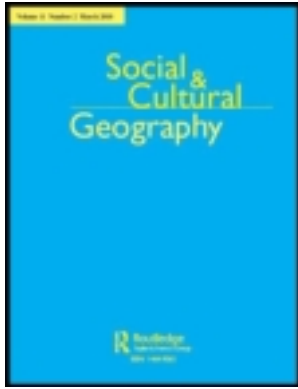


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# Urban encounters with difference: the contact hypothesis and immigrant integration projects in eastern Berlin

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*Recent urban scholarship celebrates the increased cultural and ethnic diversity of contemporary cities as promoting conviviality and intercultural sensibilities. The contact hypothesis and immigrant integration policies drawing on it similarly stress the importance of increased face-to-face contact for reducing inter-group prejudice and conflict. Drawing on ethnographic research in eastern Berlin, this paper examines spaces of encounters between local residents and recent immigrants and their potential for decreasing negative stereotypes, prejudice, and conflict. We find that contact between Russian Aussiedler and local German residents in public and quasi-public spaces remains fleeting, often reinforcing pre-existing stereotypes. Local immigrant integration projects, despite their intentions of increasing contact between migrant and non-migrant residents, often fail to provide opportunities for deeper contact. On the other hand, sustained and close encounters are enabled in spaces of neighborhood community centers, where immigrants and native residents work side-by-side on common projects. These sustained encounters engender more empathy and positive attitudes toward individual immigrants but these are not scaled up to the group, contradicting claims of recent contact theorists. We suggest that scholars and integration practitioners be cautious of overoptimistic assumptions about how encounters across difference can contribute to decreasing resentment and interethnic conflict, as these are underwritten by much broader processes of marginalization and deeply entrenched unequal power relations.*

**Key words:** immigrant integration, contact hypothesis, prejudice, encounter, Berlin.

## Introduction

During the second half of the twentieth century, European cities have become places of settlement for large immigrant populations from different parts of the globe. This diversity

has become portrayed increasingly in two contradictory ways. On the one hand, city-image makers and some urban scholars have celebrated diverse cities as meccas of new urban cosmopolitanism (e.g. Beauregard and Body-Gendrot 1999; Binnie et al. 2006).

Everyday encounters between residents of different ethnic and cultural backgrounds are said to be giving rise to hybrid cultures, bursting with creative potential. On the other hand, politicians and media have been voicing concerns about the socio-spatial separation and segregation of immigrants. The latter discourses have charged immigrants with living separate lives within their immigrant communities (Hiscott 2005; Nagel and Staeheli 2008; Phillips 2006; Phillips et al. 2007). This invocation of the specter of parallel societies has become a common justification for introducing state policies designed to foster greater immigrant integration and community cohesion.

Germany has been no exception to this larger trend. Over the past decade, charges of social segregation as well as a bleak reality of socio-economic marginalization of many migrant groups have led to the country's new major initiative, namely the construction of a comprehensive immigrant integration regime. National long-term integration measures focus on fostering German language fluency and higher educational achievements among the children of migrant origin, in hope of eventually increasing their social and especially labor-market integration (FRG 2007). Integration through work is the dominant goal of this new integration framework, as evident also in the flagship measure of so-called integration courses, which have been made mandatory for all unemployed migrants under the threat of a cut to their benefits. At the same time, at the municipal scale the German state has started promoting more strongly also local community-based integration projects (Hunger and Thränhardt 2001). These are seen as crucial especially in urban neighborhoods with a high proportion of immigrants and long-term unemployed residents (FRG 2007). Middle-aged and older immigrants of such disadvan-

tagged neighborhoods are perceived as having little chance of gaining access to stable employment and thus achieving social integration through the workplace. One of the main aims of communal integration projects is then to decrease their alleged social isolation by providing spaces in which increased contact between immigrant and native residents can take place. In addition, local integration project leaders envisage that increased contact will reduce native residents' negative attitudes toward immigrants, and in the course of it reduce tensions between them. The underlying assumption that increased contact between immigrants and locals will have positive effects on their relations expresses the rudimentary idea of social psychology's intergroup contact hypothesis.

The aim of our article is then twofold. First, given diverging representations of contemporary urban life, in this paper we examine through qualitative research methods the actual nature and extent of interactions between immigrant and non-immigrant residents in different spaces on the eastern outskirts of Berlin in Marzahn. We pay special attention to the opportunities for encounters offered by community centers and their integration projects. Here we aim to contribute to recent urban writings on everyday life with difference by showing the differential potential of varied urban spaces of encounters for reducing prejudice and inter-ethnic conflict.<sup>1</sup> Second, we engage more extensively with the contact hypothesis literature, a scholarship that geographers have paid rather little attention to (except for Valentine 2008; Wessel 2009). As the contact hypothesis continues to gain ever more purchase in policy circles, the need for critical engagement with it, in geography and elsewhere, only increases. We thus examine the nature and impacts of encounters in everyday spaces and spaces of integration projects that

are alleged to curtail anti-immigrant prejudice, increase empathy, and reduce anxiety over interethnic interactions. Urban encounters with difference do not need to be analyzed only in regard to whether they contribute to the reduction of prejudice. We, however, choose to focus on this relationship between encounters and prejudice reduction as this is the main presumption of immigrant integration policies aimed at increased contact between migrant and non-migrant residents. Most importantly, in the last section of the article we challenge main claim of dominant contact hypothesis scholarship, namely that improved positive attitudes toward an individual subject, resulting from close interactions, extend—also to the whole group. Instead we find that positive attitudes toward individual *Aussiedler* continue to co-exist with prejudice toward the immigrant group.

### The contact hypothesis reconsidered

Since its initial conception over 50 years ago, contact hypothesis has become one of the most popular ideas in social sciences. Its origins lie in *The Nature of Prejudice*, a monograph published by psychologist Allport in 1954, in which he suggested that interpersonal contact between members of different racial or cultural groups can reduce prejudice and increase positive attitudes toward each other, and in turn lessen conflict between such groups. There are several mechanisms through which stereotyping and prejudice become eroded through contact. Allport (1954) proposed that prejudice against racial or cultural minorities becomes reduced through contact because exposure to the Other enhances knowledge about him or her. More recent scholarship argues that affective rather than simply cognitive processes are far more

influential. In particular anxiety reduction has been posited as *the* mechanism through which contact elicits improved intergroup relations (e.g. Hewstone 2003; Pettigrew and Tropp 2008; Stephan and Stephan 1985). The starting point here is the view of (especially) members of the majority group as fearful of interactions with minority members. Bringing such individuals into actual contact with their Others in a non-threatening environment, it is argued, attenuates such anxiety and makes majority members more comfortable with further, regular intergroup engagement. Similarly, contact is seen as helping a subject develop an ability to take on a perspective of her Other and thus increase empathy that s/he is capable of feeling toward this Othered subject (e.g. Pettigrew and Tropp 2008).

Crucially, contact hypothesis proponents suggest that improved personal attitudes toward an individual member of minority will extend to attitudes toward the entire minority group. Namely, interpersonal contact will erode subject's prejudice toward the minority as a whole. This is said to be the case in particular for those majority members who develop a close, intimate tie with a previously Othered subject (McLaren 2003). Some scholars go even further and argue that also indirect interpersonal contact leads to scaling-up of positive attitudes toward the entire group. For example, Wright et al. (1997) assert that even knowing about a peer's close friendship with a minority subject will promote the development of positive attitudes about that minority among other peer group members. Such generalization of positive effects is said to take place especially under the conditions of so-called 'group salience', that is when participants in a contact situation are made aware of their membership in different social groups (e.g. Brown et al. 1999; van Oudenhoven et al. 1996; Hewstone 1996).<sup>2</sup>

The straightforwardness of the contact thesis, or 'starkly naïve' (Jahoda 1987: 275) nature of its basic idea, has undoubtedly contributed to its attractiveness for policy-makers and applied scholars in several fields (Parkin 1999). Urban planners and/or architects have for example come to advocate designing urban spaces with an eye on promoting encounters between different social groups in public spaces such as parks and playgrounds, so as to increase contact between them (e.g. Fincher 2003; Peattie 1998; Sandercock 2003). In practice however, designed spaces rarely get used in the way they were intended to. Numerous urban geographers have shown that such spaces are not immune to re-segregation through users' practices and sometimes even become sites of increased conflicts between social groups (e.g. Holland et al. 2007; Houston et al. 2005).

Our point here is not to discard contact theory. We acknowledge the politically salient potential of contact theory, for contact scholars' arguments have in the past contributed to such progressive causes as outlawing school segregation in the USA. Yet, we do want to stress that the process of adoption of the contact thesis outside of social psychology, and especially in policy circles, has been too uncritical.<sup>3</sup> More specifically, it has primarily paid attention to sweeping, unequivocally optimistic conclusions of the dominant strand of contact scholarship about the positive effects of contact (e.g. Hewstone 2003; Pettigrew and Tropp 2000, 2006), rather than also problematic aspects of this scholarship. We briefly outline the most relevant ones.

In the first place, contact scholars have neglected the fact that in everyday life contact often leads to hardening of prejudice and stereotyping, something that was not lost on early proponents, such as Allport. As one of the leading proponents of contact scholar-

ship Pettigrew (2008) recently admitted, the scholarship has today very little knowledge about what kinds of conditions aggravate rather than ameliorate intergroup relations. This is because of long-term one-sided focus of the scholarship on what is called positive intergroup contact.

Secondly, scholars have questioned the very causality posited in the hypothesis (Jackman and Crane 1986; Sigelman and Welch 1993). Such critiques have pointed out that statistically observed high correlations between positive attitudes and regular contact among some subjects might result from a tendency of already relatively unprejudiced individuals to be in more contact with the 'Other' rather than from an increased contact of prejudiced subjects. This is a classical issue for example in research on racially or ethnically mixed neighborhoods. As Wessel (2009) summarizes, positive attitudes of residents toward racial and ethnic minorities in their neighborhood are often not the result of increased contact with these minorities, but rather the reason why such residents choose to move into a racially and ethnically mixed area in the first place.

These issues point to a broader limitation of classical contact research, which stems from its epistemological and methodological underpinnings. Social psychologists have relied almost exclusively on clinical experiments, most often conducted with college students, in examining its propositions about intergroup contact. Yet as Dixon with his colleagues point out, contact as it occurs in these experiments and as it is portrayed in the contact literature is hardly reminiscent of 'contact as it is practiced, experienced, and regulated in everyday life' (Dixon et al. 2005: 706). Optimal conditions leading to positive results of contact, such as equal status of the two groups in a given situation, existence of common goals or lack of any competition

between these groups (Allport 1954) are hardly present in the everyday life. Real-life contact between members of different social groups is always structurally mediated and embedded in particular historical and geographical contexts of power relations between and within social groups (e.g. Leitner 2011; Ahmed 2000). Often deeply entrenched, uneven power relations are not suspended during face-to-face contact but always saturate it and exceed it. We thus cannot but concur with the call of more critical social psychologists Dixon and his colleagues (Dixon et al. 2005) for the examination of contact as it unfolds in everyday settings. Such a reorientation of the inquiry, which this paper seeks to contribute to, brings attention back to messy realities of mundane contact which are not captured in experimental settings. Such an approach is, we believe, in the end also more relevant to policy-making.

### Urban geographies of encounter

The celebration of city life as saturated with encounters with subjects different from ourselves has a long lineage in urban theory; from Simmel (1950) who hailed everyday contact with difference as crucial for development of novel personalities, through Jacob's (1961) defence of collectively co-created safety of everyday urban streetscapes, to Sennett (e.g. 2002) and other contemporary theorists. Such affirmative assessments of physical proximities of people of diverse cultural, social, or ethnic backgrounds that seem to embody city life have long been, of course, accompanied by equally strong unfavorable accounts of cities and city life.<sup>4</sup> In the recent decades it seems that it is the latter kind that has gained the upper hand in public representations. Images of cities as bedrocks of conflict and incivility have come to dominate broader public and

political discourses in many countries (e.g. Fyfe and Bannister 2006; Phillips and Smith 2006). In some countries, such as Britain, restoring 'respect' in face of alleged increased 'anti-social behavior' in the city has even become an integral part of the government's urban renaissance agenda (Bannister et al. 2006).

The resurgence of writing about the progressive potentials of city life and urban interactions might have been incited precisely by this recent preponderance of depictions of urban socialities as disintegrating and disintegrative. Amin's (2006: 1012) argument about the 'good city imagined as an ever-widening habit of solidarity' was prompted, as he pointed out, by the problematic image of cities as places of isolation, ghettos, filth, and deprivation. Similarly, through a focus on the urban fabric as constantly recreated through practices of repair and maintenance, Thrift attempts to counter narratives of doomed cities. In re-imagined cities, strangers engage each other in 'acts of kindness and compassion' in their everyday interactions (Thrift 2005: 140). Their quotidian and civil engagements as neighbors or as vendors and customers express and constitute 'being-togetherness' (Amin 2006: 1012). But more than that, the intense gathering of ethnic and cultural difference is seen as spurring transformation of cities into 'cosmopolitan melting pots where hybrid identities connect the most intimate relations with the most remote places' (Simonsen 2008: 146).

While we are broadly sympathetic to such endeavors in reframing how we think about cities, we also suggest we need to be attentive to the troubling undercurrent in this 'cosmopolitan turn' in scholarship. As Valentine (2008: 325) notes in her recent review of various strands of urban writing on cross-cultural encounters in today's cities (e.g. Barnett 2005;

Beauregard and Body-Gendrot 1999; Binnie et al. 2006; Sandercock 2003), some of this scholarship ‘appears to be laced with a worrying romanticization of urban encounter and to implicitly reproduce a potentially naïve assumption that contact with ‘others’ necessarily translates into respect for difference’.

As such, cosmopolitan urbanism reverberates with contact psychologists’ positive assessment of intergroup contact. Celebratory undercurrents of such theoretical work are in part also explicable by a lack of sustained attention to the ways in which power relations among different social groups influence the nature of actually existing interactions in actual urban spaces. When such empirical scrutiny is present, it is harder to sustain urban public spaces singularly as sites of ‘delightful encounters’ as Watson (2006: 19) urges us to do. From her own ethnography of select city spaces, one cannot but arrive at a much more complex picture of encounters that are only too often filled with resentment and prejudice.

We conceive of encounters with difference as potentially open: They hold open the possibility of either reinforcing or disorienting us from firmly held habits, stereotypes, and prejudices. Or as Grosz (2001) and LeVan (2003) suggested, they may both (re)inscribe and help transcend existing boundaries between individuals and groups. Further, encounters are not simply reducible to face-to-face contacts—but they are bound up with distinct histories and geographies, and thus are embedded in broader relations of power (for the concept of spaces of encounter see Leitner forthcoming). There is also a question of what dominant lines of difference such race, class, gender, and age that shape urban encounters., which, however, goes beyond the scope of this paper (for example see Leitner forthcoming). Although not made explicit in the German context, race, operating here as cultural rather

than phenotypical marker, is integral to negotiations across difference—as evidenced in racial stereotypes, prejudice, and cultural racism.<sup>5</sup>

Drawing on this concept of spaces of encounter, this article aims to heed the call of Houston and her colleagues (2005: 700) for new geographic scholarship that examines how ‘routine, prosaic, interactions between adults can erode long-standing stereotypes’. This research agenda requires investigating the variety of different urban spaces of encounters within their larger historical and geographic context. Urban theory has so far overemphasized quotidian public spaces, in particular the street, the quintessential urban public space, characterized by chance encounters (Keith 2005). There is, however, an increasing recognition that city streets as well as other public spaces, such as parks or malls, are not often spaces of ‘lasting and fruitful engagement’ (Amin and Thrift 2002; Clayton 2009: 489). Amin (2002) thus suggests turning our attention toward such spaces as sport and youth clubs, communal gardens, or community centers (see also e.g. Fincher and Iveson 2008; Valentine 2008). The scale of the micro-settings, neglected in particular in quantitative urban scholarship that privileges the scale of neighborhood (see e.g. Wessel 2009), is crucial. Without it we fail to capture how, for example, segregation rather than engagement occurs at a micro-scale of blocks or apartment buildings in neighborhoods classified as ‘mixed’ (Amin 2002; Hoelscher 2003). In addition, recent research shows that well beyond spaces of leisure and consumption, workplaces often provide significant opportunities for encounters of otherwise residentially segregated subjects (e.g. Ellis et al. 2004; Estlund 2003). Finally, we suggest the need to examine thus far largely neglected sites of encounter, namely the purposively created

micro-spaces of immigrant integration projects. We suggest that these purposively created micro-spaces are as much part of the micro-geographies of encounter as the sites of chance encounter.

### Researching new immigrant destinations in Berlin—Marzahn

One of Berlin's eastern localities, Marzahn, has emerged as a new place of immigrant settlement since the fall of the Berlin wall in 1989 (see Figure 1 for a map). After the collapse of the state-socialist regime 'guest-workers' from Vietnam, Angola, and elsewhere, who secured residency in newly unified Germany, could finally settle among native Germans in neighborhoods such as Marzahn. But the composition of Marzahn's population was transformed most radically

by the settlement of members of German minorities from the former Soviet Union, the so-called *Aussiedler*. In total over 3 million *Aussiedler* and their family members have arrived in Germany since 1988. Although most of them were resettled in the areas of West Germany, by the beginning of the twenty-first century Marzahn has become the place of their largest concentration in the former East Germany.

The settlement of *Aussiedler* in Marzahn has been symptomatic of the reversal of this locality's fortune since 1989. Marzahn was built during the 1980s as a part of the state-socialist regime's massive effort to speedily relieve severe housing shortages in the country. It became the largest socialist-era housing estate in the former German Democratic Republic (Hübner et al. 1999). Before 1989, apartments in Marzahn were coveted as modern housing providing central heating, warm water, and other facilities in an area with good social infrastructure and abundance of green space. After German unification however, Marzahn quickly acquired a very negative public image as a state-socialist eyesore in Berlin's landscape (Rueschemeyer 1993). The post-unification collapse of local factories that had employed thousands of Marzahner initiated an era of economic precariousness for many residents. Better-off residents started outmigrating from the district in the mid-1990s, leaving behind an increasingly marginal population. Northern Marzahn was affected by these trends particularly strongly, with a population completely dependent on welfare reaching almost 11 per cent in 2002, and a population loss amounting to 35 per cent between 1995 and 2002 (Buhtz and Gerth 2003; Overmeyer 2007). This population decline would have been even steeper if not for the settlement of the *Aussiedler*. They were attracted to Marzahn initially by the



**Figure 1** Map of Marzahn. Source: [http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Berlin\\_Marzahn-Hellersdorf\\_Marzahn.png](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Berlin_Marzahn-Hellersdorf_Marzahn.png). Map produced by BishkekRocks on 2 August 2007. Permission to use granted under GNU Free Documentation License.



availability of family-size apartments and low rents, and eventually also by the emerging Russian-speaking *Aussiedler* community. In northern and central Marzahn, our areas of focus, these immigrants comprise 11 and 17 per cent of the local population, respectively (Augustin 2008). Their strong presence here has certainly transformed Marzahn's everyday visual and audible streetscapes. But due to this relatively small overall proportion, Marzahn cannot be considered an *Aussiedler* 'ghetto'.

The social positionality of *Aussiedler* within the German context of reception is quite ambivalent. As white subjects of German ancestry, they have been nominally included into the German citizenry according to the law. The German state has until recently not even considered *Aussiedler* immigrants. Yet as many other immigrant groups, they suffer from high unemployment rates due to a lack of official recognition of their qualifications, discriminatory hiring practices, and insufficient German language skills (e.g. Greif et al. 1999; Münz and Ohliger 1998; Silbereisen 1999). Most importantly, native German residents have habitually questioned the state-sanctioned Germanness of these Russian-speaking *Aussiedler*.<sup>6</sup> In a country where hybrid identities have not been thought of as possible (Baban 2006), post-Soviet *Aussiedler* have become identified as Russians and as such are considered as an Other in everyday life (e.g. Pfetsch 1999).

As Matejskova (2011) shows, local residents in Marzahn Russianize *Aussiedler* drawing on a historically established stereotype of Russians as drunk and noisy people of peasant stock. They tie this stereotype to the geographic imaginary of the cold, wide-open, and remote East of the Russian steppe, marking *Aussiedler* as belonging to the Eastern Other. Similarly, they are seen as espousing strong family-values and traditional gender

norms and practices, which are also read as a sign of their Eastern backwardness and alleged lack of socialization in a modern, industrialized society. Finally, *Aussiedler* are criticized for lacking interest in German culture—as evidenced in the maintenance of speaking Russian as their primary language and the establishment of Russian-speaking social and commercial infrastructure. This often leads to accusations of *Aussiedler* as subjects insufficiently willing to integrate into the local society, and instead favoring separation in a parallel *Aussiedler* community.

As more and more *Aussiedler* settled in Marzahn over time, their presence started to become more palpable. This has increased tensions between the local residents and the newcomers. Local residents habitually complain about the loud and unruly behavior of drunk *Aussiedler* youth at night or *Aussiedler* not caring sufficiently for common spaces of apartment buildings. Incidents of violent physical altercations and fights between local German and *Aussiedler* youth have also become more common. *Aussiedler* who had moved to Marzahn in mid-1990s also conclude that the level of hostility they experience from Marzahner, evident for example in verbal abuse, has increased with growing *Aussiedler* population in its neighborhoods.

### *Immigrant integration projects*

In response to increased tensions between immigrant and local residents in Marzahn and social isolation faced by the immigrants, a number of integration projects were started in Marzahn in the past decade. These integration projects vary greatly with respect to their scope, work strategies, funding, and relation to the state. A select few are run by some of the six publicly supported non-profit organizations

that dominate the field of social work in Germany, such as *Caritas*.<sup>7</sup> Most integration projects in Marzahn, however, have been developed locally, by community centers, including city-funded neighborhood centers. Integration projects are usually funded by 1–3 year grants, available through various partnerships between local, regional, or federal governments, the European Union and foundations. In 1999, inclusion of northern Marzahn into the nation-wide program for neighborhood revitalization, the *Socially Integrative City (Soziale Stadt)*, brought additional funds that helped establish and keep viable such integration projects as *Aussiedler help Aussiedler (Aussiedler orientieren Aussiedler)*, a local German–Russian gallery—*Klin*, and Berlin’s German–Russian *Tchechow Theater*.

These various initiatives gathered under the umbrella term of local integration projects offer a variety of services and activities, often under the same roof. Services include free individual consultation and translation services that assist immigrants in dealing with state bureaucracy, requalification courses, native-language lectures on issues such as German health-care system, or free to heavily subsidized language classes—German for adults and Vietnamese or Russian for the second generation. Most projects also incorporate social and cultural activities that are intended to improve local-immigrant relations through increased interaction. Common are for example joint weekly breakfasts for neighborhood women, intercultural dinner ‘cook-ins’, weekend dance evenings, or presentations of immigrants’ cultural traditions. Migrant and non-migrant residents in Marzahn are drawn to the projects through their interest in a particular activity that they generally learn about through personal connections to people employed in the community centers. Thus, we want to stress, participation

in diverse project activities is not imposed on *Aussiedler* or residents.

This paper is based on participant observation and informal interviews that one of the authors conducted in two such local integration projects in Marzahn where she volunteered part-time: the project *Meridian* housed within the community center *Plattenverbund Kiezhaus* (further as *Kiezhaus*), and *Kieztreff Interkulturell* (further as *Kieztreff*) housed in the *Neighborhood center Marzahn-Mitte (Stadtteilzentrum Marzahn-Mitte)* (see Figures 2 and 3).

This volunteering was undertaken as a part of the larger ethnographic research on the local landscapes of belonging and integration practices and policies conducted from February to October 2007 in Marzahn. The research also included participation in a variety



Figure 2 Community center *Kiezhaus*.  
Source: Author.



Figure 3 Neighborhood center Marzahn-Mitte. Source: Author.

of communal events in wider Marzahn, attendance of monthly meetings of resident and neighborhood councils and local parliament's integration committee, as well as individual in-depth interviews with twenty-five integration practitioners and experts. Finally, this paper draws on six focus groups conducted separately with local German residents and *Aussiedler* in August 2007, totaling forty three participants.<sup>8</sup> They were recruited through local community centers as well as through flyers posted in commercial and public spaces in Marzahn. Each group discussion lasted about 1.5 hours and took place in the main communal room of the *Kiezhaus*. The focus groups questions were formulated broadly and enquired about residents' experiences of contact with the *Aussiedler*, their thoughts about the relationships between locals and immigrants in Marzahn, and about their understanding of integration.

### Marzahn's everyday spaces of encounter

As other socialist-era housing estates, Marzahn is predominantly a residential locality. Its bedroom-community-like nature was enhanced after 1989 when local work-opportunities diminished. Marzahn is made up by large swathes of apartment buildings constructed from pre-fabricated concrete slabs, interspersed with public facilities, such as schools and kindergartens, and commercial spaces (see Figure 4). In the past two decades, a few larger, centralized commercial areas in a form of street malls were created, and mixed-use zoning was applied to a few redeveloped apartment blocks, creating new potential spaces for otherwise limited contact among different residents (see Figure 5).

Streets or public means of transportation are the most common everyday spaces that old and new Marzahner share. More often than



Figure 4 Apartment blocks in northern Marzahn. Source: Author.



Figure 5 Wednesday market in central Marzahn. Source: Author.

not, however, there is no, as Valentine (2008: 325) put it, ‘meaningful contact, ...contact that actually changes values and translates

beyond the specifics of the individual moment into a more general positive respect for—rather than merely tolerance of—others’. As

one focus group participant, Florian, a long-term unemployed volunteer in one of the community centers, summarizes<sup>9</sup>:

It's actually really hard to have any contact with the Russian (sic) people, I mean privately. We don't have any contact. Maybe at work, but in a street it's hard, to build up anything... People are amongst their own on the street, mostly in pairs or groups, there's just no chance to get to know someone on the street without there being a problem. So if there is contact, it's mostly negative... (Florian, M, 40–50)

At worst, streets and most other publicly accessible spaces in Marzahn, such as shopping plazas, provide opportunities for superficial exchanges that, as Florian points out, often harden negative attitudes and might lead to conflicts. At best, such fleeting and chance contacts, while important components of everyday city life, comply with the norms of social civility. The latter, as we stress, cannot be automatically understood as signifying respect for and solidarity with the 'Other'. As Sveta (F, 50–60), former accountant and now an employment counselor from Russia notes, 'Just because they shake your hand it doesn't mean that they respect you. It's just what they do'. As such, these are not spaces of substantial encounters where subjects can engage each other in a more extended manner.

Apartment buildings, on the other hand, offer opportunities for somewhat closer interactions in a more semi-public setting. A few *Aussiedler* recounted that they have developed closer relationships with their German neighbors. For example, Olga, a hairdresser in her mid-40s who came to Germany in 1995 from Kazakhstan, still keeps in touch with her mother's neighbor even after her mother passed away. Or Lilia, another 30-something *Aussiedler* woman, educated as a teacher and now a trainee in a childcare center,

remembers that her German neighbors 'showed initiative', as she put it, and invited her family once to celebrate holidays with them. They also volunteered to supervise construction workers that Lilia and her husband hired for remodeling of their apartment. Most migrant and non-migrant residents, however, judge the nature of everyday contact occurring in narrow halls or elevators of apartment buildings as superficial. Such casual, if relatively polite interactions are also often 'cancelled' out by disputes and altercations with neighbors in the apartment buildings. *Aussiedler* in particular recounted stories about conflicts of various magnitude with their local German house neighbors, which they perceived as spurred by anti-Russian sentiments. As Zoya (F, 30–40), stay-at-home mother from Ukraine, concludes after a discussion of one case: 'I think that if that family wasn't Russian-[speaking] there wouldn't be any problem, really, no complaints, no discussions. It's just Russians (sic) making trouble'. Overall, however, the potential for encounters in residential spaces, whether civil or conflict-ridden, seems to have diminished over time due to the increasing concentration and segregation of *Aussiedler* within a number of apartment buildings and/or whole neighborhood blocks.<sup>10</sup>

Other local institutional spaces seem to be more conducive to allow more substantial, potentially progressively transformative encounters. For example, a Protestant church in northern Marzahn offers space where immigrants and locals are drawn together around their faith. In the past 15 years, the church has been proactive in initiating contact and exchanges between immigrants and locals, not only through the celebration of religious festivals for the whole congregation, but also through consciously involving immigrants in popular education classes, such as

*Cheap and Healthy Meals*, and, importantly, in the decision-making processes of the congregation. One of local residents, Andreas (M, 50–60), noted how his family’s friendship with one *Aussiedler* family started in church—‘We talk to each other, enjoy meals together, learn from one another and get to know one another’.

As mentioned, one of the goals of local integration projects is to promote social and cultural exchange between immigrants and local Germans. In practice this goal has in many projects come to contravene another important objective, which is to cater to *Aussiedlers*’ need for a safe and familiar post-migration environment in which they can regain social confidence. The latter often leads to the creation of *Aussiedler*-only, or Russian-language-dominated time-spaces, where immigrants socialize with one another or learn about the German health care system in their native language, rather than spaces of engagement with local Germans. Still other activities of these projects are explicitly designed to attract local Germans, such as through presentations of immigrant cultures. But as these are often of staged nature, they are aimed at the cultural consumption of, rather than an engagement with, the Other. This means that the interaction between *Aussiedler* and local Germans takes place mostly within the larger spaces of community centers that house integration projects, rather than the integration projects per se. Or more precisely, close and sustained interactions unfold primarily through community centers as sites of workplaces, shared by immigrants and local Germans.

It is precisely workspaces that immigrants and locals tended to identify as *the* spaces allowing for substantial and sustained contact with the Other. Working together facilitates repeated interactions that provide opportu-

nities to get to know each other more intimately. Several *Aussiedler* highlighted good relations at work with some of their German colleagues, appreciating for example their colleagues’ willingness to help them overcome the language barrier:

I worked in a kindergarten one year and all the other workers there were women. There was only a janitor and me—the only two men. We got along beautifully, he taught me the language, helped me—I can only say thanks, I can’t say anything bad. I was lucky, I guess. (Vadim, M, 50–60)

For a few other *Aussiedler* and local German residents, work-based relations led to the establishment of acquaintances and friendships that went beyond the workplace. As they noted, the development of such friendships requires identifying commonalities, or creating common experiences, which take time, and require space and effort by both parties. A large proportion of middle-aged *Aussiedler* and local German residents in Marzahn have, however, a highly limited access to work.<sup>11</sup> Many of the long-term unemployed may gain temporary, often part-time access to a workplace through workfare measures, such as the so-called 1-Euro jobs.<sup>12</sup> These are provided primarily by the local state and non-profit organizations, including community centers we examined. These community centers then offer a workplace environment not only to their long-term employees, predominantly local Germans, but also to many unemployed immigrant residents. As these workfare positions are usually limited to 6 or 12 months, they ensure a relatively steady rotation of such, otherwise often isolated residents.<sup>13</sup>

It is thus through their position as employees rather than as visitors or participants in integration projects that locals and immigrants

get to interact with each other in a more intimate manner. This is especially the case where immigrants and locals have been paired-up to work on a joint project, such as running a pottery workshop for local school-children or designing posters for a photographic mini-exhibition, as in the *Kiezhaus*. Although ‘integration work’ (*Integrationsarbeit*), a special subset of an expansive field of social work in Germany is thought of in the district as carried out through the activities of the designated integration projects, our research suggests that employment of locals and immigrants in community centers constitutes a more successful integrative mechanism. For example, the *Kiezhaus’s* catering business (the revenue lifeline of the center) provides opportunities, space, and time for immigrants and locals employed in the kitchen to interact and cooperate to ensure the success of the business. Working together creates a more casual environment in which immigrants and local Germans approach each other as individual co-workers, rather than primarily as representatives of their respective ethnic or cultural group. Working together means assuming joint responsibility for the work or necessity to solve problems that might arise, which over time helps foster development of trust. On the job, during a lunch break, or over a beer or coffee after work, some of these workers eventually start sharing parts of their personal histories. Or, an *Aussiedler* might try to emphatically explain to her local German colleague the reasons for the behavior of her fellow immigrants, a behavior that seemed incomprehensible. Lilia, an *Aussiedler* woman, and Dieter, a local German computer administrator, both of whom have been working in the *Kiezhaus*, highlight this unique opportunity of being a part of the same work community:

The people who work here in the *Kiezhaus*, I mean both locals and our people are already different from the people you meet on the street. We already started understanding each other, became closer...they start understanding us, we start understanding them, overall we have come closer, but you know, some of them have been working here already for 10 years! (Lilia, F, 30–40)

Before I started working here I had no contact with foreigners, maybe with the Vietnamese but it was more or less limited to saying “Hello”. It started for me here in the center 5 years ago. We had a colleague, a journalist who wrote an article about Russian Germans. That was the first time I got to know about their past, we didn’t know any of that. (Dieter, M, 40–50)

Lilia’s and Dieter’s statements suggest that working together in the community center and the opportunity to get to know each other is a process that takes time and that requires effort by both parties. However, it is also a process that is not conflict-free. Several of the *Kiezhaus’s* German staff, including Dieter, actually remarked that the only negative experience they ever had with *Aussiedler*, such as a harsh verbal exchange, happened at the center. Enforced spatial proximity in conjunction with pre-existing prejudices and feelings of injustice may indeed trigger defensiveness that hampers negotiations of difference (see also e.g. Valentine 2008). In the *Kiezhaus* for example a group of young *Aussiedler* ‘employed’ in 1-Euro jobs showed a great degree of resentment toward the local staff. By and large they refused to engage with the German staff or to speak German, and instead retreated into the separate premises occupied by the integration project *Meridian*. This in turn buttressed local staff’s belief that most, especially young *Aussiedler*, just want to

engage with each other and not with the local German population.

Overall, however, we did observe instances of increased sensibility and empathy toward individual immigrants among those local residents who had worked in community centers on common tasks and projects together with them. The likelihood of this outcome increases if community centers and organizations develop projects and initiatives not just *for* but *with* the immigrants. In the next section we turn to assess in more detail specific effects of such sustained encounters enabled by Marzahn's community centers and their joint work activities.

### The work of sustained encounters

Sustained encounters of local Germans with immigrants have ushered in several of the interpersonal processes identified by contact scholars. For example, they increased locals' knowledge about the immigrants. Like Dieter in the previous section, local residents often noted that it was through their interactions with the *Aussiedler* staff that they for the first time learned that the *Aussiedler* were actually of German ancestry and that many came to Germany with an idea of a return to their ancestral homeland. Yet such cognitive knowledge does not necessarily lead to more intimate and harmonious relations and a reduction of negative stereotypes and racial prejudice.<sup>14</sup> It even prompted some Marzahner to strengthen rather than soften their criticisms of *Aussiedler*. Sophie (F, 30–40) for example demanded that the *Aussiedler* 'speak in German, and not always in Russian!' if they claim to be, and want to be accepted as Germans. However, local German residents who had sustained interactions with *Aussiedler* through joint work projects and had

acquired knowledge of the history of forced linguistic assimilation of German minorities in the former Soviet Union expressed a greater understanding for *Aussiedlers'* continued usage of Russian as their everyday language.

As we mentioned earlier in the paper, contact hypothesis suggests that increased contact leads to improved intergroup relations also through decreasing anxiety about future interactions across difference in the first place. Contact anxiety certainly affects relationships between local Germans and *Aussiedler*. During one focus group discussion about the difficulty of engaging with one another, Tobias (M, 40–50), a middle-aged graphic designer, suggested the following: 'What is lacking is a mediator between the Germans who feel anxious, and the Russians (*sic*) who also feel anxious'. Yet, despite social psychologists' stress on majority group members as the ones suffering from contact anxiety, in Marzahn, *Aussiedler* expressed more apprehension about engaging with local residents and their institutions.

That's also because they are afraid, they don't know much [about how our society works]. I know that now. There's a lot of *Aussiedler* who come to our center because they need help with something. At the beginning, when they didn't know me, they went to Ivan [an *Aussiedler* colleague] and when he would leave the room to fetch something for them, they would sit there completely scared... I know that from Ivan. He's also had negative experiences with [German] authorities before. (Florian, M, 40–50)

*Aussiedlers'* 'shyness' that Florian is trying to explain to his fellow Marzahner here was an issue that was raised repeatedly by both local Germans *and* immigrants throughout the fieldwork. Experiences of contact, such as on the job conversations, however, seemed to decrease such anxiety on part of both groups



as well as help develop local residents' perceptual understanding of and empathy toward the Other. For example, a local resident on a 1-Euro job in a community center, Heike (F, 50–60), shows similar perceptual understanding and empathy when talking about the plight of an *Aussiedler* colleague that she had gotten to know very well: 'She actually doesn't belong anywhere, not as a German and even less so as a Russian (*sic*). She speaks with a Russian accent and [that's why she] will always be a foreigner here. I don't like that about [us] Germans.' The development of deeper personal knowledge of and affective engagement with the Other was especially prominent among those local residents who have been in a more regular and substantive contact with numerous rather than just an individual immigrant newcomer, especially in community centers.

Such Marzahner were also the ones most inclined to resist negative generalizations about the *Aussiedler*. During the focus group interviews, one or two participants in each group would contest such statements of their fellow local Germans, for example about *Aussiedlers'* alleged tendency to overcrowd apartments, their unwillingness to try German food, lack of interest in finding employment, or their tendency to come to work under the influence of alcohol. Having regularly interacted with numerous *Aussiedler* gave these German residents the ability and confidence to momentarily contest such negative generalizations. On rare occasions these respondents also reflected critically on their own expectations of immigrants' speedy cultural assimilation. As Tobias (M, 40–50) put it:

One can't expect from a person, adult, 25- or 35-year-old person who has been socialized [in a certain culture] to come to a new culture and to completely appreciate this new culture (*völlig diese*

*neue Kultur wahrnimmt*) and redefine himself anew. So this is an intergenerational process (*Prozesshaftigkeit über Generationen*); one can't simply throw everything away.

Finally, some Marzahner also reflected that increased interaction and the forging of more affirmative relations require a significant amount of conscious and consistent well-directed effort from all parties involved: immigrants, local residents, and institutional actors. The manager of *Kiek in e. V.*, one of the neighborhood centers, Mrs. Geißler, talked about a year-long project that brought together unemployed immigrant and non-immigrant residents in the following way: 'It was incredibly difficult to manage them as one team and make them work together. It cost us a *lot* of energy.' She went on to say that while at the beginning some of the local German participants expressed xenophobic, extreme-right, anti-*Aussiedler* attitudes, 'by the end of the project one could almost talk about a small friendship between them.'

Similarly some local German employees of community centers were also aware of the effort-intensive nature of encounters across difference. Drawing on her personal experiences with *Aussiedler* women at women's breakfasts in the *Kiezhaus*, Katja (F, 50–60), a local seamstress, for example, stressed that she saw it as also her own and other local Germans' role to initiate engagements and motivate *Aussiedler* women to speak German. Such a suggestion implies her emphatic understanding of the timidity many *Aussiedler* feel about speaking in German, an understanding that for her elicits a need for her own greater effort of drawing these immigrants into conversations. In everyday life it is, however, often difficult to actually translate such perceived need into practice. In fact, some local residents acknowledged that their own

effort of more sustained engagement with the immigrants has certain limits. As Andreas (M, 50–60), an economist, summarized: ‘My own initiative is missing a bit, you know, I say to myself, it’s enough now, I always engage with them in the church I don’t have to do it at home, too. So yeah, we keep a distance a bit . . .’

### Inconsistencies

While signs of increased understanding of the Other and critical self-awareness emerging out of sustained encounters with immigrants might seem consistent with the contact hypothesis, we want to stress that our conversations with local residents were most defined by a different tendency. Namely, we observed a high degree of inconsistency in local residents’ perceptions and opinions of the Other. For example, the very same local German residents who showed the most empathy toward and understanding of *Aussiedlers*’ predicament, such as Andreas, Florian, or Heike above, would equally engage in negative stereotyping and Othering of *Aussiedler*, and broader anti-immigrant statements. At different points in our conversations, they would for example criticize the *Aussiedler* for not trying hard enough to integrate themselves into the German society by opting for German rather than Russian language, only to defend, at some other point, *Aussiedler* who were speaking Russian in everyday spaces, suggesting that it is a natural thing to do and an immigrant’s right.

Such an alternating pattern of stereotyping and prejudice on the one hand, and understanding and empathy on the other was evident also in informal conversations conducted throughout the fieldwork, including numerous ones with Florian and Heike who had worked in the *Kieztreff* and *Kiezhaus*, respectively, in

2007. This finding constitutes an important challenge to the dominant narrative of the positive effects of intergroup contact. The latter at least implicitly relies on the idea of linear, gradual reduction of individual prejudice that is replaced by more positive attitudes toward the Other (e.g. Hewstone 2003). Accordingly, more positive attitudes should bring about, if not a retreat, then at least a pronounced ambivalence of negative stereotyping of the Other. However, our research suggests that a subject’s expansion of positive attitudes toward the Other does not take place in such a continuous, linear fashion. The same individuals profess anti-immigrant attitudes in some contextual and discursive situations, and empathic sensibilities in others. Seen through our research, the contact hypothesis then seems overly teleological (see also, e.g. Forbes 1997). In addition, as we discuss in our next and final section, it is also overoptimistic in assuming an easy scaling up of interpersonal positive attitudes toward the whole social group.

### Scaling up or exempting?

As Dixon and his colleagues (2005: 702) stress, contact research espouses politics that attempt to fight racism and anti-minority attitudes ‘through the rehabilitation of the prejudiced individual’. Feelings of understanding of an Other that a prejudiced person is to gain from increased contact are assumed to extend to the whole minority group that the individual subject is embedded in. This argument about the broader salience of intervention at the individual scale is widely shared by integration practitioners in Marzahn. As one of the staff in the neighborhood management office of the *Socially Integrative City* program in central Marzahn, Mrs. Westphal, explained, ‘What we do here is

very individual. It's about personification. So when you get to know Mr. So and So who's an *Aussiedler* and you're on good terms with him, you'll start thinking, well, they [*Aussiedler*] can't be that bad'. It is hoped that through positive individual encounters, negative assessments will give a way to ever more positive and equitable attitude toward Russian-speaking immigrants.

Yet instead of such a scaling up, we have observed a rather different phenomenon in our research, namely an exemption of individual immigrants from their negatively connoted *Aussiedler*-ness. That is, local German residents would extract individual *Aussiedler* from negative stereotypes inflicted on the group under the discourse of exceptionality and difference:

My daughter-in-law is a Russian of German origin. She's very different though, a very nice woman... She really wanted to work. She was a nurse, got her degree in Kazakhstan. It wasn't recognized here though. So she flew back, got some extra paperwork done so that she could work here, too. *That* is effort and that's really great! (Antje, F, 40–50)

This process of exempting individuals from the negative group stereotype, referred to by psychologists as re-fencing of evidence or subtyping (Brown and Turner 1981), was most pronounced among those locals whose interaction with immigrants had been limited to a single befriended or intermarried *Aussiedler*, as in case of Antje, a local electrician. Despite very close social relationships with an immigrant, these Marzahner tended to engage in a more forceful and consistent Othering of *Aussiedler* as a group, without showing momentary feelings of empathy and understanding of these immigrants who we described in the previous section. This finding suggests limits to the contact thesis's scal-

ability claim. It also points to a limited purchase of contact scholars' assertion that especially the intimate, familial relationships with a singular group member will result in the extension of positive attitudes from that individual to the group.

The practice of exempting immigrants from their group is widespread in Marzahn. Even local residents with more exposure to immigrants suggested that the *Aussiedler* with whom they had closer relations and positive experiences were unlike the rest of the *Aussiedler*. In contrast to the majority of immigrants, close acquaintances for example were perceived as truly motivated to learn German, as engaging with the local community and as pro-active in retraining and finding work. In short, Marzahner perceive them as being more similar to themselves in many crucial aspects. Or rather, these immigrants approximate an *ideal* of a self, an ideal of an active, involved citizen, as evident from Lena's (F, < 30) description of a befriended *Aussiedler* co-worker as 'exceptional' because of her 'getting engaged, doing things, [and] keeping busy.' Expectations of what constitutes desirable or acceptable social behavior certainly influence all encounters across difference. In the case of immigrants the expectations are modeled on the ideal German citizen-subject. If the *Aussiedler* approximates this ideal she is accepted as integrated and thus exempted. Such individual immigrants become closer to 'one of us' rather than 'one of them'. Such everyday practices of exempting subjects slightly redraw the boundary of social groups while maintaining the hierarchical difference between them. In the end the positive values gained through an encounter with an immigrant become attached to that individual subject who becomes 'like us' whereas the group category remains largely negatively connoted (see also, e.g. Valentine and McDonald 2004).

## Conclusion

In this paper we have shown that varied spaces of encounters—those of chance contact as well as those consciously constructed through integration projects—facilitate and support different kinds of encounters—ranging from superficial and fleeting to close and sustained. These are all co-existing within the city and neighborhoods, but hold different potential for negotiating across difference and for countering prejudice and cultural racism. This diversity of encounters and their potentials is important for urban scholars to understand so that we do not entertain unrealistic expectations that any kind of contact with difference is naturally productive of intercultural identities and sensibilities.<sup>15</sup>

Our research suggests that everyday urban sociality remains often fleeting, bearing little potential to spur transformation of anti-immigrant attitudes and prejudice. This is especially the case in neighborhoods such as Berlin Marzahn with public and residential spaces that are primarily conducive for superficial encounters and that at best comply with norms of civility and at worst may reinforce existing negative stereotypes. Other shared spaces that might provide opportunities for cross-cultural, more extended contact, namely regular workplaces, elude many Marzahner because of the extent of structural unemployment there. Most importantly, local integration projects, often counter to their original intention, tend to fail to provide opportunities for more sustained contact between migrant and non-migrant residents. This is because over time many of these projects have developed into Russian-language only (or Russian-language dominated) spaces of social interaction and support for immigrants. In addition, such projects' staged presentations of

*Aussiedlers'* cultural practices and traditions also largely fail to create opportunities for cross-cultural interactions.

However, throughout the ethnographic research and subsequently in the focus groups, we did observe instances of increased sensibility and empathy toward individual immigrants among those local residents who had worked in community centers where integration projects are housed. Such dispositions can be traced indeed to opportunities for sustained engagements between immigrants and local residents arising when they work together and invest in a joint purpose, such as running a pottery workshop. These findings support Ellis et al's (2004) argument about the importance of workplaces as spaces of encounter and Amin's (2006: 1017) argument that in order to counter prejudice and cultural racism there is a need to 'bring people of different backgrounds to work together in projects of common interest'. Social and cultural geography would benefit from further ethnographic and longitudinal studies investigating in a greater detail transformative processes—of attitudes, sensibilities, and behavior—that ensue from sustained interactions—including their conflictual aspects—with those considered 'different' in specific urban settings and projects. Based on our findings, such an engagement would be particularly needed within geographies of workplace and work relations. In all such research, attention has to be paid how hierarchies of class and race intersect with the specificity of local political, social, and cultural contexts to produce different constellations of interethnic or intercultural relations (see, e.g. Nelson and Hiemstra 2008).

Our findings, however, also direct us to be cautious about overoptimistic expectations of a linear erosion of anti-immigrant prejudice and generalization of more positive attitudes

achievable through more regular and sustained contact and engagements. As we highlighted, the same Marzhaner, who at times displayed increased cognitive and emphatic understanding of *Aussiedlers'* situation and willingness to counter negative stereotyping by their fellow local Germans, also continued to espouse some of the strongest negative stereotypes about *Aussiedler*. Most importantly, we found that more positive attitudes that developed through sustained and close encounters with individual immigrants are not generalized to the whole immigrant group. Rather, individual *Aussiedler* tend to be exempted from their ethnic group through locals' narratives of their exceptionality. The acceptance of immigrants into the local community by native-born residents thus unfolds on the ground as an individualized and individuating process through which an immigrant becomes a citizen-like subject in the eyes of local members of the national majority. This logic of singularity precludes an easy scaling up of individual positive experiences to the whole group, presumed by proponents of contact hypothesis. Our findings thus support the incipient critical research within social psychology (e.g. Wolsko et al. 2003) that questions such teleological assumptions of the contact hypothesis.

These findings do not lead us to argue against the attempts of local state and community organizations to create and enhance opportunities for sustained face-to-face encounters with those considered different. Quite the opposite, regular *and* close encounters with numerous racialized and Othered subjects are desirable. In environments where there are few spaces that provide opportunities for such encounters, purposeful construction of integrative spaces has an especially important role to play. Purposeful construction, however, does not mean that contact and interaction should

be imposed, but rather that residents and migrants should be enabled to have a say in the kinds of common projects they want to pursue. In addition, as local residents working in the *Kiezhaus* suggested, opportunities for open discussions of conflicts and reflections on mutual expectations moderated by personnel trusted by both sides should also form an integral component of such integrative spaces. Overall, however, we suggest that the organization of sustained encounters and interactions among individual subjects has only a limited role to play in resolving conflicts and hostility between different social groups in particular localities. For these are underwritten by much broader and complex processes of marginalization and deeply entrenched unequal power relations among different social groups, operating and enacted at multiple sites and scales. The ways actual encounters on the ground are mediated by such broader structural frameworks of unequal relations have to become an integral part of theorizing encounters and contact, in geography and beyond.

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### Notes

- 1 Although prejudice as a term has not been adopted widely in geography, Valentine (2010) has recently

made a case for its incorporation in critical social geographic research.

- 2 That such an insistence on the awareness of hard categorical boundaries between majority and minority groups might only lead to the continuation of prejudice and stereotyping is left unconsidered (e.g. Reicher 1986).
- 3 Hewstone has admitted that contact theory might have been misappropriated in policy circles (Hewstone 2003). This has, however, not stopped him and his colleagues from directly lobbying with the UK government officials and educators for state adoption of increased contact policies in wake of urban unrest that swept a number of British cities in the early 2000s.
- 4 See Simmel's own ambiguous stance on city life.
- 5 Another crucial question concerns also what we strive for in life with difference. While we do not have the space to examine the many nuances of theoretical writing on the issue, we want to underline the insufficiency of thinking about encounters with difference through tolerance, so prevalent in urban writing on difference. Tolerance hardly expresses 'the extent to which people embrace diversity', as for example Wessel recently claimed (2009: 6). Tolerance requires little, if any, work. It merely expresses a passive attitude of putting up with some degree of difference. Proclamations of tolerance are always predicated upon unequal power relations where it is up to the subject who finds herself in the position of power to tolerate Otherness. As such, tolerance becomes antithetical to equality (e.g. Brown 2006). Such depoliticization of unequal power relations and disregard for deeper issues of persistence of prejudice are also inherent in the concept of civility, another popular concept of thinking about urban encounters with difference (e.g. Bannister et al 2006; Boyd 2006).
- 6 Lacking command of German language is the consequence of German minorities' loss of cultural autonomy in the Soviet Union in wake of Nazi Germany's attack (Bade and Oltmer 1999). In addition, as Soviet Germans started intermarrying with Russian and other local ethnic groups in the post-World War II era, the Russian language eventually replaced a variety of German dialects as their effective native tongue (Münz and Ohliger 1998).
- 7 *Caritas* provides, for example, free, federally funded individual counseling to new immigrants.
- 8 As the overall project focused primarily on middle-aged residents, the largest proportion, 39 per cent of our participants were between 50 and 60 years of age, 28 per cent between 40 and 50, 14 per cent between 30 and 40 and 12 per cent over 60. 7 per cent of the participants were under 30. While the effort was made to create gender balanced groups, women comprised about two-thirds (68 per cent) of the participants in immigrant groups. In interviews conducted with local Germans, the ratio was more even at 55 per cent. About one-third of both local and immigrant participants had college degrees (at the level of German *Diploma*, which is approximately equivalent to a Master's level degree), and one German participant is currently pursuing graduate studies. Most *Aussiedler* with higher-education credentials had worked as teachers, economists, or engineers before they moved to Germany. With the exception of two local German participants (an economist and a graduate student) and one pensioner, all the other participants were underemployed. While both groups experienced deskilling, such as from being an architect to a worker in an internet coffee-shop, *Aussiedler* participants were more likely to have experienced significant de-skilling and temporary employment. One-quarter of participants were long-term (that is longer than 6 months) unemployed, and with an exception of one unemployed volunteer participated in temporary workfare measures in various communal organizations at the time. Others were employed in various low-paid service jobs, such as cleaning, shop assistance, or construction work. Reflecting the *Aussiedler*' varied geographic origin, the great majority of participants came originally from either Russia (50 per cent) or Kazakhstan (28 per cent), with others originating from Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Ukraine, or Belorussia (1–2 participants from each). Only 18 per cent of the *Aussiedler* migrated from bigger cities in the former Soviet Union. Majority came either from small towns (42 per cent) or villages (40 per cent).
- 9 For identity protection, names of our focus group participants were changed.
- 10 Although there are no precise data documenting this trend, many local participants repeatedly commented on it.
- 11 For example, in northern Marzahn 14 per cent of the population were unemployed in 2008, with 87 per cent of them being out of work for more than 6 months. These numbers, however, do not include those long-term unemployed who participated in temporary workfare measures. In addition, the employment situation started to improve for the first time in years precisely in 2008. In comparison to the previous year, unemployment fell by 42 per cent for the short-term

unemployed and 7.9 per cent for the long-term unemployed. Finally, approximately three-quarters of these unemployed are concentrated in the eastern part of northern Marzahn who were precisely under our investigation (Stadtteil Porträt Marzahn-Nord 2009).

- 12 These are officially called *Work opportunities with paid additional costs* (*Arbeitsgelegenheit mit Mehraufwandsentschädigung*) and they constitute one of the workfare measures of the federal government. Long-term unemployed are at times obliged to take such 3–12 months lasting, 30 hours/week ‘jobs’ under a threat of a cut to their welfare benefits. While on the job they earn € 1–2.50 per hour in addition to their welfare benefits.
- 13 With this observation we do not intend to imply that we favor policy shift from welfare to workfare, a component of broader neoliberal agenda.
- 14 Interestingly *Aussiedler* did repeatedly suggest, in focus groups as well as throughout the entire field research, that more knowledge about their background would lead to better relationships with local Germans.
- 15 Although this article did not address the issue of how multiple social identities effect our particular ways of responding to and negotiating across difference, we do recognize that this is an important aspect of such research, as shown for example by Leitner’s (forthcoming) examination of encounters with immigrant Others in small-town Minnesota.

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### Abstract translations

*Rencontres urbaines avec la différence: la hypothèse de contact et les projets d'intégration dans Berlin oriental*

Des études récentes en urbanisme se réjouissent de la diversité culturelle et ethnique augmentée des villes contemporaines qui promue les sensibilités conviviales et interculturelles. La hypothèse de contact ainsi que les politiques sur l'intégration qui en tirent de l'inspiration mettent l'accent sur

l'importance d'un contact face-à-face accru pour réduire les préjugés et le conflit entre groupes. Cet article examine des espaces de rencontre entre les habitants locaux et les immigrants récents en tirant de la recherche ethnographique menée à Berlin oriental pour mesurer le potentiel de ces espaces pour diminuer les stéréotypes négatifs, les préjugés, et le conflit. Nous concluons que le contact entre les Aussiedlers russes et les habitants allemands locaux dans les espaces publics et quasi-publics reste fugaces et renforce souvent les stéréotypes pré-existants. En dépit de leurs intentions d'augmenter le contact entre les habitants migrants et non-migrants, les projets locaux d'intégration échouent souvent à fournir des opportunités pour un contact approfondi. De l'autre côté, les centres d'animation de quartier où travaillent côté à côté les immigrants et les autochtones permettent les rencontres intimes et maintenus entre ces deux groupes. Ces rencontres suscitent plus d'empathie et plus des attitudes positives vers les immigrants récents mais elles ne sont pas augmentées à l'échelle du groupe, ce qui contredit les affirmations des partisans de la hypothèse de contact. Nous suggérons donc que les chercheurs et les spécialistes d'intégration se méfient des suppositions simplistes du rôle du contact à travers la différence dans la diminution de la rancœur et du conflit interethnique car ses derniers sont maintenus par des processus de marginalisation beaucoup plus larges et par des relations de pouvoir inégales.

**Mots-clefs:** intégration, hypothèse de contact, préjugés, rencontre, Berlin.

*Encuentros urbanos con la diferencia: la hipótesis de contacto y proyectos para integrar inmigrantes en Berlín Este*

Erudición urbana reciente se celebra la aumentación de diversidad étnica y cultural de ciudades

urbanas como la promoción de camaradería y sensibilidades interculturales. La hipótesis de contacto, y políticas enfocando en la integración de inmigrantes enfatizan la importancia de contacto cara a cara por reducir prejuicios y conflictos entre grupos. Llevando de investigaciones etnográficas en Berlín Este, este artículo se examina los espacios en que residentes locales y inmigrantes recientes se encuentren y su potencial para disminuir estereotipos negativos, prejuicio y conflicto. Descubrimos que contacto entre Rusos Aussiedleres y residentes Alemanes locales en espacios públicos y cuasi-públicos permanece breve, que puede reforzar estereotipos preexistentes. A pesar de las intenciones de proyectos locales para aumentar el contacto entre residentes migrantes y no-migrantes, con frecuencia los proyectos fallan de ofrecer oportunidades para contacto más profundo. Por el otro lado, los espacios de los centros comunitarios se posibilitan encuentros sostenidos y cercanos, donde inmigrantes y residentes nativos trabajan uno al lado del otro en proyectos comunes. Estos encuentros sostenidos engendrar empatía y actitudes positivas hacia inmigrantes individuales pero estos sentimientos no están aplicados al grupo en general, contradiciendo las afirmaciones de teóricos del contacto recientes. Proponemos que los eruditos y practicantes de integración deben de estar cautelosos de suposiciones sobre optimistas sobre como los encuentros a través la diferencia puede contribuir a la disminución de resentimiento y conflicto interétnico, porque estos están afectados por procesos mucho más extensos de marginalización y relaciones de poder desigual muy arraigados.

**Palabras claves:** integración de inmigrantes, hipótesis de contacto, prejuicio, Berlín.