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Investigating Spatial Transformation Processes.
An Ethnographic Discourse Analysis in
Disadvantaged Neighbourhoods

Gabriela B. Christmann [*]

Abstract: *»Über die Untersuchung räumlicher Transformationsprozesse. Eine ethnographische Diskursanalyse in benachteiligten Stadtvierteln«.* This contribution focuses on the question of how spatial transformation processes, or to be more concrete, the social *re*construction of places can be methodologically investigated. On the basis of a micro-perspective, I will argue that it is *communicative action* that plays a crucial role in spatial transformation processes. Taking this into account, the main question is how the structures and dynamics of space-related communicative action in actor constellations as well as in discourses can be empirically explored. Such a dynamic and broad object of research in methodological terms requires a complex research design, and I suggest that it is an "ethnographic discourse analysis" which can meet these requirements. In the following, I will start with basic theoretical considerations, to then outline the research question of a project that, by the example of 'urban pioneers', investigates bottom-up initiatives aiming to achieve more quality of life in disadvantaged neighbourhoods. First of all, I will describe the significant properties of the selected neighbourhoods of Berlin-Moabit and Hamburg-Wilhelmsburg in Germany as well as the characteristics of the urban actors under analysis. Subsequently, I will explain the way in which (focused) ethnography and (the sociology of knowledge approach to) discourse analysis were combined, particularly how the methods involved – such as the problem-centred interview, ego-centred network analysis, participant observation as well as discourse analytical procedures – were applied and how the collected data were analysed. The contribution concludes with the presentation of selected results and a discussion on how far the methodological proceeding proved to be adequate in order to investigate spatial transformation processes on a "microscopic level".

Keywords: Multi-method approach, ethnography, discourse analysis, socially disadvantaged neighbourhoods, spatial transformation, bottom-up initiatives, urban pioneers, communicative action.

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1.   The Communicative (Re-)Construction of Spaces. Theoretical Background and Methodological Implications

In the context of the so called "cultural turn" in social-scientific spatial research, the insight has become a matter of course that spaces are culturally shaped and that they must be understood as being socially constructed. Since then they are conceived of as a socio-spatial fabric, or when taking materiality into account, as an "assemblage" of immaterial and material dimensions. However, for the time being, insufficient attention has been paid to the fact that spaces are in a process of constant transformation and that thus the "social construction" should, strictly speaking, be conceptualised as a permanent process of "social *re*construction".

The *re*construction of space means that by way of these action processes and interactions of social actors some dimensions of spatial constructions may be modified or even newly developed, whereas others may be stabilised. For example, it may happen that urban actors develop a new perspective on some aspects of a particular place and discuss the place in a new way. This may come along with changing patterns of space-related practices, whereas existing social and material arrangements initially remain unchanged. As a consequence of a changing perspective and a different public communication about the place, however, after a period of time some responsible urban actors may decide to redevelop selected run-down buildings, to tear down others or to build new ones, all of which will gradually change even the built structure. This is, of course, only one possibility of spatial transformation.

In the contribution I will focus on the question of how spatial transformation processes can be explored, or to be more concrete, how the social reconstruction of spaces can be methodologically investigated.

Nevertheless, this requires first of all a theoretical conceptualisation. On the basis of a micro-perspective on spatial transformation I argue that it is *communicative action* that plays a crucial role in transformation processes. To date, regarding the conceptual development of the social construction of space, most theorists typically emphasise the role of knowledge. They assume that the construction and organisation of spaces are based, above all, on man's attributions of meaning. Furthermore they point out to the significance of human acting and refer to action theories (cf. Lefebvre 1991; Giddens 1993; Bourdieu 1984; Werlen 1997; Löw 2001; Schroer 2005; Thrift 2007; Weichhart 2008). That particularly *communicative* action plays a role in the (re-)construction of spaces has been recognized for quite some time (cf. Healey 1992, 1996; Werlen 1997; Hastings 1999; Lees 2004) whereas, however, the theoretical underpinning of this thought has been lagging behind the insight.

For this reason, as a theoretical concept, I suggest an approach which I call the "communicative (re-) construction of spaces" (Christmann 2010, 2012, 2014, in print) and which was developed to serve as a basis for a research project I will focus on in the following. Without elaborating on the concrete details, this approach applies social constructivism (Berger and Luckmann 1966) and particularly the still developing approach of "*communicative constructivism*". The latter conceives "communicative action as the basic process in the social construction of reality" (Knoblauch 2013a, 297; see also Knoblauch 2013b, 2014, in print; Keller 2013b, 2014, in print).[1] What is remarkable is that there the *concept of communication* goes far beyond the use of language and texts. Rather, it involves any kind of objectivation, such as in the form of bodies, practices, non-verbal signs, objects, technologies, etc. Accordingly, the approach is, by the way, compatible to practice theory (Schatzki 1996), actor-network theory (Latour 2005), and assemblage theory (De Landa 2006).

Furthermore discourse concepts (Foucault 1974, 1981), mainly the sociology of knowledge approach to discourse (Keller 2001, 2005a, 2013b, 2014, in print) are of great importance for my own theoretical conceptualisation. There discourse is more than simply a mutually related communication. Rather, it is a range of different communicative actions that are *topically* related to each other. In other words, *discourses* are seen as *accumulations of knowledge elements and conjunctions of reality interpretations which define what is supposed to be valid in a society*.

Although this discourse approach is rooted in the sociology of knowledge, this does not hide the fact that Keller's concept – in contrast to Foucault's one (1974, 1981) – has an action theoretical foundation. Keller counts on the acting subject and its power to shape things. Referring to spatial theory, he sees the benefit of his concept in the possibility of answering the question of how social actors discursively and thus symbolically (re-)construct spaces by way of negotiation processes (Keller 2014 in print). Like Knoblauch, Keller explicitly points out that the *discursive or symbolic construction of spaces* should not be seen as only being achieved by language or texts. Particularly when he brings the "dispositive" into play – which is defined as an infrastructure of discourse production and implementation – also social relations, institutions, laws, and materiality come into view (Keller 2005, 258f; see also Foucault 1978). It is by dispositives that discourses unfold profound effects, shaping not only knowledge orders but also social and even physical arrangements.

Taking these theoretical considerations into account, the question arises of how the complex processes of spatial transformations, or in other words, *the*

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[1] Whereas social constructivism is a sociology of knowledge approach, explaining how space-related subjective interpretations of various individuals become a commonly shared interpretation (or a social construction), Knoblauch's communicative constructivism focuses, above all, on the analysis of social action and the organisation of social processes.

communicative (re-) construction of spaces can be explored empirically. Particularly, it is a question of

1) how the structure and dynamics of space-related communicative action in actor constellations,

2) how the communicative negotiation of space-related knowledge orders in discourses, and

3) how the dynamics of social actors and dispositives involving physical objects can be investigated.

I argue that such a dynamic and broad object of research in methodological terms requires a complex research design and that it is an "*ethnographic discourse analysis*" which can meet these requirements. This means that a combination of two comprehensive research methodologies – that of ethnography and of discourse analysis – is needed. Such an integrated approach allows for exploring the dynamics of space-related discourses and emerging knowledge orders in the context of actors' perspectives, communicative acting and social networks. Particularly the question of how the *re*construction of spaces is tackled through dispositives requires more than a text analysis of public discourses. It rather calls for an ethnographic approach, using interviews, social network analysis and participant observation.

Against this background, for our project on transformation processes in urban neighbourhoods[2] we methodologically combined the research programme of the sociology of knowledge approach to discourse (Keller 2001, 2005b, 2013a)[3] with the focused ethnography approach developed by Knoblauch (2005). A focused ethnography, in contrast to a classical ethnographic approach (cf. Burgess 1982; Atkinson and Hammersley 1994; Anderson 2010; Fetterman 2010), does not claim a holistic thick description of the entire empirical field, rather it aims at the observation of central actors and typical actions within their social as well as physical contexts. As the approach usually focuses on *communicative* action and (verbal) negotiation processes, it is particularly suitable for combination with discourse analysis.

In the following section I will present the comprehensive research question of our project, the characteristics of the selected spatial contexts as well as the urban actors under analysis. Particularly, significant properties of the socially disadvantaged neighbourhoods of the Berlin district of Moabit and the Hamburg district of Wilhelmsburg will be outlined. Furthermore, a special type of

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[2] The project, titled "Spatial Pioneers in Urban Neighbourhoods – On the Communicative (Re-) Construction of Spaces in the Context of Structural Change", was carried out from 2009 to 2011 at the Leibniz Institute for Regional Development and Structural Planning at Erkner (near Berlin) and was headed by Gabriela B. Christmann. The six members of the interdisciplinary research team originated from sociology, geography, urban planning and history.

[3] For the investigation of dispositives, Keller (2005, 260f.) even explicitly recommends expanding text analysis by an ethnographical approach.

urban actors will be characterised that is referred to as "urban pioneers". It is a main feature of these actors that they trigger transformation processes, mostly from a bottom-up approach. In the subsequent section I will point out how the research process of the project was structured, which were the more detailed research questions for analysing the urban pioneers' ways of thinking and acting, which methods of data collection and analysis were applied and how they were applied. In this context it will be also mentioned which kind of data were collected. In the last section I will discuss how the data contributed to the research questions and particularly in how far the methodological proceeding proved to be adequate in order to investigate spatial transformation processes on a "microscopic level".

2. Urban Pioneers as Change Agents in Socially Disadvantaged Neighbourhoods? Research Questions and Characteristics of the Empirical Field

Derived from the previously mentioned theoretical considerations, the starting point of the project was the overarching research question of how – from a micro-perspective – the communicative (re-)construction of particular places such as urban neighbourhoods happens, particularly in how far actors like urban pioneers re-interpret their quarters within their action frameworks, how they develop new ideas, negotiate them by way of communicative processes, exert influence on discourses, (co-)organise their actions, include physical dimensions, implement their projects and thus trigger transformation processes. In more practical terms, we were interested in how far urban pioneers contribute to the development of socially disadvantaged neighbourhoods and develop solutions for socio-spatial problems.

As it was said above, it was the districts of Hamburg-Wilhelmsburg and Berlin-Moabit that were selected for analysis. During the project planning phase, when we were in search of potential cities and neighbourhoods for further analysis, these districts stood out because of the manifold initiatives by urban pioneers which were conspicuous already at a very first glance. This was a key criterion for selection. A further criterion was that the districts have a lot in common which made them an ideal research object. Above all, they are comparable in the following respects:

1) They are embedded in big cities and are situated close to the city centres.
2) They are similar in physical respect: they are both, so to speak, "islands", due to being surrounded by river landscapes on the one hand and to traffic infrastructures and industrial sites separating them from the rest of their cities on the other hand. For the Hamburg district of Wilhelmsburg the impres-

sion that it is cut off and (spatially) excluded has been particularly strong during the field trips.

3) The districts are similar also in respect of their social structure and their social problems, which is a main criterion: Typical of these quarters is a big number of people receiving transfer payments from the state, a high share of migrants, little purchasing power of the inhabitants, lacking infrastructure for consumption and leisure time, neglected buildings, conflicts between individual groups of migrants, between Germans and migrants as well as between feuding youth gangs. The situation in Wilhelmsburg is especially dire in as far as the nearby harbour, industrial sites, dumps and traffic infrastructure result in a considerable burden to the population in the form of air pollution, bad smell and noise. Also, a 1962 storm surge that caused terrible destruction in Wilhelmsburg is still present today in the collective memory. The danger of floods remains a topic even in these days, despite levees having been built.

4) These are phenomena on which society judges mostly negatively and which are often also negatively covered by the media. Public discourses negatively discussing the neighbourhoods, thus, add another problem – in the form of stigmatisation – to the complex of problems. Actually, on the basis of frequent negative media reports, the neighbourhoods have for long had a negative image. Stigmatising public discourses are understood to be practices that consolidate the problems of the quarters in so far as they show a tendency towards ignoring or suppressing other, also existing spatial interpretations or positive developments. If quarters are lastingly labelled "unattractive", space-related identification processes and civic commitment among the inhabitants of these quarters are weakened and development potentials are obstructed.

5) This may not blind us to the fact that nevertheless there are development potentials in these urban quarters. We understand urban pioneers with their activities as an important factor in this context. One essential feature of these actors is that they introduce something new, that they use, imagine and discuss space in a new way and thus provoke other people's interpretations of space. Often urban pioneers are connected to civic actors (e. g. members of community groups). For our project, the concept of the urban pioneer has been extended to social entrepreneurs (for instance, entrepreneurial people who run projects to keep young people out of trouble), self-employed (e. g. owners of a book or a tea shop), or freelancers (e. g. artists, creative people or journalists writing for neighbourhood magazines or running neighbourhood online fora). By way of their projects – such as by holding innovative art and cultural events, organising multi-cultural neighbourhood festivals, establishing supervised bike repair workshops for youths, re-shaping a public park, or by opening a book- and tea shop in an area of educationally disadvantaged residents – urban pioneers support alternative interpretations as

well as common identification with the quarter while at the same time driving on social, organisational or infrastructural transformations at the local level.

In the next section, by the example of these urban pioneers and their activities, I will show how the investigation of micro-processes of spatial transformation was tackled methodologically. Within the framework of the ethnographic discourse analysis the following three *"aggregation levels" of social actors and their contexts* were addressed:
1) urban pioneers as individual actors,
2) group and network meetings of urban pioneers, and
3) the local public with its space-related discourses.

3. Doing an Ethnographic Discourse Analysis in Urban Neighbourhoods. Towards the Structure of the Research Process and the Methodological Proceeding

At the beginning of the project and according to an ethnographic proceeding, after the decision to select Berlin-Moabit and Hamburg-Wilhelmsburg, first of all an *intensive field exploration* was carried out, with the intention to generate consolidated contextual knowledge of the spaces under analysis. This was done by way of field excursions, but also by comprehensive literature and Internet research. It was important to have a personal look at the district quarters, with their building structures, their infrastructures as well as their daily life in the public space. With the help of news articles and informants from citizens' groups and social organizations the team members identified people who, as result of their projects and activities, had become known to the local public. We asked informants and later also urban pioneer interview partners about other important actors or projects they knew or had heard about. This was done until we did not find any additional new names.

Then, for the analysis of each aggregation level – i. e. the individual, the actors' meeting, and the discourse level – *methods were applied which were appropriate to these levels and the related questions:* That is,
1) with *individuals* we conducted qualitative guideline interviews,
2) regarding *group and network meetings* a participant observation was done, and
3) with regard to *local discourses* the analytical programme of the sociology of knowledge approach to discourse was central.[4]

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[4] One team member was responsible for interviewing, four members for exploring the meetings and one member for discourse analysis. Thus, the investigation of the three social aggregation levels – the individual, the actors' meetings and the discourse level – ran in paral-

Together, these methods or programmes formed part of *the focused ethnography*. This way, we gathered different types of data which were analysed by applying the grounded theory methodology and – in selected cases additionally – hermeneutic procedures.

3.1 Data for Analysing Individual Spatial Practices: Problem-Centred Interviews

Derived from the overarching research question, by way of *qualitative guideline interviews*, the pioneers were analysed on the *individual level*. First of all they were interviewed about their social and spatial origins, above all, however, about their (new) ideas of the quarters, their goals, communicative strategies, and discursive practices for spatial transformation. Not least we asked them about their networking with other actors. To this end we applied an interview technique which allows the interviewees to go into depth.

In the literature on qualitative interviews different variants are distinguished, such as the focused, the ethnographic, the problem-centred or the narrative interview, just to mention the most important ones (Hopf 2000). Despite some differences, these interview techniques have in common that the interviewers follow a more or less comprehensive guideline and that they allow interviewees to clarify their own responses and their subjective perspective, whereas the degrees of "openness" regarding the response generation may vary, however. For our investigation we did not consider focused interviews because with them the "openness" is restricted from the outset: By giving an initial stimulus – e. g. through a newspaper article or a short film – they already set a particular topical focus prior to the actual interview which may influence the content of the response. In comparison, ethnographic interviews are restricted in different ways: It is true that they are "open" in so far as they do not even have a formal interview setting. Questions are asked more situationally, in the framework of a participant observation context, in order to better understand the motive for an action or the exceptional character of a situation. Against this background, interviewing is topically restricted to the specific situation, moreover it cannot be very extensive.

In our study we conducted ethnographic interviews in the context of participant observation. For the investigation of individual urban pioneers, however, it was particularly important to have the possibility to ask different questions related to the ideas, visions, strategies and networking, etc. of the actors, whereby the respondents at the same time should have a large degree of freedom to express their subjective perspectives.

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lel. The team members maintained a multilayered exchange with each other, not least in the course of regular meetings.

This is why we used the *problem-centred interview* technique which allows for comprehensive questioning and an intensive way of responding to the interviewee (Witzel 1982, 2000; Kühn and Witzel 2000). This type of interview is characterised by the fact that the interviewer may ask different questions without having to take care of the problem of whether questions will elicit narrations or argumentations. Unlike the narrative interview (Schütze 1983), with the problem-centred interview the key issue is not to trigger a long narration but to obtain as much information as possible on the object of interest. Against this background it is possible at any time of the interview, even following the interviewee's respond to the initial question, to ask for clarification or substantiation of what has been said before, whereas with the narrative interview – during the first interview phase – it is not allowed to ask further, detailed questions regarding the research objects, in order of not interrupting the narrative flow.[5] What is advantageous with the narrative interview technique is, however, that it gives interviewees a maximum of individual space for expressing their perspectives. Thus, without taking up the aim of eliciting pure narrations and without applying the rigid division into interview phases, we followed the example of the narrative interview. This means that we asked the main questions in a way that explicitly and implicitly invites interviewees to give long and detailed explanations.

This way we interviewed a total of 80 individuals, almost 40 in Wilhelmsburg and slightly above 40 in Moabit. The interviews were audiotaped and to a large extent transcribed.

3.2   Data for Analysing Group and Network Spatial Practices: Ego-Centred Networks and Participant Observation

Based on the assumption that spatial transformations can hardly be achieved only by individual actors, the networks of the pioneers were of interest. Thus, a special part of the interview found out about the actors' *ego-centred social networks*. In total, 66 social networks were depicted. This was supported by the "VennMaker" programme:[6]

1) First of all, we asked the urban pioneers to name actors which were important for their own initiatives and to arrange them symbolically on an electronic surface in proximity or distance to their own position which was put in the centre of the surface. Besides individual actors, the interviewees could also name collective actors in the form of groups or organisations.

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[5] Even the second phase of the interview – the phase of further queries – still aims at eliciting more detailed narrations. Only at the end of the interview it is allowed to ask abstract questions generating (self-)reflective, argumentative, or evaluative comments.

[6] On this, see information on the 'Vennmaker' software tool under <www.netzwerk-exzellenz.uni-trier.de>. 'Vennmaker' was introduced to the German market in spring 2010. Our research group belonged to the beta testers of the programme.

2) By a next step, we invited the interviewees to assess whether the contact persons named before were supportive for realising their intentions, whether they were strategically important or rather impeding. Depending on the quality of the relationship, the contacts were associated with coloured lines, which way more or less comprehensive depictions of social networks emerged.

3) Parallel to the gradual recording of the emerging network image, a sound recording of the verbal comments was done, by which the urban pioneers characterised their network relations.

As very soon we realised that urban pioneers do not only establish contacts and build up networks, but that they also form groups and start grassroot initiatives, right from the beginning *participant observation* of meetings was an essential part of the study. We assumed that it is on the actors' meeting level that the communicative negotiation of new space-related ideas and of implementation strategies happens. Furthermore, we were interested in the social composition, institutional structures, as well as in the financial and/or physical resources of the initiatives. Attention was paid to the question of how the activists interact within the groups and how they cooperate with other groups, how they organise their projects and how they mobilise physical objects for spatial transformations. Of particular interest was, however – as already said – to observe how the quarters are negotiated communicatively among different constellations of actors, how new ideas develop and what the pioneers' dispositives look like, that is, by what means they try to implement their space-related ideas, which resources they are able to make available and how they use them.

Ethnographic approaches are suitable to address such research questions. By way of participant observation it is possible to obtain an authentic view of the complex social activities and interactions of the researched subjects and to uncover the meaning they attribute to them. Our methodological proceeding aligns to the practices and procedures discussed in the relevant literature on ethnography.[7] There, all important issues regarding the strategic organisation of ethnographic field work are addressed, starting with entering the field and the identification of key informants via the maintenance of field contacts and the critical reflection on the researchers' role in the field and not least ending with the development of foci for the participant observation.

As it is impossible to completely observe the comprehensive action processes contributing to spatial transformation processes in urban neighbourhoods, it was of particular importance to concentrate on focus areas. With the focus on the communicative action of a particular type of actor which is of central im-

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[7] See above all the classic works, such as by Lofland 1971, Burgess 1982, 1984, Werner and Schöpfle 1987a, 1987b and Atkinson and Hammersley 1994. Of the more recent works, Anderson 2010, Atkinson 2011, Fetterman 2010, and Madden 2010 should be mentioned.

portance in the neighbourhoods, a decision was made which is on the one hand theoretically driven (see section 1) and on the other hand methodologically justified: As already mentioned above, there is an ethnographic approach focusing on communicative processes, referred to as "focused ethnography" by Knoblauch (2005). The author points out, however, that by this notion he does not aim at suggesting a new programmatic approach but rather at naming an already existing ethnographic practice which, however, has not yet been methodologically reflected on.[8]

As far as within the framework of focused ethnography our concrete way of working is concerned, in most cases the access to group meetings of the urban pioneers turned out to be unproblematic. Only a few groups refused to grant us access. In principle, the team members entered into the field by informing the groups from the outset about the research project. The role the team members played in the field was in all cases that of observers. After some initial scepticism by some of the actors the degree of trust, however, gradually increased over time. Particularly those informants with whom the researchers – by the way – could maintain a good relationship were increasingly interested in our investigations and in the question of how processes in the neighbourhoods could be optimised in order to achieve an improved quality of life.

In all, gradually we identified more than 50 initiatives, visiting most of them for one to three meetings. In the course of the research process we then selected seven groups – which were particularly prominent and important in the field – for intensive observation. In the period from 2009 to 2011 the responsible team members participated in more than 200 meetings. Detailed records of the observed meetings were made, and it was even possible to audiotape a greater number of meetings and to transcribe them in large parts for the analysis of internal communicative negotiation processes.

Not least, external communication efforts of the actors were observed. In this context it was of interest how the actors communicate their spatial development approaches to the public. For this purpose, pioneers' communication products such as press releases, posters, flyers, brochures, or articles in Internet fora etc. were collected, which were understood as a part of the local discourse.

3.3 Data for Analysing Spatial Discourses: Discourse Analysis

Within the framework of the *sociology of knowledge approach to discourse* (Keller 2001, 2005a, 2005b, 2013a), thus, we analysed on the one hand what the actors communicate to the outside. On the other hand, it was a question of

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[8] This applies, for example, to the ethnography of communication (cf. Bauman and Sherzer 1975; Gumperz and Hymes 1964, 1972) or to workplace studies (cf. Knoblauch, Heath and Luff 2004; Luff, Hindmarsch and Heath 2000).

how the urban districts and spatial transformations were made a topic of discussion in historic and current discourses.

According to Keller (2001), the discourse approach aims at reconstructing the structures of discursive knowledge production and – depending on the research questions in some cases also – of the social implementation of knowledge orders. Various dimensions may become subject of discourse analyses. Keller (2001, 135; translation by the author) describes this as follows:

> Discourses can be investigated with regard to the question of how they emerged and which negotiation processes occur in the construction of discourses, which changes they undergo over time, what their protagonists, addressees and audiences are, which manifest and/or latent contents […] they transport, i.e. which kind of reality they construct, which measures they involve, how they are structured and regulated internally, on which infrastructure they are based, which (social) consequences and which power or efficacy they have and how they are related to contemporary or historical discourses.

In the present study, almost all of these possible dimensions were subject of investigation:

1) We asked how the districts of Berlin-Moabit and Hamburg-Wilhelmsburg were typically characterised in the *past*, which were the respective knowledge orders about these districts and how they changed in the course of history from 1800 to 2010.

2) We were interested in how the districts and their neighbourhoods are described *nowadays*, i. e. between 2008 and 2010, how these places are discursively (re-)constructed (with regard to the negative images) and, thus, in how far transformation processes can be observed.

3) In the context of the analysis of the current situation, one focus was on the question of *who the actors of the discourses are* and in how far urban pioneers are able to shape some dimensions of the current discourses on the neighbourhoods.

4) We also asked how the *topics of these actors* are adopted, framed and processed by the public media, how they are related to the above mentioned negative images and in how far these images could be modified.

5) As already said above, not least also *dispositives* – i. e. the *infrastructures of discourse production and implementation* – were subject to our investigations. However, the analysis of the dispositives was done mainly in the framework of the participant observation and the interviews.

The data for the discourse analysis included about 70 fact books on Berlin and Hamburg, on the one hand, to analyse how the districts of Moabit and Wilhelmsburg were described in the course of history from 1800 to 2010. On the other hand, the relevant local newspapers in Berlin and Hamburg, neighbourhood newspapers from Moabit and Wilhelmsburg as well as local special interest media (e. g. cultural magazines) formed part of the dataset.

Keller (2001, 135) explicitly points out that the sociology of knowledge approach to discourse must be understood as a research programme and that it should not be misinterpreted as a particular methodology of data analysis. As noted above, it can be very comprehensive in its approach by even integrating an ethnographic research design. This implies that besides written sources of public discourses also data originating from interviews and/or participant observation can be included. For carrying out a discourse analysis depending on the research questions, thus, first of all the particularly suitable methods of data collection are to be selected. Even the methods of data analysis are not automatically given from the outset, rather they must be chosen in alignment with the research questions and the objects of investigation.

3.4   Data Analysis: Grounded Theory and Knowledge-Sociological Hermeneutics

Now these analysis methods shall be explained. In our case, for all kinds of recorded data we applied the method of grounded theory-analysis in combination with knowledge-sociological hermeneutics. Both methods have the advantage that they are suitable both for the analysis and the interpretation of most different social action contexts and kinds of qualitative data. This is true for operations read from observation records, knowledge structures becoming obvious from interview segments, communicative negotiations during group processes or knowledge structures found in discursive documents. Thus they are also suitable for comprehending processes of space-related communicative (re-)construction from a micro-perspective.

The concept of *grounded theory*, developed by Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss, describes how a "subject-related" theory can be developed from empirical data. Whereas their early works still focused on theory development (Glaser 1965, 1978; Glaser and Strauss 1967), currently the methodical procedure is in the fore (Strauss 1994, 1997; Strauss and Corbin 1990, 1994; Corbin and Strauss 1990; Glaser 2002). Meanwhile this method has been described very well. In contrast to qualitative content analysis, one essential advantage of grounded theory-analysis is that in principle one works with original texts, without abridging or paraphrasing them at all. Furthermore, a sequence-analytical way of proceeding is a matter of course. In contrast to atomising content analysis, by way of the grounded theory-method it is possible to relate individual textual elements to each other to observe them in the overall context.

Helpful are the coding procedures, happening by three steps (see most of all Strauss 1994, 57-68). In case of open coding, the researcher analyses word after word and line after line. The goal is to identify and name all dimensions and sub-dimensions found in the text. By way of attributing names, the so called codes, and by differentiating the dimensions, identified concepts at first become categories. By the second step of this method, axial coding, one focus-

es on a single category. Here the analysis revolves around the axis of *one* category aiming at investigating typical relations to other categories. By the third step, selective coding, it is tested if the identified categories are kept together by a key category.

This way of proceeding enables the researcher to analytically break up extensive sets of data. Precisely in cases of ethnographies and discourse analyses, typically there are extended amounts of texts. By way of the grounded theory-method, in view of space-related discourses it is possible to identify repeating topics with their structures, as well as quarter-related attributions of meaning, to analyse changes over time and to reconstruct space-interpreting negotiation processes. Particularly in case of "historical" works aiming at the reconstruction of processes and changes the coding method proves to be outspokenly useful.

However, the analysis of the most different kinds of communication always comes along with interpretation processes. Precisely if it is about the reconstruction of knowledge structures, it is not sufficient to identify topics, because the (latent) kinds of knowledge connected to the topics must be worked out. This cannot be done by way of coding processes alone, but must happen by way of processes of explicating the implicit, by way of refined interpretation. However, in the context of the grounded theory-method we find only a few instructions dealing with the appropriate method of interpretation.

In this field, hermeneutics look back to a long tradition and offer proven methods of controlled interpretation. In the more recent history of *hermeneutics*, Soeffner (1989a, 1989b) must be merited for having worked out the principles of a *knowledge-sociological* kind of hermeneutics[9] which is particularly suited for the analysis of knowledge structures and their changes. This is not to say that it is limited just to the analysis of knowledge structures, rather it is as well suitable for the analysis of action processes. Just like with other hermeneutic methods, for each interaction the researcher undertakes an extensive search for the various possibilities of interpretation, to then drop again some, by formulating exclusion criteria. This method, which is meant to overcome a tunnel vision of everyday life, is attractive but requires extraordinary efforts. In case of extensive datasets, this time-consuming way of proceeding can thus only be applied to a small part of the data. For this purpose there must be selections. With the here presented study the grounded theory-method was helpful with defining those data segments which were supposed to be made subject to a comprehensive (detailed) hermeneutic analysis. Based on the coding processes, it allowed for an exact knowledge of the contents and structures of texts. This

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[9] Soeffner himself termed it the "social-science based hermeneutics". Meanwhile it has become common practice to refer to it as "knowledge-sociological hermeneutics" (cf. e.g. Hitzler, Reichertz and Schröer 1999).

way it became possible to purposefully "head into" segments which were of particular analytical interest.

4. Selected Results and Methodological Reflection

I will now outline some selected empirical evidence which has been obtained during the investigation and reflects in how far the ethnographic discourse analysis and the methods applied have proven to be suitable for the research object. Furthermore, I will discuss where they come to their limits when it comes to a comprehensive analysis of spatial transformation processes.

4.1 Problem-Centred Interviews

By way of problem-centred interviews it was possible to obtain diversified and thorough information about the urban pioneers' origins, perspectives and strategies. The interviews revealed that even though the category of urban pioneers may include actors who have always been living at the place in question, they are often newcomers. Although the places of their choice are considered socially disadvantaged and often presented in a negative light in the public discourse, these actors have been living there for several years, sometimes even decades. Typically, once they chose these quarters because they offered cheap accommodation and environments which, in their view, would accommodate their life plans.

When urban pioneers were asked how they see their quarters, it became clear that they know about the negative images. They easily describe how these areas are seen from the outside, and they also have clear ideas of what the residents think about the neighbourhoods. According to the pioneers' observations, the residents are affected by the negative images, whereby at the same time – at least to a certain degree – they see the residents distancing themselves from these outside perceptions. The urban pioneers themselves typically adopt an attitude that is in opposition to the negative images. They are fascinated by the atmosphere of wear and tear, by the vacant (factory) buildings and derelict ruins that can be found in the quarters. Urban pioneers are just bursting with new ideas – and it is the chaotic and ramshackle things that stimulate their imagination. One actor put it as follows: "Someone like me always thinks: Alright, we can make something of this." The pioneers recognise the potential of certain sites, have visions and feel the urge to shape them – which proves to be the starting point for the *re*construction of spaces.

4.2 Ego-Centred Network Analysis

Pioneers do not, however, aim to promote their individual interests; instead they strive to include inhabitants in order to achieve joint action. Their goal is

to help residents "to find their feet within this system", as one spatial pioneer puts it. Hence, empowerment is an integral goal of these actors. At the same time, pioneers are aware of the fact that they need (experienced and powerful) fellow campaigners in order to further develop and implement visions and to jointly shape their quarters.

In this respect, the method of the ego-centred network analysis was a useful tool for the more detailed investigation of the networks of urban pioneers. This way it became clear how these actors establish contacts and how the networks are structured.

Most actors reach back to networks consisting of 15 to 25 contacts. More extended networks are rarely found. However, according to our observations the size of a network as such does not tell much about its effects. Rather, the kind of contacts or the quality of relationships is important for the work of spatial pioneers. Some contacts are close and regularly maintained, they serve as the actors' basis. Almost as important are loose contacts which serve as additional bases if necessary.[10] All actors emphasise that they have network contacts which are close to their ideals, cooperative or helpful. They consider themselves supported by them, it is them who bring on their work. The social networks of spatial pioneers, however, are not at all automatically *support* networks. Often also individuals or institutions are part of a network who or which have a critical attitude towards the cause. The analyses produced the result that spatial pioneers intend and purposefully establish contacts to such partners. A number of actors pointed out that some of their cooperation partners, such as representatives of authorities, show ambivalent attitudes towards their projects or even reject them and are rather an obstacle, but that they must be considered strategically important for pushing through with project ideas, which is why the actors constantly try to do a lot of persuading. This was the case both in Hamburg-Wilhelmsburg and in Berlin-Moabit. The pioneers are aware of the fact that such coordination processes are necessary to be able to implement certain things.

Thus, in the context of the social relations among the network partners there happens a communicative exchange, which is why we considered the networks the "hardware" of strategic-communicative acting, in the context of which there unfolds the "software" of topical communication.

4.3 Participant Observation

With some individuals of their social networks the spatial pioneers have even established a regular exchange in the context of group meetings. For, a number of actors have founded action groups or associations or have achieved crucial positions in already existing groups. By way of participant observation it was

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[10] See Granovetter's (1973) concept of "strong ties" and "weak ties".

possible to analyse how, at group meetings and by way of verbal communication, both space-related ideas and strategies of action and implementation were negotiated, that is how they were modified, brought forward or debated, and thus how the communicative reconstruction of spaces happens. In the context of the group meetings – just as by the interviews before – the pioneers' creative drive became obvious: There the actors made sure about their basic principles, that is contributing and expressing their space-related visions – and may it be just "a stretch of the street" – while being ready for the long haul. Even if sometimes the group members seem to get lost in the long chains of communication and in creative details during their meetings, at the same time they are pursuing another, completely different project they are usually unaware of: the construction of a common, space-related identity, an identity as creative, neighbourhood-oriented residents of quarters. However, the actors consider themselves to have only little influence, after all. In the fight for the power to create – compared to the "mighty" – they consider themselves David vs. Goliath.

4.4   Discourse Analysis

One approach which spatial pioneers thus pursue purposefully is taking their ideas to the outside and communicating them to a broader public, in order to still meet response and exert influence. Also for this they establish their own communication fora which we were able to analyse in the context of our discourse-analytical programme. For example, in the case of Moabit it became obvious that the small cosmos of Moabit is divided into different groups of urban pioneers, having developed respectively different interpretations of space and different communicative strategies. By the way, this distinguishes the case example of Moabit from Hamburg-Wilhelmsburg, where the social problems are comparatively graver and the actors cooperate more closely. Although for the time being the spatial pioneers of Moabit have not succeeded with controlling the public discourse on Moabit, still they have taken their topics and interpretations of space to the public, and meanwhile they have made sure that the neighbourhoods are no longer only presented as "difficult" or "socially disadvantaged" but also as "exciting" and "changing". At least the beginnings of a revaluating discourse can be identified, which the actors themselves again perceive with mixed emotions because – as they fear – they might result in gentrification processes.

Ultimately, the study revealed that even if urban pioneers with their activities are not able to simply solve the complex (social) problems of their neighbourhoods in the short and medium run, they may support alternative interpretations of the quarters. As far as they are able to introduce their activities into public discourses, they also positively influence the images of the respective quarters. Furthermore, with their projects they drive on – at least small – social,

organisational or infrastructural improvements at the local level. Thus, urban pioneers prove to be actors who, in the framework of communicative action processes, trigger spatial transformation.

4.5 Triangulation

In summary, it can be said that in the methodological respect the ethnographic discourse analysis proved to be successful, as by way of the comprehensive multi-method approach it was possible to look at the complexity of different social aggregation levels – starting from the individual actors to the group meetings and ending with the broader public. Furthermore, it was possible to fruitfully relate the results of these levels to one another. Thus, by the example of urban pioneers in socially disadvantaged neighbourhoods we obtained insights into how spatial transformation processes operate on the micro-level, particularly how subjective and collective knowledge, communicative action and the social construction of spaces are linked.

The selected methods of data collection and analysis were ideally suited for the object under investigation and complemented each other well. They allowed for a comprehensive and, simultaneously, also thorough investigation of actors' perspectives as well as strategies, of action processes and (changing) discourses. Against this background, we were able to trace processes of re-thinking and reshaping spaces.

However, it has to be mentioned that such a comprehensive methodological procedure cannot be managed by one researcher alone, it rather requires an entire research team. This is a basic limitation of the approach. And even though the research design was broad-based – as shown by some of the selected results – the approach did not go far enough. In the background of the urban pioneers scene there still operate other actors, particularly from social fields such as local politics and administration which, for their part, develop ideas for spatial development and act accordingly. Their plans for the neighbourhoods are not always in alignment with the bottom-up initiatives of the urban pioneers. At least bottom-up actors typically view top-down actions by local representatives as impeding – and vice versa. Moreover, top-down actors – on the basis of their offices – dispose of institutionally embedded resources as well as of power and thus may rely on dispositive structures that cannot be touched by those of the urban pioneers'. This is why pioneers see themselves in a position of "David against Goliath" when it comes to the implementation of their visions. As already said above, in Moabit it is not only top-down and bottom-up actors who conflict each other. Rather, even bottom-up actors compete with each other and attempt to achieve different objectives and strategies with respect to the neighbourhood development. Nevertheless, this does not hide the fact that the various urban pioneers succeed with initiating and fostering processes of rethinking places previously associated with negative images. The

analysis of the communicative reconstruction of spaces by the example of urban pioneers, thus, is a starting point for the investigation of spatial transformation processes in urban quarters. Additionally, also the heterogeneous constellations of actors and interests as well as related conflicts and power relations are to be taken into consideration. In order to explore these constellations, it is necessary to develop methodological procedures which allow for a detailed analysis of conflict negotiation and power balances.

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