

Constructing new urban tourism space through Airbnb

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Visitors of urban destinations are increasingly leaving the confines of tourist zones. They venture into residential neighborhoods and stay at private apartments, a phenomenon discussed as ‘new urban tourism’. While this ‘new’ tourist behavior has already been well documented in academic research, the emergence of tourist areas in residential neighborhoods and the role that Airbnb hosts and their place framings play in the social construction of new tourist sites have received less attention. Building upon existing research on urban place making, representations and performances are discussed as two theoretical perspectives that prove helpful in explaining how residential neighborhoods become significant for visitors. These theoretical considerations are then translated into an empirical research design. Airbnb listings located in the residential neighborhood of Reuterkiez in Berlin-Neukölln are collected and analyzed in order to understand how Airbnb hosts reframe the notion of their neighborhood. These listings serve as digital representations of Reuterkiez, contributing to the area’s discursive construction. A qualitative analysis of selected listings revealed a set of strategies that Airbnb hosts apply in order to reinterpret ordinary places and facilities and add ‘new’ meanings, thus transforming their neighborhood into a place of significance for visitors. Hosts encourage place-specific performances that support this transformation and enable visitors to transgress the boundaries between tourist and resident. Sharing-platforms thus become a new means for ‘ordinary’ people to engage in place-making processes. However, Airbnb hosts’ power in that process is two-fold. They not only invest discursively in the making of tourist places but also materially, through the rooms and apartments they provide. As such, the platform Airbnb has an immediate effect on the construction of new urban tourism areas.

Keywords: Airbnb, sharing economy, city tourism, new urban tourism, social constructionism, representation, performance, Berlin

1 Introduction

Visitors of urban destinations are increasingly leaving the confines of tourist zones and venturing into residential neighborhoods, a phenomenon discussed as ‘off-the-beaten-track’ (Maitland & Newman, 2009) or ‘new urban tourism’ (Füller & Michel, 2014) in scholarly discourse. Airbnb, the digital peer-to-peer distribution platform for

accommodation, has been fostering this development (Freytag & Bauder, 2018; Ioannides, Röslmaier, & van der Zee 2018). It enables all kinds of temporary city-users (Martinotti, 1999), such as cultural tourists, exchange students, temporary migrants, or business travelers, to stay in (semi-)private apartments located in residential neighborhoods. While this ‘new’ tourist behavior has already been well documented in academic research, this study pays attention to the supply side and the role that Airbnb hosts play in processes of urban place making (Lew 2017). It investigates how Airbnb hosts frame and (re)interpret residential neighborhoods as places of significance for visitors.

The spatial effects of Airbnb’s wide proliferation gained great attention in academic discourse. Researchers have argued that rents are affected by large numbers of Airbnb listings (Schäfer & Hirsch, 2016; Holm, 2016); that there is less affordable housing available (Arias Sans & Quaglieri Dominguez, 2016; Füller & Michel, 2014); and that the increasing number of apartments dedicated to tourists has contributed to urban transformation and gentrification processes in general (Cócola Gant 2016). These research projects identified urban tourists as central agents responsible for a particular form of urban change, frequently referred to as ‘touristification’ (Condevau, Djament-Tran, & Gravari-Barbas, 2016; Freytag & Bauder, 2018; Gravari-Barbas & Guinand, 2017).

The increasing numbers of Airbnb listings in residential neighborhoods have allowed short-term rentals to become a catalyst for visitors to enter ‘new’ parts of a city (Freytag & Bauder, 2018). However, major urban destinations, such as London, Paris, and Berlin, were already experiencing off-the-beaten-track tourism before Airbnb’s market entry in 2008 (Airbnb 2018a). Visitors were attracted to these *new tourism areas* by a variety of factors. Visitors appreciated the physical qualities of these places – their architecture, buildings, and streets (Maitland 2008). Tourists enjoyed the buildings’ more traditional conditions, which contributed to the areas’ distinctiveness and embedded its history (*ibid.* p. 21) compared to downtown’s sanitized and commodified atmosphere. Moreover, the appeal of everyday life turned out to be a relevant attraction factor. Local people living and working there were regarded as markers of the ‘real’ city (*ibid.* p. 23, Maitland, 2010). Pappalepore, Maitland, & Smith (2010) identified the presence of small creative enterprises and the co-presence of ‘cool’ people (*ibid.* 2014) as central assets of local neighborhoods. They argued that visitors explored these new

tourism areas in order to differentiate themselves from more conventional tourists (Pappalepore et al. 2010, p. 233; see also Freytag 2010) and to acquire and display their cultural capital (*ibid.* 2014, p. 235). In this way, visitors became ‘prosumers – people who not only consume but co-produce a place through their own presence and performances (Edensor, 1998; Larsen, 2008).

The literature reveals that a great deal of research on the emergence and development of *new urban tourism areas* approaches this phenomenon from a demand-side perspective. Tourists venturing into residential neighborhoods, searching for particular assets, and contributing to the process of urban change were identified as agents driving the remaking of places.

In addition to this perspective, Colomb (2012, p. 247) pointed out that the emergence of ‘new tourism areas’ is not merely a market- or demand-led process: the local state, tourism promotion and place marketing organizations play a role in this process as well. In line with this argument, several scholars have investigated functional redevelopment as a government-initiated place making process (Judd & Fainstein 1999; Spirou 2011). The planned construction of attractions and sites for tourism consumption turned into ‘an element in cities’ regeneration strategies’ (Maitland 2008, p. 26). This governmental *placemaking* (Lew 2017), frequently carried out using public-private partnerships, has been applied in many post-industrial cities to turn dilapidated areas into tourism and leisure districts. Yet, in most cases, planned urban remaking ‘in the form of themed pedestrian-oriented shopping streets and downtown shoppertainment and eatertainment venues’ (Lew 2017, p. 450) took place in downtown areas, resulting in the formation of a ‘tourist bubble’ (Judd 1999) or similar consumption places.

However, what distinguishes such strategically steered and planned areas of urban redevelopment from the neighborhoods referred to as *new urban tourism areas* is that the latter seem to be grown organically (see Edensor 2000), without major governmental initiatives and a lack of flagship architecture and famous sights. In this regard, Pappalepore, Maitland, & Smith (2014) framed *new tourism areas* as vernacular (Urry 1990) and heterogeneous spaces (Edensor 2000), which are positioned in stark contrast to the planned and commodified ‘enclavie’ (*ibid.*), tourist spaces of the inner city. The former includes places where tourists can mingle with residents and workers (see also Sommer & Kip 2019) and where they can immerse themselves in the imagined

local everyday life (Maitland 2008). Lately, neighborhoods like Reuterkiez in Berlin-Neukölln—the one under consideration for the aim of this paper—are experiencing increasing visitor numbers and changes in their urban landscape. They face transformations in their gastronomic and retail structure, rising rents (IBB 2018), and a high density of Airbnb listings (Skowronek 2015, Cox 2018). These developments have already led to confrontational encounters between tourists and residents, culminating in protests against the touristification and ‘Airbnbification’ of the neighborhood (Novy 2018; Novy & Grube 2018). As such, there is no doubt that Reuterkiez has turned into a place of tourism. What is still lacking, however, is an in-depth analysis of how such places, like Reuterkiez in Berlin-Neukölln, have taken on connotations of tourism in the first place, and what role Airbnb hosts have played in the discursive construction of these places.

To complement research on tourism-related urban transformations that has focused on changes in the built environment, this article investigates discursive strategies of place making and image construction carried out by a particular group of *new urban tourism* actors—Airbnb hosts. In doing so, the article uses spatial representations in the form of Airbnb listings as a theoretical lens to investigate how local hosts offering rooms and apartments in Reuterkiez contribute to the discourse about their neighborhood and thus (re)interpret it in a tourist-like manner. Although previous studies on the shaping and reimaging of destinations through discourse (Colomb 2012; Pritchard & Morgan 2001; Young 1999) have mainly focused on representations of a place depicted by cities’ management and marketing organizations (DMOs), this text shifts the emphasis to the perspective of local actors. Consequently, the research question guiding the approach presented here is formulated as follows: How do Airbnb hosts in Reuterkiez frame and (re)interpret their neighborhood as a place of significance for visitors?

The following sections are an attempt to answer this research question. The first section of the paper presents a relational approach toward the city as a tourist destination; this means discussing representations and performances as two conceptual means to understanding urban tourism space as being socially constructed. After briefly introducing the area under investigation, Reuterkiez in Berlin-Neukölln, the second part of the paper translates the theoretical considerations into an empirical case study. Empirical results reveal a particular set of strategies that hosts have applied to alter the

connotations of their neighborhood. They also encourage certain performances in order to illustrate how everyday places can be ‘enacted’ (Bærenholdt, Haldrup, Larsen, & Urry 2004) in a tourist manner. A critical discussion of the results illustrates that peer-to-peer sharing platforms have enabled local residents to contribute to the discursive remaking and economic valorization of their neighborhood in a way not possible before.

2 Towards a relational understanding of the urban tourism destination

The urban destination is a difficult concept (Ashworth & Page 2011), and tourism to and in cities is a complex social phenomenon that cannot be limited to its economic function or a particular urban region. The city as a tourism destination is more than its central tourist district, a place defined by agglomerations of attractions, facilities, and services (Ashworth & Tunbridge 2000). Looking at urban destinations as a space in which tourism ‘just happens’ is a perspective that does not provide for human agency and the act of applying meaning to a place (Davis, 2001; Gale, 2012). Such a conceptual perspective cannot regard urban tourism as a sociocultural practice that shapes the idea of a place, and therefore, it fails to provide a viable explanation for the emergence of *new urban tourism areas*. For this reason, it is necessary to apply a social constructionist approach following Iwashita’s (2003, p. 335) argument that ‘there is nothing “natural” about tourism destinations because they are socially and culturally constructed by human intervention’. In this regard, emerging urban destinations, like Reuterkiez in Berlin-Neukölln, are conceptualized as ‘the result of social practice’ (Framke 2002, p. 99, see also Franklin & Crang, 2001; Pritchard & Morgan, 2001; Bærenholdt et al., 2004; Saarinen, 2004a, b; Larsen, 2012). This perspective refers to a transformed conceptualization of space that goes back to ‘the spatial turn’ in a variety of research fields (Soja, 2008, pp. 252-253). It originates from major theoretical debates that Soja dated back to the 1960s and the seminal contributions of Henri Lefebvre, Michel Foucault, and many subsequent researchers who further developed the concept of space (for an overview, see Döring & Thielmann, 2008). Soja (2008, p. 252) concluded that the space we consider when we talk about ‘the spatial turn’ is socially produced space. This understanding of space is not new to tourism research; it is reflected in the following two consecutive research strands that will be discussed in the following sections:

- (1) The earlier research strand concentrates on representations, meanings, and discourse as being constitutive for tourism space.
- (2) The later research strand builds upon the first one, but criticizes its ‘hegemony of vision’ (Bærenholdt et al., 2004, p. 5). It instead focuses on practices and performances in the making of places.

Despite their divergence and researchers’ varying intentions in applying one of the two approaches, they both share a general constructionist conceptualization of tourism space.

2.1 Constructing tourism space through representations

The constructionist approach in tourism research, and particularly the idea that tourism space is constructed through representations, has challenged the absolute conceptualization of tourism space. It instead regards people as agents who transform places and landscapes into tourism destinations. This ability refers to both, their means to transform space physically and materially, as well as perceptually and symbolically by giving (new) meanings and values.

MacCannell first pinpointed the significance of symbolization in tourism. In his account on the structure of the attractions, he highlighted the fact that ‘no naturalistic definition of the sight is possible, which means that a sight, like a destination, only has a meaning for the tourist if it is marked and communicated as such. As a result, destinations only acquire significance for tourists if meanings are attributed to them and if representations of the destination are distributed.

The travel brochure has long been regarded as the main medium that ‘directs expectations, influences perceptions, and thereby provides a preconceived landscape for the tourist to ‘discover’ (Weightman, 1987, p. 230). It was the marker that pre-interpreted the landscape and decided how places and their people were to be perceived. However, it is not the tourist guidebook alone that conditions the meaning of a place. ‘Representations are disseminated by souvenirs, travel guides, postcards, (...) photography, guidebooks (...) and lifestyle magazines’, as Edensor argued (1998, p. 13). Looking into the role of the mass media in the production of new urban images, Colomb (2012, p. 19-20) pointed out that scholars also stressed the relevance of TV

programs, newspaper supplements, and lifestyle magazines, which produced and reproduced new cultural consumption practices. This variety of image and practice mediating channels has been further enhanced by the proliferation of online media. In particular, peer-to-peer distribution channels for photography (such as Instagram), and major evaluation platforms (such as Yelp or TripAdvisor), must not be underestimated in their significance for the image and identity construction of a destination (see also Zukin, Lindeman, & Hurson 2015).

These digital representations, however, do not only organize the ways in which people look at and interpret sights and cultures; they not only guide the perception of a place. Instead, they also ‘form the basis for tourists’ own production of images (...) and travel narratives’ (Edensor, 1998, p. 14). This means that existing representations of sights and places, such as pictures, may not only support visitors in their understanding of a place – these representations also guide visitors’ own reproductions of that space, as transmitted through written reviews on online platforms, for example. As a result, tourists not only consume, but also (re)produce representations; they turn into prosumers with the ability to influence other people’s perception of space (Ateljevic 2010).

Saarinen (2004b, p. 3) framed representations similarly; however, he concentrated more on language and discourse than on visual representations in their role as the carrier of meaning. With reference to Hall (1997, pp. 15–17), he argued that representations integrate meanings to all cultural structures. This means that representations not only reproduce an object ‘as it is’ but that they also integrate it in a new form and/or textual environment (Saarinen, 2004b, p. 3). For the concept of destination, such a perspective implies that a locality is not just reproduced. Instead, it is integrated within a discursive framework that constitutes its identity and that conveys meanings to the place. Ultimately, Saarinen (*ibid.*) added that representations that textualize tourist space are both part of and material for the discourses that would constitute a tourist destination. This perception is of particular importance for the research project at hand, which empirically analyzed such digital, textual representations of Reuterkiez neighborhood published on the Airbnb website. These representations only constitute a fraction of the entire discursive framework that has constructed and is constructing Reuterkiez. Nevertheless, these listings are at the same time elements that can change the discourse about the area, and thus affect the neighborhood’s identity.

2.2 Performing tourism space

Crouch (2002, p. 208), however, criticized this focus on representations in his account on tourist practices. He argued that such perspectives reduced the space ‘in which tourism happens’ to an ‘inert field of action predicated by its representation’. As a result of this perspective, the practice of tourism takes place on a pre-inscribed surface, and the individual doing tourism is solely a ‘decoder’ (*ibid.*) of places and their representations. In this sense, tourists become ‘semioticians’, as Urry (2002, p. 13) described them, ‘reading the landscape for signifiers of certain pre-established notions or signs derived from various discourses of travel and tourism.’

The ‘performance turn’ can be traced from the late 1990s in tourism theory (Larsen 2008, p. 26, see also Bærenholdt et al., 2004; Crouch, 2003; Edensor, 1998, 2001; Franklin & Crang, 2001). It is a further development of the existing theoretical concepts of representations and discourses. Scholars criticized the concepts’ primary visual focus and their neglect of other senses and bodily experiences (Larsen, 2012) and instead highlighted a perspective on tourism as an embodied practice. Nevertheless, Crouch (*ibid.*, pp. 209–210) admitted that the embodiment of tourism as a physical phenomenon alone was incomplete. It is necessary ‘to relate that physicality to imagination, to social contexts and to a “making sense” of practice and of space.’ Consequently, a particular mindset is necessary to enact places in a tourist manner.

Along this line of thinking, Bærenholdt et al. (2004, p. 2) also argued that

although tourism obviously takes place through encounters with distinct places and place images, (...) tourism is not so much about going places as it is about particular modes (...) of being in the world, encountering, looking at it and making sense. It incorporates mindsets and performances that transform places of the humdrum and ordinary into the apparently spectacular and exotic.

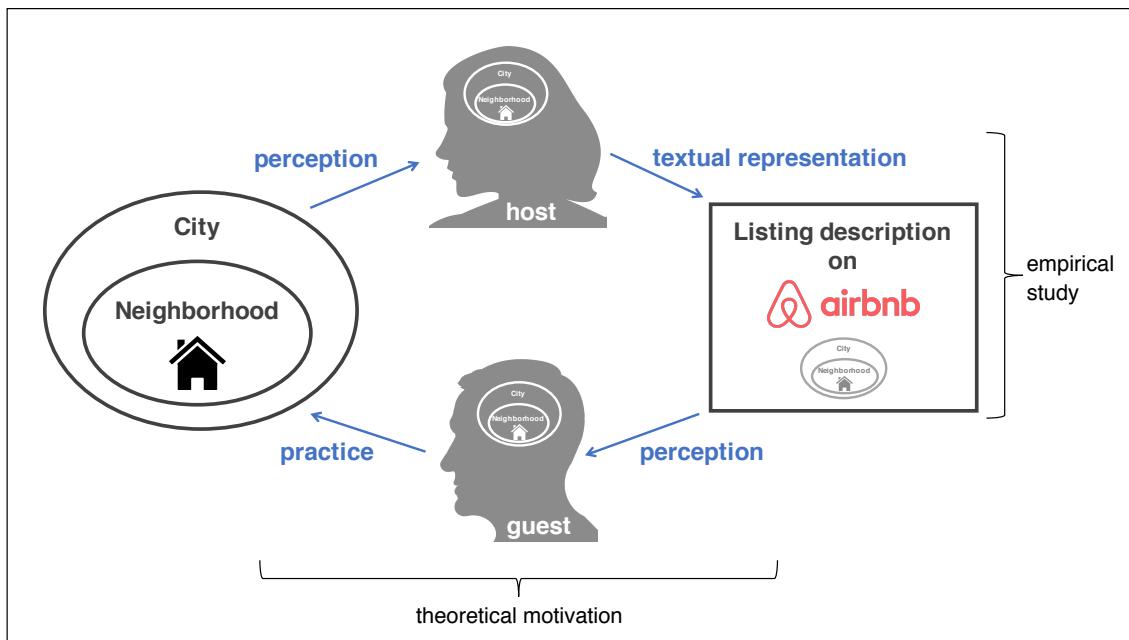
Bærenholdt et al. (2004) understood tourism places as neither being bound to specific natural or cultural environments, nor as static, pre-given place images manifested in representations. Instead, their constructionist account focused on the corporeal and social performances that make places tourist-like through mental and physical engagement with the world.

However, it is not the bodily dimension alone that differentiates performative approaches from representational ones. The idea that tourism does not necessarily mean a deviation from everyday life (Edensor, 2001; Larsen, 2008, 2012) has also been introduced by the performative turn. In contrast to Urry's (2002, pp. 12–13) perspective, tourism is no longer regarded as the spatial and temporal rupture that was constitutive for it in the 20th century (Condevaux, Djament-Tran, & Gravari-Barbas, 2016; S.A. Cohen & E. Cohen, 2017). This line of thinking enables the idea that ordinary places, such as residential neighborhoods, can take on a tourist connotation.

Although the concept of performance originates from dramaturgical studies, performing places does not mean solely following a pre-given script. Instead, performances have a constitutive power (Helbrecht & Dirksmeier, 2013, p. 292). Through performances, both the identity of the performer and the nature of the place are constructed. In her account on 'post-tourists', Feifer (1985) was the first to discuss the idea that tourists have a reflexive awareness of the role/s they are expected to play. As such, they have the ability to purposefully move across different roles, and they may even interpret such roles ironically or subversively, and in doing so even challenge the nature of a place (Edensor, 2001, p. 63).

In any case, performances only have the power to produce a place momentarily and locally. However, representations of these places and performances, as in pictures or travel narratives, can be distributed globally. They thus anchor the idea of a tourist place. Through representations, the tourist meaning of a place is 'inscribed in circles of anticipation, performance and remembrance' (Bærenholdt et al., 2004, p. 3).

Figure 1. Study design. Author's diagram, 2018.



As figure 1 depicts, the empirical analysis only investigates Airbnb listing descriptions, which were understood as digital neighborhood representations. Nevertheless, since Airbnb hosts encourage certain place-specific performances in their listings and endow them with a particular meaning, both theoretical perspectives must be taken into account in order to understand the imagined and enacted construction of Reuterkiez as a tourist place.

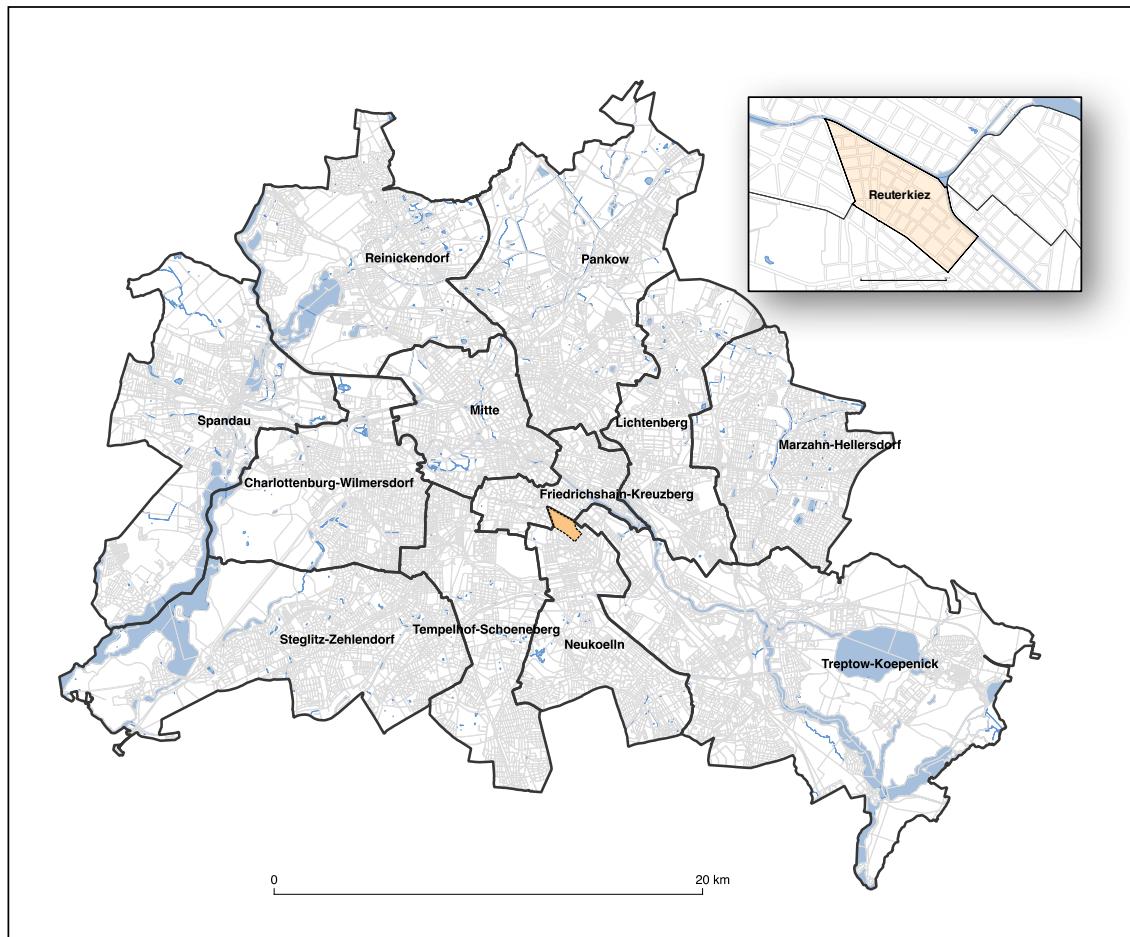
3 Presenting the case study area: Reuterkiez in Berlin-Neukölln

Neukölln is one of Berlin's 12 administrative boroughs, and it is located in the southern part of Germany's capital. Circa 330,000 people live in Neukölln, which is about 9% of the city's population; of these, about 45% have a 'migration background'¹ (Amt für Statistik Berlin Brandenburg ASBB, 2018a, 2018c). Reuterkiez is a neighborhood located in Neukölln, and it is also an independent administrative unit on the small-scale 'LOR' level. LORs (Lebensweltlich orientierte Räume) are administrative units on the neighborhood level that focus on the living conditions of their inhabitants (Senatsverwaltung für Stadtentwicklung und Wohnen, 2018). Reuterkiez is 1.03 sq km in size (*ibid.*) and home to 27,800 residents (ASBB, 2018a) of which 48.4% have a

¹ For a concise definition of migration background, see ASBB 2018b.

migration background. The largest communities are immigrants from Turkey and Arab countries². Together, these comprise 15% of the neighborhood's population. Reuterkiez is the northernmost neighborhood in Neukölln, bordering the district of Kreuzberg. The area between Kreuzberg and Neukölln is often referred to as Kreuzkölln.

Figure 2. Map of Berlin. Zoomed-in image of map: LOR Reuterkiez in Berlin-Neukölln. Map data from Senatsverwaltung für Stadtentwicklung und Wohnen, 2018.



Neukölln is Berlin's poorest borough, with the city's lowest monthly net household income – €1,700 in 2016 (IBB, 2018, p. 28), and the highest percentage of inhabitants threatened by poverty. A quarter of its residents rely on social welfare (ASBB, 2018d), and drug abuse is still a prevalent issue. Nevertheless, Reuterkiez has become a coveted neighborhood. Neukölln has experienced a higher than average influx of residents within the last ten years, which is primarily concentrated in the northern part of the

2 For a detailed description of the countries of origin, see ASBB 2018b.

borough. In Nord-Neukölln especially, rents have risen faster than the overall city average, with a median rent price of €12/sqm in the research area of Reuterkiez (IBB, 2018, pp. 102–103). A Berlin-wide housing market report has even described the district as a ‘Szenelage’ (*ibid.*, p. 86), an area that faces increasing demand and rising prices.

From an urban tourism perspective, Reuterkiez is not a distinct tourist space. The borough of Neukölln only offers 25 officially registered accommodation facilities, providing 4,800 beds. These facilities welcomed just under 400,000 guests and totaled approximately 857,000 overnight stays in 2017, which was only 3% of all guests and 2.8% of all overnight stays in Berlin in 2017 (ASBB, 2018e). However, in contrast to officially registered accommodation, Airbnb is booming in Neukölln. As of June 9, 2018, the city was home to about 26,000 Airbnb listings, of which 52% were entire apartments (Cox 2018). In the Neukölln borough, 4,165 listings were counted (*ibid.*). However, in spite of the large number of Airbnb listings, the borough in general and Reuterkiez in particular do not offer any major tourist sights. Apart from a few minor attractions, *VisitBerlin*, the city’s destination management and marketing organization (DMO), mainly promotes Neukölln’s international atmosphere and its creative scene (Berlin Tourismus und Kongress GmbH, 2018). The (tourist) image of the area and how it is promoted has also changed over time. For example, Lonely Planet introduced Neukölln in its 2006 version as follows:

Neukölln has an image problem. Many of the inhabitants of the poorest district in Berlin are unemployed, others are drug addicted or poorly if not at all integrated migrants (Schulte-Peevers & Parkinson 2006, p. 154).

Ten years later, Neukölln’s framing changed significantly:

Kreuzberg and North-Neukölln are the epicenter of the multicultural and alternative Berlin [...]. Kreuzberg’s hipness has spilled over the Landwehrkanal and is now flooding into northern Neukölln (aka Kreuzkölln). Once this district was making headlines with high crime rates and run-down schools, today, there are plenty of young, creative New Berliners, including many Italians, Spaniards and Australians (Schulte-Peevers 2017, p. 149).

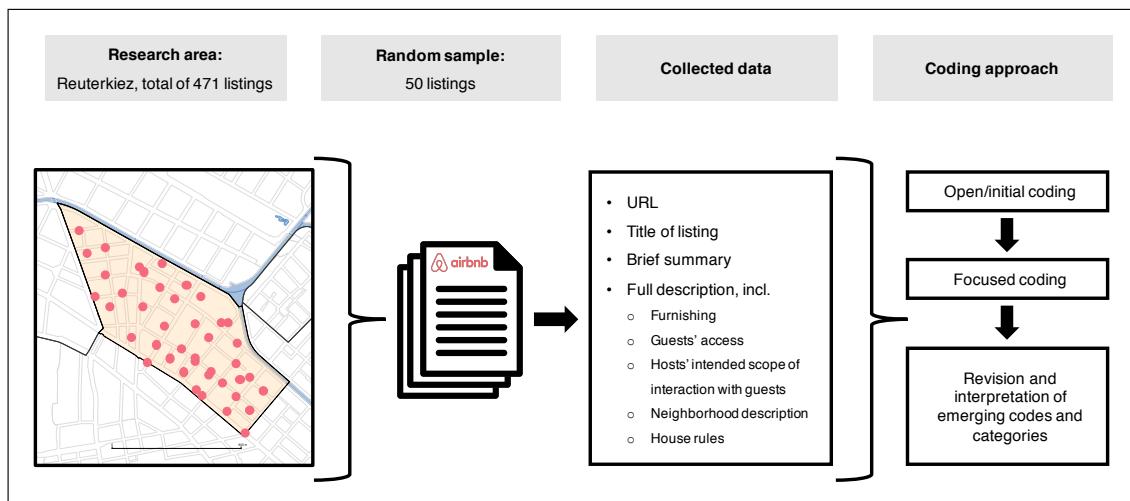
This and other, similar framings of Neukölln in the media and on online platforms such as Yelp and TripAdvisor have contributed to the area’s image change and aroused

tourists' interest.

4 Methodology: data scraping and grounded theory coding

Airbnb listing data was scraped manually from the Airbnb website. During the period of data collection between January and February 2017, 471 active Airbnb listings were identified in the research area of Reuterkiez. The map embedded in the Airbnb website was used to spatially assign listings to the Reuterkiez LOR unit. The following types of data were collected for each listing: URL, title, and all text elements of the listing description.

Figure 3. Process of data scraping and analysis. Author's diagram, 2019.



For the data analysis, the study applied a set of grounded theory coding techniques (Charmaz, 2014; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Saldaña, 2013) supported by MaxQDA. From the total number of 471 identified listings, a random sample of 50 listings was extracted and imported into the software. The subsequent coding of data was structured into several cycles. The first cycle of coding entailed analysis of the full description to explore the variety of information contained in Airbnb listings. 'Open' or 'initial' coding techniques (Saldaña, 2013, p. 100) were applied to structure the qualitative data and to establish preliminary categories. Based on a constant comparison (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) of these categories with each other and the underlying data, they ultimately brought out which main topics most Airbnb listings featured.

After defining repeatedly emerging topics, the study paid special attention to the neighborhood itself. To analyze how Reuterkiez was represented, the research moved

on to a second, focused coding cycle (Saldaña, 2013, p. 213). This coding phase mainly applied word-by-word (Charmaz, 2014, p. 124) and in-vivo coding. Word-by-word coding helped identify and quantify the variety of places and facilities that had gained particular importance in the neighborhood descriptions and how they were portrayed in terms of the adjectives that hosts used. This coding technique was also applied to identify which groups of people hosts addressed and focused on. Tables 1 and 2 depict the quantitative results of this coding cycle. In-vivo coding, in contrast, ‘honor[s] the participant’s voice’ (Saldaña, 2013, p. 91). This was done to better understand the hosts’ perspective. In-vivo coding proved to be helpful in analyzing how similarities and differences between places were established and which performances Airbnb hosts encouraged. In the final phase of analysis, the codes and categories that emerged were selected and organized to determine which strategies Airbnb hosts applied to frame their neighborhood as a place of significance for visitors and to promote it accordingly.

5 Empirical results

The following sections present the concepts that emerged from grounded theory coding. It is structured along the identified strategies that hosts have applied to reinterpret their neighborhood in a tourism manner. The first section deals with various places that hosts refer to in their listing descriptions and illustrates how they convey a conceptualization of tourism onto the neighborhood. The second section then focuses on the local infrastructure to discuss hosts’ efforts to reinterpret local facilities as tourist attractions. Both sections also contain spatiotemporal performances mentioned by Airbnb hosts to enable their guests to enact the place in a local manner.

5.1 Assigning meaning to places

Places are a central element in Airbnb listings. They are used to spatially reference the location of the apartment in the city. This is particularly true for the short listing headlines that often refer to places, such as ‘Berlin’, ‘Neukölln’, ‘Kreuzkölln’, or ‘Maybachufer’. Referring to places, however, not only means spatially positioning the Airbnb apartment; place names also carry additional value. As Cresswell (2015, pp. 6–14) has pointed out, naming places is one of the ways to attribute meaning to an area, to attach it with history, with social relations, practices, and particular images. Places, in contrast to physical space alone, are meaningful locations (*ibid.*, p. 12).

5.1.1 Attributing the neighborhood

One of the most frequently applied ways to convey the atmosphere of an area is the use of adjectives. Almost every Airbnb listing under study contained adjectives referring to the neighborhood itself or a particular street or facility. The most common descriptors were ‘lively’, ‘nice’, ‘quiet’, ‘popular’, ‘great’, ‘famous’, and ‘multicultural’. All of these carry positive connotations. While the most common, ‘lively’ and ‘nice’, refer to the general atmosphere, ‘quiet’ was often used to contrast the apartment’s specific location on a quiet street with the general feeling of the area, being lively and animated [337]. ‘Popular’ and ‘famous’ were mostly linked to the ‘Weserstraße’, a street providing a large variety of gastronomic facilities and the weekly food market at the ‘Maybachufer’ (see Section 5.2).

Some hosts also used adjectives or other expressions to add a temporal element to the area’s description and thus hint to its transformative character.

So you have the famous Kreuzberg really close and at the same time enjoy the new upcoming scene in Neukölln (...) [388].

Cute little apartment in the heart of Berlin’s much sought after district of Neukölln [333].

Yet, unlike Neukölln’s framings in the presented travel guides, Airbnb hosts only use positive attributes, such as ‘trendy district’ (Szeneviertel) [180] or ‘upcoming scene’ [388], in order to point to urban transformations and refrain from mentioning problematic issues. In a nutshell, Airbnb hosts make use of the fact that the area is still in a process of urban change and thus promote its growing attractiveness. They hint to rising demand for living space in their neighborhood to highlight its limited nature and to encourage booking their accommodation immediately.

5.1.2 Similarity between places

In naming places, Airbnb hosts make use of the fact that place names carry meanings and evoke associations in the reader’s mind (Cresswell 2004). Naming places thus means that hosts do both – they rely on existing space images and meanings attributed to a place and reproduce them, but they themselves are also able to alter images or contribute to the creation of new ones.

In Airbnb listing headlines, however, place names are mentioned without any further context. In these cases, hosts have to rely on the image a name produces in the reader's mind. Visitors have to decode the information inherent in such place names, particularly when lacking additional context. For example, the borough's name, 'Neukölln', is frequently mentioned in listing headlines (see Table 1). Despite the host's promotional intention in naming the borough, it depends on potential guests' pre-existing images of the place if the name causes positive or negative associations. If 'Neukölln' is associated with crime, drugs, and poverty, the potential guest will probably avoid booking an apartment in such a neighborhood. If the area is, in contrast, regarded as trendy and international, naming 'Neukölln' could initiate the booking. Since such interpretations are always subjective, place names are frequently accompanied by positive attributes, as discussed above.

In order to enhance these attributes and to reaffirm the positive characteristics that hosts give their neighborhood, they also draw comparisons with better-known places and highlight the similarity with them. In the listings analyzed here, Airbnb hosts emphasized Reuterkiez's spatial proximity to the likely better-known borough of Kreuzberg and highlighted its similar atmosphere.

Bright and fully equipped apartment at the border between Kreuzberg and Neukölln, two of Berlin's coolest quarters [245].

Neukölln is one of the most lively areas of Berlin. Kreuzberg is just around the corner and the allover atmosphere is pretty lively and animated [337].

Since public media and travel literature have framed Kreuzberg as a rather established tourist destination, Airbnb hosts in Reuterkiez have drawn on this image. They highlight the spatial proximity of the two boroughs and refer to their similar atmosphere in order to promote the lesser-known area of Neukölln by using the image of the better-known Kreuzberg. The use of the neighborhood's informal name 'Kreuzkölln' further fosters the association of similarity of the areas at the border between Kreuzberg und Neukölln.

Table 1. Places mentioned in Airbnb listings

Table 1. Places mentioned in Airbnb listings

Category	Subcategory	Listings
City		
	Berlin	24
Districts		
	<i>Neukölln</i>	36
	<i>Kreuzberg</i>	24
	<i>Kreuzkölln (unofficial)</i>	17
	<i>Mitte</i>	2
Parks and waterways		
	<i>Canals</i>	21
	Maybachufer	15
	Landwehrkanal	12
	Paul-Lincke-Ufer	3
	<i>Parks</i>	12
	Görlitzer Park	7
	Hasenheide	5
	Tempelhofer Feld	5
	<i>The Spree River</i>	3
Streets		
	<i>Weserstraße</i>	12
	<i>Pannierstraße</i>	3
	<i>Sonnenallee</i>	2
	<i>Kottbusser Damm</i>	2
Squares		
	Hermannplatz	8
	Alexanderplatz	7
	Kottbusser Tor	2
Neighborhoods/Kiez		
	Ausgehviertel/Szeneviertel (trendy neighborhood)	5
	Reuterkiez	5
	Weserkiez	2
Sights/POIs		3

5.1.3 Othering places

Airbnb hosts not only undertake place making by promoting the similarities between places; they also put emphasis on differences. As Table 1 illustrates, more than half of the listings analyzed refer to the borough's name 'Neukölln', the adjacent borough 'Kreuzberg', or the unofficial name 'Kreuzkölln'. What is lacking in the listings are references to well-known sights. Hosts refrain from mentioning the Berlin Wall or the Brandenburg Gate. Even sights that are located in Neukölln and that *VisitBerlin* promotes, such as KINDL, a former brewery that has been transformed into a center for contemporary art, or the Hufeisensiedlung, a functionalist housing project that is today a UNESCO World Heritage Site (Berlin Tourismus und Kongress GmbH, 2019) were not mentioned. Instead, Airbnb hosts reinterpret everyday facilities as being worth visiting (see Section 5.2), most of them located in close proximity to their apartment. While Airbnb hosts argue that the vibrant neighborhood of Kreuzberg is just at the doorstep, tourist attractions in general, or galleries and museums more specifically are uptown, a place that visitors can reach by using the subway. Thus, hosts point to the spatial distance between their neighborhood and those places where classic tourist attractions and shopping facilities are located.

5.2 Framing everyday facilities as attractions

In addition to the imagined space that hosts create in their Airbnb listings through various attributes and that they construct by drawing relations to other places, they also depict the neighborhood's material infrastructure in detail.

5.2.1 Parks and waterways as places to mingle with local residents

Apart from district names, parks and waterways were the most frequently mentioned locations in the listings. Airbnb hosts frame these green and blue spaces as defining elements of their neighborhood. They are marked as significant for both the hosts themselves and their visitors.

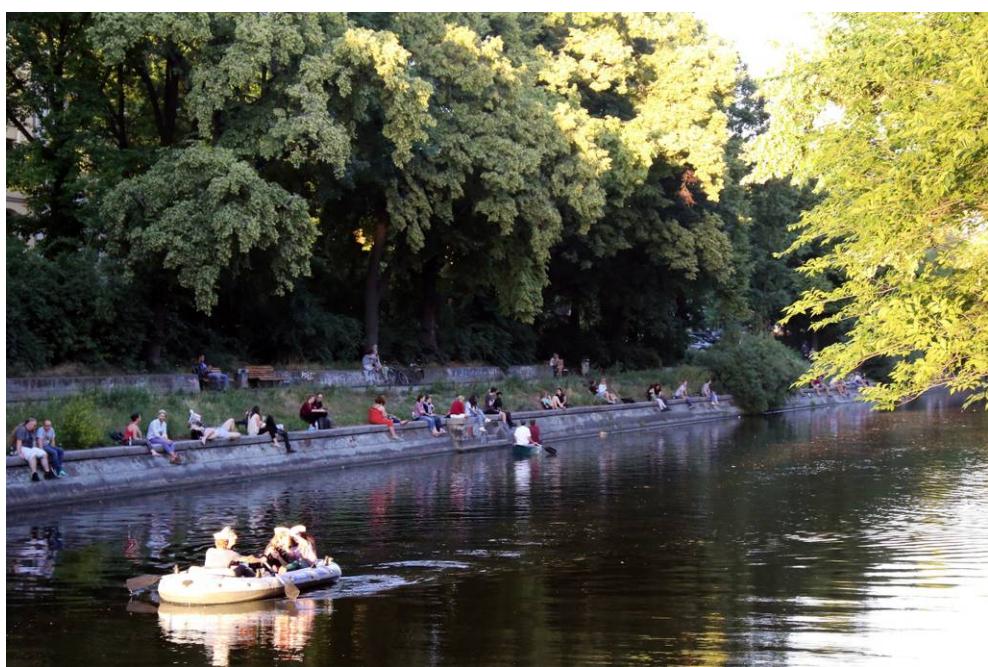
A lot of parks are close by to rest, chill, enjoy, take a walk or go jogging [388].

You can stroll along Maybachufer by the canal, you'll find all kinds of spots to hang out in the area [and] catch a drink [138].

Chilling with a beer at sunset along the canal is one of the perks of this neighborhood [32].

Parks and waterways are generally not understood as sights that have ‘some inherent unique quality which attracts tourists’ (Leiper, 1990, p. 369). In this regard, ‘Görlitzer Park’ and ‘Maybachufer’ seem to be ordinary places with a low tourist appeal. Görlitzer Park even has a reputation for drug dealers and Maybachufer is a concrete embankment of a canal, with its Neukölln side not even being officially accessible. Thus, the appeal of the objects alone is very limited. Only the hosts’ framings and the people’s enactments turn them into unique places. Hosts apply a leisure-oriented interpretation to Landwehrkanal, and add particular place-specific performances. They exemplify how they themselves make use of such spaces and which values they provide for them. Landwehrkanal is described as a place for relaxing, doing sports, or just being part of the local scene and hosts even prove these enactments by pictures they include in their listings (see Figure 1). As a result, naming places raises awareness; by suggesting corresponding performances, this even pre-interprets them for visitors. Hence, the information contained in an Airbnb listing ultimately enables visitors themselves to participate in the same leisure practices as local people do. Guests can repeat and adapt their performances, getting a chance to blend into the scene and immerse themselves into (parts) of the locals’ everyday life.

Figure 4. Landwehrkanal and the practice of relaxing. Photo taken by Harrington, 2018.



5.2.2 Food and drink infrastructure for local consumption practices

‘Restaurants’, ‘cafés’, and ‘bars’ are mentioned in more than half of all Airbnb listings as the central facilities constituting Reuterkiez (see Table 2). In continuously repeating this trio, hosts frame the gastronomic scene together with the particular retail infrastructure—which mainly consists of ‘small shops’, ‘galleries’, and ‘organic grocery stores’—as the essential material infrastructure that produces the neighborhood. However, it is not only the sheer number of facilities that characterize the area as significant for tourism. What is even more important are the users of the place. The overall narrative indicates that food and drink facilities cater to the needs of a young, international community. In framing the typical users of the area, host provide opportunities for guests to identify with those place prosumers (see Section 5.2.3).

Perfect lively hipster area with lots of nice cafés, bars, supermarket etc. [175].

The location is great!! (...) Especially for people who like going out, the lively neighborhood is ideal. Countless pubs and cafés in Reuterkiez and in Weserstraße invite you to go bar-hopping [256].

In addition to the people, local performances and daily rhythms also play a decisive role in explaining the tourist notion of the area. One of the most frequently encouraged ‘doings’ (Larsen, 2012, p. 67) in Reuterkiez is ‘going out’ [21]. The large proliferation of facilities that belong to the night-time economy are major assets of Berlin in general, and this image has recently been transferred to Reuterkiez as well. Hosts describe the ‘Weserstraße’ as the liveliest street in the neighborhood, providing plenty of bars, cafés, and restaurants, and refer to Reuterkiez in general as a place that has recently experienced retail gentrification. In this regard, changing shopping and gastronomic facilities are interpreted as positive assets, contributing to the place’s attractiveness.

Table 2. Facilities mentioned in Airbnb listings

Table 2. Facilities mentioned in Airbnb listings

Category	Subcategories	Listings
Food and drink		
	Restaurants	29
	Bars	28
	Cafés	24
	Pubs (Kneipen)	4
	Kiosks (Späti)	4
	Clubs	3
Shopping		
	<i>Markets</i>	5
	Turkish/oriental market	14
	Weekly market	7
	Flea market	5
	Art market	2
	<i>Grocery stores</i>	18
	Bakeries	5
	Organic grocery stores	5
	Drug stores	3
	<i>Shops (in general)</i>	13
	Individual/small shops	6
	Second-hand stores	3
	Large department stores	3
	Boutiques	2
Culture/arts		
	Galleries	6
	Events	3
Nightlife		
People		

5.2.3 People as markers of familiarity and exoticism

Besides infrastructure facilities and local consumption practices, hosts frequently mention the neighborhood's typical 'prosumers'. They describe the more recent residents in Reuterkiez as 'artists', 'hipsters', and 'cool people'. In some cases, they even refer to themselves as central actors in the production of a creative and international setting.

If you want to be a part of Berlin's art world (...) this is your place! (...) Christof and me are the owners of the gallery and the coffee shop and the artists in the studio [9].

We are a couple of actors and writers living together in a shared flat with one big guestroom available [21].

In order to fit in and to reinforce the established young and creative notion of the area, some hosts even depict their preferred guest type. Guests should be interested in art [9], be open-minded about other cultures [21], and appreciate the large food and bar scene [138] close by. Facilitated by their common consumption and lifestyle patterns, guests become easily integrated and are ultimately able to enact and co-produce the neighborhood in a way that is inseparable from the actions of other residents.

Apart from reproducing a ‘cosmopolitan consumer class’ (Fainstein, Hoffman, & Judd, 2003, p. 243), hosts also refer to the more traditional residents of the neighborhood. The still-prevalent Turkish and Arabic communities are the signifiers of the areas’ past, and their visible infrastructure, such as ‘coffee bars’, ‘halal butchers’, and ‘cheap restaurants’ are presented as markers of authenticity. In this sense, Airbnb hosts not only promote contemporary developments that represent the cosmopolitan taste of the neighborhood, but they also refer to the area’s facilities that exemplify the past. This, in turn, enables visitors to experience the neighborhood’s history. Hosts mention ‘great and cheap places to eat which cater to the Turkish and Arab community’ [316], or they highlight the persistence of some ‘very German, old-style bar[s]’ [79]. Such relics of the past are used to authenticate the area, to indicate that Reuterkiez still is a part of the ‘real’ city (Maitland 2008), and a place where local people live compared to the standardized main tourist districts.

5.2.4 The Turkish Market: a multi-sensual experience of the neighborhood’s past

The apartment is next to the canal, if you leave the house on the north side you are standing on the Maybachufer. It is famous for the turkisch market on Tuesdays and Fridays [159].

The ‘Turkish Market’, a bi-weekly food market held at Maybachufer, is not just another element of the retail infrastructure. Instead, it is framed as the area’s highlight. Hosts encourage their guests to visit the place [181], they describe the ‘Turkish Market’ as

being ‘hip’ and ‘famous’ and ‘almost an attraction’ [256]. Yet, unlike classic sights, the market exists only temporarily, and it can hardly be experienced by gazing upon it. The market is more of an event that needs to be embodied and enacted. For this reason, hosts set the multi-sensual experience of the market’s spices, foods, and people center stage, and thus enable guests to physically engage with it. It is only in this particular moment of enactment, when smelling oriental spices, tasting fresh fruits or deep-fried falafels, and listening to unknown languages or music performed by street artists that the market turns into something special for its visitors. Hosts refer to and reproduce these moments of enactment in their listing descriptions and thus inform their guests about how to ‘explore’ [316] the market.

Also the great oriental market with fruits and other things from all over the world, is an experience [9].

50 m from the house is a bi-weekly Turkish market with good, cheap food and usually music [70].

The ‘Turkish Market’ also relates contemporary users of the area to the neighborhood’s past. Airbnb hosts depict the market as being ‘Turkish’ or ‘oriental’, and describe the food offered as ‘cheap’ and ‘exotic’: attributes that hint again at the immigrant communities in Reuterkiez who are described as the original or traditional inhabitants of the area. They are the local and, at the same time, exotic community that Airbnb hosts refer to in order to prove the authenticity and diversity of their neighborhood.

Figure 5. The crowded and multicultural market atmosphere. Photo taken by Kersken, 2014.



6 Discussion of empirical results

Making tourist places is a highly diverse and multifaceted process. Tourist sites are neither solely bound to the materiality of the built environment nor are single actors responsible for their constructions. Particularly in the case of *new urban tourism areas* discourses and representations disseminated from various forms of media, including sharing platforms, play a crucial role as elements shaping their tourist notion.

6.1 Types of discursive place making

This empirical study analyzing Airbnb listings as representations of Reuterkiez in Berlin-Neukölln has shown that hosts draw on a particular set of strategies to frame their neighborhood as a place of significance for visitors. The most obvious element of this is the use of place names to attract visitor attention. Airbnb hosts rely on the fact that places are meaningful locations (Cresswell 2015); that they are already pre-interpreted by previous discourses (Edensor 1998); and that these names trigger

(positive) associations in the readers' minds. In order to reinforce existing associations, hosts add positive attributes to places, and draw comparisons between them to differentiate their neighborhood from or connect it to images conveyed by other, better-known localities. Besides relying on such pre-existing images, they also actively participate in the production of new ones. Hosts refer to different groups of local residents and their individual consumption practices to assign meanings of exoticism, creativity, or authenticity to infrastructure facilities, thus adding a symbolic concept to their functional purpose. In doing so, hosts reinterpret everyday places and facilities as liminal ones (Jansson 2007) – as points where visitors can transgress the neighborhood's ordinariness and get in touch with the area's history, experience exotic encounters with its multicultural residents, or take part in leisure and consumption practices of the local creative class. From a constructionist point of view, these points of transgression are manifold, since tourist places emerge as such 'when viewed with particular mindsets and performances that transforms the humdrum and ordinary into places of excitement and extraordinariness' (Bærenholdt et al., 2004, p. 4). However, Landwehrkanal and the Turkish Market are not only enacted individually and momentarily as places that 'encapsulate experiences of liminality' (Jansson 2007, p. 19), but these framings are also inscribed and manifested in the spatial discourse. Their tourist conceptualization is produced and reproduced in Airbnb listings as well as on other review platforms, such as Yelp or TripAdvisor, in the travel literature more generally and even in official tourism planning documents more recently (DWIF 2017). Airbnb hosts not only direct attention to the existence of such places and pre-interpret them for their visitors, they also encourage spatio-temporal performances that serve their guests' desire to enact a place in a typical, local manner. In this way, Airbnb hosts become 'cultural intermediaries' (Pappalepore, Maitland, & Smith 2014, p. 237) – similar to family and friends – who introduce visitors to emerging tourist sites.

6.2 Deliberate place making and its effects

The study's findings have illustrated the various ways in which Airbnb hosts engage in place making processes. In more general terms, it contributes to a strand of research that underlines 'the active potential of "ordinary" people to transform and subvert meanings' (Ateljevic 2000, p. 376) of places enabled through the proliferation of digital platforms that belong to the sharing economy. In this regard, the findings support the previously

outlined hypothesis that the construction of tourist places is far more than a top-down strategy initiated and steered by local governments; more generally, this paper further examines the increasingly blurred boundaries between producers and consumers of urban tourism destinations. However, deviating from Lew's (2017) argument that local residents' *place-making* is often unintentional, the empirical findings point to an economic agenda that Airbnb hosts pursue with their place framings. This economic intention is a new and less researched dimension of local residents' engagement in the making of tourist places. The study's findings indicate that Airbnb hosts apply the various strategies outlined above in order to *deliberately* (re)produce new sites for tourist consumption. In order to do so, hosts make use of and reproduce the conceptualization of their neighborhood as a livable and attractive place. Since such attributes do not emerge from the physical qualities of a place alone, but are jointly produced in discursive and performative acts of value creation hosts rely on such complimentary 'valorization processes initiated by those who dwell in the city' (Frenzel 2019, p. 70). This means that Airbnb hosts use such 'immaterial labor' practices (Zukin, Lindeman, & Hurson 2015) carried out voluntarily by various city users for their own place promotion. In this way, hosts derive economic gains from prosumers' discursive and performative contributions to a neighborhood's attractiveness as part of the rent they demand for their room or apartment.

In doing so, hosts draw on and even foster processes of urban change in the neighborhood. Reuterkiez has undergone different phases within the gentrification process since the fall of the Berlin wall. Despite the negative effects of these processes for some residents, such as displacement, they have also turned the area into a much sought after place, full of small creative industries and a large, international gastronomic scene. Apart from material transformations in the built environment and retail infrastructure, media coverage changed as well, which affected the overall discourse about the area. However, most of these changes have taken place long before Airbnb's market entry. That said, the platform and its analyzed listings are apparently not the only drivers for tourist valorization and touristification—these processes started much earlier and involved a large network of different actors, materialities, discourses, and performances. And yet, Airbnb hosts and the analyzed neighborhood descriptions are a significant part of this discourse that co-produces the emerging tourist site. In addition, hosts deliberately highlight these changes in their listings in order to promote

the attractiveness of their neighborhood for a particular group of city users (see Section 5.2.2). Finally, Airbnb has a double effect on transforming residential neighborhoods into tourist places. Similar to information-sharing platforms such as Yelp and TripAdvisor, Airbnb provides digital representations of places and disseminates neighborhood images; it raises awareness and arouses desires to travel. In addition to that, Airbnb hosts not only invest discursively into the making of tourist places and foster an image or symbolic change, but they also provide the material tourism infrastructure. As such, the effects of Airbnb on the transformation of residential neighborhoods into tourist sites are much more immediate than that of other (information) sharing platforms or the travel literature in the widest sense.

However, apart from digital neighborhood representations, this study did not look into the various other forms of communication between host and guest and how these contribute to the production of neighborhood images. Hence, it could be a relevant avenue for future research to investigate how personal insider tips from local residents might affect visitors' perceptions of a destination and even tourist behavior. In addition, on-site observations combined with personal interviews are needed to find out to what extent discursive place framings—produced either by the DMO, sharing platforms, or local residents—actually affect visitor behavior and their enactment of *new urban tourism areas*.

7 Conclusion

Cities are experiencing growing numbers of visitors to places outside central tourist districts, and the proliferation of platforms that belong to the sharing economy foster this development. In light of these phenomena, this article has attempted to elaborate on the emergence of *new urban tourism areas* in residential neighborhoods, paying special attention to Airbnb's role in their construction. Using the example of an immigrant neighborhood in Berlin-Neukölln, Reuterkiez, the study has highlighted the power and agency of 'ordinary' people in their role as Airbnb hosts for the (re)construction and (re)imaging of their neighborhood as a tourist place. In so doing, the work at hand has drawn on a social constructionist idea of space that understands the urban destination as a result of social practices. According to this line of thinking, representations of the neighborhood were used as a theoretical means to investigate how Airbnb hosts (re)interpret people, performances, places and facilities to promote and market

Reuterkiez. The empirical study provided a detailed analysis of 50 randomly selected Airbnb listings and revealed a set of strategies that hosts apply to discursively invest in the construction of their neighborhood as a place of significance for visitors. Hosts, for example, draw comparisons with other places in order to differentiate their neighborhood from classic tourist districts. Moreover, they reinterpret everyday places and facilities in such a way that they encapsulate experiences of liminality, highlighting their authentic and exotic characteristics, and thus reframe them as tourist attractions. Finally, by pre-interpreting sites for visitors and encouraging particular place-specific performances, Airbnb hosts turn into ‘cultural intermediaries’, enabling their guests to become prosumers co-producing a place not only discursively via various forms of digital media, but also performatively through their physical encounters.

Airbnb hosts nowadays belong to an influential group of actors who raise visitor awareness, drawing their attention to particular places, and interpreting them for potential guests. For tourism-related place making, or, in other words, for the process of touristification, hosts might thus take on a role that was previously undertaken by friends and family. As local residents inhabiting a neighborhood, they have the knowledge to introduce curious visitors to emerging tourist places. As economic actors providing tourism-related infrastructure, however, they also have the ability to incorporate remote places into cycles of tourism-related production and consumption. In so doing, many hosts pursue an economic agenda. They discursively and materially contribute to the making of new tourist sites and utilize the neighborhood’s rising attractiveness in the form of the rents they demand for their rooms and apartments.

The study has illustrated how Airbnb affects the construction of *new urban tourism areas* on multiple levels. Digital representations of neighborhoods in Airbnb listings are simultaneously part of and material for the general discourse about a place, and they thus have the power to alter its connotation. Performances encouraged in Airbnb listings may influence local consumption practices, and last but not least every listing has its material manifestations in the form of a room or apartment – a new type of tourism-related infrastructure reinforcing a neighborhood’s tourist notion. All of these dimensions have a crucial effect on the construction of tourist sites and should be taken into account in future research concerned with the role of sharing platforms in urban tourism.

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