

MORE THAN A CORNER STORE: SPÄTIS STRUGGLE FOR SURVIVAL IN A CHANGING BERLIN

More often than not, the shops are owned and managed by first, second or third-generation immigrants, and thus provide a livelihood for families across the city. When you shop at a Späti, in other words, you know exactly who your money is going to.

Aside from this, Berliners care about Spätis because they are an integral part of Kiez (neighbourhood) culture. And it's about more than just the money. In 2001, then-mayor Klaus Wowereit famously declared Berlin "arm, aber sexy" (poor but sexy), a quote that in recent years has been dragged up frequently to complain about the rapid gentrification of the city.

And while your local bar might have been taken over by hipster, craft beer enthusiasts, thanks to Berlin's Spätis, it's still possible to enjoy a beer for under a euro. Simply put, in a city that's been beleaguered by new luxury builds and spiraling rental costs, Spätis are keeping the cheap, carnivalesque spirit of Berlin alive.

"Drink Drunk" by Schlesisches Tor, for instance, is one of a number of Spätis that host free parties until 6am for their customers, sometimes even bringing in a DJ. This year, Späti-lovers enjoyed a "Spätival" around Friedrichshain and Kreuzberg, and not long afterwards, I watched England's World Cup chances die on a makeshift screen outside Neukölln's "Späti international", packed out with people spilling onto the street. They're meeting places, cheap bars, post offices and emergency stops, and as integral to Berlin's culture as the currywurst or the döner.