

## Mapping and Reverse Engineering Berlin's Nightlife Economy

In Berlin, creative industries and tourism have become key economic factors, and nightlife is seen as an important support pillar for both. The protagonists of this scene are trying to promote this vision on a political level, by means of lobby organisation and funding structures such as Musicboard and Clubcommission. With some of the public money they received, the Clubcommission has produced a map of Berlin clubs, which can be accessed at <http://clubkataster.de>. As a lobby tool, it tries to present Berlin nightlife as part of the cultural industry, representing it as one big mesh of diverse modes of entertainment and culture all over the city. They also claim that this map is a tool to avoid conflicts regarding noise complaints when new housing projects are planned.<sup>1</sup> The data is not that good: for example, the map includes a large number of non-nightlife venues that play music, including the Olympiastadion, the Admiralspalast or the Berliner Dom as some of the oldest examples in the data set. However, it does provide a partial overview of Berlin's clubs. The map contains 1000 venues in Berlin, of which around one fourth could be considered nightclubs in the rave sense. The club commission also reports that 10,000 people work in clubs.

Data is not neutral, technology is not neutral. If we want to perform an

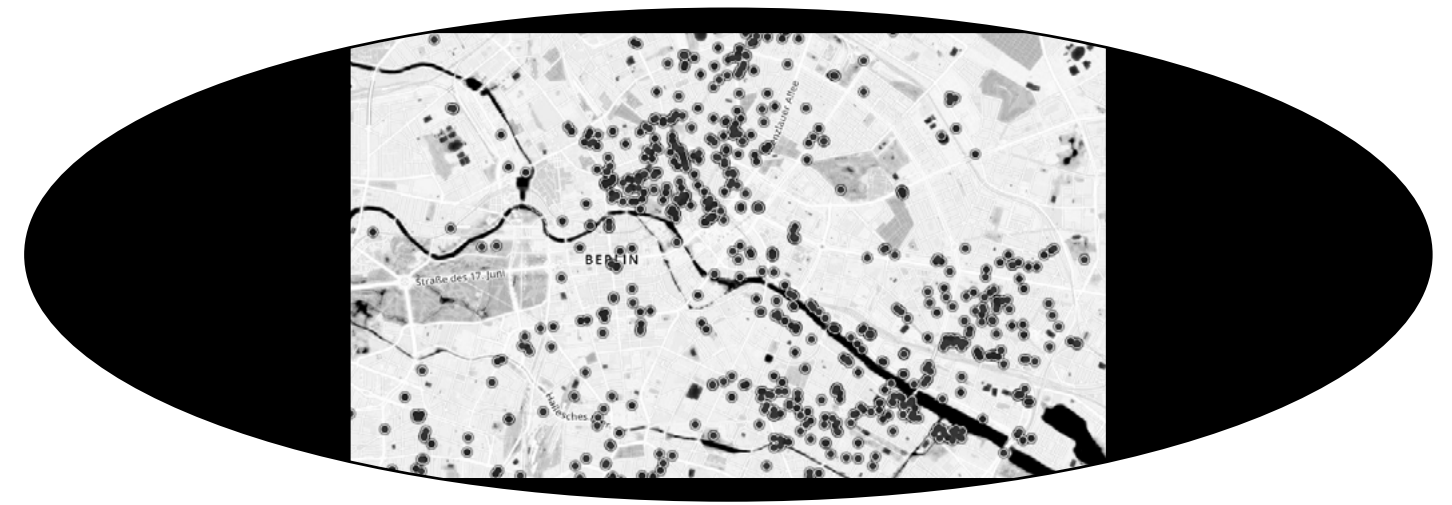
analysis we need better data. In the last years, for example, the adoption of new transparency laws mean that public funding can be researched by anyone. For Berlin, <http://data.berlin.de> is one such transparency platform. In general, these platforms can be found for many transnational, national and city levels, usually under the label of "open government". The data concerning public funding transparency for clubs is very rudimentary and does not tell a complete story, as clubs only use public funds from time to time and for strategic purposes. However, other transparency platforms for business data can help to understand the commercial entities of club culture. For example, we can look up state-registered companies and gain insight into their economic reports: the famous and often reported sum of 1 million Euros declared by Berghain comes from sources such as the Handelsregister annual reports. With data websites such as <https://openthebox.eu> or <https://www.northdata.de/>, one can generate neat networks of the many companies behind Berlin clubs.

Navigating the commercial entities can be more interesting than seeing the whole landscape of clubs presented on one map. We can hack the Clubkataster to obtain this data. In an experimental data analysis we used the <http://clubkataster.de> map and

used their data<sup>2</sup> in order to analyze the legal status of the clubs as companies. Again, this data is not neutral – it was produced for lobbying purposes, and the technology it was presented with – as a map – is not neutral. The map providers used the data fields "location" and "opening date", – we used the data field "run by" and can therefore ask different questions, with another technology. The script is published online.<sup>3</sup>

So instead of following the mapping narrative of the well-funded Clubcommission, we can take their data and run our own analyses with it. This is a map of the club industry which provides economic information that we can use to query other economic data sets (with the abovementioned tools like Openthebox). for example, to navigate through the data we filtered the spaces by their form of legal entity, such as GmbH, GbR and eV.

One question we asked was who owns several venues. One result would be Cookies (Heinz Gindullis), with 7 registered locations. He created his first bar in 1990, and is now presented by the Chamber of Industry and Commerce (IHK) as a pioneer of Berlin nightlife – a nightlife that is considered to be a key attraction for pulling millions of tourists to the city. The IHK also quotes a conservative politician who confirms that the whole technol-



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ogy sector depends on Berlin's club culture to draw software developers to Berlin.<sup>4</sup>

Taking this into account, it is quite ironic to reduce the conflict of gentrification to one of noise complaints by tenants and property owners who are not used to the level of noise produced by cultural spaces – as mentioned in the statement of purpose for the Clubkataster map. As Andrej Holm and others have shown, Berlin has developed into a special form of capitalization of urban space. Unlike the classical concept of gentrification, where specific areas are singled out for profit maximization, there is a phenomenon of gentrification targeting the whole city, wherein the "hypermobile creative class" plays a key role.<sup>5</sup> Noise complaints are just a marginal symptom of this restructuring process, whose main protagonists within the cultural factor of this process – the nightlife industry – are boasting about how they attract higher-skilled workers and new waves of tourists to the city. This makes it clear that they do not

understand how marginal their own problems are and how large their own contribution is to the housing crisis that this city faces, with people being pushed out from the areas they live in.

The Clubcommission positions itself against gentrification – as clubs like Watergate also had to face rising rents –, calling for a more tempered city development and for the protection of cultural spaces. Their main argument, however, is an economic one: "The creative industry is still Berlin's biggest, and the clubs are one of its most important pillar".<sup>6</sup> This is a financialized understanding of culture which goes hand in hand with the argument that the cultural production pulls in tourism and specialized workers. Managing this from a diversity aspect seems cynical: "If we want the scene to stay diverse and colorful, then we have to think about how these inner city locations can stay affordable – because these are not businesses that just play chart music like everywhere in the world, these are places that cater to distinct niches [...] club

culture has a social, as well as a cultural and economic effect on the community – it's all interlinked".<sup>7</sup>

This gesture of large brushstrokes to paint a picture, where something called "club culture" can be key industry and niche culture at the same time, is what the Clubkataster map represents. Downloading the data from this map and running other analyses with it deconstructs the image of culture that these lobbyists provide. Mapping can be a means to actually obscure the available data. The Clubkataster is such a means, as it renders the creative industries as a spatial order of sound. This abstraction only decorates the narrative of music venues as location factor for the software and creative industry. Or it appears as a complex blob on a map that supposedly represents creativity, culture, diversity and colorfulness. But with reverse engineering we can de-map the commercial entities in this network and analyze them one by one, thereby reversing the intended narrative. LF

1 "The Clubkataster is dedicated to considering the interests of all parties involved in construction projects and planning, and to enable existing sites to be protected" <https://clubkataster.de/>  
2 <https://www.clubkataster.de/api/6/datasets/13/>  
3 <https://github.com/rissom/club-statistics/blob/master/Clubstatistik.ipynb>  
4 [https://www.ihk-berlin.de/presse/Zeitschrift\\_Berliner\\_Wirtschaft/BERLINER\\_WIRTSCHAFT\\_Archiv/BERLINER\\_WIRTSCHAFT\\_2014/BERLINER\\_WIRTSCHAFT\\_Dezember\\_2014/Macher\\_der\\_Nacht/2282780](https://www.ihk-berlin.de/presse/Zeitschrift_Berliner_Wirtschaft/BERLINER_WIRTSCHAFT_Archiv/BERLINER_WIRTSCHAFT_2014/BERLINER_WIRTSCHAFT_Dezember_2014/Macher_der_Nacht/2282780)

5 <https://gentrificationblog.wordpress.com/2010/05/07/berlin-tourismus-und-gentrification/>  
6 <https://www.thelocal.de/20190213/new-research-highlights-the-economic-value-of-berlins-nightlife-and-why-it-might-be-under-threat>  
7 <https://uk.finance.yahoo.com/news/three-million-clubbing-tourists-poured-e1-4bn-berlin-2018-145244213.html>