
Case Study Paper

Culture as a driver for revitalization and identity definition in Chemnitz, Germany

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Abstract

Chemnitz is a city located in the State of Saxony, a former Eastern Germany (GDR) industrial hotspot. The city has witnessed a fascinating history of industrial revolution and technological innovation throughout its past, having been considered the German Manchester back in the 19th and early 20th century. The second world war bombings destroyed 80% of its architectural and cultural heritage, and forced a massive emigration in the mid 1940s. During the GDR, Chemnitz was renamed "Karl Marx City" as a homage to its working class population, soon after the German reunification in 1991, the original name was restored. Chemnitz is today a city of contrasts. Despite being a hub for innovation and technology, its society is divided. Groups of right wing extremists have been misusing circumstantial situations to polarize and feed controversy. In 2020 Chemnitz was successful in their application for European Capital of Culture in 2025. This competition had been identified by the city council and numerous civil organizations as an opportunity to recognize an own identity, promote pride about the shared heritage, but also to motivate the "silent middle" of the society to participate in reshaping the city physically and emotionally, and of being stronger than extremist minorities. This case study will describe the process and visions of Chemnitz from the planning perspective, and will try to translate this vision into potential revitalization opportunities for Chemnitz, which may be backed by the upcoming investments in projects, events and collaborations during the preparations and in the aftermath of 2025.

Keywords

culture for development, revitalisation, inclusive planning

1. Chemnitz, the Manchester of Saxony

1.1. Introduction

After (East) Berlin, Leipzig and Dresden, Chemnitz is the fourth largest city in the area of the former GDR. It belongs today to the Central German Metropolitan Region.

The city is surrounded by the Central Saxon Hill Country to the north and by the Ore Mountains to the South, in the Basin that separates Germany and Czech Republic.

1.2. History of Chemnitz until WWII

Regarding its earliest history, the name Chemnitz is mentioned for the first time as the site of a Benedictine monastery in 1143, around which a settlement grew. The first significant period of Chemnitz probably is the early 19th Century, when the city became an industrial centre and was regarded to as the Saxonian Manchester. In 1913, it had more than 320 000 inhabitants, and despite the population loss during World War I, it reached its all-time peak in 1930 with 360 250 inhabitants. As an industrial centre, Chemnitz developed an important logistics infrastructure with exports from the textile and automobile manufacture. The technological innovation in manufacturing was remarkable. It would also host an important development of the political forces behind its working class population and the socialist movement. The world economic crisis of 1929 halted that growth. Also the neighbour cities Leipzig and Dresden would never again be as populated as they were in that period.

Chemnitz was heavily attacked by Allied bombers between February and March 1945. The main targets were an oil refinery and factories which produced military equipment. As a result, 41 percent of the city area was destroyed.

1.3. Post War and GDR period

After the war, a long period of reconstruction started, which actually never finished until the reunification of Germany. Many manufacturers abandoned the city, among them the car factory Auto Union, which was refunded in Bavaria as Audi.

The reconstruction of the city was conceptualized by a new pattern of streets, which neglected the historic layout of the city centre and was mainly dedicated to provide housing as a priority over the preservation of the historical substance. Chemnitz was to be redeveloped along the urban conceptions of a socialist city. This would mean that large apartment pre-fab blocks would be built in the areas surrounding the city centre and historic structures neglected, eventually becoming derelict. As a homage to the working class and the reconstruction work, in 1953 Chemnitz was renamed into Karl Marx Stadt by the communist assembly, with no previous public consultation.

1.4. German Reunification

The reunification of the divided Germany in October 1990 brought prospects of “blooming landscapes”, as former chancellor Kohl once promised. Before the official reunification day, Karl Marx Stadt was renamed into Chemnitz following a referendum. The city would become the only one in Germany to be re-planned after 1990. The revitalization of the city centre was inspired by the urban layout before World War II and would implement a densification using vacant land. A mix of retail, gastronomy, business, residential and green and amenity space was proposed as the result of an international request for design ideas, in which world renowned architects such as Hans Kollhof, Helmut Jahn and Christoph Ingenhoven participated (Dankwart, 2009).

The revitalization of the city however would also foresee the demolition of historical buildings around the city centre, including industrial heritage, with the aim to increase the quality of the surroundings of flat blocks of the socialist era (Müller, 2006). This process motivated a movement of activism among the population. As a result of these initiatives, a consortium of private investors took over the ownership of historical and derelict buildings, some of which have been conserved or modernized. An outstanding example is the central

district Brühl, which originated in the Gründerzeit period of the second half of the 19th century. The conception includes besides residential use a mix of functions, such as retail, manufacturing, services, gastronomy and health care. The remains of a former textile factory are being converted into the central library of Chemnitz University of Technology (Fig. 1).



Fig. 1 concept Brühl Boulevard by AS&P Architects

[1] new buildings to fill gaps [2] new built or retrofitting [3] adaptation of former textile factory into university library (not by AS&P architects)

Image source: <https://chemnitz-bruehl.de/news/planungsstudie-bruehl-boulevard> (visited 1 Oct 2021)

Also the cultural offer in Chemnitz benefited from generous public investment. Many theatres, museums, the opera, and art galleries were recovered. They represent today the outstanding creative spirit of the city and its population, and also display history and cultural roots. One of the most significant landmarks among the recent city achievements is the nomination as European Culture Capital for the year 2025, which Chemnitz will share with Nova Gorica/ Gorizia (Slovenia) (Wlazel 2020).

This paper will describe the current socioeconomic challenges of Chemnitz, continue with the rationale (and research questions), methodology, analysis of results and preliminary conclusions.

2. Challenges of Chemnitz today

Chemnitz suffered most of the challenges that largest cities of the former GDR dealt with after reunification and the consequent structural changes. After the fall of the Berlin wall, the traditional markets in Eastern Europe fell apart and the classic manufacturing production of Chemnitz was largely affected.

2.1. Structural Changes

Migration to the west federal states and a low rate of births have shrunk the size of the city significantly and inverted its demographic pyramid. Today Chemnitz is the region with the oldest population by average (52) in the whole of Europe, according to the European Statistics Office Eurostat (Eurostat 2021).

The federal government launched in the early years after reunification initiatives to attract investment to the area, including infrastructure development, subsidies, tax benefits, etc. Private home builders were offered attractive conditions for building family housing in the outskirts of the city.

2.2. Current Social Issues

Chemnitz, like in most large cities in the former GDR states facing structural changes, has a high percentage of unemployment (about 10%), but also a high percentage of

underemployment (16%) (Statistic Federal Agency for Employment, Data for 2020). The average unemployment rate in Germany end of 2020 was 6%.

Unemployment and lack of perspectives for the young population have also resulted in the formation of radical groups in Chemnitz and surrounding cities. Particularly neo-Nazi and hooligan organisations are active in Chemnitz. Some of them have been formed in the city, not necessarily by locals, but by extremists from other federal states in Germany looking for fertile soil in which they can propagate their ideology.

Protests of September 2018

A symptomatic event that displays this phenomenon occurred in August 2018. Late in the evening that day, a street fight resulted in the death of a German Cuban citizen and two adults being injured. Shortly after, police arrested two males in connection with the tragic event, both of them were foreign asylum seekers. Only hours later Chemnitz witnessed massive protests against foreigners, demanding to stop “foreign crime” and “stabbing migrants”. Mobs against foreign looking pedestrians were reported, a Jewish café in the central district was attacked. A parallel countermovement promoted by activists, entrepreneurs, scientists and local citizens launched the campaign “we are more”, which underlined the motto “Chemnitz is neither grey nor racist”. A successful action against racism and violence took place few days later, which gathered regional artists and musicians who celebrated an open air concert that attracted some 65 thousand people.

Political parties and citizen organisations with radical right wing predilection used the event to propagate racist ideology. Simultaneously, several members of the local government, law enforcement and even the president of the federal constitutional watchdog understated the significance of the racial motivated protests. Eventually, the chain of events disclosed several disturbing truths. Far right organisations exist in the whole country and are very well articulated, the political power has not been able to invest on improving the social, civil, political and ethic infrastructure against this development but have rather undermined their damaging potential, and the national and international damage they cause to the region’s reputation is immense.

Corona Pandemic

According to the chamber of commerce IHK in Chemnitz, during the corona pandemic the perceived economic indicators fell down to 78 points (from 112 in January 2020) in mid 2020 in the IHKs business climate index. Especially the branches in hotel and tourism, gastronomy and manufacturing were affected. Employers complained about the mandatory preventive measures, which forced them to send their staff home if they weren’t able to allocate their children in daycare facilities, either because these were closed or because of lacking capacities.

Given the social parameters and the fragile economy in Chemnitz and Saxony, it is not astounding that among its population the emotional frustration for the mandatory restrictions and the social and financial costs during the pandemic since 2020 have influenced their mood and tendency against civil obedience, and provide fertile soil for radicalism. The data of the Robert Koch Institute, which is the main advisor body about health to the federal government, shows that the infection rates in Saxony and the

neighbour state Thuringia have been on the rise dramatically in the first weeks of fall 2021. Also the number of Covid hospitalizations is around double as high as the national median. And there is an obvious connection with the low rate of fully vaccinated citizens (61%). Conspiracy theories, scepticism about vaccines and about the pandemic being in fact a natural phenomenon, show how difficult it has been for authorities to implement preventive measures and control. Also not surprising, the far right party AfD (Alternative for Germany) had their highest vote outcome in Thuringia and Saxony, where one of four voters chose them in the last general elections of September 2021.

3. Rationale: Culture and ICTs for Revitalization

This study explores the impact of culture development as a driver for revitalization and identity building in Chemnitz. This potential has been recognized on the level of United Nations. The UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development includes the aspect of culture in several SDGs (Sustainable Development Goals). Most of these imply the fostering or development of cultural assets, but only SDG 11.4 mentions culture explicitly. Nevertheless, the SDGs require a 'cultural localization' for implementation, i.e. adaptation to the local level and specific cultural backgrounds (Yildirim et al. 2019). Thus, cultural knowledge is necessary to drive sustainable development, especially regarding the human scale of sustainability within the SDGs implementation.

Culture is also a factor for resilience. The Rio Conference on Sustainable Development highlights the importance of cultural diversity as part of the integrated approach for sustainable development (§41) (UN GA 2011). The UN GA Resolution for the MDGs ("Keeping the Promise: United to Achieve the Millennium Development Goals") concludes also in its resolution with strong statements about the "importance of culture for development" (§16), the need to foster the "value and diversity of (...) distinctive identities, cultures and social organization" (§55), the importance of the cultural dimension for development (§66), and about taking into account "local circumstances, ethics, and cultural values" when communicating respectfully with local communities (UN GA 2010).

During the 2019 International Conference on Climate Change Impacts on Cultural Heritage, UN SG Antonio Guterres reminded the capability of culture as a driver for resilience and adaptation to climate change, due to "environmental friendly building techniques" and traditional knowledge about local "environment, weather, atmosphere and biodiversity".

There are also six international cultural conventions signed by UNESCO and their member states, in which all of them commit to the protection of culture. The world heritage convention is also part of the SDG (goal 11.4) and culture was included in other goals, such as SDG 4 (inclusive and equitable quality education), SDG 8 (sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth), SDG 12 (sustainable consumption and sustainable patterns of production, and SDG 16 (peaceful and inclusive societies).

Use of Information and Communication Technologies and Digital Data for Culture Development

Former UNESCO secretary general Irina Bukova referred to culture as "the right software needed for the hardware" (i.e. urban infrastructure and services, mobility and supplies) in

order to achieve sustainability, but it takes a strategic interaction in alliances between public agencies, society and the private sector to implement that.

Digital technologies have been becoming more easily available in the last decades, together with relevant software and hardware. Also data is today readily available. This combination enables experts to use digital tools to turn data into useful information, but also to enable citizens to participate in the process, discuss, share, get informed and have a say using options for reviews and critical evaluation. The first condition is that public offices offer the appropriate platforms.

Wherever relevant data is available, it is possible to collect, filter and convert it to actual information and to generate indicators. These indicators will support the process of discussion, decision-making and implementation of measures. They can eventually be used to make comparisons and qualify the achieved changes.

Also in the municipal strategy for the implementation of the 2025 European Culture Capital year, Chemnitz incorporates digital platforms as a strong component. The purpose is to enable an easy interaction with visitors on the site or interested parties world-wide, and also as a lesson learnt during the pandemic, of the need to provide an independent environment.

3.1. Research Questions

Why is the analysis of the above mentioned aspects important for us planners?

Which role can play culture development in the process of improving the general urban conditions in Chemnitz for society and future generations?

How can the event Chemnitz European Cultural Capital in 2025 contribute to a positive development?

The analysis of the spatial conditions presented in this paper will try to address these issues and contribute to find answers and provide some considerations and recommendations.

4. Methodology

To try to answer the research questions, the authors undertake a three steps approach: (1) **A background review**, (2) an **assessment of spatial data** using a digital model (**multi criteria evaluation MCE**) and (3) identifying **four thematic areas** that can be targeted with concrete measures, and which address the goals featured by Chemnitz municipality in the process for the 2025 events.

The general background review of the current economic, social and cultural needs of Chemnitz is based on the considerations for the international bid of Chemnitz as European Cultural Capital 2025. This proposal, summarized in a “Bid Book” is considered by the authors of this paper as a relevant reflection of Chemnitz visions for sustainably improving its urban quality, aiming at the implementation of strategic measures in the area of culture, dialogue and social cohesion.

The authors use data collected from relevant datasets provided by the “Open Data Portal” by the municipal office of Chemnitz. This portal provides freely available digital data and

tabular information connected to geo-referenced components that can be represented on an actual map on a GIS environment. The datasets are provided, organized in categories, from which the relevant ones can be selected, combined or filtered to meet the objectives of the study.

4.1. Background review

Chemnitz has been described above in general terms. In connection with the design of a strategy and work plan towards the implementation of the 2025 European Capital of Culture event, Chemnitz has identified four main objectives and also four areas of implementation. The first objective is described as “Making detached place creative”. It implies that all sites in Chemnitz where activities are organized are to be reconnected through creative work. The second objective “Uncover the creative maker in society” is related to discovering and supporting creative actors in society. The third objective “Build critical creative maker communities” is related to fostering mass collaboration. The fourth objective “Foster a trans-local European maker identity” implies the need to contribute to find and understand a local identity (Chemnitz Bid Book 2020).

The four areas of implementation are also related to these objectives. They are defined as “Eastern State of Mind”, “Generous Neighbours”, “It’s Moving” and “Makers”. Among these four areas are distributed 54 actual projects, events or activities, which will be celebrated until the end of 2025.

An overall motivation, in which basically the whole structure is inspired, is the strengthening of the European principles of democracy, peaceful coexistence and freedom. In this sense, Chemnitz is also hoping for an active participation of the “silent middle”, which means the population from the middle class, whose contribution is vital for solving the social challenges that Chemnitz faces nowadays.

4.2. Multi Criteria Evaluation MCE

After collecting secondary data during the above described background review and analysing the metadata on diverse other factors that play a role, a linear calculation approach is applied to identify the conditions in the above mentioned four thematic areas and geo reference them in an intuitive map.

The approach consists basically in dividing the study area (covering the municipal boundaries) into equal cells (1 Ha each), and applying the calculation cell by cell through a GIS operation.

The analysis approach is basically a method called multiple criteria evaluation (MCE), and in this case specifically it is a weighted/ linear combination. However, the approach here is not a traditional MCE but an adaptation.

The process is customized to include weighting factors, grading borders and it delivers a more intuitive quality assessment of conditions in the raster of cells, which uses colour ranges for better representation.

This raster is a comprehensive way to represent for example locations and areas that best suit to desired interventions. It could also allow to allocate a most suitable implementation of functions and to minimize development constraints.

In total 36 different datasets are selected from the municipal database and migrated into the model in the GIS environment. Among others, they include data related to social services, such as children day-care facilities, facilities for youth activities; or data related to education such as primary and secondary schools and safe walking routes for children; sport infrastructure; areas with established building regulations; areas affected by flooding in the past; and also relevant data of the existing zoning plan that covers almost the entire city. Also data on soil and built property value is included, which provides a hint on which areas are considered less attractive for investment today, and which ones may suffer gentrification effects in the future. Other data includes the location of listed buildings and sites considered as unsafe spots for traffic and pedestrians.

4.3. Thematic Areas (Targets)

The background analysis and the considerations of the “Bid Book” are used to identify four thematic areas that the MCE model helps to spatially visualize. These thematic areas are:

- (a) How are the conditions for inclusive planning in the existing built environment (Fig. 2)
- (b) Where have families best conditions for living within the municipal boundaries (Fig. 3)
- (c) Which areas represent the identity of Chemnitz (Fig. 4)
- (d) Where does Chemnitz provide conditions for amenity use (physical and emotional balance) (Fig. 5)

As described before, the study area, divided in equally large cells, is analysed cell by cell using a mathematical formula that sums up the value of each cell in relationship to its spatial location in each of the 36 considered aspects (datasets). This operation is undertaken independently for each one of the thematic areas. The cells with the best conditions receive a higher value (a result of the sum).

For an easier interpretation, as a last step before spatial representation, ranges of cell results between 0 and 100 (a percentage of the highest measured value) is translated into a range of colours in four different tones, one for each different thematic area. The range goes in five degrees of natural breaks, which is a standard cartographic classification method that uses the Jenks natural breaks optimization as statistical formula, which is also a common method to colour thematic maps (Jenks 1967).

5. Analysis of Results

The results of the MCE operation are quite similar for each of the four thematic areas at first sight (figures 2-5). But when analysed carefully, they reveal slight differences.

The authors selected four neighbourhoods in Chemnitz which can be considered either underdeveloped or socially troubled. These neighbourhoods are Sonnenberg (east of the central district), Zentrum (central district), Schloßchemnitz (just north of Zentrum) and Markersdorf (South). It is difficult to obtain data to objectively define which neighbourhoods are best situated in their socio economy. However, few years ago a member of the city parliament, Stadträtin Christin Furtenbacher, revealed that the above mentioned four neighbourhoods are the ones where the percentage of the population that depends on social subsidies to cover their living costs is the highest. In Sonnenberg more than one of four families receives unemployment subsidies. The neighbourhood Kassberg, which is

closest to the central district, is in fifth position in this ranking, even though it is considered of higher attractiveness for real estate investment (Schilling, 2018). Among all of the five above mentioned neighbourhoods, Zentrum has the highest overall ground value, but is second highest in subsidies distribution per capita. A micro scale MCE was developed for this area, and it clearly displays hot spots for revitalization, but also the comparatively less auspicious spots, which need careful attention.

A matrix (table 1) was fed with representative values for the five above mentioned neighbourhoods, including values for all four thematic areas plus an average of all five thematic areas. The results are interesting, because in all neighbourhoods the values are at least average, but not too low. Only the conditions for inclusive planning for Sonnenberg, Schlosschemnitz and Markersdorf show low values. The conditions for families are relatively high in Sonnenberg, Zentrum and Kassberg.

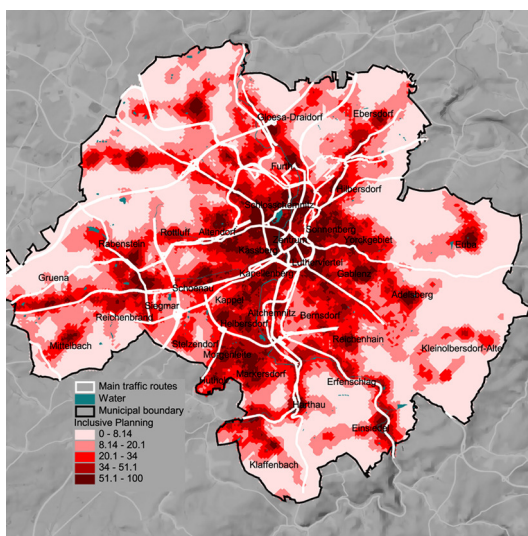


Fig. 2 MCE model results: Conditions for development inclusive planning in Chemnitz

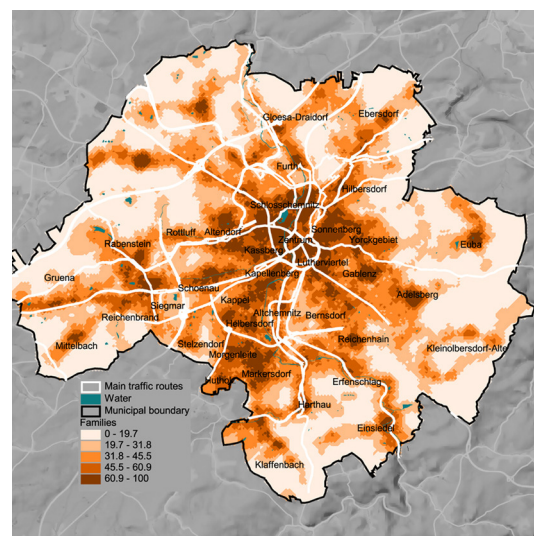


Fig. 3 MCE model results: Conditions for families in Chemnitz

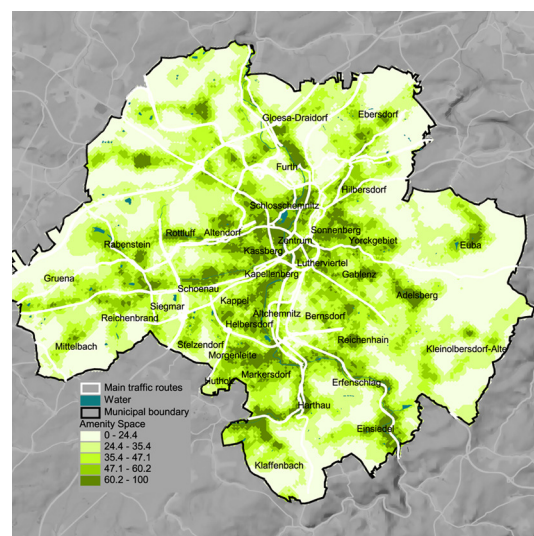
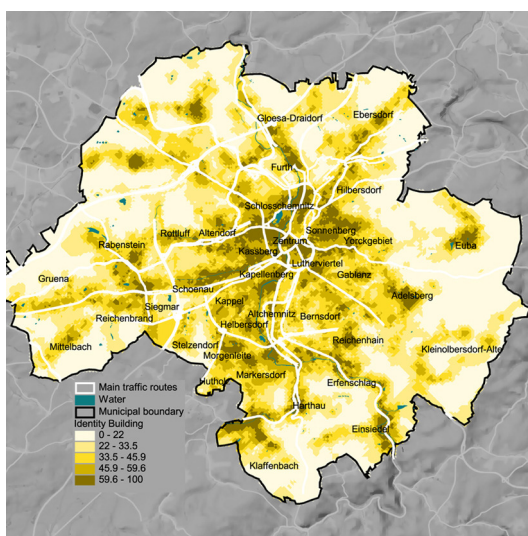


Fig. 4 MCE model results: Conditions for identity representation in the public space in Chemnitz

Fig. 5 MCE model results: Conditions for development of relax and amenity space in Chemnitz

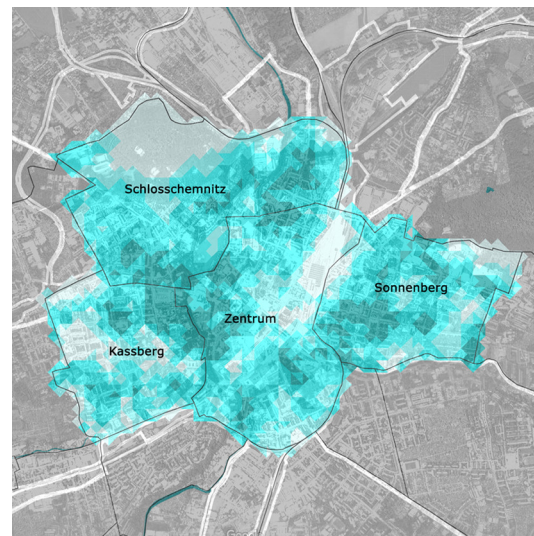
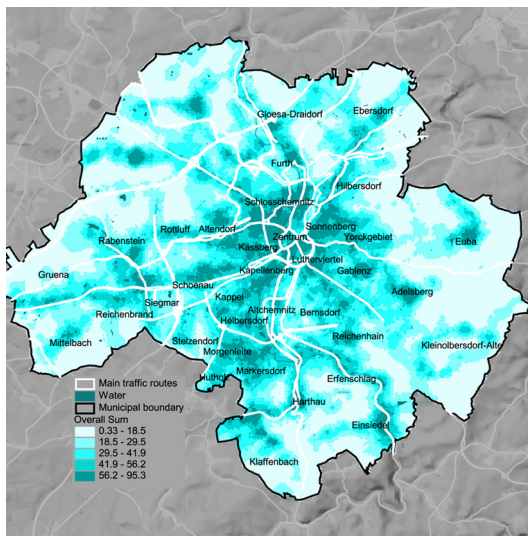


Fig. 6 MCE model results: Sum of values in Chemnitz (combined qualities)

Fig. 7 MCE model results: Micro scale representation for the socially troubled neighbourhoods Zentrum, Sonnenberg and Schlosschemnitz

Table 1 Matrix with representative values (extract, abnormal numbers are highlighted)

Neighbourhood	approx. Size (Ha)	Given conditions for (%)				
		Inclusivity	Family	Identity	Amenity	Average
Sonnenberg	660	48	61	59	56	56
Zentrum	890	55	65	59	57	59
Schlosschemnitz	950	48	58	54	52	53
Markersdorf	670	41	56	49	55	50
Kassberg	570	53	66	63	59	60

6. Conclusions

The values about the calculated conditions (for inclusiveness, identity, relax/ amenity or for families) are better than the perceived care Chemnitzers express for their city (see Bid Book Chemnitz 2020). This may indicate that measures are necessary to improve the ideal attachment of locals to the City, and that the structural framework developed so far is at least sufficient, and probably better than that. Initiatives at human scale, like Placemaking, community engagement and improvement of the aesthetic appearance of underdeveloped sites may be an option to increase the attractiveness of the city for locals.

The aesthetic value of Chemnitz or its public space is not a parameter that this assessment considers in the MCE assessment. The aesthetic value is a subjective perception that needs a different type of qualification exercise. It could complement this assessment but it needs a comprehensive work on site.

The authors therefore are convinced that the city is well predisposed to incorporate comprehensive micro scale measures that take advantage of the given conditions in these thematic areas and that these will have a perceivable impact.

Culture was successfully used to unite neighbours against racism in the “#WirSindMehr” (We are more) concert in September 2018, this is perhaps a 1 on 1 statement and proof that culture is an effective tool to beat racism and human intolerance.

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