



Introduction

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The idea behind this book 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 early 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 and affordable apartment 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 family 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.

Furthermore, 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 book 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).

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.

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



Fig. 1 Market day on Karl-Marx-Straße²

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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.

Building on this reading, my 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.

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:

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.

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 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.



Fig. 2 Public life on one of Karl-Marx-Straße's corners

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.).

Suzanne Hall (2012) claims that students of ethnic diversity, belonging, and feeling of home in diverse metropolises 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 study, 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:

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 book 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

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

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 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 cohesion⁷ (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

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)

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. 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 study 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.

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 of functions the employees of such 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 study 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-in-

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. repair), 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 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). But 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. I conceptualize “shopping” following the German meaning of *einkaufen*, as an everyday activity without an a priori lifestyle reference.

teractions which occur within them, or their potential consequences (cf. Hall 2012). This book 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 book 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 customers and neighborhood residents? And third, by considering the businesses as part of the larger whole of the shopping street and surrounding neighborhood, my study 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 and Research Design

This study 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

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 study; rather the focus here is on the (perhaps integrative) social practices and socio-spatial settings that affect local social life.

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 book 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 study’s 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 book, 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.

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