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Culture-Led Urban Development and the Populist Radical Right: Chemnitz as the European Capital of Culture 2025

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Abstract

Previous research on opposition to culture-led urban development mainly focuses on conflicts between neoliberal ideas of the creative city and counter-movements led by artists or progressive activists. The role of the radical right in these conflicts remains largely unexplored. This study examines how the parties AfD and Pro Chemnitz / Freie Sachsen discuss the European Capital of Culture 2025 in the eastern German city of Chemnitz. Using expert interviews, city council protocols, and media analysis, the study identifies two main dynamics: first, the radical right acts as an obstacle to post-industrial change by reviving Fordist urban identities; second, even from an opposition stance, it can influence the direction of culture-led urban development by pushing for its depoliticization. The paper introduces the concept of territorialized transformation threshold as an analytical tool to systematically examine how the radical right reacts spatially to cultural change in post-industrial cities. It suggests that culture-led urban development in peripheral urban areas faces specific forms of resistance that have not been explored in the literature, which mainly concentrates on metropolitan settings.

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1. Introduction

On the final night of the 2018 Chemnitz city festival, a 35-year-old German-Cuban man was fatally stabbed. This incident sparked a wave of radical right unrest in the German city. By August 26, the radical right scene and football hooligans had organized the first protests. These actions continued the next day and escalated into mobs chasing migrants and clashing with an overwhelmed police force. A nationwide call for a demonstration on September 1 further shaped the city's new image, with photos of Neo-Nazis in front of the city's Karl Marx monument finding their way over the Atlantic onto the front page of *The New York Times*. The response to this was cultural: on September 3, tens of thousands gathered under the hashtag #wirsindmehr ("we are more") at a public concert, reclaiming the city center from the radical right. Later that month, an artist's installation blocked the square in front of the Karl Marx Monument to prevent further demonstrations. These events show how urban space became a key area of conflict between radical right mobilization and cultural counter-responses in Chemnitz.

In 2025, Chemnitz became the European Capital of Culture – a title it was designated for because of the link the city established to the events of 2018 in its application. This study explores how the radical right impacts the European Capital of Culture 2025. It examines how different local radical right actors, especially the parties Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) and Pro Chemnitz / Freie Sachsen, position themselves in response to the culture-led urban transformation project and how municipal institutions address the challenges posed by the radical right. The focus of the analysis lies on reflexive spatial strategies, particularly how both, the radical right, in response to the European Capital of Culture, and municipal stakeholders, in response to the radical right, aim to territorialize their agendas.

To date, the relation between the radical right and culture-led urban development remains largely unexamined within the extensive research on creative city-making and its surrounding debates. Culture-led urbanism has become a key strategy for city renewal after industrial decline. At its core is the belief that culture and creativity can act as transformative forces to reshape urban identities and open new pathways to economic growth (Borén & Young, 2013a; Peck, 2005). Beyond academic debates, Richard Florida's (2002, 2004) idea of the creative city and the emphasis on urbanity as a location factor have shaped municipal policies. Existing studies have investigated the conflicts stemming from creative city initiatives, often describing liberal actors who resist the commercialization of culture or the socio-spatial effects of

inequality as the main opposition (Borén & Young, 2017; Markusen, 2006; Novy & Colomb, 2013). However, little attention has been paid to how culture-led urban development projects face challenges in areas where the radical right wields significant local influence.

While most studies on creative urbanism, with few exceptions (Lorentzen & van Heur, 2012; Waitt, 2006), focus on metropolitan contexts, the literature on the European Capital of Culture (ECoC) as a specific instrument for European culture-led urban development stands out as a notable exception. Since 1990, the ECoC title has been viewed as a means for symbolic and economic renewal of often post-industrial cities (Evans, 2003; Richards & Palmer, 2010; Sassatelli, 2008). By intentionally focusing on peripheral urban areas, the ECoC initiative has broadened research beyond the metropolitan perspective. However, similar to scholarship on the resistance to technocratic and profit-oriented narratives of the creative city, the literature on opposition within and related to European Capitals of Culture mainly concentrates on progressive actors (García, 2004; Giovanangeli, 2015; Lähdesmäki, 2013; Žilič-Fišer & Erjavec, 2017). Recent studies have begun examining strategic bids for the title as liberal counter-moves against conservative national governments (Borén et al., 2020) or analyzing tensions and collaborations between liberal programmatic visions at the EU level and their implementation by radical right governments (Lamour, 2025). Nevertheless, these accounts overlook how culture-led urban development is negotiated in cities polarized by the radical right, especially at the local level.

The need to engage with these conflicts grows due to the resurgence of populist radical right (PRR) parties across Europe (Mudde, 2016, 2019). The urban-rural divide, which frames cities as naturally progressive and rural areas as reactionary, is increasingly challenged by the rising success of the radical right in urban areas (Crulli & Pinto, 2025; Geilen & Mullis, 2021). In the German context, urban studies have recently examined the factors that enable radical right success in cities, including populist responses to housing issues, architectural debates, and car infrastructure (Bescherer & Reichle, 2022; Blokker, 2022; Domann, 2024b; Fainstein & Novy, 2023; Kübler et al., 2022). The research shows how the municipal strength of the radical right influences administrative actions and changes the relationship between the state and civil society (Nettelbladt, 2023b, 2023a; Reichle et al., 2024). The rise of the radical right and its impact on local governance necessitate an examination of policies like culture-led urban development, which were not initially central to the political agenda of the radical right, which first focused mainly on migration issues. This not only improves our understanding of radical right ideology but also reopens debates on the creative city, a concept some scholars have called

outdated (O'Connor & Shaw, 2014) or stagnant within a binary of enthusiastic support and complete rejection (Borén & Young, 2013a).

Conceptually, this case study explores the contestation of the European Capital of Culture 2025 through the perspective of territorialization (Terra-R, 2025). Instead of viewing space as a neutral container or treating “right-wing spaces” as fixed entities, this framework considers space as contested and shaped by the practices through which actors assign meaning to it. Methodologically, the study combines qualitative analysis of Chemnitz city council protocols, policy documents, a systematic review of media coverage, and semi-structured expert interviews with local stakeholders. This multi-method approach enables an analysis of the structural conditions that allow or limit specific radical right practices, and how these, in turn, influence the local structures of cultural city transformation.

Empirically, this study offers insight into how the European Capital of Culture 2025 is negotiated in Chemnitz. It highlights both similarities and differences between the Alternative für Deutschland (AfD), the local party Pro Chemnitz / Freie Sachsen, and other extra-parliamentary radical right actors. Both parliamentary groups share a representation of a past Fordist urban identity, expressed through emotional and imaginative attachments to space. While the AfD seeks to normalize its presence by emphasizing pragmatic infrastructural policies, Pro Chemnitz / Freie Sachsen and the extra-parliamentary actors engage in performative disruptions aimed at undermining the city’s cultural transformation. The study contributes to a more nuanced understanding of radical right agency within the municipal context. This geographical focus is often underrepresented, especially in scholarship on the AfD, which tends to concentrate on national politics. However, it is frequently assumed that local arenas are precisely where the AfD can leverage structural conditions to promote their normalization (Bescherer, 2019; Domann, 2024a; Domann & Nuissl, 2022). Furthermore, the study shows how the European Capital of Culture is planned in response to a politically divided urban environment dominated by the radical right. This involves a depoliticization of the program, an official invitation to radical right actors within the spaces created by the project, and a narrowing of the narrative on cultural change. It demonstrates how the radical right, even without formal administrative power in Chemnitz, can influence the direction of culture-driven urban development.

Based on this single-case study, the concept of territorialization is used as a theoretical framework to address the research gap. Building on the Chemnitz case, the concept of the

territorialized transformation threshold is developed to provide an analytical tool to explore how the radical right interacts with processes of creative city-making in marginalized, post-industrial urban settings. Through emotional constructions of cultural differences, imaginative expressions of Fordist identity, and symbolic comparisons of decay and renewal, the radical right can influence public discourse and actual policies in these areas. Although based on a single case, this framework opens a perspective for systematic analysis of similar dynamics in East German cities and beyond, in comparable conflicts in marginalized post-industrial regions with strong radical right local presence.

The thesis starts by reviewing the literature on the creative city and the European Capital of Culture from the perspective of contestation. It then places the study within the expanding field of geographical research on the radical right. Next, it examines the cultural-political dynamics and spatial struggles in Chemnitz. The methodology section introduces the concept of territorialization and describes the empirical approach. The analysis begins by exploring the goals of the European Capital of Culture 2025, then investigates how the radical right interacts with the project and how the initiative responds to the radical right's history and presence, both through empirical description and discussion within the existing scholarship. The paper ends by proposing the territorialized transformation threshold as a framework for future systematic research.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Culture-Led Urban Development

2.1.1 The Creative City

The idea of the creative city is ambiguous (Evans, 2009; Markusen, 2006; Pratt & Hutton, 2013), but closely linked to broader discussions about the effects of an "end of industry" on cities (Segovia & Hervé, 2022). After the economic crises of the 1970s, cities entered a phase that Harvey (1989) calls "urban entrepreneurialism". Without industries, new ways of generating economic growth in cities became the primary goal of urban policy. Municipalities focused on attracting investment and making the relocation of businesses attractive. An early description of the creative city was provided by Landry and Bianchini (1995). They compared traditional, hierarchical local government models with participatory, innovation-focused strategies for urban problems and highlighted the importance of using residents' creativity. As a result, creativity came to represent an innovative way to address a structural urban crisis.

The idea of the creative city is not only connected to innovation but also highlights using art and culture as drivers for urban renewal. Cultural institutions often replace declining traditional industries, helping to rebrand and reshape the city's image (Zukin, 1996). However, the concept of the creative city goes beyond just cultural venues to include the creation of identities, lifestyles, and stories associated with urban life (Bianchini, 2013). The practical application has two main goals: developing lively, attractive urban spaces that attract tourists (Richards, 2014; Waitt & Gibson, 2014) and encouraging residents to repopulate inner-city neighborhoods. As a result, it changes the city's image to that of a desirable place to live (Zukin, 1982). In this model, the city is reimagined as a space focused on consumption.

Subsequently, Richard Florida's influential concept of the creative city is based on place-marketing strategies and links choices of residence to economic paths (Pratt, 2008). Florida (2002) suggests that highly educated individuals, called the "creative class", are no longer mainly drawn to places by job opportunities. Instead, companies need to move to where these skilled workers prefer to live. As a result, cities must develop a "quality of place" that attracts this group, featuring lively, cosmopolitan neighborhoods and plenty of cultural amenities (Florida, 2004). Florida summarizes this approach with his success formula of "technology,

talent and tolerance”, a concept that has gained popularity not only in academic circles but also in urban policy making (Borén & Young, 2013b; Peck, 2005).

Critiques of Florida's creative city model are widespread. The main issue is the use of culture and creativity mainly as tools for economic goals rather than cultural ones (Pratt, 2008; Ratiu, 2013). In this framework, concerns about equity are often overlooked, as urban policies favor economically attractive environments that can lead to the displacement of vulnerable communities (Gerhard et al., 2017; Pratt, 2011). Critics also point out a hierarchical view of creativity, where some forms are valued more than others (Borén & Young, 2013a). Thus, culture itself is frequently reduced to a branding tool, deployed for image-making rather than genuine cultural development (Vanolo, 2008).

Before Florida's thesis, Harvey (2002) argued that using culture as an economic tool could foster unexpected alliances between culturally involved individuals and critics of capitalism. Building on this idea, much research explores opposition to the creative city concept, especially among artists and creatives who oppose the commercialization of creativity and its link to gentrification processes (Markusen, 2006; Novy & Colomb, 2013). Some artists also actively participate in urban planning processes to assert their agency and challenge market-driven forces shaping cultural policy and urban space (Borén & Young, 2017). The neoliberal model of the creative city provokes opposition from those at the very core of its agenda.

The role of actors aligned with the radical right in culture-led urban development has received limited academic attention. This gap is partly due to the primary geographical focus of the creative city literature, which, aside from a few exceptions (Lorentzen & van Heur, 2012; Waitt, 2006), concentrates on liberal metropolitan areas and often overlooks smaller cities. Examining urban environments influenced by the radical right offers an opportunity to expand the analysis of resistance, going beyond socio-economic factors to emphasize its ideological elements. This view may help address what Borén & Young (2013a) describe as the “impasse” in the academic debate, which swings between celebratory and dismissive attitudes toward the creative city.

Since the growing importance of culture in urban development is not automatically instrumental or inherently at odds with urban equity. Its potential depends on re-evaluating its core principles. Initially, the idea of the creative city was based on the view of the city as a “good city”. It arose as a response to the limitations of modernist planning, aiming to reclaim urban space for residents (Kozina et al., 2021). From a democratic perspective, early ideas of the creative city focused on participatory governance. However, this focus has gradually shifted

toward technocratic approaches and a neoliberal agenda (Bianchini, 2017; O'Connor & Shaw, 2014). At the same time, city governments may promote creative city branding to present themselves as liberal or progressive, especially amid the dominance of the radical right at the national level. Gdańsk exemplifies this, showing a partnership between civil society groups and local authorities in adopting creative urban development as an ideological alternative within the Polish national context (Borén et al., 2020). Therefore, the concept of creative cities remains influenced by the political forces shaping their implementation.

A non-neoliberal view of the creative city is necessary. Although art and culture are often seen as solutions for urban development, conditions for artists and cultural workers have become increasingly unstable in recent decades, as it was most prominent during the coronavirus pandemic (O'Connor, 2020). Therefore, authors advocate for an alternative, non-neoliberal perspective on the creative city. One approach suggests combining cultural production with the principles of the foundational economy (Hollands, 2023; O'Connor, 2022). The foundational economy questions an economic focus solely on GDP growth. It emphasizes the importance of the public welfare sector and supports increased investment, especially in areas affected by austerity, deindustrialization, and economic inequality (Arcidiacono, 2022). Integrating creative urban development into the foundational economy approach means that investments in culture in these regions would not conflict with investments in basic infrastructure; instead, the former would be part of the latter. In this regard, culture and creative urban development should not become market-driven sectors but should be viewed as a public responsibility.

2.1.2 The European Capital of Culture

While scholarly discussion on the creative city has mainly centered on metropolitan areas, the development of the European Capital of Culture (ECoC) as a policy tool has expanded the research scope to include culture-driven urban change in more peripheral European cities.

The ECoC was created to expand European policy beyond economic integration and to promote a shared cultural identity. Culture initially played a minor role in European integration. However, the crisis in European agricultural policy during the 1970s and 1980s, along with challenges faced during the Greek presidency, led to the need to rebrand the European Community's image (Mittag, 2012; Sianos, 2017). Proposed in 1983 by Greek Minister of Culture Melina Mercouri, the program initially allowed member states to choose cities they regarded as culturally significant. The first titleholders, Athens (1985), Florence (1986),

Amsterdam (1987), West Berlin (1988), and Paris (1989), all had canonized cultural legacies. In its early years, the ECoC was limited in scope, concentrating on high culture and lasting only through the summer. It started as a symbolic way to improve the image of the European Community during a period of deepening integration, gradually evolving into a more strategic tool for urban policy and city branding.

By 1990, the ECoC program shifted from mainly celebrating European cultural heritage to serving as a tool for post-Fordist urban regeneration. Glasgow (1990) was the first city to receive the title without a canonized cultural image, marking a significant change in the program's goals. The city was chosen not for a well-known cultural identity but to support a cultural transformation that still had to take place (García, 2004). Glasgow carried out urban redevelopments, including the cultural reuse of parts of its city center and former port areas (Segovia & Hervé, 2022). The city aimed to change its image as a post-industrial city with high unemployment rates and social misery (Mooney, 2004). Therefore, the Glasgow case marks a shift away from selecting cities based on historical cultural image towards the ECoC as a catalyst for post-industrial change. Over time, the ECoC has grown into a tool for regional development (Mittag, 2012; Sassatelli, 2008). Evans (2003) called it a "Trojan horse" mechanism, where cities engage in competitive behaviors under the guise of a cultural festival. In this context, the ECoC exemplifies the "festivalization" of urban development (Häußermann & Siebel, 1993), a strategy used by less economically strong cities to raise their profile, even if only temporarily. Major cultural events are therefore used as strategic tools to reshape urban identity, often focusing on areas hit by industrial decline (Richards & Palmer, 2010).

The temporal shift in the implementation of the ECoC can be seen through the cases of three German host cities to date: West Berlin (1988), Weimar (1999), and Essen (2010). West Berlin represents the program's early phase; due to the city's 750th anniversary the year before, the ECoC designation received limited attention and has since played a minor role in scholarship (Prosek, 2012). Academic engagement with Weimar is also limited. The ECoC year in the East German city focused heavily on high culture (Frank, 1999). In contrast, Essen and the Ruhr region, where a cultural reuse of post-industrial spaces was pursued, received more scholarly attention (G. Betz, 2011). Overall, title holders with post-industrial urban transformation programs tend to attract greater scholarly interest.

Since Glasgow held the title in 1990, many former industrial cities have also applied for the ECoC, aiming to reshape their industrial identities. The bid documents show that these cities

face similar challenges, including aging populations, migration away from the city, and low civic engagement, while also sharing the same goals related to cultural renewal (Ciuculescu & Luca, 2024). Many applications focus on revitalizing post-industrial landscapes through artistic projects, based on the belief that investing in culture drives economic growth. However, the actual relationship between the ECoC title and economic development remains debated. While policy documents often cite benefits for the creative economy and local stakeholders report positive economic impacts, empirical research questions these claims (Błaszczyk & Krysiński, 2023; Campbell, 2011). Demographic data show no clear pattern as well: some cities grow modestly after their ECoC year, while others, especially in Southern Europe, continue to decline in population due to economic structural issues (Antonić et al., 2023). Even Glasgow, frequently praised as a success story, remains an ambiguous example. Garcia (2005) argues that although economic gains were highlighted in the city's post-ECoC narrative, its most lasting impact has been cultural, particularly an increase in confidence among local cultural actors in engaging with municipal authorities. Therefore, economic expectations tied to the ECoC designation are often exaggerated.

Despite recurring characteristics across many ECoCs, the program's design and outcomes differ based on local contexts. This becomes evident when comparing cities that held the title in the same year: in 2010, Pécs focused on infrastructure development, Istanbul emphasized classical tourism, and Essen, along with the Ruhr region, worked on repurposing industrial sites (Mittag, 2012). In Eastern European cities, ECoC bids are often influenced by a thematization of the socialist legacy and hopes for European integration (Lähdesmäki, 2014; Sianos, 2017). In conclusion, the program's outcomes depend on local contexts. Therefore, the academic literature on the ECoC is mainly case-based and has a limited generalizability across cases.

Despite this diversity of scholarship, the conflicts related to the implementation of the ECoC are a recurring research focus. These issues often arise from contradictions within the program's objectives themselves. In addition to attracting an external audience, program cities must also encourage participation among residents. According to O'Callaghan (2012), the conflicting objectives of the European Union are a fundamental weakness of the ECoC. These disagreements often emerge as local conflicts over cultural representation. Many ECoCs face opposition from residents who feel the initiative does not represent their local identity. In particular, local artists often feel excluded or marginalized (Giovanangeli, 2015). In 1990, left-wing groups in Glasgow criticized the ECOC for being a superficial interaction with the city that did not address urgent social issues (García, 2004). In 1999, Weimar's focus on high culture

made residents feel alienated and increased local dissatisfaction (Frank, 1999). Similar patterns have appeared in the program's recent history: in Turku, Finland, activists started in 2011 a counter-initiative – the “Capital of Subculture” – to challenge the official story, thereby ironically fulfilling one of the ECoC's stated goals: encouraging civic participation (Lähdesmäki, 2013). In Maribor, Slovenia, the ECoC (2012) acted as a platform for political mobilization, which led to the mayor's resignation (Žilič-Fišer & Erjavec, 2017). Across all these examples, a common theme in the literature is the prominent role of artists as key actors resisting the official framing of the ECoC. However, the views of more conservative groups or the radical right toward the ECoC remain largely unexplored.

Beyond the local level, ECoCs operate within a complex political landscape. In the 1990s, the ECoC program became entangled with strategic political goals. For example, Thessaloniki received the title partly to ease unrest in the Macedonian region; Stockholm's designation aimed to influence Sweden's EU referendum; and in Weimar, the conservative party CDU used the ECoC as a prestige project aligned with former Chancellor Helmut Kohl's promise of “flourishing landscapes” in post-reunification East Germany (Mittag, 2012; Prossek, 2012). In response to this clear politicization, reforms were first proposed in 1999 and began with the 2005 program year. These included a mandatory tendering process, the setting of specific targets for applicants, and a rotation system among member states. Additional changes in 2006 extended the preparation period to six years and made the selection and monitoring procedures stricter to improve transparency and accountability (O'Callaghan, 2012). The past examples highlight a definite interest in strategically using the ECoC as a political tool.

The rise of radical right parties in EU member states creates new tensions between the liberal programmatic focus of the ECoC instrument and the conservative to radical right ideologies common at the national level. Lamour (2025), analyzing Veszprém's case as ECoC 2023, suggests that even nationalist governments like Hungary's Fidesz can use the initiative strategically. Although the official bid does not openly contain anti-migration or Eurosceptic rhetoric, such viewpoints are subtly embedded in the application documents. In this context, Lamour (ibid.) conceptualizes the ECoC as a “boundary object” (Star, 1993): an institutionally open and interpretively flexible framework that allows for multiple interpretations and facilitates cooperation between European and national actors despite ideological differences. What remains less explored, however, is how the ECoC is negotiated locally in cities marked by radical right polarization.

2.2 The Radical Right and the City

2.2.1 A Challenge (Not Only) for the Periphery

The investigation of culture-led development in relation to the radical right's surge (Mudde, 2019) becomes especially promising when viewed through a geographical lens, particularly in peripheral cities. Mudde (2016) introduced the category of Populist Radical Right (PRR) to describe movements and parties that combine populism, authoritarianism, and nativism. Populism creates a division between "the people" and "the elites." Authoritarianism stresses social order and the preservation of traditional values. Nativism perceives non-native individuals, ideas, and cultures as threats to an imagined ethnic-national identity. In the following, the category PRR is used for all right-wing actors mentioned here, even though some of them are more populist and others appear more radical. For linguistic reasons, the term radical right is used as a synonym. This categorization follows an understanding of radical right mobilization as an "escalation continuum" (Freiheit et al., 2020), which does not view specific protagonists as singular, distinct actors but instead sees them as embedded in a societal development with varying degrees of ideological and actionist radicalism. The first part of this chapter explains how academic interest in the PRR in urban areas has recently gained prominence. The second part examines the ideological roots of the PRR's perspective on urbanity, linking it to historical anti-urban sentiment in antimodernist thought. The chapter concludes with an analysis of PRR policies related to urban issues, especially in Germany.

While the mobility of the creative scene toward specific urban areas is one side of the coin, the dissatisfaction in regions abandoned by young, highly educated inhabitants is the other. The concentration of innovation, knowledge-based economies, and skilled workers in major cities has widened the gap between these centers and peripheral regions (Feldman et al., 2021; Florida, 2021). Less mobile populations remaining in economically stagnant areas are marginalized due to this geographical polarization (Lee et al., 2018). Therefore, Rodríguez-Pose (2018) describes the rise of the PRR as a "revenge of the places that don't matter", highlighting that social dissatisfaction is especially intense in rural and post-industrial areas suffering from political and economic neglect. This aligns with findings that show a positive correlation between PRR election results, high outward migration, and an older population average (Dancygier et al., 2025; Franz et al., 2017). Greve et al. (2022) observe that in Germany, the AfD tends to have stronger support in regions experiencing long-term economic decline.

Voters in these areas are marked by collective memories of a more prosperous past. These neglected regions are the counterpart of migration trends, where highly educated or aspiring populations move toward metropolitan areas.

A characteristic of the PRR's electoral support in Germany is its strength in the eastern federal states. Several factors contribute to this pattern. These include the changes following reunification, the contrast between recent migration and the more homogeneous population during the GDR era, and the underrepresentation of East Germans in political and economic elites (Arzheimer & Bernemann, 2024; Weisskircher, 2020; Yoder, 2020). Notably, the emotional legacies of the reunification period have reinforced a polarized narrative of elites versus ordinary people (Betz & Habersack, 2019). Consequently, many AfD voters, although they see themselves as ordinary people and part of a cultural majority, feel a sense of political and social exclusion (Versteegen, 2023). These experiences of social and political change have resulted in a unique form of peripheralization in eastern Germany that plays a central role in the support for the PRR.

However, using uniform descriptions for places can oversimplify complex realities. References to regions like the “flyover states” in the U.S., the deindustrialized North of England, or eastern Germany often reduce them to simply “right-wing spaces” (Terra-R, 2025). However, such labels ignore the ongoing struggles and local resistance present in these areas. Electoral geography shows that support for the PRR cannot be understood through simple binary spatial imaginaries that contrast spaces as progressive versus regressive, liberal versus right-wing, or urban versus rural. In Italy, for example, PRR support appears in cosmopolitan cities and unexpectedly even in inner-city neighborhoods (Crulli & Pinto, 2025). In the Netherlands, the PRR gains support not only from post-war New Towns but also from low-density urban areas and suburban municipalities (Van Gent et al., 2014). Similarly, in Germany, support for the AfD exists in large metropolitan cities, with higher support in marginalized urban districts and on the outskirts (Geilen & Mullis, 2021). Peripheralization, as an essential factor in explaining PRR support, must therefore be seen as a context-dependent process (Mullis, 2025). It does not operate solely across regional borders but also within urban areas down to the neighborhood level.

The key question, then, is how the PRR in peripheral areas responds to policy interventions aimed at revalorizing these so-called “left-behind” places by appealing to a cosmopolitan, creative class. MacKinnon et al. (2022) argue in favor of the Foundational Economy that for

peripheral areas, regional development plans should emphasize basic economic infrastructure and meet the daily needs of local communities. In Germany, there is some evidence that fostering an innovative economic environment may decrease electoral support for the AfD (Diermeier, 2020). However, an alignment of the PRR with Florida's (2002) urban success formula – focused on “Technology, Talent and Tolerance” – seems unlikely, given the prevailing explanations for the PRR's rise.

These explanations include the economic thesis of the “modernization losers”, who are pushed to the margins by economic restructuring, and the cultural backlash thesis, which highlights resistance to progressive social change and cosmopolitan values (Noury & Roland, 2020). However, both approaches portray PRR voters as rejecting cosmopolitan environments. They mainly differ on whether this rejection is seen as a cause or a result of their political stance. The modernization loser thesis explains the rise of the PRR with socio-economic conditions. Demographics with lower education levels, limited geographic mobility, and strong ties to local communities are more likely to support the PRR (Gordon, 2018; Lee et al., 2018). These groups contrast sharply with what Florida (2002) describes as a creative milieu. Nevertheless, socio-economic factors alone cannot fully explain the electoral successes of the AfD in Germany (Hartmann et al., 2022; Rippl & Seipel, 2018; Schwander & Manow, 2017). Regarding the cultural backlash thesis, scholars argue that support for PRR parties is a reaction by conservative, often older, demographics to the growing acceptance of liberal cultural norms (Norris & Inglehart, 2019). Ultimately, both frameworks are best seen as complementary. Their intersection is captured by what Fraser (2019) calls “progressive neoliberalism” – a political setup where economic disempowerment of the working class coincides with the shift of center-left parties toward identity politics, leaving mainly white working-class voters feeling both economically marginalized and culturally alienated.

2.2.2 The Continuity and Evolution of Antiurbanism

Attitudinal research may provide insights into PRR voters' motivations, but it does not delve into the ideological stance of the radical right on urban issues and its origins. It explains why the PRR is stronger in certain geographies than in others, but it does not explain how the PRR relates to these geographies. To understand where the PRR's stance on urban politics and policies originates, it is essential to trace it back to a radical right history of ideas.

Modern anti-urbanism has its ideological roots in the era of industrialization during the 19th and early 20th centuries, with the rapid growth of cities, the dissolution of the feudal system of social order, overcrowded housing, and worsening living conditions. In a defensive posture, the anti-urbanists portrayed life in the city as artificial and morally corrupting. Agrarian romanticism developed as a rejection of urban lifestyles. It praised rural life because of its healthy living conditions, social stability, and authenticity. Rural life was contrasted with what was seen as the excesses and distortions of modern urbanity (Häußermann & Siebel, 2004; Laimer, 2001). In the Weimar Republic, the cultural liberalization of society took a significant step. The city became a symbol of this liberalization, which went along with a perceived moral decline and secularization. This led conservative thinkers to express anti-urban attitudes. The back then prominent philosopher Oswald Spengler (2017 [1920]) described the city as the cause of civilizational decline. He believed that a mixture of different cultures would dissolve the cultural identity of the German people. Another example can be found in Martin Heidegger's writing (1983 [1933]), who framed his move to a lonely hut not just as a personal preference but as a symbolic gesture against urban modernity. During National Socialism, the ideological rejection of the city became a practical policy. However, despite an interest in promoting rural settlements, metropolitan cities nevertheless served as an opportunity for the National Socialists to demonstrate their power (Kahmann, 2017). In Conclusion, the historical anti-urban stance is based on a binary: cities are viewed as sites of moral and cultural decay, while rural areas are seen as symbols of stability and rootedness.

Hostility toward cities has long been connected with antisemitism. The city, with its characteristics of mobility, anonymity, and capitalist relations, was seen as a place of rootlessness and moral decline. The figure of the Jew came to symbolize the perceived disruptions of modern life that became visible through urbanization (Kahmann, 2017; Rose, 1948). Although urban living was viewed as unnatural by ethnic-nationalist Germans, Jews were thought to be better adapted for thriving in cities. This idea reinforced their image as aliens who were incompatible with the national community (Michel, 2014). In this context, the city was portrayed as the “natural habitat” of a group imagined as ethnically and culturally outsiders to the ethnonationalist ideal.

Although contemporary anti-urban sentiment in the discourse of the German PRR is less explicitly connected to antisemitism than in earlier historical forms, urban, densely populated areas still symbolically associate with ethnically “alien” groups. Prominent figures of the Radical Right, such as Alain de Benoist, hold a negative view of ethnically diverse cities like

New York. His concept of ethno-pluralism rejects multicultural urban spaces, which he views as a threat to maintaining homogeneous ethno-national identities (Weiß, 2017). In debates within the German PRR, cities like Berlin and Essen, known for large migrant populations, are often cited as examples of integration challenges and the dangers of unregulated migration (Bescherer et al., 2019). This imagery also appears in terrorist acts: the 2004 nail bomb attack by the National Socialist Underground (NSU) on Keupstraße in Cologne and the 2020 firearm attack in Hanau targeted locations took place in urban migrant neighborhoods (Seichter et al., 2025b). These attacks show how migrant urbanity is also physically targeted in the radical right's rejection of a pluralistic society.

The spatial mindset associated with radical-right anti-urban beliefs is often shaped by provincialism. As Adorno (2018) notes, provincialism isn't limited to specific areas but is more common in rural regions. It consists of both the celebration of one's way of life and the dismissal of others. Rural life is romanticized because of its perceived link to pre-capitalist social structures. Belina (2021) argues that this idealization of the countryside stems from the sedentary nature of agricultural labor. The necessity of being tied to the land is turned into a moral virtue. Although rural life has become urbanized, Belina (2022b, 2022a) still identifies a remaining attachment to rootedness in the countryside. It continues through high levels of land ownership in rural areas and the informal duty to maintain the home and garden as leisure activities. Even as the lines between urban and rural life blur, rurality is still a core ideological foundation for the radical right because it signifies authenticity.

Small towns and rural areas are idealized as cultural and moral reference points by the German contemporary PRR. The most prominent German party, Alternative für Deutschland (AfD), expresses concern that urban problems are spilling over into rural and suburban regions (Bescherer et al., 2019). This is reflected in a dual hostility toward urbanity within municipal AfD discourse (Domann, 2024a): externally, cities are portrayed as chaotic, overburdened, and ungovernable; internally, the party resists the perceived urbanization of suburban and rural areas, especially when the AfD opposes refugee housing or the construction of multi-story apartment buildings in owner-dominated neighborhoods. However, the AfD's strategy goes further than protecting the countryside from an urban way of life. According to Bescherer et al. (2019), the AfD seeks to "village-ize" the urban by simplifying its complexity. Their goal is to establish provincial values as dominant even in metropolitan areas (Metz & Seeßlen, 2018).

2.2.3 Urban Policy and Politics of the Populist Radical Right

Despite the negative portrayal of urban areas by the radical right, the city is a target of political activity for the PRR in Germany. The Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) discusses urban issues such as transportation, housing, architecture, and culture. However, their urban policy positions often reveal internal contradictions. For example, while the AfD promotes greener, quieter cities – drawing on an idealized rural aesthetic – they also oppose environmental regulations, such as restrictions on motorized individual transport (Bescherer et al., 2019).

The PRR limits the potential for more sustainable changes in urban development. By engaging in participatory processes, PRR actors increasingly threaten fair urban planning efforts (Fainstein & Novy, 2023). The AfD poses a serious challenge in transport policy, especially in suburban areas. Thereby, suburban residents' reliance on private cars is exploited by opposing restrictions on motorized individual transport and framing such policies as paternalistic actions by eco-minded urban elites (Domann, 2024b). At the same time, the AfD supports efforts that block new road developments in suburban and semi-rural areas. This conflicting stance reveals a dual rejection of urbanity: the AfD opposes both the rules imposed by elites living in the cities and the expansion of infrastructure that could connect outlying regions more closely to urban centers.

The PRR exploits contradictions within neoliberal urbanism, particularly the housing crisis, to push its political agenda. In cities with high rent prices, residents with lower incomes tend to support the AfD (Held & Patana, 2023). The AfD's stance on housing combines market-liberal ideas with nationalist views. It advocates deregulation to benefit property owners and blames housing shortages on immigration (Bescherer et al., 2019). This rhetoric gains support in East German cities affected by gentrification. In these areas, long-term residents may blame migrants for disrupting the perceived social stability of apartment buildings that have remained essentially unchanged since the GDR era (Bescherer & Reichle, 2022). The PRR is also gaining influence in West German cities. There, frustration over gentrification, austerity, and post-democratic urban governance creates a fertile environment for radical right narratives (Mullis, 2021). Although gentrification is usually linked with left-wing critique, concerns about displacement and unaffordability allow the PRR to exploit grievances related to rapid urban change (Bescherer, 2019).

Beyond housing issues, architecture remains a key topic in urban policy debates by the PRR. The PRR focuses on efforts to rebuild baroque buildings that were destroyed during World War

II. These reconstruction projects are not only about aesthetics. The PRR's stance is interpreted as a revisionist rewriting of history (Oswalt, 2023; Trüby, 2020). The goal is to recreate an idealized, continuous national past by removing visible signs of disruptions in German history. Radical right groups often hold political events at historic sites, using them as symbols of national pride and cultural persistence (Blokker, 2022). The nostalgic approach to architecture can intersect with neoliberal urban redevelopment strategies that aim to develop scenic, heritage-rich city centers to promote tourism (Kübler et al., 2022). Notably, the PRR's stance on architectural reconstruction aligns with views in the political center (Müller, 2024). This potentially enables policy cooperation with center-right parties that could influence actual architectural policies in Germany.

In cultural politics, the PRR promotes a cultural renationalization (Küpper et al., 2019). This involves emphasizing local traditions and delegitimizing artists and cultural producers who publicly oppose the PRR, dismissing them as part of an elitist cultural establishment (De Cleen, 2016). The AfD often advocates for political neutrality and links this demand to conditional public funding (Bescherer et al., 2019; Lück, 2017). This focus on restricting cultural legitimacy pressures institutions, shrinks civic space, and increases self-censorship among cultural actors in response to the growing political influence and hostility from the PRR.

In Eastern German cities, where the AfD's strength is especially high, its rise shifts local civil society dynamics. Public officials distance themselves from actors explicitly opposing the radical right. Instead of treating radical right dominance as a structural problem, municipalities frequently focus on managing their image. They attempt to rebrand the city as diverse and inclusive to repair reputational damage while overlooking deeper political and social issues (Nettelbladt, 2023a, 2023b; Reichle et al., 2024). In this context, cosmopolitanism is used as a locational asset, especially since the visibility of radical right activity can have lasting negative effects on a city's reputation and migration patterns (Pohl, 2017; Reuband, 2019). However, the strong local presence of radical right actors does not necessarily lead to active efforts to challenge racism. Instead, such environments often demonstrate a depoliticization or normalization of exclusionary attitudes.

Especially in municipal councils of small towns with a consensus-oriented institutional system, focusing on pragmatic politics can aid the AfD's integration. In the municipal context, the party often adopts a less radical stance, acting as a pragmatic player (Dancygier et al., 2025). The municipal political arena thus serves as a testing ground for right-wing alliances (Domann &

Nuissl, 2022). However, the cordon sanitaire of the so-called “Brandmauer” (firewall) against the AfD largely remains intact in most municipal parliaments. Where cooperation with the AfD occurs, it is usually limited to infrastructure and administrative issues rather than ideologically polarized topics like asylum policies (Schroeder et al., 2024). In Saxony, varying degrees of radicalism have been seen among municipal AfD factions early on, with some identifying the center-right Christian Democratic Union (CDU) as their main opponent, while occasionally voting alongside the Social Democratic Party (SPD), the Left Party, or the Greens. Conversely, in other municipalities, the center-right and center-left parties have formed alliances specifically to oppose the AfD (Gorskih et al., 2016). In summary, the AfD’s municipal performance depends on its local context. Although the municipal level is particularly important for the normalization of the AfD, it receives little attention in research on the party (Domann, 2024a; Domann & Nuissl, 2022).

2.3. Chemnitz and Its Image Rebranding

2.3.1 From Industry to Culture

This chapter will first describe the local context of Chemnitz in terms of post-industrial urban transformation before looking at the radical right in Chemnitz. This will embed the research project undertaken here not only in the general literature but also in the context of research work on Chemnitz.

Chemnitz’s image is marked by its industrial significance. During industrialization, the city earned itself the nickname “Saxon Manchester”. The moniker emphasized Chemnitz’s historical role as an industrial center in comparison to the other larger Saxon cities of Leipzig and Dresden (Schäfer, 2015). This historic role is still embedded in the collective memory of Chemnitz residents. A regional saying from the period of industrialization, which is still prominent, compares: “People produce in Chemnitz, trade in Leipzig, and spend the money in Dresden”. Historically, Chemnitz is a working-class city, Leipzig is a commercial city, and Dresden is the former royal capital in the Saxon city triangle. Chemnitz kept its industrial importance during the German Democratic Republic era, when it was renamed Karl-Marx-Stadt. But the image of a city with industrial production no longer reflects the city’s current status after the post-reunification transformations.

After the German reunification, East German cities faced a rapid population decline. The collapse of industries, job losses, and westward migration left behind vacant housing and brownfield sites (Rink et al., 2014). Vacancy rates had increased to as much as 25 percent of Chemnitz's housing stock in 2000 (Feuerbach, 2014; Glorius, 2021). This urban shrinkage was worsened by suburbanization trends across East Germany, which led to the development of residential areas on the city's outskirts. The simultaneous rise of large-scale retail centers on the outskirts also diverted commercial activity away from the city center (Reißmüller et al., 2011). Therefore, Chemnitz serves as an example of the shift from a socialist industrial city to a shrinking city.

Like many other East German cities, Chemnitz responded to the high vacancy rates by taking advantage of the federally funded "Stadtumbau Ost" program. The subsidy scheme promoted the demolition of unrenovated residential buildings and was supported by municipalities, banks, and public housing companies. It aimed to lessen the financial burden of municipal housing debt (Bernt, 2019). Germany's approach has been praised as a model of "smart decline" (Hollander & Németh, 2011) in international literature. In Chemnitz, however, the urban policy discussion during this period focused on economic growth. Investment and redevelopment were prioritized over civic participation and innovative urban practices (Großmann, 2007). Vacant lots and brownfield sites were viewed as threats to the city's image and development potential, which in turn reinforced a technocratic planning paradigm.

This approach became evident between 2007 and 2010 when a group of students and artists occupied an empty building complex to turn it into an alternative residential and cultural space called the "Experimentelles Karree" (experimental block). Not only did the building's visual appearance, with colorful windows and graffiti, cause discomfort among neighbors. The squatters' non-commercial use of the space clashed with societal perceptions rooted in the Fordist industrial city model, which assumed that urban areas should mainly serve economically rational purposes. In the end, the group was evicted despite the city's many vacant properties, sending a discouraging message to others seeking an alternative lifestyle (Weiske, 2015). The outmigration of younger people following reunification, which continues to this day, has created a generational divide in Chemnitz. This has resulted in the underrepresentation of certain social groups and lifestyles (Intelmann, 2019). Unlike nearby Leipzig, which has attracted a growing population of young, well-educated individuals, Chemnitz is characterized by an older and more conservative demographic profile (Glorius, 2021). Although this

demographic weakness is not solely caused by technocratic vacancy management, it shows that alternative spaces for development are a factor influencing people's decision to move away.

Weiske (2015) explains the rejection of the "Experimentelles Karree" with a mindset that originated in the industrial society of Chemnitz in the GDR. The GDR can be described as a state-socialist variant of Fordism (Busch, 2009). It shares the aspects of mass production, standardized consumption, and full employment, but with the specifics of a state-controlled economy and society. Culturally, this went hand in hand with a standardization of everyday life. Work was the defining element of GDR society. Companies formed "multiplexes" (Engler, 2000), as they organized leisure activities, education, and cultural life in a social totality. The importance of work, still embedded in the city's mentality, explains the rejection of lifestyles that deviate from the Fordist norm of employment, resulting in skepticism toward artistic and creative pursuits.

In contrast to preventing the development of the "Experimentelles Karree", the public officials of Chemnitz began to see vacant spaces as opportunities to promote a creative class with the preparation phase for the application for the ECoC 2025. In the Chemnitz-Sonnenberg neighborhood, which is still marked by a high vacancy rate despite extensive demolition efforts, a former industrial building is being transformed into a hub for creative workers (Glorius, 2021). In East Germany, cultural reuse can serve as an identity-reinforcing tool when it preserves the industrial past within cultural memory (Görmann, 2023). This demonstrates that culture plays a significant role in eastern Germany in healing the physical and emotional scars left by the reunification.

This approach follows strategies used in other formerly shrinking cities. Berlin, for instance, was once labeled a shrinking city at the turn of the century, but it rebranded itself as a creative hub with the potential to revitalize underused urban spaces through cultural production. However, as Colomb (2012) argues, this creative rebranding mainly served as city marketing and lacked a sustainable long-term plan for maintaining spaces dedicated to culture. Strategies for culturally reusing vacant spaces often overlook the fact that urban clustering of cultural actors cannot simply be planned; it requires more than designating free zones. It also involves intentionally leaving certain areas unplanned to allow organic cultural development (Groth & Corijn, 2005).

The cultural-led reprogramming in Chemnitz is also linked to broader social and economic goals. Reißmüller (2011) argues that the appeal of commercial enterprises increasingly depends

on the perceived quality of urban life. In this context, Chemnitz competes with the two other major Saxon cities, Leipzig and Dresden. Both cities have experienced significant growth following more successful post-socialist transformations. Leipzig has undergone recent urban renewal, earning the nickname “Hypezig” because of its popularity among young, well-educated, and culturally active milieus (Bremer, 2019). Dresden’s Neustadt district similarly showcases a lively student and alternative scene that is undergoing gentrification (Glatter, 2016). Additionally, Dresden benefits from regional branding as “Silicon Saxony,” which has attracted investments in the semiconductor industry (Wiechmann & Pallagst, 2012).

In contrast, Chemnitz lacks a clearly defined district aimed at attracting the creative class. An early effort to create such a space was made in 2010 through the redevelopment of the Brühl neighborhood. This project, which included relocating the university library and implementing top-down renovation efforts, aimed to rebrand the area as a hub for students and creatives (Feuerbach, 2014). Referring to Gramsci’s concept, Intelmann (2019) claims that Chemnitz’s shift toward a post-Fordist, creative city occurs as a “passive revolution.” The change is implemented top-down, driven by the municipal government rather than grassroots actors. Such an approach risks conflicts with the interests of the majority in Chemnitz’s urban community.

2.3.2 Chemnitz and the Populist Radical Right

Chemnitz is recognized as a focal point for neo-Nazism in Germany. In 1998, members of the National Socialist Underground (NSU) found hideouts in the city, escaping their arrests. In Chemnitz, they carried out post office and supermarket robberies, planned their first bombing in Nuremberg in 1999, and obtained a pistol later used in a series of murders (Grunert & Kiess, 2023). This was made possible through a local network that included supporters of the banned “Blood & Honour” group and connections to the city’s Nazi music scene.

Chemnitz continued to serve as a stage for radical right spatial strategies. Until 2017, a group sought to establish a so-called “Nazi district” in the socioeconomically deprived Sonnenberg neighborhood, an area marked by high vacancy rates. This effort included explosives and paint attacks targeting cultural institutions and the office of a state parliament representative. Today, radical right real estate initiatives continue in Chemnitz. These include a studio for martial arts, a sort of radical right community center for events organized by the party Pro Chemnitz / Freie Sachsen, and a venue of the Identitarian Movement (Grunert, 2021, 2025). The Identitarian Movement is a transnational initiative rooted in youth activism, which seeks to preserve white

European cultural and ethnic identity through provocative non-violent tactics. The group opposes multiculturalism, immigration, and globalism, while warning against what it perceives as the demographic and cultural replacement of native Europeans (Bar-On, 2023; Havertz, 2021). The city also became a destination for the radical right resettlement movement, in which West German neo-Nazis moved to eastern Germany under the slogan “coming together”. At the same time, there are also new groups that recruit from a local milieu. Founded in 2024, the neo-Nazi group Chemnitz Revolte is characterized by a strong public presence, and a worrying propensity for violence. It is considered part of a new, particularly young extremist scene that is notable for its low reluctance regarding criminal consequences (Grunert, 2025). Within the scene, Chemnitz has the reputation of offering a relatively undisturbed environment for political organizing and radical right lifestyles because of limited interference from state institutions or the local civil society (Grunert & Kiess, 2023).

The parliamentary representation of the PRR in Chemnitz involves two main groups: the nationwide party Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) and the regional party Pro Chemnitz / Freie Sachsen. In the 2024 municipal elections, the AfD emerged as the strongest party with 24.3 percent of the vote for the municipal council. The party increased its share from 17.9 percent in 2019. Local AfD leaders were linked to the nationalist Flügel faction, which officially disbanded to avoid increased surveillance by Germany’s domestic intelligence agency (Grunert, 2021). The AfD competes for support with Pro Chemnitz / Freie Sachsen. The smaller regional party received 4.9 percent of the vote in the 2024 municipal council elections, after it received 7.7 percent in 2019. This party is led by Martin Kohlmann, whom the domestic intelligence agency labels as a neo-Nazi. Kohlmann openly calls for the restoration of the German Empire and advocates Saxon secession from the Federal Republic of Germany (Grunert, 2021). The statewide party Freie Sachsen, which grew out of the Chemnitz citizens’ movement Pro Chemnitz, functions as a network for various radical right groups, including former neo-Nazi party members, anti-refugee initiatives, and scenes of conspiracy theorists (Grunert & Kiess, 2023; Krell & Böhme, 2024).

While the AfD at the local level often adopts a more moderate stance to appear as a viable political force and to facilitate integration into administrative processes (Domann & Nuissl, 2022), Pro Chemnitz / Freie Sachsen takes a markedly different approach. Although the party recognizes the unique features of municipal politics, it does not seek inclusion among local elites. Instead, it uses its presence in municipal bodies as a platform for performative, confrontational actions aimed at delegitimizing democratic institutions (Krell, 2025). This

shows that in Chemnitz, a more moderate local PRR party achieved the highest election results. However, the AfD, like the smaller, more radical right-wing party Pro Chemnitz / Freie Sachsen, operates from the opposition.

In the Chemnitz city council, early signs of a breaking “Brandmauer” (firewall) were already visible. In 2019, the Youth Welfare Committee was reorganized with support from votes by the centre-right parties CDU, FDP, together with AfD, and Pro Chemnitz, which excluded key stakeholders involved in child and youth services from the committee. In 2022, CDU and FDP, along with the PRR parties, also rejected a comprehensive mobility plan for the city. The plan aimed to significantly increase the share of environmentally friendly transportation (Hummel & Taschke, 2023). Therefore, Chemnitz is not immune to cross-party alliances with the PRR that block progressive and sustainability-oriented urban policies.

Besides the parliamentary stage, Pro Chemnitz / Freie Sachsen is acting as a protest facilitator. The riots in Chemnitz in late summer 2018 illustrate a temporary convergence of radical right actors at both local and national levels, with repercussions that extended beyond the milieu and the city itself (Rippl, 2019). Following the fatal stabbing of a visitor to the city festival by an asylum seeker, Pro Chemnitz / Freie Sachsen, as well as a local hooligan group – central to Chemnitz’s radical right scene (Bohmann & Laux, 2024) – initially took the lead in organizing protests that escalated into acts of violence. Later demonstrations drew some of the most prominent figures from the German-speaking radical right (Frieese et al., 2019). The effect of these events was far-reaching. Authorities uncovered a Telegram chat group named Revolution Chemnitz, whose members were planning a terrorist attack; they were arrested after conducting a “test run” that involved attacking migrants in the city. As well, the murderer of CDU politician Walter Lübcke claimed that he had been radicalized at one of the Chemnitz demonstrations (Grunert, 2021). Consequently, Chemnitz has become a symbol of radical right radicalization within broader parliamentary discourse (Weiß et al., 2021).

The city's civil society response to the 2018 riots included a cultural counter-event. The Chemnitz music scene organized a free concert called #wirsindmehr (“We are More”), led by the nationally successful indie band Kraftklub. Known for addressing themes like urban shrinkage, monotony, and youth outmigration in Chemnitz, the band had previously helped reframe the city’s past disruptions positively (Erbacher & Nitzsche, 2017). The concert, held in direct response to far-right violence, drew about 65,000 attendees, many from outside the city,

giving culture the role of a central protest medium against the radical right (Klinker & Obert, 2019).

Conversely, the response of the city's officials has been criticized for only focusing on the events of 2018. Instead of addressing the structural issues, the causes of the riots are seen as external problems, and efforts mainly aim to protect the city's reputation. This view ignores the ongoing racism in Chemnitz and the struggles faced by migrant communities (Liebscher et al., 2020; Nolden, 2019). However, the city's successful ECoC 2025 bid recognizes the riots. It presents a cultural program designed to engage the so-called "silent middle" – the part of Chemnitz society that does not openly oppose extremism. However, local civic groups remain doubtful about how well the strategy will work, believing its expectations are too high (Laux et al., 2021).

3. Methodology

3.1 Research paradigm

3.1.1 From Critical Realism to a Strategic-Relational Approach

This study adopts the ontological perspective of critical realism as outlined by Bhaskar (2008). Critical realism acts as a compromise between positivist and constructivist perspectives on reality. While positivism claims that truth can be objectively found through scientific inquiry, constructivism argues that no objective truth exists, as reality is shaped socially. Critical realism promotes ontological realism, affirming that an independent, objective reality exists. However, it also accepts epistemological relativism, claiming that subjective factors influence our understanding of reality. Bhaskar (*ibid.*) identifies three ontological levels: the Real, the Actual, and the Empirical. The Real refers to the fundamental structures and mechanisms that exist independently of perception and may not be directly observable. The Actual involves events that originate from these structures, although not all structures produce observable events. The Empirical includes only those events experienced and perceived by human subjects. Research goes beyond describing observable phenomena and seeks to explain the causal mechanisms behind these events. While an objective reality exists, our understanding of it is always partial and subjective (Sheydayi & Dadashpoor, 2023). Consequently, scientific research provides only limited insights rather than complete knowledge of reality.

Bob Jessop (2005) advances Bhaskar's ontological framework with his Strategic-Relational Approach (SRA). Jessop criticizes Bhaskar's binary view of structure and agency. He argues that it overlooks the role of historical and geographical contexts in shaping structures. Furthermore, Bhaskar's approach does not fully address the selective and reflexive qualities of social structures. Jessop points out that structures do not affect all actors equally; instead, they strategically benefit some groups while limiting others. SRA assumes that actors interpret and respond to structural conditions, adjusting their strategies based on these interpretations. The SRA is especially well-suited for a context-specific understanding of social processes related to hegemonic and counter-hegemonic projects. It has shown particular value in urban studies. Jessop's SRA draws on Poulantzas-inspired theories of the state. Simultaneously, his reflections on the state inform the development of the SRA (Jessop & Morgan, 2022). Jessop sees the state

not as a single, unified actor but as a configuration of institutions that favor certain actors and strategies over others (Jessop, 1982, 2003). This view allows researchers to analyze which voices are marginalized or excluded in urban development processes (Legendijk, 2007; Servillo & Van Den Broeck, 2012). Therefore, the SRA provides a power-sensitive approach for analyzing urban development discourses.

3.1.2 Territorialization as an Operationalization of the Strategic-Relational Approach

In geographical research on the strategies of the German radical right, scholarly discussion has focused on the analytical concepts of “rechte Räume” (right-wing spaces) and the process of “Raumnahme” (spatial appropriation). This conceptual framework was mainly introduced and further developed by Wilhelm Heitmeyer based on extensive empirical studies (Freiheit et al., 2020; Heitmeyer, 1999). The following section describes the concept of spatial appropriation, presents criticisms of this concept, and then introduces a theoretical framework based on territorialization, which is more suitable for applying the SRA to the analysis of culture-led urban development.

The model views radical right spatial strategies as a gradual, multi-stage process of appropriation, in which specific areas become progressively dominated by radical right actors and ideologies (Freiheit et al., 2020; Heitmeyer, 1999). The process starts with provocation gains, where radical right actors intentionally stage public appearances to attract attention. Next are displacement gains, occurring when the visible presence of radical right actors evolves into violence and intimidation, which creates a climate of fear and causes others to withdraw from spaces. Territorial gains happen when this intimidation escalates into the actual expulsion of groups, leading to areas effectively under the social control of the radical right. The final stage, normalization gains, is defined by the absence of public or discursive resistance, where radical right dominance in particular locations becomes socially accepted, and overt violence may decrease as hegemony is established. This framework provides a helpful way to categorize a wide range of empirical phenomena, from the spread of radical right symbolism in everyday urbanity (Enzenbach, 2017) to the self-proclaimed creation of “Nazi neighborhoods” (Bernstein, 2024) or “nationally liberated zones” (Döring, 2008). Other scholars have further expanded on the idea of radical right spatialization. Concepts like “terrain gains” (Borstel & Luzar, 2016) highlight the normalization process. Other researchers such as Küchler and

Musyal (2022) go even further by attributing an active role to space itself, as exemplified in the concept of “radicalizing spaces.”

Despite its analytical usefulness, the spatialization of the radical right through concepts like “right-wing spaces” and “territorial gains” risks fostering a static and essentialist view of space. Thereby, space is implicitly seen as a pre-existing, neutral container that can be occupied or taken over by radical right actors. This perspective overlooks the socially constructed nature of space (Lefebvre et al., 1997; Löw, 2008; Massey, 2005). Spaces are not empty containers waiting to be claimed; rather, they are continuously created through social practices. Labeling certain areas as “right-wing” is itself an act that assigns meaning to a place and can obscure the ongoing political struggles around it. Additionally, radical right spatial claims are less about conquest and more about increasing visibility for actors who have long been part of the social fabric (Salheiser & Quent, 2022). By framing radical right tactics in terms of spatial appropriation, researchers may overlook how deeply these groups are embedded in specific local contexts.

In response to the conceptual limitations of the widely used analytical category of “right-wing spaces,” the author collective Terra-R (2025) proposes the concept of territorialization to analyze radical right spatiality. This concept enables a more nuanced understanding of the spatial strategies of radical right groups and how meaning is assigned to space, avoiding an understanding of space as a fixed entity. It draws on both the Romance-language concept of *territorio* and the English-language concept of *territory*. The practice of *territorio* making emphasizes how space emerges through specific social actions and provides a lens for examining physical practices. The idea of *territory* making focuses on the process of dividing space and assigning meaning to social relations within it, combining the dimensions of enabling and constraining specific *territorio* practices. Together, these elements allow a thorough analysis of how space is created through both physical and discursive practices.

Terra-R (2025) identifies four interconnected forms of territorialization used by the radical right: performative, affective, imaginative, and infrastructural. Performative territorialization involves creating *territorio* through spatially assertive actions like demonstrations or symbolic occupations of space. These actions are influenced not only by the intentions of radical right actors but also by the institutional conditions of tolerance, repression, and resistance that affect their visibility and effectiveness (Krell et al., 2025). Affective territorialization describes how space is emotionally charged, with radical right actors associating specific locations with

feelings such as fear, pride, nostalgia, or resentment. This emotional connection aims to shape collective bonds and exclusion by making some places feel either familiar or threatening (Hutta & Kübler, 2025). Imaginative territorialization refers to the symbolic and discursive framing of space, especially the portrayal of particular areas as alien-dominated or lost to a national identity. This form of territorialization is visible in the targeting of migrant urban areas by radical right actors, but also in the framing of cities as symbols for radical right dominance in public discourse (Seichter et al., 2025b). Infrastructural territorialization describes strategies where the radical right establishes a presence within a space, such as through real estate acquisition or occupation. Also, it highlights normalization processes of the PRR through the participation in supposedly neutral infrastructural politics (Seichter et al., 2025a). These four dimensions of far-right territorialization often operate together.

The conceptualization of territorialization allows for a productive application of the Strategic-Relational Approach to analyze PRR spatiality. Within this framework, *territorio* and *territory* function reflexively as both structure and agency. Physical practices and discursive attributions are all selective agencies undertaken based on specific structures that favor them. At the same time, the physical and discursive practices of PRR, for example, also shape the structural conditions under which local state or civil society actors engage in certain physical practices of *territorio* and discursive-institutional practices of *territory* making. Structural contexts always influence the spatial practices and claims of PRR actors. These practices do not develop in a vacuum; instead, they are embedded within what Freiheit et al. (2020) call an “escalation continuum”, where escalating actions are rooted in deeply established societal beliefs. Therefore, a strategic-relational approach to territorialization does more than describe the spatial strategies of PRR actors; it also aims to identify the structural conditions that either enable or constrain these strategies. The dimension of *territory* is especially useful for understanding how spaces are constructed by the state, thereby facilitating or hindering specific PRR strategies.

This approach to the structure and agency of PRR spatial practices is exemplified in Seichter et al.’s (2025b) analysis of the 2020 Hanau terrorist attack. The perpetrator targeted spaces associated with migrant urbanity, such as a shisha bar. Through an act of imaginative territorialization, these spaces were symbolically constructed as alien. However, this act was supported by institutionalized imaginaries, in which such urban spaces had long been depicted by public discourse and policy as zones of criminality with expanded police powers. This official territorialization, where spaces with high migrant populations were metaphorically

linked to threats, influenced not only the symbolic perception of these areas but also their material outcomes. The tragic example of an emergency exit door ordered to remain locked – to prevent escape during police raids – proved fatal during the radical right extremists' shooting. This demonstrates that radical right territorialization is connected to structural conditions. The same applies to parliamentary-represented PRR actors. At the municipal level, specific opportunity structures within administrative practices, such as a consensus-driven political system, can enable particular forms of agency and contribute to normalizing radical right actors (Domann & Nuissl, 2022). Therefore, territory as the structural condition of institutionally and discursively constructed space, and territorio as the spatialized agency, are reflexively interconnected.

The typology of performative, affective, imaginative, and infrastructural territorialization provides an operational framework for analyzing PRR agency in space. As such, the strategic-relational approach to territorialization carries direct methodological implications for this study. First, it requires that the research captures both the spatialized practices of the radical right and the conditions under which these practices emerge, as well as the structural foundations that produce those conditions. Second, the analysis must examine how structural contexts enable or restrict specific actors and strategies. This involves identifying the selective affinities between structures and PRR agency. Finally, the study must consider the reflexive interaction between agency and structure. PRR actors not only operate within existing spatial and institutional frameworks but also reshape them through their strategies. The concept of territorialization, therefore, serves as a lens to analyze radical right agency in the context of the European Capital of Culture 2025 in Chemnitz and of the structural conditions influencing their practices.

3.2 Research Strategy

3.2.1 Single Case Study

Although the critical realism paradigm enables both quantitative and qualitative research methods (Sheydayi & Dadashpoor, 2023), it is especially well-suited for case study designs (Easton, 2010). Quantitative techniques generally focus on testing existing theories by measuring variables and analyzing statistical relationships. In contrast, qualitative approaches are better at generating new insights (Mayring, 2010).

This Master's thesis adopts a single, in-depth case study approach, utilizing qualitative methods to examine social phenomena within their specific contexts. These methods are used to capture subjective perspectives of different actors (Kohlbacher, 2006). In distinction to quantitative research, qualitative research highlights the importance of contextualizing empirical findings (Sheydayi & Dadashpoor, 2023). The revelatory nature of this case study seeks to identify patterns of causality. It is supposed to contribute to the theoretical development of a concept explaining PRR's relationship to culture-led urban transformation.

Case studies are better understood as a comprehensive research strategy rather than just a method (Hartley, 2004). In a case study, the researcher has limited control over the subject being studied, which makes the case study an experiment conducted within a real-life setting (Morgan, 2012; Yin, 2014). This thesis uses a revelatory case study design, which is especially suitable when the goal is to develop broader theoretical insights through in-depth analysis of a single case. This approach aligns with Stake's (2010) description of an instrumental case study, where the focus is on understanding a particular phenomenon beyond just the case itself, rather than studying the case for its own intrinsic value or as part of a larger group.

For a long time and sometimes still today, qualitative methods have had difficulties receiving academic acceptance, partly due to the politicization of knowledge production within scholarly discourse (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). This skepticism has often focused on case studies, which are the most commonly used method in qualitative research (Stake, 2010). The method is criticized for its subjectivity and limited generalizability (Yin, 2014). Single case studies may not achieve external validity because they cannot make claims about whether their findings apply to other cases. Nonetheless, exploratory case studies are potentially useful for their ability to generate theoretical insights, which can later be examined in more generalizable research designs involving larger samples (Hartley, 2004).

In contrast, single case studies hold a scientific value that Yin (2014) calls analytical generalizability. While quantitative analyses may simplify complexity by focusing on a few variables across many cases, qualitative case studies consider multiple variables within a single case. This allows for contextualized interpretations. Although many potential explanations may be possible for a single variable, only some will align consistently with all the variables (Mayring, 2010). By excluding inconsistent interpretations, case studies can achieve evidential density; therefore, the credibility of case studies depends on the "interdependence of different kinds and bits of evidence" (Morgan, 2012).

The study conducted within the paradigm of critical realism does not aim for reliability in the traditional positivist sense, as the informed interpretations of results, associated with Bhaskar's empirical level, are inherently influenced by subjective perceptions. In the following, the goal is to ensure transparency in both data collection and analysis methods by providing a detailed description of the research design and procedures. This transparency allows others to replicate the study, regardless of whether they interpret the results the same way or differently.

3.2.2 Case Selection

A well-justified case selection is essential not only to support the scientific investigation of a particular case but also to enhance the credibility of case study research. Many case studies lack a clear rationale for their selection, which weakens their analytical foundation (Baškarada, 2014). Yin (2014) identifies several criteria that can justify using a single-case design, including extreme, representative, and revelatory reasons. The rationale for selecting a specific case may overlap within a single research design.

The choice of this case is based on a revelatory logic. It is justified both in time and space. In terms of timing, Chemnitz's designation as the European Capital of Culture 2025 provides a unique chance to study a culture-led urban development process in its early stages. Conducting fieldwork before the program year – and especially before its formal evaluation – allows an examination of the expectations and strategies surrounding the initiative, free from retrospective biases or outcome-based justifications. Geographically, Chemnitz is an interesting case as an East German, non-metropolitan city. While much of the existing research on culture-led urban development focuses on large or globally connected cities, smaller and peripheral urban areas are still less studied in this field.

Furthermore, the case selection is justified by the unique characteristics of Chemnitz. Unlike other German cities that have held the European Capital of Culture title, such as West Berlin (1988) and Weimar (1999), whose cultural importance is already widely recognized, Chemnitz is not well known. Essen (2010), as an industrial center in West Germany, experienced structural changes after the coal industry phase-out, with vacant industrial spaces being repurposed with the help of cultural projects. First, this seems comparable to what is pursued in the post-socialist city of Chemnitz. However, unlike Essen, Chemnitz faces the challenge that its image is heavily influenced by its radical right reputation. This creates a new theoretical

and empirical interest: Chemnitz becomes a key location for exploring the relationship between urban culture-led development and the spatial strategies of the PRR.

A revelatory case study of the ECoC 2025 in Chemnitz provides a rare opportunity to examine the largely understudied intersection between the PRR and culture-led urban development. Although the ECoC 2025 in Chemnitz may not be a typical example, it is, to the best of current knowledge, unique in its scale, institutional setup, and socio-geographical context. No other large-scale culture-led urban development project like the ECoC has been carried out under conditions marked by a similarly strong presence and stigmatization of radical right groups. For this reason, a comparative multi-case study design is intentionally not used. Existing examples of radical right influence in urban settings with smaller projects of creative city making would not be methodologically comparable due to differences in scope and symbolic importance. Such comparisons could obscure the distinct complexity of the Chemnitz case. Nevertheless, this study's approach offers valuable insights into the challenges, contradictions, and political tensions faced when culture-led development projects are carried out in cities contested by the PRR, especially in post-Fordist context.

3.3 Data Collection

3.3.1 City Council Protocols and Policy Documents

Document analysis is a standard method in qualitative case study research and is especially important in urban studies. Official documents, city council protocols, urban development plans, and policy papers provide valuable insights into local political decision-making and how urban transformation is governed (Zaleckis et al., 2019). In this study, document analysis was conducted on a selected collection of municipal records, including city council protocols and official policy documents related to ECoC 2025. The analysis served two main purposes: first, it acts as a primary source itself, and second, it provides the foundation for developing the semi-structured interview guide. Data collection started with a systematic compilation of city council protocols from the council information system. Since the application for the ECoC title was first publicly announced at a city council meeting on August 31, 2016, this date marks the start of the document analysis. All subsequent city council protocols were reviewed and included in the data set. To find relevant discussions, a systematic keyword search was performed using

the term “Kulturhauptstadt” (“Capital of Culture”). When no results appeared, alternative keywords like “2025” and “Kultur” (“culture”) were used to identify potentially related entries.

By January 29, 2025, following the official opening event and the last council meeting included in the data collection, a total of 82 municipal council meetings had taken place. Of these, 66 meetings referenced the ECoC at least once. The data collection focuses only on city council meetings because meeting protocols from the temporary Strategy Committee for the European Capital of Culture are not publicly available. City council protocols are labeled with the code “YYYY/MM/DD City Council Protocol”, and a detailed list is provided in Appendix A.4. In addition to the protocols, the analysis also included policy documents cited during the meetings. This resulted in the identification and inclusion of twelve relevant policy documents of the City of Chemnitz and the European Commission. A list of these policy documents is included in Appendix A.3.

3.3.2 Press Reports

The media analysis in this study was conducted using the Genios database. Searching with the combinations “Chemnitz Kulturhauptstadt” (“Chemnitz Capital of Culture”) along with either “rechts” (“right-wing”), “Nazi”, “AfD,” or “Freie Sachsen” resulted in a collection of 772 German-language press articles in January. Duplicate articles appearing under both search terms were removed. Additionally, redundancies from news agency reports used across multiple newspapers were excluded. Through systematic reading, further articles were eliminated if the ECoC was not the main focus. The data collection process continued until the end of January. Ultimately, a total of 154 articles were included. These are cited in the study with the newspaper name and publication date, formatted as “YYYY/MM/DD Newspaper”. A detailed breakdown of the reports is provided in Appendix A.5.

In addition to the press coverage retrieved via the Genios database, efforts were made to identify discourses surrounding the ECoC in publications affiliated with the PRR. Using the typology of PRR media outlined by Kellersohn et al. (2023), an online search was conducted across six right-wing publication outlets in February 2025. When this query yielded no results, a secondary search using “Chemnitz” was performed, followed by an evaluation of each article's relevance to the ECoC project. This search produced two relevant articles from Junge Freiheit and one from Campact Magazin. Additionally, a search of the Telegram channel of the local Identitarian group, Zentrum Chemnitz, uncovered an interview published in the Austrian

radical right media outlet Heimatkurier. The website of the Chemnitz branch of the AfD led to the discovery of a party-affiliated podcast episode from 2022, in which three local AfD politicians discussed the ECoC 2025. In total, six contributions from PRR-affiliated media and actors were added to the dataset. These additional sources are important for the analysis because the PRR is often excluded from interviews in the media, where they are usually reported on more than being given a platform for detailed argumentation.

The media analysis was conducted to provide an additional data source. First, the city council protocols document contributions only by council members, summarized and in indirect speech, which may create significant informational gaps. Secondly, the media analysis was conducted to collect insights from additional stakeholders. Leading municipal officials, such as the mayor, are difficult to access for interviews due to their tight schedules. As a result, media sources can be a valuable alternative for capturing their statements. Unlike retrospective interviews, media analysis allows for the collection of their statements as they are expressed. In comparison to an interview, the filtering of information that might occur in retrospect, especially if specific details become less relevant or are deemed politically sensitive, can be avoided by a media analysis.

The scope of the media analysis is deliberately limited. The Genios database was chosen because it includes a broader range of German newspapers than other databases, such as LexisNexis. Smaller, low-circulation press outlets are limited in both databases. Additionally, the analysis was confined to print media, except for two sources of the PRR. Radio and television broadcasts were excluded. This choice was made because of the limited archival access to past broadcasts from the regional public broadcaster MDR, which makes it challenging to collect material systematically. It was assumed that if new positions or statements regarding the ECoC were initially expressed via broadcast media, these would be reflected in subsequent press coverage, and this would be indirectly captured in the print media collection.

3.3.3 Semi-structured Interviews

In addition to document analysis, semi-structured interviews with local stakeholders were also conducted. Semi-structured interviews offer a flexible way to gather respondents' subjective perspectives while aligning with specific research objectives (Albaret & Deas, 2023). Semi-structured interviews, in particular, find a balance between structure and openness, ensuring

some comparability across interviews while allowing new and unexpected thematic areas to emerge (Baškarada, 2014). Especially in urban studies, interviews are an essential tool for capturing the various ways different actors and stakeholder groups interpret urban processes and respond to urban interventions (Verloo et al., 2020).

Interview partners were chosen based on an initial review of press reports and city council documents, supplemented by snowball sampling. Since the development of the ECoC initiative takes place within a tension between state institutions and civil society, interviews included both city council members and civil society actors. All political factions in the Chemnitz City Council since 2024 were contacted. Except for the Pro Chemnitz / Freie Sachsen faction, one interview was successfully conducted with a representative from each faction. The selection of specific city council members was based on their documented involvement in or knowledge of the ECoC process. When this was not clear, faction offices were asked to suggest appropriate contacts. Additionally, an interview was held with a representative of the Cultural Capital Limited company, the municipal subsidiary responsible for implementing and organizing the ECoC. The primary goal for the selection of civil society actors as interview partners was to identify representatives from organizations that gained prominence through their active opposition to the PRR. This purposive sampling aligned with the research question, focusing on recruiting local experts whose experiences and perspectives are especially relevant to the intersection of PRR dynamics and the ECoC. Additionally, two industry associations involved in the ECoC and dedicated to promoting Chemnitz's image were included as interview partners. The level of engagement in the ECoC project varies among city council members and civil society representatives.

The selection of interview partners results in a sample that meets the minimum recommended number of 15 interviews per case study in the field, thereby enabling theoretical saturation, which is defined as the point where no new insights emerge from additional interviews (Baškarada, 2014; Verloo et al., 2020). The interviews were conducted between November 2024 and January 2025 and include six city council members, the responsible organization body (Kulturhauptstadt GmbH), eight civil society actors, including two industry associations (referenced in A.2). A first guide for the interviews (referenced in A.3) was created based on an initial analysis of media reporting, policy documents and city council protocols and continuously adapted to new findings from interviews and the respective interview partners, while key questions remained for comparability purposes.

The interviews conducted followed established standards for informed consent and participant anonymity. All participants were offered a consent form (referenced in A.4). In cases where interviewees felt a signed form was unnecessary, signatures were not required, recognizing that formal documentation could be intimidating and might discourage participation, especially regarding topics involving PRR actors (Ashe et al., 2020). Conversely, when an official confirmation of the research project was requested along with the consent form, a verification letter from the thesis supervisor was provided. With participants' consent, all interviews were digitally recorded to support a conversational style and prevent data loss. The recordings were made with the participants' permission, enabling a natural interview flow while avoiding potential information loss later on (Aberbach & Rockman, 2002).

All interview participants were anonymized in this study. For city council members and the Cultural Capital company representative, only their party or institutional affiliations were kept. Conversely, all civil society actors were fully anonymized. This decision was made following requests from several participants who, due to their local roles or reliance on public funding, wished to prevent their identities from being inferred, even indirectly. References to the interviews are labeled as follows: IP for party-affiliated participants, IZ for civil society actors, including industry associations, and II for the Cultural Capital limited company.

The literature offers many practical recommendations for building trust between researchers and interviewees and encouraging openness during interviews – principles that were actively used in this study (Baškarada, 2014). Interviews with actors connected to the PRR present specific challenges in qualitative research. In the past, these interviews were frequently avoided because there was a concern that engaging with such individuals could inadvertently legitimize extremist views (Ellinas, 2023). Today, scholars still debate the epistemological merits of interviewing PRR actors, pointing out the challenge of revealing their underlying ideological beliefs behind their surface-level agitational rhetoric (Feustel, 2019). Nonetheless, this study found it necessary to include a PRR-affiliated perspective because the PRR's position is central to the research question. Accessing PRR actors remains a significant challenge, especially since researchers often come from academic and socio-economic backgrounds very different from those of their interview subjects. PRR actors tend to be distrustful of academia. Existing research explicitly describes applicable behavioral guidelines for conducting interviews with PRR actors (Damhuis & De Jonge, 2022), which helped guide the data collection process.

3.4 Data Analysis

3.4.2 Content Analysis

This study employs content analysis as its primary method for data evaluation. It involves systematically interpreting textual data to reveal underlying meanings and patterns. Although initially designed for quantitative research, content analysis has become increasingly popular in qualitative studies, particularly in urban research (Zaleckis et al., 2019). Its widespread use in urban studies is partly due to its methodological flexibility (Sheydayi & Dadashpoor, 2023). Unlike more rigid qualitative methods, content analysis offers a flexible framework with fewer procedural restrictions (Baškarada, 2014). It is beneficial when quantitative techniques might oversimplify complex texts, potentially leading to a loss of context and interpretive depth (Kracauer, 2025 [1952]).

A technique in content analysis involves systematically coding texts. Assigning specific codes to categorize segments helps researchers organize their material according to research goals (Mayring, 2010). This process is usually iterative, allowing data collection and analysis to happen simultaneously. Such a method facilitates new insights to influence how data is filtered and interpreted as the study progresses (Hartley, 2004). The analysis began with an initial review of policy documents and city council protocols, leading to the development of inductive codes. As the study continued, the coding system was updated by merging related codes into broader categories and revisiting earlier coded segments. The final codebook, which was used for data analysis with the help of the software MAXQDA, is included in Appendix A.1. Because data was collected from multiple sources, new insights from one source often led to the creation of new codes or modifications of existing ones.

The presentation of the results is structured in alignment with the overarching research questions. The findings from individual codes are summarized in narrative form and presented and discussed in the results section of this study, focusing on the two guiding questions: how the PRR reacts to the ECoC, and how city officials respond to the PRR using the ECoC. All quotes from interviewees or non-English sources in this thesis – such as press articles, city council protocols, and policy documents – have been translated into English by the author.

Additional analytical methods were intentionally left out of this study. The examination of city council protocols was performed using the "speech-as-content" approach (Goplerud, 2021),

which focuses on thematic interpretation rather than quantitative measures. A frequency analysis of specific topics was not conducted, as this method often provides only surface-level insights. Likewise, there was no attempt to analyze which individual politicians spoke on behalf of their parties, since municipal politics in this context is characterized by honorary positions instead of professional political roles, thus limiting the usefulness of a speaker-centered analysis.

These considerations also apply to media analysis. In this study, media reports are mainly seen as a source of additional statements from local actors that couldn't be accessed through city council protocols or interviews. A thorough investigation of overall media coverage of the European Capital of Culture initiative was not possible due to the limited, research-question-driven sample of press materials. Additionally, a more media-science-oriented approach – examining which newspapers report on the topic and how – is not considered effective here. The consolidation of newspapers under shared publishing groups and editorial departments, along with the widespread reliance on news agency reporting, greatly reduces the value of regional differences. Therefore, distinctions between outlets based in Chemnitz, Saxony, East Germany, and other parts of Germany would offer limited insight into the discursive dynamics surrounding the ECoC 2025.

3.4.3 Limitations

The study focuses on the interaction between institutionalized urban, political, and civil society actors. It does not include a quantitative assessment of the views held by non-organized citizens. This methodological choice has certain limitations, especially in analyzing the PRR environment. While combined, the AfD and Pro Chemnitz / Freie Sachsen currently hold nearly 30 percent of the city council seats, there are no explicitly PRR-aligned institutionalized local civil society organizations whose positions on the ECoC could be studied. Understanding broader public sentiment is particularly important given the strategic goal of mobilizing a “silent middle” within the urban population. However, exploring public attitudes toward the initiative is beyond this study’s scope and will be covered in the post-ECoC research (Mayerl & Roßbach, 2024; Steinmetz et al., 2024).

Although the selection of cultural actors in this study was purposeful, it does not include a comprehensive analysis of the positions held by the many associations involved in the ECoC. Such an overview is provided in Laux et al. (2021). The interviews conducted with PRR

opposing actors, however, offer valuable, expertise-driven insights from civil society perspectives. Nonetheless, it must be noted that this sample is not representative of the broader civil society. Given their positioning, the selected actors may display a more critical stance on the topic than, for example, most sports clubs.

The data collection for this study focuses on the preparatory phase of the ECoC. It concludes at the end of January 2025, aligning with the official opening and the public debates about the opening event. Analyzing the entire program year was not possible due to time constraints. Therefore, an evaluation of half the program year was intentionally left out, as no reliable conclusions could be drawn about PRR reactions during the program without examining the whole cycle. Additionally, analyzing the atmosphere and dynamics during the program year would have required a different methodological approach, such as participant observation at key events and follow-up interviews with municipal actors reflecting on their experiences. Nevertheless, focusing on the preparatory phase is insightful on its own. It allows for a focused analysis of the negotiation and framing processes that influenced both the design and narrative of the program. These foundational discourses are essential for understanding how tensions around the ECoC initiative ultimately shaped what can be observed in 2025.

3.5 Researcher's Positionality

“What is missing in #Chemnitz and all these places is not the church or the police, but us – the millions who moved away. We, who once ran until we arrived in the West. Who believed that #Lichtenhagen and all the hatred were behind us, or east of us. Now we fight over downtown apartments in the big cities and are absent from the kitchen tables in our parents’ empty neighbourhoods.” (Bangel, 2018)

The Tweet by journalist Christian Bangel, written in response to the 2018 riots in Chemnitz, is relevant to this study in two key ways. First, it anticipates a main tension explored in this thesis: the uneven effects of Florida’s creative city model, especially the gap between urban areas designated as hubs for creativity and those left behind by these same forces. It prompts us to consider whether the migration of creative scenes to major cities has left opportunities for the radical right in cities like Chemnitz. And beyond that, whether the solution lies in replicating

the culture-driven urban development seen in major metropolises, aiming to create conditions where these creative scenes can thrive in peripheral cities.

Second, Bangel's reflection resonates with my personal experience related to Chemnitz's (urban) development history. After I was born, my family followed the post-reunification suburbanization trend. The presence of neo-Nazis influenced my early years. As a teenager, I often found temporary refuge in Leipzig's city districts, seeking cultural and social spaces that Chemnitz seemed to lack, long before I learned about the displacement, even under the abundance of space in Chemnitz (Weiske, 2015). Later, Berlin became my refuge after finishing school. Therefore, the reflections in this study do not begin with its formal idea; instead, they stem from long-standing personal experiences that predate this research. They raise a key question: Would a researcher without this background see the same dynamics or assign similar importance to specific issues? Acknowledging this influence is crucial not only for transparency but also for understanding the perspective through which the research was approached.

Supposed East Germans can be seen as a type of internal migrants who have not left their country, but the country, with all its former structures and meanings, has effectively abandoned them (Foroutan et al., 2019). In that case, those born after reunification are like a second generation of migrants. They go through processes of cultural adaptation and reconnection that are common topics in migration research. Although I left Chemnitz, I have stayed actively involved in its urban life. These experiences provide me with an overview and access to the research area. At the same time, Chemnitz's urban community is large enough that I had never spoken to most of the urban actors interviewed for this study before this project.

My connection to the research field has not been a disadvantage in this study. Since it was not explicitly asked about, my upbringing in Chemnitz was not mentioned, allowing interview partners to give detailed explanations about Chemnitz without resorting to an "as you know" perspective. Although my professional work has mainly focused on Berlin, I have published four journalistic articles about Chemnitz over the years. Of these, two met the search criteria for the media analyzed in this study's press review but were removed from the dataset. My positioning could have potentially made access to certain interviews more difficult. As far as I know, no interviews were declined because of this, nor was it mentioned as an issue during the interviews.

4. Chemnitz: The European Capital of Culture 2025

4.1 Introduction: Culture as an Image Cure

The discussion of this study's results starts by examining the objectives of the ECoC, then analyzes the PRR reaction, and ends with a discussion on how the initiative adapts to these challenges.

Although economic, demographic, and urban planning goals influence the ECoC 2025, the primary focus remains on a broader cultural transformation. At the heart of this shift is a dual process of enhancing the city's image. Externally, the ECoC seeks to rebuild Chemnitz's reputation, while internally, it aims to boost the residents' self-confidence. This is intended to be accomplished by engaging a "silent middle" of Chemnitz's urban community. An approach that originates from the events of 2018.

The economic goal tied to ECoC 2025 mainly centers on event-related impacts. While official statements highlight the importance of the cultural and creative industries as engines of urban growth (20210317 City Council Protocol), there is skepticism about the ECoC's potential to bring about broader structural change. Specifically, both civil society and political figures criticize the absence of a comprehensive plan to shift toward a more creative economic model (IZ07, IP06). Instead, expectations are primarily focused on short-term benefits for local gastronomy and hospitality sectors, with increased tourism and residents' spending anticipated during the program year (IP02). Additionally, there is hope that the ECoC will boost the city's long-term appeal as a tourist destination (IZ01, IP01). Expected spill-over effects include the hosting of conferences, congresses, and party conventions in Chemnitz – events that are not directly connected to ECoC but happen because of the title (IZ07, IP01). Therefore, economic goals mainly relate to the program year.

The city's economic growth is linked to its demographic trends. In the context of the ECoC, economic success relies on providing a high quality of life and promoting a welcoming culture (City of Chemnitz 2024c). The aftermath of the 2018 riots hurt the city's ability to attract skilled workers (IZ08). Conversely, stakeholders remain hopeful that the ECoC's efforts to improve Chemnitz's livability will lead to population growth (IP04). This demographic stability is expected to boost Chemnitz's bargaining power in infrastructure decisions at the state and

federal levels, such as improving rail connections or restoring university programs that were previously cut (20200715 City Council Protocol). However, these hopes are based on expectations of localized impacts rather than drastic changes in broader migration patterns. It seems likely that increased visibility of Chemnitz could draw more students to local universities (IZ08). Additionally, some stakeholders believe that members of the cultural sector involved in organizing the ECoC might choose to stay in the city after 2025 (II01). Yet, there is skepticism, with some predicting these individuals will leave once their project-based jobs end (IP06). Overall, there is a common understanding that the ECoC alone cannot fundamentally change Chemnitz's long-term demographic trends (IP02, IP03).

Urban development goals related to the ECoC 2025 primarily aim to transform former industrial sites, many of which have been vacant since the post-reunification restructuring. These areas are viewed as potential urban attractions (20170125 City Council Protocol). A key part of this strategy involves the targeted redevelopment of the Sonnenberg district – an area characterized by high vacancy rates and previously self-identified as a "Nazi neighborhood" by radical right groups (Grunert, 2021) – into a hub for creative professionals and cultural initiatives (20220518 City Council Protocol). In addition to district-level changes, the inner city is also to be improved as a venue for large-scale events, making Chemnitz a more attractive location for such gatherings. Important infrastructural projects include improving access to the Chemnitz river and establishing it as a space with greater recreational and aesthetic value. More broadly, these efforts aim to boost the overall quality and appeal of public spaces throughout the city (20190403 City Council Protocol).

The responsible actors for shaping the ECoC Chemnitz 2025 show a pragmatic understanding of the program's limitations regarding material transformation. While economic benefits are expected, these are mainly linked to short-term event-driven impacts rather than a fundamental overhaul of the local economy. Although many past titleholders hoped that the initiative would strengthen the city's creative industries, existing research highlights that there is no clear causal connection between ECoC designation and sustained economic growth (Błaszczyk & Krysiński, 2023; Campbell, 2011). Instead, the more realistic long-term impact of the ECoC resides in cultural and symbolic transformation (Garcia, 2005).

The European Capital of Culture (ECoC) initiative aims to create symbolic change through the city's rebranding efforts. For a long time, Chemnitz has been seen as a relatively unknown city or, more recently, as one scarred by protests in 2018 (20200519, City Council Protocol; City of

Chemnitz 2020). The ECoC title is welcomed as an opportunity to reshape the city's image (20170125, 20190306, 20190515, 20240313, City Council Protocol). It is also supposed to change the dominant narratives of the media (20200519, 20240313, City Council Protocol). However, media analysis shows that while the ECoC promotes more positive portrayals of the city and its residents, it also brings attention back to stories connected to the city's radical-right incidents.

Besides the external efforts to rebrand the city, there's also an aim to boost how locals see themselves. Many suggest that residents often feel a lingering sense of inferiority or a lack of confidence about their city.:

“The people of Chemnitz see the stars when they look into a puddle and see them reflected there. They don't see the stars because they're walking through the city with joy and standing tall – they look down and see a puddle, and in that, the stars” (IP04).

This feeling of inferiority cannot be solely blamed on the immediate effects of reunification. It also arises from Chemnitz's ongoing peripheral status. This marginalization results from comparisons with neighboring Saxon cities Leipzig and Dresden, where Chemnitz is often seen as overshadowed. In this context, the European Capital of Culture is believed to be a catalyst for a renewed process of urban self-identity (20160831 City Council Protocol). A successful ECoC year is expected to boost residents' confidence (IB02). The hope is that, after 2025, Chemnitz's residents will feel less inclined to downplay or disassociate from their city (II01). Ultimately, this restored civic confidence is regarded as the city's most valuable economic asset (IP03).

The program aims to promote civic engagement through the activation of the “silent middle”. This part of Chemnitz's society is described as “people who have mostly withdrawn from political discourse and participation or who never participated in them in the first place” (City of Chemnitz 2020). Their disengagement is linked to the structural disruptions experienced in post-industrial regions across Europe. Conceptually, the Silent Middle is defined not only socially but also spatially, referring to individuals who have stepped back from democratic public spheres and now engage, if at all, within alternative or private discursive spaces. In Chemnitz's specific context, this group includes those who stayed within the private sphere during the 2018 riots and did not openly oppose the radical right. Simultaneously, these citizens

are seen as potential innovators whose re-engagement the ECoC program actively seeks to promote.

The design of the Capital of Culture program in Chemnitz reflects this ambition. Instead of relying on major headliners or well-known international names, the organizers have chosen a program that encourages participation (IP03, IP04). The program focuses on everyday culture and individual creativity, providing a fragmented yet inclusive platform primarily aimed at residents rather than external cultural tourists. This approach is different from trajectories often seen in former ECoC programs, which usually involve well-known international artists and try to attract international visitors, rather than focusing on the needs and interests of the local community (Frank, 1999; García, 2004; Giovanangeli, 2015; Lähdesmäki, 2013; O’Callaghan, 2012). In Chemnitz, the ECoC manifests as a non-imposed initiative tailored to the city’s residents and aligned with local social conditions.

However, addressing the Silent Middle remains controversial. The term itself has repeatedly sparked debate over its precise meaning, as no one openly identifies with it. As a result, the organizers of the ECoC aimed to distance themselves from the label. However, they were forced to keep it because the European oversight body insisted on following the core concept outlined in the Bidbook (European Commission 2023; 20230819 Freie Presse). Even within active civil society, the term faces criticism: some see it as a “certificate of failure” for losing touch with the population (IZ01), while others name it a “discriminatory label” imposed on a highly diverse group (IZ02). Alternatively, it is dismissed as a problematic framing based on a reduction, which portrays the political left and right fringes as dangerous, while automatically assuming the middle ground is correct (IZ04). Skepticism also exists about whether the Silent Middle can genuinely be considered democratic (IB01, 20220910 Freie Presse).

Beyond definitional critiques, doubts remain about the practicality of reactivating individuals who have stepped away from public and political life for decades (IZ01, IP06). Some worry that the only concrete outcome will be consumerist participation in the Capital of Culture’s events (IZ06). Given these issues, some experts argue that the goal should perhaps be recasting as recognizing or acknowledging the Silent Middle rather than trying to activate it (IP03). Others recommend that instead of shaping the Capital of Culture around this elusive group, more focus should go toward supporting those who have actively opposed the far right, both during and after the 2018 incidents, or supporting marginalized groups like migrants, who remain vulnerable to radical right violence (IZ05).

Connecting debates about urban identity to the European Capital of Culture involves considerable risks, as it often leads to inflated expectations that go unfulfilled (Prosek, 2012). However, it is precisely the competitive aspect of the ECoC that drives the creation of innovative and ambitious goals to be persuasive in the selection process. Simultaneously, the professionalized monitoring system makes it hard to abandon the objectives set during the application, even if they cause conflicts within the local discourse and are difficult to implement in practice. Whether the expected social impacts will occur remains an open question. A thorough evaluation requires a long-term view, as demonstrated in the city's commissioned monitoring study (Mayerl & Roßbach, 2024).

4.2 The Populist Radical Right and the European Capital of Culture

4.2.1 Pro Chemnitz / Freie Sachsen and the Extra-Parliamentary Contestation

This chapter will first examine the stance of the Pro Chemnitz / Freie Sachsen party on the European Capital of Culture 2025 and its role in the extra-parliamentary radical right before exploring the more pragmatic approach of the AfD. The Pro Chemnitz / Freie Sachsen faction fundamentally opposes the application and implementation of the ECoC 2025. The party justifies its rejection by citing the perceived impracticality of the project in Chemnitz. At the same time, Pro Chemnitz / Freie Sachsen sees the ECoC 2025 as an opportunity to leverage media attention as a platform for its agenda. With its counter-demonstration on the opening day, the party provides a rallying point for the extra-parliamentary radical right scene.

A key argument of the Pro Chemnitz / Freie Sachsen party for rejecting the ECoC is that Chemnitz does not meet the expectations associated with the title. During the application process, it was argued that Chemnitz would risk public ridicule by accepting the title (20170125 City Council Protocol). The city administration was viewed as incapable of managing large-scale events, as shown by the premature cancellation of the city festival (20190515 City Council Protocol). Even after securing the title, Pro Chemnitz / Freie Sachsen highlighted the risk that Chemnitz could embarrass itself (20200715 City Council Protocol). In the year before the ECoC 2025, the faction unsuccessfully asked the city council to withdraw from the project. They described the project as a sign of megalomania and overconfidence (20240313 City Council Protocol). Chemnitz would become a joke in Europe, and a failed Capital of Culture would generate negative headlines, even worse than in 2018, they argued (ibid.).

The faction justifies its rejection of the ECoC by citing what it considers to be amateurish preparations (20240313 City Council Protocol) and a fundamental denial of Chemnitz's status as a cultural city. In their view, Chemnitz does not compare to former ECoC titleholders like Prague, Riga, or Wrocław. Instead, it is labeled as an industrial, not a cultural city. From this standpoint, local cultural identity is seen as something standalone and independent of European titles. As stated during the early debate phase: “If a municipality has a cultural identity, it doesn’t need the title. But if they are culturally insignificant, then quickly fading creative ideas won’t be of any help to them either” (20170125 City Council Protocol).

According to this perspective, Chemnitz has its own identity that doesn’t need external validation through a European framework. Pro Chemnitz / Freie Sachsen thus positions itself against what it sees as top-down European image politics. Their critique also draws a historical dividing line within the ECoC program itself: while early titleholders were seen as truly important cultural centers, the designation of Glasgow in 1990 marks a turning point. From then on, they argue, the initiative became a kind of “beauty contest for the less attractive” cities (Weichreite TV, 2025). According to this view, the ECoC increasingly rewards what they see as mediocre cities – such as Chemnitz – not for cultural merit, but to keep the financial and institutional momentum of the European program going.

In terms of an imaginative territorialization (Seichter et al., 2025b), Chemnitz is portrayed as an insignificant city. This discursively reinforces a collective sense of inferiority. The relationship of Pro Chemnitz / Freie Sachsen to the ECoC project exemplifies a key dynamic in the political logic of the PRR: that experiencing economic and cultural peripheralization, especially in post-industrial regions, is not only a backdrop to PRR support (Dancygier et al., 2025; Greve et al., 2022; Mullis, 2025; Rodríguez-Pose, 2018) but also something that can be actively reproduced and politicized. Instead of seeking opportunities for greater visibility, funding, and social participation that the ECoC might offer, PRR actors deliberately reject them. They depict such initiatives as imposed from outside and disconnected from local identity, thus maintaining and even deepening a state of symbolic and material marginality from which political capital can be continually extracted.

At the same time, this stance reveals an affective territorialization (Hutta & Kübler, 2025). The European Union is not merely a political or administrative body but is emotionally framed as a distant, threatening force. In this framing, the EU is seen as jeopardizing Chemnitz’s “authentic” identity and social order. The PRR narrative thus mobilizes resentment toward

external governance and cosmopolitan cultural norms to reinforce a locally bounded, exclusionary sense of belonging.

Beyond their fundamental rejection of the European Capital of Culture (ECoC), Pro Chemnitz / Freie Sachsen repeatedly criticizes the financial costs linked to the project, contrasting them with what they see as underinvestment in other sectors¹. Their argument follows a fiscal prioritization logic in which the economy must come before cultural investments: “First comes the economy, then comes culture” (20200519 City Council Protocol). In this view, the independent cultural scene is dismissed as not “value-adding” and therefore unworthy of public support (20210331 City Council Protocol). They argue that funds allocated to the ECoC should instead be redirected to the social sector or to support sustainable cultural infrastructure, although they do not specify concrete alternatives (20170225 City Council Protocol).

Throughout multiple council sessions, the faction has questioned the costs of both the application process and the implementation of the program (20170125; 20210317; 20230322 City Council Protocol), citing the city’s strained budget as a reason for rejection (20170208; 20230322 City Council Protocol). The expenditures are deemed illegitimate because they are seen as benefiting only a narrow cultural elite rather than the broader population. In populist terms, the resources are described as being “taken away from the working people” and used for projects that produce “barely anything with lasting benefit” (20240313 City Council Protocol). This critique is tied to a broader anti-system narrative, where representative democracy is portrayed as the cause of wasteful spending. According to Pro Chemnitz / Freie Sachsen, democratic institutions continually expand budgets to meet increasing demands from various interest groups. In doing so, they impose disproportionate burdens on the hardworking segments of society. As expressed in council debates, only those public expenditures that clearly “benefit everyone” should be allowed (20230322 City Council Protocol) – a framing that reduces complex public budgeting questions to moral claims about fairness and misuse.

Pro Chemnitz / Freie Sachsen justifies its stance on the European Capital of Culture by citing the perceived opinion of Chemnitz residents. The party calls for a referendum on the ECoC 2025 and also highlights the lack of such a referendum afterward (20170125; 20200519; 20200715 City Council Protocol). This view supports the request to withdraw from the ECoC

¹ The ECoC title is used as an opportunity to demand specific investments. The establishment of a monument to the writer Karl May, born in the Chemnitz region, is justified with reference to the Capital of Culture (20221012 City Council Protocol). Like the AfD faction in the city council, Pro Chemnitz / Freie Sachsen advocates for the restoration of a swimming area (20221123 City Council Protocol) and the renovation of the restaurant area in the town hall (20230417 City Council Protocol).

2025, arguing that residents and artists are not excited about previous projects, and those interested in participating face bureaucratic hurdles (20240313 City Council Protocol, 20240606 Chemnitzer Morgenpost). Furthermore, specific controversial projects in the city, such as installing a sunken car in the city's lake or a sculpture of Karl Marx's rectum in a park, are pointed out to show that many Chemnitz residents have shown little interest in the European Capital of Culture from the very beginning (20240313 City Council Protocol).

Pro Chemnitz / Freie Sachsen's opposition to the ECoC goes beyond city council debates. Instead, the party plans to use the increased public attention on the ECoC year to promote its alternative narrative. It has announced a campaign of symbolic and physical actions, including demonstrations, festivals, lectures at its venues, and strategic real estate purchases, specifically designed to replace the official image of Chemnitz as a European Capital of Culture with labels like the "capital of remigration" (20230120 Freie Presse) or, as party leader Kohlmann described in a self-written rap during a counter-demonstration against the opening event, the "capital of resistance", positively referencing the riots of 2018 (Weichreite TV, 2025).

This antagonistic stance began even before the official program year. Representatives of Pro Chemnitz / Freie Sachsen attempted to participate in a public discussion about the radical right and the ECoC. However, they were denied entry and later used the city council as a platform to criticize the event as exclusionary (20230510 City Council Protocol). Their symbolic acts of opposition include provocative gestures: they staged a pig roast across from the municipal art collection's exhibit on the National Socialist Underground (NSU) and a public celebration of the Muslim Sugar Festival, which was seen as a racist provocation (20230731 Süddeutsche Zeitung).

Pro Chemnitz / Freie Sachsen has further intensified the symbolic contest by announcing a counter-protest during the ECoC's opening event, gaining attention with a call for a "second 2018" (20250119 Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung). The mention of xenophobic unrest shows an attempt to reframe 2018 not as a shameful episode but as a proud moment of radical right resistance. In this way, the party aims to portray Chemnitz as a stronghold of cultural and political opposition to liberal, cosmopolitan values and to use the ECoC's international platform for its ideological display.

The activities of Pro Chemnitz / Freie Sachsen can be seen as a form of performative territorialization (Krell et al., 2025). Through symbolically charged actions, the party aims to mark its ideological opposition to the ECoC in urban space. Ultimately, by organizing the

demonstration against the ECoC's opening, they establish a space of radical right opposition to the initiative. These actions reflect the party's wider role as a network party in strong opposition to the political system (Grunert & Kiess, 2023; Krell et al., 2025). The ECoC thus becomes a strategic opportunity for Pro Chemnitz / Freie Sachsen to display a fundamental political rejection both in the municipal council and in public space.

The demonstration by Pro Chemnitz / Freie Sachsen on the opening day provides a connection to the extra-parliamentary actors of the radical right scene in Chemnitz. Although media reports indicated that the demonstration had only 400 participants, it was led by the young militant group Chemnitz Revolte, which also made headlines shortly after the opening with a thwarted attack on a bar in Chemnitz (20250127; 20250129; 20250205 Freie Presse). A member of the group's environment was also banned from entering the ECoC opening day due to concerns about a potential attack (20250128 Freie Presse).

Although the ECoC 2025 itself may not always be the direct target of violent actors, representatives of the liberal, cosmopolitan, and pluralist values that the ECoC 2025 aims to promote have become an explicit target of extra-parliamentary radical right actors. This broader ideological hostility is apparent in several incidents, including a physical attack on members of a European delegation, provoked solely by their use of the English language (20230404 Freie Presse), and the assault on the former head of the city's art collections after he intervened against hate speech (20230414 Die Zeit). These acts are part of a larger pattern of intimidation and violence aimed at challenging the cultural and symbolic shift represented by the ECoC initiative in Chemnitz.

Explicit actions by organized radical right groups opposing the European Capital of Culture are still relatively few but highly symbolic. One notable event of the local Identitarian Movement was a visual protest by displaying a banner reading "Remigration Capital" at their venue, or by setting up barrels labeled as "left-wing special waste" in front of the office of the Capital of Culture organization. This reinforces the framing used by Pro Chemnitz / Freie Sachsen (20250219 Freie Presse). The Identitarian Movement justified its protest by citing a perceived left-wing agenda that the Capital of Culture would pursue and a neglect of German culture in the cultural program (20230503 Heimatkurier). However, the protest's impact remains limited to its targeted audience.

The intervention by the Identitarian Movement demonstrates a hybrid form of territorialization (Krell et al., 2025). On one side, it signifies the local presence of the Identitarian Movement;

on the other side, the territory they briefly create functions across offline and online locations. Despite its limited offline performativity, it leaves a lasting footprint on their online channels. Due to institutional constraints, such as state regulations that ban such actions or the quick removal of radical right graffiti, these performative practices are mainly a strategic effort to affirm their presence within self-built online spaces of the radical right, where these actions can persist beyond their temporary offline display.

In summary, the contestation by Pro Chemnitz / Freie Sachsen and the extra-parliamentary groups shows how radical right actors challenge the project both in space and symbolically. At its core is an emotional assignment of meaning to the city, which negatively depicts Chemnitz as on the periphery, but also reclaims the periphery positively and sees Chemnitz as a city of resistance with its own identity, one that intentionally opposes European cultural narratives and the city's official image rebranding. The symbolic idea of a “capital of resistance” becomes reality through performative acts of spatial contestation.

4.2.2 The AfD and Its Tolerant Stance

The AfD describes its stance on the European Capital of Culture as "objective, but also critical" (AfD Chemnitz 2022). Its main criticism focuses on the lack of a public referendum on whether the city should pursue the title. Additionally, the party questions the use of public funds, considering that the city's urgent investment needs are more important. Programmatically, the AfD mainly criticizes parts of the program that it considers politically motivated or not valuable for most residents. However, the party doesn't take a strictly oppositional position toward the European Capital of Culture.

The main criticism of the AfD city council faction regarding the ECoC is the lack of a public referendum that would let Chemnitz residents vote on whether the city should apply for the title. Initially, some party members doubted Chemnitz's chances of winning the designation (20170125 City Council Protocol). During the application process, the AfD supported holding a referendum. Even after the 2019 municipal elections, AfD representatives listed the referendum as a key goal on their political agenda (20190527 Freie Presse). However, an online petition launched by the AfD faction to back the referendum received only limited support in the low three digits (20190823 Berliner Zeitung). Despite this, the AfD still argues that not having a referendum is their main criticism (AfD Chemnitz 2022; IP05).

Even after Chemnitz was officially designated as the ECoC, the AfD kept pushing for more citizen involvement. This call applies to possible changes to the program outlined in the Bidbook, arguing that it should better reflect the interests of Chemnitz residents (20210317 City Council Protocol). The AfD criticizes the previous image slogan, “Chemnitz – City of Modernity”, pointing out that public consultation was ignored and that the slogan ultimately failed to connect with the local community. The party says that a similar lack of engagement is happening again with the city’s new self-image as the ECoC (20220316 City Council Protocol). At the same time, the AfD hopes that upcoming urban development projects will better involve citizens and notes early signs of increased public input (IP05).

The AfD’s subtle stance on the ECoC is shown through its calls for transparency, occasional support for motions from other factions, and proposals for the ECoC in city council debates. The party mainly focuses on accountability for spending and the implementation of the ECoC (20230208 City Council Protocol). Support for other parties’ initiatives has occurred on specific organizational issues, such as advocating for a user-friendly website for the ECoC (20240619; 20200519 City Council Protocol). Like other factions, the AfD utilizes the city’s application and nomination process to promote specific urban development projects, arguing that if funds are allocated for the ECoC, these projects should also be completed². Furthermore, the party states that neglecting such improvements would be unworthy of an ECoC.

The AfD’s use of the ECoC as leverage for other investments is closely connected to a second major criticism concerning budget allocation. The party claims that the city’s planned spending on the ECoC nearly matches the backlog of urgently needed road repairs (20170228 City Council Protocol). Their main principle is “infrastructure first, then culture” (20220406 City Council Protocol). This critique not only targets the funds spent during the application process (20200519 City Council Protocol) but also the money allocated to specific ECoC projects. In their 2019 petition, the party opposed the ECoC by noting that “in many areas of daily life, people feel that these millions are needed for more urgent projects” (20190823 Berliner Zeitung). The AfD emphasizes Chemnitz’s tight budget situation (20200519 City Council

² This extends from the renovation of roads (20230322 City Council Protocol) and the lighting of pedestrian pathways (20231213 City Council Protocol) to the refurbishment of a publicly accessible restaurant area in the town hall (20230322 City Council Protocol). It also includes advocating for the construction of a new swimming hall (20170208 City Council Protocol), the expansion of a small airfield (20171108 City Council Protocol), support for procuring fair trade textile products in public tenders (20210317 City Council Protocol), the installation of bicycle charging stations (20220202 City Council Protocol), and the renaming of a square in honour of a recently deceased Chemnitz product designer who was active during the GDR era (20220202 City Council Protocol).

Protocol) and argues that limited funds should be used to maintain and improve existing infrastructure rather than funding new projects (20210331 City Council Protocol):

“Of course, for many it left a somewhat bitter taste, with people saying: all I hear is Capital of Culture, Capital of Culture, Capital of Culture – but the things that are the foundation here, like a functioning bridge, a running bus, and that means an affordable running bus, those things have been lost out of sight, just because everyone had this tunnel vision around Capital of Culture. I wouldn’t even necessarily claim that this is the case, but that’s simply the perception. [...] So, bread and circuses – sure, it’s supposed to be a nice year, but the real problems aren’t being solved that way. And most of the regular people out there see it that way too.” (IP05)

An infrastructural territorialization (Seichter et al., 2025a) in Chemnitz is reflected in the AfD’s arguments. This territorialization appears in the contrast between neglected urban infrastructure and the allocation of funds to culture-led urban development. Through this framing, some parts of the city are portrayed as abandoned, while others are seen as favored beneficiaries of municipal policies. This selective attribution of meaning to urban space actively produces territories through PRR rhetoric by assigning political priorities to specific areas. Such a strategy is made possible by the structural conditions shaped by the post-reunification transformation and municipal austerity policies, which have led to the neglect of some neighborhoods. In contrast, others have been developed according to capitalist logics of uneven spatial and economic growth. By emphasizing infrastructure policy at the municipal level, the AfD gains the ability to position itself as a party focused on realpolitik, which helps to normalize its political agenda within local governance (Domann, 2024a).

The AfD uses actor-specific criticism when it comes to the allocation of public funds, mainly targeting individuals or groups it considers left-wing or anti-AfD. The party argues that the ECoC Bidbook already has an ideological bias by including climate issues as a part of the project (AfD Chemnitz 2022). Apparent dissatisfaction was voiced about the Antifa exhibition organized by the art collective Peng, which took place during the preparatory phase within the municipal art collections’ exhibition program (20200814a Freie Presse). Similarly, the AfD criticizes the inner-city festival Kosmos, claiming it is publicly funded and functions as an anti-

AfD platform for civil society groups (IP05)³. Essentially, the AfD contends that, over the years of governance by SPD mayors and a left-leaning city administration, a network of organizations has developed that benefits significantly from public funding (ibid.). Conversely, the AfD's criticism targets projects that mainly serve a specific group but provide less value to most residents of Chemnitz. One such example is Stadtwirtschaft, a creative urban redevelopment of a former workshop space, which receives funding, while renovations of local recreational areas are neglected, as the AfD argues (20210331 City Council Protocol)⁴:

„So, no one from the Heckert [GDR prefabricated housing district, YW] – and here I'm back to my friend Horst, who lives in the Plattenbau – goes to the Stadtwirtschaft just because someone there is good at pottery. But Horst grabs his swim gear, packs his sports bag, takes the train and bus to Euba, and in the afternoon, he likes to lie by the water at the outdoor pool. We're in favor of the money being used as effectively as possible – that as many people as possible benefit from every euro, and not as few people as possible from as many euros as possible. We're here for the whole city, not just for a few lobby bubbles.” (IP05)

An imaginative territorialization (Seichter et al., 2025b) develops through the conflict between spaces designated for a creative scene and those viewed as serving the broader public interest. Urban development projects targeting a creative audience are portrayed as niche areas that fail to connect with most Chemnitz residents, despite receiving significant public funding. In contrast, recreational spaces and even maintained streets are rhetorically presented by PRR narratives as genuinely meeting the everyday needs of the city's inhabitants. This framing is part of an emotional territorialization: recreational areas are associated with positive feelings tied to Chemnitz's history, while their neglect provokes feelings of loss and dispossession. When the city prioritizes other projects over these spaces, it increases discontent.

In doing so, the AfD's stance aligns with an imagined “ordinary citizen” who shapes the party's cultural understanding. The AfD employs a broad idea of culture, including fan culture at the

³ The Kosmos Festival emerged as a continuation of the #wirsindmehr concert from 2018, which was aimed at countering right-wing demonstrations. Over the course of a weekend, concerts take place in public inner-city spaces. At the same time, various educational offerings are provided. For some, the festival represents an idealized ECoC in miniature (IZ02, IP04).

⁴ The Stadtwirtschaft is an old workshop that is being converted into a co-working space for the cultural and creative industries (Bidbook II, Handbuch Chemnitz 2025). It is located in the former working-class district of Sonnenberg, which is characterized by a high vacancy rate. The establishment is seen as an opportunity to actively support the settlement of creative professionals in Sonnenberg (20220518 City Council Protocol).

city's football stadium, cinema, experimental theater, and opera performances (IP05, AfD Podcast). At the same time, the party admits that "art is, of course, not supposed to be pleasing. Art is meant to make you think or to spark discussion" (IP05). However, it considers certain experimental performances incomprehensible to the "ordinary" people of Chemnitz. Examples given include the 2024 ECoC opening in Bad Ischgl, with naked dancers covered in powder during a choreography, and a car partly submerged in an exhibition at Chemnitz's inner-city lake (IP05). As a result, the Bidbook is seen not as a program naturally coming from Chemnitz's local community but as one forced upon the city by elites (AfD Podcast). This corresponds with the idea that many AfD voters see themselves as ordinary people and part of a cultural majority, but they feel politically and socially left out (Versteegen, 2023). The call for a referendum is thus an effort to shift decision-making power on the cultural orientation of the city from a liberal elite to a part of the city's population that is defined as not particularly interested in culture.

The ECoC 2025 should be analysed as part of a broader series of top-down urban redevelopment efforts aimed at encouraging a culture-led urban transformation. Over the past twenty years, Chemnitz has undergone a significant transformation – from initially resisting civil society-led cultural projects to officially supporting them, albeit within a controlled framework. This approach was already apparent in earlier attempts to turn the mostly empty Brühl district into a vibrant urban neighborhood (Feuerbach, 2014). According to Intelmann (2019), the cultural change in Chemnitz functions like a passive revolution, where a program supporting a minor cultural milieu within society is imposed by the local government against the interests of the societal majority. This change isn't caused solely by grassroots civil society pressure but also by a shift in the attitudes of urban elites, who increasingly acknowledge cultural redevelopment as essential to overcoming Chemnitz's marginal status. This top-down approach involves a close relationship between civil society groups and government authorities (Intermann, 2019). The AfD's skeptical view of civil society groups points to their dependence on public funding and their ties to municipal officials.

In the historical context of Chemnitz, the party adopts a defensive stance toward cultural development projects. This stance is rooted in the persistent Fordist mindset, which was already apparent in 2010 during conflicts over the 'Experimentelle Karree', when local authorities blocked a grassroots effort to repurpose a vacant building complex. Within a public discussion format, the project faced rejection not only because of paternalistic, public order-driven notions entrenched in Chemnitz's urban society, clashing with the project's alternative aesthetics, but also because it lacked an entrepreneurial logic focused on economic rationality. Only initiatives

demonstrating economic rationality were regarded as legitimate, highlighting the persistent influence of Fordist principles in societal organization. The fact that artists and students invested a large part of their available time in the non-commercial utilization of vacant space was something that was incomprehensible to East German society, which was focused on normal working conditions and continued to exist mentally even after reunification. The citizens' demand at the event, "No '68 in Chemnitz!", serves as a symbolic message expressing resistance to post-Fordist urban transformation (Weiske, 2015). This Fordist identity construction continues to influence contemporary conflicts around the ECoC 2025, where investments in culture-led urban development are dismissed as parochial interests of a creative elite, seen as incompatible with Chemnitz's historically homogeneous industrial society. However, it is no longer just civil society actors but also the local government that is trying to implement a program to repurpose vacant spaces for cultural use, similar to the one rejected in 2010. Following reunification and the broader shift toward a postmodern society described as a "society of singularities" (Reckwitz, 2019), this collective Fordist identity and its standardized way of life have dissolved. The standard employment relationship is no longer the defining structural feature of society; companies no longer function as "multiplexes" (Engler, 2000) that organize social totality. Nonetheless, the AfD's urban policy vision nostalgically draws on an idealized, bygone era of a stronger, homogeneous industrial community, where public welfare was seen not as supporting diverse lifestyles but as caring for a relatively standardized common identity.

A low-threshold program that aligns with the perceived collective cultural identity of Chemnitz's citizens receives the AfD's cultural approval. Examples include concerts by well-known artists scheduled in Chemnitz in 2025, which are not directly connected to the ECoC program. Events like the Hutfestival, a street art festival in Chemnitz since 2018 featuring clowning, acrobatics, juggling, and fire shows, are also viewed positively. Some of the Capital of Culture projects are similarly well-received, such as the Purple Path art project that links Chemnitz with its surrounding areas through an extensive sculpture trail (AfD Chemnitz 2022). Additionally, the AfD praises ECoC projects focused on GDR-era garages, highlighting their past and present significance in the leisure activities of many citizens⁵. However, the party criticizes the program's small-scale scope and laments the lack of a flagship project with broad

⁵ The #3000 Garages project addresses the phenomenon of garages, which was widespread in Eastern Bloc countries. These spaces served not only as parking areas but also as hobby cellars and workshops (City of Chemnitz 2020). As part of the ECoC, the creative products of garage owners are to be given a platform.

visibility and strong identification potential for Chemnitz residents – something like the multi-colored chimney of the city’s energy supplier, which previously served as a notable public art installation (IP05).

Beyond programmatic preferences, the AfD generally supports revitalizing the Chemnitz city center through cultural events and large gatherings. Cultural events are seen as a way to address what the AfD considers a security issue. The AfD blames increasing crime rates, which the party says are keeping residents from spending time in the inner city. In this argumentation, the increase in crime is linked to the presence of asylum seekers in public spaces starting in 2015, who allegedly sold drugs in an inner-city park and engaged in violent fights around the city center. However, whenever popular and accessible events like the Hutfestival, a beer mile, or the wine village occur, the city is described as peaceful and safe:

“The people of Chemnitz should reclaim their city center – necessarily by bringing it to life [...]. That’s why you can only appeal again and again: come into the city, go to the restaurants, there should also be many more concerts on the market square or something like that, so that the city is brought to life by the people to whom the city center belongs – namely the peaceful people who live and work here and want to go out in the evening.”
(IP05)

An imaginative territorialization by the PRR is especially evident regarding Chemnitz’s city center. The AfD views the inner city as a space overtaken by migrants and therefore lost to German-born citizens. This perspective is paired with an emotional construction of a nostalgically remembered past, when the city center was seen as more familiar and accessible, before the migration dynamics of 2015. Notably, the current unattractiveness of central urban spaces is not blamed on structural factors such as the planning legacies of the GDR, the post-reunification changes, or the outmigration of younger populations, all of which contributed to the emptiness in Chemnitz’s core (Reißmüller et al., 2011). Instead, the AfD views the reurbanization of Chemnitz, especially with the arrival of young migrants since 2015, as a threat to this urban space. This perspective created the emotional background for the 2018 riots, which Intelmann (2019) has described as a struggle for control over the central spaces. This conflict remains unresolved despite official efforts to reprogram these areas through cultural events. While Pro Chemnitz / Freie Sachsen and other radical right actors actively partake in this conflict through performative territorializations, the AfD avoids direct spatial claims. Instead,

it supports official cultural revitalization efforts, encouraging ordinary residents to reclaim territory and regain control of the city's central spaces. This shows that the AfD does not necessarily oppose an improved "urban quality" in the sense of cultural revitalization. However, it does have an ethnical-nationalist exclusive concept of urbanity, which sees revitalization as a strategy in the struggle over space against migrants.

The approval of individual program items and cultural revitalization overall promotes a generally accepting attitude toward the ECoC. The party did not vote in favor of a proposal by the city council faction Pro Chemnitz / Freie Sachsen to withdraw from the project in the year before the ECoC 2025 (20240313 City Council Protocol). Notably, the AfD intentionally avoids performative territorialization within the spaces created by the ECoC program, instead limiting its activities to the institutional arena of the city council. The party also chose not to participate in the counter-demonstration organized by Pro Chemnitz / Freie Sachsen on the opening day. However, unlike other city council parties, the AfD does not see organizing such demonstrations as inherently problematic. Given the significant progress in planning for the ECoC 2025 and the substantial financial investments already made, the AfD considers withdrawing from the project at this stage as impractical:

"No one here rejects the Capital of Culture. First of all, it's here now, and it's starting. We also need to ensure that we make the most of it, so the image of our city is portrayed as positively as possible. But of course, also the critical perspective – that it isn't politically instrumentalized. That danger still exists." (IP05)

This balanced stance of the AfD is also acknowledged by other parties and civil society actors, who clearly distinguish the AfD's relationship with the Capital of Culture from that of Pro Chemnitz / Freie Sachsen (IB01, IB02, IZ01, IZ02, IZ04, IP03, IP04, IP06, II01). Local politicians of other factions acknowledge that members of the AfD in the city council have sometimes shared positive views about the ECoC on Facebook groups or discussed its benefits, such as increased visibility and urban renewal, in private conversations. However, this stance is often met with suspicion, as many suspect the AfD might exploit any controversies during the event. Specifically, the party's direct budget criticisms are seen as appealing to many Chemnitz residents (IP01, IP03, IP04, IZ01, IZ05, IB01). Similar to the AfD factions in other city councils, the AfD of Chemnitz follows a strategy of normalization by presenting itself as a pragmatic and moderate actor (Dancygier et al., 2025; Domann, 2024a; Domann & Nuissl,

2022). Participating in performative territorialization, such as active involvement in protests or spatial disputes, would conflict with and possibly weaken this strategy. On the other hand, moderate behavior itself is a form of performative action, where the city council is used as a space to portray the party as capable of cooperation.

In summary, the AfD adopts a conflicted stance toward Chemnitz as the ECoC 2025. This analysis uncovers emotional, imaginative, and infrastructural territorializations. While engaging in critical policy discussions, the party does not fundamentally oppose the project. Its main criticisms focus on the lack of citizen participation in the application process and the allocation of funds, given other municipal investment priorities. At the same time, it uses the Capital of Culture as a reason for demanding infrastructure investments and criticizes the funding of left-leaning projects. Overall, the party supports revitalizing the city center through cultural events as a way to reclaim it from what they perceive as dominance by migrants.

4.3 The European Capital of Culture as a Response?

4.3.1 The Depoliticization of the Program

The following section will first analyze how the radical right past and present in Chemnitz are addressed within the European Capital of Culture 2025 program, before discussing the conditions for radical right participation in the next chapter. Although the final Chemnitz bid book emphasizes the events of 2018 in its narrative, its treatment of these events and the underlying social conditions remains superficial. The program should be seen as a reflection of Chemnitz's social realities. Amid a polarized urban society with strong support for the PRR, it seeks to depoliticize the event.

The engagement with Chemnitz's right-wing history and presence changed significantly from the first application document, Bidbook I (City of Chemnitz 2019a), to the final submission, Bidbook II (City of Chemnitz 2020). Although the radical right riots in 2018 initially casted doubt on the city's chances of securing the European Capital of Culture title (20180831 Aachener Zeitung; 20180901 FAZ), public opinion quickly shifted to a determined stance of "now more than ever" (IP03; 20180902 NZZ; 20180903 DNN; 20180908 Welt; 20180918 Westdeutsche Zeitung; 20181027 Berliner Zeitung). In Bidbook I of 2019, however, the 2018 events play only a minor role. They are mainly referenced to show how "right-wing populists and nationalist forces exploit a particular mixture of public sensitivities and political

circumstances to create a xenophobic climate and foster fear” (City of Chemnitz 2019a). From this, the bid develops a mission to focus on intercultural dialogue within the framework of the ECoC, highlighting the history of migrant communities. The document recognizes that Chemnitz has both positive and negative aspects: issues like hatred, violence, intolerance, and a prevailing “blind eye” mental attitude are identified as fertile ground for anti-democratic sentiments. Still, it is precisely the fear of these anti-democratic tendencies that is said to motivate the city’s application.

The jury advised Chemnitz to highlight the events of summer 2018 more prominently in their application. As a result, the “events and the social ruptures” were placed “at the heart” of the final application (City of Chemnitz 2020), making the document more politically engaged. Bidbook II begins with two articles, one from The New York Times and one from The Guardian. The first focuses on the far-right riots and the second on the #wirsindmehr concert, the cultural response of the civil society to the riots. The narrative depicts Chemnitz as a city where democratic culture has come under visible pressure over the past 30 years, portraying its history as one marked by ruptures. The document recognizes that many residents were hurt by rapid and brutal social changes, with those feeling marginalized and intimidated turning to radical forces in 2018 (ibid.). The media have suggested that Chemnitz’s candidacy stood out precisely because it engaged with the 2018 events during the final selection (20201029 FP; 20201029 Süddeutsche Zeitung; 20230828 Frankfurter Rundschau; 20240811 Süddeutsche Zeitung; 20241228 Der Spiegel; 20250102 Berliner Zeitung; 20250110 FAZ). Notably, while Bidbook I was created through active participation from the urban community, the development of Bidbook II was entrusted to a smaller, more closed external expert group, excluding many of the initial contributors (IZ01). Ultimately, it was only after the jury’s intervention that the events of 2018 became central to the Capital of Culture application – an element widely seen as decisive in Chemnitz winning the title.

The strong focus on engaging with the radical right in the second Bidbook, however, is not fully reflected in the actual program. The cipher “2018” appears explicitly in the descriptions of only two program items, and even then, the engagement remains superficial. Alongside the Kosmos Festival, one of the few events linked to “2018” is an exhibition of Edvard Munch’s painting *The Scream*, which is framed as an exploration of fear, citing the 2018 riots as an example of the destructive potential of such emotions. An often highlighted element of the program is the NSU Documentation Center, opened in the year of the ECoC, which hosts exhibitions on migration stories and radical right violence (City of Chemnitz 2020). When officials are asked

about the ECoC's engagement with radical right issues, the Documentation Center is frequently cited as the primary reference point (II01). However, this initiative is not an original initiative of the ECoC; furthermore, its thematic focus does not address the events of 2018 (IZ01, IZ03, IZ04). Beyond these examples, references to radical right phenomena in other event announcements remain largely implicit and operate on an interpretive level, as demonstrated by the Munch exhibition.

The strategy for handling the PRR presence in Chemnitz relies on intentionally ignoring it. Due to the deeply rooted PRR tendencies in East Germany, there is a common understanding that the European Capital of Culture project alone cannot fix the city's societal issues (II01). East Germany is territorialized as a region where changing societal conditions make proactive confrontation with radical right ideologies seem hopeless, leading to a spatial understanding that also influences a politically cautious approach to dealing with the radical right. It is stressed that the ECoC should not oppose anything but instead promote something positive (20240826 taz). As the head of the Capital of Culture gGmbH mentioned, "don't expect any political statements from us" (20240811 Süddeutsche Zeitung). This approach shows the belief that confronting the radical right would be unhelpful, as it might instead give them a reason for engagement:

"The New Right in particular seeks provocation, seeks confrontation. And then you take the bait. You immediately create a line of confrontation that the Right will always win. That means this is precisely the strategy being pursued: We don't engage with you, you don't matter to us. [...] What's important is: here's the cool circle, here's the motivated one, who wants to get involved – and everyone who wants to join and shares these common values is welcome." (II01).

The responsibility for defining the political scope of the program is discursively, but not factually, transferred to Chemnitz's civil society. The organization behind the ECoC in Chemnitz explicitly avoids emphasizing democracy-focused projects (20241111 Freie Presse). The Culture Capital GmbH emphasizes that it only provides the framework for the program, which consists of submissions from various local actors (20250125 Freie Presse, 20250120 Freie Presse). As a result, the limited involvement with the events of 2018 can be linked to a lack of proposals on this topic from civil society. Although enhancing local civil society is a stated goal of the ECoC organization (II01), many actors describe the process as exclusionary.

They report facing obstacles in advancing their initiatives (IZ02) and encountering unsuccessful efforts to join the ECoC program (IZ01, IZ06). Entry into the program's structures is described as a "marathon for attention" (IZ01), with many associations struggling due to bureaucratic barriers and limited resources (IB01, IZ06).

Among civil society groups opposing the PRR, there is notable criticism of the official approach. While Bidbook II initially signaled a promising engagement with the city's radical right history and present, actual involvement with these groups remains limited. Many local stakeholders believe that a true confrontation with the events of 2018 is essential (IZ01, IZ02, IZ03, IZ04, IZ05, IP01, IP06). Instead, they see a growing focus on superficial themes that are claimed to promote indirect democratization but fail to address the city's specific challenges (IZ01, IZ03, IP06). It is suspected that the program is designed to stay mostly apolitical, as the organizers, aware of the strong electoral support for radical right parties, aim to avoid alienating a large portion of Chemnitz's population (IZ01, IZ02, IZ05).

The mayor also avoids any politicizing of the ECoC. In response to the 2024 motion submitted by Pro Chemnitz / Freie Sachsen to withdraw from the project and their criticism of infrastructural neglect, he framed the ECoC as an investment program in urban infrastructure. This was meant to counter the perception of the initiative as merely an art event without economic value:

„A significant portion of the funds is invested in infrastructure that remains and serves the citizens. Through this title, we gain access to funding programs and resources that we would never have received otherwise. In this respect, it is a significant investment in the city itself, and not just in some abstract art or cultural objects.“ (20240313 FP).

The mayor's refusal to take a clear stance has faced criticism, especially from civil society actors involved in opposing the radical right. (IZ01, IZ03, IP06, 20250205 Freie Presse). It's assumed that under the previous mayor, who started the bid for the Capital of Culture, the project would have had a much more political edge (IZ01, IZ03, IP06). In the other two major Saxon cities, Leipzig and Dresden, city officials are seen as taking a more direct stance on PRR issues (IP04, IP06). While Chemnitz officials might wish for developments similar to those in these cities, they are hesitant to acknowledge that such changes would also require a strong support for a critical civil society (IZ05). At the same time, it's believed that the reluctance to address the events of 2018 stems from a desire to avoid fueling negative media coverage of

Chemnitz (IZ03, IZ04, IP01). Ultimately, the impression is that the focus of the ECoC 2025 is more on projecting beautiful images rather than engaging in democratic actions (IZ04, IZ06).

The focus on local conditions leads to a partial integration of civil society actors opposing the PRR. In similar urban settings in eastern Germany, increasing support for PRR attitudes among residents has caused a realignment of alliances between the state and civil society, with state actors pulling back from working with civil society groups that oppose the PRR (Nettelbladt, 2023b). However, in the case of ECoC 2025, there is no clear indication of active withdrawal by state actors. The program's structure, which relies heavily on submissions from civil society, allows these groups to participate, although their involvement remains limited by their resources. Support that could truly empower civil society to influence the program is limited. Such empowerment would require a fundamentally different approach – one that sees the ECoC as a deliberately chosen political initiative rather than just as an event meant to generate a positive atmosphere. Ultimately, this situation reflects a form of infrastructural territorialization in response to the radical right. Considering the polarized urban society, the ECoC does not provide infrastructural backing to those actively opposing the radical right.

In the past, Chemnitz has experienced the outmigration of liberal circles due to the suppression of alternative lifestyles, leading to the strengthening of a conservative demographic (Glorius, 2021; Intelmann, 2019; Weiske, 2015). Although civil society was initially hopeful about the ECoC application, the apolitical stance of those responsible for the project has created a pessimistic outlook for its long-term impact. While the ECoC 2025 promises to be a fun event, it is not expected to bring about deeper, lasting change (IZ05). The city's legacy process is seen as opaque and exclusionary toward local civil society (IZ02, IZ03). Moreover, doubts remain whether the ECoC can unite divisions within the city, as the overall political climate has become more divisive since Chemnitz's bid (IZ02, IZ03). Besides the general societal influence on the Capital of Culture project, city-specific decisions could also weaken the long-term impact. The most significant negative effects, however, are linked to general budget cuts, which mainly affect civil society organizations (IB01, IZ01, IP04, IZ06, IP01, IP06). While the lack of support for civil society actors may not be the only reason for outmigration, it also fails to rebuild confidence in a liberal imaginary of the city's future. Therefore, it is unlikely to reverse the departure of these groups from Chemnitz.

By focusing on local conditions, the polarized social situation is reflected in the deliberate depoliticization of the ECoC. Although the Chemnitz European Capital of Culture project is

inherently political, linked to the events of 2018, addressed in the application, and critiqued by PRR actors, the event itself is presented as apolitical. More broadly, former ECoCs often carried political significance, whether tied to EU interests, as seen in Istanbul, Macedonia, or Stockholm (Mittag, 2012), or within a national context, as in the case of Weimar (Prosek, 2012) or Maribor (Žilič-Fišer & Erjavec, 2017). However, framing the 2025 Capital of Culture as a deliberate democracy promotion initiative or an explicit counter to the PRR would have risked alienating large segments of Chemnitz's population, branding the project as an imposed agenda of a liberal elite. The events in 2018, in which parts of Chemnitz's urban society joined neo-Nazis and the high support of almost 30 percent for AfD and Pro Chemnitz / Freie Sachsen in the municipal elections, show how precarious the support for liberal politics can be. Consequently, even in the absence of PRR actors holding local government office, the significant popular support for the radical right shapes the cautious and depoliticized character of the ECoC 2025.

In summary, a form of territory-making is evident in the deliberate choice to frame spaces of artistic production, created through various events, as arenas that avoid direct engagement with the city's far-right past and present. Additionally, the initiative refrains from establishing infrastructural spaces that would empower civil society actors. This attribution of meaning to space must be understood within the context of a structurally polarized urban society, where overt political positioning risks undermining broad public support for the ECoC. Moreover, such positioning could cause more cautious actors, like the AfD, to align themselves with opposition to the ECoC or even take on a mobilizing role themselves.

4.3.2 Spatial Integration of the Populist Radical Right

The organization of the ECoC is actively inviting the PRR to participate in its program. As early as 2020, discussions were held with the AfD, indicating that key program points, including the redesign of public spaces along the river and the garage project, would be accessible to all Chemnitz residents (20201030 Freie Presse). The head of the organizing public company made this clear when he stated regarding the garage project that he found it correct and good that well-known local neo-Nazis would also come and engage (20241111 Freie Presse). Especially the garage project, which targets residents rather than tourists (20230927 Freie Presse), is a project that would appeal to people who are less involved in the cultural scene, reaching

individuals who might sympathize with the AfD (20241229 Die Presse), or even explicitly being part of the radical right (20241026 Sächsische Zeitung).

However, the integration of the PRR into the ECoC remains limited to participation without any institutional or programmatic influence. The organization of the ECoC states that the radical right has not directly influenced the program. Moving the ECoC organization from municipal administration to a limited company has provided some insulation from political changes. As one interviewee noted, this structural independence allowed the organization to run smoothly during election cycles: „That means that if the elections had been held a year or two earlier, both at the state and municipal levels, we might have had problems“ (II01). Additionally, no program submissions of radical right actors have been made in response to open calls, disguised as Trojan horses seeking to participate within the official framework of the ECoC. Although there are no specific guidelines for handling such cases, the organization maintains a general commitment to democracy: “But depending on how cleverly you write something like that, you can of course get around it” (II01). Therefore, while the ECoC encourages broad participation, it remains vigilant in preventing radical right actors from gaining programmatic control or influence.

Although the program is not specifically curated to target radical right presence, certain topics have been included that may provoke a reaction from the PRR. The implementation of these program items is tied to a safety discourse:

“The other topics would of course be things like diversity, queerness, for example, in rural areas. Of course, those are supported. But the thing is, to some extent, how do you keep that safe? Like, we’re not up for using trans people here as a kind of battering ram.” (II01)

Generally, the security discourse is a key feature of the engagement with the radical right presence in the city. The organizers highlight their close cooperation with the police, which aims to prevent a "second 2018" as announced by Pro Chemnitz / Freie Sachsen (20240811 Süddeutsche Zeitung). Additionally, the program introduces a "Democracy Support Point". Shops, offices, bars, and individuals become recognizable with a sticker that says "I'm looking for allies", so that people who feel threatened can find support at these locations or among these individuals. At the same time, there is significant fear within the city concerning the safety of visitors from minority groups (IZ04, IZ05, IZ06, IP01). This concern is justified by the ongoing

presence of radical right actors, the hesitant response to previous right-wing attacks by the city, and the explicit invitation extended to PRR individuals by the ECoC 2025 officials.

In summary, the official process of territory making creates specific spaces where the PRR is explicitly welcomed as participants. At the same time, a spatial boundary is drawn between sites where they participate as consumers of the program and spaces, from which the PRR is meant to be excluded. This territorialization also produces spaces of fear, where artistic actors must anticipate the physical presence of radical right individuals. In contrast, the Democracy Support Points establish a territory of safe zones designed to protect against assaults by the radical right. Therefore, this official territorialization operates within a field of tension: it aims to open specific spaces to the radical right while also recognizing the need for protective spaces against radical right violence. This negotiation reflects a structural acceptance of radical right ideology within Chemnitz's urban society – an acceptance only challenged when the radical right manifests in violent, performative acts. However, this approach overlooks the structural conditions that give rise to such violence, as it is part of a continuum of escalation rooted in societal embedded ideologies of inequality (Freiheit et al., 2020).

4.4 Concluding Thoughts: Obstacles to Culture-Led Urban Development

4.4.1 Chemnitz and the Persistence of the Fordist Mentality

The case of the ECoC in Chemnitz 2025 shows how opposition and support for culture-led urban development differ significantly from those in liberal metropolitan areas. In large cities, cultural urban development projects often start from grassroots efforts. However, they are met with the commercialization of urban spaces once economic benefits become apparent, which tends to displace the very people who initiated these projects (Colomb, 2012). Opposition in such liberal city contexts mainly comes from left-wing activists and artists fighting gentrification and the commercialization of urban space (Borén & Young, 2017; Markusen, 2006; Novy & Colomb, 2013). In contrast, Chemnitz represents a case of delayed, state-led co-optation of creative city development. Because of its peripheral economic position and abundant available space, Chemnitz, like other peripheral areas of East Germany, has largely not been affected by profit-driven creative industries. As a result, the heavy gentrification

pressures that usually rally left-wing civil society against cultural urban projects are notably absent.

Instead, cultural actors support projects of creative city making, reflecting them as new departures amid the generally conservative cultural climate of the region. A similar dynamic can be seen in Gdańsk, where civil society actors embrace the vision of a creative city as a countermodel to the dominant conservative cultural atmosphere at the national level (Borén et al., 2020). However, the extent to which PRR attitudes toward culture-led urban development in peripheral areas differ from metropolitan contexts remains underexplored and warrants further research. In the East German urban context analyzed here, their positioning is crucial, as the PRR accounts for a significant portion of the population and currently represents the strongest political force.

The strong societal support for the populist radical right (PRR) in Chemnitz defines the limits of what is seen as legitimate cultural urban development. Both, the AfD and Pro Chemnitz / Freie Sachsen evoke a nostalgic connection to a more culturally homogeneous past of Chemnitz. This is emotionally, imaginatively, and infrastructurally territorialized. While the AfD expresses this feeling more mildly, Pro Chemnitz / Freie Sachsen uses more radical rhetoric focused on loss and cultural alienation. The two parties depict cosmopolitanism as something foreign to the city's identity. Both see a creative environment as linked to a political elite. Pro Chemnitz / Freie Sachsen also presents Chemnitz as a symbol in a cultural and ideological fight. In terms of infrastructural territorialization, both groups compare culture-driven development projects with urban areas that have been neglected in maintenance. Despite their different stances on the ECoC and contrary performative actions, both parties share a cultural connection to the city's Fordist past.

In this mindset, shaped by Chemnitz's industrial society, cultural urban development projects face social rejection if they clash with social norms and seem useless to most of society (Weiske, 2015). This applies not only in terms of intangible benefits, meaning that culture-led development must align with the interests of the majority of urban residents. It also applies in material terms, meaning that culture-led urban development projects should not rely on public spending when they do not benefit most of society. Projects can target a particular community, but under these conditions, they must also be economically self-sufficient.

The ECoC, by securing significant funding from federal and state sources, meets these expectations and therefore gains political and public support. Similarly, development initiatives

connected to business or institutional relocations, especially those promising job creation or direct investment, may be viewed positively by the PRR. In contrast, independent efforts by civil society actors to activate urban spaces and repurpose vacant buildings are largely incompatible with this economic approach. However, grassroots efforts are essential for fostering urban vitality because vibrancy and creativity do not come from top-down planning but from the free and spontaneous expression of diverse urban actors (Groth & Corijn, 2005). The mindset of the industrial society, expressed through the PRR, thus places structural limits on the possibilities of such urban vitality.

While the AfD accepts the European Capital of Culture as long as it remains politically neutral, and even shows conditional support for revitalizing urban spaces, it also creates structural barriers to change. Even without holding government power, the AfD's presence influences the adaptation of the ECoC project to a polarized social landscape, resulting in limited engagement of civil society actors and restricting their potential to urban transformation. To sustain public legitimacy among a population with this mindset, these actors are prevented from having full freedom of action. The AfD's longstanding skepticism and cautious approach toward the ECoC deepen doubts about whether the project would have gained enough political support if a coalition government including the PRR had been in power.

Nonetheless, the ECoC 2025 can also, within the local context, be seen as a “boundary object” (Star, 1993). The instrument of the ECoC not only bridges clashes between the PRR at the national level and the European level (Lamour, 2025), but also promotes cooperation and tolerance among actors with differing ideologies on the local scale in a polarized urban society. By intentionally avoiding programming explicitly against the radical right, the project gains at least some tolerance from the AfD, with certain aspects of the program and the cultural revitalization in general even gaining approval. This dynamic creates a divide between the AfD and Pro Chemnitz / Freie Sachsen, since only the latter actively oppose the European Capital of Culture in Chemnitz. Civil society actors opposing the PRR are only partially included: they generally support the project and helped initiate the application, but are ultimately limited in how fully they can express themselves within its framework. Ultimately, the ECoC 2025 is a project that no one is entirely satisfied with, but that hardly anyone rejects either.

However, the ECoC 2025 merely delays a cultural backlash in Chemnitz. Its inclusive nature is notable given the influential role of the CDU within the local majority dynamics in East German settings. The “Brandmauer” (firewall) is already fragile in Chemnitz. In the past, center-right

parties and the PRR voted together on restructuring a committee with civil society actors or blocking a mobility plan (Hummel & Taschke, 2023). The CDU, supported by the AfD, also managed to initiate a review of security measures in the city center, where alcohol bans, surveillance cameras, and weapons-free zones are considered necessary (20250203 Freie Presse). However, the nature of the ECoC, which also aligns with CDU interests, prevents such alliances from forming in this specific project. At the same time, it remains uncertain whether the coalition built around this large-scale project will last beyond the ECoC. Due to budget cuts, many civil society projects are concerned about losing public funding. While the CDU's support for the ECoC 2025 covered the entire project and its implementation largely proceeded independently of the city council, it is possible that the CDU may, in the future, adopt a blocking stance on certain left-leaning projects, potentially with AfD backing.

4.4.2 Territorialized Transformation Threshold

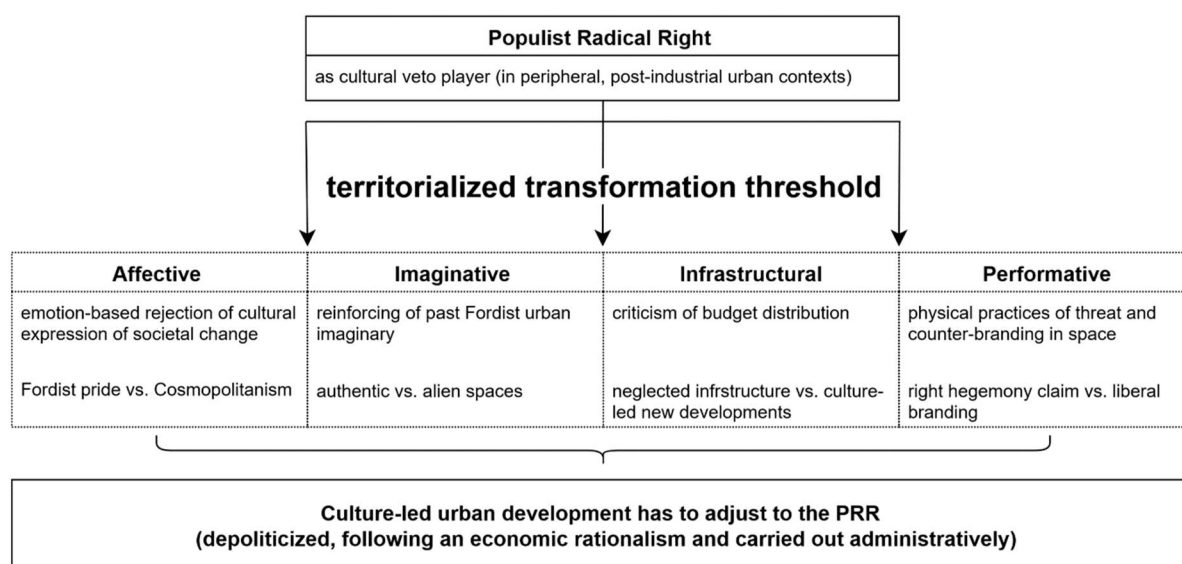
Based on the Chemnitz case study, this paper defines the obstacle posed by the PRR to culture-led urban transformation as a territorialized transformation threshold (tt). Using the concept of territorialization developed by the author collective Terra-R (2025) concerning the radical right, the paper introduces a framework that, while not aiming for cross-case generalizability, ensures an evidential density (Morgan, 2012; Yin, 2014) through a detailed, context-specific analysis of the Chemnitz case. This framework sets the stage for future research where its applicability and explanatory power can be systematically tested and expanded through comparative or multi-case studies.

The PRR functions as a cultural veto player in peripheral cities with an industrial history and strong support for the radical right. Veto players are seen as actors whose approval is essential for political change. Tsebelis (2002) distinguishes between institutional veto players, who can block change through their established roles in the political system, and partisan veto players, who can reject change as party actors depending on election outcomes. The concept of veto players was further developed, regarding the role of the church, referring to social veto players who, without formal authority, can block change through their mobilizing power (Fink, 2009; Potz, 2020). Here, the AfD is understood as such a social veto player. Even without formal administrative control, the radical right shapes the boundaries of politically acceptable cultural transformation by organizing a PRR-aligned social environment to oppose culture-driven urban development when in doubt. Culture-led urban projects are only tolerated if they remain

depoliticized, promise economic rationality, and are disconnected from progressive social groups. This creates a regime where cultural initiatives are not directly blocked but are strategically neutralized, allowed to exist only within narrowly defined ideological and economic rationalist limits. The radical right's attitude toward culture-driven urban development acts as a territorialized threshold to transformation, structured through intersecting forms of territorialization based on the Terra-R framework.

Figure 1

Diagram of the Populist Radical Right as a territorialized transformation threshold to urban cultural change



by the author (based on Terra-R, 2025)

(1) Affective Territorialization

The PRR triggers feelings of rejection toward cultural ideas seen as imposed from outside or inauthentic. European, liberal, and experimental cultural efforts are viewed as attacks on local identity. Explanations based on the “losers of modernization” (Florida, 2021; Gordon, 2018; Lee et al., 2018) thesis or cultural backlash theory (Norris & Inglehart, 2019) point to the PRR’s resistance to cosmopolitan values. These emotional reactions are especially strong in former industrial areas, where deindustrialization has undermined life paths (Greve et al., 2022). Under the framework of “progressive neoliberalism” (Fraser, 2019), funding sources for creative-class projects are seen by the radical right as signs of the government neglecting their way of life.

(2) Imaginative Territorialization

Peripheral cities are discursively reframed as sites of resistance against metropolitan cultural change. Peripherality becomes not only a source of loss, pain, and anger but can also be turned into a source of pride (Hutta & Kübler, 2025). Although local modes of production and regulation may have shifted, the industrial city's urban-cultural fabric of Fordism remains. A narrative of pride in past industrial importance, politically supported by the PRR, blocks efforts for cultural change. The city is thus divided into "organically grown" areas versus those seen as alien to its identity. This reimagining isn't necessarily anti-urban in rejecting city life but instead recalls a bygone urbanity rooted in a more uniform industrial society, often framing new urban actors as outsiders.

(3) Infrastructural Territorialization

The PRR directs its politics toward basic infrastructure. The decline of industrial economies, combined with urban austerity following decreasing prosperity, has led to cities suffering from long-term infrastructure neglect. Culture-driven development projects are framed as shiny showcases funded at the expense of urgent public needs. Both post-industrial decay and the uneven growth of urban spaces serve as evidence of a neoliberal urban order. The older voter base of the PRR has firsthand experience of these changes and maintains emotional ties to neglected parts of the city, which remain ignored even amid new investment stories. As a result, culture-led urban development projects are seen as Potemkin villages.

(4) Performative Territorialization

The PRR enacts a protest against culture-led urban development in the public sphere of peripheral, post-industrial regions. When the disjuncture between culture-led development and perceived local identity becomes significant, the PRR engages in performative acts such as demonstrations. These practices signal disapproval to city administrations, external actors, and targeted cultural milieus. Performative territorialization (Krell et al., 2025) occurs depending on the political character of the PRR and the conditions of administrative power. In contexts where it holds formal authority, it can block culture-led urban development projects through bureaucratic and parliamentary channels, and is not restricted to protest.

The general analytical framework (Terra-R, 2025) of affective, imaginative, infrastructural, and performative territorialization has been operationalized for the analysis of culture-led urban development projects by the case study of the European Capital of Culture 2025 in Chemnitz. It enables a systematic deductive approach to other research objects of PRR contestation of creative city-making. The proposed framework of territorialized transformation threshold requires empirical testing through a multi-case comparative study, starting with culture-led development projects in various East German cities. These should include large, medium, and small cities with an industrial past, where the PRR is either part of the governing coalition or forms a strong opposition force. Comparative research could also extend to similar European contexts where culture-led urban development intersects with a significant PRR presence. Further research can refine the framework and determine the relationship between the different types of territorialization.

The practical consequences of the territorialized transformation threshold can be far-reaching and may develop into self-reinforcing mechanisms. The PRR's strength in deindustrialized areas is partly based on demographic shifts, especially the outmigration and the persistent dominance of industrial-era cohorts within the urban population (Dancygier et al., 2025). These shifts leave behind regions characterized by loss, marginalization and peripheralization. When culture-led transformations try to match the sensibilities of the overrepresented PRR, they fail to create the social and spatial environments needed to attract creative and cosmopolitan groups. This, in turn, sustains the demographic and political dominance of the PRR, reproducing the same conditions that originally made cultural transformation appealing. If the cities described here want to participate in Florida's (Florida, 2002) TTT formula for success – Technology, Talent, and Tolerance – they must first find an answer to the question of how a territorialized transformation threshold (ttt) imposed by the PRR can be overcome.

Ultimately, this presents a progressive cultural policy with a dilemma. Authors such as Hollands (2023) argue for an understanding of creative urban policy that goes beyond its neoliberal view and emphasizes the support for alternative cultural spaces. These alternative spaces are non-commercial, based on solidarity, and rooted in local communities. He considers this normatively preferable to the economic and technocratic instrumentalization of culture (Borén & Young, 2013a; Gerhard et al., 2017; Pratt, 2008, 2011; Ratiu, 2013; Vanolo, 2008). However, this alternative culture-led urbanism faces unfavorable structural conditions. In the metropolitan context, economic rationalism first co-opts alternative culture-led urban development,

gradually depriving it of its potential through commodification. In post-industrial space, as this analysis shows, it is less about economic exploitation and more about ideological rejection by the PRR that blocks this alternative urbanism and can ultimately cause displacement under conditions of abundance (Weiske, 2015). This is because these alternative urban cultural initiatives rely heavily on public funding, which the PRR rejects if the development projects are unattractive to a societal majority characterized by a mentality that has survived the past industrial society. The question now is whether, under these conditions, progressive actors should align with a bureaucratic-economic model of creative urban development as a counter-movement to the PRR or oppose culture-driven urban development that does not match their alternative idea, thereby strengthening the PRR's veto power.

Here, a differentiated positioning should be pursued that promotes culture-driven urban development, which on the one hand considers local conditions but at the same time has the courage not to be dictated by these conditions. Based on the present case, it was shown how the PRR affectively, imaginatively, instrumentally, and performatively connects with a historically industrial city identity. Cultural urban development projects must therefore find a sensitive way of dealing with industrial heritage, opening cultural spaces that are also attractive to PRR supporters to counter the argument that they pay for it through their taxes but do not benefit from it. In this context, for example, cultural urban development should mainly focus on urban spaces that have been neglected due to transformation and austerity measures. This requires communication that makes clear that the past cannot be restored, but that these places remain part of an urban identity and can be filled with new content that references the past. Under these conditions, as the 2025 Capital of Culture in Chemnitz partly shows, it is possible to gain tolerance from parts of the PRR. Under these conditions, an offer must also be made to progressive civil society to help shape the city from the bottom up. Only through simultaneity can tolerance be achieved and cultural urban development become a “boundary object” (Star, 1993) that allows cooperation without ideological consensus.

It is a lesson that applies not only to other European Capitals of Culture in the context of the rise of the PRR, but also to smaller transformations in post-industrial urban contexts polarized by the PRR. It could be argued that such a conceptualization goes hand in hand with a political emptying and acceptance of the influence of the PRR. A call for radical thinking about cultural urban development as publicly funded development of alternative cultural places, understood as part of a foundational economy, may be a stimulating idea. Still, it overlooks the local

conditions of an urban society polarized by the PRR as a cultural veto player. If a left-wing dream of creative urban development is impossible in the metropolis (albeit for other reasons), why should it be possible in the polarized periphery, and why should the smaller, better option not be pursued just because the bigger picture is not possible? The aim is not to replicate metropolitan developments, but to create small beacons of a different urban future that pierce the prevailing fatalism in regions where continuous decline has eroded the capacity to imagine a better future.

5. Conclusion

This study explores the reciprocal relationship between the radical right and culture-led urban development by examining the European Capital of Culture 2025 in the East German city of Chemnitz. It investigates how the populist radical right, especially the parties AfD and Pro Chemnitz / Freie Sachsen, positions itself on the project, the reasons behind it, and the approaches used. The study considers how the city, with the instrument of the European Capital of Culture 2025, responds to the radical right and how this reaction is influenced by the populist radical right's local power.

Special attention is given to how the strategies of radical right actors and the responses to them are territorialized, meaning how they are connected to specific spatial practices and the assignment of meaning to places. Methodologically, the study uses an analytical framework based on the performative, affective, imaginative, and infrastructural territorialization of the radical right (Terra-R, 2025). The empirical basis includes a qualitative content analysis of city council protocols from the start of discussions on the application in 2016 until the opening event in 2025, a systematically selected set of newspaper articles from the same period, and relevant policy documents. Additionally, 15 semi-structured interviews were conducted with local stakeholders, including civil society members and six city councilors from various parties, including the AfD.

Empirically, the study shows the differences and similarities between a locally pragmatic AfD and Pro Chemnitz / Freie Sachsen as well as the extra-parliamentary radical right. The AfD acts as a constructive player in the municipal arena. Taking a tolerant stance toward the European Capital of Culture 2025 project helps normalize the party's local integration. In contrast, Pro Chemnitz / Freie Sachsen and the extra-parliamentary radical right serve as system-oppositional forces, working to block cultural change and the city's rebranding through demonstrations and intimidation.

Despite their differences, both parties share a commitment to the city's industrial history and the identity of an industrial society, which appears in various forms of territorialization. This is especially clear in an infrastructural mode of argument, where culture-based urban development areas are contrasted with supposedly neglected parts of the city. Even as the urban population becomes more diverse, political references continue to focus on the interests of the citizens, marked by the past of the industrial society, who are seen as mostly uninterested in cultural development. The study shows how radical right actors in Chemnitz use a range of

territorialization strategies – performative, emotional, imaginative, and infrastructural – to claim space and symbolic ownership of the city. These strategies serve not only as expressions of ideological views but also as tactical responses to local opportunities.

Although the European Capital of Culture project was originally conceived as a response to the radical right riots of 2018, it hardly addresses the social conditions of the radical right's past and present in Chemnitz programmatically. Instead, the project is depoliticized and creates space where participation by the radical right is allowed. However, neither the organizers nor radical right actors actively seek to shape the program. This depoliticized approach occurs amid a city society polarized by the PRR. As a result, the project adjusts to local realities, especially the skepticism in the voter base of radical right parties. A more explicitly political program could become a target for attack and mobilization by the radical right. Conversely, depoliticization allows the European Capital of Culture to serve as a boundary object locally. Its design satisfies no single actor, but mainly restricts open opposition to groups like Pro Chemnitz / Freie Sachsen and the extra-parliamentary groups. The AfD's tolerance helps to foster cooperation around the project, even amid ideological differences.

This study advances discussions on opposition to culture-led urban development by adding a perspective on radical right actors and peripheral spaces. In current research, mainly focused on liberal metropolitan areas, resistance to cultural urban development is primarily linked to left-leaning activists and artists who oppose gentrification and the commercialization of urban space. In peripheral, post-industrial areas with strong local anchoring of the PRR, this pattern is not observable. In Chemnitz, the conflict is less about the commercialization of culture in urban development or the imbalance between spatial visions and the availability of space; instead, it is an ideological battle over the future direction of urban transformation.

The study further advances geographic research on the radical right. Specifically focusing on the AfD, it shows that the party does not oppose cultural revitalization per se; instead, it incorporates it into its agenda as a way to reclaim urban spaces seen as lost to migrant users. This challenges traditional views of the PRR's stance on culture and urbanity, revealing that while diversity is dismissed, urban vibrancy is not necessarily opposed. Moreover, the study demonstrates that even without formal inclusion in local decision-making processes, the AfD, as an opposition force with broad support, can influence policies such as culture-led urban development. This supports recent research identifying the municipal level as a key arena for the normalization of the PRR. The AfD does not simply oppose the European Capital of Culture

initiative but shapes its boundaries by prompting a depoliticized, infrastructure-focused response from city officials. This reactive dynamic results in a cultural program that minimizes political values in favor of pragmatism and technocratic neutrality. The outcome is a narrowing of artistic vision from democratic renewal to image management. The radical right thus acts as a threshold – a boundary that limits the transformative potential of the project.

Therefore, this study advocates for a more nuanced approach to the relationship between the PRR and culture-led urban development in post-industrial settings. This relationship cannot be simply reduced to opposition against politically motivated artists but involves a territorialized engagement with the city's industrial past. The study defines the territorialized transformation threshold as a framework for analyzing the radical right opposition to cultural transformation. This framework allows for a systematic examination through four interconnected forms: affective, imaginative, infrastructural, and performative territorialization, along with their specific expressions within the context of culture-led urban development. It highlights how cultural-led development becomes intertwined with broader struggles over identity and legitimacy.

Despite its strengths, the study has certain limitations. As a single case focused on Chemnitz, the findings are closely tied to local socio-historical conditions, including the city's post-socialist transformation, demographic aging, and the influence of the radical right. Additionally, the culture-led development instrument examined here is a special case, institutionally linked to the EU and much broader in scope than typical object-focused culture-led development projects. These factors make the European Capital of Culture 2025 a unique example, not necessarily representative of other cities. The research also centers on the preparatory phase of the European Capital of Culture and emphasizes institutional actors. Analyzing contestations during the program year itself – potentially through other methods such as participant observation or surveys of reactions to specific program components – is outside the scope of this research. Moreover, the analysis is limited in time, as it does not consider the long-term impacts of the European Capital of Culture on urban society.

Future research should examine this long-term course of cultural change in Chemnitz and further test the territorialized transformation threshold framework through other case studies. Of particular interest is whether similar affective, imaginative, infrastructural, and performative expressions of opposition to culture-led urban development arise in other post-industrial settings with a strong local presence of the PRR, how these forms relate to each other, and

whether they also limit the transformative potential of such projects. Comparing with other European post-industrial regions and conducting cross-national comparisons of different populist radical right parties would also be promising directions for future research.

Despite its limited generalizability, this study provides insights that go beyond the case of Chemnitz. It shows how the radical right must be understood as an urban actor that utilizes specific imaginaries of the city. This dynamic is especially important in East Germany, where the legacy of post-reunification changes has created local conditions favorable to the radical right. If these actors shape how cities imagine and plan their futures, then peripheral urban areas risk cementing their status. The challenge is not only to protect culture-led urban development from radical right opposition but also to reclaim it as a meaningful and locally grounded project in places where culture is highly contested. This requires moving away from the idea that models from creative metropolises can be directly copied. Instead, cultural urban development needs to consider local histories and give new symbolic and social roles to the architectural remnants of industrial decline. It needs to encourage a redefinition of belonging in cities shaped by ruptures.

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Appendix

A.1 Codebook

List of Codes	Prevalence
Codesystem	1296
Presse	0
positive details actors	12
active civil society	5
exchange	1
PRR reacts	25
reaction towards PRR	7
culture against PRR	13
silent middle	5
chemnitz identity	0
post-industrial / creative	9
inner city	5
left behind	9
divided	3
self-identification	6
image	38
extreme right legacy	30
xenophobia	5
negativ	7
positiv	19
GDR legacy	17
ECOC	0
safety	5
legacy	4
deals with PRR	29
character	20
transformation	1
maker	5
goal	3

event	3
silent middle	17
citizen activation	12
cultural	1
city development	5
image	10
self identification	3
application	2
influence 2018	43
ECOC critique	32
perception arts & culture	21
ECOC positive	3
PRR	0
expectation	6
AfDinner city	3
AfDsilent middle	1
AfDmigration	1
AfDcity development	1
critique	0
ProCContestation	15
ProCCulture difference	4
AfDContestation	11
AfDcultural difference	11
proposal	0
ProCSupport	0
AfDSupport	12
ProCSuggestion	5
AFDSuggestion	15
demand a say	0
demand a say	1
transparency	3
demand a say	5
citizen participation	0
citizen participation	2
citizen participation	10

budget	0
funding	4
Budget	11
Funding	2
Budget	17
Chemnitz	0
city competition	8
Identity	25
Definition of Culture	12
Weakness	38
Strength	20
Coalition	0
ECOC as argument	36
partners	27
reaction toward right-wing	42
non-parliamentary	2
using public critique	2
discourse	3
spending	5
difference parties	3
cultural disagreement	2
Disagreement	15
resources	13
ECOC	0
positive	3
critique	9
program	3
2018 pro decision	3
legacy	31
public opinion	10
safety concerns	13
Development	47
former Mayor	3
Goals	2
self-confidence	3

cultural	5
regional connection	2
citizen activation	37
event	17
counter migration	8
european embedding	11
place marketing / image rebranding	38
city development	53
post-fordism	8
urban quality	8
counter right-wing / tolerance	45
conservative city reluctance	3
room for whom	6
image	13
support civil society	30
silent middle	25
could be better	9
nothing new	2
not foreground	5
unpolitical	16

A.2 Interview Partners

Interview Partners		
Code	Date	Institution
IP01	22.01.2025	City Councillor (Bündnis90/Die Grünen)
IP02	16.01.2025	City Councillor (BSW)
IP03	03.12.2025	City Councillor (CDU)
IP04	27.11.2025	City Councillor (SPD)
IP05	09.01.2025	City Councillor (AfD)
IP06	07.01.2025	City Councillor (Die Linke)
II01	07.01.2025	Kulturhauptstadt gGmbH
IZ01	23.01.2025	Civil Society
IZ02	14.01.2025	Civil Society
IZ03	08.01.2025	Civil Society
IZ04	04.12.2025	Civil Society
IZ05	04.01.2025	Civil Society
IZ06	27.12.2025	Civil Society
IZ07	23.01.2025	Civil Society
IZ08	08.01.2025	Civil Society

A.3 Interview Guide

Interview-Leitfaden

Interviewpartner:

Position:

Datum:

Persönlich/Videokonferenz

Startzeit:

Endzeit:

1. Einstieg

1. Mit welchem Gefühl blicken Sie auf das Kulturhauptstadtjahr?
 2. Gibt es ein Projekt während des Kulturhauptstadtjahres, auf das Sie sich am meisten freuen?
-

2. Koalition

1. Welche Fraktionen des Stadtrats stehen hinter der Kulturhauptstadt?
 1. Wie erklären Sie sich die breite Zustimmung?
 2. Welche Differenzen gibt es zwischen den Akteuren der Koalition?
 2. Wie würden Sie den Gestaltungsspielraum zwischen Stadtrat und Kulturhauptstadt GmbH beschreiben?
 3. Welche Akteure aus der Kultur- / und Kreativlandschaft Teil des Bündnis Kulturhauptstadt?
 4. Welche Akteure in der Stadt stehen dem Projekt Kulturhauptstadt kritisch bis ablehnend gegenüber?
 1. Wie erklären Sie sich die Ablehnung?
 2. Wo finden Akteure, die der Kulturhauptstadt ablehnend gegenüber stehen, eine politische Repräsentation im Stadtrat?
-

3. AfD & Pro Chemnitz

1. Wie würden Sie das Verhältnis von AfD & Pro Chemnitz zur Kulturhauptstadt beschreiben?
 1. Geht es der AfD / Pro Chemnitz Ihrer Meinung nach um eine grundsätzliche Ablehnung der Kulturhauptstadt oder um eine andere Ausgestaltung?
 2. Nehmen Sie Unterschiede zwischen beiden Parteien in Bezug auf die Kulturhauptstadt wahr?
 3. Inwiefern unterscheidet sich das Kulturverständnis von AfD und Pro Chemnitz von dem der Stadt Chemnitz?
 4. Haben Sie den Eindruck, dass die AfD stärker einbezogen werden möchte in den Kulturhauptstadtprozess?
 5. Im Stadtrat hat die AfD und Pro Chemnitz argumentiert, dass man bevor Geld für neue Vorhaben gibt, lieber für die Instandhaltung Bestehendes ausgibt. Bezogen hat Sie sich dabei unter anderem auf eine Sanierung der Talsperre Euba. Was halten Sie von dieser Argumentation?
 6. Zu Beginn des Kulturhauptstadtprozesses wollte die AfD die Einwohner darüber abstimmen lassen, ob sich Chemnitz bewerben soll. Was ist Ihre Position zu solch einem Bürgerentscheid?
-

4. Chemnitz

1. Wie würden Sie die Identität der Stadt Chemnitz beschreiben?
 1. Es gibt viele Images Sächsisches Manchester, Stadt der Moderne, rechte Stadt, Kulturhauptstadt?
2. Welche Schwächen sehen Sie in Chemnitz?
3. Welche Stärken sehen Sie in Chemnitz?
4. Was unterscheidet Chemnitz von beiden anderen sächsischen Großstädten Leipzig und Dresden?
 1. Sehen Sie eine Konkurrenz zwischen den Städten (zum Beispiel um Fachkräfte)?

2. Gibt es Entwicklungen in Leipzig oder Dresden, welche von Chemnitz versucht werden sollten zu kopieren?
-

5. Europäische Kulturhauptstadt

1. Wie ist die Idee der Bewerbung als Europäische Kulturhauptstadt entstanden?
 1. Von wem ging diese aus?
 2. Welche Rolle kommt einzelnen Akteuren (wie der ehemaligen Oberbürgermeisterin) zu?
2. Welches Ziel wird mit der Kulturhauptstadt verfolgt?
 1. Welche wirtschaftlichen Effekte erwarten sie sich von der Kulturhauptstadt?
 1. In welchem Verhältnis stehen Ausgaben Chemnitz für die Kulturhauptstadt und Einnahmen durch Fördermittel des Landes, Bundes und der europäischen Ebene?
 2. Welche Rolle spielt die Kultur- und Kreativwirtschaft für die wirtschaftliche Entwicklung der Stadt?
 2. Wie soll die Kulturhauptstadt die städtebauliche Entwicklung beeinflussen?
 1. Braucht es für diese städtebaulichen Veränderungen eine Kulturhauptstadt?
 3. Welchen Einfluss kann die Kulturhauptstadt auf Zuzug und Wegzug nach Chemnitz haben?
 1. Warum ziehen junge Menschen aus Chemnitz weg?
 2. „Unternehmen zieht es dorthin, wo gut ausgebildete junge Menschen wohnen wollen und das sind urbane Zentren, mit einem Angebot an Kultur und Nachtleben“ – Wie bewerten Sie dieser Aussage?
 4. Haben sich die Ziele der Kulturhauptstadt mit den Ausschreitungen 2018 verändert?
 1. Inwiefern kann die Kulturhauptstadt den Rechten etwas entgegensetzen?

2. Im zweiten Bidbook heißt es, mit der Kulturhauptstadt soll die „stille Mitte“ aktiviert werden, was verstehen Sie darunter?
 3. Wie werden Akteure, die sich gegen Rechts positionieren, werden durch die Kulturhauptstadt gestärkt?
 5. Welche Rolle spielt es, Chemnitz ein neues Image zu verleihen?
 1. Welches Image hat Chemnitz heute, welches soll es in Zukunft haben?
 3. Hat die Kulturhauptstadt auch Nachteile?
 4. Was denken Sie wird sich realistisch durch die Kulturhauptstadt mittelfristig verändern?
-

A.4 Consent Form

Einverständniserklärung zur Erhebung und Verarbeitung von Interviewdaten

Erläuterung

Sie erklären sich dazu bereit, im Rahmen der Masterarbeit von Yannic Walther an der Freien Universität Brüssel an einem Leitfaden-Interview teilzunehmen. Sie wurden über Art, Umfang und Verlauf des Forschungsvorhabens informiert.

Das Interview wird aufgezeichnet und anschließend digital transkribiert.

Für die wissenschaftliche Auswertung des Interviewtextes werden alle Angaben teilanonymisiert. Angaben, die zu einer Identifizierung Ihrer Person führen, unterbleiben. Die Zugehörigkeit zu Institution (Fraktion, zivilgesellschaftliche Organisation oder Interessenverband) bleibt für die Auswertung erhalten. Das Transkript des Interviews dient Analysezielen und wird lediglich in Ausschnitten zitiert.

Ihre personenbezogenen Kontaktdaten werden von den Interviewdaten getrennt für Dritte unzugänglich gespeichert und vertraulich behandelt.

Die Ergebnisse der Forschung werden gegebenenfalls veröffentlicht.

Einverständnis

Sie sind hiermit einverstanden im Kontext des Forschungsvorhabens an der Befragung teilzunehmen. Der Weiterverarbeitung und Verwertung des Interviews stimmen Sie zu.

Möglichkeit des Widerrufs

Sie können jederzeit ohne Angabe von Gründen von Ihrem Widerspruchsrecht Gebrauch machen und die erteilte Einverständniserklärung mit Wirkung für die Zukunft teilweise oder gänzlich widerrufen. Das berührt die Rechtmäßigkeit der aufgrund der Einwilligung bis zum Widerruf erfolgten Verarbeitung jedoch nicht.

Vorname, Nachname

Ort, Datum / Unterschrift

A.5 Policy Documents

- City of Chemnitz. (2019a). Bewerbungsbuch Chemnitz Kulturhauptstadt Europas 2025 Bidbook I. <https://culturenext.eu/wp-content/uploads/ECOC-2024-Pre-Selection-Chemnitz-1.pdf>
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A.6 Table City Council Protocols

Table City Council Protocols

City Council Protocols				
Code	ECOC Topics	Codes	Source	
Date	Document			
20160831	Council Protocol	Information of application idea	6	https://sessionnet.owl-it.de/chemnitz/bi/getfile.asp?id=7042090&type=do , last access 07.04.2025
20160928	Council Protocol	ECoC as an Argument for specific urban development	1	https://sessionnet.owl-it.de/chemnitz/bi/getfile.asp?id=7043404&type=do , last access 07.04.2025
20161109	Council Protocol	AfD criticises lack of involvement	3	https://sessionnet.owl-it.de/chemnitz/bi/getfile.asp?id=7046310&type=do , last access 07.04.2025
20161207	Council Protocol	Information of citizen participation options for the ECoC	1	https://sessionnet.owl-it.de/chemnitz/bi/getfile.asp?id=7047681&type=do , last access 07.04.2025
20161216	Council Protocol	-	0	https://sessionnet.owl-it.de/chemnitz/bi/getfile.asp?id=7047956&type=do , last access 07.04.2025

20170125 Council Protocol	Positive vote on ECO C application with discussion and criticism from Pro Chemnitz	21	https://sessionnet.owl-it.de/chemnitz/bi/getfile.asp?id=7050288&type=do, last access 07.04.2025
20170208 Council Protocol	ECoC as an argument for specific funding; criticism by AfD and Pro Chemnitz / Freie Sachsen	8	https://sessionnet.owl-it.de/chemnitz/bi/getfile.asp?id=7050811&type=do, last access 07.04.2025
20170308 Council Protocol	Information on progress of application (steering group, cultural ambassadors from the population)	1	https://sessionnet.owl-it.de/chemnitz/bi/getfile.asp?id=7052125&type=do, last access 07.04.2025
20170405 Council Protocol	Information on progress of application (Program Council)	2	https://sessionnet.owl-it.de/chemnitz/bi/getfile.asp?id=7054012&type=do, last access 07.04.2025
20170503 Council Protocol	Information on progress (invitation to neighboring communities)	1	https://sessionnet.owl-it.de/chemnitz/bi/getfile.asp?id=7054473&type=do, last access 07.04.2025
20170510 Council Protocol	-	0	https://sessionnet.owl-it.de/chemnitz/bi/getfile.asp?id=7055403&type=do, last access 07.04.2025
20170614 Council Protocol	Presentation of progress (Cultural Ambassador application)	2	https://sessionnet.owl-it.de/chemnitz/bi/getfile.asp?id=7057117&type=do, last access 07.04.2025
20170823 Council Protocol	Information on progress (visit to ECO C Aarhus); Dispute over public funding for left-wing youth center	3	https://sessionnet.owl-it.de/chemnitz/bi/getfile.asp?id=7060456&type=do, last access 07.04.2025
20170920 Council Protocol	Information on progress (workshops and regional conferences); ECoC as an argument for funding	2	https://sessionnet.owl-it.de/chemnitz/bi/getfile.asp?id=7061841&type=do, last access 07.04.2025

20171108 Council Protocol	Information on progress (international conference); ECOc as an argument in favor of investment (both coalition and AfD)	3	https://sessionnet.owl-it.de/chemnitz/bi/getfile.asp?id=7064301&type=do, last access 07.04.2025
20171206 Council Protocol	-	0	https://sessionnet.owl-it.de/chemnitz/bi/getfile.asp?id=7066042&type=do, last access 07.04.2025
20180124 Council Protocol	Information on progress (2018 will be decisive, guiding idea is being developed)	1	https://sessionnet.owl-it.de/chemnitz/bi/getfile.asp?id=7068676&type=do, last access 07.04.2025
20180307 Council Protocol	-	0	https://sessionnet.owl-it.de/chemnitz/bi/getfile.asp?id=7070789&type=do, last access 07.04.2025
20180411 Council Protocol	ECOc as an argument for investment	1	https://sessionnet.owl-it.de/chemnitz/bi/getfile.asp?id=7072715&type=do, last access 07.04.2025
20180523 Council Protocol	Information on progress (integration of region)	2	https://sessionnet.owl-it.de/chemnitz/bi/getfile.asp?id=7076494&type=do, last access 07.04.2025
20180620 Council Protocol	Debate about the location of the Ostrale art festival; dispute about support for local artists or external AfD against increase in cultural budget with reference to sports budget	5	https://sessionnet.owl-it.de/chemnitz/bi/getfile.asp?id=7076667&type=do, last access 07.04.2028
20180829 Council Protocol	Debate about Tod Stadtfest and subsequent demonstration without direct ECOc reference	1	https://sessionnet.owl-it.de/chemnitz/bi/getfile.asp?id=7080263&type=do, last access 07.04.2025
20180926 Council Protocol	Mayor names debate on Chemnitz and debate on who the citizens want to live together as the aim of the ECOc	1	https://sessionnet.owl-it.de/chemnitz/bi/getfile.asp?id=7081864&type=do, last access 07.04.2025

20181024 Council Protocol	Information on investment in renovation of public square justified with ECOc	1	https://sessionnet.owl-it.de/chemnitz/bi/getfile.asp?id=7083519&type=do, last access 07.04.2025
20181128 Council Protocol	Information on citizens' dialogue with Chancellor Merkel (ECOc important topic)	1	https://sessionnet.owl-it.de/chemnitz/bi/getfile.asp?id=7085363&type=do, last access 07.04.2025
20181219 Council Protocol	ECOc as an argument in favour of project funding	2	https://sessionnet.owl-it.de/chemnitz/bi/getfile.asp?id=7086659&type=do, last access 07.04.2025
20190130 Council Protocol	Decision on cultural strategy	2	https://sessionnet.owl-it.de/chemnitz/bi/getfile.asp?id=7088304&type=do, last access 07.04.2025
20190306 Council Protocol	Information Preparation; decision for application (ECOc helps against the PRR, place promotion)	7	https://sessionnet.owl-it.de/chemnitz/bi/getfile.asp?id=7091164&type=do, last access 07.04.2025
20190403 Council Protocol	Information partner city conference; city square design linked to ECOc; debate about damage to image caused by commemoration of deceased hooligan in Chemnitz football stadium	4	https://sessionnet.owl-it.de/chemnitz/bi/getfile.asp?id=7093765&type=do, last access 07.04.2025
20190515 Council Protocol	Pro Chemnitz motion in favour of application freeze	6	https://sessionnet.owl-it.de/chemnitz/bi/getfile.asp?id=7095071&type=do, last access 07.04.2025
20190626 Council Protocol	Mention of ECOc in the balance sheet of the previous legislative period	1	https://sessionnet.owl-it.de/chemnitz/bi/getfile.asp?id=7096066&type=do, last access 07.04.2025
20190821 Council Protocol	-	0	https://sessionnet.owl-it.de/chemnitz/bi/getfile.asp?id=7098447&type=do, last access 07.04.2025

20190925 Council Protocol	-	0	https://sessionnet.owl-it.de/chemnitz/bi/getfile.asp?id=7101660&type=do, last access 07.04.2025
20191127 Council Protocol	-	0	https://sessionnet.owl-it.de/chemnitz/bi/getfile.asp?id=7105639&type=do, last access 07.04.2025
20200429 Council Protocol	Decision to provide additional funds for culture; Criticism from Pro Chemnitz	1	https://sessionnet.owl-it.de/chemnitz/bi/getfile.asp?id=7113542&type=do, last access 07.04.2025
20200519 Council Protocol	Decision to provide additional funds for the Capital of Culture; AfD demand for transparency; Pro Chemnitz fundamental Criticism	20	https://sessionnet.owl-it.de/chemnitz/bi/getfile.asp?id=7115086&type=do, last access 07.04.2025
20200624 Council Protocol	Information preparation (cabinet meeting of state government); mentioned Plan B if application fails	1	https://sessionnet.owl-it.de/chemnitz/bi/getfile.asp?id=7116561&type=do, last access 07.04.2025
20200715 Council Protocol	Vote on final application; Pro Chemnitz application for referendum	15	https://sessionnet.owl-it.de/chemnitz/bi/getfile.asp?id=7117836&type=do, last access 07.04.2025
20200923 Council Protocol	Information preparation (final application book, jury visits)	1	https://sessionnet.owl-it.de/chemnitz/bi/getfile.asp?id=7119728&type=do, last access 07.04.2025
20201014 Council Protocol	-	0	https://sessionnet.owl-it.de/chemnitz/bi/getfile.asp?id=7121174&type=do, last access 07.04.2025
20201216 Council Protocol	-	0	https://sessionnet.owl-it.de/chemnitz/bi/getfile.asp?id=7124136&type=do, last access 07.04.2025

20210203 Council Protocol	Mention in the overview of upcoming challenges facing the city	3	https://sessionnet.owl-it.de/chemnitz/bi/getfile.asp?id=7127841&type=do , last access 07.04.2025
20210317 Council Protocol	Foundation of Kulturhauptstadt GmbH; AfD advocates for delegating representatives from each party; Pro Chemnitz / Freie Sachsen against outsourcing out of public administration; vote on development of Stadtwirtschaft; AfD and Pro Chemnitz/Freie Sachsen criticize project not viable without funding	18	https://sessionnet.owl-it.de/chemnitz/bi/getfile.asp?id=7129773&type=do , last access 07.04.2025
20210331 Council Protocol	Budget debate with conflicting opinions on financial expenditure for ECoC	13	https://sessionnet.owl-it.de/chemnitz/bi/getfile.asp?id=7130723&type=do , last access 07.04.2025
20210505 Council Protocol	Speech at the inauguration of the Mayor, ECoC as an opportunity for the city	2	https://sessionnet.owl-it.de/chemnitz/bi/getfile.asp?id=7132121&type=do , last access 07.04.2025
20210602 Council Protocol	Information on the constitution of the Supervisory Board of Kulturhauptstadt GmbH; election of members of the Strategy Committee	2	https://sessionnet.owl-it.de/chemnitz/bi/getfile.asp?id=7133565&type=do , last access 07.04.2025
20210630 Council Protocol	Information Financing Agreement Free State of Saxony	2	https://sessionnet.owl-it.de/chemnitz/bi/getfile.asp?id=7135001&type=do , last access 07.04.2025
20210721 Council Protocol	ECoC as an argument in favour of climate protection	1	https://sessionnet.owl-it.de/chemnitz/bi/getfile.asp?id=7136376&type=do , last access 07.04.2025
20210922 Council Protocol	Information about the process (monitoring report, cooperation with the Czech Republic)	2	https://sessionnet.owl-it.de/chemnitz/bi/getfile.asp?id=7138756&type=do , last access 07.04.2025

20211013 Council Protocol	Information on the appointment of the Head of Kulturhauptstadt GmbH	2	https://sessionnet.owl-it.de/chemnitz/bi/getfile.asp?id=7140033&type=do, last access 07.04.2025
20211124 Council Protocol	Application for Future Centre for European Transformation and German Unity	1	https://sessionnet.owl-it.de/chemnitz/bi/getfile.asp?id=7142453&type=do, last access 07.04.2025
20211215 Council Protocol	Pro Chemnitz / Free Saxony announces its own activities for ECoC year	2	https://sessionnet.owl-it.de/chemnitz/bi/getfile.asp?id=7143351&type=do, last access 07.04.2025
20220202 Council Protocol	Elections Supervisory Board Capital of Culture GmbH; ECoC as an argument for investment	5	https://sessionnet.owl-it.de/chemnitz/bi/getfile.asp?id=7145441&type=do, last access 07.04.2025
20220316 Council Protocol		4	https://sessionnet.owl-it.de/chemnitz/bi/getfile.asp?id=7148117&type=do, last access 07.04.2025
20220406 Council Protocol	AfD demands relief for citizens on road construction costs as infrastructure is more important than culture	1	https://sessionnet.owl-it.de/chemnitz/bi/getfile.asp?id=7148463&type=do, last access 07.04.2025
20220518 Council Protocol	Information Development Capital of Culture (twin city)	6	https://sessionnet.owl-it.de/chemnitz/bi/getfile.asp?id=7150628&type=do, last access 07.04.2025
20220615 Council Protocol	Invitation to the Kosmos Festival; critique Pro Chemnitz / Freie Sachsen	2	https://sessionnet.owl-it.de/chemnitz/bi/getfile.asp?id=7151691&type=do, last access 07.04.2025
20220713 Council Protocol	-	0	https://sessionnet.owl-it.de/chemnitz/bi/getfile.asp?id=7154376&type=do, last access 07.04.2025

20220914 Council Protocol	Debate on concept for city centre events	2	https://sessionnet.owl-it.de/chemnitz/bi/getfile.asp?id=7157190&type=do, last access 07.04.2025
20221012 Council Protocol	Information on the work of Kulturhauptstadt GmbH; Debate on participation of local actors	3	https://sessionnet.owl-it.de/chemnitz/bi/getfile.asp?id=7158765&type=do, last access 07.04.2025
20221123 Council Protocol	Debate on cost-cutting measures	3	https://sessionnet.owl-it.de/chemnitz/bi/getfile.asp?id=7161036&type=do, last access 07.04.2025
20221214 Council Protocol	Debate on public budget for newly founded tourism association	2	https://sessionnet.owl-it.de/chemnitz/bi/getfile.asp?id=7161858&type=do, last access 07.04.2025
20230208 Council Protocol	ECoC as an argument in the accommodation tax debate, cultural strategy	4	https://sessionnet.owl-it.de/chemnitz/bi/getfile.asp?id=7164341&type=do, last access 07.04.2025
20230322 Council Protocol	ECoC as an argument in budget votes	16	https://sessionnet.owl-it.de/chemnitz/bi/getfile.asp?id=7168716&type=do, last access 07.04.2025
20230405 Council Protocol	Debate on right-wing attack on cultural delegation; ECoC as argument in debate on music school fees, nightlife coordination	6	https://sessionnet.owl-it.de/chemnitz/bi/getfile.asp?id=7169371&type=do, last access 07.04.2025
20230510 Council Protocol	Debate about the refusal of Pro Chemnitz / Free Saxony to participate in the ECoC discussion event; ECoC as an argument for better integration Sport; debate about public firework	10	https://sessionnet.owl-it.de/chemnitz/bi/getfile.asp?id=7171789&type=do, last access 07.04.2025
20230628 Council Protocol	-	0	https://sessionnet.owl-it.de/chemnitz/bi/getfile.asp?id=7174399&type=do, last access 07.04.2025

20230913 Council Protocol	ECoC as an argument for city centre event concept, basketball court design	5	https://sessionnet.owl-it.de/chemnitz/bi/getfile.asp?id=7177841&type=do, last access 07.04.2025
20231025 Council Protocol	ECoC as an argument for investment	1	https://sessionnet.owl-it.de/chemnitz/bi/getfile.asp?id=7184951&type=do, last access 07.04.2025
20231115 Council Protocol	Information Police Security Situation Centre; Amendment to the partnership agreement of Kulturhauptstadt GmbH; ECoC as an argument for investment	2	https://sessionnet.owl-it.de/chemnitz/bi/getfile.asp?id=7185389&type=do, last access 07.04.2025
20231213 Council Protocol	Debate on over-allocation of funds for municipal theatres	5	https://sessionnet.owl-it.de/chemnitz/bi/getfile.asp?id=7186195&type=do, last access 07.04.2025
20240131 Council Protocol	-	0	https://sessionnet.owl-it.de/chemnitz/bi/getfile.asp?id=7188118&type=do, last access 07.04.2025
20240313 Council Protocol	Pro Chemnitz / Free Saxony motion to withdraw from ECoC and discussion	12	https://sessionnet.owl-it.de/chemnitz/bi/getfile.asp?id=7190852&type=do, last access 07.04.2025
20240417 Council Protocol	Information Plans NSU Documentation Centre and Legacy Conference; ECoC as an argument for investment	2	https://sessionnet.owl-it.de/chemnitz/bi/getfile.asp?id=7192800&type=do, last access 07.04.2025
20240515 Council Protocol	ECoC as an argument in discussions about local transport and public spaces	2	https://sessionnet.owl-it.de/chemnitz/bi/getfile.asp?id=7195171&type=do, last access 07.04.2025
20240619 Council Protocol	AfD approves coalition proposal for a standardised calendar of events	1	https://sessionnet.owl-it.de/chemnitz/bi/getfile.asp?id=7196370&type=do, last access 07.04.2025

20242808 Council Protocol	-	0	https://sessionnet.owl-it.de/chemnitz/bi/getfile.asp?id=7200310&type=do , last access 07.04.2025
20240925 Council Protocol	Election to the Supervisory Board of Kulturhauptstadt GmbH	1	https://sessionnet.owl-it.de/chemnitz/bi/getfile.asp?id=7202182&type=do , last access 07.04.2025
20241111 Council Protocol	-	0	https://sessionnet.owl-it.de/chemnitz/bi/getfile.asp?id=7206535&type=do , last access 07.04.2025
20241113 Council Protocol	-	0	https://sessionnet.owl-it.de/chemnitz/bi/getfile.asp?id=7207149&type=do , last access 07.04.2025
20241211 Council Protocol	-	0	https://sessionnet.owl-it.de/chemnitz/bi/getfile.asp?id=7208034&type=do , last access 07.04.2025
20250129 Council Protocol	Information about opening	1	https://sessionnet.owl-it.de/chemnitz/bi/getfile.asp?id=7211167&type=do , last access 07.04.2025

A.7 Press Reports

Newspaper reports						
Code	Title		Author	Page	Type	Codes ECOC Topics
Date	Newspaper					
20180829	taz	Dieses Land gehört nicht den Rechten	Georg Löwisch	1	Opinion	1 Influence of 2018 on application
20180831	Aachener Zeitung	“Das läuft doch alles total schief hier”	Gregor Mayntz	3	Report	1 Influence of 2018 on application
20180831	taz	Kampf um Chemnitz	Martin Kaul, Volkan Aar	15	Report	1 Influence of 2018 on application
20180901	Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung	Nicht mehr dieselbe Stadt	Kim Björn Becker	3	Report	2 Influence of 2018 on application
20180902	Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung	Die heimgesuchte Stadt	Frank Antje Schmelcher, Konrad Schuller, Christop Strauch	3	Report	3 Transformation in Chemnitz

20180902	Neue Zürcher Zeitung	Nicht anders, nur krasser	Silke Mertins	3	Report	1	Influence of 2018 on application
20180902	dtz	Autor Rietzschel: - Konzert in Chemnitz verstärkt Spaltung	-	-	News agency	2	Influence 2018 on application
20180903	Dresdner Nachrichten	Neueste Nach Demonstration von Chemnitz: Kretschmer Matthias kündigt mehr Polizei an Dirk Knoke,	Roland Herold, 1 Roth,	1	Report	1	Influence of 2018 on application
20180903	Nürnberger Nachrichten	“Wir sitzen hier auf einem Pulverfass”	Bernd Noack	23	Report	2	Influence of 2018 on application
20180904	Chemnitzer Morgenpost	HIER sind mehr!	-	4	Report	1	Influence of 2018 on application
20180906	Döbelner Allgemeine Zeitung	Chemnitz: Kretschmer lobt Polizisten, Schlagabtausch im Dresdner Landtag	Roland Herold	4	Report	2	Influence of 2018 on application
20180908	Welt	“Bekannt sind wir jetzt jedenfalls”	Steffen Fründt	12	Report		City Image, Influence of 2018 on application

20180911 Freie Presse	Ludwig: Ich hatte Angst um die Stadt	-	11	Interview	4	City Image, Influence of 2018 on application
20180918 Westdeutsche Zeitung	Mit einem Kuss (fast) die Welt retten	Helga Meister	-	Interview	5	City Image, Influence of 2018 on application
20181018 Die Zeit	Die Frau zwischen den Fronten	Valerie Schönian	10	Report	4	City Image, Influence of 2018 on application
20181027 Berliner Zeitung	Chemnitz danach	Andreas Förster	2	Report	4	City Image, Influence of 2018 on application
20181116 Welt	Merkel in Chemnitz – kann das gutgehen?	Sebastian Gubernator	-	Report	6	City Image, Silent Middle
20181120 tagungswirtschaft	Wir brauchen den Austausch. Dringend!	Christian Funk	18	Interview	6	City Image, Silent Middle
20181206 Die Zeit	Innere Einkehr auf Sächsisch	Moritz von Uslar	47	Report	7	City Image, Influence of 2018 on application
20190316 taz	Brüchiger Frieden	Konrad Litschko	8	Report	4	Divided city
20190321 Freie Presse	Pro und Kontra zur Absage des Stadtfestes 2019	Galina Pönitz, Saskia Patermann	9	Opinion	1	Influence of 2018 on application

20190527	Freie Presse	AfD legt stark zu – Rot- Rot-Grün abgewählt	Michael Brandenburg, Sven Uhlig	11	Report	2	AfD	name	ECoC
								referendum as priority	
20190705	Frankfurter Zeitung	Allgemeine Sie sind mehr	Stefan Locke	-	Report	5		Culture and civil society, Influence of 2018 on application	
20190706	taz	Keinen Millimeter nach rechts	Juliane Streich	16	Report	2		Culture and civil society	
20190823	Berliner Zeitung	Plan C	Paul Linke	3	Report	8	City	Image, Influence 2018 on application, PRR reaction ECoC	
20190926	Süddeutsche Zeitung	Perle aus Beton	Laura Weissmüller	11	Report	8	City	Image, ECoC application	
20191028	taz	Entwaffnend ehrlich	Julian Weber	15	Report	3		ECoC application	
20191207	Süddeutsche Zeitung	Gold oder Bronze	Jan Heidtmann, Ulrike Nimz	13	Report	3		ECoC application	

20200125 Freie Presse	Kulturhauptstadt: Was die Jury an Chemnitz lobt und was sie moniert	-	11	Report	1	ECoC application
20200125 Nürnberger Nachrichten	Nachbessern dringend erwünscht!	Birgit Ruf	3	Report	1	ECoC application
20200814a Freie Presse	Eine Stadt im Fluss	Katharina Leuoth	3	Report	1	Local critique art project
20200814b Freie Presse	Chemnitzer Antifa-Schau meist kritisch	sehen Mandy Fischer	9	Report	2	Local critique art project
20200820 taz	Die Evolution in Sächsisch-Manchester	in Beate Scheder	16	Report	3	City Image, local critique art project
20200828 Hildesheimer Zeitung	Allgemeine Die geschundene Stadt	Bert Strebe	22	Report	3	City Image, ECoC application
20200829 Frankfurter Zeitung	Allgemeine Wellen schlagen in einer zerrissenen Stadt	Georg Imdahl	13	Report	5	ECoC application, local critique art project
20200912 Focus	Kultur, Karl, Chemnitz	Ralf Niemczyk	22-26	Report	6	City Image, ECoC application

20200924	Chemnitzer Morgenpost	Nach heftiger Jury- - Kritik Stadt überarbeitet Bewerbung	6	Report	1	Silent Middle, application	ECoC
20201010	Freie Presse	“Chemnitz ist - Geheimfavorit”	11	Interview	7	ECoC application, culture vs. PRR	
20201021	Freie Presse	Die Äpfel der Katharina Leuoth Kulturhauptstadt	1	Report	3	ECoC application	
20201021	Freie Presse	Chemnitz will als Claudia Drescher Macher-Stadt den Titel holen	2	Report	3	City Image, application, Influence 2018 on application	ECoC
20201029a	Freie Presse	Lasst die Menschen in Chemnitz tüfteln! Torsten Kleditzsch	4	Opinion	1	ECoC application	
20201029b	Freie Presse	Damit hat Chemnitz Katharina Leuoth gepunktet	2	Report	3	ECoC Influence 2018 on application	
20201029	Mitteldeutsche Zeitung	Wir machen das	Christian Eger	21	Report	1	ECoC application
20201029	Süddeutsche Zeitung	Glamnitz	Ulrike Nimz	9	Report	3	Influence 2018 on application,

					Transformation Chemnitz	in
20201029 Tagesspiegel	Die Botschaft der Apfelbäume	Frederik Hanssen	21	Report	4	ECoC application, city image
20201030 Freie Presse	Warum Kulturhauptstadt Impulse von außen braucht	die -	3	Interview	1	Silent Middle
20201103 Spiegel	Ein Witz. Aber ein guter	Paula Irmshler	-	Opinion	6	Silent Middle, City Image
20201105 Jüdische Allgemeine	Sieg der kleinen Schwester	Elke Wittich	9	Report	2	City Image
20201105 Zeit	Womit hat Chemnitz das verdient?	-	46	Interview	3	ECoC application
20201108 Tagesspiegel	Lieber streiten als gleichgültig sein	Nadine Lang	24	Opinion	1	City Image
20201128 Freie Presse	Chemnitz 2025: begründet ihre Wahl	Jury -	9	Report	1	Influence 2018 on application

20201204 Welt	Warum Chemnitz? Die Stadt ist besser als ihr Ruf	Attila Albert	-	Opinion	1	City Image
20201224 Mitteldeutsche Zeitung	Unter Dampf	Wieland Führ	2	Report	1	Influence on application
20210102 Oberhessische Presse	Apfelbäume und 3000 Garagen	Andreas Hummel	30	Report	2	City Image
20210201 Freie Presse	Den Opfern eine Stimme geben	Maurice Querner	7	Report	1	NSU Center Documentation
20210506 Chemnitzer Morgenpost	OB Schulze will Chemnitz zu “florierenden Großstadt” machen	-	4	Report	1	Transformation in Chemnitz
20210703 Chemnitzer Morgenpost	Zeit des Wandels	-	4	Report	1	Transformation in Chemnitz
20210915 Der Standard	Die Abgehängten brechen auf	Colette M. Schmidt	4	Report	3	City Image, Influence on application
20211028 Freie Presse	Die Auserwählte	Ronny Schilder	18	Report	1	ECOC Development

20221004	Der Prignitzer	Apfelbaum-Parade und Friedensfahrt	Andreas Hummel	6	Report	1	Silent Middle
20220311	Frankfurter Zeitung	Allgemeine "Es war ein Stefan Locke Gewaltrausch"		-	Interview	3	Far-right attack
20220317	Zeit	"Ich wusste nicht, wie mir geschah"	Valerie Schönian	18	Report	1	Far-right attack
20220416	Freie Presse	Wie gastfreundlich können wir sein	-	12	Interview	2	ECoC Development
20220430	Spiegel	Bock auf Chemnitz	Matthias Fiedler	92	Report	1	City Image
20220505	Zeit	"Wir wollen etwas Großes aufbauen"	Anne Hähnig, Martin Nejezchleba, Sophie Laaß	16	Interview	1	City Image
20220627	Freie Presse	Sächsische Akademie der Künste in Chemnitz	Jens Kassner	11	Report	2	Silent Middle
20220707	Märkische Zeitung	Marx und die Macher	Jürgen Kanold	19	Report	2	City Image
20220717	Frankfurter Zeitung	Allgemeine Hier findet die wahre Documenta statt	Mark Siemons	-	Report	2	Silent Middle

20220806	Berliner Zeitung	Machen statt meckern	Sylvie Kürsten	18	Report	3	Influence of 2018 on application, Handling of PRR
20220827	Chemnitzer Morgenpost	Klare Worte	-	4	Opinion	1	Handling of PRR
20220910	Freie Presse	Soziologe gibt Anleitung zum Streiten	-	14	Interview	1	Silent Middle
20220923	Berliner Zeitung	Das C in Chemnitz steht für cool	Paul Linke	11	Report	3	City Image
20221005	Chemnitzer Morgenpost	Es zählt, was bleibt	-	4	Opinion	1	ECoC Critique
20221028	Freie Presse	Die Gesellschaft	Jens Kassner	12	Report	3	ECoC Critique
20221214	Neue Zürcher Zeitung	“Leute grüssen mich mit ‘Heil Hitler’. Ich antworte: ‘Der ist lange tot!’”	Benedict Neff	30-31	Report	3	PRR
20230311	Freie Presse	Stilles Ende für freien Freitag in Museen	Jana Peters	13	Report	1	Silent Middle
20230203	Berliner Zeitung	Kultur mit C	Paul Linke	3	Report	3	City Image, ECoC Critique, Civil Society

20230207 Welt	Kulturhauptstadt- Programm: “Neuralgisches Jahr” in Chemnitz	-	Report	1	ECoC Critique
20230404 Freie Presse	Nach Angriff auf Michael Müller Kulturmanager: Chemnitz in der Verantwortung	2	Report	2	Far-right attack
20230414 Zeit	“Sie sind hier Doreen Reinhard ausgeschlossen, weil sie Neonazis sind”	-	Report	3	PRR and ECoC
20230415 Freie Presse	“Man muss Dinge Katharina Leuoth benennen, wie sie sind”	1	Report	2	PRR and ECoC
20230503 Heimatkurier	Protestaktion gegen „Kulturhauptstadt“ – Im Gespräch mit den Aktivisten	-	Interview	2	ECoC Critique
20230527 Freie Presse	Apfelbaumprojekt steht - auf Prüfstand	13	Report	2	ECoC Critique

20230610 Freie Presse	“... und sowas will Kulturhauptstadt warden?”	Johanna Eisner	7	Report	2	PRR and ECoC
20230610 taz	Bloß keine Apfelbäume pflanzen	Sophie Jung	40	Report	1	PRR and ECoC
20230705 Chemnitzer Morgenpost	EU bescheinigt - Nachholbedarf auf Weg zur Kulturhauptstadt	-	4	Report	1	ECoC Critique
20230706 Freie Presse	Sechs Ausrufezeichen für Chemnitz	Katharina Leuoth	1	Report	1	ECoC Critique
20230731 Süddeutsche Zeitung	“Ein Museum braucht eine klare Haltung”	Lennart Labrenz	-	Interview	3	ECoC Critique, PRR and ECoC
20230805 Neue Presse	Die Westernstadt im Osten	Stefan Arndt	32	Report	1	ECoC Critique
20230810 Chemnitzer Morgenpost	Chemnitzer AfD-Wähler - haben keinen Bock auf Kulturhauptstadt	-	4	Report	1	PRR reaction on ECoC
20230811 Dresdner Nachrichten	Neueste Sichtbarmachen	Stefan Arndt	9	Report	1	ECoC Critique

20230819 Freie Presse	Do you understand: Was ist die Stille Mitte?	Jens Kassner	10	Report	1	Silent Middle
20230923 Frankfurter Rundschau	Die Stadt in der - Schublade	-	14	Report	2	Silent Middle, City Image
20230825 Lauterbacher Anzeiger	Immer noch braune - Hochburg?	-	2	Report	2	Silent Middle, City Image
20230826 Freie Presse	“Wir achten heute - starker auf gute Integration”	-	3	Opinion	3	Transformation in Chemnitz
20230828 Frankfurter Rundschau	“Es gibt nach wie vor eine starke rechte Szene”	Pitt von Bebenburg	14	Interview	4	PRR
20230909 Sächsische Zeitung	So heilt Chemnitz’ Wunde nicht	Hanka Kliese	27	Opinion	7	PRR and ECoC
20230927 Freie Presse	Chemnitz 2025: Eine von 3000 Garagen	Jens Kassner	13	Report	1	Silent Middle
20231006 Freie Presse	“Chemnitz 2025”: - Zwickau bringt sich ein	-	11	Report	1	PRR reaction on ECoC

20231028a Freie Presse	Innenstadt: Ob Schulze wird deutlich	Michael Müller	16	Report	1	Inner city safety
20231028b Freie Presse	Kann die Kulturhauptstadt scheitern?	Jens Kassner	13	Report	4	Silent Middle
20231106 Freie Presse	Das verraten Umfragen über Chemnitz 2025	Michael Müller	9	Report	2	PRR and ECoC, ECoC critique
20231208 Sächsische Zeitung	Rechtsextremisten eröffnen eigenen Kulturtreff in Chemnitz	Ulrich Wolf, Fionn Klose	-	Report	1	PRR
20240106 taz	Fast so cool wie Bauhaus	Dirk Schneider	42	Report	2	ECoC Critique
20240113 Freie Presse	“Die Stadt hat immer Angst vorm Scheitern”	-	2	Interview	6	City Transformation in Chemnitz, PRR and ECoC
20240114 Sächsische Zeitung	Ein Jahr bis zur Eröffnung: Chemnitz auf dem Weg zur Kulturhauptstadt 2025	dpa	-	Report	1	ECoC Critique

20230120 Freie Presse	Erste Störfeuer für Susanne Kiwitter	18	Report	1	PRR reaction on ECoC
	Kulturhauptstadt angekündigt				
20240315 Freie Presse	Heftige Debatte zum Antrag von Rechten	11	Report	2	PRR reaction on ECoC
20240409 Wirtschaftswoche	Fremdenfeindlichkeit kostet die Unternehmen Fachkräfte	-	Report	2	PRR
	Christoph Seitz, Sarah Marsh				
20240413 Torgauer Zeitung	Was er vorhat	10	Report	1	PRR reaction on ECoC
	Antonie Rietzschel, Denise Peikert				
20240417 Junge Freiheit	Chemnitz wird Kulturhauptstadt – und macht sich dafür zum Clown	-	Opinion	1	Critique art project
	Bäckermann				
20240418 taz	Rechte Netzwerke erkennen	16	Report	2	Culture and PRR
20240426 Freie Presse	Die Rechten und die Brandmauer	11	Report	1	PRR reaction on ECoC
	Benjamin Lummer,				

Michale Müller					
20240523 Freie Presse	Mehra ls Bier von der Tanke	Denise Märkisch	1	Report	2 City Image, Culture and PRR
20240531 Zeit	Das Basketballwunder von Chemnitz	Benjamin Fischer	-	Report	2 City Image
20240606 Chemnitzer Morgenpost	So wollen die Parteien Chemnitz zum perfekten Gastgeber machen	-	4	Report	2 ECoC Critique, PRR reaction on ECoC
20240623 taz	Wehe, ihr fast das Auto an	Beate Scheder	-	Report	4 Critique art project, PRR
20240703 Freie Presse	Integrationshelfer zu den Wahlerfolgen der AfD	Lila-Marie Schulze	9	Report	1 PRR and ECoC
20240711 Handelsblatt	Diese Stadt überrascht den Rest Deutschland	Annika Keilen	-	Report	4 City Image, PRR and ECoC
20242307 taz	Wo die Graswurzeln wachsen	Michael Bartsch	4-5	Report	1 PRR and ECoC

20240811	Süddeutsche Zeitung	Macht bitte wieder mit	Jörg Häntzschel	-	Report	City Image, Silent Middle, PRR and ECoC
20240826	taz	Ein Dorn im rechten Auge	Amelie Sittenauer	5	Report	2 Silent Middle, PRR and ECoC
20240828	Tagesspiegel	Kulturhauptstadt	Birgit Rieger	24	Report	6 PRR and ECoC, Silent Middle, City Image
20240830	Welt	Die ungesehene Stadt	Boris Pofalla	14	Report	6 City Image, Civil Society, PRR and ECoC
20241011	Süddeutsche Zeitung	Wer will schon in den Westen	Laura Weißmüller	-	Report	1 Civil Society
20241026	Sächsische Zeitung	Das plant Chemnitz als Kulturhauptstadt	Ronald Meyer-Arlt	8	Report	3 City Image, PRR and ECoC
20241107	Freie Presse	2025: Was ist von der Bewerbung geblieben?	Jens Kassner	13	Report	2 Silent Middle, ECoC Critique
20241111	Freie Presse	Chemnitz, Nazis und Kulturhauptstadt	Denise Märkisch	9	Report	4 PRR and ECoC
20241116	Freie Presse	Chemnitz 2025: Ideen fürs Miteinander	Katharina Leuoth	11	Report	2 PRR and ECoC, ECoC Critique

20241211	Nürnberger Zeitung	Von Munch bis zum Marathonlauf mit Musik (dpa)	Andreas Hummel	8	Report	3	Influence application, Silent Middle, PRR and ECoC	2018	on
20241228	Spiegel	Das Neonazi-Stigma überschreiben	Laura Backes, Wolfgang Höbel	12	Report	14	Influence application, Silent Middle, PRR and ECoC	2018	on
20241229	Die Presse	Das kulturelle Manifest einer suchenden Stadt	David Freudenthaler	38-39	Report	3	PRR and ECoC		
20250102	Berliner Zeitung	Machen, nicht meckern	Paul Linke	12	Report	2	PRR and ECoC		
20250102	Stern	Dickes C	Jana Felgenhauer	-	Report	8	City image, PRR, ECoC critique		
20250102	taz	Im Schatten des Nischels	Michael Bartsch	3	Report	6	City Image		
20250104	Freie Presse	Wie reagiert Chemnitz 2025 auf Nazis?	Susanne Kiwitter	17	Report	2	PRR and ECoC		
20250104	Junge Freiheit	Chemnitz und die Liebe auf den zweiten Blick	Paul Leonhard	-	Report	3	City image, Chemnitz Transformation		

20250110 Zeitung	Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung	Wie politisch sind DDR-Garagen?	Markus Wehner	-	Report	11	PRR and ECoC critique, Influence 2018 on application, City Image
20250111	taz	Chemnitz ist nicht Bayreuth	Michael Bartsch	40	Report	6	PRR and ECoC, City Image, City Transformation
20250113	Berliner Zeitung	Es wird Zeit, sich ein eigenes Bild zu machen	Pau Linke	18	Opinion	1	City Image
20250116	Zeit	Was ging ab in Chemnitz	Cornelius Pollmer	39	Report	3	City Image
20250117	Bersenbrücker Kreisblatt	Weg vom Verlierer-Image?	Stefan Lüddemann	24	Report	2	PRR and ECoC, Influence 2018 on application
20250117	Süddeutsche Zeitung	Sven Schulze	Iris Mayer	4	Opinion	3	City Image
20250117	taz	Eine Stadt in neuem Licht	Lara Voelter	4-5	Report	7	City Image, PRR and ECoC, ECoC Critique
20250118	Berliner Zeitung	Liebe auf den dritten Blick	Paul Linke	18	Report	3	City Image

20250119 Freie Presse	Chemnitz 2025: Mit Jana Peters breiter Brust	2	Report	5	Transformation Chemnitz, City Image, ECoC Critique	in
20250118 Standard	“Schub gegen rechts” Birgit Baumann	34	Interview	4	City Image, PRR ECoC	and
20250118a Sächsische Zeitung	Kulturhauptstadt Chemnitz: Eine Stadt wie ein Wimmelbild	-	Report	4	Influence application, PRR ECoC	on
20250118b Sächsische Zeitung	Demonstration Kundgebung Chemnitz: Das ist die Bilanz der Polizei	-	Report	1	PRR and ECoC	
20250119 Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung	Stigma 2018 Jannis Holl	3	Report	5	PRR and ECoC, Influence 2018 on application, City Image, Transformation in Chemnitz	
20250119 Spiegel	“Wir Chemnitzer sind nämlich gar nicht so böse!” Arno Frank	-	Report	2	City image, ECoC critique	

19012025 Weichreite TV	Freie Sachsen Rap zur Kulturhauptstadt 18.01.2025	-	Recording	4	PRR and ECoC
20250120 Freie Presse	Ein Tag wie eine Katharina Leuth	2	Report	1	PRR and ECoC
20250121 Freie Presse	Liebeserklärung Was bleibt von Jens Kassner Kulturhauptstädten?	12	Report	1	PRR and ECoC
20250125 Freie Presse	Wie politisch ist die Jens Kassner Kulturhauptstadt?	17	Report	2	PRR and ECoC, ECoC Critique
20250127 Freie Presse	Polizei stoppt Angriff Erik Anke von "Chemnitz Revolte"	9	Report	1	Far-right attack
20250128 Freie Presse	Wer ist die Gefährderin? Denise Märkisch	11	Report	1	PRR and ECoC
20250129 Freie Presse	Neue Details zu Überfall auf Bar -	11	Report	1	Far-right attack
20250131 Compact	Chemnitz: Mörder von Michael Brück Daniel Hillig kommt frei	-	Report	1	Influence 2018 on application