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# Conceptualizing Place Borders as Narrative: Observations From Berlin-Wedding, a Neighbourhood in Transformation

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## Abstract

Place is of central significance to urban planning processes that specifically target community involvement and co-ownership of development decisions. Consequently, the intriguing but often daunting task of understanding how a sense of place emerges, develops, and evolves has been a subject of interdisciplinary study that links the social sciences, humanities, and more recently, cognitive sciences. Since Kevin Lynch's classic study of urban images and mental maps, borders within cities have either directly or indirectly featured as vital meaning-making elements of place identities. However, despite some remarkable precedents, analysis of political and socio-cultural borders has only begun to link place-making and bordering processes in ways that resonate with urban planning studies. In this article, we will suggest that borders emerge in the embodied creation of social space as a means to interpret the environment and stabilise ways of knowing the wider world. Building on our own previous research on participatory place-making initiatives in Berlin, we will indicate how border stories (i.e., the social communication of neighbourhood distinction, relationality, and transformation) represent vital knowledges of place. These knowledges reflect embodied experiences of place as well as contestations and tensions that characterise place development processes. Perhaps most importantly in terms of planning, the salience of urban borders lies in broadening understanding of how and why places function—or fail to function—as communities.

## Keywords

Berlin; borders; participatory place-making; place narratives; urban borders

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# 1. Introduction

The central aim of this article is to contribute to the conceptualisation of social borders as cognitive constructs. In doing this, the article focuses on place-making and citizen knowledge of place identities and character. This perspective follows from what might be termed the "ontological" focus in border studies which directs our attention not only to the multiplicity of borders within society but also to their existential necessity and centrality in the forging of group and individual identities (see Almeida, 2023; Andersen & Aubry, 2022; Malpas, 2012; Scott, 2021; Sohn, 2016). Ontological concerns related to borders reflect on the one hand the sense of security that boundedness—a knowing what lies within and outside a specific space—conveys. Just as significant on the other hand are meaning-making processes that, for example, allow a "place" to be perceived as something socially significant. Indeed, a sense of place and its borders is a measure of how individuals and communities relate to their living environments. Places, understood for example as "comfort zones," are routinised and familiarised spatial references that provide meaning and orientation, a sense of "being somewhere." Understood in this way, socio-spatial borders function as markers of place through processes of intersubjective meaning-making, whereby the meaning that emerges is not static but subject to constant change.

The investigation of place as a socio-spatial element of urban life and conviviality has experienced a renaissance of sorts, not only in the social sciences and humanities but also in planning practice (see Ujang & Zakariya, 2015). In a broader sense, place-making can be defined as an active process of imbuing a specific space with meaning and a degree of uniqueness (Foote & Azaryahu, 2009). In terms of its significance as a planning tool, Nasya (2021, p. 17) argues that place-making is "a process of creating places with meaning for its users" often involving "the transformation of a public space, to address or accommodate citizens' needs." In other words, far from being merely a development project, it is the product of everyday practices, uses, appropriations and narrations of "hereness."

Building on insights from recent research on community development in Berlin, we argue that these processes involve border-making in the form of creating and communicating place distinction within wider spatial contexts. In other words, borders are co-constitutive of the creation of meaning and specifically, meaning in the social interpretation of urban environments. we will contribute to the debate on place and investigate how border-making reflects local knowledge of place character and identity. Based on evidence from the Berlin district of Wedding, border-making will be disclosed in the form of narratives that communicate neighbourhood uniqueness and relationality with regard to other neighbourhoods and areas. These narratives also reveal tensions and contestations related to perceived disruptions of place coherence and familiarity.

An important aim of the research highlighted here was to emphasise the importance of citizen knowledge in understanding specific senses of place as well as community development dynamics. Employing community reporting methodology and involving a representative cross-section of neighbourhood residents, the project curated local stories of everyday life in a highly diverse and in many ways unique community. As we will demonstrate below, the narratives that emerged from this "storytelling" have much to say regarding the production of socio-spatial borders—They reflect embodied experiences of place as well as contestations and tensions that characterise place development processes. In the concluding part, there will be a brief discussion regarding the practical consequences of this approach.

## 2. Ontological Turns: Debating Social Borders and Place

Border studies have devoted considerable attention to the means through which borders are socially produced and have provided detailed analyses of socio-political borders as a nexus of power, identity, culture, and historical memory (Andersen et al., 2012; Barthel, 2020; Brambilla, 2015; Popescu, 2012). Similarly, as part of its broadening research perspectives, the field of contemporary borders research has experienced an "ontological" turn in which the intersubjective nature and social meanings of borders have received considerable attention (Di Paolo & De Jaegher, 2015; Högström & Philo, 2020; Marsico & Varzi, 2016). At the same time, despite the reification of state borders, and their physical, virtual, or discursive iterations, a greater appreciation of the role of place and socio-spatial borders has emerged. This has provided potential for a better understanding of why borders within society are created and how they reveal themselves. Moreover, the constant production of social-cultural place boundaries offers the potential for opening up new spaces that reflect intersections, encounters, and new affinities which emerge as a part of social life (Hafeda, 2016; Váradi & Virág, 2018). For example, in elaborating on the case of "welcome cultures" in response to anti-refugee politics, Andersen and Aubry (2022. p. 11) argue that the ad hoc creation of spaces of inclusion reflects an "ontological politics whereby Europe is identified in…non-linear, multilayered creative and disjunctive processes involving a vast number of actors, practices and forces." What is expressed here is a space of possibility beyond the institutional violence of exclusive (state-centric and securitised) borders.

As part of an ontological perspective on border studies, we assume that borders emerge in the embodied creation of social space and that they serve as a means to interpret the environment and stabilise ways of knowing the wider world (Malpas, 2012; Scott, 2021; Scott & Sohn, 2018). This is also suggested by Rosch's (2017) elaborations on participatory sense-making which support the idea that borders (for example, within society and cities) emerge in the interaction between imagined and experienced space. Along similar lines, we can interpret urban borders as a nexus between everyday practices of differentiating social space, instrumental place-making, for example, as a project of urban development, and the ontological need for a sense of rootedness in place.

Reflecting on the work of Doreen Massey, Jirón (2023, p. 1) suggests that place is constantly created through social interactions and interrelations and is inherently heterogeneous, thus reflecting the multiplicity of social realities that co-exist in spatial proximity. If we develop this idea of space further, we can argue that borders emerge as space-creating processes that do not require linearity or physical barriers. In his study of urban border crossings of French banlieue residents, Almeida (2023) argues that urban borders are not only created through administrative power but are also reproduced in embodied negotiation of socio-spatial differences. Similarly, Donnen (2019, p. 2) has described urban border-making processes at the edges of places characterised by conflicting masculine identities in Central Brussels (Place Fontainas). Donnen (2019, p. 2) suggests that such everyday notions of border make it "possible to understand the interweaving of the sociospatial anchorings of place and the reproduction of intra-urban borders in everyday movements and interactions."

## 2.1. Linking Place-Making to Borders

Urban borders can be defined "externally," for example through stigmatisation or other forms of representation, but also created from within a place by its residents. These borders are essentially about the character and qualities of a place that distinguishes it from other places. To an extent, these are not revolutionary ideas. For example, since Lynch's (1960) and Nasar's (1990) classic studies of urban images and mental maps, borders within cities have been either directly or indirectly referenced as markers of place identities. However, analysis of political and socio-cultural borders has paid relatively little attention to processes of place-making. On the other hand, the ontological perspective on socio-spatial borders invites us to investigate continuous processes of place appropriation in social, cultural, and political terms.

The intriguing but often daunting task of understanding how a sense of place emerges, develops, and evolves has been a subject of interdisciplinary study that links the social sciences, humanities, and more recently, cognitive sciences (Cresswell, 2013; Maricchiolo et al., 2021; Rajala et al., 2020; Tuan, 2001). As part of cognitive processes that contribute to place attachment, Scannel and Gifford (2017, p. 275) suggest that individuals "develop a mental representation of...place, containing a mental map and route knowledge of the place's arrangement, as well as other information such as knowledge about the history of the place, and particular place affordances." Moreover, according to Foote and Azaryahu (2009, p. 96), a "sense of place can refer to positive bonds of comfort, safety, and well-being engendered by place, home, and dwelling, as well as negative feelings of fear, dysphoria, and placelessness." They also suggest that "sense of place is also used to describe the distinctiveness or unique character of particular localities and regions."

As mentioned above, our understanding of place-making is inclusive and can involve instrumental iterations as well as everyday spatial practices in the sense of Bachelard (1958/2014) and de Certeau (1980). To be sure, we agree with Berglund and Gregory (2019) that place-making as something purely instrumental is problematic—It can in fact entail a form of cultural production based on falsified or whitewashed local histories and simulacra of authenticity. However, our understanding transcends place-making as something "imposed" on a specific site; we argue that at its most basic place-making is a practice of creating place distinctions that are of an organic, every day and even spontaneous nature. The pioneering work of Tateo and Marsico (2019) has indicated how (urban) environments are selectively created depending on our abilities to interact with the world; in their interpretation, borders are co-constitutive of emotion and affect. Based on auto-ethnographies of urban borders, Tateo and Marsico describe how joy, fear, anxiety, enthusiasm, awe, admiration, and curiosity are among the sentiments that are evoked in the (embodied) experience of socio-spatial transition—e.g., by moving from one space (room, neighbourhood, city, country) to another. Place-making can therefore involve the creation of spaces of individuality and familiarity that can also be mutually shared with a wider community—The welcoming cultures mapped by Andersen and Aubry (2022) and performative spaces of refugee inclusion on Lampedusa that Brambilla (2015) has documented are both good examples of this. Moreover, if we understand place as comprising a wider community, place-making also involves narrations of place identity and spatial practices that are intersubjectively communicated.

## 2.2. Social Borders and Narrative Method

As we have suggested in our theoretical approach to place-making, borders are created in the sense-making and meaning-making processes through which space is differentiated and notions of place are generated.

By the same token, socio-spatial borders are rarely static; they are constantly adapted to changing environments as a means with which to maintain their meaning-making properties. In order to capture this processual understanding of border-making in empirical terms, the narrative method helps to identify urban place distinctions that create a sense of specific "hereness." The focus is not on cognitive mappings of urban borders as such. What is perhaps more salient are the stories of those who are actively bordering and relating the embodied experience of place specificity and relationality with regard to wider urban contexts. We thus argue that border-making can be detected in the creation and intersubjective communication of urban place (or neighbourhood) narratives.

At the same time, cities are objects of narrative representation and interpretation, sites where, following Popova (2014), intersubjective meaning-construction, for example through the enaction of a narratorial viewpoint by a storyteller who "co-authors" with others that which is read (in this case a neighbourhood or place). In an analogous manner, we can conceive that cognitive processes are disclosed in the collective and intersubjective creation of place narratives. A narrative approach to understanding the production of urban place borders has been elaborated by Scott and Sohn (2018). Here, a sense of place has been expressed as active appropriations by local residents who have incorporated new place ideas as part of their everyday geographies. In the specific cases of Berlin and Budapest, borders have been revealed in spaces of contrast that reflect the impacts of physical and social transformation as well as multiculturalism on the evolutions of multi-layered senses of place. In Scott and Sohn's (2018) approach, urban borders are also propagated by place narrations generation by social media, commercial websites, and the press.

## 3. The Wedding Case Study: Community Reporting and Mapping

The research methods employed in the Voicitys and Kieztraum projects involved a narrative approach to studying perceptions of urban diversity, including the "hyperdiverse" Berlin subarea known as Wedding. For the purposes of this discussion, the most significant method used was dedicated to mobilising the voices of local citizens through the method of community reporting. In addition, interaction with local stakeholders, civil organisations, and policymakers as well as media analysis provided vital contextual background to understanding how Wedding is experienced as an exceptional place with the greater context of Berlin's recent development.

Community reporting employs a bottom-up approach and non-directed conversations with citizens (Geelhoed et al., 2021). In both Voicitys and Kieztraum, reporting of place perception reflected the viewpoints of different segments of the local society. In total 32 persons (storytellers) were interviewed (17 of which were female and 15 male). In terms of age groups, selection reflected an even distribution between different cohorts. Rough parity between newer and more long-standing residents of the area was also achieved. Analysis of storytelling was performed through a process of curation, that is through synthesis and the grouping of information according to different common storylines (see, for example, Our Voices, 2016). Following Fotopoulou and Couldry (2015), data was thus curated in a way that involved weaving various individual narratives into a set of consistent themes.

In addition to community reporting, the Kieztraum project engaged in participatory exercises aimed at exploring emotional attachment to places in Wedding and the definition of the distinguishing, even unique, features of these places. The aim of community mapping projects organised by Kieztraum in Wedding was to

reveal specific places in Wedding that elicit feelings of positive ownership for the citizens who live and work there, primarily through awareness of shared experiences of place and identification with different neighbourhood locations. As part of the mapping exercise, participants were asked to express their own embodied experience of place and transitions between neighbourhood places, describing smells, music, and soundscapes as well as visual and other atmospheric cues. Places were collected on an online map (https://mapmehappy.com) and participants were asked to indicate the places that provided positive experiences, were accessible to all, and could be shared with family and friends. Selection criteria were chosen to reflect gender and age balance as well as length of residence, ethnic diversity, and other aspects. Extreme care was taken to address privacy and informed consent issues, recordings, and videos of interviewees (storytellers) were conducted based on individual approval. Additionally, local stories were contrasted with media reports and often negative "external" perceptions gleaned from print and social media sources. As part of curating these various accounts of life in the neighbourhood, the two projects allowed for the identification of place narratives that distinguish, and thus in our interpretation, border Wedding from the rest of Berlin.

### 3.1. Place Narratives as Socio-Spatial Borders

We will now focus attention on border-making as expressed in place narratives in the case of the Wedding area of Berlin. Wedding is part of the Mitte District (Bezirk Mitte) of Berlin and is a traditionally working-class area and former industrial centre that remains one of the city's poorest areas. Wedding is also one of the most diverse areas of Berlin with foreign-born residents making up almost 60% of the population. While Wedding has maintained much of its traditional working-class character, multiculturalism is also highly visible in the types of shops and services flourishing in the area.

One popular narrative about Wedding that has circulated in past years is that of an exceptional space where hyperdiversity and relative harmony co-exist. In the Galerie Wedding (2017) blogspot, we can read that:

> Wedding is a portrayal of the world, only in miniature. People from an array of social and cultural backgrounds coexist here. They all lend the district its unique character, making it a place of diversity and contrast, yet we still hear that Germany is only recently becoming a country in which people from different places, milieus and religions exist side-by-side. But this has long existed in Wedding.

At the same time, the Wedding area lies within the last gentrification frontier of Berlin and there are indications that this situation of diversity might be subject to considerable stress in future. As a result, there have been a significant number of programmes targeted at social regeneration, community-building, and sustainability. Action research such as that carried out within the scope of the Voicitys, Kieztraum, and other projects has been motivated by a desire to maintain and support urban diversity. Working with Berlin district administrations and projects of social integration, for example, non-governmental organisations have been important actors in attempts to strengthen a sense of place cohesion in ethnically and socio-economically diverse areas. Moreover, a sense of urgency has informed this research given destructive, anti-urban political forces that would create divisions and thus generate or resurrect hard social boundaries between ethnic groups and social classes.

The Voicitys project (2018–2019), collected stories about neighbourhood belonging from local residents while the second, Kieztraum (2019–2020), was focused on participatory place-making (see Keresztély et al., 2019; Urban Civic Education LAB, 2021). The two projects operated from the assumption that the social, cultural, and political borders inherent in diversity are in fact potential spaces of encounter and dialogue (Keresztély & Trowbridge, 2019). Among other citizen engagement activities, the Voicitys and Kieztraum projects collected stories and perceptions of Wedding as a diverse neighbourhood from more than 30 local residents representing a cross-section of highly varied personal experiences of living in a diverse community. In addition to community reporting, the Kieztraum project engaged in participatory exercises aimed at exploring emotional attachment to places in Wedding and the definition of the distinguishing, even unique, features of these places.

In the following, we will briefly document three interlinked storylines that emerged from the curation of Voicitys and Kieztraum results, each of which reflects specific modes of socio-spatial border-making:

1. The specific character of Wedding: Diverse yet cohesive;
2. The uniqueness of Wedding in relation to other neighbourhoods;
3. Wedding versus the "outside": The threat of becoming "just another" gentrified place.

Before proceeding, some caveats need to be mentioned. The narratives presented here are of course very general in nature and represent the voices of a tiny fraction of the local population. We are also aware that, given interview questions related to issues of diversity and neighbourhood identity, some responses might have provided a more positive picture of the situation. Nevertheless, the narratives reflect shared understandings of place and thus reveal ways in which bordering processes involve constructing a sense of "hereness" vis-à-vis other places and socio-spatial contexts.

### 3.1.1. The Specific Character of Wedding: Diverse yet Cohesive

Among the central place border narratives revealed in the stories of local residents is that of Wedding as an exceptional area representing both continuity and change. Unlike other inner-city areas of Berlin, Wedding has escaped many of the socio-economic and cultural impacts of gentrification and has retained traditional working-class neighbourhood elements. Moreover, while retaining a sense of Berlin-specific "authenticity," in socio-cultural terms Wedding is identified as a part of Berlin that epitomises multicultural diversity. It bears mentioning that diversity is indeed seen as a defining element of Wedding's unique character.

Many of the individual stories revealed a picture of Wedding as accommodating and resilient despite manifold changes since the 1989 fall of the Berlin Wall. Since then, migration into the area has increased and become more diverse. Africans, Asians, and others from around Europe have moved into the area and begun opening cafés, shops, and small businesses. One storyteller recalled that the "neighbourhood was originally a working-class area with a large Turkish community and other European communities." Yet despite these changes—and not being a wealthy place—this person depicted the area as "very vivid" with "a strong exchange between its different communities."

Building on this theme, local storytellers also conveyed the idea that Wedding's singularity as a diverse place is underlined by a sense of local cohesion unlike other areas of Berlin such as Neukölln, another highly diverse

area in the central city. As one resident commented: "Diversity here means that there are a lot of people creating something together." Yet another storyteller added that "people here behave peacefully and with no violence because they all got the idea since they came that our diversity builds a stronger community." What such comments suggest is that positive notions of diversity within the stories gathered are being drawn from the connections between people living in the neighbourhood.

One common theme that connects the various stories suggests that people's positive notions of diversity are specifically formed by living or working in Wedding. Indeed, several of the stories related by locals expressed the idea that, in Wedding, diversity makes for a cohesive society and that Wedding could be a role model in this case, despite some of the frictions or perceived external threats of gentrification and systemic racism. This idea is reflected in comments such as: "Wedding is changing perceptions on tolerance, especially people from Saxonian villages should come and live here to see what diversity is" (Keresztély et al., 2019, p. 115).

Moreover, local residents often used the phrase "at least here" in reference to the perceived cohesion of the area. As one storyteller outlined, it is "very tolerant [here], especially in Wedding, and therefore I only see benefits. You get to know many other cultures. And I hardly see any disadvantages. Not in Wedding." The stories also suggest that what makes diversity in Wedding as positive as the stories suggest is not total assimilation, but rather interactions and the forming of new, joint cultural understandings. This appears to partly explain why people feel warmly towards diversity in Wedding, and to the cohesion of both newcomers and the *Urgesteine* (people who have lived there all their lives).

In terms of the physical environment, it is not just the visual appeal of historic public spaces and buildings in Wedding, but the ways in which the spaces allow for interactions between people, as several interviewees pointed out. New spaces that have emerged in Wedding also contribute to a greater degree of cultural interaction. As one person explained: "If you walk down the street, you can see many Arabic and Turkish stores and restaurants. There are a lot of opportunities to interact with other people and learn from other cultures and see how other cultures are." Such spaces are valued as they allow for interaction between people and thus foster betting understanding between different groups and individuals. This in turn can result in, as one woman put it, people respecting practices which differ from their own happening in shared spaces.: "People let me practice my religion and respect me when I am praying," she said. Moreover, as one person explained: "When there are different communities it is not always easy, and it can only work if there is one or several spaces where people of different origins can meet." As would be frequently repeated during interviews with locals, there are concerns that gentrification will change the character of the area, threatening the sustainability of shared spaces and limiting access to people without social privilege.

### 3.1.2. Wedding Is Unique in Berlin and Perhaps Germany as a Whole

Several storytellers brought up the fact that they had never experienced racism in Wedding, but had experienced it or feared experiencing it in other areas of Germany. What this suggests is that the understanding of diversity, particularly in terms of its positive reception and cohesion between people from different backgrounds, is quite specific to Wedding. In this respect, Wedding is not a "typical" German or even Berlin neighbourhood, and the stories highlight the importance of preserving the area's diversity as it is.

A sense of place is therefore also underscored by comparisons with other neighbourhoods in Berlin and elsewhere. As one local resident related: "Wedding provides (for now) a section of Berlin where people belong to different groups (whether based on race, religion, sexuality, etc.), can build their lives together." Another storyteller suggested: "Here I think everything is very well accepted, your sexuality and your religion. I think in the rest of Germany it might be different, so I think Wedding is a good start for living diversity and accepting it."

Despite the heterogeneity of the participants in Voicitys, their stories indicated that difference is seen as a positive local characteristic and a relative strength in comparison to other parts of the city. Berlin is narrated as a special place generally, but Wedding is seen by many of its residents to be a more cohesive place than other multicultural areas of Berlin. As mentioned above negative references were made, for example, with regard to the Neukölln district as a somewhat unsuccessful alter ego of multiculturalism. One Turkish storyteller said that, in Neukölln, "the Turkish are less willing to contribute to the neighbourhood and therefore integration isn't the same as it is in Wedding."

### 3.1.3. Wedding Versus the ``Outside''

There are tensions between Wedding and the "outside world" (see Institute of Community Reporters, 2018, p. 43). There is awareness of stigmatisation and negative characterisations of Wedding that are generated in the media and by voices external to the area. Ultimately, this has led to the neighbourhood being further associated negatively with poverty and migration. At the same time, the spectre of change led from "outside" in the form of gentrification and rapid neighbourhood change is a constant subtheme in narratives of Wedding's transformation. The internet hyping of Wedding that adds to perceived coolness is also reflected in new cultural and gastronomic attractions such as the new Silent Green Kulturquartier that many find alienating. Indeed, the issue of "UFOs" (i.e., projects "dropped down from space" onto the neighbourhood and appropriating local public spaces) was addressed in conversation with members of the Pankstrasse Neighbourhood Management team (Quartiersmanagement Pankstrasse) in March 2018. In this way, Wedding is also narrated as the next potential target of large-scale gentrification, a process that would threaten Wedding as a model of diversity (Malplat, 2017). Above and beyond this, negative representations, including stories of crime, trash, and chaos, reverberate in the popular media as well as in official documents. Perhaps most damagingly, sensationalist press reports, including recent YouTube videos of Arab clan blood feuds, shootings, drug problems, and desolation, tell a fearful story of Wedding as "the city's bloodiest district" ("So brutal ist Berlins blutigster Bezirk," 2022). In addition to popular forms of stigmatisation, the inclusion of Wedding neighbourhoods in administrative geographies of "problem areas" (*Problemzonen*) has considerable media impact (Klein, 2015). The Structural Atlas of Berlin (Senatsverwaltung für Wissenschaft, Gesundheit und Pflege, 2022), for example, identifies Wedding as one of the poorest and most difficult areas of the city. There are fears that such negative reporting could threaten the viability of places that promote diversity. This sentiment is expanded on further with storytellers suggesting that rather than focus on negative interpretations of diversity, policies should instead focus on Wedding's unique and positive place characteristics. Some of the locals interviewed sensed that they were targeted because of a dislike of multicultural places, for example, among public officials, and structural racism, particularly its institutionalised forms in the police force and employment offices. It is highlighted moreover that although there is a system in place to support newcomers, the bureaucracy of the system presents a barrier to people who wish to use it.

Positivity about Wedding and people's enthusiasm towards life in the neighbourhood is overshadowed by some deep-rooted concerns. A key perceived threat is gentrification which until recently has proceeded slowly and less visibly in Wedding. As one storyteller suggested: "People that have the money are buying places [in Wedding], renting them to some other people who cannot afford anything else." What threatens this living environment, it seems, are external factors that are not specific to the Wedding neighbourhood but are "imported" from outside. These stories paint a relatively positive picture of diversity in Berlin and even more specifically in Wedding as an exceptional space. Many of the stories convey the idea that diversity makes a cohesive society and that Wedding could be a role model for this case despite some of the issues that people discussed like the external threats of gentrification and systemic racism. The major fear is that of existing communities being pushed out. Many say they would prefer Wedding to stay as it is, even forgoing physical improvements; most storytellers expressed fear of the disappearance of familiar places and specific characteristics that distinguish Wedding's neighbourhoods. Above all, there are fears that Wedding might lose its diversity and be converted into another white, middle-class, and sterile neighbourhood where shops, cafés, and social spaces mainly serve tourists.

## 4. Some Policy Dimensions

The policy ambitions of the research discussed above centred on the integration of citizen knowledge of place identity, diversity, and community cohesion as a resource for urban regeneration programmes. Moreover, the Voicitys and Kieztraum projects sought to develop the narrative of Wedding as an exceptional place and the idea that "it is different outside" as a policy message. One key learning about what has contributed to Wedding's current identity as a diverse yet cohesive neighbourhood is the availability of spaces where people who live in the area come together and interact, thereby creating a sense of shared place. Place-mapping exercises carried out by the Kieztraum project (Figure 1) also confirmed the sense of uniqueness of Wedding that was also reflected in fears that the recognisability and familiarity of the area could suffer from gentrification, making Wedding "just like any other wealthier area in central Berlin."

As elsewhere, participatory place-making in Wedding has involved re-thinking how the city can be understood and organised as a highly diverse community (Urban Civic Education LAB, 2021). Community mapping involves the sharing of place experiences and emotions in order to better understand dissonances between local (internal) place perceptions and those external to the neighbourhood, often expressed in stigmatising media narratives. By identifying the elements of neighbourhood that encourage a sense of shared space, counter-narratives were elaborated that challenged characterisations of the area as dirty, unsafe, and unliveable. At the same time, residents participated in designing actions in public places in order to enhance social cohesion and maintain the local positive assets of diversity.

In this sense, suggestions for policy agendas were elaborated that emphasise the need to stabilise community cohesion through measures targeted at diverse public services, social communication and improvements in the physical environment (Keresztély et al., 2019). This sentiment is expanded on further with storytellers suggesting that rather than focusing on negative elements rightly or wrongly associated with diversity, policies should rather build on the existing strengths of Wedding's relative social cohesion and tolerance.

**Figure 1.** Community mapping at the Pankeparcours in Wedding, 31 August 2019. Photo by James W. Scott.

## 5. Discussion and Conclusion

In this brief research article, we have attempted to provide evidence of the co-constitutive nature of ontological borders and a sense of place. Results from the two projects support the suggestion that place is defined by ontological borders that emerge through embodied experience with urban environments and the everyday practices of citizens. Moreover, these borders reveal themselves in narrations and other forms of place representation that express specific unique qualities, attachments, and tensions between internal/external processes impacting life within neighbourhoods. Place borders are also defined by the contrast of local experience and self-awareness of place specificity with popular and often negative sensationalist place narratives. In this way, borders materialise through tensions between lived and embodied experiences of place and narrations of place that are based on idealised and often negative perceptions. Although not discussed at length here, it should be mentioned that the storytelling and mapping methods used in the two projects involved the mobilisation of local knowledges of place in order to co-create possible scenarios of community development, both in social and environmental terms. In order to do this, the two methods also involved inquiry into how local residents make sense of place and place borders through socio-material entanglements with their neighbourhoods.

In terms of identifying the challenges and opportunities of diversity the ontological borders approach resonates with Piekut and Valentine's (2016) theoretical perspective that links diversity to perceptions, that is, how diversity is lived and experienced within a community. According to this interpretation, diversity exists in the different ways that it is subjectively recognised and can be characterised by the positive and negative sentiments it evokes. Perceptions of diversity are conditioned by a number of factors—demographic factors, cultural and socio-historical backgrounds, as well as the socio-ethnic composition of urban places. The relationship between place openness and diversity is key, particularly given stigmatising and largely externally generated stories of diverse neighbourhoods as "problem areas."

The findings from the stories and participatory place-making exercises suggested that Wedding residents are less concerned about problems with diversity or conflict between cultures and more concerned about social segregation. The storytellers fear the disappearance of long-standing spaces and the changing image of the district. They are afraid that the neighbourhood might lose its diverse character and be turned into another sterile, White, middle-class neighbourhood where the bars, restaurants, and social spaces serve mostly tourists.

In closing, however, it is necessary to reflect on the limitations of our approach. The evidence provided here is arguably from an exceptional case of hyperdiversity. In future research, it would be fruitful to engage in comparative analysis that includes areas characterised by a greater sense of socio-cultural and socio-economic tension, and in this way test and develop our place border criteria based on uniqueness and relationality. Nevertheless, as this study suggests, borders between urban places are only partly configured by administrative boundaries. Ultimately, borders reveal themselves as social and material entanglements. Moreover, at their most basic borders work as complex instruments of meaning-making rather than simply creating divisions between societies and groups.

## Conflict of Interests
The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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