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Buycotting to save the neighbourhood? exploring the altered meaning of social infrastructures of consumption during the Covid-19 crisis in Linden, Hannover, Germany

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ABSTRACT

The Sars-CoV-2 virus and the related public health measures have triggered a break in everyday life. Despite growing global protest movements against these health measures, 'solidarity' was called for by civil society groups, affected businesses, and politicians as an intuitive mode of action in this crisis. Writing from Germany, we explore how in the midst of the Covid-19 crisis a specific discourse of solidarity and locality blossomed; namely a call to solidarity-based consumption. Using documentary photography, we discuss the shifts in the attribution of meaning and discourses through which consumption has been framed by small-shop owners in Linden, Hannover, Germany. In the paper, we explore the local geographies of boycotting and specifically the ways calls for boycotting are articulated by shop owners in the neighbourhood. We find that these calls became entangled with a specific neighbourhood identity. Through our photographic documentation we also find that purchases at local stores are now framed as a necessary act of local support. Finally, we reflect on the limitations of consumption as a strategy to overcome crisis and express solidarity.

¿Boicoteando las compras para salvar el vecindario? Explorando el significado alterado del consumo durante la crisis del Covid-19 en Linden, Hannover, Alemania

RESUMEN

La propagación mundial del virus Sars-CoV-2 y las medidas de salud pública relacionadas han provocado una ruptura en la vida cotidiana. A pesar de los crecientes movimientos de protesta a nivel mundial contra las medidas para combatir la pandemia, los grupos de la sociedad civil, las empresas afectadas y los políticos pidieron 'solidaridad' como un modo de acción intuitivo en esta crisis. Los ciudadanos alrededor del mundo fueron alentados a ver su propio

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comportamiento como una expresión de solidaridad cuando usaban cubrebocas y practicaban el distanciamiento social. Escribiendo desde Alemania, exploramos cómo en medio de la crisis del Covid-19 floreció un discurso específico de solidaridad y localidad; es decir, un llamado al consumo solidario. Usando fotografía documental, discutimos los cambios en la atribución de significado y discursos a través de los cuales el consumo ha sido referenciado por propietarios de pequeñas tiendas en Linden, Hannover, Alemania. En el artículo, exploramos las geografías locales del boicot y, específicamente, las formas en que los dueños de las tiendas del vecindario articulan los llamados al boicot. Encontramos que estas llamadas se vieron entrelazadas con una identidad de barrio específica. A través de nuestra documentación fotográfica también encontramos que las compras en las tiendas locales ahora se referencian como un acto necesario de apoyo local. Finalmente, reflexionamos sobre las limitaciones del consumo como estrategia para superar crisis y expresar solidaridad.

Le « buycott » sauveur du quartier ? Une exploration du sens altéré de la consommation pendant la crise de Covid-19 dans le quartier de Linden, à Hanovre, en Allemagne

RÉSUMÉ

La propagation mondiale du virus Sars-Co V-2 et les mesures de santé publique associées ont provoqué un arrêt brutal de la vie quotidienne. En dépit des mouvements de protestation qui grandissaient à l'échelle internationale contre les restrictions mises en place pour combattre la pandémie, les groupes de société, les entreprises touchées et les politiciens ont tous fait appel à la « solidarité » en tant que mode d'action intuitif dans cette crise. Les populations autour du monde ont été encouragées à considérer leur propre comportement comme une expression de soutien lorsqu'elles portaient des masques et distançaient socialement. Écrivant d'Allemagne, nous explorons la manière dont, au milieu de la crise de Covid-19, un discours précis de solidarité et de localité a fleuri ; autrement dit, un appel à une consommation fondée sur la solidarité. À l'aide de photos documentaires, nous présentons les changements dans l'attribution de significations et de discours par lesquels les petits commerçants du quartier de Linden, à Hanovre, en Allemagne ont repositionné la consommation. Dans cet article, nous étudions les géographies locales du boycott et en particulier les façons dont les marchands du quartier ont articulé leurs appels au boycott. Nous découvrons que leurs affirmations sont devenues entremêlées avec une identité de quartier particulière. Par le biais de nos documents photographiques, nous trouvons aussi que les achats dans les boutiques du quartier s'inscrivent maintenant comme des gestes de soutien nécessaires au niveau local. Pour terminer, nous nous penchons sur les limites de la consommation en tant que stratégie visant à surmonter les crises et exprimer la solidarité.

Introduction

The worldwide spread of the Sars-CoV-2 virus meant hardship and suffering and irreplaceable loss (Maddrell, 2020). Equally, the crisis meant a rupture to routines and practices through lockdowns, stay at home orders and the closure of many social and cultural institutions that warrants a social, political, as well as, *geographical* reckoning with its complex consequences (Ho & Maddrell, 2020; Sparke & Anguelov, 2020). Writing from Germany, we explore how in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic a specific discourse of solidarity and locality blossomed: solidarity-based consumption and *buycotts* in a local neighbourhood. The term buycott describes the intentional purchase of products and services, to reward particular brands or business that share the same values (e.g., political, social, environmental) with the consumer (Lindenmeier & Rivaroli, 2021; Neilson, 2010; Sahakian, 2014).

Foregrounding visual elements of a collective auto-ethnography, we turn our focus to a particular type of retail ecology during the pandemic, namely small businesses located in the residential district Linden in Hannover, Germany, which sell either food or beverages or goods, such as clothes, books, and gifts. Precisely, in this paper, we draw on a selection of more than 100 photographs that we took during the two national lockdown periods from March to April 2020 and December to March 2021. We present images from Linden (Hannover) because of the empirical 'richness' of this neighbourhood with extensive small-shop and pedestrian areas. What we observe, document, and reflect upon here is foremost the emergence of a discourse of support and solidarity that circulates between the small shops of Linden and is manifest on the signs and messages the shops put up in their windows. Hence, we focus on the way in which shops now discursively relate their businesses to the pandemic and to the public health measures taken to combat the spread of the virus and make this visible in public space. Within this emerging discourse, we identify calls for buycotting as a recurring element that shapes the communication with customers through signs displayed in shop windows. So far, academic attention to the plight of small shops during the pandemic has been scarce (for an exception see: Fusté-Forné & Filimon, 2021; Kneese, 2021), a gap we attend to address here.[1]

The local retail and hospitality sites explored in this paper are perceived as social infrastructures that address and serve the needs and wants of different groups (Amin, 2008; Everts, 2010; Latham & Layton, 2019) and function as urban sites where people (albeit often accidently, superficially and briefly) encounter each other (Amin, 2008; Angelo & Hentschel, 2015; Gonzáles, 2019; Henriksen & Tjora, 2018; Latham, 2003). Furthermore, these infrastructures are the spaces were geographies of ethical consumption and buycotts manifest (Barnett et al., 2011; Goodman & Goodman, 2010; Retzlaff, 2020; White, 2013). As such, these places warrant in-depth analysis during the Covid-19 pandemic, as they are vital for making a sociable city and reveal insights about the geographies of ethical consumption in times of crisis.

The paper proceeds as follows: First, we will unpack the politics of ethical consumption and highlight the complexities and ambiguities within acts and discourses of buycotts. Within the review, we particularly emphasize the geographies of such solidarities, questions of identity, and the need to consider the (political) limits of what can be achieved through buycotts. These three themes also guide our analysis. Section 3, presents our methodology and reflects on the challenges and chances of doing research under

conditions of social distancing and introduces Linden as case study. Section 4, presents our research site Linden and the German context of the pandemic, before we present our data analysis in section 5 and conclusion in section 6.

2 Consumption, solidarity, and times of crisis

Consumption and the figure of the 'consumer' play a pivotal part in critical socio-cultural examinations (Adugu, 2014; Bevir & Trentmann, 2007; Friedman, 2001; Littler, 2005). As traditional forms of political participation decline, political consumerism is on the rise in many Western countries (Bevir & Trentmann, 2007; Lindenmeier & Rivaroli, 2021; Neilson, 2010; Sahakian, 2014). Increasingly, geographers have highlighted the need to attend to the spatial relations and distinct geographies of ethical consumption, which sees consumption as an act of exchange and thus as part of wider social relations between individuals and collective bodies like local communities, nation states, trading blocs, or companies (Barnett et al., 2011; Goodman & Goodman, 2010; Retzlaff, 2020; White, 2013). Especially, boycott, the deliberate sacrifice of buying particular products, was used in struggles around Apartheid politics (Beaubien, 1982), civil rights (Kennedy, 1989) and more lately religious disputes (Al-Hyari et al., 2012). Hence, boycott is a politically important instance where people seek to reclaim a political voice (Clarke, 2008; Hartwick, 2000). In this paper, however, we foreground buycotts, that is the deliberate act of buying particular products for ethical, including religious and environmental reasons (Adugu, 2014), as a political sign of solidarity with close and remote communities or environments dispersed along the commodity chain, e.g., as expressed in fair trade products (Goodman, 2004; Naylor, 2018).

The geographies of boycotting and ethical consumption

In contemporary politics, buycotting is one way of addressing what Massey (2004) has described as the 'geographies of responsibility' and hence can be perceived as a tactic to make visible the 'power-geometries' (ibid.) that criss-cross our everyday lives. In fact, buycotting shares many characteristics with civic engagement and is linked to a spirit of 'community problem solving, [...], participation in community associations and raising money for charity' (Sahakian, 2014, p. 175). Moreover, Adugu (2014) as well as Neilson (2010) find, that buycotting is embedded in processes of informal learning about contentious issues that happens within close networks of friends, family, neighbourhood, and local communities. Moreover, word of mouth information, rather than mass media communication, is an important strategy to sustain buycotting behaviours (Neilson, 2010).

For example, geographers like Hubbard (2019) explored the enthusiasm of customers for pop-up micro-pubs in British highstreets and see these pubs as a clear expression of a community-centered effort of urban redevelopment and revival, demonstrating the importance of attributes like 'authenticity', 'locality' and 'Britishness' within such community-oriented endeavours that rely on close proximity between customers and pub owners. Writing from Croatia, Borčić (2020) further explains how solidarity buying groups establish a particular and characteristic closeness between consumers and producers, emphasising a particular emotional and ethical attachment to 'the local.' Proximity and 'the local' hence matter within acts of

buycotting as Neilson (2010) and McGinnis and Gentry (2009) confirm. Thompson and Arsel (2004) equally found that avoiding particular corporate café brands like Starbucks motivates people to visit more local and independent cafés and support them through regular buycotts.

However, the 'local' is not simply a place in which community and closeness can flourish untroubled. Rather, Hubbard notes that the enthusiasm for real ale and micro-pubs is a 'distinctly white, male, and middle-aged pursuit' (2019, p. 763). Moreover, Liu et al. (2019) reveal that discourses and practices of sustainable consumption in China are influenced by a distinct distrust in products made in China due to concerns about food safety there. Thinking with Massey (2004) the 'local' can thus never be the easy remedy or antipode to global processes and networks of consumption, but is itself deeply embedded in and produced by relations of power, affect, and inequality. Hence, a critical geographic sensibility towards processes of buycotting and ethical consumption seems necessary.

Buycotting and identity

The growing attention to the politics of shopping has led to a huge diversity of inter-disciplinary research interests and (ethical) questions that arise with regard to the identity of the consumer (Trentmann, 2004). Hence, what we buy and where we buy it is embedded in manifold (from political to mundane) choices that help us express *who* we are (e.g., British real ale enthusiasts (Hubbard, 2019); local café lovers (Thompson & Arsel, 2004) or sustainability-minded and resource conservative Chinese citizens (Liu et al., 2019)).

As practices of buycotting, such as the purchase of fair trade or organic products, often involves paying more, ethical consumption is embedded in a politics that spans aspects of identity, social distinction, purchasing power as well as political stance (Hall, 2015; Naylor, 2018). Empirical research thus repeatedly finds that acts of political consumption, and especially acts of buycotting, are positively related to socio-demographics (higher educa-tion, higher income, and female gender) and political orientation (left-leaning) and values, such as altruism (Ackermann & Gundelach, 2020; Neilson, 2010; Sahakian, 2014). Furthermore, Shah et al. (2007, p. 220) explain: 'Rather than relying on governmental institutions, these consumers have decided to take on this responsibility themselves through their economic behaviours'.

The 'lifestyle politics' of ethical consumption, only goes so far however (Shah et al., 2007). Authors have critically remarked that the focus of consumption and consumers is emblematic of a neoliberal reply to, for example, environmental problems 'insofar as it implies a market-based solution and a perverse turn to consumption to solve the problems caused by consumption' (Evans et al., 2017, p. 1398). Buycotts of certified organic or fair trade products, hence, might never break free completely of the capitalist logic of the unequal distribution of labour within a globalising economy. Nor do they challenge consumption as a social (capitalist) practice in the first place (Naylor, 2018). What becomes apparent is that buycotts are embedded in complex socio-political and ethical arguments and considerations and have distinct limits and disadvantages as a form of citizen engagement. Moreover, they are enrolled in socio-spatial contexts and identity formations (Barnett et al., 2011).

2.1 Shopping in crisis – shopping to save the system?

How do people consume in times of turmoil or crisis and what role does solidarity play in such (purchasing) situations? Brinks and Ibert (2020, p. 10), define a crisis as a situation that 'encompasses the elements of uncertainty, urgency and threat'. Literature on consumer behaviour, retail, and business management shows how consumer behaviour in times of acute crisis differs from routine practices (e.g., through purchasing other, more, fewer items; Boost & Meier, 2017; Crang, 1996; Hall et al., 2020; Sahakian, 2014; Sarasa et al., 2020; Saridakis, 2012). Practices of hoarding, for example, are common strategies by individual households to react to anticipated or immanent crisis situations and are often perceived as anti-social and the opposite to solidarity (Jackson, 2010). During the Covid-19 pandemic, hoarding was frequently reported and decried in global news outlets. Hoarding was not only perceived as a disruption to established retail logistics and production flows, but rather it provoked harsh moral judgment and was branded as an anti-solidarityy behaviour by various politicians in Germany (Parliament of Lower Saxony, Transcript of plenary debate, 2020) and beyond.

However, this does not mean that ethical consumption automatically stops in moments of crisis. Rather, buycotting was an intuitive mode of support in countries, such as Italy and Spain during the financial crisis. So-called solidarity consumption net-works were common and helped households to withstand the worst of the difficult times of austerity (Baldi et al., 2019). Within the context of mafia-like food businesses in Italy, buycotting has equally been explored as a way to overcome the crisis of mafia involve-ment in that industry (Rivaroli et al., 2019). Within the present Covid-19 pandemic evidence from Spain and the USA exists that buycotting occurred to save local small shops and artisan bakeries in Oakland and various cities in Spain (Fusté-Forné & Filimon, 2021; Kneese, 2021). Crisis-situations can thus foster a sense of social cohesion and solidarity (Müller & Tuitjer, 2022; Springer, 2020), which can also manifest in consumption practices. The spatio . . . .

The spatio-temporalities of shopping were thus thrown into sharp relief by the Covid 19 crisis and perceived as an act that could threaten social cohesion and collective well-being, as much as they advanced as a site of solidarity.

3 Qualitative research in times of covid-19

In times of social distancing, qualitative research faces severe challenges: observing people in their communities and understanding their everyday practices is hardly possible when households are not allowed to mingle, masks must be worn, and public life has come to a standstill. Face-to-face interviews are equally challenging to conduct under these conditions. Moreover, the work routines and research practices of two of the authors were further complicated by the fact that childcare facilities had been closed (for a profound commentary on the gendered burden of care work during the pandemic see: Manzo & Minello, 2020). In addition to these practical and personal concerns, research in times of crisis equally needs to attend to a particular ethics as the world looks in shock at the staggering numbers of people dying from Covid-19 and popular dissent in many countries rises against public health measures.

The neighbourhood as data: photography, observations, and reflections

We chose visual methods that allowed us to keep a distance from the people around us, collect data in public space and document the transformations occurring in our neighbourhoods (Pink, 2007). In addition, we turned to ourselves as informants (Roy & Uekusa, 2020), using collaborative autoethnography (CAE), and with it: '[studying] society through *ourselves*' (Roy & Uekusa, 2020, p. 384, original emphasis). This allowed us to do empirical research at a time when social interaction especially outside households was strongly discouraged.

We used digital co-working programs (e.g., *WebEx*, shared folders, and documents) to build our body of empirical material. The data was collected between March 2020 and March 2021. The data consists of 101 photographs, the analysis of social media posts and business websites, map sketches and a year of on-site observations documented in fieldnotes, as we collected data in the neighbourhoods in which we live. We have used our extensive fieldnotes and vignettes in other publications (the authors, under review) and therefore foreground the visual elements of our ethnography here.

The visual material was analysed using visual segment analysis (Breckner, 2010). After analysing the data separately, we identified common themes within the images we took, see, Table 1.

Table 1. Themes identified in the photographic material.

Timeframe	Number of images	Short description of images
March to April 2020	50 images	People queuing in front of shops; Altered shop designs (e.g., tapes on the floor, marking the space for social distancing) Signs in shop windows asking for support from customers
January to March 2021	51 images	Signs in shop windows pledging to continue to offer services; Signs in shop windows explaining specific 'call and collect' procedures

The interpretations we are presenting further below build on (1) photographic documentation of onsite messages by shop owners addressing their customers, and (2) visualizations of the spatial (re-)designs of the neighbourhood such as maps and sketches of shop fronts, outdoor dining spaces with their newly integrated stand-up displays used for messages and information, accompanied by (3) reflections on our own doings within the city under social distancing rules. The images we took with our smartphones document the communication between shop owners and the public that was physically manifested on cardboards and hand-written advertisements. They thus serve to identify and highlight both the mode of communication between shop owners and (potential) customers, and the mode of self-presentation in local places.

4 Research site and pandemic context

Introducing: Linden, Hannover

Linden is a neighbourhood in Hannover, the capital of Lower Saxony. The city has about 500,000 inhabitants and the residential area Linden (-Mitte and -Nord), with a population of approximately 28.600 inhabitants, is situated within the city-centre and made up of

four to five storey buildings from the turn of the nineteenth century. Formerly, the workers and executives of the rapidly industrializing city lived here, followed by workers and migrants in the 1960s. Today, Linden is increasingly becoming more upmarket and gentrified with an influx of university students and creatives. Around a third of the population holds a university degree in 2020 (Stadt Hannover, 2021) and more than 50% of the votes from this neighbourhood were allocated to the Green Party in the mayor's election in 2019 (Stadt Hannover, 2019). The local milieu of a rather well-educated and well-paid population connects with a local business ecosystem characterized through owner-manager shops from food, clothing, accessories, and books together with many small restaurants (some ethnic minority cuisine, some fast-food, some fine-dining), kiosks (corner shops) and only very few chain stores (e.g., some bigger supermarkets). Local networks exist which promote the owner-led retail ecology of the neighbourhood by organizing (shopping-related) local events and advocating for the consumption from owner-led shops. Often activities addressing the economic as well as the social and cultural development of the neighbourhood overlap. More recently, sustainable consumption has been a recurrent theme in the neighbourhood activities, as a certain share of owner-led shops sell 'fair' fashion and ecological food. In total, parts of Linden exhibit a local milieu where practices of political consumption as well as entrepreneurial socio-economic activism are quite well established. The map below shows the residential areas of Linden (-Nord and -Mitte) with the retail areas highlighted in orange (not depicted: industrial area west of the highway, which belongs to the administrative neighbourhood of Linden-Mitte).

Map 1. Map showing primary research area in Linden. Source: OpenStreetMap.

Pandemic context

Globally, the hospitality sector was hit hard by the crisis; causing economic suffering as pubs, restaurants, hotels, resorts, etc., went into lockdown and often had to reduce staff (Alonso et al., 2020). In Germany, independent bars, restaurants, and cafés are still quite common (chains in this sector only make up about 30% of the total; Neise et al., 2021), tend to have fewer than 100 employees and are thus small (often family run) businesses (DEHOGA, 2019) that predominantly serve local communities and customers (Franz, 2020).

Germany is a federal state in which the local administrative communities have relevant competence with regard to public health measures. In consequence, various bodies in Germany were involved in establishing public health measures. Corresponding to the development of the infection-'waves', the rigidity of public health measures changed over time (for an overview of measures and curve of infections, see, Dannenberg et al., 2020, p. 551). In contrast to other countries, shutdowns were never imposed, that is, people were free to move on the streets but mingling was restricted as were social gatherings indoors. Germany experienced two phases of intensified lockdown, where 'non-essential' businesses and services, all public services were closed, social gatherings and events were banned, and working from home was encouraged. During lockdown, shops and restaurants were allowed to provide pick-up and delivery services only (see annex for a list of businesses, which were exempted from lockdown measures). With the beginning of the pandemic in Europe, the first lockdown started in mid-March 2020 and lasted until May the same year. Measures were lifted during the summer, but shops and restaurants had to close again in October in Lower Saxony and remained closed until May 2021.

Image 1. Overview of Covid 19 regulations in Lower Saxony.

There was substantial government support for restaurants and (small) shops. Owner-manager business were entitled to loans to facilitate the cash-flow, the wages for employees were partly covered by the state and owner-managers and other self-employed people were entitled to social security payments to cover their living expenses (David et al., 2022). In the first lockdown, the state covered the business-related expenses (such as rents and wages) of owner-managers, self-employed, and those with less than 10 employees. Nevertheless, many (small) businesses report that government programs were too complicated to apply for, and the programs distributed too little money too late. David et al. (2022) for example, counts eight different programs with durations as short as a few months for which self-employed could apply for between March 2020 and December 2021.

5 The geography of solidarity: Neighbourhood networks

Image S2 reveals the new-found moral dimension of consumption in crisis. The poster's headline states: 'Solidarität statt Hamsterkäufe' *(Solidarity instead of hoarding[2])* and proposes to organise a platform that coordinates a support network in the neighbourhood that helps vulnerable people, who have to self-isolate, with potentially risky everyday chores, such as grocery shopping. The initiative aims to bring the neighbourhood together through mutual aid and solidarity as they frame the Covid-19 measures as a call to maintain physical distance while remaining close, socially. As Springer (2020, p. 113) notes: 'In times of crises, mutual aid is pragmatic and comes to define our responses at a community level and as a species precisely because it is the most paramount element of our survival'. Furthermore, our observations relate to Mehta's (2020) findings that illuminates how urban residents have started to re-appropriate urban spaces during the pandemic to adhere to physical distancing measures but retain sociality during the crisis.

SOLIDARITÄT STATT HAMSTERKÄUFE

Die meisten Menschen, die in den letzten Tagen die Nachrichten verfolgt haben, wissen es: Corona ist für einige Personengruppen lebensgefährlich, für andere nicht. Besonders gefährdete Menschen können sich die Isolation nicht aussuchen, sondern es ist gerade ihre einzige Perspektive. Diese Menschen müssen Vorsorgen und bspw. Vorräte anlegen. Als vollkommen gesunde und ungefährdete Person muss das nicht sein, vor allem nicht im gleichen Ausmaß. Wir werben hier fütr Rücksichtnahme und Solidarität.

Image 2. Calls for solidarity within the neighbourhood (Image by the author).

Through this image, however, we can also learn that mutual aid is embedded within a more complex moral economy, in which particular types of consumption are promoted as socially and morally acceptable during the crisis and others (hoarding) are not (Müller & Tuitjer, 2022; Parliament of Lower Saxony, 2020). During the crisis then, morale and shopping are brought into an immediate discursive connection that is found in state-ments by politicians as well as on signs throughout the neighbourhood, thus inscribing itself into the everyday lifeworld of people during the pandemic. The neighbourhood emerges as an important scale on which the discourse of a new morality of shopping manifests itself and connects to previous crisis discourses (e.g., the global recession that

unfolded since 2008) that champion local consumption as part of a 'moral economy' in which closeness and caring are important tropes within economic transactions (McEwan & Goodman, 2010). Furthermore, the poster calls for new social practices, for example, shopping for elderly/vulnerable people or conscious consumption of goods at local bistros and cafés. Research from Belgium (Waeterloos et al., 2021) and Greece (Travlou, 2021) has found similar local online-offline networks that advocate for mutual support, confirming the importance of the neighbourhood as a site for action during the crisis.
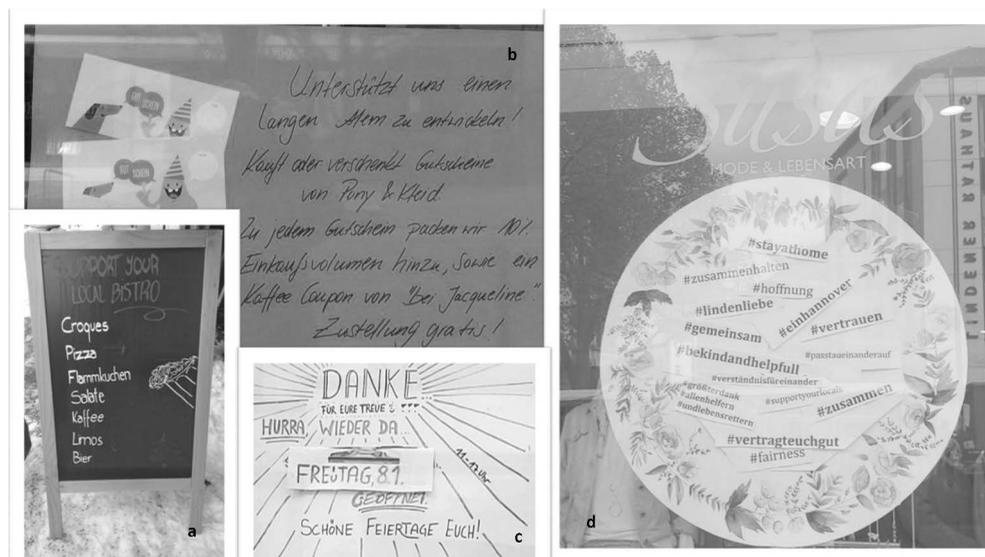
Collage 1. Calls for solidarity with cafés and retail (own images).

The images of collage 1 address passer-bys in the neighbourhood differently. Here, solidarity is evoked between the neighbourhood and the local retail infrastructures. 'Support your local bistro', the sign reads in image A and lists the food and beverages on offer in the place. Photo B ('support us to give us breathing space') calls both on the solidarity of customers and likewise reveals collaboration among the local shop owners, as customers who buy a voucher from the advertising shop will get a coffee-voucher for the café next door for free. Image C simply says, 'Thanks for your loyalty', whilst image D features a list of hashtags from #supportyourlocals to #stayathome and #lindenliebe (Linden love).

A stroll through Linden seems to faintly echo Tobler's (1970) (much debated) first law of geography in which he postulates that near things are more related to each other than distant things. The current pandemic makes us re-consider the importance of proximity and distance and pushes us to perceive our local surrounding as a worthy terrain of solidarity action. Whilst *buycotting* often reflects a way of expressing solidarity with distant producers and promotes a 'care at the distance', as it is the case within fair trade products (Naylor, 2018), this crisis brings our attention towards (economic) hardship and acute suffering at home. As buycotting is defined as an act of 'community problem solving' (Sahakian, 2014, p. 175), the images fit this practice of political consumption well. In times

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of crisis, buycotting might in fact inspire a sense of efficacy in consumers who themselves, like the shop owners, have to cope with uncertainty and adapt to new rules and regulations. The pandemic, as it was noticed before, thus not only inspired a sense of powerlessness, but also a window of opportunity to engage in acts of mutual help and community support (Tyner & Rice, 2020), which matches Shah et al. (2007) findings about political consumption that is often embedded in a belief that action can achieve a positive outcome. Our observations of customers patiently waiting in line at local shops and cafés, equally mirrors the reported enthusiasm by Hubbard (2019) for supporting local micro-pubs to save pub cultures and highstreets in the UK. Consuming particular products within specific neighbourhood settings, thus is a strategy to express mutual support and closeness during different types of crisis, from austerity measures (Hall, 2015; Baldi et al., 2019 for Italy) to neoliberal increases in chain restaurants/pubs (McGinnis & Gentry, 2009; Thompson & Arsel, 2004).

In Linden, however, this is a relatively novel phenomenon, where 'Support your local bistro' is a trend that privileges the local as an, for example, sustainable, fair, ecological scale worthy of support (Borčić, 2020). It is a new variety of this trend in so far, as it is not local producers so much as local (food) retailers that are deemed worthy of support and solidarity. Thus, whilst buycotting tends to aim at changing the element of production within the economic cycle of consumption, the Covid-19 pandemic seems to shift attention towards the spaces of consumption and the sites of retail.

Research from the USA (Kneese, 2021) and Spain (Fusté-Forné & Filimon, 2021) confirm that, the neighbourhood seems to gain importance for consumption during the pandemic (in particular for everyday products obtained from, for example, bakeries (Fusté-Forné & Filimon, 2021)). As urban mobility and transport sharply declined in Hannover (Schaefer et al., 2021), we assume that people spent more time in their homes and the local neighbourhood during lockdown. Research drawing on cell phone data from the USA confirms that the neighbourhood was less frequently left by citizens, leading to cases of neighbourhood isolation in which the local area became the primary – at times only – location of interaction (Marlow et al., 2021). Equally, Freudendal-Petersen and Ho and Maddrell (2020), Mehta (2020) and Glover (2021) notice how local neighbourhoods gained importance as a site of encounter during the pandemic, as people limited their spatial mobility. Für Arbeit (2021, p. 280) critically comments that neighbourhood walking was on the rise during the early periods of lock down and observes how 'civil inattention in public space appears to have shifted with the pandemic to greater civil attention' to the neighbourhood. This supports our interpretation that the neighbourhood gained in attention and importance within people's life during lockdown. As such, the crisis is a moment in which not only proximity/distance within everyday acts like shopping are present, but also a moment in which concepts of place and space and our (political) responsibilities and acts to care for such spaces surface (Massey, 2004; McEwan & Goodman, 2010).

5.1 New shopping procedures, solidarity, and aesthetics in the neighbourhood

Whilst shops asked for support and solidarity (e.g., to stay financially afloat) during the crisis as documented in the Collage 1, shop owners equally displayed signs in which they offer continuous support to their customers, e.g., through adjusting their services by call and collect services (Collage 2, below).

Collage 2. Shops continue to offer their services (own images).

The photos A and B of collage 2, represent visual manifestations of a new type of 'window shopping' that was possible under Covid-19 as people can either 'call and collect' or 'click and collect' the displayed goods in the windows. While most shops and cafés in Linden do have websites, they do not have e-commerce plug-ins. Thus, their take-away offers depend on window shopping and telephone calls or orders via email and represent a particular intermingling of offline and online spaces. The email orders continue to be on a rather direct and personal level, as clients need to write to a contact person to obtain their designated items and have to pick them up in the shop. This contrasts with experiences in other cities where small shops were relying on a digital platform like *etsy* or *ebay* for organising purchases as common in, for example, Oakland, California during times of lockdown (Kneese, 2021). In Spain, where local artisan bakeries experienced a surge of continuous support from loyal local customers (Fusté-Forné & Filimon, 2021) stricter lockdown measures equally encouraged many of these stores to increase their social media presence to remind customers of their continuous services. Whilst Spanish and US-American social media posts differed in terms of physical proximity to customers from German window shopping, similar messages and discourses were reported, as the bakeries both thanked customers for their loyalty as well as pledged their continuous supplies. The new form of window-shopping in Linden, visible in our photographs, hence also serves to maintain the 'social infrastructural' (Latham & Layton, 2019) function of the stores. Hence, local varieties of public health measures crucially influenced the experiences of space, community, and neighbourhood within different countries and mundane acts of shopping alert us to the shared, yet differentiated, experience of the pandemic. More broadly speaking, our findings also support a call for more geographically informed and local perspectives on practices and discourses of ethical and sustainable consumption (Liu et al., 2019).

A temporal shift in the type of messages used by stores could be observed. In particular, during the second national lockdown, which officially began in January 2021 in Germany, 'we continue to be there for you'- messages increased in Linden (and in chain

stores in city centres and online stores alike). Here, shop owners call on a concept of solidarity which is a form of mutual support between two parties that recognize that they are dependent on each other (for income, for wellbeing, for a sense of home). Within the social science literature on solidarity, this is termed 'horizontal solidarity' that emerges through the interaction of mutually dependent people (Lahusen, 2020). Such a concept of solidarity sits in contrast to the notion of solidarity routinely invoked in, for example, fair trade products that take inequality between producers and consumers across the global north/global south divide as evident (Naylor, 2018). Especially the consumption of food or certain food products is linked to identity constructions and lifestyles embedded in politics of class, gender, and ethnicity (Goodman & Goodman, 2010; Trentmann, 2004).

Connected to the aspect of identity are the aesthetics of the handwritten posters that we documented in this paper. First, the posters contribute to a sense of place as it is commonly (albeit not uncritically) associated with the '"real", "grounded", "everyday", "lived"' (Massey, 2004, p. 7, original emphasis) experiences. Handmade posters seem to foster a notion of relatability, creativity and assemble a quality of authenticity. Kneese (2021) similarly remarks that the small independent stores in Oakland she investigated during the Covid-19 crisis struggled to maintain their distinct aesthetics and related authenticity to their online presence on e-commerce platforms. Likewise, aesthetics seem to matter within the small-shop ecology of Linden we observed, as hand-written posters are the continuation of the mode of communication of these small owner-led shops. Many of these stores used to have hand-written signs with, for example, their opening hours already before the crisis. Indeed, the local dimension of communication becomes quite visible in the shops' practice of (hand-written) signs in the windows, which can only attract the attention of those who are (regularly) passing by. Second, the posters increase a sense of the temporality, or 'urgency' (Brinks & Ibert, 2020) of the crisis. As such, they convey the sense of disruption and exception of the crisis. Potentially, they also inspire a sense of hope as far as the crisis might be over soon and things can return to normal.

5.2 Solidarity-based consumption and its limits

While we have explored in detail the ways in which notions of solidarity were expressed in Linden, we want to contextualise these findings with statistical insights about the retail and hospitality sector in Germany during the crisis. From occasional talks with shop owners, we know that some tried to hold on to their staff using 'Kurzarbeitergeld'.[3] Official statistics confirm that in the gastronomy sector, unemployment linked to Covid-19 increased almost by 32% compared to the unemployment rate in this branch in 2019 (Agentur Für Arbeit, 2021, online). Those who remained in employment were facing a severe cut in working hours, which is only partly compensated through Kurzarbeitergeld. In gastronomy, almost 99% of the business and almost 65% of the employees received Kurzarbeitergeld; in retail, numbers were much lower with an esti-mated 17% of employees in February 2021 (Link & Sauer, 2021). The cited numbers only include jobs covered by social security. Any marginal, atypical or irregular employment, which is not uncommon both in retail and gastronomy, is not covered by the official numbers. Acts of buycotting within the neighbourhood and adhering to calls for solidarity articulated by shop owners within the neighbourhood may thus save particular

businesses but may not suffice to reduce economic hardship for the employees, despite state support in Germany. In other national contexts with even fewer support schemes, Covid-19 restrictions were added to the injuries of austerity and declining welfare standards (Standring & Davies, 2020). For example, Kneese (2021) and Fusté-Forné and Filimon (2021) confirm that the losses of small shops in Oakland and artisan bakeries in Spain and the immense burden of having to adapt to constantly changing new rules and regulations for their businesses, were not compensated by state support schemes.

Our focus on a middle-class inner-city district like Linden can equally make us forget about other urban areas with a potentially different local 'retail ecology' that is less flexible and where residents might be less prone to participate in solidarity-based acts of consumption. Research from the UK analysed people's experiences of social cohesion within different neighbourhoods (Borkowska & Laurence, 2021). The survey found that perceptions of social cohesion eroded more quickly in deprived neighbourhoods and among ethnic minority communities, while a sense of social cohesion among economically better-situated neighbourhoods declined less. While the paper did not focus on solidarity-based consumption in these neighbourhoods nor did we take up an explicitly comparative perspective, it becomes obvious that socio-economic status and retail ecology of neighbourhoods matter in how the crisis was perceived. More comparative work is necessary to determine the impact of such factors on the retail ecology during crisis.
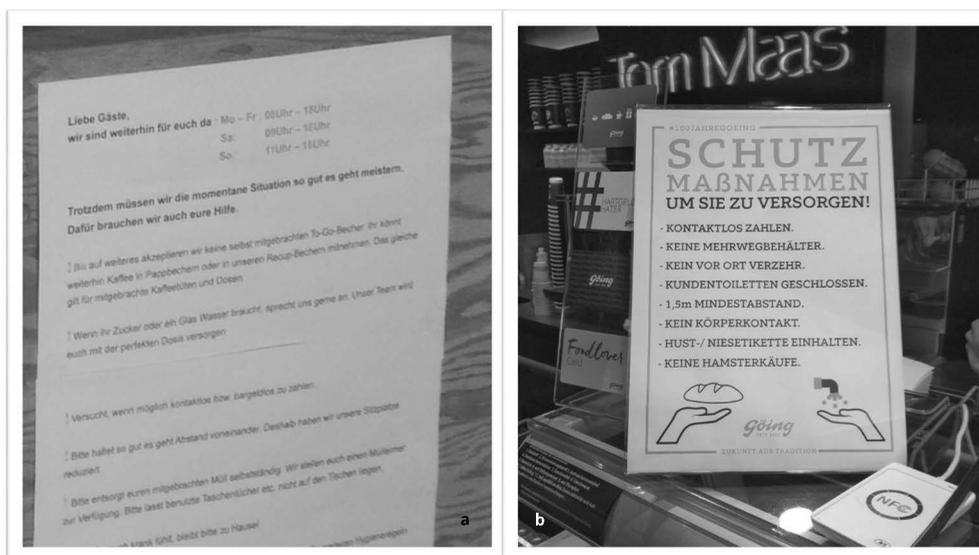
Collage 3. New rules for take away (own images).

The take-away culture that the Covid-19 pandemic intensified in Linden is also highlighting the conflictual way in which discourses and practices of solidarity can collide. Within a neighbourhood of 50% green voters, many cafés and restaurants encouraged bringing reusable coffee mugs or your own Tupperware to the shops before Covid-19. For public health reasons, however, this practice has partly been discouraged during the

(<= p. 654)

pandemic. Both images of collage 3 state that bringing mugs or containers for food and beverages will not be accepted. Instead, disposable boxes, cups, and bowls were used, producing immense amounts of waste (Adeyl and Sills, 2020). Hence, the pandemic adds to the mobile waste-scape that circulates through continents and oceans, connecting our consumption across spaces and scales in uncanny ways (Arnall & Kothari, in press). Although we can observe attempts to use recyclable materials (e.g., certain kinds of cardboard) for take away-dishes, the waste problem remains. The consumer is now confronted with the dilemma of choosing solidarity with the local small-shop ecology at the expense of environmental pollution or vice versa. The current crisis is thus also a crisis in which different discourses of consumption compete for hegemony. It reveals that consumption as a strategy to overcome crisis has its limits, as it highlighted earlier in other contexts (Goodman, 2004; Goodman & Goodman, 2010; Naylor, 2018).

6 Conclusion

In this paper, we explored the neighbourhood of Linden in Hannover, Germany, and documented how the local small-shop ecology embraced discourses of solidarity-based consumption and encouraged acts of boycotting. This was done by the shop-owners through fostering a discourse of mutual aid, interdependency as well as solidarity in their communications with customers and visually expressing it through signs displayed in their windows.

We find that during the crisis, shopping has become framed normatively, with hoarding being branded as anti-social and purchases at local stores and food retailers framed as a necessary act of support. Through our photographic documentation, we especially evidenced and reflected on the changing role of the neighbourhood during the pandemic and the new ascribed meaning of shopping in times of crisis as an act of horizontal solidarity within the local community. As urban travel became limited in the city of Hannover during the pandemic (Schaefer et al., 2021), the local neighbourhood became an important site for social contacts. Crucially, hence, acts of buycotting were now grounded in local experiences and immediate acts of communication via signs calling for support, rather than being directed at distant strangers (Naylor, 2018). Furthermore, (local) identity and aesthetics, we argue, modulate these calls for solidarity. By retaining signs as a way of communicating with customers, a sense of authenticity was preserved. Moreover, shops employed a language in which buycotting was framed as an act of mutual aid. Within the context of Linden, we find that local commerce does not *per se* lose during the crisis, but rather that it appeals to a boost of conscious support and sustained solidarity within the neighbourhood. How successful these appeals will be in the end, remains to be investigated, as the pandemic and associated health measures are on-going by the time of writing.

We have furthermore highlighted the limits of solidarity-based consumption on the local level and pointed out that buycotting in the neighbourhood can potentially even aggregate particular crises, like the waste and climate crisis. This points to the dilemma inherent in solidarity-based consumption and links our findings to wider debates on ethical consumption that highlight the complicated nature of ethics, care, and responsibility in geography (Goodman & Goodman, 2010; Barnett et al., 2011; White, 2013; Retzlaff, 2020; McEwan & Goodman, 2010).

(<= p. 655)

Notes

1. In particular, grocery shopping and e-grocery (via online delivery) saw an upswing in Germany (Dannenberg et al., 2020). It is equally known that online retail giants like Amazon have seen a boost in sales and massively added to their brand value since the beginning of the pandemic (see: Amazon Quarterly Results, online).
2. For complete translations of all signs, please see the annex of the paper.
3. The German state covers 60% of the earnings foregone to a cut in working hours. The compensation rate increases up to 80% with duration of under-employment spell.

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