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Revaluating “Germany’s worst street”. Commercial gentrification on Leipzig’s Eisenbahnstraße?

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Abstract

Leipzig’s Eisenbahnstraße in Germany is currently discussed from different points of view. Ethnicity, crime, but also urban growth and revaluation processes are in the center of the discourse. As one of the city’s high streets, the Eisenbahnstraße and its two surrounding quarters show changes in the commercial structure, which are claimed to be gentrification processes. This paper aims to analyze both the process by using the concept of commercial gentrification and its local perception. This is done by mapping current commercial uses in the retail, service and gastronomy sector, categorizing them, and comparing them to secondary data. Apart from that, local stakeholder’s perspectives are evaluated based on 16 structured interviews conducted with shop owners on the one hand, and a survey among 105 passersby on the street on the other hand. The material indicates that the Eisenbahnstraße is currently in an initial phase of commercial gentrification. This is displayed by diversification of supply and demand structures, represented by the arrival of new potential customers, but also by a diversification of business concepts. Apart from that, commercial activities experience a strong increase in the area and have led to spatial dispersion from the high street to neighboring roads. We argue that Leipzig’s Eisenbahnstraße follows partially the East German gentrification path, as until now no displacement is identified, but the case also stands out due to the important role of ethnicity in commercial structures.

Zusammenfassung

Die Leipziger Eisenbahnstraße in Deutschland wird derzeit aus verschiedenen Blickwinkeln diskutiert. Themen wie Ethnizität, Kriminalität, aber auch städtische Wachstums- und Aufwertungsprozesse stehen im Zentrum des Diskurses. Als eine der Magistralen der Stadt zeigen die Eisenbahnstraße und die beiden sie umgebenden Stadtteile Veränderungen in ihrer kommerziellen Struktur, die als *commercial gentrification* beschrieben werden. Ziel des vorliegenden Beitrages ist es, mithilfe dieses Konzeptes die beobachteten strukturellen Veränderungsprozesse und deren Wahrnehmungen im Stadtraum zu analysieren. Dazu werden aktuelle gewerbliche Nutzungen kartiert und mit Sekundärstatistiken verglichen. Darüber hinaus werden die Sichtweisen lokaler Stakeholder unter Einbezug von 16 leitfadengestützten Interviews mit Ladenbesitzer:innen und einer Befragung von 105 Passant:innen evaluiert. Die Resultate deuten darauf hin, dass sich die Eisenbahnstraße derzeit in einer frühen Phase der *commercial gentrification* befindet. Dies zeigt sich in einer Diversifizierung der Angebots-

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und Nachfragestrukturen, die sich in der Ankunft neuer Zielgruppen, aber auch in neuen Geschäftskonzepten niederschlägt. Darüber hinaus erfahren gewerbliche Nutzungen im Gebiet eine starke Zunahme, was zu einer räumlichen Streuung von der Hauptstraße hin in Seitenstraßen führt. Es stellt sich heraus, dass die Leipziger Eisenbahnstraße einerseits dem ostdeutschen Gentrifizierungspfad folgt, da bisher keine Verdrängung festzustellen ist. Andererseits tritt der Untersuchungsraum durch die hohe Bedeutung von Ethnizität in den kommerziellen Strukturen hervor und unterscheidet sich somit von anderen ostdeutschen Gentrifizierungsfällen.

Keywords commercial gentrification, urban development, retail, Leipzig, Eisenbahnstraße

1. Introduction

Embedded within the East German context, gentrification has shown different characteristics in Leipzig compared to West German cases (Bernt et al. 2010; Wiest and Hill 2004). This included the lower pace and intensity of gentrification processes, as they remained spatially limited and did not necessarily implicate displacement (Glatter 2007). Since 2007, Leipzig’s population has grown by more than 100,000 inhabitants. The two quarters surrounding the Eisenbahnstraße (Neustadt-Neuschönefeld and Volkmarshausen, see Fig. 1) even show the highest growth rates in the city between 2010 and 2019 (Stadt Leipzig 2020a). Average asking rents have increased by 59 % between 2012 and 2019 in Neustadt-Neuschönefeld (Immobilien Scout GmbH 2020). Consequently, Haase and Rink (2015) identify new dynamics on the housing market in Leipzig since then. That gives reason to evaluate current trends in the area once again because only one decade ago degradation processes were still assumed in the quarter (Glatter 2007). Degradation on the Eisenbahnstraße even aroused national interest. The German television program ‘ProSieben’ broadcasted two features on it, labelling the Eisenbahnstraße as “Germany’s worst street” (translated from German “Die schlimmste Straße Deutschlands”, title of two German TV reports, ProSieben 2013, 2015). There, a relationship between the area’s high crime rate and immigration was insinuated.

In summer 2020, there has been protest and squatting in the neighborhood in order to indicate the growing shortage of affordable housing, even leading to violence (Brod 2020). For the squatters, the issue of commercial development was relevant as well. Their concept for the empty building did not only entail space for housing, but also gastronomy and other uses (Leipzig Besetzen 2020). Hence, our research interest is based on the assumption that the above-mentioned

dynamics influenced the development of Leipzig’s Eisenbahnstraße and initiated processes of upgrading. This has not only affected the housing market, but also the commercial structure of the two quarters.

This paper has three research objectives: Firstly, it questions to what extent commercial gentrification as a concept describes the current processes on Leipzig’s Eisenbahnstraße in recent years. Secondly, the observed change is analyzed from the perspective of shop owners and passersby to reveal how the commercial change in these quarters is perceived locally both on the supply and the demand side. This is of particular interest as gentrification on the local housing market has led to public protest, whereas so far, commercial gentrification has not. Thirdly, the paper aims to contribute to the regional discourse on gentrification. Leipzig’s Eisenbahnstraße stands out for two reasons. On the one hand, it is the first neighborhood in East Germany (excluding Berlin) where (commercial) gentrification comes along with the topic of ethnicity. On the other hand, the discussion of upgrading and displacement has led to (violent) protests in Leipzig, showing a general urgency.

For this purpose, the second section of this paper summarizes the current state of research in the field of commercial gentrification. Section three introduces Leipzig as a case study and section four describes the methods applied. In section five the results of our empirical analysis are presented. The current supply in retail, gastronomy and services is compared to data sets from 2012 and 2007. Then, these results are contextualized using structured interviews. The final section discusses the case of Leipzig considering the ongoing gentrification debate in East Germany and draws conclusions.

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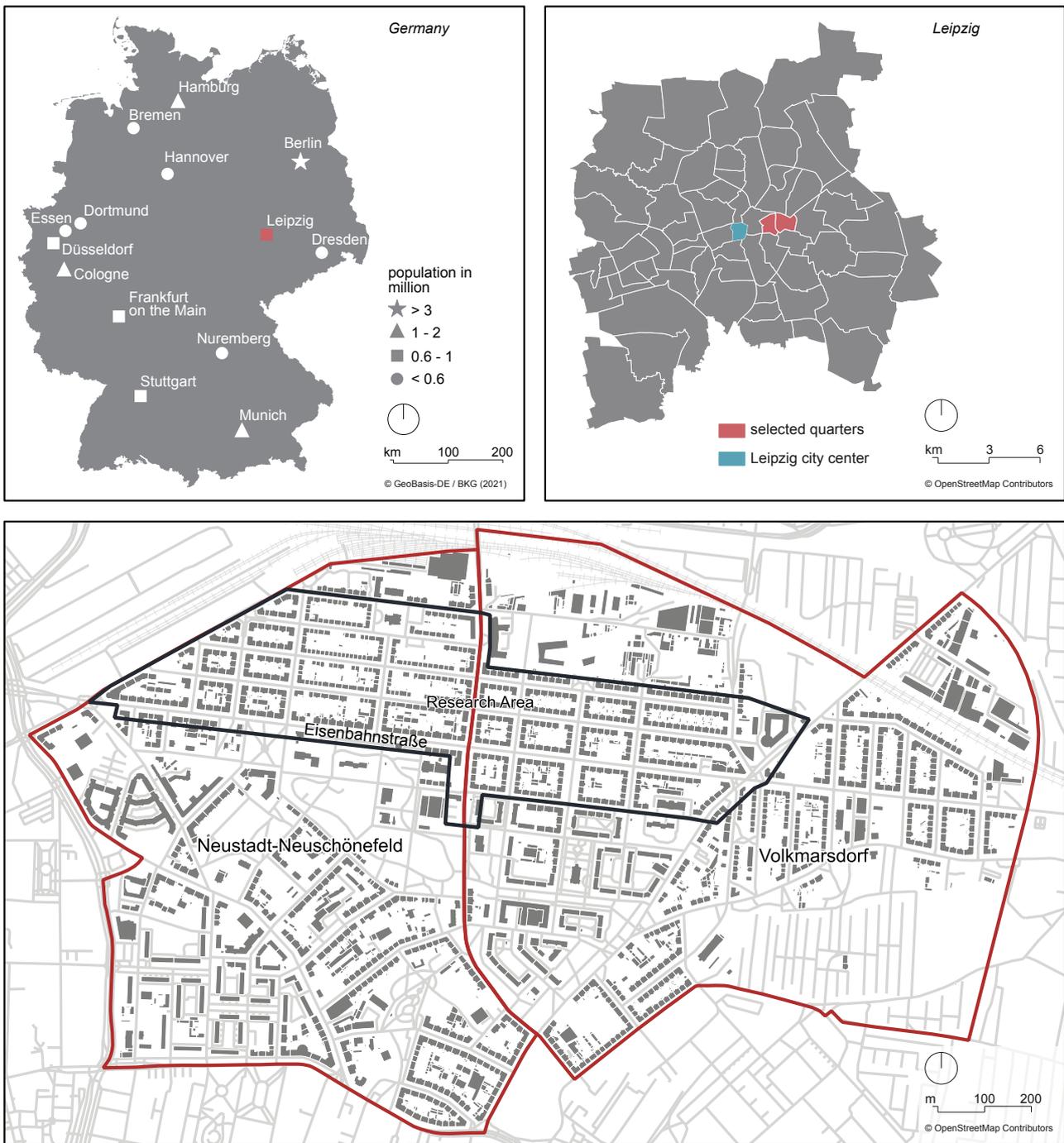


Fig. 1 Geographical situation of Leipzig’s Eisenbahnstraße and adjacent quarters. Source: own elaboration based on Destatis (2020), Open Street Map and Geofabrik GmbH (2019) and Stadt Leipzig (2020b)

2. Commercial aspects as one dimension of gentrification

In her pioneering definition of gentrification, *Ruth Glass* emphasizes two aspects of change (*Glass* 1964). She observed physical upgrading as well as displacement and the arrival of new and higher social groups. Since then, research on gentrification expanded and

the concept of gentrification has been broadened, especially through the establishment of gentrification as a “global urban strategy” (*Smith* 2002: 437). As part of complex gentrification processes, some researchers deal with commercial gentrification as one aspect among others in gentrification processes such as in Dresden (*Glatter* 2007) and Santa Cruz de Tenerife (*Hübscher* 2019). Others consider it as the cen-

terpiece of their investigation as in New York (Zukin et al. 2009), Amsterdam (Sakızlıoğlu and Lees 2019) or Tallinn (Pastak et al. 2019). However, commercial gentrification has attracted relatively limited interest among researchers around the globe, despite its high spatial visibility in daily life (Hubbard 2018).

With commercial gentrification we understand an “upward transformation of local businesses in terms of social class that refers to mutual change” (Pastak et al. 2019: 1). During this process, many established shops which often meet the needs of the local working class and ethnic communities are displaced (Hubbard 2018). In this respect, Marcuse (1985: 207) argues that commercial gentrification can increase the pressure of displacement among residents, when “the stores they patronize are liquidating and new stores for other clientele are taking their places”. Additionally, a transformation of industrial or manufacturing uses to services alongside the establishment of new and more sophisticated enterprises might occur (Pastak et al. 2019). This arrival of ‘new’ or ‘unconventional’ businesses with lifestyle-oriented concepts can particularly be attributed to the emergence of boutiques, but also bars and cafés with “well-designed furniture, non-mainstream music, exotic dishes and eye-catching signage” (Jeong et al. 2015: 148). These new businesses, which are often started by recently arrived newcomers, address the demand of social groups, that are distinct from the old-established residents (Mermet 2017). In general, change can be divided into three different categories: (1) change in the number of businesses in different sectors; (2) more affluent entrepreneurs and (3) new and different supply in goods and services (Pastak et al. 2019).

Explanatory approaches for commercial gentrification are seen as analogous to gentrification in general, as they can be differentiated in supply and demand factors (Mermet 2017). On the demand side, a changing consumer environment and a segmentation of consumption based on the two broader trends of “institutionally facilitated corporatization and lifestyle-driven homogenization” (Benediktsson et al. 2016: 591) are identified. Explanations regarding the supply side focus on the rent gap theory. Mermet (2017) applies this concept to commercial gentrification: Investments in the built environment – for example in retail spaces – form the basis for consumption opportunities in the first place. Post-industrial cities then build on these consumption opportunities, in which (also internationally) high investments are made, such

as in big events. Finally, the growth of chain stores as well as internationalization (of both chain stores and investors) taking place in retail reinforce the previous two factors.

What adds to the particularity of our case study is the high importance of ethnic economies. On the relationship between ethnic entrepreneurs and commercial gentrification, Stock and Schmiz (2019) detect a research gap. So far, ethnicity has played an ambiguous role in (commercial) gentrification. There are cases where policies have “neglected the role of immigrant entrepreneurs in improving neighborhoods” (Kloostermann and Van der Leun 1999: 659). However, ethnic minorities are often the “victims of gentrification” (Huse 2018: 186). In contrast, Hackworth and Rekers (2005) observe how ethnic packaging inherits the role that art and artists used to play in gentrification processes – “as a way to anchor bohemian culture” (ibid.: 232) – and trigger gentrification.

Thus, the role of migrants and ethnic businesses may differ depending on the stage of gentrification as well as the type of migration. Ethnic businesses as found within the context of the Eisenbahnstraße are mostly owned by migrants initially orientated towards the demand of ethnic communities (Volery 2007). These are particularly located in areas densely populated by ethnic minorities (Greene and Owen 2004). However, with growing market proliferation and time, ethnic businesses are also catering to the needs of a bigger customer base (Volery 2007).

Following the research objective of this paper, the characteristics of commercial transformations are of crucial importance to compare the case study with the concept of commercial gentrification. Change can be operationalized by the three aspects “scale of ownership, quality of products and atmosphere; and type of promotion” (Zukin et al. 2009: 58). These aspects help to measure the decline of owner-operated local shops over time resulting in an increase of boutiques and chain stores. The indicated attributes represent changing shares of different types of businesses (Hubbard 2018). Glatter and Sturm (2019) add further approaches for a possible research agenda, such as spatial clusters in commercial structures and also demand side aspects. On that basis, the following stage model is used (Table 1).

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Table 1 Stages of commercial gentrification. Source: own elaboration based on Üblacker (2018: 169-170)

INITIAL PHASE	DIVERSIFICATION OF SUPPLY AND DEMAND STRUCTURES	COMMERCIAL REPLETION	COMMERCIALIZATION
low threshold uses, vacancies	new unconventional businesses with lifestyle-oriented concepts for new residents	growing share of new businesses, increasing rents	further increasing share of chain stores due to higher rents
partially “authentic”, ethnic economies	specialization and development of clusters	uses with high potential for conflicts (higher frequencies, noise, tourism etc.)	decreasing supply for local residents, possible touristification
local supply and social functions of old-established businesses	coexistence of old-established businesses		

The little interest in commercial aspects within the gentrification research also applies to the discourse in East Germany, where a research gap can be identified (Glatter and Wiest 2007). However, there is an independent discourse on gentrification in East Germany, discussing the different framework conditions and patterns of the process compared to West Germany (Bernt et al. 2010; Glatter 2007). Concepts such as ‘split gentrification’ are central in this discourse. It describes the physical and spatial upgrading in the early 1990s, while only low eviction rates were observed, as it happened for example in Leipzig after the German reunification (Rink 2015). The high supply on the real estate market (Bernt et al. 2010) combined with relatively affordable prices are two possible reasons for that (Harth et al. 1996). Moreover, the high importance of students and young creatives is emphasized which is why some of the processes observed are even labelled as “studentification” (Wiest and Hill 2004: 369). From the 2000s on, soft gentrification is described (Wiest and Hill 2004).

Comparing the selected case study with the prevailing idea of how commercial gentrification takes place temporally will help to embed the case within the discourse. In order to illustrate this, the following section will introduce the case study.

3. Case study

Leipzig has experienced ups and downs in urban development. Once Germany’s fourth-largest city before World War II with more than 700,000 inhabitants (Herfert and Röhl 2001), the city’s structure later has been shaped in four decades by socialism and state-directed economy. From 1990 on, Leipzig has faced strong deindustrialization and suburbanization processes (Nuissl and Rink 2004). This resulted in the

lowest population with just around 437,000 inhabitants in 1998 (Liebe 2001). However, with the beginning of the new century, reurbanization has been initiated (Haase et al. 2010). During the last decade, Leipzig even became the city with the strongest increase in population in Germany, growing about 10,000 inhabitants per year (see Fig. 2; Wiest and Kirndörfer 2019). The two quarters with the highest population growth since 2010 are Neustadt-Neuschönefeld (45 %) and Volkmarshausen (71 %), which surround the Eisenbahnstraße. Both show much higher growth rates than the rest of Leipzig (Leipzig: 18 %, Stadt Leipzig 2020a; see Fig. 2).

Comparing these two quarters to other areas in the city, they can be seen as more deprived (Stadt Leipzig 2020a). Both quarters stand out due to their relatively young population and their high shares of students and foreigners (see Fig. 2), the latter being about six times higher than in Saxony (Mackenroth 2018). This high share of inhabitants with migration experiences in both quarters (26 to 32 %; Stadt Leipzig 2020a) are rather untypical within East German gentrifying neighborhoods (excluding Berlin). In Leipzig’s Südvorstadt or Dresden’s Neustadt, two quarters where gentrification had been discussed more than one decade ago, the share of foreigners ranked only between 5 % in 2008 (Stadt Leipzig 2020a) and 8 % in 2002 (Glatter 2007). On the Eisenbahnstraße, the high share of immigrants results in a considerable number of ethnic businesses (Kühl 2010). This leads to the paradox situation where migration is seen as an economic resource, while simultaneously, it is publicly regarded as “factor of unproductive deviance” in the area (Wiest and Kirndörfer 2019: 583). In addition, it is one of the last neighborhoods in Leipzig’s inner city that has not been gentrified yet. Compared to other neighborhoods, prices for housing and businesses are still characterized as modest (Engel&Völkers Commercial 2020).

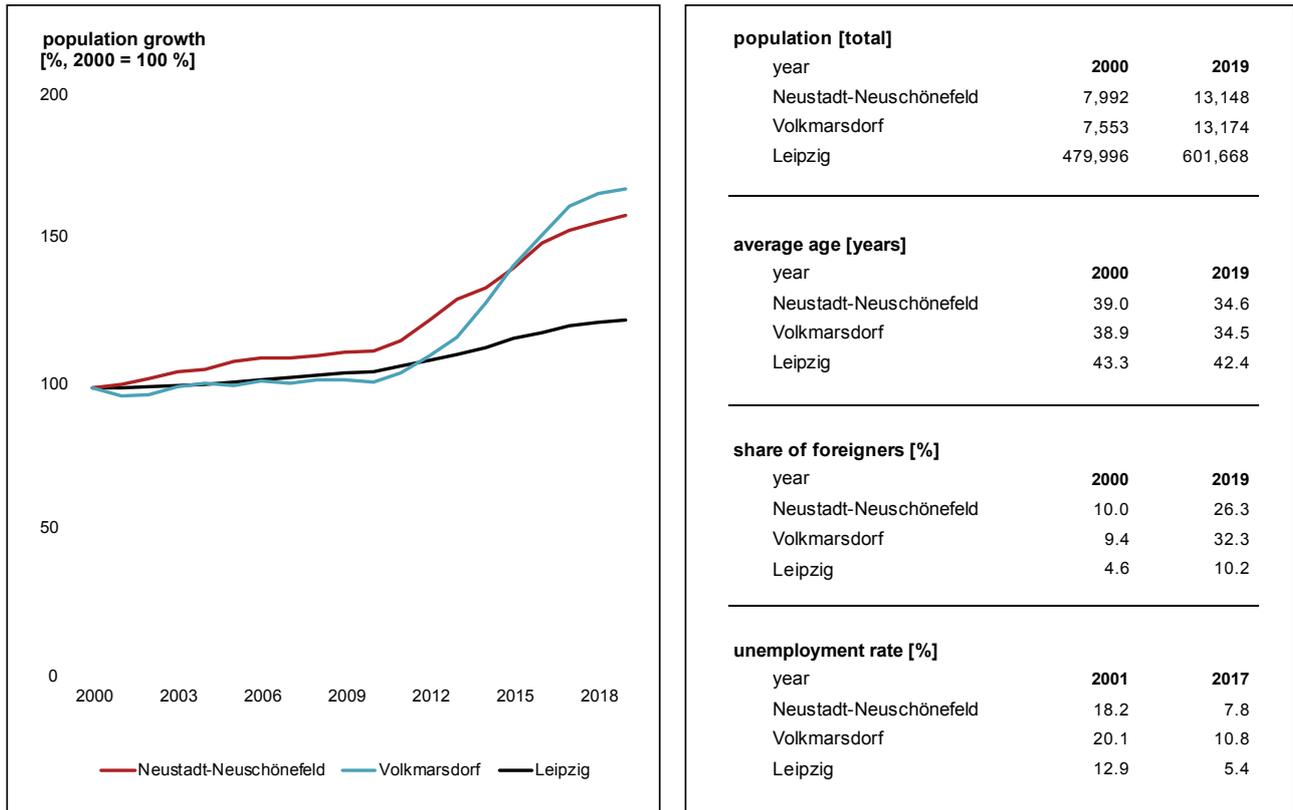


Fig. 2 Younger, more international, more unemployed: socio-economic variables in Neustadt-Neuschönefeld and Volkmarshdorf compared to Leipzig. Source: own elaboration based on Stadt Leipzig (2020a, 2018, 2010)

4. Methods

In this case study, different approaches have been chosen. Three methods – conducted between November 2019 and January 2020 – are presented that address both the supply and the demand side. Firstly, the status quo of the commercial situation has been analyzed. This was done through on-site inspections and mapping of the current supply on the ground level. Additionally, online research on the respective businesses’ website or social media profiles was carried out and pictures were taken on-site to collect samples for the classification of the shops (see upcoming Fig. 5). The following data has been collected: name and address of the business, line of business (service, gastronomy, retail and vacancies), and business categorization. For the latter, the businesses are divided based on aspects such as design, concept and costumers after Zukin et al. (2009). Accordingly, there are three types of businesses: The traditional type, which mostly meets the needs of old-established residents, such as (ethnic) grocery stores and other conventionally established businesses. Apart from that, there are chain stores, that represent regional or (inter-)national operating companies. The third category is uncon-

ventional businesses, which address newly arrived social groups. These shops usually put an emphasis on professional marketing, (interior) shop design and rather innovative products, both offline and online. The collected data then are compared to statistics acquired by the city of Leipzig in 2012 and 2007 (Stadt Leipzig 2019).

The findings are completed by means of 16 interviews with local shop owners. The interviews were held with business managers or senior employees to give insights into the current business situation and future perspectives. In order to provide a broad view of the business perspective, the interviews were conducted considering different types of businesses. To guarantee comparable results, a standardized guideline method has been chosen even though the given structure does only allow for limited responses and is thus less explorative (Gill et al. 2008). The surveys were conducted by the authors using a digital questionnaire and were filled in either directly during the visit of the shop or later on independently by subsequent written information of the interviewees. This part of the study rather aimed to get insights into current business perspectives in the case study

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than being representative. It will help to understand if local businesses face pressure induced by upgrading and displacement. The assumption is that owners and employees do not only know their own business’ situation but probably also have knowledge about the commercial structure in their neighborhood. On that basis, they are considered to be experts, as they are expected to contribute to the research questions posed in this paper (Meuser and Nagel 2009).

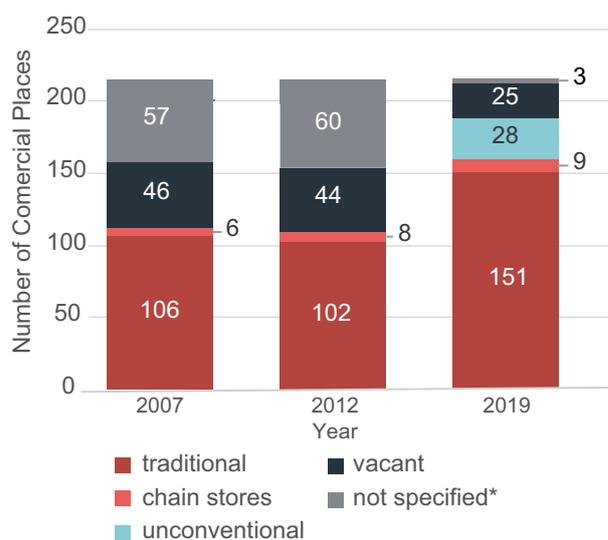
The third method used is a quantitative survey (Jacob et al. 2014) of passersby in the center of the Eisenbahnstraße. This survey aimed to evaluate the locals’ perspective on the potential change in the commercial structure of the area. Also, data such as age, gender or place of living were compiled. We conducted interviews with 159 persons. One-third of the persons declined to take part in the survey, more than half of them due to language barriers (55.6 %). This also means that our analysis might be distorted as we were not able to capture this part of the international visitors of the street. In total, 105 persons were willing to answer the questions which leads to a participation rate of 66 %. Slightly more than one-third of the interviewees had a migrant background and the average age of the participants was 35 years. These values are very similar to the social characteristics in both quarters (see Fig. 2). However, only 63 % of the interviewees were residents in the researched area. Another 30 % lived in Leipzig and 7 % did not live in the city. The interviews were conducted by the authors with the help of a digital questionnaire. To ensure consistency within the interviews a standardized guideline was used. The questionnaire included 14 mostly closed questions in order to guarantee a simple evaluation. The majority of the questions were multiple-choice options, others were scales. Apart from that, some open questions aimed to capture feelings associated with the researched area. The interviews were held on different days of the week and times of the day to address a diverse sample of passersby.

5. Leipzig’s Eisenbahnstraße: decayed, hyped, revaluated

5.1 The analysis of the commercial structure according to the stage model

Comparing the outcomes of our analysis with the stage model introduced in section 2, the current situation on

the Eisenbahnstraße shows various similarities with the first stage of commercial gentrification. It still represents the demands of the established residents in various aspects. More than a quarter of all businesses have an international background that stand for an entrenched ethnic economy which has already been observed one decade ago (Kühl 2010). Apart from that, there is a high unemployment rate (see Fig. 2) and also a lower income per household compared to the city’s average (Stadt Leipzig 2018). Therefore, it can be assumed that there is a relatively low purchasing power as well. Complementary, this can be one reason for a still high vacancy rate and a mainly low-threshold supply, like three secondhand stores and eleven gambling halls in the area, which are typical for pre-gentrified areas (Glatter and Sturm 2019). The degree of chain stores only increased slowly over the last years and remains on a low level (6 % to 9 % from 2007 to 2019, see Fig. 3). This would have been otherwise an indicator of ongoing commercial gentrification, particularly in the later stages of the process (see Table 1; Yoon and Park 2018). Instead, following Glatter and Sturm (2019; see Table 1), another typical aspect in traditional commercial settings occurs. Many of the existing traditional shops have names that include the description of their main product or their family name such as ‘Messer-Müller’ or ‘Augenoptiker Maul’. Overall, all three criteria presented in Table 1 for the first phase of commercial gentrification are met.



* no data available; due to different research goals of the inventory data, the results may differ

Fig. 3 Commercial development on the Eisenbahnstraße (categorized). Source: own elaboration based on Stadt Leipzig (2019) and own survey

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However, there are clear indicators that the quarters around the Eisenbahnstraße are in transition towards the second stage and therefore a diversification of supply and demand structures is taking place. The vacancy rate in commercial structures decreased by 50 % between 2012 (20.6 %) and 2019 (11.9 %), while the existing building stock did not change fundamentally. One reason is that the total number of businesses increased by 68 % from 112 (2007) to 188 (2019) over the last years (see Fig. 3). Also, displacement of traditional shops by new businesses does not seem to be an issue as these new shops still mostly fill in formerly existing vacancies. Only three traditional shops were replaced by new unconventional ones, but this might be also traced back to other (economic) reasons. A structural change is taking place with more unconventional businesses settling in the quarters, that are different from the existing old-established shops, which were focusing mainly on the inhabitants’ needs (ethnic grocery stores, secondhand shops, etc.; see Fig. 5). The new shops cover only about 5 % of current retail. Nevertheless, they represent a quickly emerging sector, with all of them just being opened within a timeframe of the last years. This type of business

depicts a typical indicator of progressing commercial gentrification and is expected to grow throughout the different stages, like Zukin *et al.* (2009) point out, as they push the cultural appreciation and expansion of the commercial quarter. A similar process has been observed in other gentrified parts of Leipzig such as Plagwitz and the Südvorstadt, but also in other cities such as Äußere Neustadt in Dresden, where small shops related to creative businesses opened and introduced a new direction of development (Glatter 2007). New target groups are addressed by these establishments: younger visitors and students, which is in line with the significant rejuvenation in the quarters (see Fig. 2). Especially students might be considered as arrival pioneers following the classical gentrification explanation models (Holm 2012). This development is comparable to the observation of Leipzig’s Südvorstadt, where studentification was an important part of upgrading processes (Wiest and Hill 2004). This development has led to a spatial extension of economic activities from the center of the Eisenbahnstraße to neighboring roads (see Fig. 4). From a spatial point of view, 72 % of these new unconventional businesses are located on Hermann-Liebmann-Straße



Fig. 4 Business structure on the Eisenbahnstraße in 2012 and 2019. Source: own elaboration based on Open Street Map and Geofabrik GmbH (2019), Stadt Leipzig (2019) and own survey

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or minor streets, rather than on the Eisenbahnstraße itself (see Fig. 6). This further indicates a spatial clustering process, which has been described as typical of commercial gentrification processes (Glatter and Sturm 2019). Retail is mainly concentrated in the first third and the center of the Eisenbahnstraße near the junction with the Hermann-Liebmann-Straße. In con-

trast, gastronomy accumulates in the Hedwigstraße and east of the Hermann-Liebmann-Straße. Considering these indicators (the development of clusters and the emergence of new unconventional businesses with coexistence of old and new shops), there is a clear tendency towards the second stage of commercial gentrification.



Fig. 5 Impressions of the Eisenbahnstraße (left), unconventional bistro (top right) and traditional ethnic businesses (bottom right). Photo credit: own photographs 2019

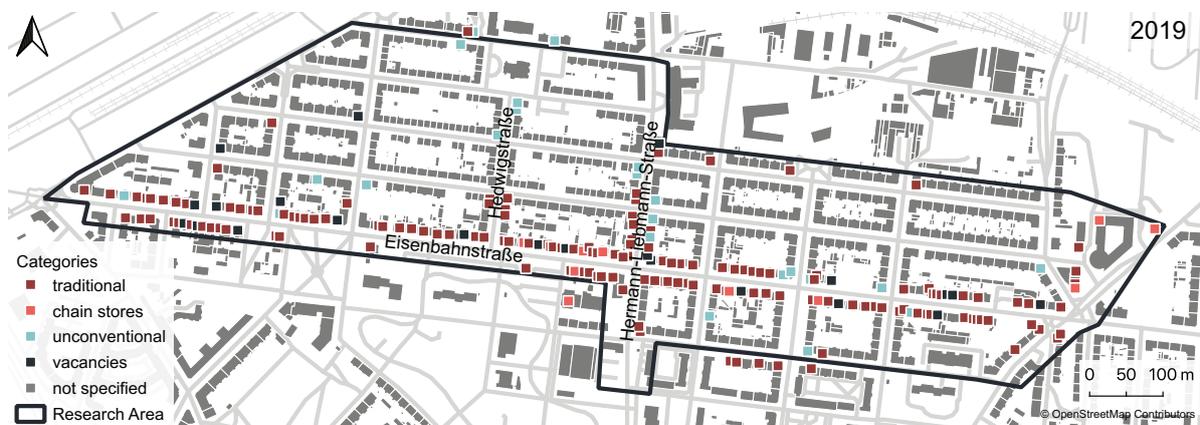


Fig. 6 Business structure categorized. Source: own elaboration based on Open Street Map and Geofabrik GmbH (2019), Stadt Leipzig (2019) and own survey

5.2 Perception of the ongoing change

Based on the identified gap in public discussions between housing and commerce within gentrification processes on Leipzig’s Eisenbahnstraße, the question is raised how this change in commercial structures is perceived. We thus present two surveys to capture the perception of both the demand and the supply side. From the surveyed visitors’ point of view (demand side), only 19.4 % observed very little or no change at all in the commercial structure of the Eisenbahnstraße over the last ten years. Contrary to that, the majority (53.8 %) characterized the change as strong or very strong, as one interviewee points out: “The supply of shops is changing. New shops open constantly and there is more gastronomy now” (interview, 2019). Another interviewee puts it this way: “It’s becoming the place to be. The shops here nowadays differ completely from those ten years ago” (interview, 2019). This sensibility towards the ongoing change is strongest among residents in the neighborhood and interviewees aged 55 or older (see Table 2).

The ongoing process on the Eisenbahnstraße is evaluated differently. Almost half of the interviewees (45.6 %) have a neutral position, whereas nearly the same share (42.2 %) evaluated the change as positive. Large parts of the interviewees associate the change with the diversifying supply (35 %), the varying types of visitors on the street (26 %) or with the changing image of the quarter in the context of the whole city (14 %).

It is observed that “The shops that open here [now] are much more sophisticated, the atmosphere has a higher quality” (interview, 2019). Moreover, it is also the mixture of old and new businesses that increases the attractiveness of the place. One passerby points out: “There are more and more shops coming up, that are

neither ethnic supermarkets nor restaurants, which makes the area more interesting and mixed” (interview, 2019). The new diversity in supply structures also attracts new target groups: “A lot of Germans come here now who visit particularly the greengrocery stores and restaurants” (interview, 2019). This influx of non-immigrant consumers in multicultural neighborhoods has also been observed in quarters in Berlin (Polat 2020) or Amsterdam (Sakızhoğlu and Lees 2019). The new visitors are attracted by an “aura of authenticity” (Zukin 2008: 724) which they attribute to ethnic minorities. Hence, gentrification is not only considered as “class remake but also as ethnic remake” (Polat 2020: 173). The interviewees even associate similarities with other cities themselves: “It feels like the multicultural neighborhoods in Hamburg or Berlin” (interview, 2019).

The abovementioned aspects also show that a homogenization process cannot be observed, which would indicate commercial gentrification in a later stage (Benediktsson et al. 2016). This is also reflected in the perception of the interviewees: “I come from Berlin, where the change in commercial structures goes hand in hand with increasing prices. I don’t see that here, yet” (interview, 2019). Simultaneously there were passersby who explicitly named gentrification processes: “I am worried about more gentrification and displacement of inhabitants, but right now this is still not the case here” (interview, 2019).

In general, local residents tend to evaluate the change on the Eisenbahnstraße more positive (3.5) compared to others (3.2; on a scale with 1 = negative, 5 = positive; see Table 2). Also, the two younger cohorts (age groups from 14 to 29 and 30 to 55) both considered the change to be rather positive (3.6 and 3.5 respectively). The group aged 55 or older perceived it as less positive (2.9) compared to the others.

		Did you notice a change in the commercial structure on the Eisenbahnstraße since 2010?		How do you evaluate this change?		
		0 = no change; 5 = strong change		1 = very negative; 5 = very positive		
		average	n	average	n	
passersby	total	3.2	97	3.4	90	
	place of living	local inhabitants	3.3	63	3.5	60
		non -locals	2.9	34	3.2	30
	age	14-29	3.2	44	3.6	44
		30-55	2.7	38	3.5	38
> 55		4.1	14	2.9	14	
shop owners	total	3.9	16	3.9	16	

Table 2 The perception of change on the Eisenbahnstraße. Source: results of the interviews with passersby and shop owners carried out in Leipzig in 2019 and 2020

This could be explained by gentrification models, where older residents or old-established inhabitants are facing displacement pressure (Dangschat 1988) not only due to rising rents but also because of indirect factors. This is a result of the changing social or cultural atmosphere in a gentrifying neighborhood, but also the change in commercial structures, as Marcuse (1985) points out.

On the Eisenbahnstraße this aspect is accompanied by the topic of safety: “I don’t go out in the evenings, it is too dangerous, there are too many foreigners” (interview, 2019). Others confirm that “There is more police here now and the number of police raids has increased” (interview, 2019). Hence, the perceived insecurity should be considered as another factor that may increase the displacement pressure, at least for some of the inhabitants. High levels of insecurity are even discussed as one proxy of “soon-to-upgrade communities” (Covington and Taylor 1989: 145). In total, only 12.2 % of all interviewees described the ongoing change in the neighborhood as negative.

On the supply side, similar observations are made based on the interviews with shop owners. All of the surveyed owners see a clear, strong or even very strong structural change since 2010 (see Table 2). Their sensibility to the change is more distinct (4.0) compared to the perspective of the passersby (3.2). A large majority of shop owners (87.5 %) associates this with the changing supply in the area: “You can see a strong growth on the street since 2006, there are much more shops now” (interview, 2019). The surveyed shop owners observe a rising number of gastronomies, but also a higher diversity in supply in the shops and more diverse visitors from different backgrounds which is congruent with the visitors’ observations outlined above. Only one of the shop owners regarded this change as rather negative. Four out of the 16 interviewees had a neutral opinion about the change. The largest share evaluated it as positive or very positive (62.5 %): “I expect more growth on the street. The people on the Eisenbahnstraße are getting more diverse, there are more Germans now and there is a more intensive cultural exchange” (interview, 2019). In total, shop owners had the most positive average opinion, compared to the passersby (Table 2).

This can be clearly related to the high level of satisfaction of the shop owners with the economic situation of their businesses. While 37.5 % of the interviewees were only partly satisfied, the rest was completely

content with their situation: “I hope that it even becomes better” (interview, 2019). However, our results could partly be distorted as shop owners with positive business perspectives might be more willing to participate in the survey in the first place.

Although 75 % of the interviewees rented their shops’ place, none of them feared to be displaced during the next years. This somehow opposes the gentrification assumption as displacement is one of the central elements of the concept. One of the shop owners observed that “you don’t find free shops to rent anymore” (interview, 2019). Several owners expect an even “more diverse supply structure” and “existing vacancies to decrease” (interviews, 2019). This is congruent with the first two stages of the commercial gentrification model (Table 1). Also, the observed decline in vacancies could provoke rising rents in the area and thus add to commercial gentrification of the neighborhood. This adds to the existing perception gap of the Eisenbahnstraße, which does not only appear between the juxtaposed internal and external points of view but also within local perspectives: “I feel that parallel societies emerge, the new and the old shops do not communicate with each other” (interview, 2019).

6. Conclusions and research perspectives

For this paper, the concept of commercial gentrification was chosen as an approach to investigate the current dynamics in Neustadt-Neuschönefeld and Volkmarisdorf, two inner-city quarters surrounding Leipzig’s Eisenbahnstraße. We have sought to capture perspectives from both supply and demand side employing different methods. This included a mapping of the commercial status quo in the area compared to existing secondary data of the last ten years, as well as interviews with local shop owners and passersby. Based on the material, we draw two main conclusions:

- On the one hand, compared to Übler’s (2018) stage model, several indicators can be confirmed in the case study that represent the first and the second stage of commercial gentrification. The initial phase on the Eisenbahnstraße is marked by a high vacancy rate, low-threshold supply and a local economy with an important share of ethnic backgrounds. However, the material shows that a transformation process has started in recent years, indicating the diversification of supply and demand. This is accompanied by strong population growth in both

neighborhoods with students and foreigners showing the highest increases. We also observe an ongoing dispersion of businesses throughout the whole research area, that has led to spatial and functional clusters. The new business concepts in the field of gastronomy and retail emphasize marketing, interior design and suggest a higher quality.

- On the other hand, this change is perceived as positive by a majority of passersby and local shop owners. While from the demand side, the ongoing diversification in the commercial structures is increasing the area’s attractiveness, the supply side benefits from the promising prospects based on the ongoing process of upgrading. The arrival of non-migrant Germans as a new target group is mostly seen as a chance for diversity, intercultural communication, but also as an economic opportunity. Simultaneously, the fear of parallel societies exists. As other cases show, the influx of new target groups could also be associated with upgrading that leads to displacement of ethnic minorities due to gentrification. However, for both shop owners and passersby, displacement is currently not a dominant topic on the Eisenbahnstraße. This might explain why commercial gentrification has not been on the agenda of public protest so far.

This study shows that upgrading processes in commercial structures have reached the quarters surrounding the Eisenbahnstraße during the last decade, even though until 2007 processes of degradation have been described (Glatter and Wiest 2008). However, there are rather multiple realities perceived by different stakeholders in the area. The rising prices on the housing market have already led to visible public protest. Nevertheless, the ongoing change in the commercial structure is regarded as positive by several groups, although the oldest cohort and non-locals had a more critical point of view. This also intensifies the gap between the internal and external perception of the Eisenbahnstraße, adding to the existing paradoxical discourses (Wiest and Kirndörfer 2019). This synchrony of perceptions indicates an ongoing polarization that is expected to intensify space conflicts on the Eisenbahnstraße in the next years.

On that basis, two possible lines of further investigation are identified. Firstly, the transformation process on the Eisenbahnstraße should be monitored continuously because the dynamics on Leipzig’s housing market are likely to increase the revaluation pressure

in inner-city quarters. The fact that displacement currently does not play a significant role on the Eisenbahnstraße, does not imply that this cannot change in the future. This is particularly the case as in just seven years, the vacancy rate in commercial structures on the street has halved (Stadt Leipzig 2019 and own survey) showing a clear tendency for future developments. Secondly, further research must be done to investigate the outstanding role of the Eisenbahnstraße in the East German context. The case study follows the line of the East German gentrification debate in some central aspects. So far, spatial upgrading with little or no displacement is one of them, described as split gentrification (Harth et al. 1996). Another element is the high importance of students within the upgrading process in East German cities, labelled as studentification (Wiest and Hill 2004). Contrary to that, Leipzig’s Eisenbahnstraße becomes comparable to case studies in cities such as Cologne (Friedrichs and Blasius 2016), Berlin (Polat 2020), Amsterdam (Sakızhoğlu and Lees 2019) or Toronto (Hackworth and Rekers 2005) where the outstanding role of ethnicity is a central element of the observed commercial gentrification. This hypothesis is in line with what other studies have revealed. It is argued that Leipzig is becoming more similar to development patterns of West German large cities considering the main socio-economic variables during the last ten years (Korzer et al. 2020). Hence, the question has to be raised to what extent the East German gentrification path is still applicable – in Leipzig, but maybe even elsewhere – thirty years after reunification.

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