AN ANALYSIS ON THE CHANGING "GIVE AWAY" PRACTICES IN GERMANY: THE CASE OF NEUSTADT DISTRICT, DRESDEN (11475)

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SUMMARY

During the COVID-19 pandemic, people living in cities have reduced their consumption, and the society habits have turned to ways of acquiring more sustainable living behaviours. Focusing on homes and close neighbourhood areas has become a priority for the vast part of the urban population, and this has accelerated the people's interactions with their daily household layouts and their close neighbourhoods. This awakening of the urban people has basically strengthened the idea of simplifying their lives and giving the surplus goods to the needy in most of the areas. The disposal of these items, on the other hand, proceeded with a practical approach on the basis of "giving away free to those in need."

In order to better analyse the reflections of this "disposal" culture in place, the Neustadt district of the city of Dresden, which was formerly within the borders of East Germany, was chosen. Compared to the other parts of the city, the Neustadt district stands out as an area that is more popular with its young population. In this study, "give-away" boxes in front of the building blocks on the main streets, which are determined to represent the Neustadt residential area, have regularly been observed for a 6-week period and geo-spatial analyses of "give-away" items and habits are intended to be represented in order to understand this ongoing circulation in the district. Moreover, short interviews were also conducted with the local people to reveal the increasing popularity of the "give-away" boxes and to discover how the pandemic has affected the "give-away" culture in the district.

1. INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic has effected the people globally not only making hazardous impacts on the health system but also limiting the social and economic activities and daily practices dramatically. During the pandemic, most of the cities had to apply public strategies such as having lock downs, keeping social distance, wear masks and applying strict hygiene rules to control the transmission of the disease (Sintema, 2020). Therefore, the majority of the urban people had to stay home and spend time in quarantine for a long period. In this time, people also got a chance to take care for themselves, their homes and their close neighbourhoods, and community resilience came up as a significant issue (South, 2020). Sharing and give-away culture have rebirthed in the pandemic period (Kacik, 2021), and as a reflection of this, give-away boxes into which people put extra stuff to give-away for free have become remarkable.

In order to understand the process of these daily give away habits and practices in urban areas in detail, the Neustadt district in Dresden, Germany was selected regarding the district's well-known give-away boxes, and its lively and extravert life-style that provides valuable data sources and rich opportunities to observe the situation. The district is also known as one of the most popular residential areas in Dresden with its central location, advanced service facilities and young population. In the research, the daily give-away practices of the neighbourhood will be analysed through the give-away boxes and the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic to community resilience and sharing habits will be discovered. Furthermore, the views and thoughts of the local inhabitants on the give-away practices that will help us to evaluate the analyses will be given.

2. THE CASE STUDY AREA

Neustadt is a district which is located on the north side of River Elbe, in Dresden. The district is not a newly developed area but an area totally reconstructed after a fire in the 18th century across the river from the old town area. During World War II, Neustadt could preserve more historical buildings than the old town [URL-1]. Neustadt is a residential neighbourhood with a large number of cafes, restaurants, art galleries, service facilities, independent cultural institutions and green areas. Its central location in Dresden and the selected case study area (in blue) are shown in Figure 1 below.

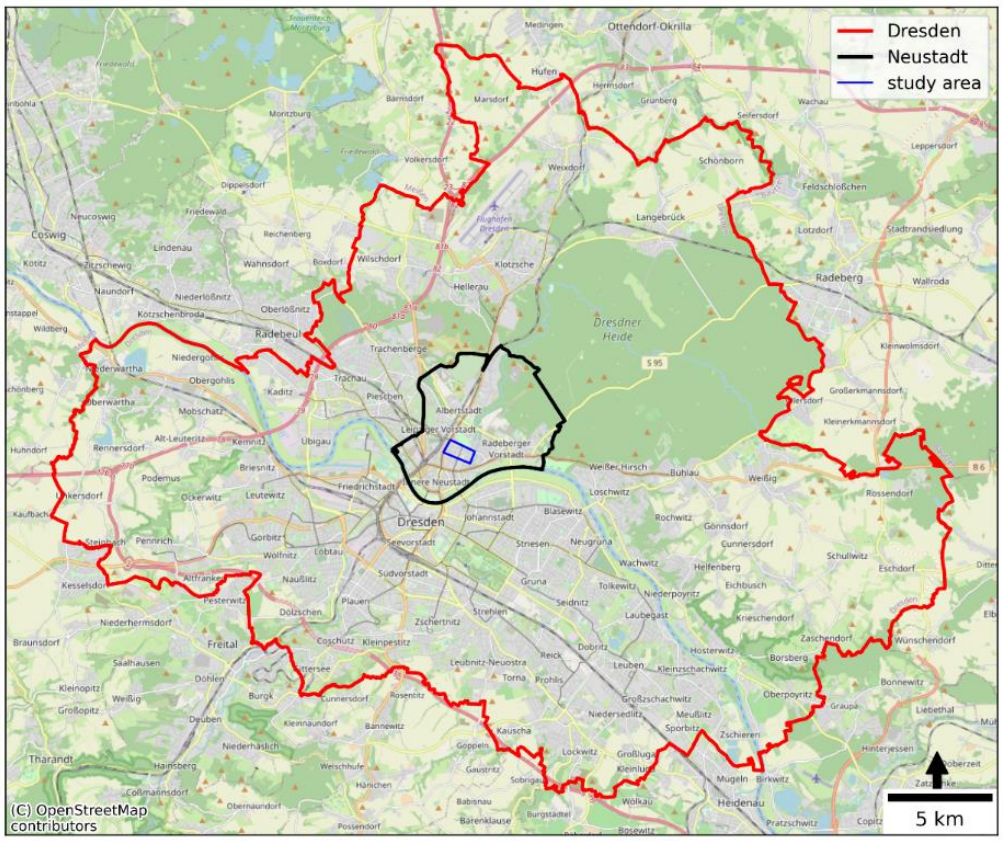

Figure 1: The location of Neustadt and the case study area in Dresden

In order to observe the give-away habits in Neustadt in detail, a case study area was selected in the centre of the district within 10 streets. While the study area is specified, the priority was given to the popular residential streets. The selected streets are: Bischofsweg, Louisenstraße, Königsbrücker Straße, Priessnitzstraße, Jordanstraße, Alaunstraße, Görlitzer Straße, Kamenzer Straße, Sebnitzerstraße and Förstereistraße as demonstrated Figure 2.

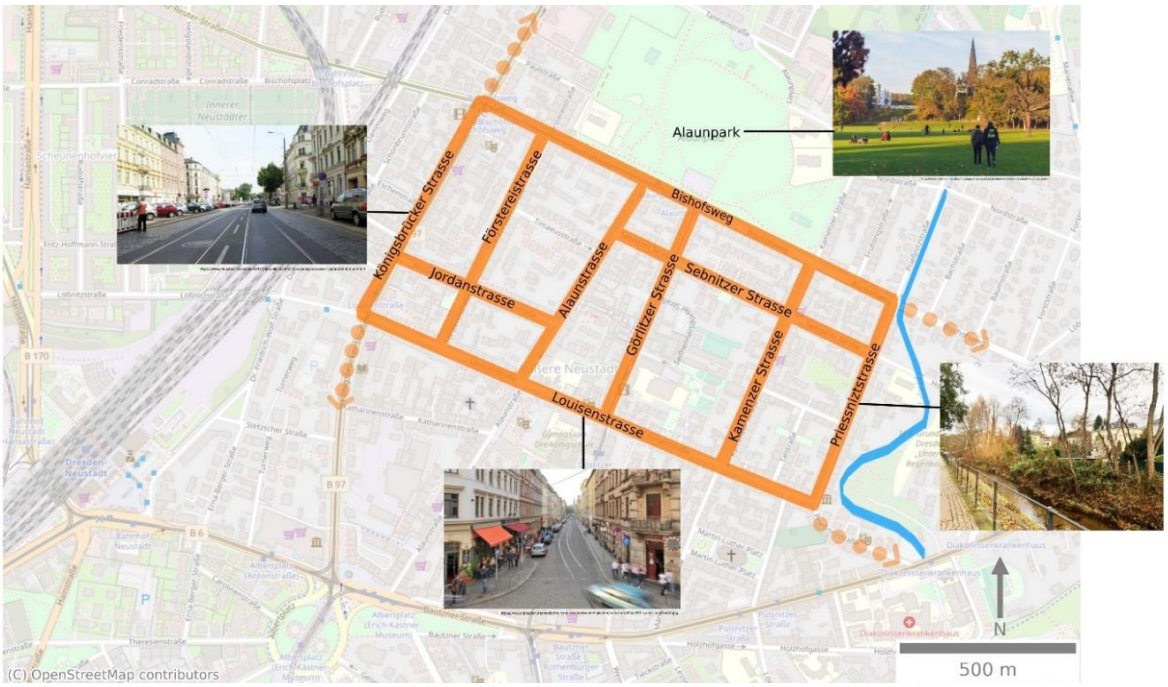

Figure 2: The determined case study area streets and surroundings in Neustadt

The case study area covers a 34-hectare neighbourhood consisting of the selected 10 streets, that have a total length of 4.8 km.

While the borders of the case study area were drawn, some other limitations were taken into consideration. As it can be seen in Figure 2 above, the large park (Alaunpark) that starts after the Bischofsweg, and the little branch (Priessnitz) borders the Priessnitzstraße and the different trade & residential pattern that starts after Louisenstraße were noted as the natural borders of the selected case study area. Furthermore, it was also noted that the residential area pattern in the north west of Königsbrücker Straße and the south of Louisenstraße were having different and more detached housing patterns as compared to inside of the selected case study area. Therefore, these 2 streets were also defined as the main borders of the case study area.

It is also noted that all of the selected streets have mainly attached residential building blocks without having a considerable setback distance to the streets. This made the accessibility to the entrance of the building blocks very easy and remarkable for everybody that passes by the streets.

Moreover, Priessnitzstraße, Föreistreistraße and Sebnitzer Straße were noted as the main residential areas that do not provide mixed land uses within the buildings. However, mixed land uses for particularly the entrance level of the buildings were often observed in Königsbrücker Straße, Alaunstraße, Bischofsweg and Görlitzer Straße. These streets have many cafes, restaurants, pubs and service areas that are used not only by the local people but also visitors to the area every day.

3. METHODOLOGY & DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSES

In the research, the data collection was conducted in the 10 streets in order to undertake a geo-spatial analysis to observe the give-away habits of the local people for 6 weeks. Later, 2 other weeks were also spent to hold the interviews with the inhabitants in order to understand the points of view of the locals.

3.1 Data Collection on the Give-away Boxes and Analyses

In the first 6-week period, the streets were visited regularly between 11 am and 4 pm to be able to observe and detect the give-away circulation during the daylight. In the fieldwork, the items that were put in front of the building blocks to be given away were noted within their spatial information. During March and April 2022, the data collection part of the fieldwork was undertaken and completed in 10 days. While half of the visits were made during weekdays, the other half was conducted over the weekends to provide a more comprehensive outcome. It was seen that the give-away items for free were mostly put into paper boxes with the label of "zu verschenken" which means "to give away" in German to make them more visible and make other people aware that they are for free as can be seen in Figure 3.

Figure 3: Give-away items were observed mostly in boxes in Neustadt, Dresden.

It was also seen that sometimes people put their items and objects without using any box or coverage, which causes a mess in front of the buildings (Figure 4). Moreover, there were also some give-away boxes that were unfortunately used as rubbish bins or disposal containers since it was a way to get rid of the stuff that was not needed anymore. However, this misuse of the boxes could make the other clean and useful stuff inside also dirty, and obviously, people would not like to touch these boxes or take anything from them regarding the hygiene concerns. Therefore, these boxes within the disposal and rubbish would stay in the same place for weeks, and also create a real mess and unhygienic situation for public health in addition to their unpleasant appearance.

Figure 4:Give-away items are sometime given without a box or a proper coverage in Neustadt

During the fieldwork, approximately 827 items were noted and classified under 10 subtitles: Clothes, books, toys, shoes, furniture, kitchen materials, decoration articles, office materials, bags and others. The number of collected items for each class is shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Number of items in classes

Class	Number of items
Book	107
Toy	34
Clothes	230
Shoes	79
Furniture	83
Office material	17
Kitchen material	86
Decoration article	82
Bag	28
Other	81
Total	**827**

The collected items in classes are given in Figure 5 within the fieldwork dates. It was noted that more give-away objects were recorded over weekends as highlighted in red on the left.

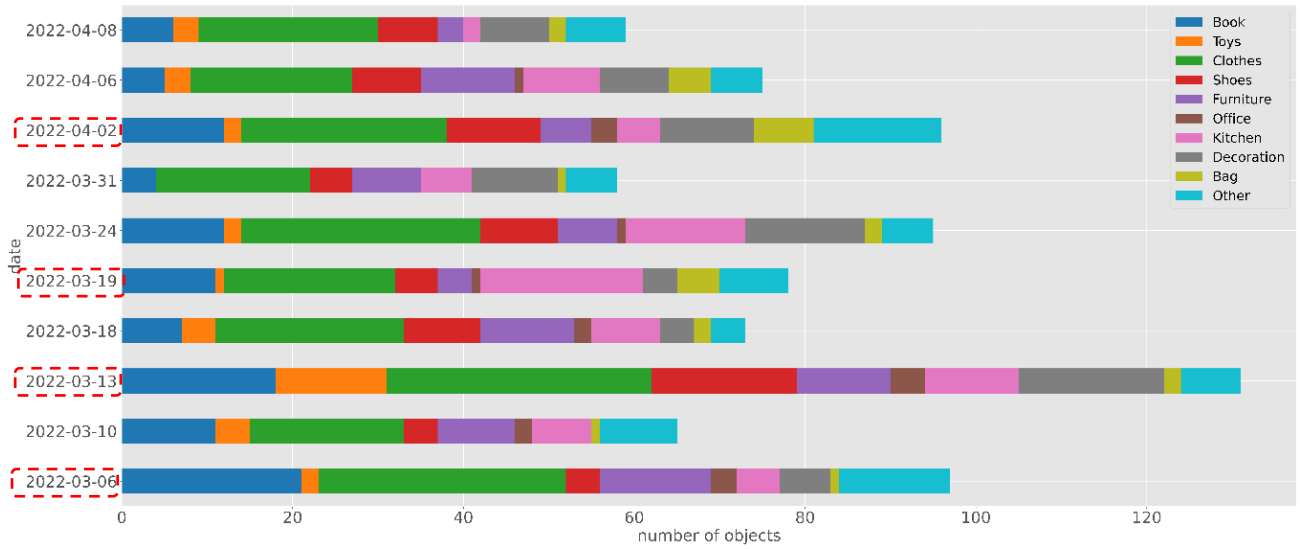

Figure 5: Number of give-away items regarding the different classes during the fieldwork with dates

Here, it is beneficial to add that there were many different objects that were noted under the "Other" class since they were not actually related to any of the other 9 classes. Most interesting and often objects were recorded as washing machines, printers, vinyl records, computer screens and cables under this class. Before making geo-spatial analyses of the final data in Python, the differentiation of each street regarding the classes can be seen in Figure 6.

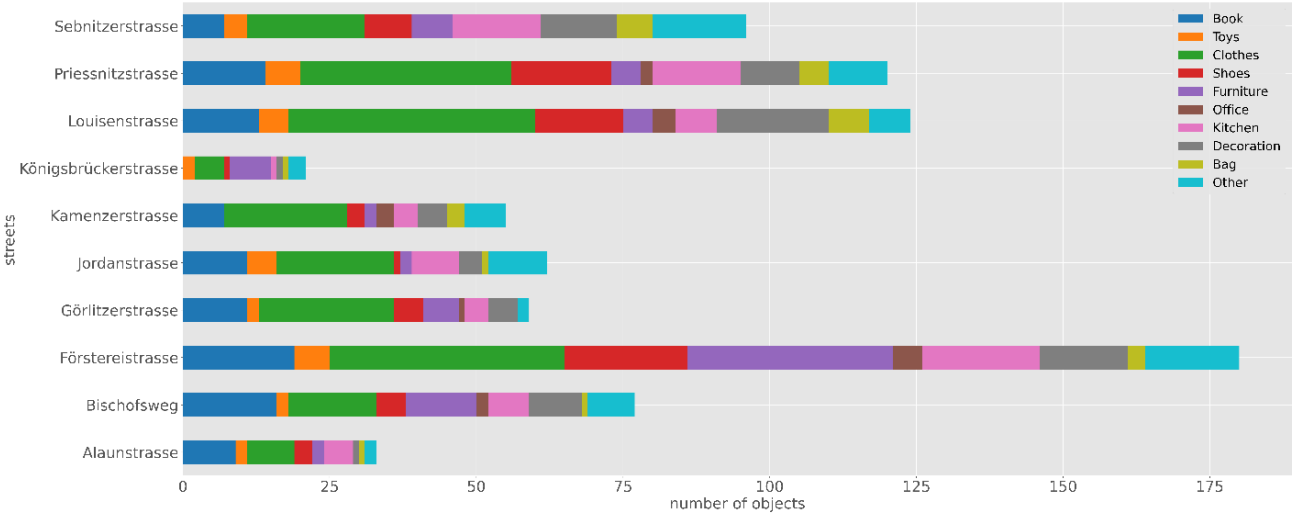

Figure 6: Classified items collected from the give-away boxes within the streets

After the completion of the fieldwork, the data within the spatial information was reorganized in an Excel file to be converted in Python to be analysed and visualised. In Figure 7, a screenshot from the reorganized final data is given.

E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O	P	Q	R	S	T	U	V
Streets	House Number	Book	Toys	Clothes	Shoes	Furniture	Office	Kitchen	Decoration	Bag	Other	Explanation	Address	location	point	latitude	longitude
Louisenstrasse	7	1		1							1		Louisenstr	Girschik, 7,	(51.06782	51,06782	13,74868
Louisenstrasse	8												Louisenstr	8, Louisen	(51.06758	51,06759	13,74876
Louisenstrasse	9								1				Louisenstr	9, Louisen	(51.06777	51,06777	13,74895
Louisenstrasse	31												Louisenstr	31, Louise	(51.06731	51,06731	13,75078
Louisenstrasse	37								1				Louisenstr	Mondfisch	(51.06711	51,06711	13,75136
Louisenstrasse	45			1									Louisenstr	Little Crea	(51.06667	51,06667	13,75302
Louisenstrasse	57			1									Louisenstr	Mamaris K	(51.06626	51,06626	13,75459
Louisenstrasse	73			1									Louisenstr	Barbier Be	(51.06583	51,06584	13,75622
Louisenstrasse	83			1									Louisenstr	Mambo, 8	(51.06551	51,06552	13,75743
Louisenstrasse	74			1	1						1	food	Louisenstr	74, Louise	(51.06527	51,06528	13,75751
Louisenstrasse	76	1								1			Louisenstr	76, Louise	(51.06519	51,0652	13,75786
Louisenstrasse	93			1					1				Louisenstr	Sukuma ar	(51.06516	51,06516	13,75882
Priessnitzstrasse	24			1									Priessnitzs	24, Prießni	(51.06542	51,06542	13,75956
Priessnitzstrasse	17	1											Priessnitzs	17, Prießni	(51.06560	51,06561	13,75932
Priessnitzstrasse	26	1											Priessnitzs	26, Prießni	(51.06555	51,06556	13,75965
Priessnitzstrasse	19			1									Priessnitzs	19, Prießni	(51.06570	51,06571	13,75939
Priessnitzstrasse	28							1					Priessnitzs	28, Prießni	(51.06565	51,06566	13,75972
Priessnitzstrasse	33												Priessnitzs	33, Prießni	(51.06675	51,06676	13,76003
Priessnitzstrasse	48										1	cables	Priessnitzs	48, Prießni	(51.06684	51,06685	13,76047
Priessnitzstrasse	60												Priessnitzs	60, Prießni	(51.06796	51,06796	13,76111

Figure 7: The rearranged final data after the data collection on the field

After all this rearrangement and rough estimations, the classified data was proceeded in Python 3.10 environment on the base map of Neustadt that was gained from OpenStreetMap [URL-5]. Since the spatial data collected within the building blocks numbers and streets, the data was put together and a full address for each point was defined in order to obtain their latitude and longitude values. To do this, the Geocoder module of the GeoPy [URL-2] library was utilised, and each address was successfully converted into a latitude and longitude value. The coordinate system of these points were at first non-projected, and when they were superimposed onto a base map using GeoPandas [URL-3] and Contextilly [URL-4] tools, the Pseudo-Mercator projected coordinate system, which is a global system used to render, e.g. OpenStreetMap, was defined. The illustrations related to these points can be seen in Figure 8, Figure 9 and Figure 10, that show the most popular 3 items: Clothes, books and kitchen objects to comprehend their distributions in the field.

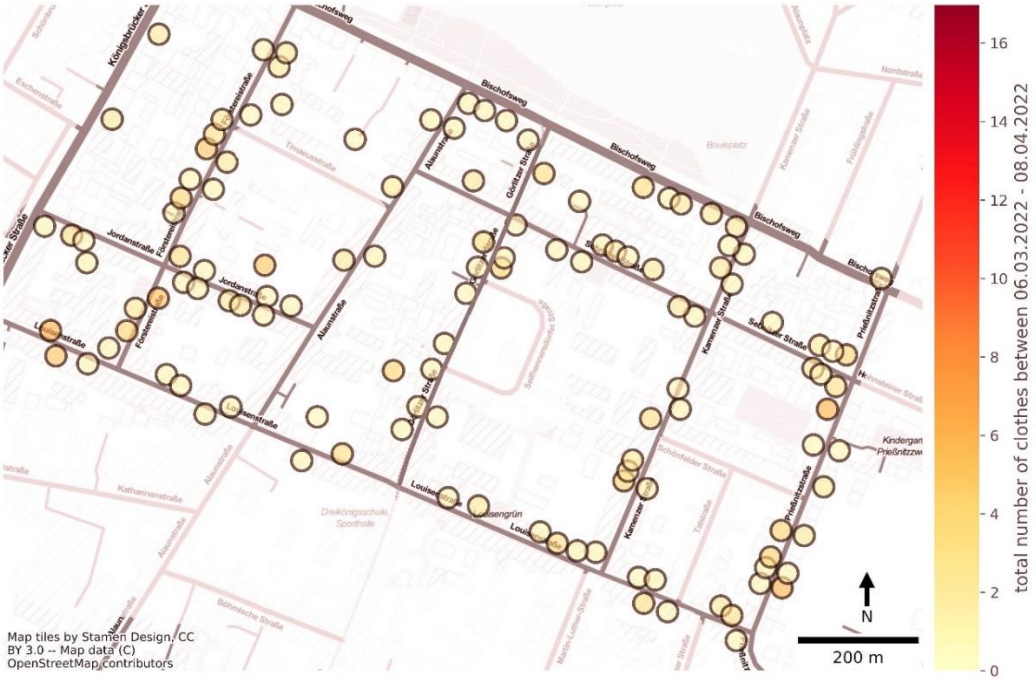

Figure 8: A visualization shows the number of give-away clothes in the selected streets of Neustadt

Figure 9: A visualization shows the number of give-away books in the selected streets of Neustadt

Figure 10: A visualization shows the number of give-away kitchen items in the selected streets of Neustadt

As it is seen from the 3 maps above, while give-away clothes can be found almost all of the streets, give away books and kitchen items were more provided in the streets that are located in the inner parts of the selected area.

Afterwards, the mapping for all the number of collected items was completed as it can be seen in Figure 11.

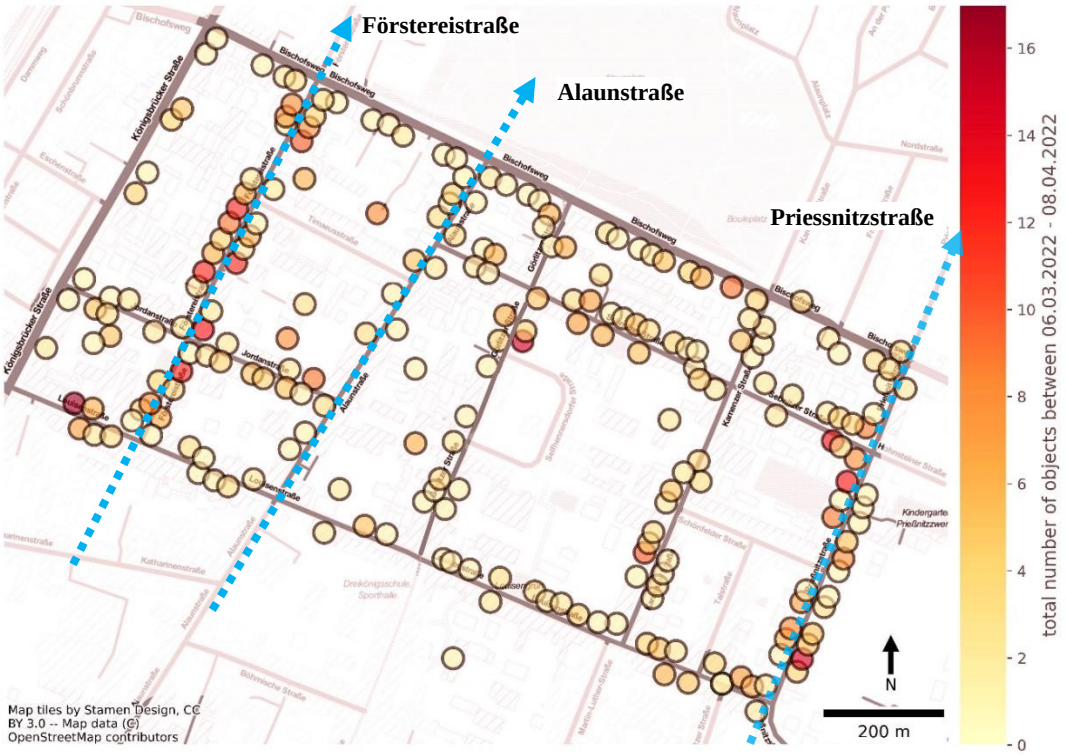

Figure 11: The map show the total number of give-away items in the selected streets of Neustadt

As it can be understood, Förstereistraße and Priessnitzstraße had more frequent and higher numbers of give-away objects compared to the other streets. On the other hand, there were not many give-away articles detected in Königsbrücker Straße and Alaunstraße, as demonstrated. As a reason for this situation, the differentiation of the land-uses could be identified. While Königsbrücker Straße and Alaunstraße which had a mixed land use character within many shop and services, Förstereistraße and Priessnitzstraße had basically residential areas within only small shops. Therefore, it was understood that the residential and family-friendly areas provide more give-away objects than the lively streets with service areas in Neustadt.

3.2 Interviews and Assessments

As a second step of the data collection, 20 interviews were undertaken with local people in Neustadt to evaluate the give-away habits in the neighbourhood. During the interviews, 12 semi-structured questions were asked. This phase of the work was aimed at discovering the views of the actual actors, the inhabitants of the district, to elaborate the give-away practices in the area with its all dimensions in addition to understand the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the give-away habits in the neighbourhood.

The random selected interviewees were consisted of a diverse professional background, such as engineers, researchers, lawyers and free-lance artists, etc. The average age of the interviewees was 37, and 40% were female. It was noted that half of the participants have been living in Neustadt for 1 to 5 years, while 40% have lived there for more than 10 years.

The participants were asked to assess the quality of life in Neustadt, and 95% stated that they were happy to live there. To demonstrate the view of Neustadt from the locals' perspectives, they were also asked to state the best and the worst aspects of the neighbourhood.

It was understood that while many local people enjoyed the central and the diverse character of Neustadt (Figure 12), party tourism (which could often bring noise, mess and unsafety, particularly during the nights, according to the statements) was underlined as the worst side of living in Neustadt for a big majority (70%) as shown in Figure 13.

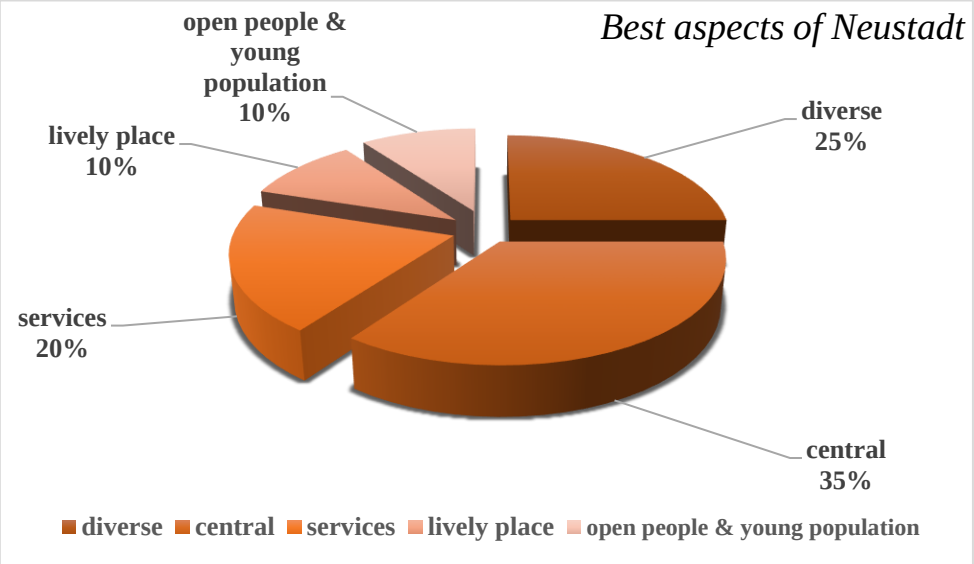

Figure 12: Best aspects of Neustadt according to the surveys with the local people

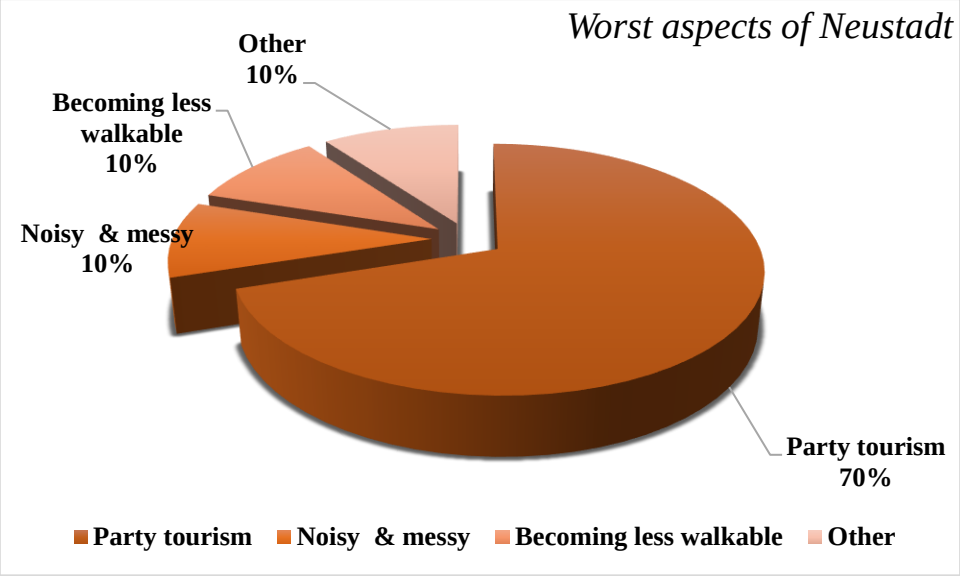

Figure 13: Worst aspects of Neustadt according to the survey with the local people

When the questions related to the give-away practices in Neustadt were asked, 85% confirmed that they received some of the objects from the give-away boxes. 71% also said that they checked the give-away boxes regularly and collected more than 10 times a year, as demonstrated by Figure 14.

Figure 14: Annual frequency that shows the locals' give away habits in a year

Furthermore, 90% said that they left some of their extra items in the give-away boxes and 50% expressed that they made it more than 10 times a year, which shows that the locals liked both giving away and collecting items as a quite frequent daily habit.

Afterwards, the most beneficial side of give-away boxes habits was investigated, and all of the participants agreed on that the give-away boxes were a nice practice that also helps sustainability.

However, some negative sides of this give-away habits were also detected for Neustadt, as it was foreseen in the beginning of the research, such as causing messy and dirty areas in addition to the trash that is put into the give-away boxes (Figure 15).

In parallel to this observation, 60% declared that the boxes causing mess and creates trash areas in front of the buildings.

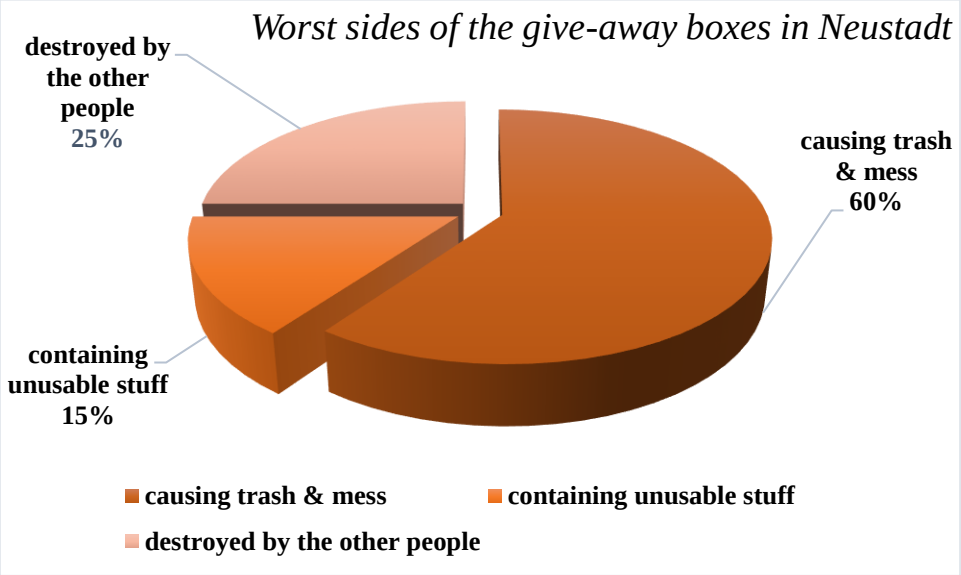

Figure 15: Worst sides of the give-away boxes in Neustadt

Again, in parallel to the starting point of this research, 90% of the interviewees thought that give-away practices were more common in Neustadt compared to any other place in Dresden or in Germany. However, when the locals were asked to elaborate if the COVID-19 pandemic increased the tendency in give-away, 80% said that the give-away habits were not affected by the pandemic anyhow and stayed the same as they had been before the pandemic, as seen in Figure 16.

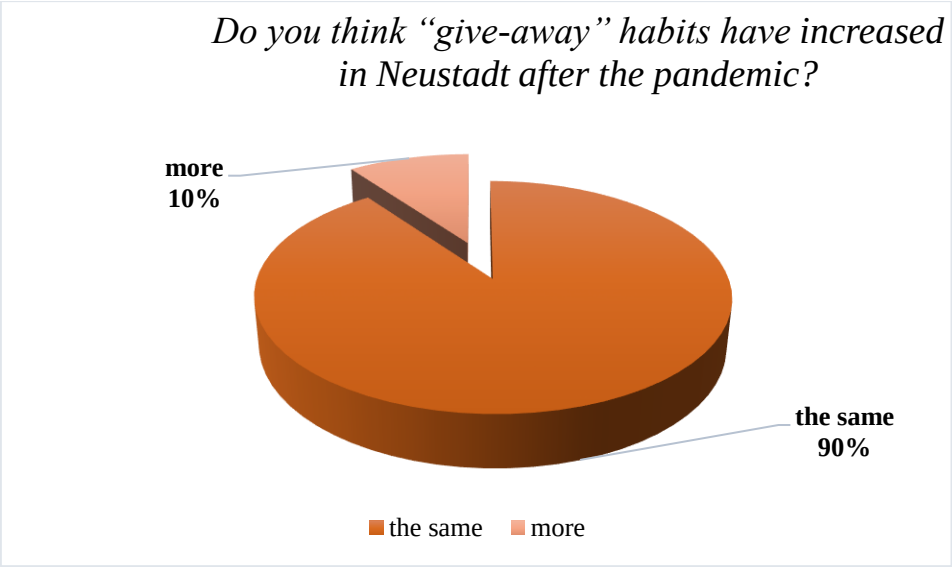

Figure 16: The changes on the give-away habits after the COVID-19 pandemic in Neustadt

In other words, give-away practices were already popular in Neustadt even before the pandemic and the local people had already practicing this sharing culture in the neighbourhood. Therefore, one may say that the outcomes of the research falsifies the claim that the pandemic increased the tendency at sharing for the Neustadt case.

Future estimations were also asked to locals related to the give-away habits in Neustadt. As more than half (55%) said that the give-away habit would be the same, 35% expressed that it could be more common in the future.

As the last question, the suggestions of the interviewees were asked to make the give-away practices more efficient in Neustadt. A vast number of the locals (65%) underlined that creating dedicated places would be the best way to protect the give-away items from external factors such as bad weather conditions, drunk people etc., and added that the messy appearance could also be sorted in this way. Besides, providing information to the inhabitants about the give-away boxes on how to use them, and limiting the number of the objects in the boxes were also seen as other suggestions that could enhance give-away practices.

4. EVALUATION AND SUGGESTIONS

In the presented research, the give-away habits of a central urban neighbourhood were evaluated through the Neustadt district case from Dresden, Germany, and the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on this sharing culture was also examined. Since there was not any research on the topic that explores the give-away culture in Dresden in the literature particularly in English, the research has had to face some challenges and has had to produce the needed information itself. Therefore, the research was mostly conducted as an experimental urban sociology project that combines planning and engineering.

In order to undertake the data collection and the interviews with the 20 inhabitants, more than 40 hours were spent in the field in Neustadt which also provided the authors a valuable opportunity to observe and follow the give-away circulations in the neighbourhood closely.

Regarding the outcomes of the research, even though it was expected to see that the pandemic had accelerated the sharing habits of the people in urban areas through the Neustadt case, it was surprisingly found out that the pandemic did hardly made any impact in Neustadt since the neighbourhood had already had a big tendency and enthusiasm on give-away culture even before the pandemic.

As another point, it was also found out that the people that live in the residential areas and therefore have closer neighbourhood relationships were more willing to give their stuff away. Besides, it was observed that attached building blocks and the short setback distances of the buildings to the main streets made the circulation of the give-away items faster since they were easily seen in addition to being for free.

All in all, this research is seen as a preliminary work that sheds light on more comprehensive urban studies that will discover daily urban practices by including real time spatial data, observations and also the needs of the neighbourhoods.

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