

# URBAN LIVING ROOM

## A NEW CONTEMPORARY PUBLIC CONDENSER

### PROBLEM STATEMENT

After the fall of the Berlin Wall, Berlin's gentrification has grown significantly in former 'East' districts like Friedrichshain.<sup>1</sup> Since the late 1990s, an event and entertainment structure typical for gentrification processes has established itself in Friedrichshain. Bars, pubs and clubs ensured the arrival of many students and wealthy migrants.<sup>2</sup> As a result, the places with which people once defined their neighbourhood have become spaces with which they no longer associate. Especially for origin, ageing residents, this has consequences; if they can no longer use their familiar social facilities, loneliness will increase even faster.<sup>3</sup>

Despite the delayed pioneering phase, extensive modernisation of old buildings has also occurred in Friedrichshain. Although rents are far below those in Mitte, poorer households cannot afford them.<sup>2</sup> As a result, less wealthy people are being driven out of neighbourhoods like Weberwiese to make way for more affluent residents. This change creates significant socioeconomic inequality and segregation in a neighbourhood.

Besides the conversion of old buildings, many new apartment complexes are rising from the ground in large open areas like the south of Wriezener Bahnhof. Lift access to the apartments, undefined public space between the buildings and the possibility to work from home create more individualism and isolation.

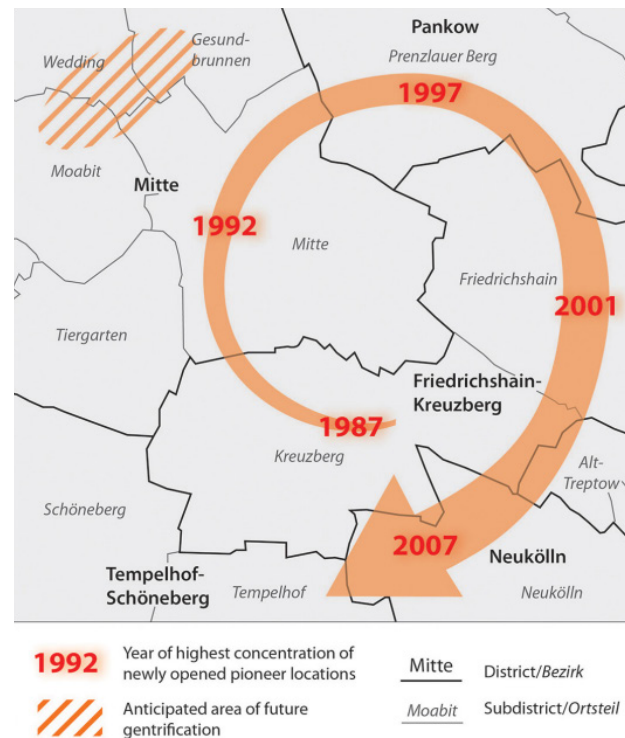


Figure 1. Spatial displacement of pioneering phases of gentrification in Berlin (1987-2007). Source: Siemer, J., & Matthews-Hunter, K. (2017).

1. Holm, A., Grell, B., & Bernt, M. (2013). Berlin's Gentrification Mainstream. In *The Berlin Reader. A Compendium on Urban Change and Activism* (pp. 171–187).

2. Holm, A. (2009, July 29). Berlin: Die Karawane zieht weiter – Stationen einer Aufwertung. *Gentrificationblog*.  
3. Davidson, M. (2008). Spoiled mixture: where does state-led 'positive' gentrification end? *Urban Studies* 45.12, 2385–405.

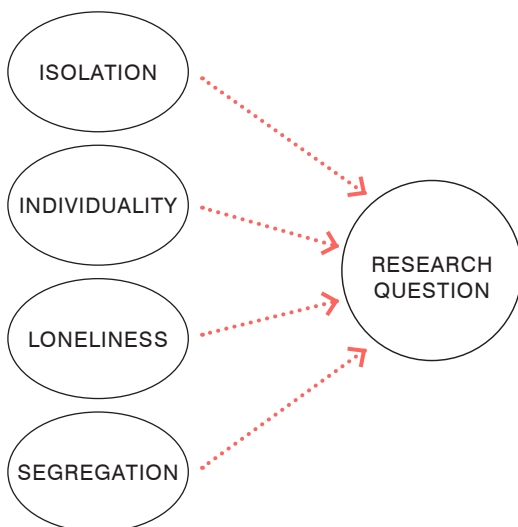
## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In summary, four significant effects of gentrification can be identified: isolation, individuality, loneliness and segregation. Gentrification comes at the expense of 'origins' culture and society, whereas change should go hand in hand with existing conditions. For this reason, the thesis will investigate the following research question:

“How can a public condenser serve as a central heart between the social and spatial effects of gentrification and the original culture and society?”

This question can be further broken down in order to help structure the research into subquestions:

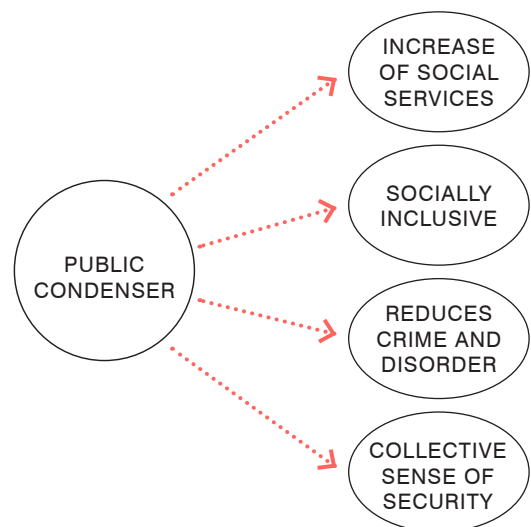
1. What are the effects of gentrification on the social relation between original and new resident adults and children?
2. How can different generations help each other to break up social isolation?
3. How can a public building mediate between the individual and the collective?
4. How can architecture influence segregated socioeconomic classes?



## RESEARCH RELEVANCE

All places change over time; however, the extent and availability of alternatives are essential. The transition to a large-scale class can have significant consequences for low-income and older people with fewer choices and fewer opportunities to travel to recreate and socialise.<sup>4</sup>

Changes in neighbourhood resources can be seen as “positive elements” of gentrification if the availability of social services increases.<sup>5</sup> Adding social functions to existing services ensures that renewal and origin reinforce each other. Moreover, bringing different socioeconomic groups together reduces crime and disorder and enhances the collective sense of security.<sup>6</sup>



4. Shaw, K. S., & Hagemans, I. W. (2015). Gentrification Without Displacement' and the Consequent Loss of Place. *IJURR*, 39(2), 323–341.

5. Freeman, L. and F. Braconi (2002). Gentrification and displacement. *The Urban Prospect* 8.1, 1–4.

6. Vigdor, J.L. (2002). Does Gentrification Harm the Poor? *Brookings-Wharton Papers on Urban Affairs*, 133–182.

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### PROJECT AIM

The design aims to form a new central heart between an existing and new neighbourhood and their society. The public condenser should blur rigid divisions between neighbourhoods and enhance inclusivity and diversity. Essential target groups often ignored in gentrifying areas but with a high number of residents are lonely elderly, less affluent families and, partly due to digitalisation, individual youth.

Interviews conducted in Friedrichshain revealed that these target groups desire a safe place to recreate and learn. The design will therefore have the function of an urban living room where different generations can interact and cohabit. Functions such as a library, workshops, dance studios, play areas and catering facilities will be brought together in one building. The building will be inclusive, hybrid, flexible and resilient to future changes and users' needs.

### METHODOLOGY

Various research methods have been and will be used to answer the research questions correctly. For background information on Berlin and Friedrichshain, quantitative research was conducted in the first weeks. During the site visit, the data was extended with participant observation and interviews to discover who the commons in Friedrichshain are and their needs.

Qualitative research will be used to investigate the social and spatial effects of gentrification and the influence of public interiors in an urban context.

Finally, plan analysis will show what the relationships between the functions in a building have on the users and the surroundings. Several cases-studies of urban living rooms and community centres will be explored to see how a public building can mediate between the individual and the collective.

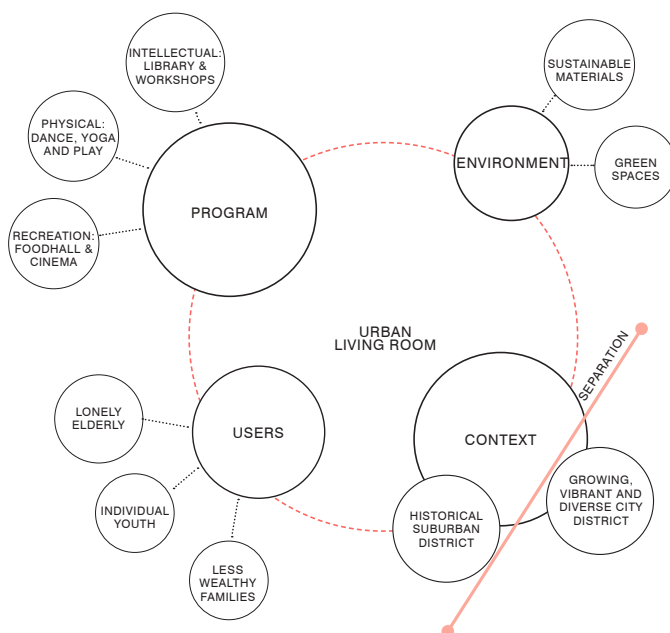


Figure 2. Diagram with main aspects concerning the design of a new urban living room. Diagram by Author, 2022.

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