

# Industrial forever? Narratives, place identity, and the development path of the city of Zeitz, Germany

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## Abstract

*There is a growing interest in understanding development processes and opportunities in small and medium-sized towns that so far did not attract much attention in mainstream urban theory. Conventional growth-oriented approaches fail to capture the complexity of local development and policy-making processes because they prioritise production factors and underrate the role of discourse and place-based identity. This paper aims to explore the linkages between narratives, place identity, and local development. As local actors try to make sense of a place's past and future, they select, contribute to, and mobilise various local narratives. Multiple narratives feed into and are part of a place's identity that defines a frame for possible development options. The paper uses the case of Zeitz in Saxony-Anhalt (Germany) to analyse the evolution of local development narratives from the 1970s until today. The paper concludes that: i) narrative-making is not a linear process; narratives, spatial imaginaries and local identity are complex, dynamic, and interconnected with each other; ii) local narratives help to construct a coherent imaginary of a place and are mutually intertwined with local development and policies; and iii) local narratives are interdependent with external events and strategies requiring a multiscalar relational perspective on local development processes.*

**Key words:** narrative; place identity; past; coal mining; small town; local development, Germany

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## 1. Introduction

There is a growing interest in expanding the current understanding of the urban via engaging with a variety of geographical scales, histories, and types of urban settlements, and encouraging dialogues between various world regions. Leading theorists have argued for a long time that the “paradigmatic city” approach has limitations (Jacobs 2012, p. 908), suggesting that urban theory must be “provincialized” in order to “address a much wider range of modes of urbanism” (Parnell and Robinson, 2012, p. 600), and that “cities have to be theorised as open, embedded and relational” (Ward, 2010, p. 481).

While the focus of current debates has been shifting beyond large cities and western domains (Bell and Jayne, 2006; Brenner and Schmid, 2014; Bryson et al. 2021; Hamdouch et al., 2017), there is a need and scope for a more nuanced understanding of development processes in smaller, peripheral, and disadvantaged places (Carter, 2016; Servillo et al., 2017). The complex dynamic of urban development “under the conditions of deindustrialisation and (sometimes) subsequent regeneration” (Bell and Jayne, 2009, p. 693)

deserves more research attention, especially about understanding the role of non-economic factors, such as local identity. Research should “delve into the spatial and historical contexts in which economic [and political] change has unfolded and economic [and political] agents have made key decisions” (Martin and Sunley, 2022, p. 12). This paper responds to these calls by exploring the role of local identity and local narratives about a place's development in forming a specific development path.

Old-industrial places and particularly those strongly connected to mining activities often have experienced economic and demographic decline as a result of changes in global production patterns and technology. After mining has lost its relevance, such places often find themselves in a precarious economic and social position (Wirth et al., 2012). Finding new economic roles poses a formidable challenge because of the structural conditions and various lock-ins, including structural, institutional, and cognitive factors (Grabher, 1993; Hassink, 2010). Intertwined processes of economic restructuring, demographic change, disinvestment, and the collapse of social fabric often result in a very

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particular image associated with decay, marginality, and abandonment (Edensor, 2005). On the other hand, industrial legacies and specific industrial cultures are also associated with endogenous economic potential and new opportunities (Görmar and Harfst, 2019; Harfst, 2015; Tiran et al., 2022).

As the industrial past often constitutes a foundational element of local identity and a major reference point in current local narratives and future imaginaries, its role and implications for development prospects requires a better conceptual and analytical grasping. Traditional imaginaries may compete with alternative visions leading to a so-called “crisis of definition” (Cruickshank et al., 2016), or in other words a crisis of local identity, and doubts about which kind of development path to pursue. A feasible strategy requires joint efforts of actors in the fields of planning, place making and economic development (Nathan et al., 2019; Albrecht and Kortelainen, 2020; Van Hoose et al., 2021).

Local narratives affect the ways future development opportunities are perceived and what political decisions are made (O’Dowd and Komarova, 2013; Sandercock, 2003; Shanahan et al., 2013; Willett, 2016). We employ the term here in the sense of stories which are told about past events and future visions impacting the development of a particular

place in the perception of the narrator(s) decisively. They serve as sources of strategic intervention entailing material effects. At the same time, they are also the outcome of these activities as through narratives people make sense and meaning of actual events and local development processes (Jessop, 1997; Garud et al., 2010; Groth, 2019). Drawing on these debates and the idea that local development is an “ongoing attempt to construct the identity of place” (Cruickshank et al., 2016, p. 151), this paper explores how identities (expressed via narratives) shape a local development path.

The paper aims to understand how identity-forming discourses and local development activities co-constitute each other. We focus on local narratives and spatial imaginaries that contribute to a particular ‘sense of place’ and constitute elements of social agency in local development, using Zeitz, a medium-sized older industrial town in Saxony-Anhalt, Germany, as a case study (see Fig. 1). The research is guided by the following question: How do local narratives and perceptions of a place’s imaginary and identity, influence policies and development options? This is followed by three empirical sub-questions:

1. How do official narratives in urban development and marketing documents change over time?;



Fig. 1: The location of Zeitz in Germany  
Source: Leibniz Institute for Regional Geography

2. What future did the municipality at different points in time imagine?; and
3. How has this been translated in actual development measures in the town and subsequently influenced its development path?

The research uses Critical Narrative Analysis (CNA) – a novel methodological approach that allows the researcher to contextualise the unfolding local narratives and changing imaginaries of old-industrial places in time and space, and consider their specific political, social and cultural settings (Souto-Manning, 2013; Gavriely-Nury, 2017). This approach is based on a strategic-relational perspective on place(s) and local development that emphasises the mutual constitution of agency, discourses and structures across time and different scales (Görmar et al., 2022; Jessop, 1997).

By researching narratives and imaginaries, we offer a better understanding of connections between changing economic environments, local development processes and community responses by identifying three different functions narratives have in local development:

1. Explaining and making sense of situations;
2. Structuring options and actors; and
3. Imagining futures and facilitating discussion.

The paper is organised as follows: the following section outlines the conceptual frame, while section 3 introduces CNA. Section 4 gives a detailed overview of the different local narratives from 1970 up to today, which will be discussed in form of a synthesis in Section 5. Section 6 concludes the argument.

## 2. Narratives in local development and identity building

We depart from the standpoint that places are laden with meaning “which is not only attached to materialities, but also to experiences, practices, feelings and narratives” (Glorius and Manz, 2018, p. 29). According to Massey (1995) narratives are not pre-given, instead they should be understood as “constantly shifting articulations of social relations through time” (Massey, 1995, p. 188). A powerful narrative combines both discursive and material factors “that give them a more or less coherent imagined identity and social structuration” (Jessop, 2012, p. 13). It is important for agents involved in local development to use their capacity to frame discourses, and more specifically local narratives, through which past experiences are mobilised and futures are imagined (Martin and Sunley, 2022; Garud et al., 2010).

Spatial imaginaries and local narratives can be seen as constitutive parts of local development (Paasi, 2013) and identity building transforming “urban [and rural] spaces into territories and places while constituting both as part of social identity” (O’Dowd and Komarova, 2013, p. 540). While spatial imaginaries are understood as “mental maps representing a space to which people relate and with which they identify” (Boudreau, 2007, p. 2596), local narratives are conceived of as their political and discursive articulations that both shape a place’s identity and culture and are representations of it (Paasi, 2013, p. 1207). Imaginaries can be considered as operating in the background as abstract world views influencing decision-making processes. Yet, they are rather elusive and hard to grasp.

Narratives offer a useful entry point for their identification. They are used by people to make sense of the complex

processes in the world and their implications for specific localities. They establish coherent and logical plots which link a sequence of (potentially or actually) transformative events and actions and the involved human or non-human actors to each other (Gadinger et al., 2014; Groth, 2019). This sequencing or emplotment is a highly selective practice both on the sender’s as well as recipient’s side and has an inherent political dimension as it implies a certain causality between these events (Ameel, 2016; Jessop, 1997). The same applies to references to specific timeframes and socio-spatial relations. The past, present, and future are inextricably intertwined as “different visions of the future will lead to the mobilisation of the past in different ways” (Garud et al., 2010, p. 768), creating space for current policies. Massey (1995, p. 186) links place identity to “the histories which are told of them, how those histories are told, and which history turns out to be dominant”. As there is a multitude of potential narratives, they represent different interpretations of a place’s identity “based on the different socio-geographical position of groups which promote them” (Massey, 1995, p. 185). Which ones will become dominant is contingent but entails the emergence of strategically selective visions about a place’s future (Jessop, 1997; Pike et al., 2017). Hence, narratives should be seen as “internally complex and contradictory [and] incorporating multiple resistances [which nevertheless] engage in a dialogue with each other and even partially overlap” (O’Dowd and Komarova, 2013, p. 540). Control over narratives brings about political advantage and shapes agents’ capacities “to frame political [here: urban development] processes according to one’s view” (Groth, 2019, p. 2).

Narratives are deeply linked to our affects and emotions as they resonate with former experiences made and are expressions of the creative agency of actors within specific structures. They are hence drivers of human agency (Garud et al., 2010) which is particularly visible (but not only) in place making and planning processes. The latter can be even described as processes of “writing a narrative” (Paasi, 2013, p. 1214) or “persuasive storytelling” (Throgmorton, 2003). At the same time, narratives as well as place identity are historically contingent. They might change even to the extent that they are not anymore present in successive planning or marketing documents.

When studying development and change in older industrial places, three interrelated aspects of development appear particularly relevant (see Grabher, 1993; Hassink, 2010): firstly, changes in the local economy including processes of regional restructuring and renewal, path creation and path contingency (e.g. Miörner, 2020; Isaksen et al., 2018; Martin and Sunley, 2006); secondly, changes in local culture and identity (Glorius and Manz, 2018; Cruickshank et al., 2016; Cooke and Rehfeld, 2011; Byrne, 2002); and finally, changes in local governance and institutions including planning policies and practices (Sotarauta and Suvinen, 2018; Kinossian, 2018; Dale, 2002). In this regard, spatial imaginaries and local narratives are important in multiple ways, for example, by setting the basis for place making and branding strategies (e.g. Van Hoose et al., 2021; Albrecht and Kortelainen, 2020; Van Assche and Lo, 2011) thereby giving symbolic meanings to a place and shaping its identity (see also Vainikka, 2015), by legitimising urban development projects (e.g. Ameel, 2016, 2021; Jensen, 2007) or new industrial pathways (Mackinnon et al., 2019; Garud et al., 2010) or by empowering (or suppressing) specific actors in such emerging industrial paths (Miörner, 2021).

In summary, narratives can be understood as strategies or tools for social action (Groth, 2019), spatial imaginaries as the underlying worldviews. They are created, diffused or contested by different political, social and economic agents at specific points in time and foster (intentionally or intuitively) competing political and economic interests and coalitions thereby shaping a place's development "both in relation to its external positioning and its internal differentiation" (Healey, 2006, p. 534). Narratives that are told in the right way motivate and organise collective actions either by reaffirming dominant imaginaries and hence the hegemonic order or by contesting it. As such, spatial narratives are always normative and political although they may be presented as 'facts'. They promote images, identities and/or normative assumptions on what is good or bad, (un)important, (im)possible or (un)desirable to inspire people to act (or refrain from certain actions). Hence, they shape agents' imaginaries about a place and their visions of how a place should develop in future, which will be negotiated in distinct political arenas and lead to specific local development policies and measures. Planning narratives are particularly important as they aim to "explain, legitimise and produce change in a city that went through a process of urban transformation" (Walter, 2013, p. 7).

### 3. Research design: A critical narrative analysis

As shown above, narratives and imaginaries are constitutive elements of local development and identity. Hence, their analysis offers a useful entry point to the discussion on what a place or a region aims to 'become' in the future (Willett, 2016). Local actors 'texture', intentionally or not, stories and discourses in certain ways to push their agendas forward. Discursive change is achieved by varying themes and topics, foregrounding, or backgrounding specific aspects, which potentially leads also to social and material change. Socio-material and discursive processes in local development can be understood as mutually constitutive, impacting on and transforming particular social relations (van Heur, 2013), which requires a suitable research design. We rely here on Critical Narrative Analysis (CNA) (Souto-Manning, 2014; Gavriely-Nury, 2017) that builds upon elements of two approaches:

1. Narrative Analysis (NA); and
2. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA).

So far, this novel approach has not been used in geographical studies, yet it proves to be suitable for such a complex endeavour.

Both NA and CDA are concerned with evaluating transformations by focussing on processes of sense- and meaning-making (either through semiosis in general or through narration) (Fairclough, 2005; Jessop, 2010; Varró, 2014). Both can link institutional systems with social and cultural contexts (Fairclough, 2003; Souto-Manning, 2014). CDA is especially concerned with the relationship between language and discourse on the one hand, and social structures and non-discursive elements of social actions on the other hand (Fairclough, 2013). It offers a three-dimensional framework that treats discourse as text (in a linguistic sense), discursive practice, and social practice (Fairclough, 1992), allowing one to link texts and narratives to actual development outcomes. Narrative approaches in turn offer an additional conceptual perspective on texts as (written or oral) stories. CNA is not only suitable to show how individual narratives are shaped by powerful institutional

discourses (Souto-Manning, 2014), but also to look at collective narratives and how they could contribute to the construction of a group such as an organisation, community or even an economic or political system and related identities (Gavriely-Nuri, 2017).

In this study, we look at collective local narratives and processes of local identity building, providing a link between local development processes and their linguistic representations through emplotment (see above). A change in narrative plots or vocabulary may indicate processes of variation, selection and retention leading to changes in both the discursive and material elements of a place, in short in local development processes (Fairclough, 2005).

#### 3.1 Data collection

The research relies primarily on an analysis of policy documents, marketing and tourist brochures that have been published in Zeitz since 1970. This is complemented by the analysis of data collected via 23 semi-structured interviews with local actors.

We adopt this mixed methods approach as narratives are created, stored, and transmitted by both oral communications, such as interviews (Czarniawska, 2004), but also policy or planning documents (Shanahan et al., 2018; Ameal, 2016) and other texts e.g. place marketing materials (Lichrou et al., 2017). Such official documents can be understood as "institutionalised traces" (Wolff, 2009) of activities by actors or organisations such as city administration and regional development agencies. They indicate values and principles that are prevalent in local development at a specific moment and point to the nature of existing power relations, because drafting such texts is a simplifying, complexity-reducing process, whereby dominant actors enforce their imaginaries, narratives and associated values and principles.

We start the empirical work with the analysis of policy documents to trace changes in the official narratives as articulations of a publicly promoted local identity and the underlying power relations. Documents have been selected in several rounds of desk and archival research and by asking interviewees for additional sources. They have been deemed relevant for this study when they:

1. Disclose strategic potentials to further the development of the selected case study towns;
2. Include a specific development vision for the municipality, one of its parts or the region within which it is embedded;
3. Have a potential to foster a local or regional identity; or
4. Refer specifically to an already existing local and regional identity (for a comprehensive list of the documents used: see Appendix 1).

The interviews were carried out between July 2020 and May 2021 during face-to-face meetings or via video conferencing. Interviewees were representatives of the city authorities, local entrepreneurs, and civil society actors, and have been chosen on the basis of extensive desk research as well as snowballing (a table on the interviews is provided in the Appendix 2). Interviews gave insights into different interpretations of past development processes, as well as actual results of former narrative building and hinted towards underlying power relations. They served hence to contextualise the official narratives and imaginaries, allowing the researchers to dig deeper into the analysis of the documents as social practices (see below).

### 3.2 Data analysis

Following Fairclough's (1992) three-dimensional analytical framework that understands discourse as text, discursive practice, and social practice, we aim to connect changes in the analysed texts and to identify local narratives with changes in actual development processes. The first dimension, discourse as text, is concerned with concrete linguistic and literary features, such as narrative structures, characters, settings, and events linked to each other by emplotment, and leading to 'lessons' drawn from the narrative (e.g. Shanahan et al., 2018). Specific vocabulary, metaphors or textual structures that give hints of underlying values and imaginaries, as well as temporal and causal relations, link different events and place them in the broader local narrative and identity discourse (Ameel, 2016). In this paper, we analyse the narratives of each text separately before relating them to each other in a second step.

The second dimension, discourse (or narrative) as discursive practice, is concerned with socio-cognitive processes of text production and interpretation. By focussing on intertextuality and interdiscursivity, we can assess the narrative repertoire and associated common knowledge, internalised structures, norms and conventions mobilised in the production and interpretation of texts (Fairclough, 2003). By adopting a long-term perspective in assessing documents from a period of 50 years and relating them to each other, we go beyond a simple narrative analysis of each text.

The third dimension, discourse (or narrative) as social practice, is concerned with the social, institutional, biographical, and situational context of texts (Marxhausen, 2010). For a nuanced interpretation of the material, Fairclough (2005) proposes in this step of an analysis to recontextualise the analysed texts with texts of other genres (e.g. interviews, further documents) and with reference to other scales (e.g. individual, regional, or state level).

Figure 2 shows how we apply the method outlined by Fairclough to the narratives which are inherent in planning and marketing documents. One novelty includes contextualisation and further interpretation by triangulating the analysis of documents with interview results. This enables an assessment of the "relationships between discursive and social change" and allows the researcher to

systematically relate the "detailed properties of texts [...] to social properties of discursive events as instances of social practices" (Fairclough, 1992, p. 8). In the following analysis the different dimensions are already synthesised to give a detailed account of the results of the analysis.

## 4. Results: Changing development narratives of Zeitz

Zeitz is a medium-sized town located in the south of Saxony-Anhalt, situated at the fringes of the Central German lignite exploitation area. The mine of Profen is approximately 15 km away; the village of Theißen belonging to Zeitz, is the headquarters of MIBRAG, the Central German lignite mining company. Besides the core town and Theißen, seven other villages belong to the municipality. Zeitz has a long history of more than 1,000 years but has had to cope with considerable challenges regarding demographic and economic developments since 1990.

Although lignite mining continues, Germany's proposed exit from carbon energy and the post-2022 exposure to energy security risks, created a lot of uncertainty about Zeitz's future. Table 1 summarises the main characteristics of Zeitz. The analysis demonstrates changes in the narratives which can be traced in the official documents from the 1970s up to today. Table 2 shows the timeline of key events as well as the narratives which prevailed during associated periods. We identified four main narratives presented here in a linear form. Yet, we want to point out that narratives may overlap, coevolve, borrow elements of former narratives, or incorporate new elements which we want to show with the analysis of the individual narratives below.

### 4.1 The socialist "Town of labour" (1945–1990)

In GDR, Zeitz was home to large manufacturing enterprises, including the pushchair manufacturer ZEKIWA, a sugar factory, the sweets factory Zetti, a piano factory, a cosmetics producer, and a hydrogenation plant nearby. Deposits of lignite (brown coal) were (and still are) exploited in the surrounding areas. This was particularly important for the GDR goal of energy self-sufficiency. Mining and the development of energy-intensive industries created a need for adequate housing of the workers, which was met by the construction of modern 'socialist' quarters of prefabricated

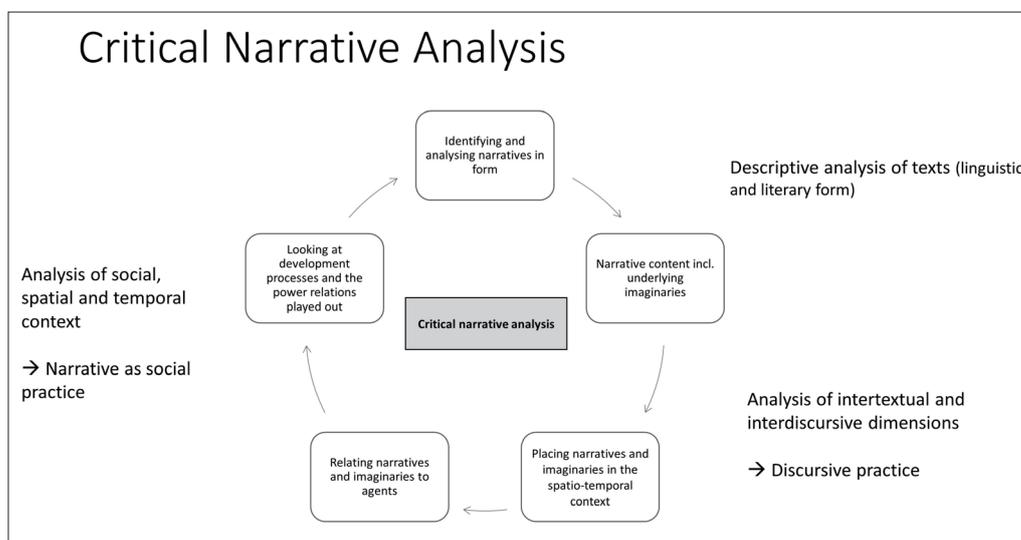


Fig. 2: Critical Narrative Analysis – analytic dimensions

Source: Authors' elaboration; with reference to Fairclough (1992, 2003)

houses (most notably in Zeitz-East). Investment in the inner-city areas stagnated. According to older interviewees, socialist enterprises also dominated completely the social life as they took care of cultural and sports events, health care and kindergartens. Hence, it is no surprise that these enterprises have been important identity markers (Interview ZZ\_IN\_11).

The tourism brochure from 1977 reflects these developments (see storyline in Fig. 4). Being inspired by the communist ideology, it interprets local history and development through the overarching narrative of class struggle, leading to the foundation of a new socialist state.

It lists important dates of the town history like the town's first mentioning in 967, the works of the last bishop Julius Pflug and Martin Luther, its time as residence of the Duke of Saxony-Zeitz or the period of industrialisation.

Yet, these are embedded in the storyline of social progress towards a socialist society and intertwined with events deemed of national importance, like the peasant struggles, the role of the Russian Cossacks during the Napoleonic Wars, the revolutions of 1848 and 1919, and finally the merger of the socio-democratic party and the communists into the Socialist Unity Party (SED) or the Party Congresses of SED.

Population	Significant population loss since 1990	
1990	47.732	
2000	38.991	
2010	31.556	
2019	27.601	
2021	27.003	

Migration balances	Since 2019, positive trend in migration balance, especially due to decreasing outmigration numbers	Migration balance Zeitz–Leipzig (from the perspective of Zeitz)
1991	– 546	Not available
2000	– 483	– 47
2010	– 284	– 63
2019	+ 38	– 36
2021	+ 325	+ 23

<b>Historic development</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Foundation in 967</li> <li>• Seat of bishops (11<sup>th</sup> c.) and dukes (17<sup>th</sup> c.) – building of the castle Moritzburg</li> <li>• Development into a diversified industrial town from the 19<sup>th</sup> century on, Zeitz was one of the industrial centres of GDR</li> <li>• Main industries until 1990: pushchair production (ZEKIWA), mechanical engineering, piano manufacturing and sugar production, lignite extraction, hydrogenation plant and refinery</li> <li>• Closure of a great share of industrial enterprises – from 1995 to 2001 the number of industrial enterprises decreased by more than 50% from 52 to 25 – since then this number is stagnating</li> </ul>	
<b>Local economy</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Manufacturing, extraction and processing industries: Sugar and sweets industries (Südzucker and Zetti), diversification of sugar plant integrating bio-ethanol, carbon acid and starch production</li> <li>• Lignite mining (MIBRAG) &gt; end of lignite mining in 2035, 22 largest enterprises in Saxony-Anhalt (2018)</li> <li>• Chemical and industrial park in Elsteraue &gt; specialisation in biochemistry (“green chemistry”), planned to be expanded; Zeitzer Guss – metallurgy</li> <li>• Number of employees considerably lower than in former times</li> <li>• Services with increasing importance, a small number of creative enterprises, tourism is seen as a complementary potential for the region</li> </ul>	
<b>Numbers of tourists</b>	The number of guests arriving in Zeitz increased until 2019, decreasing numbers in 2020 and 2021 were influenced by the COVID-19 pandemic (not represented in table)	
	<b>Arrivals</b>	<b>Number of nights spent in Zeitz</b>
2010	6,565	12,092
2015	7,731	17,181
2019	10,802	20,050
<b>Current and recent debates</b>	<p>Zeitz is heavily affected by the closure of lignite mines and power plants in the region → currently several discussions and participatory processes take place on various scales (local, regional, federal state level in Saxony-Anhalt)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• since 2021: elaboration of a master plan, office “Town of future”</li> <li>• 2020: Integrated urban development concept (ISEK 2035)</li> <li>• 2019: elaboration of mission statement (Leitbild)</li> <li>• Urban renewal process (Stadtumbau) since 2002</li> </ul>	

Tab. 1: Overview of the characteristics of Zeitz

Sources: Statistical office Saxony-Anhalt, Statistical Office City of Leipzig

Time	Events	Narrative
1949–1990	Division of Germany. Post-war recovery. Growing competition with the west. Zeitz appears one of the major industrial centres in GDR with great diversity of industrial branches. Physical degradation of the old city centre.	The socialist “town of labour”
1990	German reunification  Restructuring of local economy, closure of many of the manufacturing enterprises (e.g. hydrogenation plant, piano producing plant, pushchair factory ZEKIWA); few enterprises could survive with fewer employees (e.g. sugar factory Südzucker, sweets factory Zetti) > consequences are high unemployment, out-migration, increasing housing vacancies	The story of change and adaptation. Linked to the hope to overcome the crisis soon
1994	Decision on new district “ <i>Burgenlandkreis</i> ” of which Naumburg will be county capital; with that, Zeitz loses its status as county capital and seat of regional administration which it had since the 19 <sup>th</sup> century	
1996	Foundation of “ <i>Pakt für Arbeit</i> ” (Pact for labour) to fight against high unemployment; members are the municipality, labour unions and enterprises (still active today)	The story of loss and uncertainty. Realisation of market economy realities
End of 1990s	Highest number of unemployed people with approximately 30% unemployment rate in Zeitz	
2002	Start of urban regeneration process (“ <i>Stadtumbau</i> ”)	
2004	1 <sup>st</sup> garden exhibition of Saxony-Anhalt ( <i>Landesgartenschau</i> ) which resulted in the new creation of the castle park, demolition of former industrial buildings and renovation of a few industrial buildings (“ <i>Klinkerhallen</i> ”)	
2009/2010	Incorporation of adjacent municipalities, including Theißen which is the headquarters of lignite company MIBRAG	
2013	Flood of river Weiße Elster; damages of many buildings in environments, e.g. railway station, former ZEKIWA factory > reconstruction and reuse of some of these buildings possible by using flood support funds (on-going)	
Since 2013	Foundation of an association dedicated to developing the monastery Posa as place of culture and education (Kultur- und Bildungsstätte Kloster Posa e.V.)	The potential “phoenix from the ashes” story. New uncertainties.
2020	Law on exit from coal-based energy production and Law on recompensating for regions affected by “coal exit”	

Tab. 2: Overview of events and narratives shaping local development in Zeitz  
Source: authors' compilation

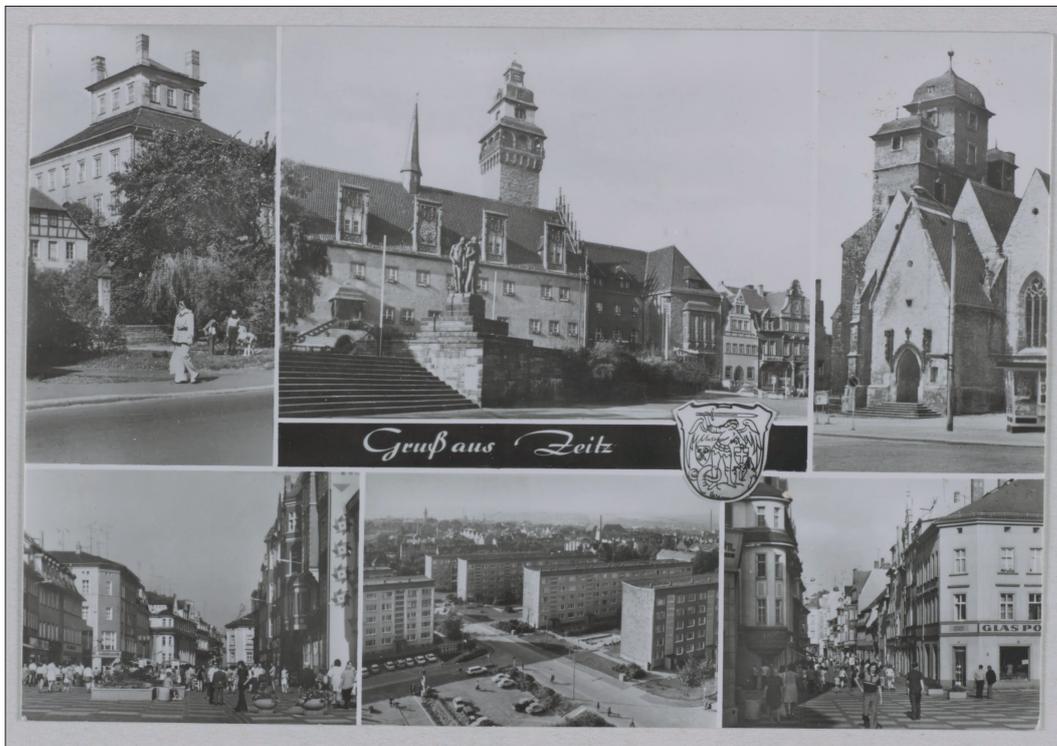


Fig. 3: Postcard from 1989 showing several sites of Zeitz including the newly built Zeitz-East (below centre) and the “boulevard” (below right and left)

Source: Archive for Geography at Leibniz Institute for Regional Geography

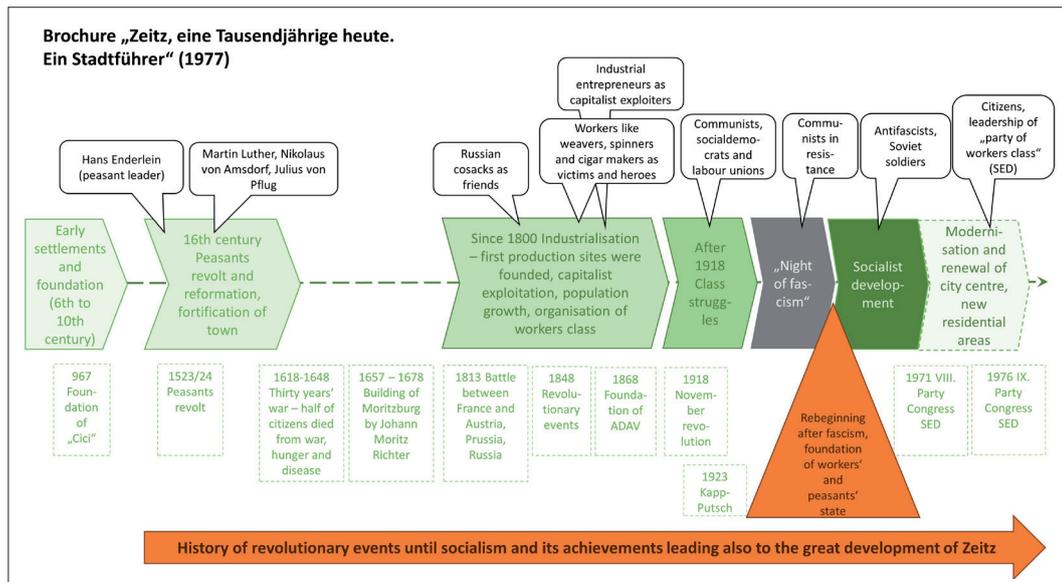


Fig. 4: Storyline in 1977

Source: authors' elaboration based on city guide brochure "Zeit, eine Tausendjährige heute"

The 'heroes' in this storyline are seldom individual persons. Instead, the "workers" and "peasants' state" appealed to the class identity of peasants and workers and members of socialist and communist organisations. Not even the Duke of Saxony-Zeitz was mentioned (in contrast to the builder of his Moritzburg castle). By demoting the former noble elites and promoting the figure of the builder, the authors presumably aimed to foster a sense of empathy and shared identity within the contemporary working population. A strong emphasis was put on social and economic achievements of the socialist state by promoting stories of a modern industrial economy, turning the inner city into an area of consumption (called "Boulevard") as a symbol of the progress of the socialist state and in building the new housing quarters promising social equality to all workers. In this narrative, Zeitz is portrayed as a new socialist industrial town and administrative centre with a long and interesting history as can be illustrated by the following quotation:

"Zeitz [...] is not only an interesting old town, but also a modern, new district metropolis [...]" (Rat der Stadt, 1977, p. 32; authors' translation).

But the decay of the inner city was already happening at this time (ZZ\_IN\_03; ZZ\_IN\_23). The focus was on the modern city, not on the old buildings, reminiscent of a bourgeois past, although the long history has been used to strengthen the official narrative.

#### 4.2 The story of change and adaptation (the early 1990s)

After German reunification, Zeitz was hit hard by enterprise closures and the restructuring of still existing enterprises, leading to an increase in unemployment numbers, outmigration, and considerable demographic shrinkage. Yet, in the early 1990s, hope still seemed to be evident that successful change could be achieved in an adequate time-period. Large projects had been announced but unfortunately rarely been realised (ZZ\_IN\_18).

The documents of that time, as for example the marketing brochure "Stadt Zeitz", developed a storyline which emphasised the continuous changes and hard times Zeitz experienced in its long history (see Fig. 5). The first of these

changes was the end of the long period as a Bishop's residence, which resulted in the loss of independence of the bishopric Naumburg-Zeitz being set under the administration of the Elector of Saxony. The period as Bishop's residence has been considered as time of growth and prosperity, when trade relations developed and several monasteries and churches still existing today were built. The heroes of this time were, besides the Emperor Otto I. who decided on Zeitz as seat of the Bishopric, the citizens of Zeitz and the clerks. The following period was marked, inter alia, by a time as an independent duchy Saxony-Zeitz (1653–1718), which resulted in the construction of Moritzburg Castle by Duke Moritz and a blossoming local culture.

The second drastic change was the transfer of the territory of Naumburg-Zeitz to Prussia after the Napoleonic Wars in 1815. First critically received by Zeitz's inhabitants, the subsequent period was marked by increasing industrial development and a growth in wealth and population, which is still important today as part of the local narrative (ZZ\_IN\_01; ZZ\_IN\_11; ZZ\_IN\_15). During World War II and the subsequent GDR time, industry remained strong whereas historic buildings had already decayed.

Reunification and the subsequent economic and political changes have been then considered yet another, third change which could be handled with courage, energy and confidence (Zeitz, 1994, p. 7). Yet, from today's perspective one can see that enterprises did already close or struggled heavily and unemployment rates were on the rise. Still, the narrative was nurtured by hope, pointing to the importance of the community and conjuring a "blooming town" (Zeitz, 1994, p. 1), which resonated with Helmut Kohl's metaphor about the "blooming landscapes" in Eastern Germany used in several speeches in the 1990s (Kohl, 1990). These promises were not to hold, however, as the opening to western markets and privatisation destroyed many of the enterprises in the town and especially the public agency that was responsible for privatisation, the Treuhand, is considered today as the villain in this story (ZZ\_IN\_03; ZZ\_IN\_11; ZZ\_IN\_14).

The documents from the 1990s particularly emphasised the historic time periods when Zeitz had a central role either as a bishop's or as a duke's residence, which went along with

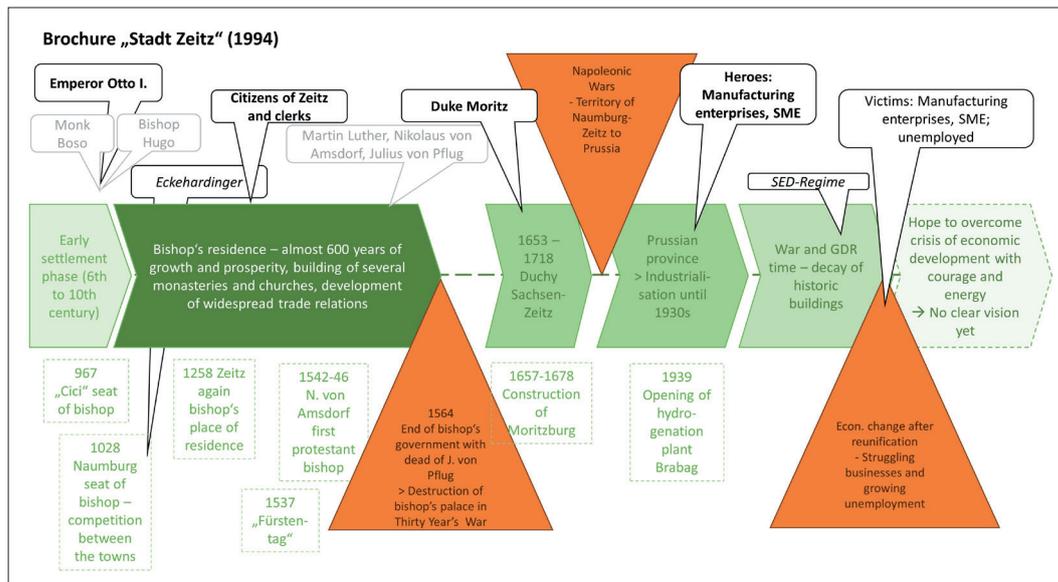


Fig. 5: Storyline in 1994

Source: authors' elaboration based on brochure "Stadt Zeitz"

a certain cultural importance. This is also clear from its quantitative weight, with three quarters of the historically oriented part of the document speaking about this period. It seems that the cultural flourishing of the town during these times could have served as a model for future development, without being very clear about a concrete vision. Zeitz was compared with an "old lady" which will have again a "countenance full of culture" (*kulturvolles Antlitz*) and a certain power (Zeitz, 1994, p. 1). The metaphor of Zeitz as beautiful, but as a shy and neglected lady (even considered as a Sleeping Beauty or Cinderella), has also been conjured recently by our interviewees (ZZ\_IN\_01, ZZ\_IN\_18) or in public presentations (SPD Zeitz, 2018).

Further on, its economic and administrative role was emphasised in the documents, the latter, however, being reduced in 1994 by the merger of the counties of Zeitz, Nebra, and Naumburg to the new Burgenlandkreis, with the county seat being in Naumburg. This decision hit the town hard and reanimated the long competition between the two towns, going back to the decision to relocate the seat of the bishopric from Zeitz to Naumburg in 1028 (a decision which at least regarding the place of residence, was revised in 1285). Still today, this rivalry can be witnessed, e.g. in decisions about the closure of administrative authorities in Zeitz, about the hospital with seats in Zeitz and Naumburg, or about cultural sites like the theatre (closed in 2003) (ZZ\_IN\_03, ZZ\_IN\_06, ZZ\_IN\_11). Even the decisions about financing current development measures with money from the current coal funds are scrutinised under the perspective of intermunicipal competition and mistrust towards federal and regional authorities (ZZ\_IN\_03, ZZ\_IN\_15).

Economic development, particularly during industrialisation has been mentioned as leading to a diverse economic landscape, but was not at the centre of the narrative. Interviewees also emphasised the great scepticism of the mayor of that time towards external investments, hindering potential development projects like the conversion of a landmark building into a care home (ZZ\_IN\_01, ZZ\_IN\_03). Lignite mining, although still present in the region and one of the major job providers, did not appear strong in the researched documents. This may be due to the nature of the documents selected (touristic and marketing documents) but also because the acknowledgement

of environmental damages and their devastating impacts on landscapes in East Germany, created by mining and industries in general, led to changes in public attitudes towards lignite exploitation and processing.

### 4.3 The story of loss and uncertainty (late 1990s – early 2010s)

From the late 1990s until mid-2000s unemployment rates peaked in Zeitz (as in many parts of East Germany). Still at that time, important enterprises like Zemag had to close. Additionally, the relationship between the mayor and its administration on one side and city council on the other side, deteriorated noticeably up to his deselection in 2008, as the interviewees who already were active at that time told us.

In 2002, the first urban development concept of Zeitz was elaborated as a prerequisite for access to the federal funding under *Stadtumbau Ost* (Urban Redevelopment East) (for storyline see Fig. 6). The concept describes the history of Zeitz only briefly and in rather technical terms: important landmarks were mentioned: 967 (the date of first mentioning of the town as a prospective seat of the bishop); Zeitz as a protestant town with the first protestant bishop and the place of Luther's heirs; and the XIX<sup>th</sup>–XX<sup>th</sup> century industrialisation and lignite exploitation. The actual and perceived losses of the town, particularly the processes of deindustrialisation (with subsequent losses of many jobs) and depopulation, received most attention in this document, also the reason for the envisaged changes in urban development, namely the deconstruction of prefabricated panel houses in Zeitz-East, a quarter built in GDR times, and the suggested improvement of the inner city area. The main idea was to redevelop a compact town by concentrating on the inner city and dismantling buildings at the outskirts. Following that, almost 3,000 flats have been demolished up to today in Zeitz, albeit not always strictly following the idea of starting at the outer limits of the city but also in the city centre. Still today, the idea is prevalent in the urban planning department where the model of the 15-minute-city is upheld (ZZ\_IN\_02, ZZ\_IN\_04).

Not only the urban development concept but also other documents in this period emphasised two main points (e.g. Burgenlandkreis, 1997; Stadtbuchverlag, 2000). First, the need to increase the attractiveness of the town by offering

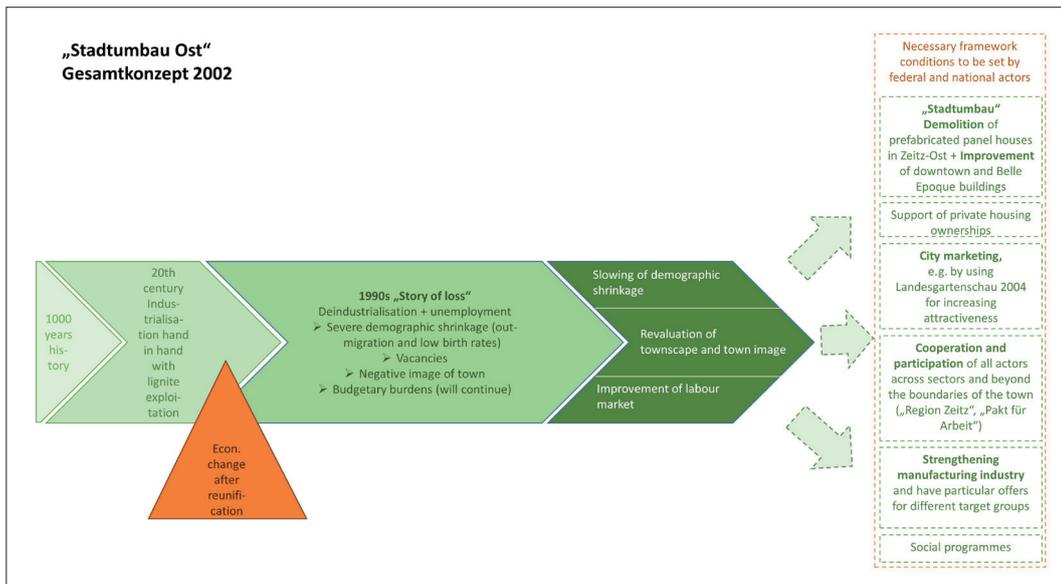


Fig. 6: Storyline in 2002  
 Source: authors' elaboration based on urban development concept 2002

cultural and touristic amenities in the town and its environs. That would include the lighthouse project of the garden exhibition in 2004. Second, the need to create new jobs in order to curb outmigration and slow down the demographic decline. Some local measures have been carried out in this regard, like the foundation of the “Pakt für Arbeit” (Pact for jobs), an association meant to foster development of the labour market, which was meant to assume a central role in economic redevelopment (ZZ\_IN\_03). Local actors also called for adequate measures by federal, state and national actors, however, to set the necessary framework conditions in terms of infrastructure and business acquisition.

In this way, the town could have become a new node between Saxony, Saxony-Anhalt and Thuringia (Stadtbuchverlag, 2000). Additionally, the need for cooperation across sectors and in the region beyond the territory of the town was very much emphasised, although only partially implemented. The documents of this time also emphasised the need to build a new identity for the town and to give its inhabitants new self-confidence. Also in this regard, the garden exhibition under the title “Zeit(z)-Reise”

(Travel across time and Zeitz) was deemed to play a crucial role (Stadtbuchverlag, 2000) and is still considered of great significance for the development of the town (ZZ\_IN\_03, ZZ\_IN\_08, ZZ\_IN\_09, ZZ\_IN\_11). In many of the documents from this period, passive voice and impersonal structures have been prevalent. This is an indication that agency is not foregrounded – rather the feeling that Zeitz is affected by developments beyond its control, a feeling of (self-) victimisation which still today can be witnessed among Zeitz’ older population (ZZ\_IN\_18, ZZ\_IN\_23).

The “story of loss and uncertainty” was still prevalent in the 2<sup>nd</sup> urban development concept elaborated in 2009 (see Fig. 7). The search for a new identity still did not end, although three potential main pillars were identified: (1) the still existing industrial function; (2) its historical heritage which was also foregrounded by the title “1,000 years old cathedral and residence town”; and (3) the landscapes of the villages which were incorporated in 2009 and 2010 into the municipal territory. A clear vision, however, was still missing. Instead, the document focused on processes of adaptation to past developments.

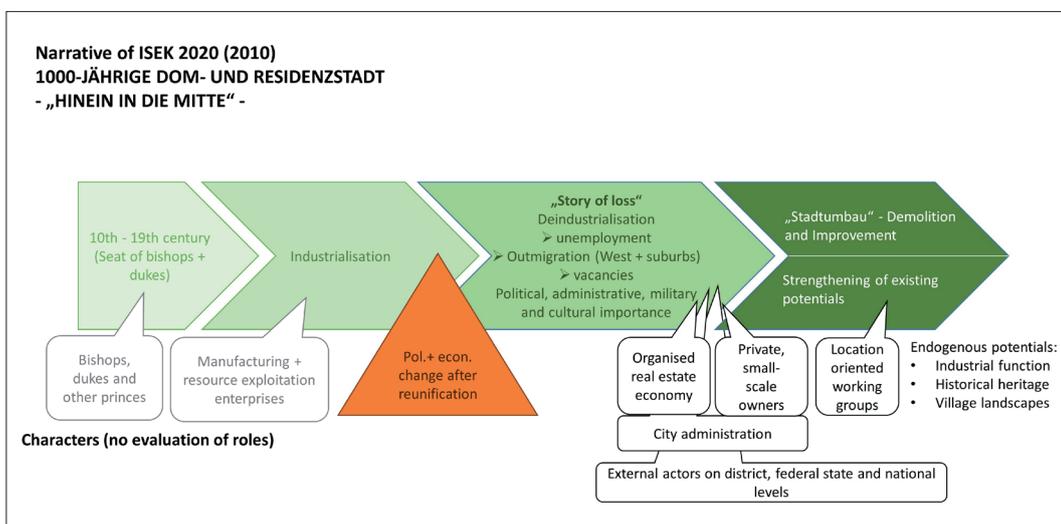


Fig. 7: Storyline in 2010  
 Source: authors' elaboration based on urban development concept 2010

“For about two decades, the city of Zeitz has been undergoing a fundamental transformation during which it is striving to develop a new identity. Since it is foreseeable that no single unique selling point will be able to convey the city's future identity, the city's future must be built on multiple pillars. For this purpose, the existing historical reservoirs and the rural peripheral zones should preferably be used alongside the city's remaining industrial function.” (City of Zeitz, 2010, p. 56).

Additionally, the imaginary of a compact city, as promoted by the Leipzig Charter, was again taken up by the authors of the urban development concept who were the same as for the first one, aiming to continue the renewal process which started in 2002. This is particularly visible with the subtitle “Into the centre” (Hinein in die Mitte) of the 2010 document. Once again, the main goals were the demolition of mainly prefabricated panel houses on the periphery of Zeitz and an improvement of the inner-city areas with punctual clearance of so-called “junk real estate” (*Schrottimmobilien*) to gain more space in this area. This was meant to go, however, hand in hand with a strengthening of existing economic, historic and leisure potentials. It seems to be no coincidence that in parallel to the development of an “industrial belt” (*Gewerbeband*), the concept speaks also about a “belt of cultural sites in Zeitz” (*Zeitzer Band der Kulturstätten*) and about a “blue belt” (*Blaues Band*) for water tourism measures. Portrayed as relevant actors of the urban development process have been, besides the city administration, big housing cooperatives and private small-scale housing owners, and specific location-oriented working groups, which has been in line with the focus on urban renewal, and, once again, external actors on district, federal state, and national levels, illustrating the town's dependence on external decision making.

#### 4.4 A potential “phoenix from the ashes” story (from 2016 to the future)

While the “story of loss” still has been told by many people up to today (ZZ\_IN\_03, ZZ\_IN\_15, ZZ\_IN\_21), the narrative gradually has changed towards an emphasis of the potentials of the town and the first signs of recovery which became visible at the latest since 2015/16. After the garden exhibition in 2004, two other decisive events in Zeitz have been the election of a new mayor in 2009 and the flooding of 2013. The flooding damaged many buildings along the river (e.g. the railway station and the main building of the former ZEKIWA factory) but also created some opportunities connected to funding for reconstruction and flood prevention measures (ZZ\_IN\_10). The mayor and the city council seized the opportunity by purchasing the railway station and redeveloping it into a business and service centre, as well as converting the ZEKIWA building into a city archive (restoration of buildings to be finished in 2022). A third event with long-lasting, albeit not immediately visible effects, was the foundation of a culture and education association at the Posa Monastery (Kultur- und Bildungsstätte Kloster Posa e.V) by two former inhabitants of Zeitz and their friends. The association aims at diversifying the cultural landscape of Zeitz, offering events and education programmes for young people, and contributing to a sustainable and participatory local development in the town and the region. During the last decade, they attracted attention of other creative- and culture-oriented actors as well as the media towards Zeitz which in recent times lead also to a change in external perceptions of the town (Eckel, 2021; ZZ\_IN\_08, ZZ\_IN\_13, ZZ\_IN\_20, ZZ\_IN). Yet, the above-described developments

took time and were not particularly visible until 2017/18, while already in 2016 another new mayor was elected. In the meantime, debates about appropriate measures against climate change gained momentum in Germany, resulting in the decision to exit from coal-based energy production and close all lignite mines by 2038 (in Central Germany by 2035).

This new structural change within the region is seen both as a risk for employment and economic development but also as an opportunity to restructure the local economy and receive the necessary support for local infrastructure and economic development projects. Dilapidated buildings of both industrial and residential use are not only considered as a burden but also an asset that could be rediscovered and revalorised (e.g. ZZ\_IN\_08, ZZ\_IN\_11, ZZ\_IN\_17) (see also Fig. 8). The growing number of tourists (which has grown considerably between 2010 and 2019 – before the COVID19 pandemic, see Tab. 1) and people in creative occupations coming from the wider region and even from Leipzig have been identified as markers for future change. In the third Urban development concept (ISEK 2035, 2020), Zeitz is portrayed as a town offering enough open spaces for experimentation, physically but also ideationally (“Stadt der Freiräume”). By illustrative metaphors and a description of several actors as either heroes (e.g. young creative people) or villains (e.g. media representatives), the concept aims to foster further identification of the residents with their town as the quotation below shows.

“Particularly older citizens find it difficult to identify with today's Zeitz. [...] However, something has happened in Zeitz for a few years now: an increasing number of tourists discovers the city's treasures and young creative people from the surrounding area – especially from Leipzig – have realised the town's potential and revitalise the cultural landscape. They discover open spaces that are awaiting a new utilisation – residential buildings, brownfields and industrial landmarks. Hence, vacancies are not only a great burden, but also a treasure to be recovered. Many young residents are no longer interested in what Zeitz once was, but in what Zeitz one day will become - their home.” (City of Zeitz, 2020, p. 1)

The Urban development concept calls for novelty but also refers to the founding myths of the town (see Fig. 9). Being founded as a town of Bishop's residence in the 10<sup>th</sup> century, it witnessed a first reinvention in the 19<sup>th</sup> century when it became an industrial town based on energy-intensive industries and mining. Today, it has to reinvent itself again after the 1990 juncture by developing a new, rather complex identity entailing creativity, innovation, and climate consciousness which integrates different storylines of historical and contemporary developments, while at the same time leaving enough space for individuals to elaborate their own stories. Not only the new mayor but also young entrepreneurs and civil society actors are weaving this new narrative, which is not anymore referring to the lost past but to the potentials to become a more liveable city (e.g. ZZ\_IN\_10; ZZ\_IN\_12). Storylines are drawn, for example, from innovative entrepreneurs in the 19<sup>th</sup> century to today's culture and creative industries and other innovative enterprises which the mayor want to attract to the town (own field work documentation; ZZ\_IN\_11). The designation of certain areas as “areas of change” (Wandelgebiete) and symbolic projects along Rahnestraße may serve as an illustration of the “rise from the ashes” metaphor. In the Rahnestraße, a first development project has been approved



Fig. 8: Facade in Zeitz – part of the urban space gallery showing landmark buildings of Zeitz  
Photo: Franziska Görmar

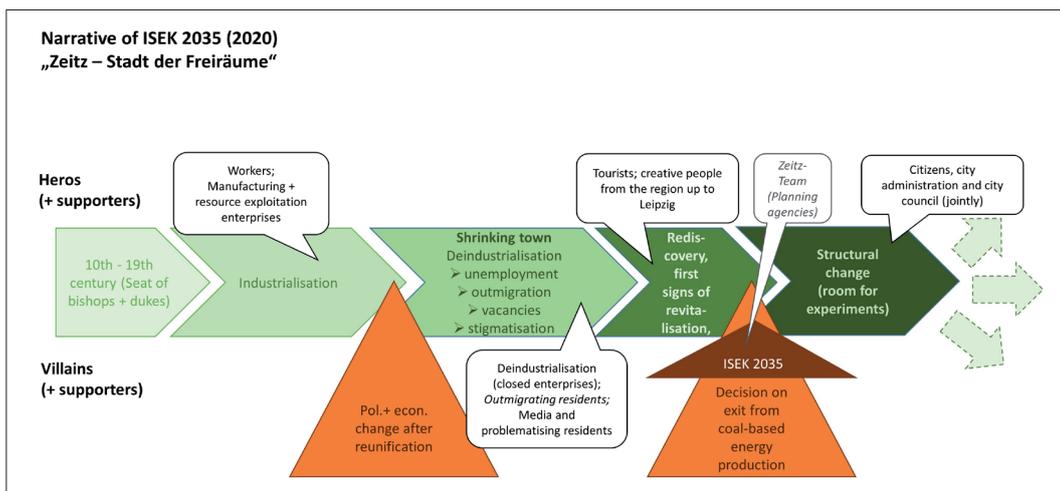


Fig. 9: Storyline in 2020

Source: authors' elaboration based on urban development concept 2020

by the federal and regional governments and a student is developing another building on their own. The change of the perspective towards a liveable future seems to materialise at least partly, which is also noticed by potential in-migrants. At least, in 2020 and 2021, more people moved from Leipzig to Zeitz than vice versa, maybe a first sign for the often-expressed expectation to benefit in future from Leipzig's growth (Stadt Leipzig, 2022).

## 5. Summary of the narratives and discussion

By looking at the local narratives in Zeitz over time some clear themes can be identified. First, during the past decades, Zeitz has been strongly dependent on external political and economic decisions, such as the GDR government pursuit of energy self-sufficiency, German reunification and subsequent privatisation and deindustrialisation, territorial reforms, funding decisions or the decision to exit carbon energy (followed by the post-2022 doubts).

At the same time, local narratives have been also influenced by local challenges and struggles, e.g. between mayor(s) and the city council resulting in a standstill in local decision making in the 2000s, which could only be overcome after the election of a new mayor.

The dependency on external centres of power is reflected in local development narratives that changed from (self) representation as a modern socialist industrial town to that of a place forced to adapt to unstable environments associated with uncertainty about the future and the feeling of powerlessness. Recently, a vision of an innovative and creative town offering enough space for experimentation has emerged in response to globally prevailing discourses of the creative city (Landry, 2008). We can see that arts and creative industries (including digital technologies) have been posited as transforming forces by external or returning actors, including the association behind the monastery Kloster Posa project, the developer of the arts centre in the former pasta

factory, or the current mayor himself. Yet, the fact that some of them are returnees or plan to settle in Zeitz for a longer time, allows one to think that the narrative will be adopted also by local residents, despite their current scepticism.

At the same time, an emphasis of political strategies of re-industrialisation and the transformation of energy-production has been broadly taken up, when local governments and economic actors aim to develop business districts and engage in bioeconomy or hydrogen strategies as recently discussed in Germany and particularly in mining regions such as Central Germany or Lusatia (ZZ\_IN\_05, ZZ\_IN\_11, ZZ\_IN\_12, ZZ\_IN\_22). Hence, local narratives take up broader transformative narratives developed in debates for climate action (Hinkel et al., 2020).

Secondly, we can see changes in the emphasis on specific historic events and of specific actors feeding into narratives and imaginaries about the future of both economic development and tourism. While during the GDR times, the focus was on class struggles and reaching socialism, documents in the aftermath of reunification emphasised the residential heritage of bishops and dukes and highlighted both the role of individual elite actors (e.g. an emperor, bishop, duke) but also the power of citizens in the development of the town. Considering the drastic changes of the 1990s, this is not surprising. There has been a long-lasting hope to attract one or more large industrial enterprise(s) as saviour(s) of the town (ZZ\_IN\_07), while aiming at the same time to valorise the historic heritage and expand touristic development to compensate for the losses. These approaches can be associated to widespread strategies of town embellishment resulting in the famous “blooming landscapes” (in Zeitz, materialised in the form of the garden show) but also to privatisation strategies which were meant to create a second chance for the formerly state-led enterprises in East Germany. Yet, for a couple of years now, different actors (albeit not all) increasingly acknowledge that Zeitz will not be again an “industrial town”. Instead restructuring will most likely happen on a small-scale basis, with smaller businesses and innovative experimental approaches which may lead to the emergence of new development paths, e.g. in the creative or digital industries, but also economic diversification in traditional branches of the chemical and food industries, being in line with current rather endogenously oriented place-based approaches to local development.

Against this background, lignite mining was always seen as the precondition for industrial development, but given a greater diversity of economic branches since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, not particularly emphasised on the local level while it always had a greater importance for the region (Burgenlandkreis, 1997). This has changed just recently when the foreseen closure of the mines and the subsequently expected structural change have brought about new risks but also new opportunities for the local economy and the municipality, e.g. in terms of funding for restructuring and renovation measures. The fear of another “structural break” has been conjured by local and regional politicians alike as a bargaining coin in negotiations about the conditions of the lignite mining closures, placing the development in Zeitz within broader debates about a just transition.

Thirdly, the changing narratives point also towards changes in local identity which have been confirmed by the interviews. In all documents, both physical heritage as well as the industrial past have been considered as potential points of reference for local identity, albeit with different emphasis put on one or the other. Yet, the story of loss symbolised

by the still existing ruins threw its shadow over former narratives which had highlighted residents’ capacities to adapt to change and actively shape the town’s destiny. Today, a more future-oriented narrative has taken up the story of change and reinvention again. Without replacing other narratives, current stories have become more complex. Culture, for example, is not anymore considered only in terms of cultural heritage but includes new storylines of creative entrepreneurship and sustainable development.

Finally, particularly those interviewees coming from the outside emphasised the simultaneity of different storylines integrating both the decay of the past and the departure into the future. Yet, this multiplicity also results in a mental divide between different generational groups of people in the town which needs to be overcome (ZZ\_IN\_10, ZZ\_IN\_23). The elaboration process of the current urban development concept carried out by a team of four complementary development offices is here symbolic for the attempt to establish an inclusive narrative jointly elaborated by city administration, politicians, and citizens alike and resonating with the emotions of Zeitz’ residents to initiate stronger cooperation on all levels.

Material symbols of these competing narratives are the city centre and especially the rather dilapidated Rahnestraße, which are still places of identity both in a positive as well as a negative sense. The actual development of the last years led to decreasing importance of the city centre, both as residential and shopping area, with the highest share of housing vacancies in this area and a lot of empty shops. Yet, there are first attempts to reverse this development with revitalisation measures from the local government like the railway station, the former ZEKIWA factory or a former clothing store which will be developed into a coworking space. There are also some bottom-up approaches with the Old City library, which is used as an arts house now, and some privately renovated houses (see Fig. 10). The future is still uncertain but there are some first signs that Zeitz might stabilise or even rise again like “phoenix from the ashes”.

## 6. Conclusion

This study contributes to the growing literature on smaller, peripheral, and disadvantaged places that are seen as legitimate sources of knowledge for advancing urban theory beyond the focus on large cities. In a small town, specific narratives and economic processes are often affecting local development as a whole and are hence particularly visible. This applies even more to localities heavily dependent on the mining industry: any changes in market conjuncture or government regulation tend to have a considerable impact on a city’s fortunes. The study also attempts to complement our understanding of urban processes by engaging with topics of local narratives and identity. They appear as important as conventional economic factors because they create mental spaces where local narratives are identified, elaborated, and deemed attractive, acceptable, innovative, or otherwise.

This research has been inspired by the observations of economic decline, shrinkage, and emerging new development paths in the town of Zeitz. These processes require explanations, which we have tried to find by exploring changing narratives of local development. Instead of a somewhat static view that suggests that the most powerful actors in the fields of planning, place-making and economic development use narratives about a place’s development and spatial imaginaries to frame policy options and promote



Fig. 10: *Rahnestraße*, house No. 7 will be renovated soon and developed into a multigeneration house  
Photos: Franziska Görmar

their interests, we have tried to draw a more complex and dynamic picture where narratives are conceptualised as an element of local identity that forms the time-space specific context of decision-making processes. The continuity of narratives is important, as they exist beyond the current interest of living actors. For instance, socialist era enterprises are long gone but the expectations of a certain format of business-community ties may be still present. Further on, local narratives have the potential to link local discourses to overarching broader discussions, as e.g. debates about transformation and climate action (Hinkel et al., 2020). They show strong interdependencies with prevailing strategies of state and business actors calling for a strategic-relational and multilevel perspective when looking at local development processes (Görmar et al., 2022; Jessop, 2012).

In Zeitz, it is particularly visible how complex the discursive layers of development are, and that imaginaries and narratives create on one hand a frame of expectations where specific decisions can be inserted, while on the other hand they are influenced themselves by local and trans-local events and decisions. The main narratives, in our case that of continuous change and reinvention and that of loss and uncertainty, comprise different storylines that might be competing or mutually exclusive and that actors strategically select to legitimise their actions and evoke emotions in support of them. The same event of a certain period can be elevated or forgotten in the discourse or interpreted in various (novel) ways. We tried to show this by focussing on the changes in local narratives over a period of 50 years and by employing the novel methodological approach of Critical Narrative Analysis. We combined the narrative analysis of urban development and marketing documents with an intertextual analysis of interviews and a broader consideration of the spatial and temporal context, allowing for a more nuanced understanding of local narratives, spatial imaginaries and their co-constituting role in local development.

We argue that current urban debates would benefit from integrating such cultural approaches revealing non-economic motivations and expectations in local development processes (McCann, 2002; Jessop, 2010). The policy process appears as rather complex and embedded in place identity, the latter functioning as a stabilising factor in decision making. Various stories feed into the 'composite' narrative of a place and relate to its 'identity'. Yet, these multiple narratives may change over time, overlap, and contradict each other. Narratives also give legitimacy to development

options which open up or are actively created by local actors. Development plans must fit into a narrative's frame to avoid social tension or discontent. In that sense, narratives may be 'pregnant' with future development options. They may also derive, however, from actual development or external ideas and take up new options which have not been considered before, as in the case of the attraction of creative industries. In these cases, it needs time for people to familiarise themselves with such stories, digest, and accept them before they materialise.

For this study, the focus has been on official narratives in publications issued by the city of Zeitz, amended with current interpretations by our interviewees. Yet, there is still further potential in the new approach of Critical Narrative Analysis in examining, for example, how local narratives, e.g. linked to the closure of enterprises and connected social infrastructures but also to emerging new economic opportunities, are connected to biographic narratives, to feelings of belonging, collective and individual experiences of place. It would be worthwhile to look deeper into alternative narratives about future development paths to be taken or about the narratives of minorities and other disadvantaged groups and expand more on their interrelations with overarching meta-narratives.

To summarise, we suggest that narratives about a place's development and derived spatial imaginaries help to explain and make sense of complex situations, especially during recent times. Secondly, the example shows that the development of local narratives is a dynamic policy arena where collective and individual experiences influence each other and create structuring frames for options and actors on multiple scales. Finally, narratives help to construct a coherent imaginary of a place linking the past, present, and the future and feeding into a particular local identity. Hence, local policy and development processes should be considered as relational processes within a broad volatile environment but rooted in the 'stabilising' element of identity.

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## Appendices

### Appendix 1: List of analysed documents. Source: authors' compilation

Publishing year	Document	Publisher
1977	Brochure "Zeit, eine Tausendjährige heute. Ein Stadtführer"	City Council Zeitz
1994	Brochure "Zeit und seine Region im Süden Sachsen-Anhalts"	Tourist information Zeitz and Landratsamt Zeitz
1994	Brochure "Stadt Zeitz"	NovoPrint VerlagsGmbH (in collaboration with City of Zeitz)
1997	Brochure "Eine Region mit Profil. Der Burgenlandkreis"	District administration Burgenlandkreis
2000	Brochure "Ortsumgebung Zeitz/Theißen. 1. Planungsabschnitt"	Stadtbuchverlag W + I (edited by Straßenbauamt Halle)
2002	"Stadtbau Ost – Gesamtkonzept" (Urban development concept until 2010)	City of Zeitz (elaborated by architectural office Weber, Gera)
2009	Flächennutzungsplan (Land use plan)	Planungsverband Zeitz und umgebende Gemeinden (Burgenlandkreis) (elaborated by Gesellschaft für Planung und Vermessung mbH, Leipzig)
2010	"1000-jährige Dom- und Residenzstadt. Hinein in die Mitte" (Urban development concept until 2020)	City of Zeitz (elaborated by architectural office Weber, Gera)
2013	Brochure "Zeit" with map	Städte-Verlag E. v. Wagner and J. Mitterhuber (in collaboration with City of Zeitz)
2018	Leaflet "Zeit – Stadt an der Weissen Elster"	City of Zeitz
2018	Brochure "Willkommen in Zeitz. Dom- und Residenzstadt im Burgenlandkreis"	Städte-Verlag E. v. Wagner and J. Mitterhuber (in collaboration with City of Zeitz)
2019	Leitbild für die Stadt Zeitz – 2035 (Mission statement)	City of Zeitz
2020	"Zeit – Stadt der Freiräume" (Urban development concept until 2035)	City of Zeitz

### Appendix 2: List of interviews. Source: authors' compilation

Interview ID	Occupation and Function in town	Date of interview
ZZ_IN_01	Retired; former member of city council, current member of one of the committees	16.07.2020
ZZ_IN_02	City administration – urban planning	21.10.2020
ZZ_IN_03	Coordinator of regional network for metal business, member of city council	21.10.2020
ZZ_IN_04	Member of city council	13.01.2021
ZZ_IN_05	Manager of industrial enterprise	15.02.2021
ZZ_IN_06	Cultural actor, former member of city council	24.03.2021
ZZ_IN_07	Member of city council, mayor of one of the villages	24.03.2021
ZZ_IN_08	Independent project manager in the field of culture	24.03.2021
ZZ_IN_09	City administration – economic development	29.03.2021
ZZ_IN_10	Event manager, member of city council	20.04.2021
ZZ_IN_11	City administration	20.04.2021
ZZ_IN_12	Local entrepreneur	20.04.2021
ZZ_IN_13	Project manager of civil society organisation Freelance project manager of civil society organisation	23.04.2021
ZZ_IN_14	Former member of city administration	28.04.2021
ZZ_IN_15	Public utilities company, member of heritage association, member of city council and district council Member of heritage organisation and village council	28.04.2021
ZZ_IN_16	Federal state Saxony-Anhalt	29.04.2021
ZZ_IN_17	Real estate developer	07.05.2021
ZZ_IN_18	Retired, member of city council, voluntary editor of internet portal about Zeitz	07.05.2021
ZZ_IN_19	Director museum	12.05.2021
ZZ_IN_20	District Burgenlandkreis	18.05.2021
ZZ_IN_21	Entrepreneur, initiator of citizen's initiative	19.05.2021
ZZ_IN_22	Manager of industrial enterprise	26.05.2021
ZZ_IN_23	Urban planner	27.05.2021