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Multiplicity of encounters

On the encounter capacity of public space using the example of HafenCity, Hamburg*

Abstract: The planning of urban districts involves ideas of how people in cities would like to and should best encounter each other. The term ‘encounter capacity,’ which denotes social and material dimensions of enabling a ‘social mix,’ has emerged in the reflexive planning practice of Hamburg’s HafenCity to increase the realization of encounters through planned public space. This article explores the conception and reality of encounter capacity. It is based on commissioned research in the districts of the urban development area which were completed in 2015. The term “multiplicity of encounters,” developed from ethnographic observation and inspired by the work of Doreen Massey, refers to the multiplication of encounters within specific horizons of meaning: neighborliness, eventfulness and trendiness. The high-priced housing and consumption possibilities, the image of an exclusive district and the group-specific rhythms of everyday life are selectively but never completely cancelled out by these factors.

Keywords: urban anthropology, urban planning, encounter, social mix, urbanity

Planning is a practice that links reality and imagination simultaneously as it reproduces their difference. The planning of urban districts is no exception. When we were tasked by the urban development company HafenCity GmbH¹ to study the encounter capacity of the built space of HafenCity that had been declared as public,² it had already been realized in some of its then still central and now western areas at Sandtorkai, Grasbrook and Überseequartier; however, large parts were still under construction or even in planning and remain so to this day. While the research assignment for us as employees of the university located in the district testifies to a selective interest in the scientific thematization and study of a planning goal and its realization, an event as unpredictable and far-reaching as the global COVID-19 pandemic does not only question the capacity

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1 Robert Hübner edited the research report and Jennifer Löwenstein illustrated the joint observation of encounters. We would like to thank both of them very much, as well as the anonymous reviewers for their constructive criticism of previous versions of this article.

2 The so-called public space in several districts of Hamburg is no longer owned by the city of Hamburg but belongs, for example, to investment communities, such as in the case of the Überseequartier of the HafenCity.

of concrete realizations of meeting spaces but, more fundamentally, the ‘future capacity’ of planning. Is what was considered a planned facilitation of encounters before the pandemic still sustained today? Can the encounter capacities of built public space be expanded to meet both the demands of dealing with the pandemic and the idea of a desired encounter?

In this article, the focus is not on the cultural-analytical examination of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the transformation of public space. Nor is the reflexive practice of urban development, on which our initial research is based, the central object of our reflections at this point. Instead, the perspective on the multiplicity of encounters proposed here, which emerged from the empirical study of observable encounters in 2015, provides the opportunity to sharpen the perception of which factors enable and reinforce encounters in cities. In the following, we emphasize the intertwining of elements, such as water or wind and built environments, planned interventions, everyday uses and largely normalized notions of ‘encounter’ and their relation to ‘urbanity.’

The empirical perspective on ‘encounter’ has led to the observation that individual situations of encounter are ‘multiplied’ in everyday life by being translated into different media forms: an encounter between neighbors is retold in the neighborhood; a major event in which very different encounters take place is recorded for the purpose of information in the news, in images and sounds, and multiplied in this way. In our analysis, we draw on the term “multiplicity of places” used by the British geographer Doreen Massey with which she refers to the variety of experiences of places that occur simultaneously in everyday life (1994: 3). Conceptualizing encounters as fundamentally multidimensional opens up the possibility for a cultural analysis of the urban to explain the desired participation in and the randomness of encounters. Knowledge of the “multiplicity of encounters” can, in turn, be incorporated into matters of design.

How can this conceptual framework be transferred to HafenCity, Hamburg? On the one hand, we encountered Hamburg’s HafenCity as a specific place where this “multiplicity of encounters” occurs, for example, because it has special material conditions (water, wind, or emerging flora). On the other hand, the planning area also points beyond itself because it has become a model for the planning of postindustrial land use in the urban areas of Northern Europe since the turn of the millennium. Both specificity and model character are reflected in the encounters observed and their multiplication.

In a first step, we present HafenCity, Hamburg, as an example of planned urban quarters that emerge from a reflexive planning practice that is rather common these days. We show the specific planning ideas of urbanity and the associated notions of desired encounters in the context of the relevant literature. We then elaborate on concise snapshots represented in a drawing and bring them together into four patterns. The potential of an urban-ethnographic approach lies in the socio-material perspective from which the encounter capacity does not depend solely on built conditions but, as we will show in the following, on the possibility of multiplying encounters.

Encounters as an attribute of planned urbanity

What can the preconditions for encounters be in a district in which, on the basis of a master plan (GHS 2000) and the subsequent development following the commissioning of a concept, a large number of buildings and associated outdoor areas have already been realized, while other sections are either in the process of being realized or have yet to be planned? The mix of functions in HafenCity, the former inner-city port area of Hamburg on the banks of the Elbe river,³ which has been in planning and redevelopment since 1997, is enormous: uses as diverse as housing (subsidized, cooperative, private), education and culture (from day-care centers to schools and public and private universities to vocational training places, but also museums and exhibition spaces, as well as the lighthouse, the Elbphilharmonie concert hall, consumption and production, as well as company headquarters, nongovernmental organizations and spaces for religious gatherings) are unfolding on 157 hectares.

However, this diversity of uses does not mean that encounters take place in HafenCity between people who are quite different socially, culturally and in terms of their reasons for being there. During our 2015 survey, HafenCity was considered a “ghetto of the rich”⁴; a powerful image that was difficult to counteract at the time when the third construction phase with higher socially subsidized housing had not yet been completed, and the temporary accommodation for refugees at the outer end of the third construction phase had not yet been built.

The development company HafenCity GmbH was also aware of the discrepancy between encounters taking place, the planned and emerging diversity of use, and its perception, and they examined this in the form of their own (scientific) publications as well as commissioned studies. Under the programmatic heading “Social Mix and Encounter Capacity: A Pragmatic Social Model for a New Downtown,” Jürgen Bruns-Berentelg, who has been a member of the management board since the beginning and was the public face of HafenCity GmbH at the time of our research, asks what kind of “social mix” is even possible in planning contexts generally dominated by the market (2012: 70). Bruns-Berentelg puts this skeptical initial question alongside the concept of “encounter capacity,” which could make the foundations for encounters between strangers in public and semipublic spaces visible and, thus, plannable. In the eyes of the urban developer, encounter capacity encompasses an emancipatory potential: the possibility that it may not be individualistic ideas of a “NIMBY” public sphere that prevail

3 HafenCity Hamburg is a prominent example of “urban waterfront regeneration,” i. e. for urban development projects that, in the course of building container ports, have opened up old harbor areas for other uses and, in doing so, rely heavily on iconic architecture, see, for example, Lorens (2014).

4 See, for example, Menzl (2010: 15). Regarding criticism directed at the high-priced segment in residential construction in HafenCity, see Füller et al. (2013) and the related discussion in Menzl et al. (2011: 35ff.).

here,⁵ but that it produces social encounters between different people (Bruns-Berentelg 2012: 77). Therefore, in his view, it is precisely the public places that contribute to the development of encounter capacities in urban society, and the socially and physically determined encounter capacity constitutes the emancipatory quality of core inner cities (Bruns-Berentelg 2010: 426). In this sense, he refers to the places that generated such encounters and which should be the object of urban development: “Possibility of encounter can transform into the encounter capacity of a place, which makes it clear that, dependent on the social actors, spaces and time of day involved, these can be understood as relational potential spaces with at least ambiguous influence, but which can also be developed” (Bruns-Berentelg 2012: 78).

This idea of encounter capacity, generated here from the perspective of urban development, is closely linked to a certain idea of urbanity as an urban planning model (Lees 2010),⁶ whose fundamentally metro- and Eurocentric tinge has been pointed out in recent years (Lanz 2015; Schmidt-Lauber 2018). Moreover, the planability of urbanity has often been criticized as an instrument of symbolic politics (Wüst 2007: 4) and wishful thinking or a marketing tool (Baum 2008: 49, 59; Diehlmann 2013; Hengartner and Schindler 2014). The term ‘urbanity,’ nevertheless, continues to resonate for (urban development) practice, and the question of the encounter capacity opens up a research perspective of everyday practices that may help to produce this capacity. We, therefore, do not understand urbanity as an analytical concept that we use normatively, but as a cipher for qualities that are described in urban development as planning goals to be achieved (Dirksmeier, Mackrodt, and Helbrecht 2011). Planned urbanity, seen in this way, participates in the design of, in Brigitta Schmidt-Lauber’s words, landscapes of urbanity that reify an idea of the city and an expectation of urban life (2018: 20). The encounters we observed in HafenCity, on the other hand, structure the specific form of urbanity on-site as everyday cultural dimensions (Amin 2008: 9, 12; Amin and Thrift 2002: 17). They occur in HafenCity against, with or because of its planned development. In the following, we will elaborate eight snapshots in the form of graphic condensations from the diversity of encounters and their performativity.

5 The problem of NIMBY (‘Not In My Back Yard’) was studied in HafenCity by HafenCity GmbH, see Menzl (2010: 12–25).

6 Alongside sustainability and identity, urbanity is one of the three guiding principles that were decisive for the qualitative design of HafenCity (Bruns-Berentelg 2014: 23). “Urbanity,” as a counter-design to the urban planning paradigm of functional separation, today combines ideas of centrality and density that are certainly also fed by sociology (e.g. from the works of Emile Durkheim and Louis Wirth, cf. Roskamm 2011: 19 ff., 40 ff., 299 ff.). For an introduction in terms of the history of ideas, see Baum (2008) or Häußermann and Siebel (1998).

Multiple interactions: snapshots

There are many different ways of encountering each other: by chance or intentionally, repeatedly or only once. Encounters can take place between many people or just two. They happen in one place, be it a shared physical place or, with the help of media of communication, in different places that are connected to each other via these media, either at different times (e.g. letters by mail) or simultaneously (e.g. the telephone or internet). Seen in this way, encounters create spaces – encounter spaces. In order to scientifically grasp this diversity of encounters, which we reduce here to encounters between people, two criteria of differentiation have become established in cultural and social anthropological, geographical and sociological urban research. Firstly, a distinction is made according to the degree of plannedness or randomness of the encounter. Random encounters⁷ are particularly considered an expression of urbanity. The second essential differentiation is made by the degree of familiarity of the individuals: How well do the people who meet know each other, or how can they classify each other socially? The underlying assumption is that the classifications that are effective in everyday life, such as gender, ethnicity and class or milieu, are conveyed at first glance. In this way, identity can be reproduced and/or changed in encounters (Frers and Meier 2007: 1). In the urban context, in addition to the stranger introduced by Georg Simmel (1908) as typical of big cities, the “familiar stranger” is important as a social figure (Milgram 1992). People who use the same subway to commute to work every day, who, thus, know each other by sight and yet are strangers to each other, are a classic sociological example of this. They do not communicate verbally with each other, but can identify each other (Milgram 1992). The figure of the “known stranger” has led to further distinctions (e.g., Wehrheim 2009: 35) in which, for example, encounters in closer or more manageable relationships, such as networks or neighborhoods, have been examined (e.g. Kusenbach 2008).

Attention to different degrees of the randomness of encounters or acquaintance of the people who meet has been extended in recent years to include asking about the contexts that bring about “contact opportunities.”⁸ When fleeting encounters with their lasting consequences (Dirksmeier, Mackrodt, and Helbrecht 2011; Helbrecht and Dirksmeier 2011) become the focus of research, the social and material effects of “rubbing along” (Watson 2006) come into view. Seen in this light, situations of “unex-

7 The use of the term “chance encounter” in the discourse around the creative class, on the other hand, refers to something else: here, the chance meeting in a manageable context is understood as a prerequisite for innovation, for example, the informal chat at the coffee machine. Elisabeth Currid translates this assumption to the neighborhood level (2008). She explains New York City’s high level of cultural innovation by the density of cultural actors and the opportunity the city provides for random meetings and exchange. The difference is that these actors are not fundamentally strangers to each other.

8 Beckmann (2015: 84), for example, on reducing prejudices; see also Fincher (2003), Menzl et al. (2011), Wehrheim (2009) and Wessendorf (2014).

pected encounter” contribute to the emergence of urban society in the first place (Amin 2008: 13).

This performative understanding of encounters also guided us in the observation and analysis of encounters in HafenCity. The encounters observed could not be categorized exclusively into one of the aforementioned graduations of randomness and familiarity, and yet the random encounter played a conspicuous performative role. The spectrum of encounters in Grasbrookpark, the starting point of the ethnographic observations, and beyond showed how in this area, for example, people meet indirectly by moving out of the way, meet unintentionally through eye contact and, therefore, try to avoid it (Kendon 1990: 52 f.). Traffic routes – especially when they are narrow and crowded – are predestined for this kind of encounter, which is not, as described by Erving Goffman, deepened through looking, smiling and greeting (2009). Mobile communication media also expand the forms of non-encounter: virtual encounters allow a simultaneous withdrawal from what is happening on-site. Deeper encounters based on existing social relationships (colleagues, networks, friends) also manifest in different ways: as brief encounters formed around a specific point of contact, as targeted encounters focused on a common interest that is to be represented, or as encounters anchored in an everyday place.

In this section, therefore, we have brought together the encounters observed and explain them from the respective everyday situation, practice and effect. Both the degree of randomness and plannedness plays a role, as does the nature of the social relations on which they are based or which produce them. We have distilled eight snapshots from the abundance of charted forms of encounter that are characteristic of HafenCity’s public space:

- Encounter with a potential for deepening: such as accompanying children
- Indirect encounter: such as leaving fragile traces behind
- Unintentional and avoided encounters: such as passing through
- Virtual encounters: such as talking on the phone, reading, writing
- Brief encounters: such as waiting and taking a break
- Expected encounters: such as lunch
- Directed encounters: such as representing interests
- Unplanned regular encounters: such as spending time together

We present them in Figure 1 as visual sketches whose title condenses the character of the form of encounter.

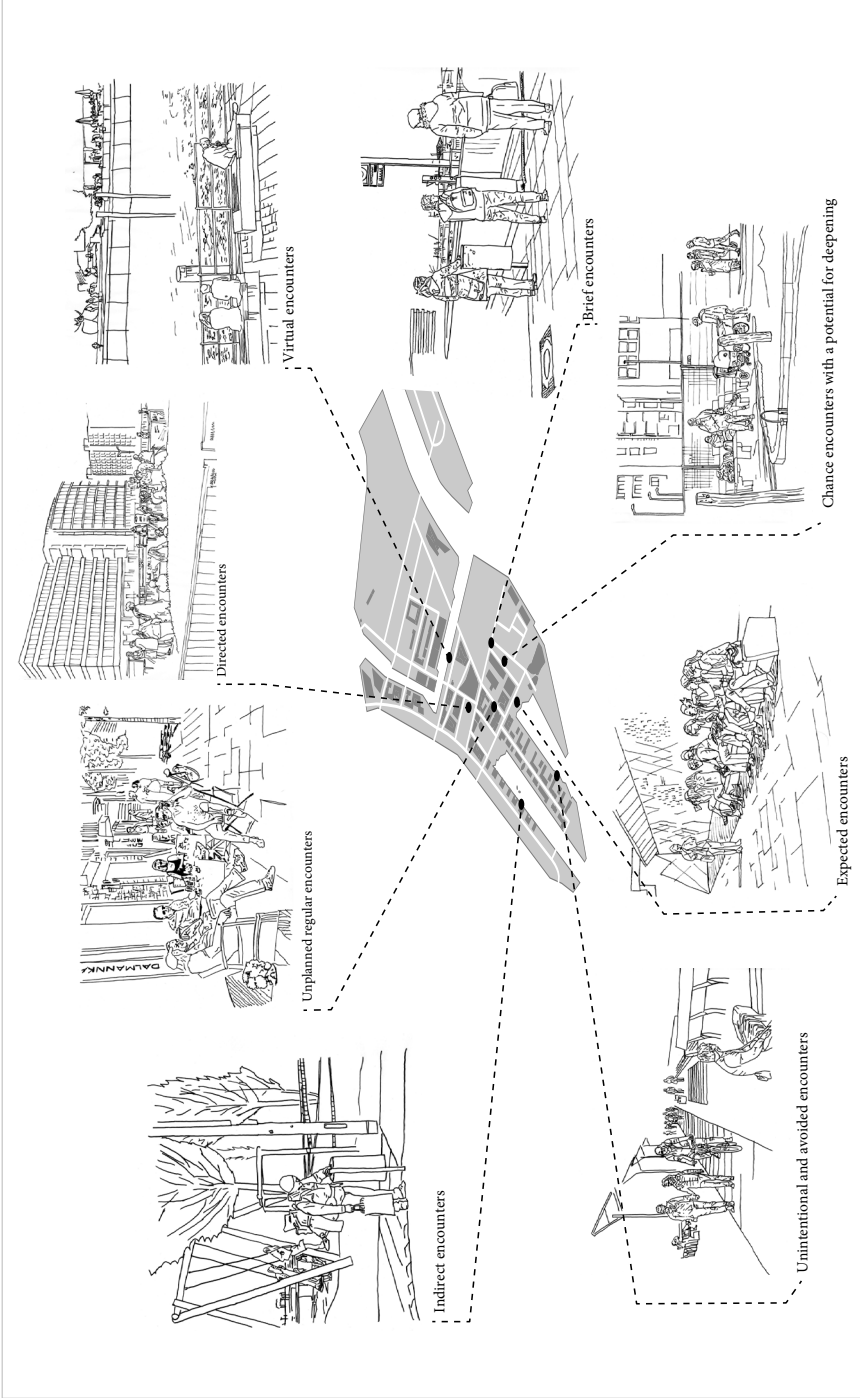


Fig. 1: Cartography of the described situations of encounter (Illustration: Jennifer Löwenstein)

The local starting point for our four-month survey was the heavily frequented Grasbrookpark. According to the urban anthropologist Setha Low, parks are particularly well suited for studying the cultural and social diversity of a neighborhood. They appeal to different senses, and allow for multiple uses and subjective attributions of meaning (Low 2000; Low, Taplin, and Scheld 2005). Accordingly, we have paid close attention to space and spatial perception through perceptual walks (Rolshoven 2001) and mappings (Ploch 1994; Wildner 2016; Wildner and Tamayo 2004; Ziervogel 2011). In addition to systematic observations (Beer 2007), we applied go-alongs as a space-exploring form of interview (Cuny, Färber, and Preißing 2020; Keding and Weith 2014; Kusenbach 2008), as well as interviews and participant observations as actor-centered approaches to evaluate the material collected in this way with a view to (spatial) practices and conceptions of social encounters. A total of 23 short interviews and informal conversations were conducted at all locations named with mostly middle-class residents (female) and users, such as employees or self-employed individuals in the field of marketing, landscape architecture, education and the service sector; in addition, a construction worker, a pastor, a homeless bottle collector and a pensioner were interviewed. In addition, four go-along interviews were conducted with five people, residents and employees (including HafenCity GmbH and Ökumenisches Forum) as well as three hang-out interviews with young people, employees and vendors.

The location of the encounters described in the map of HafenCity illustrates (Fig. 1) that they are not dependent on any specific design, as shown by the use of the wastelands or the sidewalk for sitting. Instead, the prerequisite for the diversity of encounters seems to be the inclusion into everyday and walkable pursuits and associated routes (Goffman 1982, Grannis 2009). This may be especially true for people with children, whose paths often converge in Grasbrookpark. It is primarily the public spaces produced and used collectively by networks or groups of friends (e.g. Grasbrookpark) that facilitate specific encounters (Kusenbach 2008). Less intensive encounters occur between *all* users of HafenCity – even if they are of an indirect nature, as in the case of the bottle collectors (Moser 2014; Rau 2014). The more intensive situations of encounter are experienced within individual groups: for example, residents, parents with children and tourists, but not all of them materialize for a longer period (e.g. in the form of appropriated seating). In other words, and with a view to the meeting places, when the relationships of the people who meet intensify, and they become increasingly familiar with each other and, thus, less of a stranger, the demands placed on the encounter spaces also change. Places that facilitate chance encounters turn out to be unsuitable for networks and circles of friends or are reinterpreted, shaped and occupied through more intensive appropriation. This can make them unsuitable for chance encounters – and, thus, exclude strangers. The deepening of our research has led us to five patterns of encounters that emerge from the analysis of the material conditions, their discursive description and the rhythms of encounters.

Materiality and rhythm: patterns of encounter

Four recurring topoi have emerged from the observations, conversations and interviews that address the materiality of the place. Seen in this light, these material characteristics of HafenCity are also discursively effective beyond their specific materiality. These are the structural development and the accompanying everyday experience that the surroundings are in constant “transformation” (1); the perceived omnipresence of water (2); the sometimes iconic architecture (3); and HafenCity’s image as an exclusive residential area (4). These material environmental conditions are repeatedly invoked in everyday knowledge and play into the quality of HafenCity’s encounter capacity. The following patterns of encounters can be crystallized from the snapshots that include the built environment. They also give an impression of the rhythm of the interactions.

1 Nodes for encounters

Who? The movements in the public space of HafenCity are shaped by specific rhythms of work: in the morning, the employees arrive, the residents leave; at midday, groups of employees move to the bakeries and the supermarket; in the afternoon, the employees leave HafenCity via the subway stations and the residents shape the public space.

How? Nodes emerge on the routes between transport infrastructure and supply that generate encounters between ‘known strangers’ or acquaintances in particular.

2 Group movements and spatial behavior

Who? Employees and residents in particular move through HafenCity in fixed rhythms and a directed manner, for example, to look after children, play with them or take a break together (including skaters, park tourists and personal trainers). In doing so, they form groups.

How? Groups take up more space and are slower in their decisions, reactions and movements than individuals. Many places in HafenCity are designed as meeting places: benches that can accommodate four mothers with prams and small children; seating and reclining furniture on which an entire group of students can eat and relax.

3 Consolidation of encounters

Who? Residents have created everyday forums through which communication channels and encounters become permanent utilizing meetings spaces, such as an enoteca or a bar, or communication media, such as the HafenCity newspaper.

How? The initiators moderate social processes and strengthen the sense of belonging. Different places of gathering have emerged for different interest groups.

4 Encounters with spatial experts

Who? In addition to the ice cream, coffee or strawberry vendors, tourist and Segway guides, people come to collect bottles, to sell the street newspaper *Hinz&Kunzt* or play street music. People come to *HafenCity* at night and weekends to do training and sports.

How? These groups of people help shape the place through their independent or leisure-oriented activities. They remain exclusively in the public space and sometimes communicate intensively (with the exception of the ‘invisible’ bottle collectors). Apart from the coffee vendors in *Grasbrookpark*, they usually remain anonymous, but they are contact people with local knowledge, especially for tourists.

5 Separation of place of work and of residence

Who? Employees and students routinely use the public space as a transit space to the subway or to bakeries in their rhythms of work and breaks.

How? They move within windows of time on purposeful connecting lines and, thus, between rather inflexible meeting points. Their use of *HafenCity* is planned and usually only allows encounters in the form of arranged meetings.

These patterns of encounter are specific to the areas of *HafenCity* we studied. This is especially true for the material dimension of the meeting places. At the same time, the actors and uses can be found in many other (urban) places as well. Therefore, these patterns are not suitable as a model for each and every other pace of urban development. However, they are transferable as an analytical approach. This also applies to the far-reaching spatiotemporal dimensions of encounter capacity, as we would like to show in the following.

Representations and imaginations as horizons of encounter

A pleasant but coincidental situation of encounter can be remembered or retold and lead to trying to bring it about again. It becomes a topic of conversation and results in action. It becomes embedded into contexts of meaning and practices that we would like to call *horizons of encounter*. Since these are translations and, thus, multiplications of situations once experienced, we speak in this case, following Doreen Massey’s understanding of “multiplicity of places” – opposing, evading or overlapping worlds lived simultaneously (1994: 3) – of the “multiplicity of encounters.” Ultimately, the encounter capacity of a space also consists of this multiplicity of possibilities.

Guided tours through *HafenCity*, for example, connect the space with narratives and images. They also facilitate a number of the encounters described above and are

remembered through subsequent narrations and documents, such as photographs.⁹ The following field notes convey an impression of this. They begin with a description of the work of a city tour guide.

On the Magellan Terraces, she explained to her group that they are standing in front of a music stand with a sheet of music on it. She asked them to squint a little, look towards the Elbphilharmonie and they would be able to see the dancing notes on the façade. Then she led the groups to Meßmer Momentum for a tea tasting (field research diary HD, April 4 and 20, 2015). She was one of the few city tour guides who tried to convey the character of the district through points of contact that could be experienced directly and did not allude to the image of the (newly) rich HafenCity residents with sensational figures on rent and housing prices or names of HSV football club players, the Klitschkos or Helene Fischer (field research diary HD, June 23, 2015). Nevertheless, these celebrities are important virtual actors in HafenCity who make it an attractive encounter space.¹⁰

On the one hand, these projections and expectations are transported by prior knowledge from the media and the information provided by the guides; they steer perception, while the guides lead through the district. Fourteen different tour providers were known to HafenCity GmbH at the time of our research; 210 groups were guided by these providers in May 2014 and 2015 alone.¹¹ The visits encourage people to document and tell others about them and multiply in this way. Pictorial motifs of the new buildings and harbor views or surprising events support this capacity for encounter.

Three horizons of encounter seemed particularly important to us for the possibility of multiplying encounters and, thus, for characterizing the encounter capacity in HafenCity: neighborliness, eventfulness and trendiness.

Neighborhood

The following sequence contains a series of different social encounters that were differentiated into individual situations of encounter in the previous chapter. The sequence shows how an encounter between strangers translates into various other encounters in the neighborhood and thus multiplies.

A private argument between a couple is taking place on the side of the road on Saturday afternoon. While waiting and looking at the couple, my interlocutor talks about an unknown neighbor and their encounter in the lift. He did not introduce himself and yet he had been living in her house for half a year. In the case of the argument on the street in HafenCity, the staring caught the attention of the arguing couple and initiated an interaction between the observers and the couple.

9 On the communicative potential of urban tourism, city marketing and collective memory politics, see Farías (2008).

10 Direct quotations from field notes have been translated from German.

11 All statistical information from HafenCity Hamburg GmbH, as of July 2015.

Later, at a meeting with neighbors she knows and has befriended, she talks about the dispute and her intervention. In this narrative, the encounter becomes an emblem of what the neighborhood as a place of encounter is actually supposed to be and what it can do. Later during our interview, she says: 'They always say that HafenCity is always so cold and full of rich people. But this is just a brilliant neighborhood.'
(AI2, interview HD, May 7, 2015).

Four different encounters take place in this episode. Firstly, the ethnographer and her interlocutor exchange their understanding of the situation via eye contact with each other: they find it threatening. They decide verbally that they will remain standing there. Secondly, they both direct their gazes at the couple, who legitimately feel that they are being stared at. Staring for the interaction sociologist Erving Goffman (2009), as a means of negative sanction, has the function of social control of a range of inappropriate behavior in public. Goffman states that staring is often a first warning to the individual when he or she is in danger of stepping out of line and the last one that one is obliged to give (2009: 101). Strangeness is articulated by emphasizing (staring at) the inappropriateness of the behavior. An idea of neighborliness and neighborly concern is expressed in both encounters, the one just experienced and the one recounted. Finally, the last direct encounter is the later meeting of the interlocutor with her friends and acquaintances in which she again combines the encounter she has just witnessed with the couple and the conflict situation she remembers in order to articulate her idea of neighborhood.

The entire sequence illustrates that encounters have to be interpreted based on more than a snapshot of the situation. They contain not only components from past encounters and experiences but also images that form the context of what the encounter means for the actors – and become effective in potential encounters. The encounters described are embedded in a horizon of experiences of encounter and, simultaneously, have an effect on it.

Eventfulness

The following sequences originate from situations whose eventfulness leads to the individual encounters experienced and, moreover, makes them multipliable. In our understanding, this is where their encounter capacity lies. The encounter in the previous section could also be interpreted as an event. It represents an extraordinary occasion for the resident that is now regulated by her understanding of neighborhood and multiplied in different narratives. The situations discussed in the following section do not derive their encounter capacity from a random occasion but from the fact that the eventfulness is predictable and planned and brought about by different actors. However, it is not only tourists who visit HafenCity. It is also an important place of excursion for residents of Hamburg who visit it, for example, in the context of a cultural or sporting event or another special occasion, such as the flea market.

The image of HafenCity as a “strolling city” with little life on the streets, offering few points of contact where one could “get stuck” (field research diary HD, August 2, 2015), is counteracted by a dense “event calendar.” In the 2015 research period, these are, on the one hand, high culture events such as the Elbjazz Festival or Thalia Theatre and, on the other hand, the popular culture Duckstein Festival or the Harbor Birthday. A middle-class spectrum is also covered in the field of visual arts, from gallery presentations to live sand painting. A number of events take place on vacant lots and, thus, in the form of temporary uses. However, people from rather similar milieus meet here since participation is not only based on financial means but, above all, on habitualized preferences of taste.

This social homogeneity also applies to the flea market that has been taking place in HafenCity since August 2014. The “late riser flea market” has moved from the Grindel district to HafenCity and, unlike the more local flea market for residents, offers opportunities for Hamburg residents from other districts to meet. The following field note captures the atmosphere of the market on the Überseeboulevard on a rainy Saturday afternoon:

None of the traders I interviewed (including only one man) is from HafenCity. I ask them if they have already met people from HafenCity, and they deny it. But they think it is great here because it is not as crowded as at the flea market ‘*Flohschanze*’ and because there are no professional traders. The vendors at the four stalls to whom I talk are here for the first time and have found out about it via Facebook (3), the man came along from the Grindel flea market. (...)

Everyone I talk to tells me that it was worth it for them. Except for the vendor at Störtebeker-Ufer. He says that the flea market at Turmstraße also takes place today. Obviously, he is already experienced. He almost exclusively sells women’s clothing. (...)

One female and one male employee of the media agency walk up and down with flyers and talk to people to recruit them for the next flea market. The flyer distributor tells me that I should book a stand under the roof for next time. I could pay right away. The media agency is from HafenCity and works for the company that looks after Überseeboulevard. (Field research diary HD, April 25, 2015)

In the interview, the vendors emphasize the social difference between their own milieu and that of HafenCity, or what they imagine HafenCity residents to be like. Most of them are between 30 and 40 years old, mostly residents of Eimsbüttel and Eppendorf, and are not financially dependent on the sale of the goods they offer. However, they consider HafenCity to be an expensive, exclusive location. This image is noted with annoyance by HafenCity residents, and it is a recurring theme at the stands of Hamburg residents from other parts of the city.

In the mutual perception, the assumed degree of social strangeness, thus, differs. It is precisely this (variously staged) difference that residents and buying and selling visitors encounter, and they correct or confirm these images. The flea market as an event enables all participants to multiply encounters: the bought items themselves can

also be understood as traces. The resulting ironic atmosphere becomes the subject of documents, such as photos, or of stories about the joint action and the joy of selling. Finally, the people responsible for marketing the *Überseeboulevard* are interested in perpetuating the event, providing the infrastructure for it and advertising it. The buying and selling of objects at the flea market proves to be an infrastructurally supported cultural practice through which one shares an experience with acquaintances and gets to know strangers. This eventfulness generates different forms of direct and mediated encounters, which are, furthermore, projected into the future due to the local interest in this kind of revitalization of the district.

Translocal scenes

HafenCity is used for many urban sports, such as BMX riding, parkour, dance and workouts with personal trainers. It is mainly boys or male youths that are likely to participate. They are to be found in the sports facilities, the basketball courts on Vasco-da-Gama-Platz and in Lohse Park, the skate park on Strandkai, the small sports equipment park in Grasbrookpark and the football field on Stockmeyerstraße (field research diary HD, May 11, 2015). The prerequisite for many of the urban sports is the repurposing of existing street furniture (Fig. 2). At the same time, the size of the public spaces, their cleanliness and the relative emptiness in the evening hours seem to lend themselves particularly well to these appropriations through sport.

As a third significant everyday horizon in which encounters in HafenCity take place or into which they are woven and then multiply, we present the example of fishing. According to our observations, fishing in this inner-city location is perceived as a surprise by non-anglers and is, therefore, an occasion for direct encounters. Fishing, thus, has the potential to be considered particularly characteristic for HafenCity and to become the subject of self-documentation and narratives.

More and more tourists stop, a crowd forms around the anglers. Cyclists and a Segway group slowly make their way through the groups along the pavements. When it is already very crowded, a rickshaw driver with his passengers winds his way through the crowd and stops briefly next to the angler. He greets him with a 'Moin' and briefly explains to his passengers something about fishing in this place. There is a lot going on, the Saturday excursion to HafenCity now takes on an excited mood.

A few meters behind him on Sandtorkai, a group of young people are fishing. They document their catch with mobile phone photos and a video camera. They are also happy to tell us that Hamburg is a very good zander fishing area and that the harbor basins in particular are the habitat for predatory fish such as catfish, cod, eel and zander.

(Field research diary HD, April 3, 2015).

In these short talks, the anglers prove to be experts in their sport and also contribute to the listeners' image of Hamburg with their specialist knowledge: Hamburg has many bodies of water and is considered an established place for sport fishing. Teenagers or



Fig. 2: Sports in Hafencity: From individual sports to personal training, sports in clubs, and privately organized groups (photos: Heike Derwanz)

young men who describe themselves as street fishermen are particularly willing to communicate. Some of them wear clothes with “Street Fishing Hamburg” printed on them and present themselves proudly and openly on the quay. They themselves document their catch with their phones or larger digital cameras and ‘post’ them on social media (field research diary HD, April 2, 3, 20 and 24, 2015).

Although HafenCity has many kilometers of water access such as this, it is particularly the Sandtorkai that is used by different groups of anglers. It serves as a fixed meeting point for older male anglers, young street fishermen, families or individuals. They are, thus, also one of the first groups of people that visitors encounter in HafenCity on this thoroughfare that is frequently used during the day. Their equipment, such as boxes with colorful bait, nets or fishing rods, which lie on the benches or are propped up on the railings, provide a direct conversation starter as one passes by. They are greeted by tour guides, rickshaw drivers and Segway guides and staged as an attraction. This facilitates low-threshold communication that is already rehearsed and repeatable. Indeed, many anglers willingly answer questions, explain their practices, show photos and their catches. Like the tourists, they also spend their free time here, coming from other parts of Hamburg.¹² So-called street fishing, which is also practiced in other big cities, has a special significance for the encounter capacity in the sense of multiplying individual encounters: similar to other urban sports, the actors use the city as a stage. Accompanied by the commercial interests of the fishing tackle shops, the interactions that the urban and mediatized space entails are an elementary part of the sport.

Multiplication potential

In this last step of analysis, the snapshots described above were examined in terms of their integration into horizons of meaning. Three horizons were singled out that are particularly characteristic of the encounter capacity in HafenCity: neighborliness, eventfulness and trendiness. The following characteristics of encounters in HafenCity were, thus, described in more detail:

1. Ideas about and desires for collective interests are expressed in encounters: some of these ideas and desires are bundled in the horizons of meaning of neighborliness. They are sometimes negotiated under the topos ‘village,’ express themselves in anger about a lack of commitment or quite specifically in the assertion of interests, such as a football pitch.
2. Encounters have an effect on the future: through the structuring effect of images, such as exclusivity, as well as the ideas and wishes of the users, selective events in the horizon of meaning of eventfulness also contribute to projecting encounters into the future. By being disseminated privately and publicly

12 The anglers come by bicycle, train or their own car from surrounding districts or more distant areas, such as Rahlstedt; for more on the urban leisure activity “hanging out,” see Schwanhäußner (2015).

through the media, they create points of contact for further encounters; in the context of translocal scenes, they can become points of contact.

3. Encounters are multiplied when they are surprising: encountering a quarrelling couple in the street is surprising because for some, it does not correspond to the expectations of neighborliness. Encountering people fishing in the inner-city location of HafenCity, between new buildings that house offices, apartments and public facilities, is surprising because for others it does not fit with a place that is perceived as exclusive or because the water quality is considered questionable. Within the horizons of meaning of neighborliness, eventfulness and trendiness, these surprises unfold their further capacity for encounter by being retold or digitally mediated and, thus multiplied.

The three characteristics can be summarized by the term “multiplicity of encounters.” The “multiplicity” indicates that these characteristics are not mutually exclusive, but do not always complement each other either. They do, however, contribute to the fact that different social milieus congregate in HafenCity. It became clear that each of the three horizons of meaning of encounters described, be it neighborliness, eventfulness or trendiness, is not limited to one social milieu. Here, either residents and service providers meet, or other residents and tourists, or visitors and members of the scene. Nevertheless, the encounters made possible by this do not cover all possible social milieus if they are not encounters mediated by traces, as in the case of the bottle collectors.¹³

The multiplicity and multiplication of encounters

From an urban development perspective, we have initially defined encounter capacity as the quality of a space that results from the possibilities of constructed places for multiple social encounters, while remaining an ambiguous property of public space (Bruns-Berentelg 2012: 78). The fanning out of the observable situation of encounter and the connection of this interaction with the material conditions have revealed patterns of encounter. Their rhythm can be considered to be the structuring dimension of the urbanity planned here and the materiality of its environment. This revealed when and how encounter capacity comes into play, for whom and what boundaries it produces. In our view, the horizons of encounter that result from different forms of meaning production complement the characterization of encounter capacity.

Without trying to make the spectrum of possible encounters in HafenCity uniform, it is, nevertheless, possible to name a few characteristics, some of which can also apply to other urban development areas, and some of which are unique selling points. In addition to the usual transformations of a district through generational change, influx

13 The detailed ethnographic case studies (original title: *Soziale Begegnungen in der HafenCity. Eine qualitative Studie zur Begegnungskapazität*) are recorded in the final report to HafenCity Hamburg and can be accessed there.

and gentrification, on the one hand, and structural measures such as a new street, or a demolition or the construction of a new building, on the other, in HafenCity, there is also the large-scale further development and the constant growth of the district to consider. On the one hand, this means one suddenly no longer works or lives on the edge of a built-up area, but right in the middle of it; on the other hand, vacant spaces are constantly disappearing and uses that have just been created have to be abandoned. As a result of these transformations, new encounters on the eastern edge of HafenCity were expected in spring 2015. Encounters with visitors have also become a habit for employees and residents. However, if we compare the mapping of events with the mapping of the paths of people engaged in HafenCity, we see that their places of encounter do not necessarily overlap. One place with a particularly high multiplicity of encounters, as has already become clear, is Grasbrookpark.

However, the opportunity for encounters is also shaped by the group-specific everyday rhythms: during the day, employees will miss the residents and vice versa. But their paths cross in the mornings and evenings. Tourists arrive at the weekend when residents depart. Employees have little time for breaks, and in the evening, they usually take the train home straight away. We were able to show in the five rhythms and patterns that emerged that it is by no means only active residents, members of subculture scenes or institutions located in HafenCity that shape the encounter capacity. However, they have a much stronger power to articulate horizons of meaning in such a way that they are spatially effective as a friendly neighborhood (HafenCity newspaper, *enoteca*) or a 'playground' (e.g. football pitch, fishing area).

If we look at the more pointed types of encounter and compare them with the claim to social diversity formulated by HafenCity GmbH, the encounters in places such as Grasbrookpark result from the meeting of residents and employees. Both belong to a milieu with high purchasing power and correspond to the target audience of the surrounding upscale restaurants. The service staff, who facilitate these places of consumption, come into contact in a service capacity; beyond that, there are no chance encounters, for example, due to the specific rhythms. The guided tours of the district, which are oriented at precisely this middle class, slightly broaden the spectrum of different social backgrounds, as do the events with a high encounter capacity. The rhythms that facilitate encounters on weekdays are primarily based on working hours in offices and the related services. In this part of the week, the lunch break, which can be seen as an emblem for the encounter capacity in HafenCity, amasses the greatest heterogeneity of HafenCity users. While the employees exploit this potential in predictable and planned encounters for 45 minutes and meet on the street furniture to eat together, the service workers and the sales, cleaning and kitchen staff remain at their workplaces at precisely that time and spend their break time in less visible places.

The encounter capacity that arises beyond the places designed for this purpose from the multiplication of encounters within the horizons of neighborliness, eventful-

ness and trendiness only selectively and not completely outweighs the separating factors resulting from high-priced living and consumption possibilities, the image of an exclusive district and group-specific everyday rhythms. It remains to be seen whether social heterogeneity will also increase over time as a result of the high potential for multiplication here and how this will affect the horizons of meaning of neighborliness and trendiness. Seen from the perspective of encounter capacity, the form of urbanity that can be observed in HafenCity is not characterized by the chance encounter of complete social strangers, but is, above all, shaped by chance encounters between known strangers.

Moreover, the encounter capacity does not only depend on the conditions existing on-site but also on continuing, for example, translocal narratives, image archives or other media representations. Against this background, in conclusion, we understand encounter capacity as a capacity emerging from interaction, materializations and imaginaries, which translates and, thus, multiplies encounter as experience in this multifaceted way. This capacity for multiplication is made tangible by the term “multiplicity of encounters.” With this perspective, the ambiguity of encounter spaces can be emphasized by tracing them in the different dimensions that produce them.

The latter two aspects particularly allow for concluding reflections on the relationship to encounter capacity and encounters under the impression of the COVID-19 pandemic: the relationship between the randomness of encounters and the degree of familiarity of the people encountering each other underwent a serious change during the pandemic. While chance encounters between complete strangers or ‘known strangers’ in public spaces could hardly be prevented, it was precisely the nonrandom encounters between several acquaintances that were made impossible. The performative appropriation of places of encounter through these recurring encounters could not occur. On the other hand, it can be assumed that the media representation of (a few) encounters took on a greater intensity. The fact that the translocal dimension of encounters had increased in events that took place online indicates, at least, the diversity of the places in which people participated in them. A fanning out of encounters in urban public space now allows us to identify and name the effects of the pandemic more precisely. A starting point for new research is emerging here, which should support urban planners in the future in designing specific areas as meeting places.

Against this background, considerations of controlled distance will certainly play a role in the planning of encounter capacity and become the subject of persistent debates. The broad understanding of an encounter as a social practice that can be shaped by the (built) environment and a feature of urbanity, which was a commonsense starting point for the study commissioned by HafenCity GmbH, might not be affected by this; however, the question about the consequences that a regulatory influence on the site-specific characteristics of the situations of encounter in HafenCity may have would be affected. Years after our commissioned research, this article, therefore, not only allows the mate-

rial collected at the time to be published for the first time in a scientific context. From today's perspective, the results are also of empirical interest for urban cultural studies, not because the encounters fanned out here in their everyday cultural form make a world tangible that is less permeated by ideas of order and regulation than the one we are heading towards. Rather, they offer other studies on social interaction and urban space production a suggestion of how the associated temporalities and conditions of elemental and built environments and imaginaries can be explored and compared. The article published here also translated the interest in encounter capacity into a conceptual proposal of the "multiplicity of encounters" for urban cultural studies research. The accompanying reflection on commissioned research shows that the interlocking of expertise, conceptual reflection and empirical survey is quite common in longstanding urban development processes (Lees 2010; Menzl 2010, 2011). In our case, this has led to repeated exchanges and follow-up commissions. With this way of working, HafenCity GmbH has not only *demonstrated* the seriousness of its concern to achieve a 'social mix' and promote encounters. At the same time, a partly symbolic function of scientific research in the context of urban development processes does not prevent the emerging HafenCity from becoming a research field in which planning practice is reflective. Seen from the perspective of research on knowledge work (Färber, Cuny, and Preißing 2019), the commission and research project converge for the duration of the cooperation and, subsequently, allow knowledge to be produced that, ideally, is relevant in the respective field.

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