught observing other people. In addition, "bad" or funny music videos often stimulate further interactions between the casual mix of television watchers.

This interplay between social conversation and material devices and the stimulation of conversation through objects also apply to the **additional cafés**, where the (comparatively more common) social practices of working with or without electronic devices, reading newspapers and books, and the discussing serious topics complement playful conversations.

In conclusion, even if some of the sampled gastronomic establishments sometimes lack the type of third place playfulness, they do reveal high levels of public sociability among customers as well as between customers and employees (e.g. owner of café I, l. 733, 764 f., l. 777: "contact market" "information market"). However, the majority of conversations - playful or not - occurs either only among customers or only among staff. In the lunch restaurant, the owner mostly induces (playful) conversation, trying to connect his disabled employees with customers. These short conversations mainly seem to serve to make the customers feel at home or to build up, maintain, and refresh the customers' status as regulars. In the other businesses and particularly in the **butcher's shop** and **pharmacy,**[178] playful conversations between employees and **customers** lighten the atmosphere and make the business operations and work tasks less monotonous. These are also part of the work performances discussed in subchapter 6.2.

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[178] Particularly in the pharmacy, the playful conversations but even more warm words often serve to cover or distract from the seriousness of the diseases and the pain. The owner and her employees describe that consolation and even pastoring are often involved in customer consultation, regardless of their status as regulars or unacquainted customers.

A final point that must be made concerns power relations in conversations and the role of playful conversation in leveling practices (as in Subchapter 6.2.). Oldenburg describes playful conversation as one of the leveling practices that helps third places equalize status differences. In direct contrast, my observations across all cases demonstrate that power relations among customers, and even more so between customers and owners, affect all conversations, even those that are playful. For instance, during both interviews and observations, when an owner would make a joke, both staff and customers responded by laughing, even if they did not seem to find it funny (evident by the faces they were making). And vice versa, owners and employees purposefully laugh at certain "important" customers' jokes in order to maintain a good mood and to ensure the customer will return (e.g. owner of café I during the interview, l. 1154 ff.). Indeed, staff in the cafés, in the bar, and in the butcher's shop often can't "escape" the customers' conversations and jokes, not only because they feel entitled to remain "good" hosts, but also because they are physically trapped behind the counter. In this vain and in regard to the power relations, during one of my visits, the owner of the **bar** described her role also as a "psychological garbage can" (*Seelischer Abfalleimer*), because she had to listen to all her customers' problems, often repeatedly, while hardly being able to bring up her own problems or pressing issues or getting away from these customers' "tirades." So while the owner sets the topics and tone of the wider discussions in her bar, she is also trapped while listening to her customers' stories and opinions.

However, in all the businesses, if owners and employees strongly disagree on customers' statements, the furthest the owners and employees will go is telling them to leave. Most often, the staff tells customers to "just calm down" in order not to disturb other customers' "privacy" (the term used to mean their right to be undisturbed). Depending on the level of mutual knowledge and status as a regular, employees and owners react more directly, sometimes refusing customers service if they cannot stand their issues anymore. For instance, the flower store owner told me that when her husband was seriously sick, she had no patience for her elderly customers' concerns about their own health anymore. This creates another important power dynamic. And overall, regardless of the playful or serious nature of the conversations, power relations always impact the type, content, consent, and duration of the social exchange.

Overall, my observations indicate that rather than playful conversation, direct, churlish and contentious conversation is more a sign of people feeling at home and familiar with the stores and their staff. This type of conversation indicates more the levels of trust (in their own skills as business people but also in their customers), loyalty (from customers), and mutual knowledge. For instance, during one of my visits,

the saleswoman of the butcher's shop told a lunch customer that he gained weight. She commented "such a beautiful potbelly," which to my surprise, did not offend the customer and ended with both of them laughing together. Goffman and Lofland's differentiations into public and private behavior or performances also help to distinguish the different nuances in the conversations and their different types: the more public the socio-spatial setting is perceived, the more playful the conversation. The more the furniture and atmosphere enable private conversations, the more intimate those discussions are. However, more intimate conversations also include heated discussions and fights. The salespeople and owners, who mostly act toward their customers as if they were an audience, endeavor to generate and maintain a good atmosphere. For instance, the bar owner also uses churlish teasing to stop their customers' discussions. Therefore Oldenburg's "playfulness", as playful conversations, also helps the store owners cover and calm underlying conflicts. Finally, the ethnographic findings show that playfulness is a part of small talk; an act might help to ease the interaction between mostly strange people in the businesses. Such playful conversations are more shallow than the gentle chiding and do not indicate the same level of trust and comfort. But I also conclude for the role of the businesses that contested and blunt conversations express that customers and staff have a mutual understanding and trust in their relationship, and that customers feel at ease in the business.

6.4. "For quality we need to go to another neighborhood, this is really difficult here. "[179] – The Businesses' *Accessibility* and *Accommodation*

According to Oldenburg and Brissett (1982), third places are easily accessible, geographically, financially, and socially. Ideally, they are accessible by foot and do not have high price points. "A third place is a public setting accessible to its inhabitants and appropriated by them as their own." (Oldenburg/ Brissett 1982: 271) This chapter interrogates these notions of accessibility and accommodation. However, the quote of one of the owners of the organic store in this chapter's title demonstrates that accessibility and accommodation, often framed as "quality" places and "quality" products, can mean very different things to very different people. While the owners of the organic store bemoan the lack of "high quality" businesses around Karl-Marx-Straße and thus a lack of accessibility, other people (e.g., flower store owner, pharmacist, owners of café I and II) describe the street as offering everything that is needed for both daily and special supply. Hence they praise the street's businesses' accessibility. For the organic

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[179] Paraphrased quote from organic store owner (l. 899 ff.): "[For quality] we need to go in another neighborhood. No, this [quality shopping] is really also more difficult here. "

store owner, accessibility means the presence of high-quality stores. However, for most of the owners and customers, a "highly accessible" store indicates financial accessibility in the form of affordable prices and spatial accessibility in terms of distance between shop and residents. Indeed, most local residents prefer to acquire their daily goods within walking distance, but will, for specialty products, travel to other neighborhoods as well. [180] As outlined chapter 2, most of Neukölln residents have highly localized lives, shopping, working and spending their leisure time in the neighborhood where they live. These facts align with the owners' observations that the majority of their customers live nearby and come by foot. In particular, "regulars" all live and work within walking distance. Hence, the availability of stores, where interaction beyond the purchase seems possible, coupled with the proximity to customers' apartments, increases the likelihood that people will stumble into a business before, in between, after work, or during a walk through the area. Hence, if Oldenburg's notion of accessibility is understood as accessible by foot, the sampled businesses on Karl-Marx-Straße are highly accessible for local residents.

Yet, again, people's backgrounds define what they consider as accessible and accommodative. For the social makeup of the businesses, the social milieu of the customer base in the sampled businesses along Karl-Marx-Straße seems similar to the social milieu of the surrounding neighborhood (cf. Dröge and Krämer-Badoni's (1987: 71). [181] In regard to the businesses' socio-spatial qualities and particularly with regard to features of accessibility, it is important to contrast the structures of the respective interior and exterior social milieus. Given that their customers are locals and that the neighborhood is highly walkable, all the sampled businesses are geographically accessible. And thus, the customer base is

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[180] The conversation and interview partners state that also those local people who can afford (time-wise and money-wise) shopping trips to stores outside of Neukölln nevertheless mostly shop in the neighborhood and spend time in its local gastronomic facilities. Despite their visits to these businesses outside of the neighborhood, none of these businesses seem to play an important social role for the customers' everyday lives. In addition, the urban renewal program's preparatory investigation and the interviews show that most customers live in close proximity to Karl-Marx-Straße and appreciate easy accessibility and immediate accommodation. Only around 200 out of 1000 residents in North-Neukölln have a car and most travel to shops and eateries by foot, bike, or public transport. Cf. Aktion! Karl-Marx-Straße (n.d.). Vorbereitende Untersuchungen Neukölln – Karl-Marx-Straße, http://www.aktion-kms.de/files/be100506_vu_karl-marx-strasse_-_bericht_2010.pdf, accessed 03/23/2016 and Berlin.de (n.d.). Mobilität der Stadt, Kenndaten zur Mobilität, http://www.stadtentwicklung.berlin.de/verkehr/politik_planung/zahlen_fakten/download/Mobilitaet_dt_Kap-1-2.pdf, accessed 09/14/2015.
[181] However, drawing conclusions between the local living conditions to the customers' leisure time behavior and respective selection of grocery stores, cafés, or shopping malls is not possible. Equal living conditions do not necessarily result in the preference of same shopping facilities. With the increasing ethnic and social diversity of Neukölln, the local place of residence or postal code often seems to be the only commonality. On the other hand, a conclusion from the visit of a certain business regarding a certain lifestyle or living condition is likewise impossible.

recruited from the immediate neighborhood, as mentioned by the interviewed store owners and city officials and matching my ethnographic observations. In their study of bars, Dröge and Krämer-Badoni (1987: 71 f.) find that the social milieu of bars' customer bases is more homogeneous - in terms of the customers' educational and employment background - than the already quite homogeneous surrounding neighborhood. They suggest that this homogeneity stems from larger patterns and processes of city-wide segregation that resulted in multiple ethnically and socially segregated neighborhoods. They also cited an uneven distribution of businesses and eateries as a cause for this segregation pattern. Their latter observations hold true in North-Neukölln along Karl-Marx-Straße: the nightlife is clustered to the north and the residences are all located southward. However, Karl-Marx-Straße does not have a differentiated commercial structure (the one exception being the wedding dress stores clustered along the northern part of the street). However, the neighborhoods surrounding Karl-Marx-Straße have a much higher degree of ethnic diversity than the neighborhoods in Dröge and Krämer-Badoni's analysis.[182] While both Oldenburg and Dröge & Krämer-Badoni argue that homogeneity is the basis for the development of trust and playful conversation, my research shows that the Karl-Marx-Straße businesses - being located in one of Berlin's most ethnically and socially diverse districts - foster interaction and the development of ties across a sometimes extremely diverse mix of individuals - precisely due to their accessibility and leveling qualities, evolving from the staff's practices.

Oldenburg and Brissett (1982: 270) argue that,

> [a] third place is a public setting accessible to its inhabitants and appropriated by them as their own. [...] it is a taken-for granted part of their social existence. [...]. It is simply there, providing opportunities for experiences and relationships that are otherwise unavailable. The most obvious of these opportunities is the possibility of pure sociability.

With this quote, the authors argue that a location allowing for spontaneous visits without any great effort is the spatial basis for the generation of sociability. Oldenburg repeatedly emphasizes the importance of accessibility since most US-Americans live in car-dependent suburban settlements:

> What suburbia cries for are the means for people to gather easily, inexpensively, regularly, and pleasurably — a "place on the corner," real life alternatives to television, easy escapes from the cabin fever of marriage and family life that do not necessitate getting into an automobile (Oldenburg 1997: 6).

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[182] Dröge and Krämer-Badoni (1987) researched bars in the much smaller city of Bremen in the early 1980s, where most bars were frequented by predominantly ethnic German working class men or students.

Compared to American cities, eateries and shops in Berlin are distributed throughout walkable neighborhoods - even large chain supermarkets and discounters are increasingly dominating the city's fringes. My ethnographic data indicates that accessibility does not necessarily result in sociability on Karl-Marx-Straße, but questions of access do matter for the selection of customers for the in-store social interaction.

First, the easy accessibility and most-often low-threshold accommodation of the businesses allows for an integration of the business visit into the flow of everyday life. The availability of seating facilities eases the level of accommodation: The **gastronomic facilities** offer easy self-accommodation on the comfortable sofas, tables and chairs, low-priced goods and services, ample space for strollers and wheeled walkers, and special service for disabled or elderly customers. This low-threshold accessibility and accommodation (offered to all not just those with signifiers of specific lifestyles) result in a publicly sociable space, where people of different ages, incomes, and ethnic backgrounds intermingle. The **flower store**, the **butcher shop**, and the **pharmacy** do not offer seating facilities for easy accommodation. While Oldenburg would consider the chilly temperatures in the butcher shop and flower store and the hygienic, sterile smell of the pharmacy and the lack of seating therein as reducing the businesses' accessibility and easy accommodation, all three businesses receive (regular) customers who intentionally come for social exchange. They use the businesses as social spaces and stay long after they have made their purchase.

Appropriating practices in Oldenburg's sense certainly vary across cases: In the cafés, some customers make themselves at home; in the organic store, customers seem to use the space a part of their own identity; whereas in the pharmacy, customers appropriate the space in their search for help. In detail, in the **main café**, people loosen their clothing and sometimes even remove their shoes. They relax in the chairs, often stretching their legs as if they were in their own private living rooms; they scatter their belongings on tables, benches, and chairs and use the electrical outlets for recharging their ICTs without keeping an eye on them; they spend entire days from late breakfast to early dinners chatting, observing, reading, watching TV, snoozing, and caring for their children. The sense of ownership and comfort that customers show is made possible, I argue, by the dim lighting, the comfortable seating, the background noise, and the ballet movements of the business people - all of which creates a sense of privacy. Hence the café's atmosphere itself fosters easy accommodation and the appropriation of the space. [183] The

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[183] The term atmosphere tends to the spatial qualities that exist between an object (e.g. business) and a subject (e.g. customer) and that are not only perceived but 'felt' by the latter. An atmosphere may further be defined as a

crowdedness and interior design of the café's (semi-public) space with the correlating and rather intimate practices, such as touching, shouting, or teasing, along with other "private" practices such as hugging, child caring and nursing, hair dressing, putting shoes off, et cetera create the specific type of sociability that Oldenburg (1989; 2001) ascribes to his third places

Appropriation in the other **gastronomic facilities** includes similar social practices; yet employees frequently "push" customers to consume more. Furthermore, in these other businesses, people are more aware of being observed and thus do not behave in such "private" ways. Part of this is also spatial: The other businesses are less crowded, more orderly, and quieter, all of which undermines a feeling of anonymity. Whenever a customer realizes that he or she is being observed, they return to their "public" performance. Nevertheless, in certain ways, customers of these businesses also act "at-home:" They greet employees and other familiar customers in loud voices while entering the business, also slapping one another on the back, shaking hands, or hugging. They also spread work items, tools, mobile phones, newspapers, and other private belongings on the table, but sleeping for longer than a quick nap seems to be going too far (although employees rarely sanction this), for instance.

In the **organic store,** the surroundings likewise offer little in the way of privacy. The bright light and the central location of the tables, leaves the customers feeling exposed. The lack of background music, loud conversations, and cell-phone use (phones being banned) further inhibit feelings of privacy and thus any sense of ownership that might develop. The regular customers, who extend errands in order to socialize with familiar customers and salespeople, limit these interactions to hushed conversations in the aisles. Arguably, this is likely why the owners erected a dividing wall to the sales room in fall 2015, thereby giving the "food court" a cozier atmosphere. The social life of customers' children is less inhibited. Upon entering, they immediately start to run around and play in the store, fully aware that they are welcome by the staff, who often gives them free fruits and organic sweets. Certainly, children do not necessarily change their behavior from "private" to "public" in any location, but compared to other businesses, the owners in the organic shop make a particular effort to welcome children, inviting them to use the entire business space as "their" space.

The physical appropriation of space does not occur in the **butcher's shop** and **pharmacy** given the hierarchy established between a consulting salesperson and the "consultee." In addition, the counter

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tuned space, a space with a mood (Böhme 1995; 2006). The experience of an atmosphere is a process between the subjective and the objective as the socio-spatial environment. From this follows that an atmosphere represents a medium of perception and describes the invisible parts of socially-constructed spaces (Kazig 2007: 179 ff.; Löw 2001: 205).

demands that customers line up and wait until they are served. There are only a few standing or seating possibilities, and this greatly limits the people's use of the space. The pharmacy in particular has a serious atmosphere that forces customers to use lowered voices. However, regular customers of both businesses are greeted and welcomed in a very warm and public way, also often being called to over the heads of other customers. Furthermore, since regulars usually know what they want to purchase and where to find the respective goods in the counter and the shelves, they move through the sale spaces competently - integrating them as everyday places in their quotidian routines.

In the butcher's shop, every midday construction workers, employees from the local schools, banks and doctor's offices, as well as local seniors and students meet at the same four tables in order to grab a quick lunch. The midday social setting has an observable, routine social order. Some of the customers walk by the business in the morning in order to figure out the day's lunch special. By 11 am at the very latest, lunch customers arrive to get the best standing places at the tables where interaction with the salespeople and parallel observation of the sidewalk life and the entrance are the most facilitated. During my visits, the bank and doctor offices' employees arrive in little groups (around noon) - some of the seniors have already reserved places for them. The construction workers, who usually show up early, leave and then usually have a smoke outside; they greet the office employees and share cigarettes. The customers come in waves, followed by the students (usually between 1.30 and 3 pm), who usually come alone. The exchange of the tables seems to follow implicit but well-known and accepted routinized rules. In regard to Oldenburg's easy accessibility and accommodation, this ethnographic example of the butcher's shop shows that even if the spatial design, the temperature, the lack of seating possibilities, and the overall atmosphere do not invite customers to easily accommodate themselves in the businesses, businesses are nevertheless used for social exchange and sociability. Customers make themselves at home and owners and their employees invite them to do so. So most shops on Karl-Marx-Straße – with the exception of the new café, the organic store, and the lunch restaurant – seek not only to be highly accessible by being located close to customers' homes, but by not adopting specific lifestyle-signifiers, and relying on the social skills of the staff to foster easy inclusion. In a diverse neighborhood, such as northern Neukölln, businesses are low-threshold places for interaction among people who may not interact with each other outside of the stores. This social mixing is supported by the leveling practices of the shop owners. Their practices cut across class and ethnic lines and thus support the easy accommodation in and appropriation of their business spaces.

6.5. "We really have lots of regulars."[184] – On the Role of *Regular Customers*

The previously discussed socio-spatial features are all interlinked with each other, as is the found fifth characteristic that also helps to offer "more," the "presence of regulars" (Oldenburg 1999: 22f.). This chapter explores what makes a regular a regular, how they make places, and in what ways they interact with other people.

Regulars are very important to Oldenburg. He argues that regulars are involved in many leveling interactions that create a welcoming and inclusive atmosphere. He sees regulars as responsible for rendering a third place "attractive," for setting up the tone and overall atmosphere that allows for eased public sociability. Oldenburg further claims that customers choose bars or neighborhood taverns precisely because of the regulars that mingle there. Being a regular means developing a trusting relationship with other people in the business, customers and staff alike.

However, Oldenburg and his followers do not ever clarify what a "regular" *is*. They do not distinguish what makes customers regulars, or how this status is reinforced or maintained, nor do they examine how it might be lost or if there are any internal differences or hierarchies among so-called regulars. Second, while a basic definition is missing, they also overlook the potential exclusive and normative social practices of regulars, their domineering behavior or their reinforcement of certain behavioral norms or implicit/explicit codes. And third, one does not naturally become a so-called regular. Furthermore, Oldenburg neglects to analyze and accept that, as my research indicates, the owners and staff play the most important role in generating customers' relationships and attachment to the place and its people. More so than any customer, the staff determines the atmosphere, norms, rules, and sociability of the business. Moreover, it is the staff that creates the customer's status. This subchapter addresses this topic, showing how regulars make places lively and emotional and the ways these processes are affected by the people working in the businesses. However, before comparing the role of owners and regulars, it is first necessary to define what a regular is.

One can ascertain who is and is not a regular in a bar or cafe as well as the characteristics of a regular by "sitting it out" (Dröge/ Krämer-Badoni 1987: 237; see also Oldenburg 2001). However, for the much more varied sample of business types (often without seating facilities) the question of why certain individuals make a certain business their "home" must first be addressed. My early assumptions about

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[184] Paraphrased quote from lunch restaurant owner (l. 265 f.): Lot of [regulars] […] we really have people who come every midday."

customers' perception and use of businesses led me to develop the research goal of discerning what makes people come back to particular enterprises. These reasons seem to go beyond necessity, the ease of accessibility, the quality of products sold. During field work, customers listed the following characteristic as factors influencing their decisions about what businesses to frequent: the (type of) owner and salespeople and their personalities, a welcoming environment, an atmosphere conducive to whatever activity they want to do there (such as working or meeting friends), the place's design and style, the ease of routine purchase, the possibility of interaction with staff, and last but not least, the expected presence of other recognizable regulars.

For Oldenburg, the presence of other regulars comes first. He considers that already knowing people who visit as place is crucial for a newcomer's inclusion: People either visit a neighborhood tavern because they already know people who drink there regularly, or they have heard of the place through a friend who is already a regular there. They come because they anticipate that they will get introduced to other regulars through a mutual acquaintance. For gastronomic facilities, this assumption that customers already have social ties in the businesses is linked to Oldenburg's as well as Dröge and Krämer-Badoni's research in only highly homogeneous settings (in terms of gender, ethnic, and income background). So the question begs to be asked, how do people become regulars in extremely diverse neighborhoods? The question for 21st century Karl-Marx-Straße remains, if the owners and their staff's socio-economic and ethnic backgrounds differ widely from the customers, does this affect how people become regulars? In addition, people on Karl-Marx-Straße can select their favorite places among many gastronomic businesses, while Oldenburg and Dröge and Krämer-Badoni (1987: 68) focus mostly on neighborhood bars. In their focus, the social need for exchange is the main selection criteria for regulars. By contrast, this chapter's findings reveal that other businesses also generate and foster similar social exchange on Karl-Marx-Straße. But customer motivations on Karl-Marx-Straße seem nonetheless much more tied to a planned purchase and show more variations than in the prototypical male neighborhood bar.[185] Given that the process of becoming a regular is a social practice that involves objects of consumption, what does this mean for the differences in the process of becoming a regular in a non-bar location?

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[185] For Oldenburg, Dröge, and Krämer-Badoni, the (obvious) presence of people of the same milieu or occupation group is a prerequisite for the development of a relationship between the regular and the place. The pressure of the peer group to visit a given place as a matter of fact results then in an institutionalization of the visits to that place. The customer integrates this institutionalization into his (or her) everyday life, thereby "becoming a regular" (Dröge/ Krämer-Badoni 1987: 239).

The observations show that the main practices (as well as the main skill) necessary for developing a regular-status are talking and/or initiating conversations. Talking, as a social practice, requires a command of implicit or explicit rules and local norms. One needs to know how far one can tease another person and when to remain silent. Only with this knowledge do customers seem to be able to perform self-confidently in the business. Knowledgeable performance fosters the development of a casual customer into a regular. Through talking, customers are able to expand their commercial exchange into a social exchange by, for instance, making a joke or asking a question. Although it is clear that familiarity increases through social interaction or conversation, my research did not conclusively find a specific "point" that indicates when someone has become recognized as a regular.

The second social practice that makes a customer a regular (in addition to conversations) is recognition. In the butcher's shop, for instance, employees sometimes remember customers' names even after one or two visits, and will still remember them if a week passes in between visits. While in the organic store or some of the additional cafés, for instance, customers who come twice a week still do not gain the status as a regular. Hence, customers don't just become regulars by "sitting it out" or by frequenting the business at a regular basis. Rather, "talking" with salespeople or other regulars is required. While many customers on Karl-Marx-Straße frequent their favorite businesses on routine basis, i.e., on the same days of the week, or at the same times of day, a "real" regular, according to the staff of the butcher's shop and the cafés, is someone whose name and family background as well as purchase preferences is known by the owner.

Thirdly, regulars know their place *in* the business, both socially and in terms of location. While their status as regulars is constantly established and reestablished through interaction with staff, the status deeply depends on a sense of mutual recognition along with routines that maintain this status, such as ordering the same coffee or sandwich every day (Henriksen et al. 2013: 92). Regulars perceive the business as "their" place, and are increasingly acknowledged as a "natural inhabitant in this home away from home" (Henriksen et al. 2013: 92). This is illustrated by how regulars use the businesses for private and for social purposes, such as the following behavior witnessed in the **main café**: sleeping on the benches after having a coffee, shouting over other customers' heads with other customers or staff, lingering in the chairs watching TV, and spreading their clothing over the extra chairs.[186]

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[186] These practices were also observed in non-regulars; however, those customers that I could distinguish as regulars, performed these space-appropriating or occupying practices more often.

To give another example, in the **bar**, regulars are "rewarded" with their "own" seat at the counter. The farthest stool to the right, for instance, is reserved for a long-time regular who works as a theater technician at the German Opera. Due to his late working hours, the owner reserves the seat and whenever he enters the business, she asks other customers to move if they have occupied his stool. She places a special beer mug in front of his seat as he nods at the other regulars and hangs up his jacket. He almost never chats with the other regulars: he is either silent or speaks with the owner. Their exchange usually follows the same routine: The owner waits until he is settled and has had a few sips before she asks him about his day. He gives her then a short update, and the conversation ends with her offering her lighter for him to use to light his first cigarette. This routine, in particular the non-verbal components, reinforces the owner-customer relationship and his status as a long-time regular.

Once customers are recognized as regulars, their (still public) performance (Lofland 1998; Goffman 1959) is further eased due to their perception of the place as a "home territory" (Dröge/ Krämer-Badoni 1987: 69). Hence, in those businesses that allow for more private behavior, the presence of regulars blur the dividing lines between what Oldenburg distinguishes as first, second, and third places. My observations demonstrate that the presence of regulars in some of the businesses also stimulates more "first-place" or "private-place" practices. For instance, in the bar, some regulars choose the music played in the bar and in the butcher's shop, it is two lunch regulars who usually collect the dirty dishes. These practices make businesses social spaces that offer even "more" than the "public sociability" Oldenburg (1999: 22f.) ascribed to his third places: They become places for social inclusion and belonging, where customers (and the regulars in particular) take over some of the staff's tasks.

However, for those regulars who use the cafés, the bar, the butcher's shop, and the flower store as ordinary comfortable social places outside of their "real" home, the (semi-) public places are additional and less problematic social contexts that stabilize and give meaning to their self-presentation. In the **bar**, regulars decide on the music and assume that they can switch to another song as they please. Regulars walk right up to the stereo equipment behind the counter and introduce the next album or song to the other customers and the owner, as if in their own private living rooms. However, the owner who originally gave them permission to do so will ask them to change their selection if she does not like the song they have chosen.

Hence, from the customer's point of view, being a regular is first and foremost including the businesses as a fundamental element of their everyday life. They seem to perceive the social space of the

respective business as an extension of their everyday life private spaces. As one bar customer repeatedly mentioned:

> Here, you go to work, on your way home you go shopping for dinner, but then you end up in the bar. And five beers make a schnitzel [instead of dinner], too. And when the chips are down, I'll get my pretzel sticks here.

Customers develop a comfortable routine that makes them feel grounded. This routine often has a strong temporal dimension, as in the case of the main café and bar, where most regulars come during the same time frame on a daily or weekly basis (Dröge/ Krämer-Badoni 1987: 69).

Furthermore, the ethnographic data indicates that it is the owners, staff, and other regulars that confer a customer the status as a "regular." They can also withdraw this status in the case of inappropriate behavior or prolonged absence. Thus, in addition to the customer's own ease and comfort in the business, being a regular also requires that other people perceive, acknowledge, and confirm this status. Hence, staff and owners take an active part in shaping and maintaining the (special) status and role of regulars (Henriksen et al. 2013: 93). So while owners seem to benefit from regulars in terms of often predictable social exchange and a reliable customer base, customers also seem to enjoy the status of "regulars" because of the insider knowledge that comes with this status. Regulars know more about the place than other people; they know, for instance, which bar stool "belongs" to which customer and will take other stools in order to avoid conflicts. Or in the butcher's shop, regulars know about special mustards that can be asked for; in the bar, regulars order special beer glasses that otherwise would not be served.

In all the businesses studied, staff or owners greet regulars by name and know or can anticipate what the customer is going to buy and how he or she "likes it."[187] The social exchange then follows a standardized routine, which involves teasing, handshaking, or inquiring about business, the weather, family members, and so on. Customers all seem to enjoy being recognized as regulars and being known by name: After having entered the salesroom or restaurant space, they directly look for familiar faces, also among staff, often walking straight to the counter for a short conversation. If no seating is immediately available, they rest at the counter to continue their chats. This applies in particular to the

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[187] A few times when customers ordered or bought something unexpected, the staff became confused or irritated. However, these shifts in behavior usually then led to an extended and particularly humorous exchange about the reasons for the change.

smaller stores, where staff outnumbers the other customers and thus the status of a regular is most reaffirmed by the staff.

If other regular customers are present, they also greet entering regulars, often shouting through the salesroom, waving their hands to signal to the newcomer—sometimes even standing up and walking toward him or her. This underlines Oldenburg's ideas about the internal structure of third places with its conventions, rituals, and rules as "patterns of intersubjectivity" among the people present (Dröge/ Krämer-Badoni 1987: 81). These patterns are generated by the regulars and staff, who bring their social realities to the business, where they encounter other people with often similarly constituted subject-structures and social realities.

This leads to the question of the withdrawal of the regular status. It is rare that a regular lose their status as such, and it only happens when customers speak and behave inappropriately, such as using politically incorrect language, speaking too loud, disturbing other customers, not paying on time,[188] or failing to show up for an appointment as promised. This applies to men and women customers alike. For instance, in the **organic store**, a customer who did not pay her membership dues after multiple reminders was then met coldly when she approached a salesperson, who replied to her query in a very taciturn manner. In the **bar**, by contrast, the senior owner first asked a fighting and belligerent drunken customer to leave and then, with the help of other regulars, threw him out.

In contradiction with Oldenburg, my research showed that regulars are not necessarily welcoming or inclusive of others. Quite the opposite, throughout the field visits, regulars and staff turned away from and rejected customers whom they did not like or did not welcome. For instance, in the gastronomic facilities, regulars (often sitting along the counter) pulled their chairs away from unwelcomed customers, or spoke in an intentionally loud voice about topics the unwelcomed person would disagree with. Furthermore, but only during quieter hours, customers watched the entrance door as it opens, screening the newcomer from head to toe, regardless of whether they knew the person. Always curious, they sometimes reacted with a smile, but just as often with a grim face, turning their back on newcomer. In a business where everybody knows everybody and interactions are determined by well-established routines, customers seem to feel disturbed by newcomers they do not know. They

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[188] In most businesses, regulars are allowed to get a tab. While in bars and cafés open accounts are widely accepted and historically institutionalized, the flower store, butchery and organic store also allows their customers who run short of money to pay with their next visit or when they get their next paychecks or welfare transfers.

sometimes convey the impression that they want their time with the other regulars, the staff, and owners to remain exclusive.

A common metaphor that was used by the interviewed owners in the discussion of customers' in-status and out-status was that of the *family*. Businesses were framed as "family-like" (e.g. owner of main café, l. 46, 48, 53) settings. The owners want to create places with a sense of family, because „people need encounters and people also need physical encounters. Well, we worked out a little that when our employees come then you hug each other" (organic store owner, l. 1018 f.). But also other owners, such as of the flower store, bar, main café, and of the pharmacy, admit that their businesses are inclusive and supportive for members of the business' "family". Hence, rejecting newcomers may be one way that customers try to defend the group and their position in it. If the "family" metaphor might explain in-group ties among regulars and staff, it might also help us understand intragroup conflicts. This is described by the owner of the organic store who feels guilty when she takes her anger out on her employees, "and then I projected this grudge" (l. 662). But a family like setting can also result in social control on the one hand and boredom and a lack of conversational topics on the other hand. Hence, in the bar and butcher's shop, for instance, where the very same men usually gather, new customers can also serve as a distraction, a new spirit, and a new social dynamic.

Furthermore, the presence of a certain group of regulars can also deter new customers: During one of my observation dates, two women regulars approached the **lunch restaurant.** Standing in front of the business and reading the weekly menu, they saw a group of colleagues who, they seemed not to like through the glass door. "Oh no, not these idiots again," said one woman to the other. She pulled her friend's sleeve and told her that they better grab lunch somewhere else. The women usually frequent the restaurant later during their lunch break; therefore the two groups do not usually intersect. But on this day, the presence of certain colleagues caused a conflict.

Being a customer in the sampled businesses myself, I also at times experienced various levels of exclusion. For instance, due to my limited financial means, I can only buy some of my necessities at the organic store. While waiting in line at the cashier I often felt observed by the other customers who seem able to buy all their housewares, cosmetics, and food in the organic store. I felt uncomfortable disturbing their more intimate conversations, as I was not part of their organic store "family" or community of regulars. Once, I pulled out my inexpensive, no-name hand cream, and the woman behind me shot me a nasty look and mumbled "another [mineral] oil based product." During a visit in **café I** around 4 pm in the afternoon, I was the only customer along with a group of theater employees, who

were all already acquainted with the café staff. The theater employees and the café staff were joking and talking loudly, playing around with the music and enjoying their break from work. I felt like an outsider and a disturbance. I had to wait to be served because of this (private) interaction and then, when they did turn to me, they assisted me only quickly and unwillingly.[189] Sometimes the regulars and the waitress turned their heads toward me, lowering their voices, realizing that there is indeed an "outsider" present in "their" café until I left.

Regulars might also exclude other customers by making fun of them or by issuing provocative comments. In my observations, I saw this frequently in the gastronomic facilities along Karl-Marx-Straße; however, as previously mentioned, jokes and particularly Berlin wit (*Berliner Schnauze*) is also used to relax the general atmosphere in the businesses and as a means of inclusion. Because of their longer-term relationship and their mutual understanding of the Berlin wit, customers know when someone is being mean or when someone is simply joking. The staff also knows and maintains these boundary lines. Regardless of any structural similarities that the respective outsider might have with the regulars, each visit remains still a test to see if that person fits to the group of regulars and thus will be included in the social setting. For instance, the performance and understanding of the Berlin wit helps achieve social inclusion into the businesses' social life. With the exception of the regulars of the lunch restaurant, the butcher, and the bar, regulars in the other gastronomic facilities, who really consume in the businesses every day but during the very same time window, regulars might miss each other. Hence, Oldenburg's idea of "regulars making the place" also holds true for the negative or exclusive practices that are part of placemaking. And since regulars come mostly during the same time windows, different regulars make the place differently during different time phases of the opening hours.

In the **main café,** the regular morning customers never meet those who come at lunch time. Hence groups of regulars or even individuals do not necessarily develop relationships with each other. Moreover, if regulars affect the businesses' atmosphere, then *different* regulars will create very different atmospheres. Early mornings, for instance, are quite busy, with mothers meeting for tea; their children crying and playing around, while workers are grabbing a quick breakfast. The later morning is quieter: Most customers, enjoying their public solitude, work, read, or enjoy a small meal or cup of tea during their work breaks. Lunch time regulars mostly work or live on the street; they arrive in groups with their colleagues or fellow students, chatting loudly, eating, and rushing out again. During the late afternoons, the majority of customers are elderly people, couples, and students. It is during this time,

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[189] Usually, in this café the service staff is very attentive, friendly and committed to their work.

when the café has an attentive and relaxed atmosphere, which unfamiliar newcomers can most easily integrate. Different groups of regulars do intersect at the entrance when one group is leaving and the other one is coming. Only staff and owners know all the groups of regulars and can link them together. For instance, when a waitress heard that one of the morning mothers was looking for a job, she referred her to an afternoon customer who owned the adjacent clothing store and was currently hiring new sales staff.

Regulars can only support one another if they are regulars of the same time window and have a reason to interact. Oldenburg (1997: 8 f.) writes that,

> [t]hird places also serve as gathering spots […] — to help and support each other, and to decide on courses of action. […] Third places help reduce the cost of living. Where people meet regularly to relax and enjoy one another's company, natural support groups or "mutual aid" societies tend to form. As we take our relaxation with people, we grow to like them and, as we come to like them, we are inclined to "do for them." Third places are also easy places to collect time-saving, labor-saving, and moneysaving advice — sometimes without even asking!

The relationship between the regulars and particularly between different groups of regulars is thus generated by staff and owners, who know their customers' needs, but also their competencies and other resources. The benefits that Oldenburg ascribes to the status of being a regular largely depend on the mediating role of staff and owners. The ties between regulars and staff are highlighted in the different owners' accounts of how much they enjoy time with their regulars inside and often also outside the businesses. They enjoy running into them on their commute to work or home (as mentioned by the owners of the gastronomic businesses), during their leisure time activities (organic store), on vacation (flower store), or on the street or in other local businesses. For instance, the **lunch restaurant** owner explains that he constantly runs into his regular customers on his commute to or from the restaurant. When this happens, he teasingly reminds them to come again the next day, even though he knows they will come anyway. During my observations in the restaurant, exchanges that were started outside of the business were often taken up again during lunch. This pattern of ongoing, multi-sited conversation reassures the customers' statuses as regulars and may even give customers the impression of a privileged or special relationship. The owner also enjoys conversations and jokes with his regulars: "and then I just meet regulars in the train and I ask, of course, well, are you coming for lunch and then [they ask back] well, what's on the menu, this is how it works" (l. 609-611). Hence, the ethnographic

work reveals that it is much more the staff and owners' who build up, reassure, and alter the regulars' status – inside and outside of the businesses.

Furthermore, it is the special bond between staff and customers that lays at the very heart of what makes a bar or businesses favored (*Stammkneipe* in Dröge/ Krämer-Badoni's and *neighborhood tavern* Oldenburg's work). Preferred regular bars and businesses are either close to work places, but mainly in the walkable vicinity of customers' residential places, who develop a more functional, exterior relationship to the first type. Bars close to work places are largely frequented in order to break monotonous working routines, cheer up business meetings, or to have after-work meetings. Dröge and Krämer-Badoni (1987:117) found that in the bars close to customers' residences, bonding among customers as well as with staff is more emotional, also because of the socio-spatial segregation of the surrounding neighborhood and the self-selection among the businesses.[190] On Karl-Marx-Straße, working and living are deeply intertwined, even physically so, as the businesses are found on the ground floor of residential buildings and segregation is lower. This makes the functional and emotional relationships of regulars very strong. And regardless of the types of relationships between the businesses and their people, customers have different motivations to become regulars in a business close to their home or work. According to the conversations with customers and interviews with owners, proximity is an important criterion for a regular's selection of a favorite bar; however, it is not the only criteria. Although the regulars all live close to their favorite businesses, it is not necessarily the *closest* business that becomes their favorite. One exception perhaps is the flower store, where the group of senior women meets in the store because of their relationship with the owner and each other, but also because they live on the same block and their limited mobility prevents them from meeting elsewhere. However, discerning the complex and manifold motivations of why customers select a single business as their regular place remains outside the scope of this study.

To summarize, in line with Oldenburg, I found that regulars make places. All businesses under examination have a significant number of regulars who play an important role in the social life of the businesses and beyond. But there are different groups of regulars for different time windows, so their placemaking is also restricted to these times. However, the findings demonstrate that it is predominately staff and owners who contribute to the generation and maintenance of regular statuses and who link regulars with one another. Hence, the described benefits of being a regular and the

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[190] Of all the discussed business types, more than one can be found along Karl-Marx-Straße. For instance, there are three flower stores and fourteen pharmacies in the main field site. However, their products and price ranges do not differ significantly (see Chapter 4).

capacity to which "regulars make the place" emerge mostly with the help of people who *work* in the businesses.

6.6. "Stability" and "Reliance"[191] allowing for "More": The Businesses' Appeal and *Profile*

Another characteristic that Oldenburg attributes to third places is that they have a "low profile." However, it is unclear what Oldenburg means by this term. "Low" for whom? "Low" from whose perspective? What is a "profile?" Does this term refer to the first visual impression, the places decoration or interior design? Do the customers and staff have a "low profile"? Or, does "low profile" refer to the type of interactions or conversational tone in the businesses? And furthermore, what gives a place and its public, semi-public, and private social practices a profile at all? In response to these questions, this subchapter explores the design and appeal of the sampled businesses as well as the social practices of owners, employees, and customers that give the place a special profile and atmosphere.

Oldenburg (1991: 37) states that as "a physical structure, the third place is typically plain [and] unpretentious" (p. 36): The plain appearance[192] is supposed to maintain the leveling social effect and the everyday nature of the place. The simple design is supposed to foster customer relaxation and comfort. If Oldenburg's low profile refers to the material aspects of a third place, a low profile third place in his terms would mean a business that is not flashy or prestigious, and has no noticeable upscale design features at all.

My observations refute this argument, because if the businesses are too plain, they may not attract customers. They must project *something* that customers find appealing, be it the wall decoration, a particular type of coffee, or the background music. Oldenburg states that third place businesses do not advertise extensively: "In cultures where mass advertising prevails and appearance is valued over substance, the third place is all the more likely not to impress the uninitiated (1991: p. 36)."

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[191] Quotes from butcher (l. 302, l. 318).
[192] It also remains unclear if for a low profile, this "plainness" refers to the interior or exterior business design.

Figure 41: Back wall in the new café, displaying vegan cook books and homey decorations

However and certainly, all the businesses on Karl-Marx-Straße do care about their interior and outdoor design. The interviews with the store owners reveal that they are very aware of the impact of their front windows' displays as a form of advertisement. In addition, the owners of the cafés and restaurants advertise in local magazines, newspapers, and online; they also diligently manage their ratings on relevant gastronomic websites. Other business owners advertise with posters, stand-up displays, and billboards. And while Oldenburg states that "the third place is all the more likely not to impress the uninitiated" (1991: p. 36), none of the examined businesses could compete without advertisement. Owners also try to please customers with their interior design or product display. Due to the competition with the nearby discount supermarkets and e-commerce (see Chapter 2), brick and mortar businesses are all the more dependent on self-promotion. Hence, in order to compete with for instance their online competitor, the pharmacy had to drop its "low" (or rather regular) profile in order to give special consultations and to offer workshops and training for special diseases.

If Oldenburg's sense of low profile refers to rather unpretentious customers and design, then all the more established businesses largely have this third-place feature. However, the low-profile design has also been increasingly fetishized over the last decades. For instance, Zukin (2011) and Fainstein (2005)

frame this fetishization as promoting certain businesses, streets, or neighborhoods as "authentic" or "diverse" places by tourists or gentrifiers. The **butcher's shop** represents an extreme example of this, as its customers (established regulars and the younger new customers) do not allow the owner to change the old (electricity-consuming) refrigerated counter for a new, up-to-date, and more energy-efficient interior design.[193] They use the shop as their third place and in order to maintain its function as a meeting and community place, the design thus needs to remain reliably stable. But it is not only the design that needs to be stable, so do the merchandise, the opening hours, and the staff:

> There are ten employees, **always the same ones**, there is the same chef, the same saleswoman [...] Well, there's still [...] **this face behind the sausage**, this old butcher, I'm part of the furniture, and there the sausage tastes just like it tasted last year, five years ago, ten years ago, 20 years ago [...]. **There's the mirror crooked, the tiles are cracked, the counter is ageing, but this is exactly what the customers like, this is what makes the difference for them, really.** We conducted a customer survey and **it should remain exactly like it is, right. [...] this is why this [the store] is indeed a real anchor** when you had a bad day, right [...] **people strive for stability, they simply need some few stable points, a little bit of new things is interesting, but finally, if it gets tumultuous, right, we experience this here again and again, then you wish for a piece of stability**. **This is first, your home and then, it's the stores that you always frequent** and this is such a store, [which] doesn't change at all, no, [...] **obviously I'm not allowed [to change]** (l. 292 - 310).

The design of the flower and butcher's store, the pharmacy and gastronomic facilities refer to Karl-Marx-Straße's "good old days." The decoration design, which includes many nostalgic photographs, shapes the business' profile. The design, including these small items, is a part of the owner's business strategy. For this reason, small design items serve as communal fetish objects and many customers and staff identify with these small symbolic objects. Although some business owners also remember periods of financial instability, they refer to the "past" or the "good old days" in a nostalgic gesture that romanticizes the street's working class history and the strong neighborhood solidarity in the final decades of the 20th century. In addition to standard shopping routines, the material signs - photographs, pictures, old furniture, and decorations - of a common past bind customers and employees to one another and to the place itself. Since Neukölln still has a reputation as an impoverished working class district, many business owners and customers perceive themselves as having a low profile, even if not necessarily being working class themselves. They use adjectives as "working class" or "normal" and self-

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[193] Nevertheless, the butcher does also promote his business by putting up all the awards he won in the last decades for his products in the front window. He also makes sure that the new "hip" burger spots that he provides me to all promote his butcher shop on their webpages and in front windows.

descriptions as "simple people" (butcher) not in a pejorative way, but rather as a forthright neighborhood character they can relate to - but importantly, as one that might soon be lost.

Figure 42: Butcher's shop with its long-standing wall decoration

As described in Chapter 5, the specific aesthetics of the sampled businesses support their character as everyday places, with references to the owners and customers' origins and the neighborhood's past. They are designed for local people and not for visitors seeking a certain kind of working-class authenticity (Zukin 2011). This aesthetics is considered as low profile, but the owners nevertheless do target customers with their businesses and shop windows' design. The florist, for instance, sees her decorations as being flashy and eye catching, but the owner of the organic store sees the flower store's design and offers as old-fashioned. By extension, while some customers on Karl-Marx-Straße may see their businesses as everyday places with no extravagant appeal, others may perceive certain business as fancy or high-profile.

However, since the stores' profiles and interiors are also intentionally used as identification markers, group symbols, or as common nostalgia or fetishes (particularly in light of recent neighborhood changes), these former often more *everyday* or *low profile* decorations seem to have become *high*

profile - all the more so if the new businesses have ostentatious or eye-catching displays. For instance, the butcher's and flower shops' business signs as well as their unchanged interior design (e.g., from the 1950s) indicate their longstanding service for the neighborhood. The pharmacy, the bar, and the fruit and vegetable store decorate their sales and back spaces with black and white pictures of the street, of the store's facade, and of former employees and customers. In addition, the stores clearly make an attempt to root the stores physically and to sell a sense of localness. They offer "traditional" German cuisine, homemade dishes, or sausages made from old recipes, and locally brewed beer. The main cafe that sells Turkish baked goods also offers German cream cakes that are typical of the 1950s and 60s. These specials, along with plastic flowers or home remedies, locate the neighborhood's past as an ethnic German working class area. In designing their enterprises in this way, owners honor and pay tribute to the remaining customers from these by-gone days.

With this the question remains, what could "plain" design signify and to whom might plainness appeal? None of the sampled businesses, with the exception of the **organic store** and the **new café**, seem to appeal only to one or very few upscale consumers that long for a particular shopping experience and atmosphere supported by a specific design and price range. However, the people who shop at these stores are socially and ethnically more homogeneous compared to the other shops' customers. In the organic store and new café, customers and staff also practice or enact more a "community of interest" (cf. Gusfield 1975; McMillan/ Chavis 1986; Durkheim 1964 [1893]), built around certain products (e.g., espresso, pastry or organic food) and particular aesthetics. Certainly the customers in the other businesses may also form a community of interest, but less around the offered products, but rather around the people working or spending time in the businesses. But aside from lifestyle products displayed or served in an accordantly styled surrounding, all business people do care about their stores' design and decorate their businesses according to their own or assumed customers' aesthetic preferences. Oldenburg considers the simple design of third places as fostering customers' relaxation and comfort, but on Karl-Marx-Straße, customers find relaxation and comfort in manifold ways. For instance, senior customers across all cases seem to have preferences that differ not only in terms of the design, but also in terms of the desired service (with the exception of the butcher and pharmacy). The senior customers in the flower store seem to share a preference for specifically designed flower bouquets and decorations, which fits the owner's style as well. The overflowing décor of dolls and glittery flowers does indeed support - following Oldenburg's claim - the senior women's relaxation and comfort during their purchase. However, contrary to Oldenburg, the design is anything but "plain."

Figure 43: Shelves in the flower store

In contrast, the organic store does have a very plain design; there is almost no additional decoration or pictures on the wall, and the furniture is functional and rather purist. However, the simplicity is also what many customers of organic products or LOHAS[194] seem to favor, also for their private spaces, as the owner describes. Hence the plainness comes from the owners' decision to present the rather expensive, exclusive products in a clean and chic environment without any distracting decoration; they do this to appeal to their customers as well as their own. Also if Oldenburg's low profile and plainness mean that there are no distractions from the main practice of having a conversation, as mentioned earlier, all of Karl-Marx-Straße' gastronomic businesses that allow for a longer stay also offer background music, newspapers, and magazines - and in the case of the main café, even a TV.

Hence, the ethnographic work shows that although the businesses offer more to the customers in the sense that they find a place for recovery and social exchange there, it disproves Oldenburg's (1999: 22) often romanticized idea of third place working-class taverns with blue collar men sitting at a plain counter, engaging only in ritualized "natural" and "levelling" conversations. The ethnographic work

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[194] LOHAS - Lifestyles of Health and Sustainability - are people, who (presumably) put health and sustainability at the center of their life and action.

shows that other places also work as third places but function in a different way, often regardless of their "profile." But the socio-spatial setting, with a focus on image and design, attracts certain customers more than others and thus, the Karl-Marx-Straße' businesses are only partially, not wholly, inclusive.

Figure 44: Diverse customers chatting over a coffee or tea in the main café (afternoon)

Some, such as the **butcher's shop** and **main café,** even include customers in the design process. Knowing that many customers have roots in the region in Turkey where the owner's family comes from, he decided for a "modern" style, but combined this modern aesthetic with pictures of coastal towns and landscapes from that region. He also brought in Turkish chandeliers in order to make his customers feel more at home and to stir up common conversation topics. Yet, the owner intentionally combines the "Turkish" elements with more "modern gastronomic elements," as he frames it, in order to signal to all passersby that they are welcome in the business. The butcher's customers did not allow the butcher to renovate his business space, because they liked the nostalgic design and how it symbolized "good old craftsmanship," and reminded them of "their neighborhood's past." It seems that the two newer businesses in the sample, the **new café** and the **organic store,** are the only places, where the design references and targeting of a distinct lifestyle or age group are comparatively obvious. For instance their

clean-cut shelves made out of sustainable material target their customers' taste for "holistic sustainability;" the plain flowers in vintage vases on the table, lifestyle magazines, books on the shelves, the alternative background music, and plain bulb lighting on the ceiling are thought to appeal not only to their own taste and to make the businesses distinctive from other business competitors, but also to adjust the business' design to the assumed interior design of the customers' own private apartments. Hence, it is not surprising that it is also the two newer businesses that stand out in the sample as having the least heterogeneity among customers and the lowest degree of interaction among people with different age, lifestyle, or ethnic backgrounds. Hence, in the case of the new café and the organic store, the clear stylistic elements lead to a strong preselection of the customers and thus it is predominantly the more established businesses that offer "more" inclusion in terms of diverse social exchange.

But even with a low profile, diverse customers and staff interact with each other in highly different ways, ranging from small talks to personal assistance to heated debates. But status backgrounds also remain eminent in all the observed conversations. The owners, for instance, remain always the ones who might stop conversation if they consider the topic as inappropriate or if they see customers disturbed or feeling uncomfortable with the social interaction's direction. Although in most businesses people with different socio-economic and education backgrounds mingle at the counters and although their mutual opinions seem equally respected and appreciated, status differences remain obvious in terms of rhetoric, bodily performance, as well as spending habits. And wealthier patrons sometimes receive more attention and special service from the staff than less-affluent customers do. Hence, while these businesses allow for safe and easy interaction between people and particularly with strangers from different stratification groups, the interactions that take place within the businesses do not abolish status differences, prejudices or stereotypes. Yet, it is possible that these interactions would decrease prejudice.

To summarize, the design of the stores influences who shops there and the kinds of social practices that take place therein. On Karl-Marx-Straße, it seems that all store owners (not just those sampled), including chains, franchises, and independent businesses, attempt to attract attention, to target specific groups, and to please customers' tastes through their businesses' physical appearance. As per the owners' framing of their stores' idea, vision, and design (cf. Chapter 5), they decorated and designed their store according to their own taste, financial means, and visions or ideas of what their potential customers would like.

So, while Oldenburg states that third places "fall short of the middle-class preference for cleanliness and modernity" (1991: 36), those businesses on Karl-Marx-Straße do show (social and physical) third place characteristics but mostly do not serve a single class. Moreover, they are indeed "clean" and try to appear "modern" with regard to goods, tools, skills, training, interior design, and so on.

6.7. Businesses as "Male *Playful* Places"[195] - Businesses for "Self-Confident Women"[196]

As argued in the previous subchapters, despite the usefulness of Oldenburg's criteria catalogue for conceptualizing businesses and the ways they create sociability or even a "home away from home" atmosphere (Oldenburg/Brissett 1982, Oldenburg 1999: 22f.), he never explicates his concepts of "low profile," "plain design," "modern," or "clean" to middle-class lifestyles and further, he does not relate his empirical work to other contexts. His preference for "male working-class" places where people mingle and share their problems betrays a highly nostalgic and protectionist view of his research subjects and the everyday places where they meet. However, in order to analyze what makes a business a place for socially significant interaction and a place where customers and staff mold feelings of belonging or attachment, the overall atmosphere and tone are just as important as the material design of the commercial spaces and the social practices therein. Therefore this section looks at the relation of the businesses' atmospheres, tone, and mood – eventually as "playful" as Oldenburg (1999: 22 f.) sees necessary for business to be a third places. In the course of this the section particularly examines the gendered placemaking practices in and of the businesses.

As previously discussed, Oldenburg assigns third places a "playful mood" (1999: 22f.). He sees them as places full of rough laughter, wit, and strong statements—places where customers go to escape from their presumably tough everyday work and family lives. As distinctly male places, he praises their function to provide an escape or neutral ground for stressed-out husbands fighting with their moaning wives at home, for hard working males dealing with strict or mean bosses, long working hours and their families' survival, and so on. Hence, the playful mood attribute Oldenburg ascribes has a direct relation to the distraction that men require from their stressful and tiring everyday lives. While he formally welcomes the increasing inclusion and openness of some of the third places toward female customers, his descriptions from both the early 1980s and from his more recent work refer only to interactions

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[195] Oldenburg 1999: 22f.
[196] The Owner of the main café describes the customers as "self-confident women" (l. 19). I assume that he means women that frequent stores without male accompaniment.

among male drinkers sitting up at the counter. Although men and women might have the same kind of wit and desire for playful distraction outside of work hours, his empirical fieldwork focuses on male bonding, much of which involves mocking their wives. It is unclear, however, if he just claims that no women were present in his study site or if he ignored female subjects in the neighborhood taverns or bars. In his more recent work (2001; 2009), Oldenburg does include female customers in his study of a laundromat, a study that looks at both males and females. However, whenever he talks about bars, or less housework or household supply-related spaces, he rarely mentions women as participants. But inasmuch as all spaces are "gendered spaces" (Spain 1996: 30), and their spatial arrangements reinforce gender-related status differences, the presence of differently gendered customers and staff likely create different atmospheres or "moods," that may also show different degrees of openness.

In the mid to late 20th century, many women did not enter eateries and taverns/ bars, particularly during evening or night hours, facilitates without male accompaniment, or more precisely, without being the accompanying decoration of male customers or guests (cf. Starzinger 2000). Even if there ever were or are no formal rules that prevent women from entering establishments without male accompaniment, many businesses still prevent women from entering or socializing by means of unwritten but socially enacted laws. Women who don't follow these rules are often considered dishonorable and provocative (Starzinger 2000: 49 f.). The gastronomic businesses along Karl-Marx-Straße do have female customers in the evening and night hours, but compared to the daytime, their number decreases significantly as soon as the sun has set.

Certainly, even today many bars in Neukölln (as well as the rest of Berlin and even Germany) are "male spaces," with drinking customs, counter topics, conversational forms and modes of behavior that take an explicitly masculine form (Starzinger 2000: 39 f). Most local bars, in particular, still work as places of exclusion and internal cohesion by means of physical (e.g. not taking the chair next to her until all other chairs are occupied) and conversational (e.g. mocking, complaining) distancing practices from the women present. The women are often left outside, socially excluded, or remain somewhere else (e.g., at home). Even as bartenders or owners, women are often perceived differently than their male counterparts. On Karl-Marx-Straße, customers often approach female bartenders with different interactional expectations with regard to conversational form and content. Their interactions with women are often less playful than in Oldenburg's elaborations on "male" third places. However, sometimes the behavior is even more playful, but this occurs only when they have developed a long-term relationship with a female member of staff.

Figure 45: Waitress cleaning the table and making a joke to the customer in the main café

Still, women in gastronomic businesses are more often found working behind the counter rather than drinking and sitting at the counter. This was definitely the case for Karl-Marx-Straße, where far more women work in the local gastronomic businesses rather than the number who enjoy a drink or a meal therein. As service providers, and particularly in bars and cafés that stay open until late, where there is an increased demand for counselling during the late hours (as mentioned by one waitress), women seem to take over a rather traditional role as caretakers—or as one waitress put it, *carer of souls* (*Seelsorge*).

The owner of the examined **bar** recounted that during the time her husband was alive, she had to work more in the back of house and in the kitchen (which she enjoyed), while her husband played the entertaining host up front. But when a customer had a broken heart, for instance, her husband would send them over to her rather than listening to their sorrows at the counter. During my observations in 2012, cross-gender interaction is very common, also because it is the bar owner who sets widely the tone, even if she's not involved in the conversations.

In all businesses, women are still more commonly employed as waitresses and sales personal in the more visible and "serving" functions, while men usually work the "physically harder" (as described by

the main café owner) jobs at the back of the house. This pattern was typical for the butcher, the bars and eateries, and the fruit and vegetable store - even in those cases when the business was owned by a woman.

The **organic** and **flower stores** – as daytime businesses that sell household products - have slightly more female than male customers, and the conversations observed therein focus mainly on household supply, environmental and family issues. Conversations seem to be stimulated by the shop's products. As the organic shop owner mentions, "young Turkish girls shop for decorative cosmetics" (l. 269), husbands send their wives to shop for allergy-free products (l. 236), elderly women come for local organic products from their childhood; and for Karl-Marx-Straße, "it is still very uncommon that a business is operated by two women" (l. 146.). At the butcher, slightly more men than women are customers, and conversations either remain at the small talk level, or they include casual jokes and the discussion of local politics. The regular customers also discuss more private family and work-life issues, but the butcher thinks this occurs less than in the stores with predominantly women customers. Hence, the observations confirm rather traditional shopping roles and conversational topics, often linked to the businesses' offers.

As stated, while the gastronomic businesses do have slightly more men than women, the gender compositions therein depend also on the different time of the day.[197] However, traditional gender lines do also blur—even if only partially—in the sampled businesses. For instance, cross-gender interaction is very common in the **bar**, where the majority of the customers are male, but is owned by a woman. It is the owner who widely sets the tone for the business, even if she's not involved in the conversations. She also includes other female customers into the discussions at the counter and thus succeeds in giving the bar a more open and inclusive atmosphere. While Oldenburg did not examine the role of owners and staff for the tone and mood of the businesses, for the sampled businesses, it was clear that staff managed to include men and women both in conversations; staff often initiated chats and conversations between the genders, setting the tone and atmosphere for the stores in a more explicit way than customers.

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[197] Since men still have higher incomes than women, they are also able to eat and drink out more often than women. While women still spend more on clothing and household wares, for groceries and leisure time shopping, gender differences in spending habits has decreased significantly over the last years. Hence, behavioral norms for women in gastronomic businesses also depend on the general higher spending abilities of male customers. For women's consumption poverty and spending habits in Germany, see WSI (n.d.). Armut, Nur ältere Frauen sind Stärker von Konsumarmut betroffen, http://boeckler.de/53623.htm, accessed 04/25/2016.

In addition to the gender composition in the businesses, the degree to which owners, staff, and customers know each other also affects the playfulness and the intimacy of conversational topics and physical interaction. Furthermore, as described in the section on the customers (Subchapter 6.5.), the businesses have different moods at different times of day. Atmospheres also shift within a business: along the counter and the cashier line of the **main café**, the spirit of the social exchanges is primarily humorous, talkative, or grumpy; those at the hidden table in the back of a café are often intimate, humorous, or serious. A chat during the quick lunch break at a standing table at the butcher's shop differs from the tone and atmosphere during the coffee parties at the flower shop. In the additional cafés, the owners name teasing and joking as common for regular-staff- and regular–regular-interaction ("they are pulling my leg quite often" owner of café I, l. 233; "I'm just kidding!" customer in café I, l. 734; "we had a funny experience with our customers", "customers laugh, customers drink" organic shop owner, l. 338, 955). Different still is the tone in which the pharmacist chats discreetly with a sick customer in the back of her business. As this last examples also indicates, the different moods depend on the type of conversation occurring and the subject under discussion, which in turn is affected by the reason for which the customers came to the business. For instance, most of the observed social interactions also include the exchange of serious information, debates, and discussions on a huge variety of topics, ranging from superficial chats to political or family issues, or explaining to the adjacent person how to repair something. Hence, these conversations give the businesses a rather functional or serious atmosphere.

Hence, light conversation that often involves "playful" conversational elements is most common for staff-customer interaction as long as they do not know each other well. Certainly the owners, as good business people, need to get along with everybody in order not to risk to losing potential customers; they also must train their staff in a similar way. The owners consider this kind playful small talk as a means of binding customers to the place as well as a way of supporting their sense of well-being during their stay. They see small talk as a first step to the development of a further relationship. Hence, cultivating a playful or light mood is a business practice and business skill necessary for operating a business successfully. For this, owners and staff need to watch what they say, avoid certain critical issues and be careful to maintain a balance between socializing and professionally serving the customers. Even though these light conversations maintain and foster the customers' status as "familiars," they remain "familiar strangers" (Milgram 1992; see also Massey 2005; Lofland 1973; 1998) or only categorically known people (Lofland 1989; Bahrdt 1969). Indeed teasing and joking and light conversation on general but common topics such as the weather, parking situation, the visible

reconstruction of the street outside of the businesses provide a smooth starting point for conversation and relaxed atmosphere. These light social exchanges do invite for more social interaction, once a certain degree of mutual knowledge and familiarity is reached. But only if they are repeated these light conversations weave stronger ties (Granovetter 1973) or relationships, that then support the discussion of more serious topics and more supportive social exchanges.

My observations reinforce Oldenburg's argument that playful conversations are at the core of third places: This type of social exchange is most common for interaction among strangers that (have to) share the same (limited) space. When parties have an interest in maintaining a polite and comfortable atmosphere without intruding on one other's privacy, playful conversations help bridge and ease physical proximity. With only a partial mutual knowledge or incomplete integration (Bahrdt 2013 [1961]: 86) in a public setting with others present, customers and staff have to be careful when sharing personal information in order to not turning (the) customers off or decrease customer loyalty and frequency.

As discussed, objects in the stores such as jukeboxes, cell phones, background music, TVs, news or bar games are conversation starters and contribute to the light mood. They do not distract from conversation but rather invite further interaction. For instance, in the **flower store**, radio news often invited discussions and jokes about the news, and in the **main café**, two customers got to know one another by watching the "badly and dilettante produced music videos," as they called them. Watching the videos, they caught each other shaking their heads with disgust, which resulted in laughter, an exchange of opinion, and a short discussion of contemporary pop music. Hence, the presence of the TV and the social practice of watching music videos while eating or drinking a cup of tea bound the two customers together for the length of their stay. Hence, the playful friendly tone is not only maintained to provide a comfortable and relaxed shopping and consumption atmosphere for the customers, but also for staff and owners.

A good mood also helps the people working in the businesses to endure their long working hours, tough business situations, boring work routines, and to get along with picky customers, competing colleagues or strict bosses. Above all, playfulness helps increase sales and customer loyalty and thus also increases the functionality of the places just as much as it helps build an intimate atmosphere.

From this it follows that it is the commonly shared social practices, the personalities of the owner (and to a lesser extent of employees and customers) and the respective behavioral codes and norms that create a socio-spatial setting where "joy and acceptance reign over anxiety and alienation" (Oldenburg

1999: p. 38). Humorous regulars alone cannot create this atmosphere. The owners and staff's main goal of nurturing this kind of mood or atmosphere maintains the business as an open, civilized, welcoming, and inclusive place. The businesses generate "more" in the sense as they invite play and recreation as well as quietude or reflection. But the ethnographic work also reveals that the gender of the owners, staff, and customers affect the social order and conversational topics as well as how social interactions are initiated, continued, and ended. However, within one business, different atmospheres can be found, depending on the conversational partners' location within the business, the people involved, their degree of familiarity, and the content of their conversations.

6.8. *Home away from home*? A Synthesis of the Offered "More" and the Businesses' *Third Place* Features

Based on my ethnographic work, this chapter has explored the distinct features and characteristics of the businesses that affect how - and with whom - people in the Karl-Marx-Straße businesses develop social relationships. I have also looked at how senses of home and belonging develop in and around their everyday shopping patterns. The data shows that these shops are not third places in Oldenburg's sense, but that they share many third place characteristics. Karl-Marx-Straße's retailers and gastronomic facilities also generate and allow for the kind of sociability and communal social processes that Oldenburg attributes to his neighborhood taverns and restaurants. But Oldenburg needs to expand his definition of third places to include other typologies. Due to the higher diversity of customers, staff, products, and uses, not to mention the businesses' overall socio-spatial settings, the businesses function differently as third places. Nonetheless Oldenburg's assumptions about the potential benefits of spending time in third places as well as his descriptions of the eight qualities found therein provided an initial conceptual lens through which the Karl-Marx-Straße businesses' socio-spatial features, social order, behavioral norms, and social processes could be researched. My research diverges from Oldenburg's findings, showing new and notable ways in which social interaction is fostered in the stores primarily due to the blurring of public and private spaces therein. My work also highlights the importance of the materials or artifacts (Reckwitz 2002; 2003) involved in these interactions. And the findings further reveal new dimensions of the third-place qualities in regard to the manifold ways in which the businesses' socio-spatial setting and design allows customers to identify with the places, developing attachments to businesses that in many cases evolve into a sense of belonging and inclusion.

As most of the observed people use the businesses regularly and in the course of their everyday lives, these social micro-processes and particularly the social interactions in the stores deserve more sociological attention (more than Oldenburg payed to them). Furthermore, more conceptual emphasis needs to be placed on the physical features of these ordinary places' and how they shape interactions and connect people in the course of everyday shopping and consumption. The data analysis reinforces the sociological relevance of researching everyday life at the micro-level and of researching businesses as places that facilitate and build the spatial basis for local social life. Most significantly, without local low-threshold places to meet, urban dwellers with limited mobility, such as the disabled, the elderly, or the impoverished, risk further deprivation, isolation, and social exclusion.

The businesses are social anchors in the district and attract people to them as secondary diversity (Jacobs 1961: 150 f.). The customers and owners also describe their businesses as "anchors" (e.g. butcher, l. 278, 301, 324), using the term as a metaphor for being at home, for a place that doesn't change, a neighborhood center. Hence, the final benefit of spending time in the businesses along Karl-Marx-Straße - the last constituent of the "more" that comes with shopping or eating/drinking out - is the use of the place as a "home away from home" (Oldenburg 1999: 22 f.; Oldenburg 2001: 160). But in order to analyze how the sampled businesses do or do not function as homes, it is important to first consider the term more precisely: Homes are not literally open to the public, but rather, a host invites and allows certain people to enter. In contrast, the businesses on Karl-Marx-Straße aim to maintain and increase a wide client base in order to survive or expand economically. And how people make themselves at home in the businesses varies: The observations of Oldenburg's third place features for Karl-Marx-Straße's businesses show people relaxing, socializing, and recovering similar to at home. However, this is done with the freedom that comes from not actually being at home, where one might have to act as a host or fulfill the social roles of being at home (e.g., as a parent, partner, housekeeper and the like) (cf. Oldenburg 1999; 2001), yet under the behavioral rules and norms of the respective business.

Moreover, the businesses actually are semi-public spaces with an audience of strangers, only categorically-known, or familiar people (Kusenbach 2006; Lofland 1998; Goffman 1963). This means that the businesses show certain features of a private place and evoke particular social practices assigned to private spaces, while still remaining places where public behavior is most common. Throughout the observations, the depicted micro-interactions can be conceptualized with Goffman's (1959; 1963) three main principles for public behavior: civil inattention, audience role prominence, and civility towards

diversity structure. Oldenburg's "playful mood" and "light conversation" also serve to maintain this kind of inattention and civility on the one hand and performances in front of an only partially or fully unknown audience on the other hand. The more the space is used as private space, the more intimate and serious the interactions were in the businesses.

On Karl-Marx-Straße, these micro-interactions reveal different senses of inclusion and exclusion. The respectively encountered interactions in the frequented business thus widely affects how people will further interact in the stores; however, as has been shown in the previous subchapters, the layout and physical features, and the behavioral norms set by owners, staff and other customers, also structure the behavior therein and determine how the spaces are used. In other words, whereas the last subsections (6.6. and 6.7.) examine how the "playful" mood and conversations are used to maintain this civility towards diversity as well as civil inattention, it seems that customers and staff also sometimes forget that there is an (eventually unknown) audience witnessing all social practices within the business. This is when "home-practices" appear in the Karl-Marx-Straße' businesses; however, these are not necessarily inclusive practices.

Therefore, this subchapter also focuses on the socio-spatial features of the businesses in an effort to bring together the previous (explanatory) descriptions of the ways each discussed feature contributes to the "more" that the businesses manage to offer and thus make the places significant localities for local social life.

For the socio-spatial qualities of the businesses on Karl-Marx-Straße, the "more" is that the businesses provide customers, staff, and owners with a low threshold place for interaction, facilitated by the feeling of being at home[198] (Oldenburg 2001: 160).

For instance, in the beginning of a business day in the **main café**, the distinction between front stage and backstage is quite recognizable: customers enter and occupy the front; staff work in the back. Customers are an "audience" waiting to be entertained, or served. Salespeople, as "actors," need to

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[198] My conceptual and contextual understanding of the concept of home transcends the material characteristics of domestic space, but is left rather vague and open for the customers and staff's relationship to the businesses. For a more theoretical underpinning of "home," it is an abstract signifier of a wide set of associations and meanings (Moore 2000: 208). The definition of home belongs to the individual, and encompassing an affective bond between a place and a person. Home has a subjectively defined meaning and scale. The main urban studies theory in use in relation to home is probably place attachment (Altman/ Low 1992). Place attachment is viewed as an affective measure and identifies the types of bonds with home places, and emphasizes the process by which people and home places develop relationships (Moore 2000; Altman/ Low 1992). The more theoretical definitions and conceptual ideas of sense of belonging, including place, home, and attachment are discussed in Chapter 3.3..

follow both the rules of the front stage as well as the backstage and are constantly switching between the two (cf. Goffman 1963). At this point, the café's small social life world consists of socio-spatial relations of consumption (Crang 1994: 677), and is not a place with high levels of sociability. People are not interacting in a comparatively intimate way, characteristic of third places in Oldenburg's terms. The behavior of both customers and salespeople is guided by the rules of the work in the business space: The café's micro-geography defines who moves where and how, permitting the use of certain spaces and forbidding the use of others. For instance, the entrance, lines, and bathroom lines delineate a spatial order, becoming cornerstones for bodily movements in the space of the business. As customers increase, the "dance" in the café speeds up. Around midday, when the neighboring schools let out, local employees as well as students come over for a quick lunch or to grab a take-away. As their bodies stream through the entrance and into the business space, the dance reaches its peak: due to the crowds and noise, people in the café have to shout in order to place orders or to carry on their conversations. Most often, their behaviors make customers and salespeople laugh among one another. Waitresses and customers intermingle in a way that front and back stages, work and consumption spaces, public and private spaces, merge - creating an atmosphere of public familiarity. And it is most often during the afternoons that customers start to use the café as a more home-like place. Observations note participating in the afore mentioned behaviors of putting off shoes and jackets, distributing them around their table, taking out newspapers, pencils, cosmetics and the like. Customers relax as if at home, often forgetting that they are surrounded by a crowd or audience of strangers or only categorically known people. Other customers pull out work material, such as laptops, smartphones, homework, or reading material and shut off the background noise and audience - even if both helps some to focus on their work, as one customer told me. Another home-like behavior I observed was snoozing on chairs; customers were sometimes audibly snoring, but were rarely getting disturbed by employees or neighboring customers. During the interview date with the **pharmacist** - as another ethnographic example how business spaces are used for practices that are assigned to more private spaces (Lofland 1998; Goffman 1963), a senior customer took a nap on the chair in the salesroom, while the business operations busily went on. Other (familiar) customers also entered the pharmacy just to take a break from the crowded and busy shopping street, sitting down on the few chairs or the bench, noticeably relieved to leave the street and sidewalk life for a moment.

When business is slow or when employees take a break, they a convert the business' front and back stages into their "own," more private, and thus home-like spaces: The following picture (46) depicts a saleswoman enjoying the sun at the entrance door during her break. She is playing on her phone; the

owner of the adjacent kiosk snoozes on a plastic chair in front of his business; another salesman watches on, enjoying a cigarette with a customer in front of his furniture store.[199]

Figure 46: Staff taking a break

Inside the **main café**, the front and back behavior (Goffman 1959) of the salespeople is recognizable by the way saleswomen come from the kitchen to the counter or salesroom: they straighten up, smooth their clothes and their hair, and smile. When moving to the back, they often loosen their clothes, shake and rearrange their hair, put their feet up on one of the few stools, sometimes even taking their shoes off when they take a break. Here, their bodies loosen and relax; they sometimes tease and pinch or massage each other. However, sometimes they also conduct these practices in the front rooms: for instance, waitresses sit down with customers and chat with them and in doing so, loosen their aprons, shoes, and relax their overall posture. They also take breaks in the salesroom, playing with their cell phones, pulling off their shoes, and closing the eyes for a minute on the bench.

Hence, by displaying private behavior in (still) public settings, the practices of staff and customers creates a rather informal and familial setting. This is where the work in the café with its division into

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[199] However, this behavior might also prevent new customers from entering the business or from feeling welcomed in the stores.

front and back stages, or, more precisely the interaction of bodies, material, social practices and the space culminate. This turns the café into an "extended living room," or "home away from home" (Oldenburg 2001: 160) for some of the customers (cf. Erickson 2007: 19). This means that sometimes customers also infringe the implicit rules and socio-spatial orders of the business. If salespeople don't know or don't feel comfortable with customers entering "their" space, they will tell them so.[200]

In the **butcher's shop**, customers appropriate the tiled salesroom with their lively, loud, but nonetheless intimate conversations. In doing so, the regular customers enliven the chilly butcher's shop and turn it into a private living room or neighborhood bar setting that makes the formal and legal ownership secondary. The men, as "lunch friends" (as mentioned by a saleswoman and a lunch regular), perceive the shop as a stable anchor of their weekday working routines, but moreover, of their local social lives. As mentioned by several customers throughout my visits, the butcher's shop is one of the significant places in the community, a place where "nothing changes" (also mentioned by staff and the butcher, l. 306) in an ever-changing neighborhood. The fact that their common meeting place is a butcher's salesroom, where strangers enter and leave the business, where meat and sausages are sold, and where visiting is governed by opening hours and a lack of seating facilities, fades into the background during lunch time. Similar practices – as customer-led placemaking - were seen across all businesses. Regardless of the formal ownership, customers - and regulars in particular - make the place their private places, so long as they feel welcomed and comfortable there. These interactional practices might involve other people (including staff), as in the case of the butcher's or flower store, whereas in the gastronomic businesses customers use the space for more explicit private or work purposes, often without paying attention to anyone else present.

So it is first and foremost the social practices in the businesses that contribute to a sense of home. The manifold social practices of the customers in the stores and the purposes for which they seem to frequent them synthesize with the types of interactions between the people that work in the businesses and those who use them for consumption and shopping. The practices thus explain what makes these places socially and physically a place that offers "more" in terms of fostering senses of home or belonging, or, in Oldenburg's terms, a "home away from home." Oldenburg's work simply states that third-place neighborhood bars and restaurants "provide customers with a feeling as if at home" (1999),

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[200] However, only three times during my fieldwork of two years were customers corrected or guided back to the "formal" rooms; in one occasion, it was a lost elderly lady who was looking for the restrooms but ended up in the kitchen. Yet, this example also highlights that "formal" and "legal" place ownership is still on the employees and owners' side.

whereas my research reveals much more complicated and nuanced relations, particularly one of regeneration, between home and third places. For instance, one of the lunch customers that frequents the butcher's shop regularly identifies this business as a place to both satisfy his consumption need, but also refers to the shop as a place where he finds refuge and regeneration during his work days. After watching another customer approach the owner of the main café in his back office in order to shake hands and greet him personally, I asked him why he frequents the café. He responded: "To see people, and because I belong here." My observations thus demonstrate that customers use these spaces for regeneration among people whom feel comfortable with. However, they also maintain social relationships in these businesses. In doing, so they transform the businesses as places of consumption and leisure into places of social significance, into a "home away from home."

Legally, owners own places. However, people practice and perceive ownership in different ways. The observations and interviews show that what is used and thus considered as "private" spaces for some employees and customers is still perceived as public spaces by others. In these cases, more public behavior is displayed than in private homes (e.g. social practices as performances towards or in dependence to an audience, awareness of strangers, behavioral norms, house rules etc.). This applies to the fruit and vegetable store, the organic store, the pharmacy as well as the new café. But in terms of practiced ownership, the observations show that some customers appropriate and occupy the space or parts of the salesrooms as if they "own" these corners, tables, or spaces – also physically with their private belongings, such as jackets, computers or work material, or newspapers. While customers call their regular bars, cafés, and shops on Karl-Marx-Straße "my" shop, "my bar," and "my butcher" and call themselves "belonging" to the "lunch round," or to the "morning customers," (or even "belong to the café"), the businesses also "belong" to the owners and remain legally solely their private spaces, even though they are open to any potential customer[201]. Nevertheless, the businesses are not "home" to anyone. The customers need to acknowledge the formal ownership, and thus become aware that they remain "visitors," but, as discussed, are simultaneously allowed to appropriate and use the space as if it were their own—so long as their practices have the consent of employees and owners.

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[201] As has been shown with the descriptions of the stores and their customers in Chapter 5 and the above discussion of the ethnographic findings, what makes an entering person a "customer" and thus locally accepted person in the business varies across the cases and owners' statements. The status of a customer may range from collecting information on certain goods and services, to window-strollers, random customers, to regulars or someone who asks for the restrooms and leaves without any purchase but is believed as a potential future or past customer, and so on.

Hence, a business does not inherently work as a "home away from home," but is *made* a home by certain customers and for a certain period of time and only in accordance with staff. As well, customers probably have highly varying understandings of "home. The observed practices along with the interview statements do reveal that the businesses are used for practices that are usually ascribed to home spaces, or at least, spaces where people have a sense of ownership, familiarity and belonging.[202] Hence, home activities are transferred to and practiced in these places, resulting in a sense of ownership or belonging, but the place still belongs to the business owner and is open to the public and thus not a home away from home in the real sense. These places offer more than "a home away from home" and carry a less exclusive notion than the home.

Summarized the ethnographic work results in an understanding of home and belonging as praxeological: Home and belonging are practiced relationships to a business and its people, which simultaneously blur the lines between public and private spheres.[203] My analysis of Karl-Marx-Straße's businesses has uncovered the "more" as the social qualities of the consumption places that are deeply embedded in everyday routines of everyday supply and leisure time activities. This social "more," including low-threshold help, advice, public sociability, or social exchange, seems to belong today neither to exclusively private spaces, nor to public spaces or to all shopping places in general. More precisely, these social qualities or this social "more" also results in expectations of predictability. Customers want to see what is socially to be found in the store and thus the stores serve an anchoring function in an ever-changing surrounding. Furthermore, being recognized and served in a special way enables and ascribes a certain status to the places' users. And finally, the "more" also includes a facilitated possibility of establishing links, ties, and relationships with other locals who might have knowledge and skills that could help in situations of need, or who simply just help ease everyday life. These are weak ties or bridging ties (Granovetter 1973; 1981). As per Granovetter (1973), weak ties, such as acquaintances, tend to promote social integration because they often occur between people with different backgrounds, including different interests and experiences, and thus help to bridge diverse societal groups.[204] Therefore, place attachment and feelings of belonging[205] can also be seen as "unanticipated

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[202] The more theoretical definitions and conceptual ideas of sense of belonging, including place, home, and attachment are discussed in Chapter 3.3.

[203] The gathered data did not allow for a full analysis of the customers, owners, and employees' affective feelings to the respective business as a socio-spatial setting.

[204] Granovetter examined strong ties as good friends and relatives (intimate ties) and weak ties to only partly known people and the benefits and weakness that come with both. For him, dense clusters of network ties are linked by "local bridges" or more weak ties, but also affect these bridges. But he also found that in lower socioeconomic groups, "weak ties are often not bridges, but rather represent friends' or relatives' acquaintances;

gains" (Small 2009) that come with shopping or working in these stores, or as a by-product from spending time in a neighborhood's (semi-) public spaces. My discussion of the manifold, intermingling private and public behaviors demonstrates how they lead to a sense of relaxation, sociability, and social exchange which in turn fosters feelings of belonging, attachment, and "home." Hence, to conceptualize the businesses as places whose socio-spatial features allow for offering "more" also allows us to analyze how this "more" is offered, to trace back and work out the processes and mechanisms that lead to this "more," as an unanticipated or anticipated gains (Small 2009) of frequenting (customers), but also operating (staff) these places.

But furthermore, and as will be argued further in the next chapter, it is the owners and employees with their distinct social practices, who first and foremost generate these social benefits. By caring, asking, networking, teasing, comforting, pleasing their customers, as well as by sharing important knowledge, emotional, social and material support, owners create a setting that conveys not only a more private sense, where the social exchanges cover the economic exchanges, but they also help to ease everyday life (within and beyond the neighborhood) for both customers and staff.

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the information they provide would then not constitute a real broadening of opportunity, reflected in the fact that the net effect of using such ties on income is actually negative" (Granovetter 1981: 13). Hence, weak ties do not necessarily represent an opportunity or access to resources. However, for the businesses, the social relationships found between regulars or with selected staff often represent weak ties, linking people with very different backgrounds, transferring knowledge and support that wouldn't be or hardly be accessible otherwise or through the involved people's more intimate social networks.

[205] See more on the concepts of sense of belonging, attachment and community building in the chapter on the respective sensitizing theoretical concepts (Chapter 3.3.).

Figure 47: Karl-Marx-Straße's sidewalk life

7. Store Owners that Offer "More" - *Public Characters* on Changing Karl-Marx-Straße

The previous chapter discussed how the sampled businesses' socio-spatial features offer "more" to the businesses' customers and employees. This chapter shifts its focus on to the business owners themselves, examining how their social practices generate and maintain a particular socio-spatial context. On Karl-Marx-Straße, local business owners are not only important for sustaining local economic activity, but also for creating places of practiced (cultural or ethnic) diversity and sociability. The store owners and partly their staff act as the main actors in these potential places of practiced diversity - places where various self and group identities might intersect (Hall 2012). Compared to their customers and local residents, who leave the street during the day for work, leisure, or school, business owners spend the most time on the street. They also attribute personal, sometimes shared, meanings to the street. In other words, with their businesses and daily practices, business owners make the street on a symbolic, social, cultural, and economic level. Their social practices thus deserve further analysis.

The questions of how and why the processes and practices that make businesses important social places for local residents—and thus also "make" Karl-Marx-Straße—correlate on a sublevel with the previously discussed socio-spatial features that help to foster attachment and feelings of home, belonging, or "moral ownership" (Zukin et al. 2015: 42).[206] Further, this section explores why these social practices make the store owners true public characters in Jane Jacobs' terms (1961: 68).[207] It also analyzes how these public characters, and the viability of their businesses, are increasingly affected by the ongoing urban renewal of Karl-Marx-Straße.

The next subchapter thus explains the structure of a public character, based on Jacobs' elaborations. Subsequently, the different sets of social practices that turn a business owner into such a public figure are discussed. In this context, the following subchapters address how the local officials use these "public

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[206] Moral ownership refers to the potential of a sense of ownership for "empowering groups who are excluded from mainstream society and unable to access economic ownership" (Zukin et al. 2015: 24). The notion of moral ownership encompasses more than legal property rights or a sense of belonging. It is based on a deep identification with the respective space's culture. Moral ownership means that certain "actions and symbols"—which I conceptualize as particular (public character) social practices and (third place) business features—create a sense that particular customers or customer groups "own" the place, the street, or the neighborhood.

[207] During the extensive interview and observation material analysis (and particularly during the coding process), increasingly more data referred in one way or the other to Jacobs' "public characters." This means that after analyzing the gathered data in regard to the different dimensions and aspects of social practices, the process revealed three main groups of practices: caring, connecting, and trust developing. Only if all three types of practices are performed or carried out by a store owner, can she or he be described as a public character.

character practices" - as I call them - in the course of the street's urban renewal to promote a certain (economically viable) nostalgic image of the street, while structurally excluding some of the sampled businesses from further production of space (Lefebvre 1991). Many of their public character practices are threatened by the urban renewal as the officials remake the street in a different image. The final two subchapters discuss the other two sets of social practices that make a store owner a public character—the connecting and trust generating practices—likewise embedded within the context of the changing street.

7.1. The Structure of so-called Public Character Practices

In her work, Jacobs defends the influential role local stores and their staff play in street life: These shops and their staff affect not only how and how often residents will make everyday use of the streets, but also whether their customers feel more at home in the neighborhood. They can also increase residents' senses of place, security, and attachment. With this thesis, she empirically examines the social life in and around the local shops and eateries in terms of the networks, mutual help and care, and responsibility for the street ("eyes on the street"), the neighborhood, and its people. Taking Jacob's thesis as a departure point, this chapter not only explores what makes the owners public characters, but also whether and in what ways these figures continue to affect social interactions between the members of the local population. As Jacobs observed (1961:68):

> The social structure of sidewalk life hangs partly on what can be called self-appointed public characters. A public character is anyone who is in frequent contact with a wide circle of people [...] They are store keepers or bartenders or the like. All other public characters of city sidewalks depend on them - if only indirectly because of the presence of sidewalk routes to such enterprises and their proprietors [...] In a curious way, some of these help establish an identity not only for themselves but for others.

The well-recognized public characters of the sidewalk "help establish an identity not only for themselves but for others" (Jacobs 1961: 69). These so-called public characters do not only "spread the news and learns the news at retail [...]. They connect with each other and thus spread the word" (Jacobs 1961: 70). The question remains, however, whether her observations in 1950s and 1960s Greenwich Village hold true for Berlin-Neukölln of the 2010s. Hence, this chapter focuses on those observations and interview material that give insight into staff's social practices that create contact sites, link people, take care of the business' surroundings (place and people), and thereby make their carriers (Reckwitz 2003)

so-called public characters. Three sets of manifold "public character practices" emerged over the course the ethnographic data's analysis. I conceptualize them as: caring practices, connecting practices, and social practices that generate a special kind of trust.[208]

The more a business owner carries out these social practices, the more local social status she or he also enjoys, which in turn, allows the owner to offer even "more." Because of this causal relationship, I further argue that the public character practices' "more" has a stronger placemaking quality than the previously discussed spatial aspects of the "more." However, the public characters' spheres of influence, as well as their 'made places'—can have more or less concrete geographical and social boundaries. For instance, the small life-world of the now-closed **bar** was mostly confined to the bar space. Many customers lost touch with the other regulars when the main group of regulars moved to another bar for their spontaneous meet ups. Since this new place is further away from the former location, some of the former regulars didn't or couldn't include the new meeting place in their daily routines. While the idea of public character practices as placemaking practices focuses mainly on the concrete business space, it can also extend to the business' surroundings, such as the street or the neighborhood. As will be demonstrated, this was the case with the flower store, organic store, and butcher.

As a brief reminder, and as presented in detail in Chapter 3.1., Jane Jacobs's book "The Death and Life of Great American Cities" (1961) provides a sensitizing starting point for understanding the significance of loose social relations in the public and semi-public spaces of inner-city neighborhoods. Jacobs describes the so-called spaces of encounter, i.e. spaces of neighborly co-existence, as a product of mixing living, working, leisure, and shopping uses all in one place (Jacobs 1961:36):

> The basic requisite... is a substantial quantity of stores... Enterprises and public spaces that are used by evening and nights must be among them especially. Stores, bars and restaurants...give people - both residents and strangers - concrete reasons for using the sidewalks... Second, they draw people along the sidewalks past places which have no attractions to public use in themselves... Such enterprises must be frequent... There should be many different kinds of enterprises, to give people reasons for crisscrossing paths.

Some of Karl-Marx-Straße's businesses take on this role as places of encounter—or as I call them, contact sites—but only if the owners turn them into such by enabling such interactions and encounters.

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[208] The sets of practices are demonstrated by the ethnographic material about the social life, but are not declined for each business in detail. Rather, examples of only one or two businesses are presented and discussed as typological for the social processes in all the stores.

The existence of such places further results in small "public (sidewalk) contacts" (Jacobs 1961: 56), both outside and inside of the stores, which in turn generate a higher degree of confidence or even a casual "public familiarity" (Fischer 1982: 61; Blokland/Nast 2014) among neighborhood residents. In other words, because users of the street come in contact with the business owners on a regular basis— regardless if they observe one other, talk to one another, or simply nod to one other—for many Karl-Marx-Straße users, some level of familiarity and sense of belonging might develop in and around these businesses. Or, as Jacobs writes (1961. 72) "[l]owly, unpurposeful and random as they may appear, sidewalk contacts are the small change from which a city's wealth of public life may grow."

Although Jacobs was one of the first (and still one of the few) urban researchers who address the meaningful role that local business people play in the social life of metropolitan neighborhoods, her observations and conceptualizations focused mainly on how those features and actors make neighborhoods safe and livable. She does not sociologically examine what makes a person a public character. Nor does she question why the owners in her New York neighborhood enjoy an excellent social status.[209] For these reasons, Jacobs' idea of a public character serves only as an inspiration for conceptualizing the socially important practices which distinguish the public character.

In addition, the early data analysis also revealed that the geographical scope and reach of public character practices differ. Because Karl-Marx-Straße cannot be described as one coherent neighborhood but rather as a main shopping street that links several *Kieze*, the caring, connecting and trust developing practices might only comprise the business space or the street strip geographically, and only a selected group of customers, socially. This chapter thus also tries to empirically establish the purview of public character practices. While Jacobs focuses on a rather homogeneous group, my group of observed people is more diverse. This is important because in her work, the long-time business residence and rootedness within the neighborhood seem to matter for the enactment of a public character role. On my field site, owners are women and men with different occupational, educational, ethnic, age and lifestyle backgrounds, who also target probably more diverse people than the residents and visitors of 1960s Greenwich Village.[210]

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[209] This chapter therefore takes her early statements about neighborhood characters as simply another conceptual lens for the analysis of the ethnographic field work. It does not try to match Jacobs's few characterizations with the owners' personal traits and practices.

[210] In addition, the sample of potential public characters comprises more diverse persons than then three described neighborhood figures in "The Death and Life of Great American Cities" (1961).

Figure 48: Women chatting in front of a drug store on Karl-Marx-Straße, where they ran into each other.

In sum, Jacobs' ideas sensitized and informed the fieldwork and data generation of this research. They helped to find a concrete name or term for the role business owners play in the social life on and around Karl-Marx-Straße (similar to the use of Oldenburg's terms in Chapter 6). But since her ideas about public characters lack empirical evidence and reference to what actually makes a person a public character, the following elaborations are not thought to confirm, adjust, or contradict Jacobs' work. By contrast, this chapter addresses the concrete practices, content, and kinds of interactions between customers, employees, and store owners. The latter two as

> store keepers and other small businessmen are typically strong proponents of peace and order... They are great street watchers and sidewalk guardians if present in sufficient numbers. […] the activity generated by people on errands, or people aiming for food and drink, is itself an attraction to still other people (Jacobs 1961:36).

7.2. *Caring about the Street* in Times of Urban Renewal: "It all looks spick and span in front of my door"[211]

Whether generated by business owners or not, Jacob's much heralded diversities of sidewalk life—of place, business, users, and social practices—have attracted urban dwellers who appreciate diversity to the respective inner-city neighborhoods. Urban research often refers to these individuals and social groups as gentrifiers, people who have more cultural and/or economic capital than the previous or longer-standing neighborhood residents. In the Berlin context, these new comers are more often of German and West-European descent than the long-standing residents (cf. Friedrichs 2000, Smith 1996, 2002, Zukin 1987). But just as this diversity satisfies particularly the gentrifying groups' tastes (Zukin 1987, 2015), it has recently become the selling point for many ethnically-diverse metropolitan neighborhoods in Berlin, in Germany, and around the world. Karl-Marx-Straße is among the streets with the ethnically and socially most diverse sidewalk life in the German capital. The resulting marketing strategies of the district, urban renewal, and *City Management* programs, as well as those of recently opened stores in the area, follow this diversity theme of neighborhood promotion:

> We couldn't be prouder to be the flagship hostel based in Berlin's up-and-coming Neukölln district, billed by many as the new Kreuzberg [...] **Seen as a poor neighbourhood with few prospects** up until the fall of the Berlin Wall, only recently have people begun to recognise the **huge potential** that the area holds, with its beautiful buildings, its proximity to the city's **main attractions and museums and its unique array of cheap shops, markets, bars and restaurants**. There is no better base to work from than [...] Neukölln, [...]. **People from all walks of life rub shoulders here**, and its **variety** has led to an abundance of hidden treasures that only those who live in the area know about.[212]

Hence, any placemaking practice that evolves out of caring practices and the performance of a 'caring' public character needs to be reflected in this context of commodification and gentrification. In this context, the sampled businesses seem to have a symbolic value of space for gentrification and neoliberal urbanism. Therefore, this subchapter also focuses on how the caring practices of store owners are perceived and used by the urban renewal agents. For this analysis, I draw on material from the observations in and around the stores, promotional publications from the urban renewal offices, and interviews with store owners and the urban planners in charge of the development programs.

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[211] Pharmacy owner, l. 835.
[212] Neighborhood description on the new hostel's homepage, Karl Marx Hostel (n.d.). About The Hostel and Neukölln, http://www.karlmarxhostel.com/about-hostel-berlin/#tab-id-2, accessed 03/30/2016.

As is the case with Karl-Marx-Straße's *City Management* and *Active Centers Program*, discourses that promote urban regeneration require highly stigmatized urban spaces—including commercial spaces—that are socially constructed as marginal, substandard, and deprived. These spaces are thus imagined as ripe spaces for the planned "upgrading" or "urban renewal." On Karl-Marx-Straße, just as in many other Berlin inner-city neighborhoods, gentrification is often disguised as *urban regeneration.* It is marketed using various discourses that promote social mixing, more pedestrian space or higher neighborhood quality. However, ultimately, such urban regeneration results in higher social inequality, exclusion, and displacement of those who can't afford the higher rent prices and those who struggle to find businesses that cater to their needs, e.g. grocery stores where one can pay at the end of the month or corner bars that serve beer for less than two euros per glass (cf. Smith 2002, Burnett 2014). In this case, Karl-Marx-Straße's long-standing stores and their caring and well-networked owners are just what the urban renewal actors were waiting for. The commodification of the "authentic" (Zukin 2009) thus means that in the course of the street's renewal, these owners get a socially constructed image as popular neighborhood characters.

Sharon Zukin discussed the rise of authenticity as something visitors, developers, and urban dwellers — as consumers and as residents — increasingly crave. In this form, authenticity has become something that has been transferred from a quality of people to a quality of things (like places and commodities) to a quality of experiences (like shopping or drinking a glass of wine or eating a piece of cheese). "Whether it's real or not, then, authenticity becomes a tool of power. Any group that insists on the authenticity of its own tastes in contrast to others' can claim moral superiority" (Zukin 2009: 3).

For example, the leader of the *City Management* program described the flower store owner as contact site, but old-fashioned (l. 373 - 378). As such, the owners and their shops are supposed to introduce newcomers to the neighborhood by helping them with their daily survival. The local officials promote these store owners with their wide local knowledge as contact persons who could help new residents settle into the neighborhood. Ironically, while turning off many customers from these longer standing businesses with the vast reconstruction of the street and threatening owners and customers by contributing to the rising rents, the local officials simultaneously portray these businesses as nostalgic and caring figures of a bygone working-class era to tourists, other visitors, and the new residents. While some of the owners did practice these helping and caring roles over the years, now such services have become instrumentalized by urban renewal activists in marketing campaigns. With this, the analysis of the ethnographic material shows how and why the commercial establishments move to the forefront of

gentrification for Karl-Marx-Straße as a socially, ethnically, and commercially diverse shopping street. The analysis also shows how Karl-Marx-Straße's businesses and their operators sit at the cutting edge of commodification into a new narrative or label with which the area is developed.

Therefore this section first dwells on the owners' engagement with the street, before elaborating on the businesses' different roles in and how this engagement is used in the formal placemaking process of ongoing urban renewal. On Karl-Marx-Straße, the business owners' engagement with their immediate surroundings is not and never was as altruistic as described in Jacobs' observations of New York's Greenwich Village:

> I am someone, who walks with open eyes and open ears through the world (l. 718). Let's put it that way. It is **simply really badly structured here**, what I know [about the street] are **these renewal plans, sure, I, as a good business woman, need to know what's going to happen in two years** in front of my door, but this [thing] that happens back there, no (shakes head with a disgusted look at the construction site) (Organic store owner, 801 ff.).

This means that the **organic store** owner does care about and is attentive to what happens in her immediate business surrounding, not only because she considers herself as a generally attentive and open person, but rather because the survival of her business is dependent on this kind of knowledge. For instance, when the construction site arrived in front of her business' entrance, she felt prepared and prepared fewer lunch options because of the decline of customers during that time.

The **flower store** owner also pays a lot of attention to the street's ongoing changes and potential disturbances. She cleans and decorates her business front every workday and fights with her neighbors when they don't satisfy her standards in regard to the sidewalk's cleanliness. But she feels exhausted from engaging herself so much in the street's maintenance and development. Hence, whenever her efforts to engage with the street do not pay off in terms of revenue, networking, or as a social reward, she prefers to leave such things be:

> If it [engagement] **pays off that you engage yourself, doing and making, I mean I always went there** [to the neighborhood meetings], but also after work time, I mean, if I have a ten to twelve hour day here and then sit down there at seven and **they chew my ear off** [without respecting my needs], I could also lay down on my couch at home and scarf a movie down (Flower store owner, l. 455-459).

The **butcher** considers the business people's engagement with the street as something that evolves "naturally" out of their perceived responsibility for their surroundings. This sense of responsibility increases with time, regardless of the owners' ethnicity:

> [T]he longer they [migrant owned businesses] reside here, particularly those who aren't around for a long time, such as the hairdresser or the junk dealer, **in the beginning they didn't care at all, right, under the slogan 'I make my business here and everything else doesn't interest me'. By now they realized, it [the location's success] only works in cooperation** […] The longer they are here, the better this works that it only works in cooperation and that **it's clean in front of the business and of course, also on the street** and that they urge their fellow countrymen not just to throw garbage on the street […] **if one talks to each other and everybody is a little considerate** towards the other person's sensitivities, then it functions wonderfully, yes! (l. 880 - 897).

Hence, like the other two business owners, he also appreciates a clean business environment and actively works to achieve it. All of the business people need to cooperate, he says, in order to achieve an environment which is most conducive to business. Interestingly, he thinks that the newer businesses are exclusively immigrant owned. These owners, he claims, care less for the street when the business first opens. The owner's perception that migrant owners don't clean up the street makes him think that, despite his efforts, his customers feel less comfortable and safe on their way to his business. This relates to Jacobs' idea of engagement for the street as clearly linked to the owners' business ideals and experiences: The cleaner and more orderly the businesses surroundings, the more comfortable and safe they and their customers feel.

More precisely, the interviewed business owners put a lot of effort in the street's and their own business spaces' maintenance and development. They now feel that the urban renewal program's portrayal of the street has lumped these longer standing businesses into two groups: Either "their" aesthetics and engagement are romanticized (i.e. the charming, nostalgic floral shop) or critiqued as being dirty, unappealing, or "too homogeneous" (stated by all three interviewed local officials) in terms of the migrant owned businesses and certain business types, such as cell phone stores. These (stereotyped) images thus exclude the business owners, their vision for the street, and their ideas about what should be done there.

In contrast, the head of the urban planning department in charge of the renewal blames the long-standing businesses for not appealing to a changing or more affluent clientele:

[T]he locational quality decreased […] and those [stores] that settled here as a sign of decline, who might have only benefitted from the downward rents, **naturally show no interest in a rising quality** of the location [now]. I guess, such a cell phone store only cares that he's on a street where many people come to and such stores **do not necessarily attract the managers** of a company, but somehow everybody, they sell phones where you don't know where they come from […] they don't need quality for their existence (l. 436-453).

My personal impression is **that most retailers act just as the public servants**, they come to work, do their thing and if their business goes belly up, they just look for a new job (l. 559- 562).

[S]uch an **outdated** window decoration (l. 634). I mean it's not the job of the public side, but the entrepreneur's [to help himself] [..] Whatever, then **he just has to design his window decoration funkier** […], if you know that there are other people around now (l. 646 – 649).

The owner of the **pharmacy**, for example, underlines her long-term engagement with the appearance of the street. She prides herself on her "inviting" front window decoration, business entrance, and the cleanliness of her sidewalk. However, the urban renewal program with its slogan *Aktion Karl-Marx-Straße – jung, bunt, erfolgreich* (*Action Karl-Marx-Straße – young, colorful, successful)* obviously favors economically stronger and differently (ethnically and socially) structured businesses for the future of Karl-Marx-Straße.

[B]ut, you know, it's also this human side and of course, in front of our door, **it all looks spick and span**, but I can get horribly angry [if it's not]. We have a really ambitious advertisement out there. This has cost as a lot of cash, for which we said we do it and then you have that kind of businesses to the right and left who have these ugly-ass awnings […] well yes, **I place value, I'm an aesthete, I put value on many and this doesn't get appreciated**, but rather even counteracted! (Pharmacy owner l. 835-843)

The pharmacist thinks that she fits into the urban renewal's future vision for the street and appreciates the urban renewal program's efforts to remodel the street, beautify the buildings, and widen the sidewalks, yet she is also worried about how her long-term customers might be affected by the subsequently rising rents. However, she indirectly would welcome a replacement (or displacement) of her current (immigrant) business neighbors who diminish her elaborate business design and advertisement and congest the foot traffic on her sidewalk strip.[213]

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[213] She nonetheless buys her magazines, newspapers, and cigarettes at the adjacent kiosk. I also observed both the owner and her mother in friendly conversation with the kiosk's (immigrant) owners.

Those owners who adapt to the changing neighborhood or at least to the public narrative of "change" partly gain the urban renewal agency's attention. The owners do so by offering different, new, or special products or services (e.g. organic products, wireless internet), by changing their advertisements, or emphasizing their ethnic background on the one hand or their nostalgic design on the other, or by promoting their length of residence on the street.

The newer businesses and their owners are also more likely to be marketed as "entrepreneurs,"[214] whereas the longer standing businesses owned by ethnic Germans are portrayed as "typical Neukölln" in the tourist, urban development, and shopping guides. Although the new "hip" businesses are given the most attention in such guides, some of the other, longer-standing businesses are also advertised, albeit with very different terminology. For instance, an article about the rooftop bar describes the new establishment "as the new open-air cultural center" "on the top of the new hip district Neukölln", "ambitiously" offering a "cocktail- and coffee bar, beer from tap and finger food, fashion markets with catwalks, public viewing events for soccer […]" (p.4 f.). Along with a "new vegan café," such establishments are described with a dynamic, future-oriented vocabulary (e.g. "new wind", turning the street into a "magnet for the young and creative", etc.). In contrast, the long-standing stores, such as a local optician, is described with words like "caring," "trustful," "owner-operated," "personal address," "comfortable atmosphere," "quality of offers," "without ruffle or excitement." [215] The extra services— attributes that Jane Jacobs ascribes to neighborhood public characters—performed by such business, like "taking over postal deliveries" (p. 10), are also emphasized. Hence, if long-standing businesses owned by "old Neukölln people" are promoted in the district's cultural and tourist guides, then their role as public characters is underlined.

This means that in as much as these long-standing business owners and their businesses can be a means to spur on further gentrification, they gain more attention from the urban renewal program: These local independently owned businesses offer a high potential for "interaction with the authentic Neukölln people" (urban renewal commissioner, l. 131) and "authentic experiences of different cultures that

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[214] All of the business owners on Karl-Marx-Straße are entrepreneurs, just as entrepreneurs are generally business owners. However, the term entrepreneur is often more used in reference to "younger" owners of more lifestyle-related businesses, e.g. in Florida's work (2002) on the creative class. For Karl-Marx-Straße, the terms "entrepreneur" and "entrepreneurship" are mainly used by the involved urban planners, the new owners, and the media in regard to the celebration of another opening of new and so-called hip businesses.

[215] Aktion! Karl-Marx-Straße (n.d.). Shopping Guide Neukölln – Essen und Trinken, http://www.aktion-kms.de/files/100730_shoppingguide2-ml-innen-a-10.pdf, accessed 03/31/2016, and Aktion! Karl-Marx-Straße (n.d.). Shopping Guide Neukölln – Fashion & Beauty, http://www.aktion-kms.de/files/shopping_guide_akms.pdf, accessed 03/31/2016.

interact with each other"[216] (*Aktion Karl-Marx-Straße*) and are thus rediscovered as attractive and desirable. More and more planners and developers market these small businesses and the diverse commercial structure as a desirable neighborhood quality to certain affluent population groups, such as potential homebuyers. With the spatial diversification as a consequence of the marketing, the neighborhood experiences all the more construction, investment, and an influx of particular population groups (which own the financial and cultural means). This influx of wealth and increase in demand in turn drives up both residential and commercial rents.

Figure 49: Cakes, rice pudding, and baklava displayed in the main café

The urban renewal program thus exercises a great, yet ambivalent, influence over the commercial development of the street. For instance, when the owner of the main café wanted to expand his business to include the neighboring commercial space, the local officials didn't allow him to. But the urban renewal agents promote his business in the tourist and cultural guides to the neighborhood. While the urban commissioner appreciates the business as a trend ("this coffee house tradition of the modern Turkish café, they are a big hit, they work well" (l. 367 f.), he strives for a different type of

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[216] Aktion! Karl-Marx-Straße (n.d.). Handel/Dienstleistungen, http://www.aktion-kms.de/angebote/handeldienstleistungen/wochenmarkt/, accessed 07/10/2015.

commercial (or ethnic) diversity: "and then, of course, we also have the thought, do we want the same everywhere, don't we maybe want something new" (l. 434-436).

In this process, the examined businesses and their owners also play a crucial role: Intentionally or not, they contribute to the desired, promoted, and sold local provision with goods and services. They also shape the area's physical appearance and atmosphere, thereby increasing its economic, cultural, and social value (sometimes by their mere existence). But whereas the economic and urban development actors claim to favor the establishment of a "distinctive and diverse" (urban planner, l. 190 f.) commercial structure, they exclude certain businesses and support others. These businesses can be typologized as the promoted and desired "hip" (urban planner) businesses, the more contested "ethnic" or "multiculti" (urban renewal commissioner) businesses, and the longstanding "nostalgic" anchor businesses (*City Management*). Although the so-called ethnic businesses and specialty shops on Karl-Marx-Straße are not always given the same consideration as other shops on the street, they are also promoted as a tourist attraction for potential home buyers and developers. These clusters of commercial facilities are sold as a distinct neighborhood quality under names "Little Arabia," "Little Lebanon," "Multi-Culti Street," "smells like Orient."[217] Or as the urban renewal commissioner frames it, "the future viability of modern metropoles depends on this cultural diversity and mix and the best opportunities are well, in this cultural diversity and this is what makes modern urbanity" (l. 782-784).

However, while appreciating the business owners' ethnic diversity, the urban renewal agents also neglect the responsibility the owners feel for the street and deny the owners' ongoing efforts to affect change. The promotional brochures feature, for instance, the owner of **main café.** However, he was excluded from the redesign process of the square adjacent to his business, where he planned to open a second business. The owner complains about the ongoing disrespect and exclusion in the meetings with the *City Management* and urban renewal agency, "where they started to laugh at me and stultify me and I found that so absurd" (l. 105 f.). The owner of the **flower store** also felt disrespected and stopped her formal engagement for the street due to her perceived structural disadvantage of being an owner of "an only small business":

> **I used to take part** in a working group but there [whistling sound] as I said before, **they only give the big ones an advantage** and as for this part [of the street], the very last part [doesn't receive attention] [..] oh

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[217] See documents of Cultural or Tourist Guide: Aktion! Karl-Marx-Straße (n.d.). Shopping Guides, http://www.aktion-kms.de/service/veroeffentlichungen-downloads/shopping-guides/, accessed 07/10/2015.

my god, we just don't have [the means], but **we just have to [be also included]** [..] this [engagement] all costs money and I don't have enough of it (l. 793-797).

The local officials thus promote the street and its businesses in a distinct way that markets the contributions of certain businesses without sharing potential benefits with them. The juxtaposition of the urban renewal strategies with the store owner's perception of those strategies further unveils the different meanings these actors assign to the place. It also shows how these often conflicted meanings affect the everyday practices of the store owners. The individual owners' place-meaning — and resulting placemaking practices — depend not only on his or her socio-economic and demographic status, but also on his or her vision for the street in general, and on his or her specific role on the street. The owners take care of the street and its people for several different reasons: Some simply want to ensure their business' future; some want to please their own and customers' aesthetic preferences or offer customers a safe, orderly, and comfortable shopping atmosphere; and some take care of the street because they feel it is their "home," like is the case for the flower store owner and the pharmacist. These reasons imply a higher sense of responsibility and action, and a desire to personalize their business spaces (Chavis/ Wandersman 1990: 58).[218] However, the local officials not only deny the efforts of these business owners, they actively exclude and discriminate those businesses that are perceived as not caring about the street or not offering the "right" goods (e.g. urban planner, l. 444 ff., 560 f.). As a result of this misperception, these stores' owners are left out of the planning process rather than re-integrating them into the making of the future street. Instead, they are merely formally informed about new phases of the street's development and the respective physical measures. This treatment has led to distrust among the owners for the planning commission causing some business owners to remove themselves entirely from the process. This is the case with the owners of the flower store, the main café, and the two additional cafés, who all participated at one point in the workshops, round tables, and development meetings but have since stopped attending. The planners also knowingly risk the closing of the less desired businesses in the course of the implementation of their new vision for the street:

[O]nly in special cases compensatory payments are made, for which they have to apply for an extensive administration procedure and certainly for those businesses who are in a financially bad situation anyway, if

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[218] Solving problems through voluntary participation in local community institutions and organizations is an American tradition, but not so common in welfare states. Several types of communities have been identified by the social sciences: community as a place, community as relationships, and community as collective action or political power (cf. Gusfield 1975; Suttles 1972). As people identify with their neighborhood, they personalize their homes, contributing to the development of common symbols. Hence the more somebody feels at home, the more they take action to defend it (Chavis/ Wandersman 1990: 58). Again, the scale of what is considered as home is left to the interviewed people, from the concrete residential or business space to the street to the district.

they experience an additional restriction, if **they then are maybe not able to pay their rent** anymore, **they also have to close** […] in the first construction stage that is now finished, four or five businesses are closed now (l. 218-225).

The construction site itself also put a major financial burden on the flower store, the organic store, the pharmacy, and the cafés. Two other cafés, three jewelers, and a supermarket all went out of business during this construction phase between 2012 and 2016.[219] These burdens are not, however, represented in the public relations strategies of the development program. As the following picture (fig. 50) shows, the local officials claim that they "are there for you" just as the businesses "are there for you" in the course of the reconstruction.

 In other words, the local redevelopment officials exploit the business' reputations, their diversity, and the services they offer for promotional purposes while reducing the businesses to nostalgic references of Neukölln's working class past. In the process, they explicitly ignore the long-term efforts of the owners themselves to keep the street clean, safe, and attractive; and it is clear that these types of business are not welcomed on the future Karl-Marx-Straße:

> Well, I consider the current store owners as, those actors that are now here and occupy this space right now but **we plan strongly focused on the future**, to around 15 years from now […] We **explicitly don't serve the local actors** but we have a development vision (Urban planner, l. 265-269).

The street's overall planning vision also underlines this imbalance of power and the structural exclusion. The vision follows the motto: "*Aktion Karl-Marx-Straße* – jung, bunt, erfolgreich" (translated: young, colorful, successful) with the core themes of "trading, meeting, experiencing." The three main fields of action are bundling interests, creating "better" public space, and strengthening diversity.[220] This motto has far-reaching consequences for the different store owners' daily lives and the survival of their businesses: The urban renewal programs favor mainly those businesses and residents that fit these characteristics of younger, more colorful, and more successful. This reflects not only a rather exclusive notion of diversity, but also allows only selected business people to formally take part in the placemaking of the envisioned street. For instance, the interviewed owners report that they get less attention and support from the local administration in the course of the community meetings, less information about upcoming events, and less advertisement in the district's public material and

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[219] However, as was the case with the bar and the fruit and vegetable store, the owners might have had additional motives or reasons to close, which were not empirically assessed.

[220] Cf. Guiding Vision: Aktion! Karl-Marx-Straße (n.d.). Wettbewerbsbeitrag Aktive Stadtzentren, http://www.aktion-kms.de/files/leitbild2020.pdf, accessed 04/12/2016.

magazines. This treatment has led many of the interviewed business owners to stop cooperation with these city agents.

Figure 50: Sign with the (highly diverse) stores along the strip, hidden behind site fences during the reconstruction

The more recent promotional materials also tend to advertise mostly shops and services that are aimed at a more affluent customer base. For instance, in the latest promotional newsletter, two newer gourmet coffee shops, an organic delicatessen, and new nightlife bars, as well as a fashion show in the shopping mall and the spring opening of its rooftop bar were advertised.[221] This obvious targeting suggests that the placemaking practices of the local officials are aimed at an increase of the local property values (cf. Fainstein 2000; 1991). In this vein, the local renewal office also envisions and plans

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[221] Latest so-called newsletter in March 2016, Aktion! Karl-Marx-Straße (03/2016). Newsletter, http://www.aktion-kms.de/files/160321_newsletter83_der_aktion_karl_marx_strasse_mar2016.pdf, accessed 04/30/2016.

for a future commercial structure that will satisfy the anticipated residents and investors. Because of this strategy, it is also likely that the officials will mainly try to satisfy the future stake-holders and residents in the area. These main stake-holding partners are mainly the managers and owners of the (newer) chain stores, upscale niche stores, and businesses in the shopping mall. In other words, the urban renewal officials concentrate and tailor their cooperation to those local actors, who share the same or at least parts of the same target groups. Therefore, the main cooperation partners of the urban renewal office involve only very few of the smaller and independently-owned businesses, focusing instead on the land and building owners, construction company executives, and shopping complex developers. These actors agree on the common aim of generating a vivid economy, which they believe means attracting more affluent outsiders as residents and customers (Fainstein 1991; 2000). The urban renewal commissioner explains these partners in the following way:

> **The big ones because they have time**. Just because **they can activate a center management**, things like that. But also, yes, what is a really **important part** of this entire structure [as structural development] are **increasingly the gastronomes**. […] Well, because the gastronomes are interested that **we [promote] their projects**.
>
> [in terms of built measures?]
>
> Yes, because **we just create the space, the public space for gastronomy**, also outdoor gastronomy, because **we support, encourage everybody who aims for the sector of gastronomy** (l. 311-326).

In addition, the corporate businesses do not only have more resources to do community work and to lobby their interests in regular neighborhood and renewal meetings, they also benefit from a clear preference from the commissioner. Additionally, the commissioner is very explicit about his vision of Karl-Marx-Straße as a place with an increased upscale restaurant and bar industry. Karl-Marx-Straße currently hosts many gastronomic facilities—from Turkish and Arabic kebab stores and restaurants, to German restaurants, to Italian restaurants and Turkish breakfast cafés, from vegan and organic places to classic corner bars—all of which offer food and beverages for decent prices compared to the new restaurants which have received support from the district. Or as the commissioner frames it, "I certainly prefer any gastronomic place rather than the second-hand cell phone store, that's for sure" (l. 389 f.).

Hence the local officials draw strongly on the new gastronomic businesses as the main attractions:

> I approach the gastronomes […] and **I feel that there is much more** [to achieve with them], also **confidence.** This [the cooperation] works perfectly and this is also simply because of the strong changes within the

population structure, which is **now more of a nightlife generation** or more communicative […] who spend their leisure time outside and this leads to a situation, if I look at the requests for changes of use within the last three four years, **so much has developed in terms of gastronomy, this is amazing** (Urban renewal commissioner, l. 336-344).

For the urban renewal commissioner, new gastronomic businesses seem an adequate and promising means to develop the street in the desired direction.[222] His support for the new restaurants and bars—in terms of helping them to get a license for outdoor seating or serving alcohol or featuring them in the urban renewal's promotional material—pays off in terms of the changing reputation of Neukölln in the media. One of Germany's most renowned newspapers, *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, finally covered Neukölln's new restaurant scene in its extended weekend edition in early 2016:

> The Berlin district of Neukölln. Hardly any place in Germany appears so often in the headlines as a symbol of everything that can go wrong in a big city. Here, Rütli School is located, where the teachers chuck their jobs because they were afraid of the students. Or the library, where drugs are dealt and where gangs are carrying out their turf wars. Not to mention the former district mayor Heinz Buschkowsky, who's currently wandering through the talk shows where he warns that it will soon be as bad as it is here in all of Germany. And yet there **is hardly any better place in Berlin**. Not only because the district changes in every corner - **everything is getting new in Neukölln**. **Nowhere else in the capital, you can eat as good and varied as here.** Whether […] falafel from the street or fine dining - the once notorious district with its rough manners is currently the **hottest tip for foodies from all over the world**, even the New York Times enthused already about it […] In previous days, aircrafts thundered over the shabby houses; here, nobody lived here who wasn't forced to […] And of course, there are all the newcomers […] this here is all fresh and crazy in a way that is only possible if you can do anything and nothing is expected of you [as a newcomer]. […] [The chef of one new restaurant] raves about the possibilities and the relatively low rents in Neukölln, and calls his shop just a big 'mischmasch'. This is also one of his few German words. Apart from this, English is spoken.[223]

This new image of the street is supposed to stimulate the existing—but more importantly the future— local economy and further attract new entrepreneurs and customers:

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[222] The other interviewed urban planner draws mainly on the cultural institutions and artists for the further development of Karl-Marx-Straße, which is apparent in the local officials' publications, which also focus on the promotion of the local cultural events.

[223] Mayer, V. (02/20/2016): Besser Essen in Neukölln, http://www.sueddeutsche.de/stil/samstagskueche-besser-essen-in-neukoelln-1.2868160, accessed 02/24/2016.

Karl-Marx-Straße will be a **young and colorful main center of Berlin**. The street should become a **successful shopping street** again. In order to become a **successful attraction for increased trade**, services and culture, citizens, administration, […].[224]

Summarizing I'd say that we make an **investment in the future**, this means, with the construction measures we create a n**ew spatial situation that leads to the establishment of certain stores on the long run, no, to attractiveness in the long run** and thus also creates better site conditions. But also for the businesses, you need to consider that the **reconstruction measures do not necessarily have to be in the interest of the current businesses**, because the current businesses that survived this situation [pejoratively], they have their, well, location, they are adjusted to this location. Well, if I have a bad location with a thoroughfare that has no quality, then well, the cell phone store settles down or a business that doesn't care, which means in most cases [**our work] doesn't have to be in the interest of the current businesses** that we now reconstruct. Just because they also agreed to operate a business here [they don't need to survive], if it hadn't worked, if it wouldn't work for them now, they would be gone anyway (Urban planner, l. 188-202).

Hence, the local administration's leading urban planner admits that his vision and the concrete measures he pursues may damage many current stores and eventually displace them. From his view, these businesses are remnants of the street's economic past. He sees them as low quality and having no place in the street's "attractive" future. These businesses, he admits, probably won't enjoy any of the "potential benefits":

[The reconstruction] creates a **tense situation** because the measures we conduct also result in impairments for these uses and **affects basically those businesses that don't expect benefits** by the reconstructions and have now additional damages, so certainly, the[ir] view on things indeed can be very negative. But doesn't have to. Some businesses will also benefit, even if they don't necessarily need a more attractively designed public space now (Urban planner, l. 202-208).

The urban renewal's guiding principle reveals that the local authorities, urban renewal office, and city management obviously consider past and current Karl-Marx-Straße as not economically successful or vibrant.[225] They see the current businesses as remnants of the past and obstacles which impede future development. They aim for a new kind of diversity, both in terms of commercial offers and residential mix. This vague definition of a new diversity is mirrored in the vague vision of a "young, colorful, successful" Neukölln. It remains unclear if "young" refers to business owners' age, the appearance or

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[224] Aktion! Karl-Marx-Straße (n.d.). Leitbild, http://www.aktion-kms.de/akms/leitbild/, accessed 02/11/2016.
[225] The one exception to this principle is their positive view of the historic architecture and the few iconic buildings along the street.

style of the businesses. It is also unclear which age groups the attribute "young" is applied to and how businesses can or should change to a "younger" profile. And again, a "younger" street would be less diverse than the current Karl-Marx-Straße, which, according to my observations, was frequented by all age groups.

The same confusion exists with the notions of "successful" and "colorful": If they are referring to ethnic diversity, it remains unclear which ethnicities are considered advantageous and fitting to the desired "colorful" appearance. The owner of the **main café**, for instance, interprets the motto of "colorful, young, and successful" as "young, dynamic, and German," highlighting what kind of business people and their businesses he sees as included and excluded in the development of the area. He feels that he, as a man of Turkish descent, and despite his café catering to all age and ethnic groups does not fit the profile:

> They say **young dynamic German, young dynamic German**, young dynamic German, that's it, it has to be young dynamic German for them and you know they can do lot of things with that. I think **they haven't understand anything here**, **I do not have to grow blond hair to be German**, I can also be more German than German with my black hair. If we predefine German, we need to know what it's about (Main café owner, l. 110-115)

Asked about the "colorful" attribute in the vision, the commissioner of the urban development programs mentions that for him, the street doesn't need another Kebab store or cell phone store (most of which are immigrant owned), but rather a French or Italian fine café (l. 389 f.). With these statements, the urban development commissioner is clearly saying that he is open to immigrant owned businesses, so long as they are owned by western or northern European immigrants. He is not as open to immigrant business owners from "the near or middle east". He describes these unwelcomed businesses as "this Turkish-and-I-don't-know-what-else-picture-frame-vendor" (l.408). His unwelcomed businesses also comprise the local cell phone stores, which he considers as exclusively owned by men of Turkish or Arabic descent: "there's always a huge discussion, how many cell phone stores does this street need" (l. 311 f.). However, the "ethnic attributes" and "branch attributes" remain mixed and most examined store owners excluded, regardless if they fit the motto or not.

The business owners' engagement for the street as their business location and thus the center of their weekday life remains contested with their branding as "authentic" Neukölln characters and 'nostalgic' business spaces. This underlines in turn how the concept of authenticity is "used as a leveler of cultural power for a group to claim space and take it away from others without direct confrontation, with the

help of the state and elected officials and the persuasion of the media and consumer culture" (Zukin 2009: 246). [226]

In this sense, a place´s authenticity will be evaluated in terms of its capacity to facilitate exchanges of meaning beyond simple financial transactions. Not only the shopping, cultural, and tourist guides, but also the interviewed store owners and officials - they all construct a narrative that chain stores lack this authenticity. According to this narrative, in the new franchise stores, behavioral protocols, surveillance, and limited time for customer service dictate the company's vision of the respective business' service provision to its customers. For instance, when a salesperson attempts to sell a blouse to a customer in a chain store, the ultimate aim remains selling goods and increasing turnover. But enjoying a chat with the customer that is not directly linked to the blouse at stake may be infrequently accepted.

By contrast, both the interviewed planners and the published brochures portray the small "authentic" stores along Karl-Marx-Straße as places which provide social exchange and interaction with "different cultures," involving a lot of "the local wit," and store owners who are "typical" and "well-known Neukölln characters." [227] These notions are in line with Jane Jacob's (1961) perhaps socially-romantic image of her neighborhood's social life. The urban developmental agencies benefit from the idea that local store owners act as so-called public characters, thus maintaining the street's "authentic" image. They create a nostalgic image of a bygone era of high solidarity and daily friendly interactions between "small people" of various ethnic origins to push the promotion of the street as a shopping and investment destination.

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[226] Zukin (2010) uses the Greek words "kairos" and "chronos" to describe the relationships between time and authenticity: kairos means a sense of the past that intrudes on and challenges the present and chronos refers to "our usual sense of time as a simple, unending arrow of progress from yesterday to today and on to tomorrow" (p.101). She claims a place´s authenticity depends on the presence of kairos and chronos at the same time, or in other words, on the available opportunities to unfold in the now but still keep a sense of history. She doesn't present an explicit definition of authenticity, but rather uses authenticity as a reference point to mark the difference between the time when a place was developing genuinely and a new point in time when the development was influenced by expansion and economic interest. As per her, authenticity is threatened by the increasing economic interest in urban spaces. In this sense, the simultaneous presence of kairos and chronos, dressed as authenticity, can also be used to sell experiences in places without explicitly stating the economic interests. Hence, the type of authenticity that is the most aesthetically identifiable and economically useful is today the type of authenticity most suited to being marketed.

[227] Aktion! Karl-Marx-Straße (n.d.). Angebote: Handel/Dienstleistungen – Wochenmarkt, http://www.aktion-kms.de/angebote/handeldienstleistungen/wochenmarkt/; Aktion! Karl-Marx-Straße (n.d.). Angebote: Handel/Dienstleistungen – Gastronomie, http://www.aktion-kms.de/angebote/gastronomie/; Aktion! Karl-Marx-Straße (n.d.). Service: Veröffentlichungen / Downloads, http://www.aktion-kms.de/service/veroeffentlichungen-downloads/, accessed 07/10/2015.

Hence, while for the most part the urban renewal agents neglect or deny the owners' caring practices, an image of these practices is exploited by the urban renewal agents when they want to project an image of urban authenticity and urban cosmopolitanism (Zukin 2009; Robinson 2006). Therewith the corporate interests threaten the very definition of an urban authenticity, understood as the social practices of shopping, buying, or selling that go beyond the economic transfer action and involve a meaningful and thus "real" social act (Zukin 2009).[228]

Following Zukin's notion of such a practiced authenticity, the northern parts of Neukölln around Karl-Marx-Straße have become a place where the prices of sold goods in the new stores and rents for most of the currently open apartments contradict the "carefully nurtured sense of authenticity" (Zukin 2009: 102). The areas around Karl-Marx-Straße are neighborhoods where low-income people, with working or "creative" class backgrounds, have lived together and contributed to the neighborhood character for decades (see Chapter 2). Their authenticity and their caring practices are now promoted and turned into one of the main driving forces for urban renewal. But as such, they also lead to their own displacement. Hence, caring for the street turned into a marketable practice and many of the recent measures to market the street threaten the long-term carriers of these practices, just because "[…] the local character that draws so many people to the neighborhood is experienced through consumption: eating, drinking and most often, shopping" (Zukin 2009: 104).

The disposition of the store owners' created neighborhood authenticity is underlined by the flower store owner's ambivalent position towards any further engagement for the street. She feels that she is under great pressure from the urban renewal and *City Management* to organize special events in her shop:

> Well, the advent exhibition is, well, required. […] maybe it's carrying things too far to say **it's a duty,** but on the other hand. But when I got donated this neon advertisement signs by the *Aktion Karl-Marx-Straße*, I threw a backyard party, well, **I had to throw it** [as return service] and then this backyard was opened, so that people could also look at this old farmer's house and **this made a big fuss, it cost a lot** (l. 613-618).

On the one hand, she received (financial) support to better advertise her business as one of the most long-standing, authentic businesses on the block, but on the other hand, she then received pressure to

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[228] Sharon Zukin (2009: 101 f.) describes, for instance, New York's East Village as a place where "[w]ith kairos comes a particular kind of authenticity that connects your sense of the old East Village with your desire to consume it. And suddenly you see that this projection of your own self-image on the shabby chic streets is exactly what the marketing theorists expect authenticity to be: a sympathetic vibe between consumers and their objects of desire. So it´s not surprising that selling kairos in the East Village today brings big bucks."

take part in those festivities that promote this kind of authenticity and nostalgic narrative of the street. Such obligations demand a lot of extra-time and money from her already low revenues and long working hours.

In this case, she received free advertisement in exchange for throwing this party in her "authentic" business and backyard. The local authorities and renewal agencies asked her to serve (in her opinion expensive and extravagant) organic meat from the local butcher and wine in order to increase the event's appeal to a "wider clientele." She was then highly disappointed when only a few of the administration and urban renewal staff showed up. In addition, only few of the other people who came to the party came back as customers. The party and its socio-spatial setting can thus be best described as offering "kairological images of living simultaneously in the past and the present and in contrasting class worlds of poverty and privilege" (Zukin 2009: 122), which rarely economically benefit the so-called authentic places.

Figure 51: Flower store's decoration

This also holds true for the **main café**, where the owner donated and invested extensively in the street during his first business years. He supported the remodeling of the street and each of the neighborhood

events and sponsored a local soccer team. The local authorities and subsequently the new urban renewal actors didn't reward or acknowledge his engagement in any way, but rather responded with a rejection of his business expansion ideas. After that, his resistance and skepticism toward the local authorities and *City Management* grew and resulted in his withdrawal from most charity and community work.

> In the past, **we contributed to each of the festivities**, we donated. Now we don't do this anymore" (l. 471). "**They do not give a crap**; we have a substantial loss of sales and so on [due to the reconstruction and events] but they don't care about it (l. 724 ff.).

The café owner's disappointment, resignation, and final withdrawal are in line with most of his immediate (small) business colleagues'; their general disappointment and anger had particularly increased over the last few months before our interview.

These ethnographic examples show that most of the owners' engagement with and caring for the street and its social life are not acknowledged by the street's renewal agencies. Indeed, the urban development programs actively neglect and have even put an end to many of the store owners' long-term efforts. As a result, the majority of interviewed owners either gradually stopped some of their caring or public character activities, or at least focus their efforts now exclusively on their own business space, business interests, and selected regular customers. However, certainly none of the social practices that—in Jacobs' terms (1961: 29 ff.)—keep Karl-Marx-Straße safe and clean, turn the staff into watching "kibitzers," give local and visiting people a reason to go out on the street, and create a lively "sidewalk ballet," are free of economic interests. The businesses themselves benefit the most from safety, cleanliness, and a thriving sidewalk life in as much as these attributes attract customers. As self-appointed, but indeed competent public characters, whose engagement evolves out of a long-term commitment and perceived responsibility for the street, their efforts for a working local social life remain thus inextricably intertwined with their business survival strategies.

7.3. Connecting People - "The idea was a place for encounter, with a feel-good-character"[229]

The business owners I interviewed all framed their visions for their businesses in a way that showed a deep commitment to the street. This commitment goes beyond Jane Jacobs' "caring" in terms of keeping the street safe and the neighborhood lively and attractive. For them, this commitment also means the establishment of a community "center" or "hub of the world" (e.g. flower store, l. 782 ff.), a place that is known and frequented by "everybody" (e.g. flower store, l. 2), and a place where people can come if they are feeling lonely: "Yes, somehow they all come here and ask and 'have you heard' and 'do you know' and [laughs]" (flower store, l. 2 f.). This commitment refers to the second set of public character practices: linking people together and helping disseminate information. This crucial role the public figure plays also increases their social value as a neighborhood figure. Whereas the owners' creation of a socio-spatial setting that invites neighborly interactions was mainly discussed in Chapter 6, the social practices that link people on the micro-sociological level are here in focus.[230]

Because different motivations drive the individual owners' linking practices, each owner fosters different social connections and networks. Some owners consider their task as simply establishing spaces, where customers can freely interact (see Chapter 6). Others actively stimulate interaction between both familiar and unacquainted people by directly inviting selected customers to concrete conversations. Further, some owners build more intimate ties through providing extra services like handing over notes, keys, or postal deliveries. These practices foster interactions and even relationships between the place, its staff, and the customers and among the customers themselves.

Indeed, for some of the owners, the whole business idea is itself deeply rooted in the desire to connect people in one way or the other. As the organic store owner notes,

> the idea was to **create a community center**, a store, a **place for encounter**, shopping **with a feel-good character**, that's how we called it back then (l. 118-120). Every day there are **always new faces**, I'm really astonished, **they then heard [of us]** from these and these [customers]" (l. 317 f.).

> What we wished for was this **personal contact within a relatively short time**. Just like, hey how are you, how was your vacation, ah well, where were you and have you tried already... and man, are you sick and do

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[229] Organic Store Owner, l. 118-120.

[230] The so-called third place attributes also include the material and sensual aspects such as furniture, wireless internet, food, temperature, and lighting in the businesses. These also affect the duration of the customers' stay and therewith the (increased) likelihood for interaction with other people in the place.

you want another piece of cake, yes that's it […] that was important for us (l. 323-329). Yes, they come over and then **they see each other accidentally,** ah well, what are you doing here and yes I also have to go shopping and I've heard or, a mother sits here and drinks her cup of tea and then she sees someone**, oh, I haven't seen you in a while** but yes now we have this organic store around here and this is exactly what's happening there and has such a **own dynamic**, right, as it is in such stores, **we don't do a lot for it** (l. 337-349).

The **organic store** owner considers her role as providing a "feel good space," where interaction evolves "organically" and only requires her initiation, if at all. However, she downplays her and her partner's role in creating these interactions. Not only do they obviously stimulate and enjoy conversations, but they also consider human interaction at the core of their work and as part of the business' overall character. Sociability is at the core of their business concept, in part because organic nutrition often requires more extensive consolation about the foods' origins and preparation, diets, ingredients, and potential allergies than in a supermarket. The observations show that customers also request narratives about the type of farmer and farming, the philosophy of the products, their preparations and usage. The salespeople enjoy these extra services and the social exchange. Social interactions, in terms of the giving and receiving of additional information, represent an intrinsic part of most of the shopping in this business. This willingness on the part of the staff to spend the extra time with customers may also be a reason why the customers are more willing to pay higher prices for the shopping experience.

Because the shopping experience is based on trust and interaction, customers often seem to imagine themselves to be more part of an ("organic") community here than in the street's other ("regular") grocery stores. The clientele can also expect other customers to belong to a similar lifestyle group as themselves when they shop in a store with such high-priced, value-driven goods. At the very least, the organic store's customers most likely share a common interest in nutrition and environmental issues. On the one hand, people who share similarities are already more likely to interact with one another than with very dissimilar people (Granovetter 1973; McPherson et al. 2001). On the other hand, the owners indeed act as public characters inasmuch as they put effort into creating a sociable atmosphere and linking customers with each other. While it is true that people like people who are like them, the owners clearly encourage and steer these interactions.

In addition, the owners of the other examined businesses also distribute local information to their customers, if needed. These stores often act as an information receptacle, as the owners collect information from their customers, local authorities and patrolling police, their own observations, the

construction workers in front of their door, postal delivery staff and the district officials. Or, in Jacobs' words, "[n]ot only do public characters spread the news and learn the news at retail, so to speak. They connect with each other and thus spread word wholesale, in effect" (1961: p.70). This collection of information also increases the owners' own local importance, status, and power, and thus gives additional reason for the customers to visit the stores. The owner of the **organic store** describes her information collector role in the following way:

> I'm such a [information] **pool, I soak this up** and then I say, look, make me a note or **look at this** and yes, then it also happened that an apartment came across [for them] (l. 453 - 455).

> [if they say] I'm looking for a job then I would say **if I hear something,** leave me a number or a note and this is our thing. Events are also part of this, we have the front window, there are also such things [notes, posters] (l. 458 - 460).

The owner of the **pharmacy** also enjoys the exchange of relevant information during her interactions with customers. She considers small, independently-owned businesses—particularly her own—"classic" information hubs, where customers can look for information and neighborhood news, even if the information sought is not directly related to a purchase:

> Yes, yes, I would say that **I'd love nothing better than to live this out** in a much stronger way. Well, let's say I had the time now **I'd love to offer a bill board**, I think this is [good] like at Edeka,[231] we could – I mean this might go beyond the scope of or the size of [my business], but I could well imagine that **we become such a communication center**, where [the information] could also go maybe into the direction of health issues or somebody has free time and the other person needs someone in the afternoon who takes care [of children, care-dependent people] because he wants to go shopping. This would be ideal, the pharmacy, we have **so many customer contacts**, this is indeed incredible! (l. 572 - 579).

She makes clear that while she would enjoy linking and connecting people much more often and in a much stronger way, this would require more space. However, she is aware that the pharmacy has numerous, important customer contacts and access to manifold resources that could benefit other customers through this type of social capital (Bourdieu 1986; Putnam 1995, 2000). In addition, she and

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[231] Founded in 1898, Edeka is the largest German supermarket corporation with more than 4,000 stores that range from small corner stores to hypermarkets (www.edeka.de). Edeka enjoys a good reputation particularly among senior and less mobile customers due to the slower, calmer atmosphere. They also tailor their selection to the surrounding neighborhood and adapt to special demands. Most Edeka stores have big bulletin boards in the entrance space, which customers can use to hang up flyers.

her employees also simply enjoy the random and spontaneous interactions between customers in and in front of her store:

> Yes, this **is too beautiful**, yes **wonderful** and in addition, I'd say to them, I didn't know that you two live together (laughs) […] I think that's great, 'I didn't even know that you go to the same pharmacy', well this is nice, this is really nice, this human side" (l. 389--394) "there's nothing more beautiful than you enter [a store] and can say hello because **you recognize each other**. I think **that's wonderful** (l. 830 f.).

Inasmuch as she enjoys these interactions and trust, she is also proud that her pharmacy functions as a contact hub and community center:

> Yes, yes, we know the residents of this house, but also [the residents] from the neighboring buildings, we **know them and we pick up everything**" (l. 775 f.) "**There's no topic with which you can't approach us** and this **makes me happy,** yes. **This trust they show to us, this is something magnificent**, something really magnificent. But this is the special thing, right; in any other pharmacy somewhere else […] this doesn't happen that such conversations evolve. Well, **you need to know** [them], the **customers know us**, that one of us will join the conversation, there's something evolving over time […] and then you make big actions, events, and it is these that **bind you** together, right, you make pictures with the customers and then they come back years later and are happy, well this is **something beautiful,** of course (l. 314 - 328)[232]

She believes that her customers - particularly the regulars - long for these special, intimate, and trustful conversations and they appreciate the time she and her staff make for them (l. 343, l. 348 f.). During the observations, these customers seemed to just want someone talk to or help them on particular issues. The conversations also seem to make the customers feel special. But as the interview shows, the owner also enjoys and praises the social extra-exchanges. In this case, the "more" offered by the pharmacist and her staff - from the pure sociability and enjoyment that comes with the interaction to the information that is learned or shared – benefits all involved people: Not only customers who frequent the pharmacy for a purchase or more intended social exchange, but also the owner and her employees gain "unanticipatedly" (Small 2009).

The pharmacist's reputation as a public character extends out on to the sidewalk and in to the neighborhood: When she leaves the business she most often runs into familiar faces and even if she

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[232] The stairways to the upper floor's rooms are decorated with photographs of previous and current staff, customers, and owners. Most pictures were taken in or in front of the business or during the business' festivities. While walking up to the office for the interview and without being asked, the owner explained to me who every single person is and told me their biographies, how she or her father got to know them, where they live(d), their profession and family background, et cetera.

doesn't recognize them, she herself is recognized by her customers (l. 461 ff.). This is a common narrative told by all of the store owners and observed during the on-site research. As hard as they try to remember their customers, the owners themselves enjoy a much higher recognition value:

> this [public recognition] **happens a lot**, if there's someone driving by and **you wave** [unrecognized], then somebody comes out immediately […] well I think **I also want this little familiarity** […] but by and by, this will die out, somewhere this won't exist anymore (l. 356- 359).

The **butcher** also feels that he and his predecessors created a "neighborhood place" where "neighborly" interaction is common (e.g. l. 357, 375, 656). But from his point of view, his demeanor and the types of interactions that are typical for his store are marks of an almost bygone time. He emphasizes that his store's popularity derives from the store's longstanding history with the neighborhood and his staff's and his own roots in the district. He attributes the high levels of information and social exchange in his store to his long-term engagement with the neighborhood. The observations, however, also comprise occasions where customers and staff included unacquainted people in their conversations. So the length of business residence rarely seems to affect the linking and connecting practices as in the owner's perception. Interactions do, however, mostly occur in the store among longstanding customers and staff. Only occasionally will a newcomer get invited into the conversation. The butcher describes the social life in his business and his role in it in the following way:

> I'm in the front row, **of course I am well-known, people greet me** […] ask the saleswomen, […] and **you greet each other and you talk to one** or the other or within a group and **if I then join**, they lament and hello, hey, how are you, and say, what's your opinion and I say oh my god and so on (l. 844-849). And yes of course **I like that, sure, you greet, you chat together, right, you exchange local news, neighborhood news, Berlin news, right, and you get feedback** (l. 656 - 658). Right, **if you want to know what's happening here, you have to come to us** (l. 370).

This assessment is in accordance with my observations. Since his customers come from very different occupational, income, age, and ethnic groups, his networks and knowledge cross all of these lines, supporting the generation of so-called weak ties[233] (Granovetter 1973) as well as stronger connections

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[233] Granovetter (1973: 1361) measures the strength of ties as the combination of the amount of time, the emotional intensity, the intimacy, and the reciprocal services that are characteristic for the tie. He categorizes three types of ties—strong, weak, and absent ties. He focuses on the cohesive power of weak ties in comparison to strong ties or the power of what he calls bridging social capital in contrast to bonding social capital. Strong ties are common among homophile people that are well and intimately connected to each other and have thus reliable tight connections that are filled with expectations. In contrast to strong ties, weak ties develop mainly between differently stratified individuals or groups and are less transitive. Hence, weak ties are common, for instance, on a

between members of very different population groups: For instance, during one of my lunch visits, he and one of his saleswomen were approached by one of the construction workers currently working on the rebuilding of Karl-Marx-Straße. The worker asked if they had heard of an available apartment in the area, since his wife is pregnant for the second time and they have to move. Although he previously viewed the neighborhood negatively, he had come to like it through his time working there. After he and his colleagues discovered the butcher's shop and went there for lunch every workday, he decided that he and his new family would enjoy living in the area - also because he has already his first regular spot there, the butcher's shop. His family currently lives in Gropiusstadt, a 1970s housing estate five subway stops south of Karl-Marx-Straße. But the more time he spent working on Karl-Marx-Straße, the more he could imagine moving to the area because of the good provision within walking distance and the many child care facilities. The saleswoman and the owner shouted simultaneously to a man eating his goulash at the window table, "Bernd,[234] didn't you say there's an empty apartment below yours?" Bernd is a single high school teacher, who, during the observations, also frequents the butcher at least once a week for late lunch, always reading newspapers and only exchanging few words with the other lunch customers. However, despite their different occupational, educational, and income backgrounds, he nodded. The two then talked about the apartment and renting conditions and they exchanged numbers and email addresses. In this and in other instances, the butcher acted as a public character and made use of his wide weak and strong ties to help his customers. These observed types of social interaction also often extend beyond business hours. For example, during my observations, a customer invited one of the saleswomen to a birthday party.

These social ties also help the butcher both professionally and personally. For example, through these connections the butcher can stay up-to-date on the construction site and when it will prevent parking and deliveries in front of his business. Or, when the nearby Asian restaurant, which he was fond of, had to close because its owner died suddenly, his customers informed him about the funeral.[235] The regulars knew that the two owners liked each other. As a result, the butcher could attend the funeral and donated a flower bouquet (ordered at the sampled flower store).

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neighborhood level where people greet each other, nod at each other, and have fleeting but regular interactions with each other. They extend beyond the homogeneous and tight networks and thus bridge to other social circles. These networks or loose ties can help to open doors into different social life worlds, but also to jobs, apartments, knowledge that wouldn't be accessible within one's own homogeneous social circle. Jane Jacobs (1961) also discussed weak ties as so-called hop-skip links within neighborhood or community organizations.

[234] Pseudonym

[235] The owners of the organic store and flower store also learned of their neighbor's death from their customers.

Like the owner of the pharmacy, the butcher is also proud of his well-known and well-informed status. He describes his role as a contact person and person in charge if anything happens in his immediate business surroundings:

> **I also greet the people**, also from this house and also if they don't buy here […] however, you greet each other, **you exchange words, you know each other, you talk to each other, you say few words just because you share the same spot of land**, right, […] **there's a lot of people that I just know because I see them again and again on the street** […] there was a dead body in the backyard, there used to be pizza place next door and the chef killed his girlfriend out of jealousy, stabbed her to death and wrapped her in a carpet and then she was lying in the trash and yes, **I was the one who was the person of contact for this subject** (laughs), because our apprentice found her, he brought the trash to the backyard and then couldn't open the trash can because she was lying there (l. 836-856). [236]

After the body was found, he took care of his shocked apprentice and neighbors, called the police and reported to them. As he mentioned, since then he watches the surrounding neighborhood more carefully and neighbors approach him more regularly to report incidents. He is also in closer dialogue with his business neighbors and they update each other whenever they see something unusual.

But while he enjoys networking with his customers, the butcher perceives the caring, networking, information gathering and distribution as well as the maintenance of trust as a requirement rather than a privilege:

> **We stand for something**, of course, and **we certainly foster social cohesion**, but **also unconsciously** by greeting our customers, and they greet to us, and by talking to each other, and by making and keeping our business attractive, right, [we] **answer our customers' wishes** and that's why we indeed **fulfill many many social functions** and if this wouldn't be the case, the **entire area would lose** (l. 824 - 829).

All owners feel that most customers expect them to be sociable, caring, responsible, friendly, and well-informed, and expect them to remember preferences ("Latte extra-hot", "three spelt rolls", "the usual", "you know pink is my color"). In other words, acting as a public character is deeply intertwined with imagined customer expectations and owners engage with the area and its people because they think it will make their business an economically successful one. Performing as a public character is thus a part

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[236] The pizza store had been closed for years already when the murder occurred and neither the butcher nor his staff knew the murderer personally. The police informed him of the motive and circumstances, which he has happily repeated to his customers and other interested people since. He seems to enjoy the special attention he gets when knows the gossip.

of the business strategy, even if it is not a conscious one.[237] At the same time, the interviews and observations show that the owners also enjoy these interactions and feel proud of the extra services they perform (such as storing keys and packages or keeping an eye on the children in the store). The kind of trust that is conveyed with these services makes both partners feel special: customers enjoy and reinforce their regular status and get extra services for free, owners and salespeople also enjoy their status as trustful public persons. The **café I's** owner is more forthright about this topic:

> What I really also think is **beautiful is certainly this contact creation**, this is **also my aim** and also the guests, I hear that **they also come definitely because of this**. Also the waiters play a big role for this and I **really pay attention that my colleagues care**, **that they provide well for the people** and also a little familiar and [develop] these conversations as well (l. 630 - 635). Well I definitely welcome that you greet each other, **I think that's the spirit**, because to keep in touch with these contacts, this is very important, in my opinion (l. 185 -190). I say I know it only this way, I like that, **with this you feel at home** (l. 209 f.)

While he makes sure that his employees follow his rules about caring, greeting, and general politeness toward the guests, his ties to the customers are not necessarily merely professional:

> Well, **I do know them very well**! I also know their names and everything, I know them very good, also what they do [professionally] and so on (l. 116 f.) Well, for me, **I would describe them as friends, not only guests**, but really good friends, because we talk about many things, yes, well these [guests] from the TV or so, these from the [names radio station], I talk with them also about **private problems** and he [does] as well, for instance. Not necessarily about private problems such as with my wife or so, but about my nephew, […] or **about problems at work** or if business is slack or so, that's what I tell him sometimes and he tells me about his work and this and that. Al**so with other two regulars, I'm really close with them** as well, with them **I also talk in Turkish**, for example, or another man, who is also interested in the Turkish language and when he comes he greets me with *merhaba* and *nisilsiniz* and so on and his wife, she writes for newspapers and [name of newspaper] and so on (l. 254 - 266).

Despite being on different sides counter, the owner of this café and some of his guests had social interactions which led to close or strong ties and even friendships. These friendships seem to extend beyond the business, but are nurtured and maintained mainly in the café during the customers' stays. While the customers that he describes as "close friends" also take part in its services when frequenting the café, they also spend time with the owner (and sometimes familiar waiters). Hence, they consider the café a social place and a place where their friendship is practiced.

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[237] Certainly none of the owners call themselves public characters, nor is the term generally known in everyday language outside of Urban Studies.

The **flower store** is also a place for practicing friendship. The same circle of senior women meets there weekly for coffee; and most of these women also frequent the business for chats and purchases on other days as well: "[S]ometimes [they come] every day, well sometimes two three times a week." As the owner's mother adds, "I always call it cafeteria and flower store" (l. 754). The owner sees a thin line between working as a florist, being a friend, and working as a social worker for the elderly. She is straightforward about her view on these practices: acting as a social worker, or at least "someone who cares" and "help each other" (l. 373) is only possible for her if first, there are adequate revenues and second, if the chats and the extra services don't disturb her business operations. She enjoys every social interaction and interruption during a slow or boring business day. However, she does feel that sometimes her extra services—such as going shopping for some of her senior customers, distributing fresh eggs from a local farmer she meets at the wholesale flower market, or delivering her flowers to the customers' homes—go beyond her own physical and time capacities (l. 958 f.). Although she knows that some of her regular customers depend on these services because of their own physical conditions, she feels that she needs to focus on keeping her business running.

She does enjoy being considered a friend by her "honored" customers. However, the way she described the thin line between being friends with customers, operating a business, and delivering extra services, also underlines how acting as a public character raises further expectations of free extra services and intense social interaction for the future. For instance, when the big construction site on Karl-Marx-Straße reached her business, she struggled to maintain her revenues. She was only earning 60% of her regular revenues and tried to attract customers behind the construction fence with ever-changing new decorations in the front window and on the sidewalk. During this period (from summer 2014 until early summer 2015), she stopped doing any of the services, since she couldn't risk to leave the business and miss a single customer.

The flower store coffee klatch also underlines the relationship of homogeneity and propinquity for social interaction in the stores. As per Gans (1961), social homogeneity outweighs physical proximity in the creation of ties and relationships:

> Propinquity results in visual contact, whether voluntary, or involuntary, it produces social contact among neighbors, although homogeneity will determine how intensive the relationships will be and whether they will be positive or not. Propinquity also supports relationships based on homogeneity by making frequent contact convenient. Finally, among people who are comparatively homogeneous and move into an area as strangers, propinquity may determine friendship formation among neighbors (Gans 1961: 138).

The coffee klatch in the flower store also seems somewhat untypical for a dense, anonymous, and diverse inner-city shopping street: ethnic German women of the same age and occupational groups (mostly wives of formerly renowned merchants) gather in "their long-standing flower store" "as it used to be," as one customer repeatedly insists, where they get cared for and served by a (younger) working woman. The homogeneous coffee klatch members became friends explicitly because of their 'similarity.' But they remain friends because the store allows them to nurture and maintain their relationships within walking distance on a regular basis. However, with Gans' idea of the relationship between physical propinquity and social homogeneity, this unexpected sociability of the store might be less related to the spatial attributes and the owner's social practices than to its location and social homophily:

> Propinquity is also more important for some types of social activities than others […] adolescents and adults socialize either in peer groups-people of similar age and sex-or in sets of couples. Peer groups are more likely to form on the basis of propinquity. For example, the members of that well-known suburban peer group, the women's "coffee klatch," are usually recruited in the immediate vicinity. Since the participants indulge primarily in shop talk - children, husbands, and home - the fact that they are all wives and mothers provides sufficient homogeneity to allow propinquity to function (Gans 1961: 138 f.).

For Gans, friendships require homogeneity. Even if "propinquity initiates many social relationships and maintains less intensive ones, such as 'being neighborly,'" (Gans 1961: 135) propinquity itself is not enough to create intensive relationship—regardless of the store owner's networking and social skills.

Nonetheless, the flower store owner does enjoy the coffee klatch and more generally, she enjoys setting up people who could help each other. She also enjoys informing the local officials, magazines, and newspapers, as well as any other interested person about local news, the neighborhood and street's past and current history. She also enjoys telling them anecdotes from her long business history. She also is very proud that her store is the place where all the "old Neukölln people" shop.[238] She constantly drops their names and how well she knows how the local social life and networks work:

> Mrs. K always gets a paper cup because **she visits so often** [avoiding to wash too many dishes] […] I don't want to call it friendships, but on the other hand, yes! Where we also **talk about some private stuff** or also **get insights into their private** [lives] or, I don't know, that they own a garden, or the **family circumstances** and **when you know one around here, you know all**, you know half of Neukölln, well, they are all related to

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[238] She describes these people as the previous 'leading' ethnic German families: residential and commercial building owners, merchants, doctors, pharmacists, artists, and so on, most of which were also born and raised in the area.

each other, related by marriage (laughs), we also take care of the graves, and then there comes other stuff, and **one leads to the other**. The [building] owners, **they all know each other** and if you're in trouble with one, then, you know that you have to forget the others as well - the others will know as well (l. 700 - 707).

While the contacts and relationships help to foster the owner's local identity as a store where, from her perspective, renowned people and honorable merchants shop, the relationships also serve to increase sales. However, if someone doesn't like her or her work, these networks could also turn against her. Hence, networking itself seems ambivalent for her.

This image that she fosters helps the owner to manage tougher business times, the urban renewal, and the resulting discussions in the local business association meetings, where she must compete with the bigger chain stores and the nearby shopping mall. By emphasizing her long business history, her engagement for the street, and her renowned clientele, she achieves the effect that the local authorities and bigger businessmen listen to her and inform her in a timelier manner about new constructions, activities and plans. [239]

> I wish that they would do more sometimes, that they draw on those people from which they got and wanted all the information or from which they want that we act as mouthpiece or what else and then they talk so big […] this really annoys me sometimes (l. 400 - 404).

In sum, the owners of these surveyed businesses act as public characters by forging ties between and with their customers. These ties in turn allow the business owners to access and transfer important information. These public character practices are driven first from the pleasure both they and their customers derive from fostering a sociable atmosphere. Second, the owners nurture their own local relationships and "business friendships" as welcomed distractions during tough business days. Third, they depend on these social connections in terms of local news—not only for the survival of their business but also for the maintenance of their status as a knowledgeable public character. [240] Fourth, they act as public characters because the maintenance of good relationships with regulars contributes to the reliability of revenues and might also attract additional customers. And fifth, they foster social interaction as an (informal) business strategy to increase customer satisfaction and loyalty. Hence, the creation of local places with a "feel-good-character" (organic store owner, l. 108), along with the many

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[239] All of the chain stores as well as the shopping mall are owned by men. Women owners are more common among the smaller and individually owned business, as well as among the newly opened stores.
[240] Most of the store owners named some of the regulars "friends" (e.g. flower store owner, l. 948); however, when asked more directly about the type of relationship they have with their customers, the owners referred to their customers as business-related friends or avoided the term at all.

other public character practices of Karl-Marx-Straße's business owners, supports the development of local "social cohesion" (butcher) and a sense of community as a by-product or "unanticipated gain" (Small 2009) for the neighborhood.

In terms of the customers, the ethnographic findings are in accordance with Tauber (1972). Customers do not only have very different motives for shopping, eating, or drinking—such as playing a specific role, supplying one's household, self-gratifying, or seeking a social experience outside of the home or working place—but they also have different motives for interacting with other people in the businesses and behind the counters. Most customers have distinct social needs that they want to satisfy during their shopping trips (Tauber 1972). Not only the social dimensions of retail and gastronomic spaces, but also the networking and social practices of the owners and staff seem to fulfill these needs, as the above examples have shown. These social connections, whether direct or indirect, contribute not only to, but also become intrinsic parts of what is perceived as a pleasurable shopping experience for the owners, staff, and customers (Johnstone/ Conroy 2008: 381). Hence, retail and gastronomic spaces become not only places for supply and leisure, but also deeply social places.[241] As primarily social environments they convey a particular linking value (in addition to a use value) as these environments facilitates social links, often across lines of ethnic and status differences (Shields 1992; Miller et al. 1998).

Hence, the analysis of the owners' practices reveals the reasons why certain customers feel attached to different stores and businesses extend beyond the places' physical characteristics and selection: Some frequent the businesses because of the expected and desired social connections with other customers and with the staff, in particular. Therefore, these customers are not only open for, but explicitly look out for social interaction and reward the owner and staff when such social needs are fulfilled. As a consequence, social interaction increases the potential for the development of a sense of attachment to the business. Furthermore, this sense of place in terms of the in-business social relationships gives additional meaning to the place and its owners and thus also increases the sense of belonging for both the customers and the staff (Low/ Altman 1992).

It is first and foremost the owners as public characters that make these places low-threshold (or as the chapter title implies, "feel-good") "community spaces" (White/ Sutton 2001) with their constant and routine engagement with their customers and other local actors. It is their social practices of caring,

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[241] This is also why retail specialists and researchers increasingly pay attention to the social aspects of shopping. There is a belief that the more time customers spend in the facilities, the more potential the owners have to increase sales (Hu/ Jasper 2006; Feinberg et al. 1989).

chatting, teasing, helping, and networking that give them the status as a well-known and renowned public character and further set the basis for inclusion and belonging for the businesses' further users: a social more.

7.4. Store Owners as Trusted Persons - "Certainly, packages always get delivered at the butcher's"[242]

> In speaking about city sidewalk safety, I mentioned how necessary it is that there should be, in the brains behind the **eyes on the street**, an almost unconscious assumption of general street support when the chips are down – when a citizen has to choose, for instance, whether he will take responsibility, or abdicate it in combating barbarism or protecting strangers. There is a short word for this assumption or support: **trust**. **The trust of a city street is formed over time from many, many public sidewalk contacts**. It grows out of people stopping by at the bar for beer, getting advice from the grocer and giving advice to the newsstand man, comparing opinions with other customers at the bakery and nodding hello to the two boys drinking pop on the stoop, eyeing the girl while waiting to be called for dinner, admonishing the children, hearing about a job from the hardware man and borrowing a dollar from the druggist, admiring the new babies and sympathizing over the way a coat faded […] Most of it is **ostensibly utterly trivial** but **the sum is not trivial at all.** The sum of such casual, public contact at a local level […] is a **feeling of public identity of people, a web of public respect and trust, and a resource** in time of personal or neighborhood need (Jacobs 1961: 56).

Jane Jacobs sees "casual public trust" (p. 56) as an indispensable ingredient to a neighborhood's health and public safety, growing not only out of the many and often fleeting interactions on sidewalks, but as I argue, in the more semi-public spaces of businesses. These offer spaces for noncommittal interaction with both acquainted and unfamiliar people, often embedded in and eased by the routines of shopping or stopping for a drink, but also – as previous subchapters have shown – initiated, negotiated, and nurtured by their owners and employees. However, their role as trust personified deserves special attention.

As local figures who constantly receive information via their customers and guests, they

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[242] Butcher, I. 390.

know about each other who is to be trusted and who not, who is defiant of the law and who upholds it, who is competent and well informed and who is inept and ignorant – and how these things are known from the public life of the sidewalk and its associated enterprises (Jacobs 1961: 59, citing Padilla 1958).

This trust, as a main feature of public characters, plays out in the exchange of keys, packages, and notes for friends or family members – services that are provided regularly from the store owners on Karl-Marx-Straße to varying degrees.

For instance, the **flower store** owner receives organic eggs from a local farmer, which she picks up at the wholesale flower market. Despite her already fully loaded van, she transports cartons of the delicate groceries to her business every second week, where she then distributes the eggs to her regulars. If they are too weak to come to the store, she delivers them to their apartments. The distribution and regular consumption of the eggs through her hands serve as a metaphor for the high level of trust the regulars have in her:

The purchase of eggs became an act of trust in and of itself, as well as a means of distinction (Bourdieu 1984). In Germany (as in other countries), the production and consumption of eggs has been a highly controversial topic, as increased media coverage of the extensive animal abuses inherent in industrial egg production led to eggs being banned from selected discounters, supermarkets, and grocery stores, and to a noticeable decrease in egg consumption after each new "egg scandal."[243] Just as in the organic store, customers are forced to trust the statements from staff about the products sold. The flower store owner mentioned that her customers often discussed the quality and lack of trust in locally sold eggs, and thus they desire for an alternative source. Since she always got her own eggs through a befriended farmer she meets regularly at the wholesale market, the flower shop owner started to provide selected customers with these "happy eggs, big eggs, and reliable eggs" (l. 942):

[T]hursdays, we also took eggs with us from the wholesale flower market. Well, [**we] took the eggs and then the customer, who always drinks her coffee here, said, oh, could you bring me some as well**? Yes. Well, now the wholesale flower hall closed and now we [florists] need to go all up to *Beussel* [street] and now the egg man comes to me. Right! Now **my friend always wants to have eggs, Mrs. K wants eggs, Mrs. B wants eggs, Mrs. S. B. [daughter of Mrs. B] wants eggs, so now they all come every 14 days**, he comes

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[243] See, for instance Grüllund, P. / Obermaier, F. (06/24/2015). Faule Eier, http://www.sueddeutsche.de/bayern/bayern-ei-skandal-faule-eier-1.2535510, accessed 08/05/2015. Drutschmann, D. (03/26/2013), Wie Landwirte um ihren Ruf kämpfen, http://www.tagesspiegel.de/wirtschaft/bio-eier-skandal-wie-landwirte-um-ihren-ruf-kaempfen/7983722.html, The Huffington Post (03/24/2014). Skandal um Bio-Eier, die keine Bio-Eier sind: Verdächtige Firma wehrt sich, http://www.huffingtonpost.de/2014/03/24/bio-eier-fuerstenhof-_n_5020125.html, accessed 08/05/2015.

and then I say we need ten eggs, we need 20 eggs, now we need 30 eggs, last week I had 110 eggs, then other people also asked me, well do you also sell eggs? I said, not really, but well, **these are these networks I have again and again** (l. 917 - 927).

The egg exchange happens between "friends", who trust the owner in her selection of a high-risk food product. But the sale of eggs – even during times of contested egg consumption – represents only one metaphor for the deep trust between the tight circle of regulars and the owner.

Moreover, when an increasingly wide circle of locals heard about "her eggs," their sale further contributed to her reputation as a trusted local business person who had access to numerous networks, knowledge, services, and goods. Just as with the eggs, local urban renewal actors (the *City Management* as well as the redevelopment commissioner) approach her before other store owners, knowing that she delivers reliable information on business neighbors and the street's issues. Other business people along Karl-Marx-Straße also mention that the flower store shop enjoys a generally positive reputation as the best informed about the street, its residents, and other business people.

She also stores and distributes packages – either personal deliveries or postal packages – for residents of adjacent buildings. And as a trusted public character, locals approach her in search of help – be it private problems, debts, asking for directions or traffic schedules, searching for specific goods to purchase on the street, or seeking someone to watch their children while they have a doctor's, hair, or administrative appointment.

> [A]s I told you, they [city officials] also **come to me and ask for my connections**, either to the owners of the side buildings, where [the jeweler store] used to be, they had to move out, or because **they need pictures** of the backyards for their studies and what else, or **some inquiries** or so. This is when **they ask me if I could open the door for them**, in inverted commas, you know, **if I know someone who,** let's say, does this and that. But hey, you know, they get paid for it!! Someone from the *Aktion KMS* came over recently or also Mrs. X and Mrs. Y [working for the *City Management*] and then they ask, **have you heard about** this and that or **do you have this phone number** of this and that, I got them, for example, the phone number of the house owner or administration of this building here, where the pool salon used to be, you know (l. 646 – 654).

On the downside, she is also aware that the urban renewal officials sometimes exploit the trust placed in her, as underscored by her complaint that she gives out privileged information for free, whereas the officials actually get paid for doing their research.

> **If I wouldn't do it** [giving out contacts and information] **then folks would say, what a stupid cow** or so, or **we don't go to her business anymore, she's stupid** or, with her, we can't get along anymore. You know, it's the same when they ask me, where's your hair dresser and then I always say, not here, definitely not here because of this and that and then, **word goes around and you know, you lose reputation much easier than you establish it**. **That's why** I give it [information] out, also because of **business interests** (I. 912 - 917).

Although she clearly enjoys her reputation as a trusted, knowledgeable, and respected businesswoman, she is nonetheless critical of the strings and expectations attached to this status. However, in the flow of her business operations she never hesitates to give out information or to help people, obviously relishing the distraction from working routines and the prestige of her status as the person to approach in important matters.

Trust is often addressed in direct relation to public characters and neighborhood safety in Jacobs' work. However, neither Jacobs nor urban sociology emphasize trust as a core subject – unlike in social psychology or political science's studies of urban life. While I conceptualize trust as a relationship practice, where the people involved rely on each other, and which acts as the basis of all social interaction (eventually resulting in more permanent ties), other more theoretical concepts of trust typically refer to a situation, where one person (trustor) is willing to rely on the actions of another person (trustee) and where the situation is directed towards the future. By trusting the trustee, the trustor (voluntarily or forcibly) abandons control over the actions performed by the trustee. In this situation, the trustee is uncertain about the outcome of trustor's actions, and thus can only evaluate their own expectations (and not the outcomes). This uncertainty involves the risk of failure or harm, if the trustee does not behave in the desired or expected way (Mayer et al. 1995).

As seen in the example of the flower shop owner, store owners as public characters represent a special version of a trustee: Not only do they receive power and control over private information and belongings from their customers; they are also deeply involved in the generation of trust between customers and third parties around the business, whom they vouch for. In other words, the availability of trusted individuals (such as the public characters) on a neighborhood scale is important on three levels: one, the distribution and provision of up-to-date information and support on local and personal issues; two, the provision of an overall feeling of safety in the neighborhood, by dint of a general level of trust; and third, the generation of other (trusting) local social relationships.

The ethnographic work shows that the store owners on Karl-Marx-Straße are well connected and trusted figures, who demonstrate not only high levels of social capital, but are also willing to use it for

their own businesses as well as their customers' overall prosperity. Therefore the presence and everyday practices of the store owners effect not only the level of safety, but also wider local networks and engagement structures for the area – framed as "neighborhood vitality" by both Jacobs and Oldenburg (2013: 140; Oldenburg 2013: 288).[244]

The owners on Karl-Marx-Straße do not necessarily turn their social capital and these high levels of trust into a business advantage. While the management of the shopping mall and the clothing chain stores regularly attempt to improve and expand their social capital, reputation, and trust by sponsoring street events and taking part in the formal economic development meetings, none of the interviewed independent stores on Karl-Marx-Straße are currently part of a formal business improvement organization or chamber of commerce. Nevertheless, the independent owners underline the value of having good relations with their business neighbors – for the sake of the street (e.g. lobbying for adverting during construction, or putting forward a shopping guide in a local newspaper, recommending other stores when asked), and last but not least, for their own profit margins (e.g. as a business hub and shopping destination, where they benefit from each other's customers). Furthermore, small owners instrumentalize these business ties and use them as social capital in order to lobby against traffic changes, the opening of competing businesses (mostly in the form of chain stores), or against new administrative regulations.[245] For instance, they inform each other if patrols are in the area, or help each other with license renewals via their ties with city staff. Just as they enjoy their status as trusted

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[244] As per Putnam (2000), trust is not only the basic ingredient for the generation of social ties and relationships, but also crucial for mutual cooperation and engagement in social interactions and neighborhood life. Trust combined with so-called bounded solidarity form social capital, which as a resource can produce (social and economic) benefits for the individual, the neighborhood, and society (Portes 1998: 18).

[245] Since 2014, owners of Neukölln's kiosks ("Spätkauf") have been increasingly fined for breaking the law governing trading hours (e.g. at night or on Sundays). Since most of their revenues stem from those hours, some of the owners have the impression that the fines are part of a larger displacement of their business type in favor of shops that pay much higher commercial rents. Most kiosk owners have a migration background, and after having dropped out of the primary labor market themselves, now employ mostly family members. As such, the closing of a kiosk often leaves entire families without income, and little chance on the first labor market. With the systematic destruction of their income base through these fines, the affected kiosk owners have united and are now fighting for their unwritten, but long-practiced, right to keep their businesses open long after the discount stores and supermarkets have closed. An online petition and repeated public protests have received wide public attention and support. See for instance, Fiedler, M. (07/10/2015). Alle gehen kaputt in Neukölln, http://www.tagesspiegel.de/berlin/spaetis-in-berlin-alle-gehen-kaputt-in-neukoelln/12037476.html, Fiedler, M. (06/15/2015). Eine Berliner Institution – Spätis kämpfen um ihre Existenz, http://www.tagesspiegel.de/berlin/oeffnungszeiten-eine-berliner-institution-spaetis-kaempfen-um-ihre-existenz/11915550.html, RBB Panorama (05/31/2015). "Rettet die Spätis vorm Ordnungsamt", http://www.rbb-online.de/panorama/beitrag/2015/05/online-petition-berlin-spaetis-ladenschlussgesetz.html, accessed 8/12/2015.

individuals only as long as they do not disappoint their clientele, the owners only maintain their business relationships if they live up to each other's expectations.

By contrast, in formal business meetings, the mistrust and distrust between the businesses, especially of franchise and chain stores, becomes apparent in the independent owners' lack of interaction. Their exchanges with local officials and business people in the meetings, as reported by both the interviewed store owners and local officials, reveal a stronger focus on increasing business activity and less on mutual social ties and aid.[246]

> We also try to include the smaller entrepreneurs, but **they are more difficult**, it is **more difficult to include them in the participation** (l. 78 - 80). In the leading board, the **small retailers' interests are only indirectly represented**, because the **big stores' managers have all an interest** that the location generally works, yes **there's certainly a gap** [no individually owned stores represented]. If they don't come and represent their interests, they have to take it that others do, in the process (l. 82 - 86). [The chain stores] make then their **own locational analyses**, they also made their own survey and what else […] and they **adapt to changing demands** (Urban planner, l. 554 - 557).

The urban planner openly admits to the business advantage accrued by the corporate partners from attending these meetings, but also to the participatory measures that inherently favor them, especially since their representatives are being paid by their head offices to attend these meetings during working hours. Rather than reflecting on the reasons for poor independent store participation, he blames them for being unable, unwilling, or "difficult." So while the individually owned store owners receive a high level of trust from their customers and have a good relationship with their small business colleagues, they seem to receive little or no attention, respect, and trust from officials and the bigger chain stores.

The high levels of trust in the stores' internal social life are somewhat surprising, considering the comparatively high level of ethnic and social diversity on Karl-Marx-Straße. While trust forms the basis for any human relationship, since without it, "the everyday life we take for granted is simply not possible" (Good 1988: 32), trust becomes a more urgent concern in today's more uncertain, polarized, and global conditions (Misztal 1996:9).

Sociology, and in particular urban sociology, determined that with increasing diversity, trust and social capital most often decline and thus prevent social interaction between differently stratified individuals

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[246] However, since the participants are mostly the managers and owners of the chain stores, who do not necessarily work at the front, it remains an empirical question if their salespeople network differently.

(cf. Marschall/ Stolle 2004). Flipped around, in diverse neighborhoods with low levels of social interaction, trust and social capital – regardless if within the same socio-economic or demographic group or not - are also low. [247] However, Neukölln also offers a number of characteristics that together structure opportunities for social interaction. These opportunities base widely on the availability of potential contact sites, some of which are the addressed public and semi-public places and they further depend on the local store owners in the neighborhood and if they act as contact brokers, communicators, or middle(wo)men (Bonacich 1973). Together, these characteristics also shape residents' perceptions of themselves and of the neighborhood's identity. With these features, Karl-Marx-Straße as a diverse, yet also ordinary, shopping street brings together all kinds of residents in spatial proximity and, and through the work and social skills of the business owners, in direct contact with each other in the businesses. This stands in clear opposition to the field of sociology's long-standing fear of an alienated and individualized society with low levels of group solidarity and face-to-face interaction.[248]

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[247] For example, life in an ethnically diverse neighborhood forces residents to confront their preconceived attitudes and even stereotypes of other ethnic groups on a daily basis. While for some tolerance and mutual interaction might increase while in-group solidarity decreases, for others prejudices and ethnic hostility might also increase (Marschall/ Stolle 2004:131). But in general, living in an ethnically diverse place significantly increases the probability and frequency of inter-group social interaction and direct contacts between people of different origins (Stein et al. 2000 in Marschall/ Stolle 2004). Proximity effects and personal interaction are mutually dependent and reinforcing, particularly if habitually used (semi-) public spaces such as the selected businesses are available.

[248] In brief, sociology's original concern addressed the decreasing sense of community that ostensibly proceeded from the rise of "modernity," as Tönnies (1887) noted the loss of moral bonds and moral communities, and the change to a more freely bound, but also more individualistic, isolated, and functionally driven social life, or from a tight-knit and intimate "Gemeinschaft" (community) to a loosely and functionally knit "Gesellschaft" (society). Durkheim (1897) described the loss of trust and thus community as increasing "anomie," referring to the increasingly chaotic and antinomic nature of legal and social relationships that resulted in the withdrawal and isolation of the individual. Marx (2008[1844]) explained this anomie as "alienation" stemming from the distancing process of the individual to their work and social life, or to their economic, political, and social organization, which engendered the loss of dignity, identity, and a sense of purpose in life. Weber (2002[1922]) also addressed trust in regard to the formalization, instrumentalization, and de-personalization of social relationships with the bureaucratization of social institutions and organizations. In the context of progressive urbanization, Simmel (1903) explored the rise of secondary relationships in contrast to intimate first relationships in more homogeneous settings, while Wirth (1938) addressed trust as essentially changing, and urbanization as a de-moralizing agent for residents, who must adapt to urban life and everyday survival. What these authors have in common is their emphasis on moral community as the means by which individuals relate to each other in order to define an "us" or "we." In the context of these moral communities, trust represents the basic ingredient along with solidarity and loyalty (Sztompa 1999: 5). On a less moralistic level, and for more urban and often less tightly knit and homogeneous communities and individuals, trust is thus defined as the positive expectations of mutual future behavior and performance of allies. As a very positive assumption, trust comprises the willingness to accept vulnerability, based on positive expectations about another's intentions, but also the overall expectation that the other person or others act in a way that at least serves one's own interests (Gambetta 1988; Mayer et al. 1995) (cf. Chapter 3.3.).

However, just as trust is the basis for all social life, it also lays foundation for "small life world communities" (Honer/ Hitzler 1984; 1988) in and around the businesses. The owners' distinct social practices simultaneously foster mutual trust, and generate the development of these business-related small life worlds. The ethnographic findings show that the businesses not only welcome a varied social and ethnic clientele, but that trust generated therein expands to both the respective in- and out-groups. As with the distribution of eggs or the exchange of keys, public characters represent exactly those individuals who mediate and bridge one's social capital to other business-related people that might be of interest. These bridging contacts are important for the building of an identity and ever-greater trust with other locals that then in turn transcends group boundaries. Face-to-face interactions in the stores (often initiated by the owners) widen not only the local networks and increase general trust in the neighborhood, but also help to decrease ethnic stereotypes and mutual reservations (Putnam 2000).

Many of the owner-initiated interactions between as of yet unfamiliar customers or so-called familiar strangers[249] (Milgram 1992) – and in particular between customers of different age or ethnic groups – show that the owners act as trusted conduits: Since the individual trusts the respected public character, they quickly seem to trust the other customer as well. While the **flower store's** long-time homogeneous coffee klatch circle is more of an associational bonding group, other more spontaneous customer interactions bridge individuals of diverse backgrounds, fostering the development of broader and more generalizable trust. Hence, the social interactions in a diverse context such as on Karl-Marx-Straße – and even if within the less diverse social context of the flower store – help to build a broader form of trust that could also include unfamiliar people with different backgrounds (e.g. Stolle et al. 2008).

In short, trust thus evolves out of the many little "public sidewalk contacts" (Jacobs 1961) or semi-public interactions, even extending the businesses' socio-spatial range: None of the flower store's regulars buy eggs elsewhere anymore. On the other hand, and despite the owner's enjoyment of the regular social exchanges with these women, she regrets the taken-for-grantedness with which these business friends extend this trust to other deliveries as well:

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[249] Familiar strangers are those people who are repeatedly observed in the course of daily life without direct interaction. Nonetheless, people develop real social relationships with these familiar strangers, in which both agree to mostly ignore each other. There are exceptions to this non-interaction rule: The further away from common and routine places, the more likely interaction with a familiar stranger becomes. As a visual but not verbal relationship, familiar strangers are not totally unknown people, but not acquaintances either (Milgram 1992).

Yes, **you network with this** [kind of service], right, but this **developed then a little bit by necessity**. Or, for one customers**, I also went shopping on Saturdays**, but I got out of this habit, because that didn't fit in my stuff sometimes, **I mean I feel sorry for her**, that she then doesn't get out of her apartment and out and so […] well, she's getting sicker and well, almost 90 years old, well […] **I stopped this habit because it didn't suit** my plans then because my husband was also sick and then I just couldn't get rid of this [shopping trips] and say no, well this almost bordered on, well, **exploitation** is too much, but yes, **indeed a little and too much** (l. 950 - 967).

She had also contacted the local health department and relatives of a customer who had not been seen for a while. Vice versa, local district and social workers and customers' relatives also reach out to her in search of support. But these trust-based extra services, as another aspect of the "more" she offers, also resulted in too much (financially and socially) unpaid and unrewarding work that she could no longer provide when faced with the care of her partner. This trust and the resulting involvement in her customers' private lives might also produce expectations that she could not or would not satisfy. Ostensibly risking the social and physical health of some of her elderly and needy customers, she had to focus on her own health and business survival first. But even though the high level of trust, imparted to her by customers and local administrators, does not contribute directly to her revenues, it does play into her personal self-confidence as a respected businesswoman – despite the store's small size, revenues, and economic role for the street. Hence, she and the other store owners' public character practices weave a safety net of public trust, emergency contacts, and resources in times of personal or neighborhood need.

Similarly to the flower shop owner, the **butcher** also offers "more" as means of generating or increasing the level of public trust while maintaining trusted relationships with his customers**.** Due to the high level of respect he enjoys, the butcher is able to correct his customers or disturb lunch conversations whenever he thinks his customers are speaking in a disrespectful or politically inappropriate way. Surprisingly, none of the customers who were sharply interrupted during their lunch subsequently stayed away. By contrast, on those occasions where the owner intervened, customers seem to immediately follow his rules. With his long-term engagement for inter-ethnic social cohesion in the neighborhood and the quite strict conversational rules in his store, the butcher shop achieved a high reputation across most population groups and in the media.

I always say, **we can make it** [living together], well, I also said that during the tough times, when **there were also tensions** between the people with migration background and the Germans, **I always told them, hey**

folks, stop, and you know, [they talked] in such a populist way 'they should go back to where they came from', this is bullshit, absolute bullshit, it only works out if we do it together! (l. 394 - 398).

From his point of view, trust comes naturally with the business' long existence, and his employees' efforts to win, keep, and satisfy every new customer, and his performance as a "good" businessman. Offering more is thus deeply intertwined with maintaining a good business atmosphere, local social cohesion, and social life. He considers the shop's little extra services as "normal" and part of the general job as a neighborhood business:

> [**O**]**f course, we store packages just as we also help** if someone's door shut when the key is still inside of the apartment, right, this all has happened or if someone got injured, we call the emergency doctor or we drive him to the hospital, right, or if parking spots, if the family comes and needs to carry a heavy furniture up or down, **they come to us, somehow they all come to us always and say, can you help or do you have** a piece of strap, do you have an extension cable, do you have a bulb or do you have a piece of paper and a pen, I need to write a note, well, **[they come] for the most different things** […] and **if I can do a favor for them, if I take care about the human cooperation,** then I keep its costs as low as possible, which means **I don't leave them stand alone** (l. 411 - 433).

The **pharmacist** considers extras as a by-product of operating a responsible business. Although she understands her distinct business type as inherently entangled with high levels of trust, for her trust does not develop naturally, but requires effort and training. Whenever she succeeds in building up trusting relationship with a customer, the owner is very proud and thankful for being trusted:

> [If customers decide to go to her business] **this is where a bond of trust is forged and this clutches for a long time and I think that's beautiful, I'm also thankful for it,** because I say this is exactly what I have my training for. They don't have to go to the doctor, me **as a pharmacist, I am likewise responsible**. If you come back to me after three, four days and tell me, it's not getting any better, then [I say] go to the doctor, now it has to get cleared. It's not that we take anything away [from the doctors] but **this is where my job starts to make fun and this increases the more you listen** [the customers' stories] (l. 236 - 244).

It becomes clear that the "cultivation [of trust] cannot be institutionalized" (Jacobs 1961: 56), but in contrast to Jacobs' observations, the social practices that generate this trust do imply private commitments – during work and outside of work hours. Most of the owners' extra services or social care would not be necessary if their customers' social and health insurances, pensions, and incomes were better, and as such the owners could easily say no to services that exceed their own capacities. All owners mentioned and occasionally complained about the thin line between voluntary services and

these services being taken for granted or even exploited. This is also why half of the owners decided to move away from the street, in order to gain some distance from the pressure and expectations, but also to avoid additional extra services during their leisure time. Although they appreciate Karl-Marx-Straße as a business location, spending time at home away from the street allows them to physically and mentally retreat from the street and their customers.

The owner of the **fruit and vegetable store** suffered in particular from high social control when her parents, the former owners, died: "I felt so observed," (l. 87) by customers within and outside of the business, who also evaluated her professional performance as a young businesswoman They did not give her extra time to recover from her grief, and continued to demand deliveries or extras. Afraid of losing her regular business, or changing established shopping routines, she obliged and continued to offer the same little extra services as her parents. Although the fruits and vegetables store owner enjoyed the high level of trust and the numerous condolences, this trust resulted in a mental overload for her: „for me alone it was too much" (l. 40). In the end, she sold the business. The owner of the **pharmacy** and the **lunch restaurant** also consider spending leisure time in the neighborhood as highly ambivalent, because they can never leave their roles as "public characters."

Hence, while Karl-Marx-Straße's business owners are proud of their trustworthiness and competency, they are only able to maintain this important role for the neighborhood if their revenues remain stable and if they have a separate place to withdraw to during their leisure time. With the progression of urban renewal in northern Neukölln, and the resultant competition between the long-standing small shops and the newer businesses, the owners feel forced into providing more of the extra services that generated the high levels of trust. Furthermore, the owners feel that their commitment to the neighborhood has been exploited or re-appropriated by the street's marketing and urban renewal actors. So while Jacobs (1961: 59) claims that

> [a] good city street neighborhood achieves a marvel of balance between its people's determination to have essential privacy and their simultaneous wishes for differing degrees of contact, enjoyment or help from the people around. This balance is largely made up of small, sensitively managed details, practiced and accepted so casually that they're normally taken for granted,

Jacobs overlooks the fact that store owners deserve the same essential privacy and self-control over social interaction, enjoyment, and help as their customers. The social practices that build trust and thereby knit together a sense of community in the stores, must also be carried out and managed in such

a way that the owners can decide when they want to be well-known public characters or not. This dichotomy explains the high levels of skepticism in the rejection of, as well as distrust and mistrust, city efforts to include them – or make use of them – in the progression of the street's urban renewal. Their measures invariably require an ever-increasing material and time investment (still taken for granted by the authorities) outside of their business "community" – and with it a greater feeling of potential exploitation and frustration.

7.5. Conclusion: Offering "More" as Leading to an "Excellent Social Status"[250]?

Store observations and interviews with the shopkeepers and local officials along Karl-Marx-Straße reveal that the sampled businesses and their keepers fulfill an additional social role for their customers and for the street. Simultaneously, these caring, connecting, and trust-generating practices are neglected, or cynically exploited, by the immediate aims of urban renewal programs.

As previously discussed, the store owners care about what is happening near their businesses: They watch the street and try to maintain it as an inviting shopping destination and residential neighborhood; they care about the well-being of (selected) customers, encourage social exchange between them without excessive intrusion or self-interest; and enjoy conversations and the mutual exchange of information with them. The ethnographic data also shows that Karl-Marx-Straße's business owners attempt to support their customers inasmuch as resources allow, motivated by a hybrid between altruism and business sense. For their often repeated "service for the neighborhood," the businesspeople and their staff draw upon their wide local networks and neighborhood knowledge. They also give out advice and free information to the urban renewal actors – even if they do not necessarily agree with the reconstruction plans for the street, or its present/desired business mix.

Although most owners downplay their role in street life, comparing themselves negatively to the greater visibility of the bigger chain stores and educated new business owners, they "bring together people who do not know each other in an intimate, private social fashion and in most cases do not care to know each other in that fashion" (Jacobs 1961: 55). It is difficult to demarcate the social practices that make them "public characters" in Jacobs' sense, versus those practices that keep the business afloat in a – from the owners' perspective – successful way. The ethnographic work shows that while businesses

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[250] Jacobs 1961: 61.

share a strong interest in the local community (both old and new neighborhood residents), the newer business owners' social practices suggest the creation of a comparatively more homogeneous shopping community, in terms of socio-economic status and age. Of course, many owners enjoy socializing with people who share similarities, as with the exchanges between German pensioners' in the flower store, or between the businessmen of Turkish descent in the main café. But the owners of the longer standing businesses still welcome a diverse group of customers and (often) turn them into regulars, regardless of their background (as long as they can afford the products in the business). Irrespective of the number of years in residence in the neighborhood, owners' social practices make the businesses socially important places and incorporate them into their customers' life worlds, thereby making the place socially and physically.

Figure 52: New coffee spot on a newly remodeled square

With the heightened business competition stemming from the street's reconstruction, rising commercial and residential rents, as well as the opening of more lifestyle and chain stores, the ability to act as a public character will become more difficult in the future, engendering a fight for every single customer and their loyalty. From this state of affairs, it follows that local officials ascribe a different status to the small independent stores than their customers and business colleagues. Therefore, I conclude that their

status can be described as ambiguous, rather than uniformly "excellent" (Jacobs 1961:61).[251] By way of a conclusion for the "offering more" or "public character" practices, this last subsection addresses how the addressed sets of social practices impart independent business owners with a special status, which is nonetheless contested in the perceptions of the different groups of relevant actors (owners, customers/residents, local officials).

Figure 53: Inclusion of passersby at the main café

While it is much easier, from the perspective of the owner of the **main café**, to build up a trusting relationship with the local customers of Turkish descent, he also enjoys a good reputation among the German retirees, who enjoy the little extras he and his employees provide – including lending them an ear for their stories or guiding them to their preferred chairs.[252] Local officials do not recognize any of these social practices as extras, as became apparent by their treatment of his business when he applied to open an outdoor café on the new adjacent square.

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[251] It nonetheless remains unclear what characteristics – from the perspective of the customers – make a business owner a highly valued local figure, since this study focuses on the store owners' practices, rather than investigating the motivations of customers, or their perception of what the owners do for them.

[252] As we walked to his car after the interview, passersby and customers repeatedly greeted him, teased him, and called him nicknames – which he clearly relished.

[A]nd **this hurts, you know I'm born here and they don't understand** a fraction of our ideas, they think these guys have black hair, **they don't understand us**, but we <u>do</u> understand business, yes we really do, […] when I open the door here [points to café door] then I think of **what my next business sign will be** in ten years, what will it be like and this pavilion would have made such a beautiful area over here, right? […] then, you know, **this bullshit that I've seen, that they pre-assigned the winner** [of the public tender] beforehand […] even though he didn't meet the requirements of the tender. Then they are not allowed to participate, finito! And then I, **I even made a full business plan**, […] **proved all our business experiences** (l. 106 - 119). There's someone sitting [in the local administration], **he wants to make the district German**, then the person also needs to have the knowledge to understand what it means to be German and how can I make the people more German („eindeutschen") (l. 153 f.).

The owner complained about the unfair and opaque public tender process, the apparent discrimination against his non-German origin, and the disrespect shown to his position as an honorable merchant, with a future-oriented business, expansion plans, and manifold measures meant to impress local officials. From his experiences with local officials, he concluded that they preferred "more German" businesses, regardless of his yearlong efforts to improve the street as a communal business location. On a more ordinary level, my observations of his practices revealed the high status he enjoys among customers and business colleagues, the pride and the enthusiasm with which he enjoys and enacts this status:

Well, I believe **they do know me more as I know them, but I also like it this way** (l. 652 f.). Well, I'm the tradesman here and then **they all come to me every day**, friends and other people come to me and yes, if only a fraction sees me every day and would recognize my beautiful face, **then it's so easy (to become well-known)** (l. 602 - 618) **If I know somebody, it means that many more know me**, I have bad memory […] and I also shake hands and sit down with the folks and so. For me **this is just social**, well just like greeting your neighbor in order not to alienate him, **that's what it's all about for me** (l. 349 - 352).

The owner of the **pharmacy** is also well aware of her well-respected status, generated by three generations of engagement for the street, its residents, and their health issues. Her business colleagues' perception of her business is not as important as the pharmacy's reputation among customers, yet she cares about good relationships with them as well.

I think that **all colleagues are able to make use of our name**, yes and even if I don't know one or the other [business people], this is not supposed to sound arrogant, in quotation marks, but yes that is the bonus and **people know that we do good work here** (l. 460 - 464).

For her, gaining trust and respect is just the outcome of doing good work and thus her interest in maintaining a positive reputation is not actively pursued as part of a business strategy. Similar to the pharmacist, all interviewed owners care a lot about their reputation, as well as productive relationships with business neighbors, since they all benefit from their mutual efforts and believe in working for the common good of maintaining Karl-Marx-Straße's public attractiveness. But the tight small-scale networks between residents and business people around Karl-Marx-Straße contribute not only to high levels of mutual help and information and to a high social status. They also fuel a potential negative side-effect - a rapidly spreading bad reputation, as seen in the context of the **flower store** ("they all know each other and if you're in trouble with one, then, you know that you have to forget the others as well", l. 706 f.).

Furthermore, a "difficult" reputation, even if respected by regulars and other customers, challenges an owner's ability to compete in the tense situation of Karl-Marx-Straße's urban renewal. The flower store owner refers to her expansive knowledge that – despite her reputation as being stubborn – prevents the local planning authorities from excluding her completely from the urban renewal and official marketing process. But if their "excellent social status" is built on the "more," then the owners along Karl-Marx-Straße discharge their tasks admirably – first, in terms of the services they offer their customers that go beyond mere economic exchange, and second, in terms of the care they invest in the maintenance of the street. Without an excellent social status, the businesses would not be able to keep their many long-term and regular customers. Even the comparatively new **organic store** succeeded in building up a growing circle of regulars ("members") immediately, partially because they promoted their support of the street and of customers in the local newspapers, magazines, and the *City Management*'s published material. In this particular situation, acting as a public character became an effective advertisement strategy. But overall, all owners increasingly promote their engagement in street life as a tactic necessary for survival, including activities which previously flew the radar, as services "for the neighborhood" (butcher).

Ultimately, Jane Jacobs' description of the public characters in 1960s Greenwich Village still helps to conceptualize the many social practices that offer "more" in easing residents' everyday life on Karl-Marx-Straße, and in helping them settle and integrate in the area. Since most customers, particularly the regulars, are well-aware that "their" businesses along with "their" staff make them feel at home around Karl-Marx-Straße, they have a great deal of respect for these owners and are scared of losing them (even if some customers nonetheless welcome the opening of select new stores). With this, "at

home" or "belonging" means having a place with trusting relationships, and people who can be approached in situations of need, but also where socialization and 'recharging their batteries,' is possible. This highlights that the owners on Karl-Marx-Straße do "enjoy an excellent social status" in the neighborhood, exactly because they have successfully created these socially important spaces for the neighborhood that offer more – a "multiplicity of extra-merchandising services" (Jacobs 1961: 61).

> Their advice, as men and women of common sense and experience, is sought and respected. They are well known individuals, rather than unknown as class symbols. No; this is that almost unconsciously enforced, well-balanced line showing, the line between the city public world and the world of privacy. This line can be maintained, without awkwardness to anyone because of the great plenty of opportunities for public contact in the enterprises along the sidewalks, or on the sidewalks themselves as people move to and from or deliberately loiter when they feel like it, and also because of the presence of many public spots, so to speak proprietors of meeting places like Bernie's where one is free either to hand around or dash in and out, no string attached (Jacobs 1961: 62).

Put together, it becomes clear that the social role the small business owners play on Karl-Marx-Straße stems both from their personal engagement in local social life, and from business considerations, attempting to stay in business despite threats by ever changing shopping patterns (more chain stores, e-commerce, franchising, increasing gastronomization, and the adjacent shopping mall), but more importantly from the disruptive upgrade of the street. The addressed sets of practices that make the owners public characters also effect the development of a sense of belonging for those people who currently use these businesses, and in the end also make and shape the place – both the concrete physical spaces around the business, but also their local social world.

8. Conclusion: "Lifting the curtain" on Karl-Marx-Straße[253]

This chapter brings together the lessons learned about how store owners and their businesses foster positive interactions - a social "more" - among neighborhood residents. It substantiates the appropriateness of viewing store owners as socially important figures whose business activities contribute to local social life. Drawing on the deep ethnographic data described in previous chapters, it offers a grounded (emerging) theory focusing on the micro-interactions in the stores, summarizing how the manifold interactions described in previous chapters cumulate into new patterns of belonging and understanding in everyday urban life.

The first chapters of the thesis reviewed Karl-Marx-Straße's street-level context and the main changes that are currently taking place, due not only to new shopping and trade patterns, but also the marketing, rental, and construction measures currently being implemented by the area's urban renewal project. The next chapters described how the empirical sample of businesses was selected and the sensitizing concepts that led to identifying them. By looking for maximum and minimum contrasts between the cases and their internal social processes, the study tried to cover as many aspects of the businesses' socio-spatial and praxeological peculiarities. Drawing strongly on the interviews and participant observation, as guided by the concepts of third places, public characters, (semi-) public behavior, and senses of home and belonging, the core empirical chapters described and analyzed how the interactions taking place within the businesses added up to much more than simple commercial transactions. First, the socio-spatial qualities of the businesses shape the ways in which the staff and their customers interact, and thus, the analytic focus fell on the internal social life of the businesses. The next chapter examined the concrete practices of the store owners: how they operate their businesses and why, and with what implications for how they interact with their customers. While the thesis identified many specific practices, it was often hard to distinguish between what was intended and trained for and more unintentional, community-oriented, or altruistic practices that produce the central "more", as unanticipated social benefits and gains (cf. Small 2009). Much more work also needs to be done to fully understand how the customers understood this "more" and its implications for their lives outside the businesses' socio-spatial settings.

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[253] "Karl-Marx-Straße is not as anonymous as it seems. Behind the curtain, it does work" (Flower Store Owner, l. 195 f.). The quote refers to the belief held by the interviewed store owners that although Karl-Marx-Straße conveys a rather anonymous impression for outsiders, there is behind the scenes mutual cooperation and social interaction between the store owners.

We now turn to the most important aspects of the social life of ordinary local places highlighted in this research. Most centrally, business people clearly foster social benefits that go beyond the mere provision of goods. Their business settings generate important forms of interaction, with real meaning for such facets of neighborhood life as sense of belonging, rootedness, social trust, and managing difference, which have previously not been acknowledged by urban sociological studies. We must unpack the deficiencies and contradictions of existing theoretical concepts and complement then with a new analytical lens focused on local and mundane moments of togetherness in urban life. After laying out some thoughts about how to do this, this concluding chapter ends by discussing the limitations of this research, the remaining research gaps, and what more we need to learn about the social and commercial processes on Karl-Marx-Straße.

The empirical findings clearly demonstrate that neighborhood residents develop an enhanced sense of belonging and community through the ways in which they engage with local businesses and commercial opportunities in the course of everyday life. While shopping may not be the most important thing in life, it makes a surprisingly strong contribution to how people feel part of and enjoy their neighborhoods. The Neukölln district of Berlin - like many other places - is much more highly defined by consumption and reproduction activities than it is by production (Castells 1977). Its streets give specificity to everydayness. Much of what residents do in the neighborhood (aside from sleeping and eating at home or leaving the neighborhood for work) involves shopping, selling, consuming, and just spending time on the street. The stores and gastronomic businesses where this takes place represent thus the dominant underlying everyday urban places.

These businesses concretely bring (diverse) urban dwellers together far more often than other forms of civic engagement, like going to community or neighborhood meetings. While these places enable residents to encounter different kinds of people, it does not guarantee that they will interact across lines of gender, ethnicity, income, education, and so on. But they make that possible in a comfortable and routine way. As Chapters 5 and 6 demonstrated, the stores represent important contact sites for many people that would not come in contact with each other in their home or work places.

Sociologists and urban planners have rarely recognized the ways that shopping and consumption contribute to sociability and community building among diverse people in the neighborhood level. Only few studies - and even fewer ethnographies - have studied small businesses on the neighborhood level (Satterthwaite 2001). But as the data explored throughout this thesis amply demonstrate, local small-

scale businesses offer places for building well-being, comfort, and inclusion, not just fulfilling important supply functions. Put in other words, <u>these places promote the practice of community</u>.

Further, my observations of the customers' behavior in these places reveal the limits of Goffman's (1959; 1963) and Lofland's (1989; 1998) concepts of private and public behavior. These places are hybrids of the two. They are privately-owned spaces that are open to the public; customers' and staff's behavior in these spaces transcends the boundaries that Goffman and Lofland draw between the public and the private sphere. People often do things that signify their occupation and appropriation of the businesses' space (e.g. distributing private belongings over the table, shouting to other people, taking off shoes, teasing the staff, etc.). They reveal a public familiarity in using the businesses as a "home away from home" (Oldenburg 1999: 22 f.; Oldenburg/ Brissett 1982: 267). These practices show how customers integrate the businesses into their everyday lives. More precisely, the socio-spatial and material features of the businesses encourage social interaction between mostly unacquainted people, bringing different people together in the limited spaces - such as in the corners of the rooms, checkout lines, at common tables - blending public and private practices. Dismantling the either/or dichotomy for public/private social behavior and interactions, they become concrete local <u>places for practiced diversity.</u>

Businesses represent sites "of everyday social contact and encounter," that gather the people within them into "micro-publics" (Amin 2002: 959), where such contact subtlety yields "more" in terms of sociability. When people from different backgrounds can get together in (new) noncommittal ways, they can form new attachments (to the business, its staff, and its internal social life). Some businesses on Karl-Marx-Straße thus help people to "learn to become different," in Ash Amin's words (2002: 970). The convivial encounters with no or only few "strings attached" (Jacobs 1961) foster at least a temporary sense of belonging and maybe deeper identification through common interests (such as organic products or nutrition) and common practices (such as eating lunch in the butcher's shop). The ethnographic observations showed that fleeting encounters as well as more purposeful interactions between staff and customers and among customers contributed to these shared senses of belonging or communal feeling (cf. Fincher/ Iveson 2008). The businesses on Karl-Marx-Straße provide specific venues in which neighborhood residents encounter, negotiate, and reconstitute urban diversity.

Oldenburg outlined eight characteristics of third places, and the sampled businesses on today's Karl-Marx-Straße clearly present them – even if with variations (cf. Chapter 6). While some owners intentionally design their stores to enhance sociability – a "meeting place" for the organic store owners,

for instance – other businesses only accidently function as social contact places. The regulars and owners initiate, maintain, and strengthen the social interaction within the stores as part of keeping them economically viable, as indicated by the main café owner's quote "we are committed to all." But they also regulate and eventually may prevent further interaction and evolving social ties, if they seem inappropriate to the conduct of business. The focus on the micro-level of everyday life allows us to distinguish the different conversational elements for within-business-interaction that lead to low-threshold inclusion: the teasing on the one hand - "they are pulling my leg" - and predictability - "stability and reliability" facilitate interaction among strange or only little known people. However, even when some of the sampled businesses blur gender, ethnic, and social status differences among the customers and between the people shopping or working the stores, the gender and background of the staff set the predominant tone for in-store-conversations as well as the overall atmosphere and sociability. Hence, how the staff operates may decide whether the place is "a home away from home" or a place where community is not practiced.

With this said, the previous chapter (7) explored in detail how the role and practices of the owners affect the enactment and maintenance of a community place. Caring owners are particularly good at creating a social "more" - easing and stimulating social interchanges and low-threshold participation that amplifies the everyday practice of shopping for or consuming something.

The urban planners have a quite different vision for the future of the street that is often ignorant of, if not downright inimical to these practices. The local officials are also trying to enforce a form of placemaking on Karl-Marx-Straße. In reaction, the owners transfer important knowledge to their customers about the planned changes and vice versa. This information exchange helps them to deal with or mediate the effects of the urban renewal process. But despite the owners' status as public characters, their wide knowledge, and social networks, they rarely make strategic use of this role. Ironically, the role of local businesses in creating neighborhood social cohesion is thus asymmetric. They help neighborhood residents feel more at home, but they themselves are too fragmented and out of touch with each other to engage in collective action around urban renewal. The interviews revealed several reasons why they seem only to fight on their own. For instance, the owner of the flower store considers her business to be too small and economically weak to make a difference, while the migrant background lead the owners of the main café and café I to expect that local officials will denigrate their participation in the planning process, making them think that they won't be allowed to speak publicly for the businesses and excluding them a priori.

This shows great myopia on the part of the urban renewal managers and local officials. Given that shopping makes up a substantial part of urban everyday life and community formation, the businesses on Karl-Marx-Straße represent a great social asset to the neighborhood and the city. Urban renewal and upward pressures on commercial and residential rents in many ordinary neighborhoods threatens the capacity of these places to engage in community building and practiced diversity. Since most of the new, independent-owned businesses in Neukölln, as in other upgrading parts of Berlin, target the new demographics, this diminishes the number of places that the long-term residents have to meet and interact. The displacement of the low-threshold businesses thus parallels and is equally important to the displacement of longtime residents. Or, in other words, the displacement of the low-threshold businesses means nothing less than the displacement of community places.

Despite the high diversity, commercial fluctuation, and perceived anonymity the businesses on Karl-Marx-Straße (and probably other local shopping streets) have a unique ability to sustain the intangible social life of cities "Karl-Marx-Straße is not as anonymous as it seems. Behind the curtain, it does work" (flower store owner, l. 195). With their micro and small scale interactions, these businesses elicit a sociability that, for some, might seem romantic or recall "village life" (Zukin 2012: 10). In fact, these are quite real characteristics of neighborhood urban life as these contact sites bring together previously unacquainted people and thus mediate strangeness and familiarity.

> Those people that then come to me and say 'did you hear this' or 'what happened there' […] [we are] indeed popular [locations] where you talk to each other and not only go in anonymously and leave again like in a supermarket or so (Flower store owner, l. 903- 907).

Moreover, these are not "unanticipated gains" (Small 2009) of merely frequenting the businesses. Customers and owners and their employees often actively pursue these gains. The socio-economic and demographic structure of Neukölln includes poverty, unemployment, and persistent discrimination. Some people who live near Karl-Marx-Straße are threatened by social isolation, exclusion, and a lack of social support. They thus tend to spend more time in the vicinity of their apartments. Across all analytical levels, the empirical findings reveal that the longer-standing residents depend more on the businesses as sites for interaction and help. Hence, the presence of businesses that act as third places is particularly important for those people who are at risk of isolation or further exclusion.

This study has not explored the various reasons why people shop where they shop; however, it finds that the "village-like" sociability and social life (Zukin 2012) also mean a higher level of social control and

less personal freedom for some people (cf. Simmel 1903). Mutual help, regeneration and well-being, social interaction and the further nurturing of social relationships, having a <u>place where people feel welcomed and like they belong</u>, as practiced in the stores, represents only one part of the balance that owners are required to maintain for a social life with "no strings attached" (Jacobs 1961). The other part is that the businesses also function as (subjectively defined) <u>effective places for supply</u> without being interrupted and forced to interact more than necessary beyond the purchase act. As the empirical examples demonstrate, the store owners on Karl-Marx-Straße acknowledge this balancing act.

Even as local social networks contribute the economic health of these businesses, they can also be detrimental. Business people do not let social obligations get in the way of maintaining sales and profitability and they make sure that people looking to socialize do not disturb other customers who don't want to participate in the conversations. Hence, the owners' practices along with the specific social dynamics within their stores seek to<u> enable "more" social life without attaching (constraining) strings</u>.

This work also finds that neighborhood changes can affect urban social life through a quite different channel than has been prominent in the literatures on gentrification and urban renewal. In particular, the structural disadvantage of business owners within and their exclusion from formal participation in the urban renewal planning process has had a deleterious effect on neighborhood social life. Moreover, the exclusive notions and visions of the urban renewal planners explicitly discriminate against some of these businesses. They discriminate physically by reconstructing streets in ways that impair accessibility to and therefore social life within the sampled businesses. These beautification measures also contribute to rising commercial and residential rents that threaten the smaller businesses. The (state-supported) gastronomization of selected streets in Neukölln seems designed to accelerate the area's demographic and residential changes (see Chapter 7.2.). Hence, policy should be reformed to <u>(re)integrate commercial developments into gentrification theories</u>. Today, the term gentrification is widely used in a wholly residential context. Urban studies need to pay much more attention to its commercial dimension.

The findings in this study show how the businesses and their owners mobilize aesthetics and special services that resonate with the desires and tastes of the long-term local residents while also adapting to a changing clientele. Because they offer and ease inclusion of both groups, the sampled businesses shape collective memories and narratives by embodying both the district's past and its current

commercial, social, and physical dynamic. They offer <u>stable anchors</u> for many long-term residents on the one hand and <u>important information hubs and points of inclusion</u> for newcomers on the other hand.

The planners and shopkeepers alike both agree that the street has always changed and its ability to continue to do so an indispensable ingredient of urban life. The local officials, however, partly neglect, partly endorse, and partly exploit the manifold efforts by most store owns to adapt to these changes. Their valorization of the street and the upgraded future they envision often results in what Susan Fainstein calls "staged authenticity" – a specific variety imposed from above (2005: 11). The planners' vision for Karl-Marx-Straße reflects Richard Florida's argument that "diversity and creativity work together to power innovation and economic growth" (2002: 262), conflating economic competitiveness and social inclusion. Hence, the local officials call for altering the new commercial mix on Karl-Marx-Straße to be "colorful" and represent a specific kind of "diversity." But they understand diversity to mean anything that supports economic growth rather than the things that currently yield practiced diversity and socially inclusivity. Their rather exclusive "diversity" has become a mantra that it is possible to have "a happy reconciliation between the values of economic growth and social diversity" (Fainstein 2005: 12). For this reason, these <u>urban renewal officials need to give more official recognition and protection to businesses and their owners.</u>

Figure 54: Narrow, interrupted sidewalks prevent crisscrossing the street and accessing the businesses

The urban renewal agents are currently busy planning for a "different street," and for "a different socio-spatial situation." They reckon that those businesses which they don't consider as "fitting into their

planning vision and understanding of diversity" will "simply disappear" (urban planner l. 171 ff.; see also Chapter 7.2.). This direct threat raises the question of why the store owners don't cooperate more with each other and collectively engage to counter-balance the powerful placemaking strategies of the urban renewal programs. Conspicuously, the interviewed owners all used to be actively involved in the (formal) street development issues of the past, but officials pushed them out of the official placemaking boards because they did not fulfil their vision's characteristics of "young, colorful, and dynamic." Owners felt disadvantaged, not taken seriously, exploited, and ignored. They feel like the formal placemaking measurements are planning for a street that is no longer "theirs" anymore - if they survive the urban renewal at all.

This fragmentation undermines the small business owners' common interest in developing the street as a thriving business location for them all. Although they all make positive efforts to engage with their customers, none of the business owners suggested they need to cooperate more closely with other stores or to form a business association. Working long hours and not feeling well represented by the larger and more costly chambers of commerce also led the smaller retailers and gastronomic facilities to undervalue the possibility of strategic cooperation. The urban renewal agencies often seemed to promote distrust and skepticism among the smaller and marginalized businesses toward the local administration and planning offices. Despite their seemingly noble aim to include "all" local actors and to develop the street with a highly participatory and integrated approach, the urban renewal agents worked assiduously to ensure that all placemaking and decisional power for the future of the street remains exclusively in their hands.

Most of the shopkeepers are also not thinking strategically about how to attract new customers, even as they know that their customers' shopping patterns and preferences are changing. My field work did not uncover any new marketing campaigns, product developments, or special staff training designed to adapt to new shoppers. Hence, there seems to be <u>an asymmetry between the individual and (lack of) collective efforts by the shopkeepers and the determined and focused official commercial planning of the district authorities</u>. While the shopkeepers manage to satisfy most of the newer residential groups and their longer-standing clientele, the local officials consider the majority of examined stores nonetheless not oriented toward the "future."

The local officials' repeatedly mentioned "cell phone store" as the kind of businesses they do not welcome for the future commercial structure on the street: they see these businesses as owned by people with lower educational backgrounds and as "immigrant owned" (urban planner), but not by the

right kinds of immigrants who can contribute to an attractive value-improving diversity. They serve a comparatively poor clientele (and "no business managers," urban planner l. 396), have an "old-fashioned design," and owners who "don't care about business" (l. 198) and "make shady dealings" (l. 397 f.). Thus the local officials think people will not complain if urban renewal decreases their number (l. 455 f.). Discriminatory attitudes like the urban planner's exemplary one prevents the renewal agencies from including some of the sampled businesses as part of Karl-Marx-Straße's future and highlight how the urban renewal is deliberately undermining the existing stores' efforts to adapt.

Figure 55: Stores that had to close (permanently and temporarily) due to the construction site (March 2016)

What the urban renewal actors and urban scholars fail to see about these businesses is that they are vernacular and authentic urban places that offer important opportunities for social interaction and inclusion and continue to give Neukölln and Karl-Marx-Straße their distinctive character - far more than any of the official themes and narratives. Without these businesses, Neukölln and Karl-Marx-Straße will lose its ability to make people feel at home and practice diversity in everyday life. The cumulative impact of the data analyzed and presented in this study is communities, and the sense of belonging to a community, result less from a shared geography or common interests than they do from the positive social externalities of everyday consumption practices such as having a drink or buying a piece of meat. In other words, communities are built by everyday practices in specific locations, among which local businesses are prominent. Stores owners frame and enable interactions that promote community. The store owners are, in Jacobs (1961) words, "public characters" and their businesses important institutions that constitute "third places" (Oldenburg 1999) alongside the integrative dynamics of work and home.

As important as these conclusions are, this research still has some obvious limitations. If contemporary communities arise partly out of ordinary everyday micro-interactions in specific material and social spaces, an ethnographic approach cannot tell us how members of these communities understand the relative importance of this source of community relative to many others they may experience. Focusing on the meaning and consequences of the social life in the stores shows us how they help to generate one important aspect of sociability and sociality, but not the other aspects of the customers' lives. Frequenting neighborhood businesses is a temporally and spatially limited phenomenon. Neighborhood residents undoubtedly have many other venues for developing senses and forms of togetherness. At the same time, this study does provide a detailed analysis of one important – and largely ignored – venue for generating a sense of belonging to the neighborhood. So while the strong focus on the micro-level could not include interviews with the customers, this micro-focus revealed how community develops, evolves out of, is practiced through particular low-threshold interactions.

This thesis also limited its focus to independently owned businesses. Chain stores and franchise businesses also may have the potential for promoting neighborhood sociability. Even if these business operations are more standardized, they may still generate meaningful interaction and enable the generation and maintenance of local social ties. The difference may be that owners are more distant and chain store employees less responsible for the (development and maintenance of the) business' ties to the locality or the customers' loyalty. Employees may also be less free to chat with customers beyond the purchase act. However, research on these types of businesses may bring out their similarities and differences with independent and chain stores.

In addition, my findings may be limited by the reluctance of many business owners to take part in the study. Hence, it was not possible to learn about some of the dominant business types along Karl-Marx-Straße. My findings apply only to the stores studied, though they undoubtedly hint at what is going on in similar businesses on Karl-Marx-Straße and elsewhere.

Bringing different (local) people together in business premises clearly offer them opportunities for informal and noncommittal yet often helping social exchanges. These interactions do not always lead to greater feelings of belonging or further practices of openness towards others. Gestures of friendliness by store owners and staff, such as leading to the chair, taking off customers' coats, offering a seat, pleasing the customers' tastes, and the often mentioned "smile" (e.g. pharmacist, l. 213) may also be rejected by customers, depending on their experiences, attitudes, and mood (cf. Amin/ Thrift 2002; Wiesemann 2012: 22). Furthermore, it is in the owner's interest to use an increased sense of well-being

and comfort to increase customer satisfaction and loyalty. Hence, promoting conviviality is a standard operating procedure, to be limited if social exchange produces negative incidents. We need not romanticize the community-fostering side effects of local business practices. At the same time, social scientists should not ignore the fact that the stores on Karl-Marx-Straße have socio-spatial qualities that offer easy inclusion and generate meaningful positive social externalities. Its business owners are important public figures, who not only play a commercial role, but also a social role, and potentially a political influential role in making the current and future social life in cities.

This study began by drawing on Oldenburg's and Jacobs' concepts of third places and public characters. They turned out to be more problematic than initially expected, even though they were quite useful in focusing the nature of this ethnographic research. Both authors focused on white working-class neighborhoods in Northern America. Increasingly, these are things of the past. Today's metropolitan neighborhoods around the globe show much higher levels of social and ethnic diversity. This thesis has developed some new concepts appropriate to this context.

Even though this thesis focused on few businesses on one street in one city – also in the Global North – it sheds light on the ways in which globally comparative urban studies might go about using everyday urban life and the study of its micro-interactions to generate a broader-ranged-theory of neighborhood life. Looking closely at how interactions within everyday spaces can help use evaluate their potential for generating and increased sense of home and belonging. Neighborhood businesses are an excellent place to apply this sociological method.

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