

# SMALL-SCALE PROJECTS AND THEIR POTENTIAL FOR URBAN REGENERATION: EXPERIENCES FROM EASTERN GERMANY

CHRISTINA GÖTZ<sup>1</sup>

IAN COOPER<sup>2</sup>

KRASSIMIRA PASKALEVA-SHAPIRA<sup>3</sup>

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**ABSTRACT:** *The notion that urban living is composed of multiple, interacting aspects instead of only depending on the condition of buildings is widely known. However, once urban renewal is considered, talk automatically turns to large-scale rebuilding projects. To date, there has been little knowledge exchange about projects that take place on the local level, tackling the socio-cultural dimension of urban life. While not destroying, but transforming, what already exists into something socially valuable, such projects open up a set of opportunities for the urban community. This paper draws upon German case studies to propose a definition for such projects and to investigate their potential for urban regeneration.*

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Discussing urban regeneration and urban development in Germany after the reunification in 1989-90 usually immediately leads to a discussion about large-scale regeneration projects. This is not without reason, as by the end of the 1980s, and after 1989, both parts of the country were confronted with a high demand for housing. In West Germany, this demand was caused by high immigration rates from Eastern European countries (Harlander, 1998), while in Eastern Germany, people sought a better quality of housing in the unified country, after having lived in homes affected by technical deficiencies (Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, 1992) for years.

Although the situation in the former GDR Laender was very serious, the German state responded promptly to the challenges in urban development and regeneration. In

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1 Karlsruhe Institute of Technology, Institute for Technology Assessment and Systems Analysis, Karlsruhe, Germany, e-mail: christina.goetz@kit.edu

2 Eclipse Research Consultants, Cambridge, United Kingdom, e-mail: icooper@eclipseresearch.co.uk

3 University of Manchester, Manchester, United Kingdom, e-mail: k.paskaleva@mbs.ac.uk and Karlsruhe Institute of Technology, Institute for Technology Assessment and Systems Analysis, Karlsruhe, Germany, e-mail: krassimira.paskaleva@kit.edu

1991, the former GDR Laender were incorporated in the *National Urban Development and Regeneration Programme* [*Städtebauförderung des Bundes und der Länder*] in order to adjust the living conditions in both parts of the reunified country to a similar level (Göddecke-Stellmann & Wagener, 2010). Nevertheless, East-West migration and high vacancy rates, especially regarding the large prefabricated housing areas, could not have been prevented, and the 21st century began with many open questions about how to deal with this situation. Therefore, in 2000, the Federal Ministry of Transport, Building and Urban Development initiated the foundation of a committee for *Structural Changes in the Housing Sector in the States of the Former East Germany* [*Wohnungswirtschaftlicher Strukturwandel in den neuen Bundesländern*] in order to investigate the extent of housing vacancy in Eastern Germany, and to explore suitable solutions. The commission asserted that 13% of the housing stocks (approximately one million apartments) were affected by a loss of residents, and recommended – among other measures - to establish a demolition programme in order to stabilise the housing market (Pfeiffer, Simons, & Porsch, 2000). This was the start of Germany's largest urban regeneration funding programme *Urban Renewal East* [*Stadtumbau Ost*], which was officially launched in 2002, and drew many pictures of massive large-scale, urban regeneration measures. While the impact of these measures are well-known – 300,000 residential apartments being demolished (BMVBS, 2012) – there is little knowledge about urban regeneration activities on the local or neighbourhood scale; despite the fact that another German funding program, *The Socially Integrative City* [*Soziale Stadt*], supported projects of this type. This article addresses such projects that focus on the micro-level of cities, or in other words, projects that focus on the small-scale level.

Although there is no consistent definition about what a 'small-scale project' is, or has to be, this paper draws its results from the research carried out within the European project called *ReNewTown – New Post-Socialist City: Competitive and Attractive* (ReNewTown, 2011). Within this project, it became apparent that urban regeneration in Germany, as well as in other Central European countries, is manifold. The definition employed is experientially based - grounded in the research conducted within the *ReNewTown* project (see also Götz, Paskaleva, & Cooper, 2012).

The term 'small-scale projects' is used here for projects having the following characteristics: projects that are enacted on the local level of a city district or a neighbourhood and are often aimed at enhancing the social and cultural life of local residents. Small-scale projects are carried out by a variety of local actors such as local institutions, social workers or other engaged individuals and residents. Small-scale projects often result from small-scale investments, but this is not invariably so. Indeed, the costs of small-scale projects can differ in many ways - for instance depending on country-specific financial differences or the amount of work carried out by volunteers. Often, the total amount of money is difficult to assess, as many small-scale projects are implemented in several stages. Some projects are under constant development and improvement. Therefore, the objectives of small-scale projects can be implemented locally, in one way or another, with a higher or a lower amount of money. This is, for example, the case in Germany regarding projects that aim to enhance the quality of places between blocks of flats to create attractive meeting

points for local residents. The costs for such project initiatives may differ widely, but the idea of enhancing a place between blocks of flats in order to bring local people together remains the same [see, for instance, many of the projects listed in the website databases called *Werkstatt-Stadt* (BBSR, 2013a) and *Soziale Stadt* (BVBS, 2006)]. In contrast, large housing regeneration projects (for instance demolition projects) cannot be carried out for small amounts of money. Such projects always require high investments.

Being clear about the lack of a general definition, this paper will nevertheless focus on small-scale projects. It will be argued that during the EU project *ReNewTown* it became apparent that such projects have an impact on urban regeneration, especially when respecting the locality and neighbourhood as a specific area for regeneration activities. Talking about this, the paper is structured as follows: The theoretical part in section 2 describes the socio-cultural dimension of urban living, a dimension where most small-scale projects are focused; section 2.2 then describes the *Socially Integrative City* [*Soziale Stadt*] programme in order to show that, in Germany, urban regeneration focuses on both small and large scale projects. Unfortunately, the funding for this program was cut immensely in 2011 – not because of the lack of impact of small-scale projects, but rather in the course of the national budgetary procedures. In section 2.3, the European transnational cooperation project *ReNewTown. New post-socialist city: Competitive and attractive* is outlined as the baseline for the present research on small-scale projects in Eastern Germany, and the carrying out of case studies. Section 3.1 describes the methodology that was used to identify case study examples of small-scale urban regeneration projects in Germany. Section 3.2 then follows with a discussion of the case study and section 3.3 closes with lessons learnt about small-scale urban regeneration projects, their potential and limitations. In the end, section 4 offers overall conclusions about the potential of small-scale urban regeneration projects, whether stand-alone or as part of large scale regeneration measures.

## 2. SMALL-SCALE PROJECTS IN URBAN REGENERATION: REINFORCING THE SOCIO-CULTURAL DIMENSION OF URBAN LIVING

### 2.1. The Socio-Cultural Dimension in Urban Living and Regeneration

Urban living does not only depend on the physical form of houses or city structures. However, discussion of urban regeneration programs often turns to large-scale projects that renovate the physical infrastructure of an urban settlement. However, as the German sociologist Hartmut Häußermann (2001) pointed out, there are a lot of “[...] urban problems and conflicts that cannot be explained by referring to the bad condition of houses and apartments [...]” (p. 147). Instead, many problems arise, because individuals or groups become segregated and separated from the rest of the urban society. Segregation, here, refers to the unequal distribution of living places among different social groups (Häußermann & Siebel, 2001). Consequently, it is often associated with social exclusion, which means that some people become excluded from the rest of the wider society and the average living standards (Häußermann, 2001). With this negative connotation, segregation

became a key concept in urban sociology, and was highly discussed by the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. However, as the roots of urban sociology show, segregation is not a revolutionary new concept. On the contrary, Robert Ezra Park, a member of the famous Chicago School of Sociology at the beginning of 1900, regarded segregation as a characteristic of the city that does not necessarily have to be a negative attribute (see for instance Park, 1968). He defined the city as a “[...] mosaic of little worlds which touch but not interpenetrate” (Park, Burgess, & MacKenzie, 1925, p. 40). To him, segregation constitutes the natural structure of the city as “[t]he city is, in fact, a constellation of natural areas, each with its own characteristic milieu, and each performing its specific function in the urban economy as a whole” (Park, 1968, p. 79). So segregation - or the ‘natural areas’ (Park, 1968) in *which* the city is segregated - has an integrative function as it bundles people who have the same moral order. These areas provide – somehow – the framework in which we live. In the mid-1920s, the Chicago School developed baseline theories for urban sociology using this approach. Later, researchers also emphasised the fact that segregation also has positive functions. According to Boal (1987), for example, segregation contributes to “[...] the preservation of particular ways of life and bases for action in the wider society [...]” (p. 103). It offers “[...] environments supportive of ethnic entrepreneurship” (Boal, 1998, p. 95).

Segregation can thus be seen as a two-sided coin - segregated areas can provide room, space and a sense of belonging to the people living there, while, at the same time, pose the risk of social exclusion and marginalising people. The ambivalence inherent in the concept can, of course, only be resolved in particular cases where the area under scrutiny is deeply analysed. However, in general, sudden events, such as the unification of the two German states in 1989-90, can devitalise city districts and weaken their integrative functions. In such cases, immediate reaction is required in order to stop the increasing risk for segregation and social exclusion. From an integrated point of view, segregated and socially excluded areas are not just ‘poor.’ Instead, segregation and social exclusion may also occur, leading to processes - the destabilisation of the labour market, the exclusion from political or welfare institutions or the stigmatization parts of the population because of cultural differences (see also Häußermann, 2001).

Similar to (urban) living in general, Häußermann (2001) suggested considering social exclusion as being composed of more than just one dimension. Instead, there are four dimensions: economic, institutional, cultural and social. When considering measures to reduce exclusion, these four dimensions are particularly relevant. However, this paper will primarily focus on the last two of these dimensions, the social and the cultural ones, subsumed under a single descriptor - the socio-cultural dimension. This is done for a reason - when analyzing small-scale urban regeneration projects according to the definition in section 1, it soon becomes clear that this project type predominantly focuses on the socio-cultural dimension of urban living. Within this project type, urban regeneration is often understood as stopping the on-going processes of segregation and social exclusion by providing certain benefits to the local community, which focus on the social and cultural site of urban life. Thereby, the socio-cultural dimension of urban living cannot be seen as a static condition, nor can it, therefore, be reinforced solely through physical changes. Just as social isolation cannot be solved by building a bridge from an

excluded urban district to the wider society, tolerance and cultural acceptance cannot be inculcated by 'just' putting people with different backgrounds together. Instead, several social processes have to be brought into play for these characteristics to evolve. The socio-cultural dimension of urban living is dynamic, an interplay between a wide range of factors such as having a feeling of identity, knowing about and being accepted for one's own culture and heritage, having access to leisure, arts and sports, and being included in a specific community, without this leading to exclusion from other ones or from the greater society. Accordingly, constructing a program for re-integrating an excluded (or as it is often called 'deprived') district can only be developed together with the local people; as they are the carriers of culture, heritage and identity. The reinforcement of the socio-cultural dimension of district living is also dependant on their own actions (Häußermann, 2000). However, this does not mean that local people should be left alone with their problems. As Holt-Jensen (2000) points out, referring to the closing conference of the European *ELSES - Evaluation of Local Socio-Economic Strategies in Disadvantaged Urban Areas* project, inhabitants living in districts affected by social exclusion often feel disempowered as they "[...] are increasingly treated as clients and not as participants and stakeholders in local decision making" (p. 282). Therefore, "[...] empowerment and transfer of responsibility to the residents seems to be of importance" (Holt-Jensen, 2000, p. 288).

Reactivating the socio-cultural dimension does not mean simply reconstituting former relationships, practices and formally established everyday routines. It is, rather, about dealing with the found situation in a new way by giving new meanings to what already exists. Sperber, Moritz, & Hetze, (2007), referencing the *Phenomenology of the Social World* by Alfred Schütz (Schütz, 1972), suggested that structural changes in urban regions have made former meanings inconsistent and less reliable. Therefore, the creation and implementation of new meanings can be regarded as an innovation (Sperber et al., 2007). Reinforcement of the socio-cultural dimension of urban living is about creating possibilities for local people - the carriers of the socio-cultural capital - to be a part of the development process to bring back a feeling of identity, acceptance and social inclusion, for them.

These points are often considered by small-scale projects. They do not only focus on the social and cultural measures in the sense of providing social or cultural services at the end of a project implementation. They often involve local people from the beginning in order to let the project develop as a 'peoples' project' - a project from and for local people.

## **2.2. The Socially Integrative City Programme in Germany: A Funding Programme for Small-Scale Projects**

In 1999, the German state started a funding programme called *Socially Integrative City* [*Soziale Stadt*] to stop on-going processes of social-spatial segregation and the fragmentation of the city. In many cases – sometimes earlier, sometimes later – the programme accompanied physical urban regeneration activities carried out within the funding programme *Urban Renewal East* [*Stadtumbau Ost*]. However, in comparison to

the latter, the *Socially Integrative City* [Soziale Stadt] programme's strategy was aimed at addressing urban challenges on the local level through the participation of local actors and governance procedures. Hence, the program tackled not only the stabilisation of the housing market and the physical living conditions, but acted on a much broader scale of supporting and enhancing various fields of urban living, ranging from education and employment to health care, social integration, district culture, and overall district image (BVBS, 2008b). Overall, most of the programme's action fields can be linked to the socio-cultural dimension of urban living and many small-scale projects were carried out under its umbrella.

The program utilised two instruments: a funding scheme to support projects in previously selected city districts named as *districts with special development needs* [Stadtteile mit besonderem Entwicklungsbedarf] and a nation-wide competition in order to award single projects which fulfilled the following criteria – bundling of various resources mainly regarding the actors involved, participation of persons concerned, long-term sustainability, and amount of financial effort and social benefit (Geschäftsstelle des Wettbewerbs “Preis Soziale Stadt”, n.d.). By 2012, hundreds of projects had been realised in over 600 municipalities (BMVBS, 2013) and more than 60 initiatives received the award (Geschäftsstelle des Wettbewerbs “Preis Soziale Stadt”, n.d.).

As already mentioned in section 1, the programme's budget was cut severely due to general savings in the federal budget in 2011. The budget cut was all the more surprising since it was mainly directed at non-construction projects, thus excluding predominantly small-scale projects intended to enhance the social and cultural life in the city district from programme funding. The cut was done despite a wide range of various actors - from politics, civil society, the economy, or from other public or private institutions (foundations, NGOs, educational institutions etc.) – who argued that socio-spatial integration continued to be very important field of urban regeneration (Franke, 2011). Furthermore, the budget cut happened only three years after a status report, produced in 2008, confirmed the programme to have produced positive impacts. The report contained an evaluation of the already fulfilled objectives and existing challenges for projects targeting the socio-cultural dimension. In detail, the socio-cultural infrastructure, the quality of living together, the district image and the possibilities for local people to participate and interact with each other, and other stakeholders, could have been improved (BMVBS, 2008b). Therewith, many small-scale projects were also rated as successful. The results were again reflected in a 2011 published study on the expected consequences of the programme's budget cut (Franke, 2011). In this study, the quality of living together, a positive change in the attitude towards life and an increased pro-activeness of local residents were named as effects of projects acting on the socio-cultural level within the *Socially Integrative City*.

Thus, many small-scale projects within the *Socially Integrative City* programme have emerged as playing an important role in enhancing the social and cultural dimension and an important field of action for urban regeneration.

### 2.3. The *ReNewTown* Study Framework: An EU Project for Reinforcing Feelings of Identity, Culture and Social Cohesion

Small-scale projects turned out to be an important field of urban regeneration during research carried out within the European project *ReNewTown*. This project was implemented through the CENTRAL EUROPE Programme and co-financed by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF). Its aim was to start a cross-border knowledge exchange project searching for solutions on urban regeneration in post-socialist cities. The project was running between 2011 and 2014 (*ReNewTown*, 2011).

The *ReNewTown* partnership consisted of eight project partners from Germany, Poland, Slovenia, Czech Republic and Slovakia. It offered a platform not only for research, but for exchange between various actors such as municipalities, cultural institutions, regional development agencies and scientific institutions. Moreover, *ReNewTown* intended not only to exchange, but to directly implement, knowledge into pilot actions during its project lifetime. The pilot actions in the project pursued to transform:

- a post-industrial building into a centre for cultural activities in Nowa Huta, Poland;
- a public space to a new purpose by offering a meeting place for local residents in the City of Velenje, Slovenia;
- district life by attracting and provoking entrepreneurship and a local business culture in Prague, Czech Republic;
- an old building from the socialist era into a museum for socialist curiosities and a place for cultural and social exchange in Hnusta, Slovakia.

All of the pilot projects can be categorised as small-scale projects although this was not explicitly expressed at the beginning of the project. However, during the project lifetime it became apparent that all pilot actions showed similar characteristics. All were subject to financial restrictions, intended to act within a neighbourhood or locality, wanted to involve local residents from the beginning, and were carried out by engaged individuals having various professional backgrounds. Furthermore, in those pilot projects that aimed to reuse an already existing building structure, it was not intended to completely reconstruct the buildings, but to transform them and lead them to a new purpose.

All pilot action sites were embedded in surrounding blocks of flats residential areas. There, the socialist past is still tangibly present in the bricks and stones, while, on the other hand, intangibles, such as the feeling of identity or a common sense of shared history, which gave rise to the blocks, are in danger of being lost. In *ReNewTown*, the objective was to create more balanced urban districts, and to reduce disparities among local residents, thus avoiding segregation and social exclusion. But this focus on the future does not need to lead to a denial of history – on the contrary, the *ReNewTown* project dealt with both future and past in the form of already existing tangibles and intangibles. The aim was to transform the cultural, social and urban heritage into something new (or with redefined meaning) that could lead to more social cohesion and a stronger common sense of identity. The *ReNewTown* project often focused on the socio-cultural dimension of urban living taking

into account the carriers of this dimension, the local people, in order to not only provide them with improvements in housing quality – whose importance should not be denied – but to give them a new sense of belonging.

### 3. SMALL-SCALE PROJECTS AND THEIR IMPACT FOR URBAN REGENERATION

#### 3.1. Methodology of the Case Study Research

With its focus on international exchange of knowledge and experience in order to enhance post-socialist urban districts, the *ReNewTown* project started with research on good practice initiatives. In five countries, good examples of urban regeneration in post-socialist cities were identified and analysed. In Germany, the Institute for Technology Assessment and Systems Analysis (ITAS), part of the Karlsruhe Institute of Technology (KIT) reviewed projects mainly undertaken in Eastern Germany. Information about good practice in Germany was gained from:

- the database of the national urban renewal funding programme *Urban Renewal East* (Leibniz-Institut, 2004-2013);
- the database of the Federal and States funding programme *Socially Integrative City* for cities with indicated urban and social development needs (BMVBS, 2006);
- a database called *Workshop City [Werkstatt Stadt]* provided by the Federal Ministry of Transport, Building and Urban Development (BBSR, 2013a);
- a database for urban renewal projects in Berlin that were part of the programme *Urban Renewal East* (Senatsverwaltung für Stadtentwicklung).

In addition, information was also taken from interviews with neighbourhood management offices, urban planners and project managers in Berlin, Cottbus and Leipzig who had been involved in projects funded by *Urban Renewal East* or the *Socially Integrative City* programme.

In order to be appropriate for consideration by the *ReNewTown* project, examples had to meet at least one of its stated objectives (see Table 1 below).

Table 1: *ReNewTown* Project Objectives

Provision of new local cultural and social programmes and events
Improving conditions and quality of public spaces to improve quality of life of local residents and the community
Support for the development of small business operators in the locality
Improving the attractiveness of the architecture of the socialist buildings
Involvement of the local community in events organised in its quarter
New functions for structures from the era of socialism (in 1945 – 1989) that serve improving the well being of the community



However, because a very large number of renewal projects have been conducted in Germany since 1989, a second set of criteria was employed by KIT to filter those surveyed and reported (see Table 2 below).

Table 2: *KIT selection criteria*

Transferability to other countries with regard to the level of the financial effort which was needed for the project implementation (approximately 200.000 € or less),
Exhibition of good governance through a high level of stakeholder involvement beyond urban planners and politicians to include local groups and residents in decision-making
Innovation by adding a new value to the quality of life of local residents or sustainability (social, ecological or economic)

Employment of this second set of criteria led to selection of projects that were feasible on a smaller scale, with lower costs and high stakeholder involvement (Götz, Paskaleva-Shapira, & Cooper, in press). In total, ten projects had been selected in Germany. They were later included in a publicly available database of the *ReNewTown* project (ReNewTown, 2011). Today, the database includes 148 cases from 13 Central European countries and 69 cities targeted at improving the quality of life in urban areas built during a socialist period (ReNewTown, 2013). Not all projects within this database are small-scale projects, but they became of great interest during the project's lifetime, as a lack of international research within this field was uncovered. Therefore, the following section will give insights into three of the ten selected German case studies on small-scale projects. Later on, in section 3.3, lessons learnt on small-scale projects will be presented. The lessons learnt were thereby drawn from the good practice research in Germany and from a public workshop that was carried out in 2012 in Karlsruhe, Germany. This workshop was held with representatives from municipal departments, urban planners, architects, representatives of social institutions and researchers in order to gain more insights into their experience with this type of regeneration projects (Götz, Cooper, & Paskaleva, 2013).

In the following section, three selected case study examples are presented with regard to their location, actors, processes and outcomes. This provides insight into the characteristics of small-scale projects, and sets the basis for the analysis of the potentials of small-scale projects in urban regeneration.

### 3.2. Examples of Small-Scale Urban Regeneration Projects in Germany:

#### *The Cases of A Place for the Marie, Kunstplatte and the Tower Block of Culture*

##### 3.2.1. *A Place for the Marie: A Project in Berlin, District Prenzlauer Berg*

The *A Place for the Marie* (*Ein Platz für die Marie*), today the neighbourhood square, lies within the district Prenzlauer Berg in Berlin, part of the wider district Berlin Pankow. From an architectural point of view, Prenzlauer Berg is characterised by *Gruenderzeit* [*Gründerzeit*] buildings. Due to the lack of interest in this construction method during the GDR regime, the reunification revealed a massive need for the structural

refurbishment of these buildings in many Eastern German cities. Furthermore, by the time of the reunification, the district Prenzlauer Berg suffered from a high level of traffic volume, damaged streets and pathways, and a lack of public spaces (Bezirksamt Pankow von Berlin, 2011). Therefore, it was in 1994 when the district was officially marked as a redevelopment area – an initiative that lasted for 16 years aiming to make living in the area more attractive to residents, especially to families with children (Bezirksamt Pankow von Berlin, 2011). In the scope of this, many urban renewal actions were carried out, often with support of local residents and citizens' associations. The starting point for this engagement happened already in the 1980s, when citizens tried to gain more influence within the district Prenzlauer Berg, and to receive a voice in regard to the GDR state-regulated urban development strategies (Häußermann, Holm, & Zunzer, 2002). With the end of the division in Germany, and the possibility for citizens to become engaged in urban development, many people took the opportunity to get involved in citizens' associations (Häußermann et al., 2002). One of these associations played a crucial role in the following described project about the transformation of a brownfield site into an attractive place for spending leisure time.

Prenzlauer Berg is composed of several neighbourhood areas. It was in 1997, when a brownfield site in the area around Winsstraße - a street, home of around 9.000 people - was converted into a vivid place for people of different ages and backgrounds living there. In detail, this spot was developed as an adventure playground with an open-air lawn and several elements such as a swing, a watercourse, a biotope and a community garden (Wend, 2004). The *A Place for the Marie* project exemplifies the conversion of an area as a community project, where a great diversity of actors was involved. In the beginning, a district office, a citizens association and a regional company, which was delegated to implement urban regeneration measures within in the district, advocated for the conversion of the brownfield site and conducted initial negotiations in order to carry out conversion processes together with local residents (BBSR, 2013b). Afterwards, the conversion concept was elaborated within a multi-stage procedure that started with public relations work and the invitation of residents to a workshop and citizens' jury (S.T.E.R.N Gesellschaft, 2011). At the workshop, lay people and experts, supported by two moderators, exchanged ideas about how to design the area and voted for their preferred conception which was, in the end, accepted by the district authority (Wend, 2004). Later on, the conversion process was implemented with the help of many local residents, school children, local artists and the cooperation of public authorities (BBSR, 2013b). On this occasion, it was, for example, the Federal Employment Office who financed long-term unemployed people (BBSR, 2013b) and their work within the project. Thus, in the end, the project had been realised by bundling together various financial resources with workforce, both provided by public authorities as well as by local residents, initiatives and other interested parties. Still today, there are interested people who aim to keep the idea of this particular conversion strategy alive. So, in 2009, residents founded an association in order to maintain the place in the spirit of the participation process (Freundeskreis Marie e.V., n.d.). Furthermore, at present, sixteen years after the original implementation, the district administration applies for funding in order to enlarge the project with further attractive offers for families and children.

This project was selected as a model for small-scale projects, though it exemplifies the character of this project type. The *Place for the Marie* project fulfills the criteria of acting on the local level. It was carried out with a variety of engaged actors and involved residents from the beginning. Furthermore, the financial costs are not the predominant factor – a similar project could have been carried out with a higher or lower amount of money. What made this project the choice for an example of good practice is its characteristic of making urban regeneration a common matter, a matter that needs the involvement of residents who live nearby. It shows that urban regeneration can tackle the socio-cultural dimension of living, while improving a physical space. Today, the place is even used in wintertime, when it is already dark outside, and serves as a space for various events. In this sense, the *Place for the Marie* added new value to the life of residents who live nearby, as it provides space for the extension of urban living to the outside area.

### **3.2.2. *The Association Kunstplatte e.V.: An Example from the City of Stendal, District Stadtsee***

Stendal was a prosperous, medium-sized city with around 50.000 inhabitants in 1989, but soon lost its industries after the reunification in 1989-90 (*Nachhaltiger Umbau*, 2005). Like in many other German *Laender*, this caused several consequences ranging from economic decline to outward migration and vacant residents' apartments and building blocks. This has also significantly affected the large residential areas, which were built in the 1970s to meet the need of housing for workers working in the industries nearby (*Nachhaltiger Umbau*, 2005). Stendal's district, Stadtsee, can be regarded as typical; it originally provided living space in approximately 10.000 apartments in prefabricated housing blocks (*Nachhaltiger Umbau*, 2005). After losing many residents, the City of Stendal decided to be one of the first in Germany to demolish entire housing blocks (BMVBS, 2012) and to give the district of Stadtsee a new makeover. However, as already described in section 2.1, strategies dedicated to the physical infrastructure of housing blocks cannot solely solve the challenges that arose from the massive transformation processes caused by the reunification. Thus, the aim of the project *Kunstplatte* (Kunstplatte, 2010), which resulted in the foundation of an association for social and cultural offers, was to transform the socio-cultural life within the Stadtsee district over a long-term perspective (GdW, n.d.). The project has aimed to reduce the physical distance between the residential area Stadtsee, in the periphery, and the inner city of Stendal by developing offers for residents from both parts of the city (BMVBS, 2001). Originally, the initiative started as a short-term-project of only week when, in 1998, a local housing association and a local gallery owner carried out an arts-and-culture-week (BMVBS, 2001). Because of the success of this short-term project, and the request of many citizens, the association *Kunstplatte e.V.* was founded on the basis of sponsoring and voluntary work (BMVBS, 2001). The local housing association provided a 400 m<sup>2</sup> large vacant salesroom for the association to settle down in (GdW, n.d.). Since then, *Kunstplatte* has offered social and cultural events of different kinds, for example: dancing courses, theatre programmes, (senior) sports programmes, sewing courses etc. – first with the help of a part-time employee supported by a national job creation programme [*Arbeitsbeschaffungsmaßnahme*], but, since 2003, on the basis of voluntary work and donations (Kunstplatte, 2010). The main aim of the

project *Kunstplatte* is to enhance social integration by delivering skills in regard to arts and culture. Thus, the project is not about passively consuming cultural events, it is about delivering a positive learning experience in order to provoke the development of the self-consciousness of local residents.

Similar to the *Place for the Marie* project, *Kunstplatte* qualifies as a small-scale good practice as it started on the very local level and according to the demand of local residents. Its objective is to enhance the socio-cultural dimension of urban living by actively involving local residents in activities. As already noted in section 2.1, enhancing the socio-cultural dimension of urban living is not only about reconstituting former relationships and conditions. It is also about giving new meanings to the residents' lives. In this sense, the premise of *Kunstplatte e.V.* was transformed from a salesroom, into a place for residents - a place where residents are encouraged to discover personal skills they have perhaps not been aware of before.

### **3.2.3. The 'Tower Block of Culture': An Example from Berlin, District Marzahn**

Today, the area of Berlin Marzahn is part of the district Marzahn-Hellersdorf. Marzahn can be described as a large housing area that provides living space for more than 100.000 people. The Northern part of Marzahn is relatively new, its building process was not completed until the end of the 1980s (Cremer, 2005). This part of the district is predominantly composed by 11-storey high-rise buildings and here, the vacancy rate reached between 17% and 40% percent per building after the reunification (Cremer, 2005). In 1999 the area was appointed to be a city district with a special need of assistance in future development, and was included into the funding programme *Socially Integrative City*. In addition to this, an urban regeneration concept was developed and submitted to a national competition, in the course of the urban regeneration programme *Urban Renewal East*, in order to get start-up financing for improving the physical structure of the building complexes and the housing environment (Schulz, 2004).

The *Tower Block of Culture* project [*Kulturhochhaus Marzahn*], a social and cultural project implemented in 1993, accompanied these massive changes that took place between the end of the 1990s and today. However, the project started before those extensive public funding programmes supported the urban regeneration process, as a response to a survey carried out by the Berlin senate that revealed a lack of space for young people to spend their leisure time.

The resulting *Tower Block of Culture* consists of three single projects. All of them are carried out under the umbrella of an association that was founded in 1990 by children, youths, parents, and social and child care workers. The 'Tower Block of Culture' is led by two social workers with a total amount of 150 percent working time for the project. Until 2014, the project's funding is mainly secured by the *Socially Integrative City* (see also 2.2) In addition, the *Tower Block of Culture* project has a strong cooperative relationship with the local housing association that provides the space needed for the project free of rent. In reverse, the housing company benefits from the project because its aim is to improve the

well being of the inhabitants and to change the image of the district. Besides the positive effects for the inhabitants, it is expected that a change of the district's image could also lead to attracting new residents.

In the basement of the high-rise building, a place for children was created where they are able to play together, to do their homework and take part in organised events. The first floor of the *Tower Block of Culture* accommodates a café that is predominantly run by residents working there voluntarily. It either serves as a meeting place for local people or is used as a space for exhibitions and other events to enhance and improve the cultural life in Berlin Marzahn North-West. The most publicly visible subprojects, guesthouses designed by children, are located in the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> floor of the high-rise building within two apartments. These formally vacant apartments were renovated and designed for foreigners to experience an unusual Berlin city trip and to overcome prejudices about living in a prefabricated housing complex. The idea was to create guest rooms developed within a short-time project in 2004. Local artists were invited to live and work in some of the vacant apartments of the housing block for two weeks. During this project, more and more inhabitants became interested, so that, when it ended, children voiced the idea of transforming a living apartment into guest rooms decorated with self-made artwork. Supported by the two social workers, funds were raised, and brainstorming workshops were held, together with artists and children. At these, a design concept for the apartment rooms was proposed which was later implemented by volunteers, together with the artists. Due to its success and the increase in requests to stay overnight in the *Tower Block of Culture*, a second apartment was designed and opened in 2006. In general, the implementation and operation of the *Tower Block of Culture* and its sub-projects 'children's basement,' 'café' and 'guest apartments' are very much based on voluntary work. The project aims to empower residents and to motivate them to introduce their knowledge into the project. It has served as a place for learning not only hard but also soft skills such as communication and teamwork (BMVBS, 2008a).

Accompanying the massive changes in the district Marzahn that were caused by structural changes and regeneration measures, the *Tower Block of Culture* intended to add a different perspective on urban regeneration. The prefabricated housing block where the *Tower Block of Culture* project is located in was transformed into a creative space without denying its history. Today, the project does not only provide a space for residents to meet, it can be regarded as a real residents-driven project that gives room to residents to fulfill their ideas. Similar to *Kunstplatte e.V.* the project intends to encourage and empower residents to become actively involved in the process of changing the district's negative image into a positive one – both within the residents' community but also with regard to the regional and national scope.

### 3.3. Lessons Learnt

On the basis of the analysis of ten selected small-scale projects in Germany, and results from a workshop on the impact of small-scale projects that was held in June 2012 with experts such as urban planners, architects, municipal representatives and social workers (see also 3.1), two forms of lessons learnt can be distinguished. First of all, those regarding the question of what can be achieved with small-scale projects. Second, there are lessons to be learnt regarding what should be used as success factors for small-scale projects.

On the general level, the lessons learnt can be described as follows: when comparing the ten selected German cases, of which three are exemplified in section 3.2, the main resource has been the inhabitants themselves. Indeed, small-scale projects often begin as small initiatives with little assured resources, whether long-term financing or human inputs. However, it is the participation, motivation and engagement of residents that keep these projects alive. In exchange the projects offer new possibilities for members of the local community to interact with each other and to strengthen ties. Often, small-scale projects aim to convey to members a feeling of being able and welcomed to take part in the development, decision-making and implementation of projects within the own city – a feeling that can somehow be described as the possibility to be valued as a co-designer of the urban environment and one's own neighbourhood.

In this sense, small-scale projects make their contribution against social exclusion and towards the empowerment of the local community. Often they are open for all kinds of residents not only within the neighbourhood but also for outsiders living in other parts of the city or even in a different country, like in the case of the guesthouses within the *Tower Block of Culture* (see section 3.2). In general, these projects extend the residents' living space through creating an inclusive creative space where people are welcomed regardless of their background. In addition, some projects are intended not only to provide room and space for community building and social inclusion, but have as a future focal point an aim to provide skills to inhabitants which they might use in their future private or even professional lives. Hence single skills are not of major importance: instead, such projects are more about giving residents a positive 'learning experience' and a feeling of 'self-confidence' (BMVBS, 2001).

On the implementation level, the success of small-scale projects starts right at the beginning of the project formulation. At the experts' workshop, it became apparent that small-scale projects can be of benefit for the local community if they respond to a local demand that is formulated by people who are connected with the locality. This implies two characteristics: The involvement of local people and the willingness to open the project's design for the 'real' needs of the local community. This focus on the locality can be regarded as strength of small-scale projects as the local level is easily forgotten in times dominated by concerns for globalisation and digitalisation. Still, a major part of our life remains embedded in a particular neighbourhood and "[t]he fact that the effect of spatial distance differs from one person to another, and that distance could mean nothing for one person and everything for another, does not contradict the hypothesis

that spatial distance systematically influences the production and reproduction of social networks” (Andersson, 2001, p. 157). The effect of the neighbourhood or locality can thus be regarded as twofold: small-scale projects offer possibilities for strengthening the local community, while at the same time the local community is able to strengthen the potential of the small-scale projects. As illustrated with the cases described in section 3.2 all three projects started with a basic idea, for example establishing a playground, and ended up with a broader community-driven contextualisation of what needs to be done to meet a greater local interest.

However, whatever the positive effects of small-scale projects on the urban community regarding the socio-cultural dimension of urban living, it should not be denied that they have their limitations. In the course of the *Socially Integrative City* programme, for example, it was intended to build up new governance structures for urban regeneration by carrying out projects that act on the local level and smaller scale. In retrospect, it became clear that this objective was only fulfilled to a limited extent as the establishment of sustaining governance structures takes more time than it was expected at the beginning of the programme (Zimmermann, 2011). Furthermore, small-scale projects are not able to solve the big challenges of our times in regard to societal problems such as poverty or unemployment. Nor are they able to fully encompass all four dimensions of urban regeneration (described in section 2.1) at the same time. However, the community effect of small-scale projects is not to be underestimated, although it has again to be noted that these projects rely very much on the participation of the residents. Participation in urban regeneration is able to encourage both local potential and to support engagement and local democratic processes (Cremer, 2005). However, the line between citizens’ active participation and participation overload is thin. Especially in times when the call for participation in urban development is widespread, the risk of ‘particainment’ (Selle, 2011) exists. Here participation is only used as a catchword in order to receive more attention for the implementation of projects. In both literature and practice, a long list of criteria has been set out for participation in order to provide ‘how-to’ guidance (see also Selle, 2010). However, this cannot replace the high level of reflection that should be shared by the actors involved in the planning and implementation processes of both small- and large-scale urban regeneration projects.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

The discussion in this paper focused on small-scale projects, a type of project that is often forgotten about when talking about urban regeneration. To shed light on this project type, within this paper, a definition was proposed, selection criteria were outlined and insights into the impacts of small-scale projects were presented.

We argued that urban living depends not only on the condition of physical structures, but is also composed of social and cultural factors - such as being included in a community and having the feeling of acceptance for one’s own culture and identity. Ideally, urban regeneration programmes need to respond to this. Small-scale projects are required to act

on the socio-cultural level by being embedded in integrated urban strategies. However, there is a danger in putting too much pressure on small-scale projects by requiring them to be integrated in large urban regeneration policies focusing on new urban governance strategies (however desirable). Small-scale projects have their own intrinsic potential. What might, in the beginning, start with a small idea or a local initiative, could in the end lead to more social inclusion sometimes 'only' on the local level or sometimes also on a greater scale. What is important is to take over a realistic position and to accept that small-scale projects are not suitable for changing the overall future of our cities. Small-scale projects often do not intend to bring about innovations in the sense of our information society. People living in an area that is affected by (socio-) spatial problems are often concerned with very basic problems and challenges, such as a depressed economic situation. The innovation lies within the added value that the small-scale project provides for local inhabitants. In the first instance, small-scale projects do provide 'space,' space in which a feeling of well-being, acceptance and self-worth can be developed starting within the immediate locality. Within this space, there is room for exchanging problems, but also new ideas, so that, in the end, a small-scale project can serve as an 'initial spark' for inhabitants to gain a positive 'inclusion experience.' In this sense, small-scale projects deal with social exclusion in a very traditional way within the particular localities. Indeed, they have impact on the neighbourhood level and on the level of physical closeness when attempting to improve the social and cultural dimension of the everyday urban life.

This discussion should lead to an understanding that urban regeneration is more than renovating building structures or changing city shapes. Small-scale projects do play a role – and in many cases a positive one – in urban regeneration. With the results illustrated in this paper, an impulse should be given to further research activities. What needs to be done, in the future, is to give this type of regeneration projects more attention. Further, future research needs to evaluate the outcomes of small-scale projects in regard to their contribution to the quality of urban living. This will not be an easy task. Friedrichs and Hommerich (2005), for instance, have already discussed the difficulties in assessing the success of social measures in the urban context. Many of their findings can also be transferred to the study of small-scale projects. However, small-scale projects – especially when they are integrated in urban regeneration programmes like, for instance, the *Socially Integrative City* – promise a positive impact on the quality of living for local residents. Research in this direction is overdue.

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