Improving Quality of Place: Strategic Approaches in Germany and the UK

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1 ABSTRACT

The last decade has seen an increased interest in assessing, measuring, and comparing quality of place, in particular related to the urban built environment. However, the transient and intangible nature of place makes it difficult to agree on generic criteria and indicators. In the UK, a government strategy identifies four 'elements' being essentially important for the creation of high quality places. In Germany, the term *Baukultur* (building culture) describes the intention to create more attractive, more sustainable, and more competitive places related to the production of and the interaction with the built environment. The paper discusses differences and similarities of strategic approaches in Germany and the UK related to the question of how quality of place could be improved.

2 INTRODUCTION

Place and its qualities have been subject to investigation in a variety of disciplines including architecture, philosophy, anthropology, psychology, sociology, and geography. The discussion has been fuelled by the impression that from the second part of the twentieth century onwards, quality of urban space has declined. In the 1960s, Modernist urban planning has been made responsible for the loss of spatial quality and the creation of unattractive and dysfunctional urban spaces (e.g. Jacobs 1961; Alexander 1965; Mitscherlich 1965). In the 1970s, the rejection of positivist concepts of space such as understanding space merely as a 'container' and not as the product of particular processes, discourses, structures, etc. (Vogelpohl 2008: 71) stimulated new phenomenological approaches focusing on emotional and subjective experiences of place (e.g. Relph 1976; Tuan 1977). The ongoing commercialization and privatisation of place in the post-modern city have become subjects of discussion from the 1990s onwards (e.g. Augé 1995; Hajer and Reijndorp 2001; Eckardt 2003). Nowadays, most scholars agree on the holistic nature of place emphasising its multi-dimensionality and complexity (e.g. Schnur 2008; Eckardt 2009). However, urban planning and urban design have been concentrating mainly on physical attributes of place. This deterministic focus has been critically examined by questioning if traditional urban design techniques are sufficient enough to address the complex nature of place (Arefi and Triantafillou 2005). Equally critical are the prevalence of normative theory *in* urban design, and the lack of substantial theory *of* urban design (Cuthbert 2006: 11–12). Only recently, larger quantities of empirical data have been used to explore "[...] how people give meanings to physical settings in various ways […]" (Radfar 2010).

In the context of an increased global competition, it has been assumed that cities need to exhibit distinctive qualities to distinguish them from their competitors, and to attract new investors, businesses, skilled workers, and tourists. The production and export of material and immaterial goods based on innovation, knowledge, and creativity (creative knowledge economy) have been considered as possible drivers for successful economic development (Florida 2002, 2005). It has been presumed that so called 'soft' location factors including cultural offer, tolerance, diversity, etc. have an influence on the perception of quality of place with consequences for relocation and migration behaviour especially among the creative industries. Indicators have been proposed to identify elements of quality of place based on diversity, liveliness, culture, talent, creativity, tolerance, or aesthetics (Trip 2007). However, the prescriptive character of Florida's studies as much as his methodology have been subject to discussion and critique (e.g. Scott 2006). The role of soft location factors has been explored in the EU-wide study ACRE analysing conditions "for creating or stimulating 'creative knowledge regions' in the context of the extended European Union" (University of Amsterdam 2006). One of the findings of the study is that personal networks and relationships as much as typical 'hard' location factors seem to play a far more significant role for location choices than 'soft' location factors (Musterd and Murie 2010). Nonetheless, Florida's concepts continue to have influence on governments and policy makers (e.g. N/A 2010).

The 'Leipzig Charter on Sustainable European Cities', a document issued by the ministers responsible for urban development in the member states of the European Union, recommends the creation of high-quality "public spaces, urban man-made landscapes and architecture and urban development" (European Union

2007: 3) by emphasizing their significance for life quality of urban residents as much as their role as soft location factors attracting knowledge and creative industries, qualified staff, and tourism. The German term *Baukultur* (building culture) has been employed to describe joint efforts in architecture and urban planning to increase the standard of the living environment "as the sum of all the cultural, economic, technological, social and ecological aspects influencing the quality and process of planning and construction" (European Union 2007: 3). A particular emphasis has been put on preservation of architectural heritage. High quality of place is considered to be accomplished jointly by national, regional, and local authorities, private businesses and ordinary citizens. *Baukultur* is understood as the joint and interdisciplinary effort to implement processes which help improve the (physical) quality of urban places.

The 'Leipzig Charter on Sustainable European Cities' is the first European Union wide initiative for developing sustainable strategies for improving quality of place. However, strategies need to be developed, tested and implemented individually by each member state. In that context, the paper looks at how the *Baukultur* concept has evolved as a national political strategy for improving the quality of the built environment over the last decade in Germany, and compares its objectives, its theoretical and methodical framework, and its political implementation to another national strategy for improving quality of place, 'World Class Places' in the United Kingdom.

3 IMPROVING QUALITY OF PLACE – TWO STRATEGIC APPROACHES

3.1 World Class Places (UK)

In May 2009, the previous (Labour) government published a strategy paper on how to improve quality of place in the United Kingdom (UK Government 2009b) followed by an Action Plan in September 2009 (UK Government 2009a). The paper is based on analysis undertaken in the Cabinet Office (UK Government 2009c). Supported by national surveys and local case studies, the publication follows the assumption that poor quality of place contributes to social and environmental deficiencies such as higher crime rates, health problems, disjointed communities, spoiled environments, or higher public expenses resulting from fighting the effects of poor quality of place. National performance surveys illustrate that low crime rates, access to health services and public transport, clean streets, shopping facilities, parks, and public open spaces rank high when people are asked for their opinions about quality of place (UK Government 2007a).

3.1.1 Defining Quality of Place

The publication focuses on physical aspects of quality of place such as the consequences of bad planning, design, and maintenance. Hence, quality of place is defined as "the physical characteristics of a community – the way it is planned, designed, developed and maintained – that affect the quality of life of people living and working in it, and those visiting it, both now and into the future" (UK Government 2009b: 11). The publication identifies eleven place-related factors which contribute - amongst other factors - to a good quality of life in local areas. Quality of place is consequently understood as a "subset of factors that affect people's quality of life and life chances through the way the environment is planned, designed, developed and maintained" (UK Government 2009b: 11).

The identified eleven factors have been organised in four categories - called 'elements' - of quality of place: First, the "range and mix of homes, services and amenities"; second, the "design and upkeep of buildings and spaces"; third, the "provision of green space and green infrastructure" and fourth, the "treatment of historic buildings and places" (UK Government 2009b: 12). For each of the four 'elements', a number of 'good quality' criteria are suggested: To achieve a "good range and mix of homes, services and amenities", it is proposed to create mixed-used developments, encourage higher density, and offer a wide range of different neighbourhoods to serve different needs of different users, such as student housing, family housing, etc. Regarding buildings and spaces, the design should be durable, inclusive, functional, and sustainable; public spaces should be pedestrian-centred to encourage walking and cycling as much as "social interaction, community cohesion and a sense of place" (UK Government 2009b: 13). In addition, and under consideration of national survey data (UK Government 2007a), an emphasis is put on regular maintenance of both buildings and public space. Research outcomes are used to emphasise the role of green spaces and infrastructure for the physical and mental well-being of the population (UK Government 2007b), and for higher property values in surrounding residential areas (CABE 2005a). Good quality green spaces are hereby understood as safe and attractive offering a variety of uses such as play and sports facilities as much as quiet

areas. For the last of the four 'elements' of quality of place, a "sensitive treatment of historic buildings and places" (UK Government 2009b: 12) is proposed emphasising the role of historic environments for "our self-understanding" and "our sense of connectedness to the past" (UK Government 2009b: 15). Two studies are employed to show that investment in the historic environment increases not only the attractiveness and quality of place (BDRC 2008) but also the value of properties (English Heritage 2003).

3.1.2   Benefits of High Quality Places

After having defined the four 'elements' of quality of place and having proposed the criteria for 'good' quality of place, the publication focuses on possible economic, social and environmental benefits of high quality places. Under the headline "The contribution that high quality places make to achieving positive outcomes", a number of possible positive behaviours (e.g. walking, cycling, social interaction, ease of mobility, etc.) and products (e.g. green, pleasant environments, low-energy-buildings, user-friendly buildings, etc.) stimulating positive effects such as low crime rates, good health, social inclusion, environmental sustainability, etc. (UK Government 2009b: 18) are stated. The argument that high-quality places foster possible economic, social, and environmental benefits is supported by various research studies. For the economic benefits (UK Government 2009b: 19), evidence is presented to illustrate that investment in good design does not only contribute to higher property values and lower maintenance costs, but also helps avoid so-called 'social' costs related to dysfunctional buildings and environments (CABE 2006). In the social benefits section (UK Government 2009b: 21–23), research outcomes are used to show that good housing and public space design can be linked to an increased community spirit, better health, reinforced social ties, and social inclusion. Good design of public buildings can increase staff performance (CABE 2005b), pupil performance in schools (CABE 2002), and patient recovery rates in hospitals. Regarding environmental benefits (UK Government 2009b: 23–25), research studies point at a link between high-density built environments and CO_2 reduction (Dodman 2009), as much as a relationship between green space, greater biodiversity, and reduced urban temperatures (Goode 2006).

3.1.3   Progress, Challenges, Opportunities, and Strategic Objectives

The publication summarises government efforts for increasing quality of place between 1999 and 2009 (UK Government 2009b: 27). It presents evidence of achieved improvements in eight different fields: sustainable development, urban renaissance, public realm, public buildings, homes and neighbourhoods, historic environment, sustainable urban transport, and public engagement (UK Government 2009b: 28–31). The publication utilises research results to identify remaining challenges (UK Government 2009b: 32), in particular deficiencies concerning the design quality of private housing and local neighbourhood, affordable housing (HCA and CABE 2009), and maintenance of public spaces (UK Government 2008). It identifies additional opportunities for improving quality of place including stronger and more ambitious national, regional and local leadership, better guidance on quality of place, wider public engagement, more investment in good design quality, and better access to quality of place skills by the public sector (UK Government 2009b: 33).The identified opportunities are addressed by seven strategic objectives to be achieved. First, "strengthen leadership on quality of place at the national and regional level"; second "encourage local civic leaders and local government to prioritise quality of place"; third, "ensure relevant government policy, guidance and standards consistently promote quality of place and are user-friendly"; fourth, "put the public and community at the centre of place-shaping"; fifth, "ensure all development for which central government is directly responsible is built to high design and sustainability standards and promotes quality of place"; sixth, "encourage higher standards of market-led development", and seventh, "strengthen quality of place skills, knowledge and capacity" (UK Government 2009b: 37).

3.1.4   Action Plan

In September 2009, the government published a second document laying out the seven strategic objectives in form of an action plan (UK Government 2009a). Each objective has been subdivided into several rationales, and a number of concrete tasks ("next steps to deliver action"). A leading public body such as the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE), English Heritage (EH), or the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) has been assigned to each rationale. A time frame for the delivery of each of the tasks has been set up (UK Government 2009a).

The tasks of the action plan and their underlying rationales and strategic objectives can be clustered around four key areas of action: First, creating an awareness for quality of place, e.g. within the central government, local governments and civic leaders, public agencies, local communities, the general public, etc. Second, providing knowledge, tools, guidance, and support on quality of place, e.g. by encouraging research on quality of place benefits, revising existing indicators, publishing guidance, promoting workshops, etc. Third, encouraging public and community engagement for quality of place, e.g. by developing direct participation processes, ownership and investment models, management and maintenance schemes, etc. Fourth, implementing quality of place principles and objectives in practice, e.g. by reviewing and revising existing planning policies and processes, streamlining expertise, developing, testing, and implementing new standards, etc. Table 1 provides an overview of the different strategic objectives, rationales, and "next steps to deliver action".

Strategic objective	Rationale	Next steps to deliver action
1 Strengthen leadership on quality of place at the national and regional level	1.1 Bolstering the role of ministerial design champions	• agreeing with ministerial design champions on responsibilities and approaches and providing necessary support on delivering quality of place
	1.2 Embedding quality of place objectives and targets in departmental strategic objectives	• identifying ways how policies to improve quality of place can be integrated in future departmental strategic objectives (DSOs) and disseminated across other departments where appropriate
	1.3 Ensuring Regional Development Agencies (RDAs) work to improve quality of place	• helping RDAs to find best ways to promote high quality of places • ensuring cooperation between the HCA and RDAs
	1.4 Publishing a statement of the Government's vision for the historic environment in England	• publishing cross-departmental heritage statement in co-operation with English Heritage
2 Encourage local civic leaders and local government to prioritise quality of place	2.1 Developing better ways of assessing quality of place	• reviewing, amending and streamlining existing indicators and metrics • developing clearer and more effective parameters in cooperation with local governments and other bodies such as HCA, CABE and EH
	2.2 Ensuring that quality of place is reflected in the Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA)	• integrating quality of place indicators into CAA and ensuring that any change regarding quality of place is illustrated in CAA guidelines
	2.3 Working with local authorities to achieve high quality development	• Setting up programmes to identify how local agencies can cooperate to deliver high quality places in efficient and cost-effective ways
	2.4 Improving support and training on quality of place for civic leaders	• Ensuring training and support for civic leaders on how to prioritise and deliver quality of place
	2.5 Establishing an award scheme for high quality places	• streamlining existing awards and linking them to quality of place • dedicating an award on new quality of place indicators that are developed

Strategic objective	Rationale	Next steps to deliver action
3 Ensure relevant government policy, guidance and standards consistently promote quality of place and are user-friendly	3.1 Developing new planning policy on green space and green infrastructure	• publishing, promoting, and disseminating new planning policy which reflects the key role of green space and infrastructure
	3.2 Developing new planning policy on the historic environment	• publishing new planning policy statement on the historic environment with a focus on how heritage can contribute to creating quality places
	3.3 Extending the *Manual for Streets*	• extending principles in *Manual for Streets* from lightly trafficked residential streets to other streets • producing, promoting, and disseminating new guidance
	3.4 Developing an integrated set of standards for homes and neighbourhoods	• embedding quality of place objectives into the HCAs Design and Sustainability Strategy • developing new quality standards on housing and the public realm in co-operation with CABE and English Heritage and providing user-friendly guidance on how the standards could be applied in practice
4 Put the public and community at the centre of place-shaping	4.1 Encouraging public involvement in shaping the vision for the area and the design of individual schemes	• supporting a variety of programmes strengthening the influence and involvement of local people, groups, and communities
	4.2 Ensuring the citizens and service users are engaged in the design and development of public buildings	• stimulating co-operation between Government and organisations such as CABE or English Heritage to develop, test, and implement methods that encourage public engagement
	4.3 Encouraging community involvement in ownership and managing the upkeep of the public realm and community facilities	• enabling communities to take ownership of public assets and helping them develop the necessary skills needed to manage and maintain them • supporting investments from the Community Builders Fund which contribute to delivering quality of place objectives • supporting communities to improve and manage public spaces, and to engage with the local historic environment with the help of organisations such as CABE and English Heritage
	4.4 Promoting public engagement in creating new homes and neighbourhoods	• embedding community engagement within HCA projects • providing guidance on how to involve local people in regeneration and development processes

Strategic objective	Rationale	Next steps to deliver action
5 Ensure all development for which central government is directly responsible is built to high design and sustainability standards and promotes quality of place	5.1 Applying a design threshold to all public building programmes	• developing, testing, and implementing a design threshold for public building programmes
	5.2 Ensuring publicly funded homes and neighbourhoods meet high standards of design and construction	• embedding quality of place objectives into Design and Sustainability Strategy • co-operating with HCA, CABE and EH to get maximum advice for schemes to be funded
	5.3 Attaching conditions to the disposal of public land to ensure high quality development	• assessing existing policy to improve high-quality development on public land
	5.4 Strengthening adherence to the Common Minimum Standards (CMS)	• reviewing, updating, and promoting CMS throughout the wider public sector
	5.5 Updating and strengthening adherence to the Protocol for the Care of the Government Historic Estate	• encouraging the widespread adoption of the Protocol in co-operation with English Heritage
	5.6 Setting up or expanding public sector enabling teams to support first-time and infrequent clients in capital programmes	• developing a Client Support Action Plan to identify needs of public sector clients in co-operation with CABE
6 Encourage higher standards of market-led development	6.1 Encourage local authorities to set clear quality of place ambitions in their local planning framework	• providing workshops and training programmes on place-making for local authorities • providing guidance on how to use the historic environment for quality of place objectives in local planning frameworks
	6.2 Encouraging stronger joint working early in the development process	• developing new proposals for pre-application discussions between local authorities and developers • improving Planning Performance Agreements ensuring that they promote quality of place
	6.3 Developing and promoting the business case for investing in achieving quality of place	• encouraging research focusing on links between quality of place and social and economic benefits
7 Strengthen quality of place skills, knowledge and capacity	7.1 Strengthening advisory support on design quality for local authorities, the wider public sector and developers	• strengthening regional advisory support provided by HCA, CABE and EH • providing new guidance how to operate design review panels
	7.2 Encouraging local authorities to share planning, design, conservation and related expertise	• developing 'shared services' models with local authorities to make most efficient use of specialist expertise, staff, and shared resources • introducing peer review programmes for local authorities
	7.3 Ensuring that councillors on planning committees have the skills and support they need	• updating and improving training offer and guidance to councillors on quality of place principles

Table 1: Strategic objectives, rationales, and "next steps to deliver action" as proposed by (UK Government 2009a)

3.2 Baukultur (Germany)

During the last ten years, *Baukultur* (building culture) - a concept related to the quality of the built environment - has become subject of national, regional, and local political discussion in Germany. Following ideological exploitation by Nazi propaganda between 1933 and 1945, the term *Baukultur* had not been used in political discussion of the 1950s and 1960s. In the late 1970s, it reappeared as an attempt to reconnect formerly joined disciplines being torn apart by processes associated with division of labour (Durth and Sigel 2009: 10), and in reaction to Modernist urban planning and the correlated dissatisfaction with the built environment. Following the Global Conference on the Urban Future, Urban 21, the German parliament (*Deutscher Bundestag*) asked the federal government (*Bundesregierung*) to strengthen the position of German cities in terms of attractiveness, quality of life, sustainability, physical and social development, innovation, competitiveness, and traffic infrastructure. In addition, the government was asked to commence a public discussion on current functions and meanings of architecture (Deutscher Bundestag 2000: 5). Subsequently, the "*Initiative Architektur und Baukultur*", a programme to stimulate and focus the public discussion on quality of planning and construction in Germany, was launched (Deutscher Bundestag 2002: 2). In 2003, the German parliament asked to set up the *Stiftung Baukultur*, a public trust which became formally established in 2007 to promote a positive public awareness for *Baukultur*, and to increase the competitiveness of German architecture and the construction industries (Deutscher Bundestag 2006: 5).

3.2.1 Defining Baukultur

In 2002, the German Ministry for traffic, construction, and housing (BMVBW) issued a first status report on *Baukultur* as an attempt to define the concept, to discuss influencing factors, and to develop methods of measuring. The report identifies four qualities of *Baukultur*: First, the design and appearance of the built environment and its integration in space; second, the use of the built environment; third, its ecological, social, and economic sustainability, and fourth, the operational processes during tendering and award procedures and construction (BMVBW 2001: 12). The consideration of *Baukultur* as a subject of research (BBR 2002; Wiegandt 2002, 2003) led to the integration of the concept into a number of research and development programmes (BBR 2004; Haller and Rietdorf 2003a, 2003b). Research on *Baukultur* has been considered trans-disciplinary (Durth 2006), and a number of different research projects related to *Baukultur* have been carried out such as a study on the interplay of arts and architecture in federal public buildings (Kunze and Schmidt 2004), or a research project on regional design differentiations of the built environment in Germany (Brzenczek and Wiegandt 2007, 2009).

3.2.2 Current tendencies

While initial approaches encouraged a theoretical and methodological discussion on quality of the built environment (BMVBW 2001), current notions of *Baukultur* seem to have deviated from that objective. Government publications following the first status report have mainly focussed on best practice case studies (BMVBS 2007a) and discussions related to planning and design practice (BMVBW 2005; BMVBS 2007b) without necessarily encouraging new theoretical or empirical research on *Baukultur*. Due to the politically motivated focus on public awareness and economic competitiveness, initial intentions to encourage interdisciplinary research projects between the social and the spatial sciences (BMVBW 2001: 47) have not been realised so far. Public bodies such as the *Stiftung Baukultur*[1] or the *Länderinitiative StadtBauKultur*[2] in Northrhine-Westfalia concentrate mainly on PR campaigns, presentations, networking events, public discussions, exhibitions, etc. Their publications rarely include theoretical or methodological aspects related to *Baukultur*, and their internet representations do not provide independent platforms or links[3] to research-related matters. The first status report on *Baukultur* provides a list of general suggestions for action not only for the federal government, public bodies, and local governments, but also for private developers, professional bodies, construction businesses, schools, universities, etc. (BMVBW 2001: 46–55). Some proposals have been put into action so far, such as the creation of the *Stiftung Baukultur*. However, the list of suggestions does not provide a detailed or time-bound action plan such as the one provided by 'World Class

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[1] http://www.bundesstiftung-baukultur.de

[2] http://www.stadtbaukultur-nrw.de/stadtbaukultur/index.html

[3] for example to the website of the German Federal Institute for Research on Building, Urban Affairs and Spatial Development (BBSR) related to *Baukultur*:
http://www.bbsr.bund.de/nn_459826/BBSR/DE/Bundesinstitut/I/ReferatI7/ReferatI7__node.html

Places' (see chapter 3.1.4). The lack of time-bound goals makes it difficult to assess if and how suggestions have been realised so far.

3.3 World Class Places and Baukultur in Comparison

The strategic approaches incorporated in the two concepts, 'World Class Places' and *Baukultur*, have – in broad outline – two important elements in common: First, they intend to improve quality of place. Baukultur does not explicitly mention 'quality of place', and refers instead to the 'built environment'. However, both concepts focus on the way physical characteristics of place are planned, designed, developed, and maintained (BMVBW 2001: 13; UK Government 2009b: 11). In both concepts, the built environment is understood as the private and the public realm including buildings as much as public and green spaces. Second, in both approaches quality of place - or the quality of the built environment respectively - are understood as affecting everybody's quality of life (BMVBW 2001: 14; UK Government 2009b: 11). They emphasise that quality of place requires the engagement of local people and communities (UK Government 2009b: 7), and that improving the quality of the built environment is a societal responsibility even if the production itself requires specialist knowledge linked to disciplines such as architecture, planning, structural engineering, landscape design, or arts (BMVBW 2001: 13).

3.3.1   Defining and measuring quality of place

The methodological approaches of how quality of place, or respectively the quality of the built environment, could be defined or measured are different in the two strategic concepts. 'World class places' provides an approach which focuses on the status quo of a particular spatial situation typified by the four elements of quality of space (see chapter 3.1.1). The state and treatment of these four elements determine quality of place. For example, in order to achieve good quality of place, the element "design and upkeep of buildings and spaces" should be "well designed and maintained" whereas "well" is understood as durable, inclusive, functional, sustainable, pedestrian-centred, regular maintained, etc. (UK Government 2009b: 13). *Baukultur*, on the other hand, does not focus on a particular spatial situation. The four qualities of *Baukultur* provide a rather generic framework to measure quality which can be applied to a variety of different spatial situations - quality influencing factors have not been explicitly defined. The reason for that might be linked to the particular open-ended attitude assigned to *Baukultur*: "*Baukultur* does not describe a predetermined goal to be accomplished at a particular occasion, but the continuous process of adopting and handling the built environment"[4] (BMVBW 2001: 14). This is a crucial difference to 'World Class Places' which provides a very explicit set of indicators defining quality of place. *Baukultur*, on the other hand, suggests a broad framework for measuring the quality of the built environment, but without defining any explicit set of indicators. It remains therefore remarkably vague.

3.3.2   The consideration of research outcomes

Concepts suggested in 'World Class Places' are predominantly based on research outcomes (see chapter 3.1). The authors pay a lot of attention to non-expert perceptions of place. National survey data (e.g. UK Government 2007a; UK Government 2008) have been used to evaluate design and maintenance insufficiencies. This is a considerable bottom-up approach valuing people's individual perceptions of place in the same way as expertise provided by organisations such as CABE, English Heritage, or university-related studies. Concepts of *Baukultur* show - at least in the beginning - intentions to develop research-based frameworks to define and measure the quality of the built environment (BMVBW 2001: 47). Research programmes have been developed and carried out (see chapter 3.2.1). However, in contrast to 'World Class Places', there has not been any systematic way to pool research outcomes, to disseminate knowledge, or to develop research-based recommendations on quality of place. In addition, there is an obvious lack of information to encourage bottom-up approaches, for example regarding the question how local people and local communities perceive quality of place, or how socio-economic processes influence the built environment.

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[4] Original quote: "Baukultur beschreibt kein feststehendes, einmal erreichbares Ziel, sondern den andauernden Prozess der Aneignung von und des Umgangs mit gebauter Umwelt" (author's translation from the German)

3.3.3   Political implementation

Quality of place must be considered a long-term goal. Aspirations for improving quality of place and the quality of the built environment require long term strategies supported not only by one particular political party or one particular social group but by the society as a whole. However, political reality is often more complex, and campaigns for improving quality of place depend on political support and financial backup. In the case of *Baukultur*, concerns about the quality of the built environment have been uttered by various political actors. The creation of a public trust not directly dependent on the good will of one particular government has been a long and sometimes controversially discussed political process. *Baukultur* – as a strategy for improving the quality of the built environment - has proved to survive a number of political, social, and economic changes in Germany during the last ten years. 'World Class Places', on the other hand, has got a far more difficult stand. Initiated by the last government, it incorporates various social and economic ideas associated with Labour politics. Therefore, it is likely to be changed if not abolished by the new Conservative-Liberal government despite its fundamental importance beyond political boundaries.

4   CONCLUSION

The above discussion has highlighted a number of positive and negative aspects of two different strategic approaches for improving quality of place. Both concepts, 'World Class Places' and *Baukultur*, follow the assumption that quality of place has an effect on everybody's quality of life. It is this very aspect which creates the complexity and multi-dimensionality of the discussion: Dealing with place is not merely a specialist matter; it concerns everybody, and everybody needs to be considered. However, *Baukultur* has a perceptible focus on the production and operation of the built environment addressing a rather selective group of experts and practitioners. There is a noticeable lack of extensive and accessible data on people's perceptions of place, for example based on national public surveys. And, there is the evident need to connect *Baukultur* to interdisciplinary research. 'World Class Places', on the other hand, makes those links. Although concentrating on physical aspects of place in the same way as *Baukultur* does, 'World Class Places' considers the impact of subjective and emotional perceptions connected to a "sense of place" (UK Government 2009b: 13), a concept widely discussed in geography (Vogelpohl 2008: 71), but rather neglected by the planning and urban design disciplines (Arefi and Triantafillou 2005). It also draws profoundly on research results to support its concerns.

The two strategies propose different ways of how to define and measure quality of place. The German approach provides - with its definition of four qualities of Baukultur (see chapter 3.2.1) - a generic, but flexible framework to measure the quality of the built environment. It could be used for various spatial structures including buildings and public spaces, and it seems flexible enough to be extended, further developed, alternated over time, etc. What it lacks, however, is further specification. Without specification and methodical foundation it remains extremely vague. There have not been any government publications providing a reflective focus on how the four qualities of *Baukultur* could be further developed, specified or tested. The given focus on public relations and economic competitiveness is politically comprehensible, but it cannot replace a reflective theoretical, methodical and empirical discussion. For the *Stiftung Baukultur*, it would be worthwhile considering providing a platform for this kind of dialogue. 'World Class Places', on the other hand, is very specific in the way it identifies the four elements of quality of space, and in the way it gives detailed suggestions for further action (see chapter 3.1.4). However, compared to *Baukultur*, the identified factors and the proposed action plan seem - at least in parts - overly prescriptive offering rather static solutions to a complex, ever-changing and highly heterogeneous subject. It seems almost that the flexibility of the German framework combined with specific researched-based contents of the British concept could eventually level the individual deficiencies of both approaches.

The two strategies show that long-term strategies with great socio-economic importance such as the improvement of quality of place need frameworks which work independently from short-term political goals and party policies. In that sense, *Baukultur* seems to have – at least at the moment – a more steady future than 'World Class Places'. Some hope remains that the new government would recognise that improving quality of place requires long-term achievements beyond political boundaries. However, political stability and durability are no guarantee for excellent results. After more than ten years of *Baukultur* in Germany, some English lessons could still be learned.

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