



Store Owners that Offer “More” – *Public Characters on Changing Karl-Marx-Straße*

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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).²¹² Further, this section explores why these social practices make the store owners true public characters in Jane Jacobs’ terms (1961: 68).²¹³ 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 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 Public Character Practices

In her work, Jane 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,

212 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.

213 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 developing trust. Only if all three types of practices are performed or carried out by a store owner, I describe them as a public character.

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.²¹⁴

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” that turns the businesses into places where community is practiced. 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

214 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 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. 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.²¹⁵ 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,



Fig. 48 Women chatting in front of a drug store on Karl-Marx-Straße, where they ran into each other.

215 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.

educational, ethnic, age and lifestyle backgrounds, who also target probably more diverse people than the residents and visitors of 1960s Greenwich Village.²¹⁶

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).

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).

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 and analyzes in detail the concrete practices, content, and kinds of interactions between customers, employees, and store owners.

7.2 *Caring about the Street* in Times of Urban Renewal: “It all looks spick and span in front of my door”²¹⁷

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; cf. Chapter 2). 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

216 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).

217 Pharmacy owner, l. 835.

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.²¹⁸

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. 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.

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 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

218 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.

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 instance, 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; 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 immi-

grant 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 safer 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**. 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).

In contrast to the planner's perception, the owner of the **pharmacy**, for example, emphasizes 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 I. 835–843)

The pharmacist thinks that she and her business fit 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 who 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.²¹⁹

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,”²²⁰ 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

219 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.

220 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. Most interviewed owners describe themselves usually as “business people.”

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.”²²¹ 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 interact with each other”²²² (*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.

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. Simultaneously, 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.

221 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.

222 Aktion! Karl-Marx-Straße (n.d.). Handel/Dienstleistungen, <http://www.aktion-kms.de/angebote/handeldienstleistungen/wochenmarkt/>, accessed 07/10/2015.

367 f.), he strives for a different type of 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).



Fig. 49 Cakes, rice pudding, and baklava displayed in the main café

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."²²³ Or as the urban renewal commissioner frames it, "the future viability of modern metropolises 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 the **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 an advantage to the big ones** and as for this part [of the street], the very last part [doesn't receive attention] [...] oh 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 re-

223 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.

sponsibility and action, and a desire to personalize their business spaces (Chavis/Wandersman 1990: 58).²²⁴

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 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 2016.²²⁵ These burdens are not, however, represented in the public relations strategies of the development program. As the following picture (fig. 50) shows, the

224 Solving problems through voluntary participation in local community institutions and organizations is an American tradition, but not so common in European 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.

225 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. More businesses had to close down since the end of the fieldwork in late 2016.

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.²²⁶ 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 magazines. This treatment has led many of the interviewed business owners to stop cooperation with these city agents.

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, a fashion show in the shopping mall, and the spring opening of its rooftop bar were advertised.²²⁷ This obvious targeting suggests that the

226 Cf. Guiding Vision: Aktion! Karl-Marx-Straße (n.d.). Wettbewerbsbeitrag Aktive Stadtzentren, <http://www.aktion-kms.de/files/leitbild2020.pdf>, accessed 04/12/2016.

227 March 2016 Newsletter of Aktion! Karl-Marx-Straße (03/2016). http://www.aktion-kms.de/files/160321_newsletter83_der_aktion_karl_marx_strasse_mar2016.pdf, accessed 04/30/2016.



Fig. 50

Sign with the (highly diverse) stores along the strip, hidden behind site fences during the reconstruction

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 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 and Thai food 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.²²⁸ His support for

²²⁸ 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.

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.²²⁹

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:

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, [...].²³⁰

Summarizing I’d say that we make an **investment in the future**, this means, with the construction measures **we create a new 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

229 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.

230 Aktion! Karl-Marx-Straße (n.d.). Leitbild, <http://www.aktion-kms.de/akms/leitbild/>, accessed 02/11/2016.

[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** [...]. 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.²³¹ 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 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

231 The one exception to this principle is their positive view of the historic architecture and the few iconic buildings along the street.

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 understood 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).²³²

232 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 influ-

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."²³³ 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.

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 prac-

enced 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.

233 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.

tices of shopping, buying, or selling that go beyond the economic transfer action and involve a meaningful and thus “real” social act (Zukin 2009).²³⁴

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 it is. 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 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

234 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.”

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.



Fig. 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”²³⁵

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.²³⁶

The interviewed business owners all framed their visions for their businesses in a way that showed a very deep commitment to the street. This commitment goes

235 Organic Store Owner, l. 118-120.

236 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.

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.

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 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 ("we don't do a lot for it"). 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 consultation 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 also 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 (and particularly her own) businesses as "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,²³⁷ 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 and time. 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 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**

237 Founded in 1898, Edeka is the largest German supermarket corporation with more than 4,000 stores that range from small corner stores to hypermarkets (cf. 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.

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)²³⁸

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 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

238 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.

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 ties²³⁹ (Granovetter 1973) as well as stronger connections between members of very different population groups: For instance, during one of my lunch visits,

239 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 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.

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, also because of the good provision with daily supply stores and the many child care facilities within walking distance. The saleswoman and the owner shouted simultaneously to a man eating his goulash at the window table, “Bernd,²⁴⁰ 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, Bernd nodded. The two (very different) men 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 interactions and social ties also help the butcher both professionally and personally. For example, through these connections the butcher can stay up-to-date on the adjacent 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.²⁴¹ The regulars knew from the conversations in the store 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).

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:

240 Pseudonym

241 The owners of the organic store and flower store also learned of their neighbor's death from their customers.

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).²⁴²

After the body was found, he took care of his shocked apprentice and neighbors, called the police, and reported to them. As he mentioned, he watches the surrounding neighborhood more carefully, wherefore his 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 of the business strategy, even if it is not a conscious one.²⁴³ At the same time, the interviews and observations show that the owners also enjoy

242 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.

243 Certainly, none of the owners call themselves public characters, nor is the term generally known in everyday language (outside of Urban Studies).

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 well, 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. Also **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.

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.²⁴⁴ 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 [...] 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

244 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.

to 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.²⁴⁵

I wish that they would do more for us 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.²⁴⁶ Fourth, they act as public characters because the maintenance of good relationships with regulars contributes to the reliability

245 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.

246 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.

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 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’s (1972) analysis that 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.²⁴⁷ 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

247 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).

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 thus first and foremost the owners as public characters that make these places low-threshold – or as the chapter title implies, “feel-good” – “community spaces” with their constant and routine engagement with their customers and other local actors (cf. White/ Sutton 2001). It is their social practices of caring, 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 “Certainly, packages always get delivered at the butcher’s.”²⁴⁸ Store Owners as *Trusted Persons*

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.

248 Butcher, l. 390.

As local figures who constantly receive information via their customers and guests, they

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.”²⁴⁹ 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):

249 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.

[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 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** (l. 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).²⁵⁰

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 advertizing 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.²⁵¹ For instance, they inform each other if patrols are in the area, or

250 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).

251 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

help each other with license renewals via their ties with city staff. Just as they enjoy their status as trusted 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.²⁵²

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.

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.

²⁵² 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 sales-people network differently.

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 (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.²⁵³ 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.²⁵⁴

253 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.

254 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

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 strangers²⁵⁵ (Milgram 1992) – and in particular between

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.).

255 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

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:

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

not verbal relationship, familiar strangers are not totally unknown people, but not acquaintances either (Milgram 1992).

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 Status²⁵⁶?

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.

256 Jacobs 1961: 61.

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 share a strong interest in the



Fig. 52 New coffee spot on the newly remodeled square

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.

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.



Fig. 53 Inclusion of passersby at the main café

“excellent” (Jacobs 1961:61).²⁵⁷ 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)

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.²⁵⁸ 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.

[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 do understand business, yes we really do, [...] when I open the [café] door here, 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

257 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.

258 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.

high status he enjoys among customers and business colleagues, the pride and the enthusiasm with which he enjoys and enacts this (public character) status:

Well, I believe **they [customers] 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, [...]** 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.

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