



Built cultural heritage and quality of life in a context of peripheralisation. A case study of ten historic towns at the German–Polish border

Bettina Knoop · Eva Battis-Schinker ·
Robert Knippschild · Sarah Al-Alawi ·
Sławomir Książek

Accepted: 28 April 2023 / Published online: 19 May 2023
© The Author(s) 2023

Abstract This paper assesses the contribution of built cultural heritage to the quality of life in peripheralised small and medium-sized towns (SMTs). While the scientific discourse on peripheralised towns and regions is largely focused on development threats and challenges, this paper highlights heritage as an endogenous resource with the potential to promote a high quality of life in peripheralised towns. A case study covering ten historic towns at the German–Polish border constitutes the basis of the research presented in this paper. Qualitative focus group workshops have been conducted in each town to get detailed insights into the heritage-related quality of life. It appears that under specific conditions, heritage contributes to the quality of life in peripheralised SMTs. This contribution is more pronounced on emotional terms, i.e. regarding meaningful constitutions of place and social cohesion. Practical domains of quality of life related to urban functions or the economy benefit less from the towns’ heritage. It follows that the heritage resources themselves are no warranty for an

enhancement of the quality of life in peripheralised SMTs. Exploiting their potential remains context dependent, and peripheralised SMTs are faced with particular socio-spatial challenges in this regard.

Keywords Small and medium-sized towns (SMTs) · Peripheralisation · Quality of life · Built cultural heritage · Central Europe

Introduction

Point of departure

In the current context of (re-)urbanisation, smaller towns outside the metropolitan areas are facing a series of developmental challenges. The German–Polish border region is no exception in this regard. It features numerous small and medium-sized towns (SMTs) that are both spatially peripheral and affected by societal processes of peripheralisation. Concepts of peripheralisation are relational: They regard the peripheralised places in relation to other, socio-spatially central and economically successful places (Kühn, 2014). It follows that the scientific discourse on the topic is largely focused on development threats and challenges peripheralised towns and regions are faced with. Internal development potentials and endogenous resources of peripheralised towns are barely considered (Görmär & Lang, 2019, p. 488).

B. Knoop (✉) · R. Knippschild · S. Al-Alawi
Technische Universität Dresden (IHI Zittau), Dresden,
Germany
e-mail: bettina.knoop@tu-dresden.de

E. Battis-Schinker · R. Knippschild · S. Al-Alawi
Leibniz-Institute of Ecological Urban and Regional
Development (IOER), Dresden, Germany

S. Książek
Instytut Rozwoju Terytorialnego (IRT), Wrocław, Poland

Built cultural heritage can be such a resource. How does heritage affect the everyday life and development of towns? To approach this question, a comprehensive perspective informed by local development dynamics seems suitable. Accordingly, growth oriented policies and related indicators of success need to be supplemented or even replaced by indicators of quality of life (Schatz, 2010; Wirth et al., 2016).

The bulk of studies on quality of life are only marginally concerned with heritage. This applies in particular to the impact of heritage on the quality of life in peripheralised SMTs (Battis-Schinker et al., 2021, p. 3; Książek et al., 2022). The far-reaching neglect of heritage in studies on quality of life stands in contrast to an increasing number of research pointing at its positive effect on various domains of quality of life (Sanetra-Szeliga, 2022; Sektani et al., 2022). Moreover, unprecedented levels of historic awareness (Brichetti, 2009) and a vast appreciation of heritage amongst Europeans (European Commission, 2017) call for a stronger embeddedness of heritage in concepts of quality of life.

Contribution and approach

Against this background, the paper explores the relation between built cultural heritage and the quality of life in peripheralised towns. It is guided by the following research question: (How) does heritage as an endogenous resource contribute to the quality of life in peripheralised towns?

The project *REVIVAL! — Revitalization of Historic Towns in Lower Silesia and Saxony* has approached this question theoretically and empirically in ten historic towns along the southern German-Polish border. Many of the now peripheralised towns have witnessed periods of wealth from the middle ages to the mid-twentieth century, and have preserved a rich built cultural heritage from various centuries. The transdisciplinary research presented in this paper is centred around a broad qualitative empirical case study. The conceptual background, methodological foundations and results from the case study are presented and discussed below.

Conceptual framework

This section features key scientific concepts behind our research. A schematic illustration of interlinkages

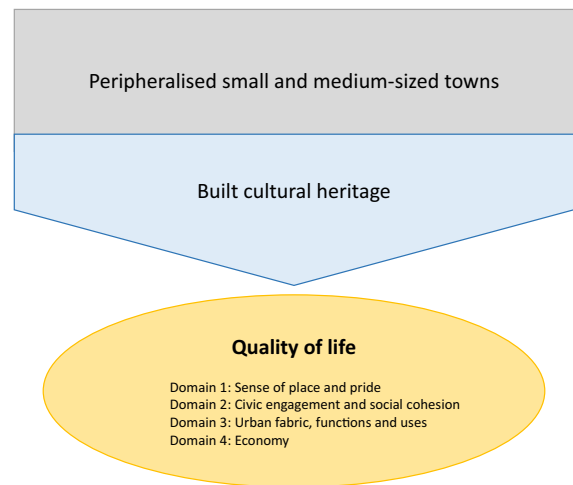


Fig. 1 Schematic illustration of the implemented scientific concepts and interlinkages between them (own elaboration)

between the concepts as we understand them in our research is presented in Fig. 1. Relations between the concepts are presented in detail and substantiated with literature in the upcoming section *Potential contributions of heritage to the quality of life in peripheralised SMTs*.

Small and medium-sized towns

According to official classifications, both in Germany and Poland, a town counts as small or medium-sized if it has less than 100,000 inhabitants. All settlements above that threshold are considered as cities (Bundesinstitut für Bau-, Stadt- und Raumforschung [BBSR], 2021; Statistics Poland, 2018). Both countries are characterised by a polycentric settlement structure (Urban Europe, 2016, 58), with approximately 55% of the population in Germany (BBSR, 2021) and 32% of the population in Poland living in SMTs (Statistics Poland, 2020).

While population size is a primary variable in defining SMTs, it implies ‘the presence of a threshold’ which separates towns from bigger cities, but which is not mirrored in everyday life. Still, everyone has ‘a ‘feeling’ of what constitutes small and medium-sized towns in terms of their physical characteristics, spatial identity, daily routines and life style’ (Servillo, et al. 2016, p. 366). Typical features of towns compared to bigger cities comprise a less dense population, a higher social homogeneity, and

higher degrees of social cohesion (Hannemann, 2002, p. 20; Kolb, 2007, p. 26; Lindner, 2010, p. 42). Functionally, towns serve as socio-cultural, economic and administrative reference points for the surrounding (rural) areas, even more in peripheral contexts with larger towns located far away. While this role has been decreasing with the development of information and communication technologies, towns still constitute intermediaries between the rural and the urban (Fischer, 2010; Fertner et al., 2015, pp. 120–121; Demazière, 2017). Some socio-spatial attributes typically attested to SMTs, such as short travelling distances within the town, a high social proximity or the access to green spaces, are equally related to a high quality of life (Knippschild et al., 2020).

Despite their significance in the global settlement system, SMTs have rarely been an issue in the field of urban studies until a few decades ago. The ‘relative lack of research into small towns’ (Mayer & Knox, 2010, p. 1545) has prompted researchers from geography and related disciplines to intensify their inquiries on towns (Bell & Jayne, 2009; Kilkenny, 2010). While the number of publications on SMTs has increased in recent years, big cities remain the focal point of urban studies, leaving towns comparatively under-researched to this day (BBSR, 2019, p. 488; Heffner, 2016; Porsche, Milbert, & Steinführer, 2019, p. 14; Śleszyński, 2017; Steinführer, et al., 2021, p. 6). Furthermore, research on SMTs remains dominated by individual case studies whose results are hardly generalizable (Steinführer, 2019, p. 19).

Peripheralisation

Many large metropolitan areas in Europe are characterized by processes of centralisation of population, of economic and cultural activities and of political functions (Kotzeva, 2016, pp. 61–69). Simultaneously, smaller towns and cities located off the metropolitan centres are faced with a series of development challenges. Against this background, the concept of peripheralisation has experienced a heyday in urban and regional research (Kühn, 2014; Kühn et al., 2017). The concept stems from the term *periphery*, which is used to describe a place that is physically located off the center(s) of a settlement system. The related term of *peripheralisation* is primarily used to describe social distance: ‘to be peripheralised suggests that one is disadvantaged because of one’s

location at the fringes of society’ (Kühn et al., 2017, p. 259). However, spatial and social distance often coincide in peripheralised places: spatially far off and with a poor infrastructural connection to bigger urban centres, they are characterized by demographic and economic decline, disconnection from superordinate political decision-making, and symbolic devaluation. These processes go along with increasing dependencies from superordinate political and economic structures and decisions (Görmar & Lang, 2019, Kühn & Lang, 2015; Kühn & Weck, 2012).

Concepts of peripheralisation are relational: accordingly, the described negative developments in peripheralised places are regarded in the light of centralisation processes elsewhere.

The bulk of research approaches peripheralised towns from the viewpoint of external threats and structural constraints, limiting their development capacities. By comparison, little research has been done on endogenous resources that contribute to positive developments in the affected places (Görmar & Lang, 2019, p. 488). Subsequently, several claims for an increased focus on endogenous resources and soft location factors beyond market- and growth-oriented indicators have been raised in socio-spatial sciences (Knippschild et al., 2020; Schatz, 2010; Schlappa, 2017; Wirth et al., 2016). Quality of life is such a factor.

Built cultural heritage

Both physical and social living environments have an influence on the quality of life (Pacione, 2003a, p. 19; Pacione, 2003b; Brereton et al., 2008). Cultural heritage sites and buildings are components of the physical environment. Nevertheless, definitions of built heritage commonly go beyond the mere physicality and age of a built structure. They also comprise subjective perceptions and valuations, highlighting the importance of the socio-cultural context in defining heritage. It has been shown that the perception of heritage is crucial for its role in human well-being (Sektani et al., 2022; Interreg Europe, 2020). Its perception equally has an impact on heritage preservation—a process which by itself has a positive influence on the quality of life by fostering community participation and integration (Gražulevičiūtė, 2006).

Generally speaking, people connect with heritage on transactional and/or on emotional terms: ‘Where

the connexion is transactional, heritage is thought about in terms of the practical benefits it brings to individuals or the community. [...] Where the connexion is emotional, heritage [...] has personal meaning to residents' (Heritage Lottery Fund [HLF], 2015, p. 6). Transactional effects of built cultural heritage to the quality of life include economic impulses or the usability of space. Emotional benefits relate to an increased sense of place and to the improvement of social connections.

A recent survey of the European Commission (2017, p. 4) found that more than 70% of Europeans believe in cultural heritage having the potential to improve their quality of life. Similarly, a study from the United Kingdom found that 80% of urban dwellers believe that heritage makes their town or city more liveable (HLF, 2015, p. 5).

Quality of life

The quality of life discussion emerged in the second half of the twentieth century as an alternative approach to concepts of welfare and prosperity, which were dominated by economic variables (Brereton et al., 2011). Contemporary approaches to quality of life usually comprise a range of both objective and subjective indicators which aim at capturing everyday physical and social living environments, as well as at measuring attributes of people themselves (Pacione, 2003a, p. 19; Pacione, 2003b, p. 20). Objective, quantifiable indicators commonly refer to education, access to infrastructures or natural resources, crime rates, and economic data. As particularly economic growth did not result in the expected improvements, the role of subjective estimations is gaining attention in measuring the quality of life (Borys, 2008; Layard, 2010; Noll, 2000; Pacione, 2003a). Subjective estimations can refer to both personal attributes and to the physical and social living environment. They can also relate to quantifiable indicators, such as the economic performance of a place. To a certain degree, the resulting effect of such subjective estimations on the quality of life is independent of the objective conditions (Fernandez-Urbano & Kulic, 2020). The vital role of subjective perceptions has been acknowledged by the World Health Organisation (WHO, 1998).

Scale is another relevant aspect in analyses of quality of life: While macro-level comparative investigations generate broader public attention (e.g.

comparative studies on the quality of life in cities), local investigations are of greater value when it comes to gaining detailed into a situation. The specificity and practical relevance of research findings rises further if specific realms, like the built environment, form the target of a study on quality of life (Pacione, 2003a, p. 22).

Potential contributions of heritage to the quality of life in peripheralised SMTs

Relating heritage to quality of life in peripheralised SMTs: our approach

Before starting the empirical inquiries, quality of life — the main dependent variable of our research — was related to concepts of built cultural heritage in peripheralised SMTs through a theoretical desk review. To get an overview of the extent to which heritage and SMTs are taken into account in studies on quality of life, 25 sample studies were analysed for focal domains and underlying indicators of quality of life (see Appendix for the complete list of studies). The studies from the years 2006–2018 were mostly from Germany or Poland. Only studies that directly or indirectly related to the quality of life in towns and cities have been included in the analysis — most prominently, these studies feature comparative city rankings or investigations on individual settlements. While there seem to be more quality of life studies on larger cities in general, the majority of studies in our sample were focused on SMTs, along with the focus of our research.

Despite culture being an issue in most of the studies, cultural aspects were limited to quantitative data on cultural facilities, and to cultural services such as events and festivities. Built cultural heritage in specific was rarely addressed in the studies. Therefore, in a complimentary literature review, domains of quality of life that particularly relate to built cultural heritage were carved out (see *Conceptual framework*). Only such domains that appeared to be particularly affected by built cultural heritage in SMTs were maintained for the further analysis (see Battis-Schinker et al., 2021 for details on the methodology). These domains served as a basis for the empirical inquiries. They are presented in the following.

Domains of quality of life: Heritage as a potential for peripheralised SMTs

This paper features four domains of heritage related-quality of life that are of particular relevance in peripheralised SMTs. They have been slightly modified in the course of the empirical analysis: five distinct domains have been identified in the desk review. During the empirical analysis and evaluation, it appeared that the initially separate domains on (a) the urban fabric and (b) services and facilities were hardly distinguishable. Thus, these domains have been merged to form the *Domain 3: Urban fabric, functions and uses* as it is presented in this paper.¹

Each of the domains presented in the following is supported by a statement on the *potential* contribution of heritage to a high quality of life (in italics). The statement is thereafter illustrated and substantiated with references to the literature. The statements sketch the *possible optimum effect* a historic built environment can have on the quality of life of its inhabitants. During the empirical inquiries, the statements served as a basis for discussion (see section *Data collection and analysis*).

While the first two domains focus on emotional connexions town dwellers make with built cultural heritage, the last two domains emphasise transactional, i.e. more practical, everyday-life potentials of heritage to contribute to a high quality of life. Notwithstanding the proposed categorisation, intersections of the domains are unavoidable, coinciding with the overarching radiance of built cultural heritage. The numbering of the Domains is random. It merely serves for a better differentiation of the domains from one another.

Domain 1: Sense of place and pride

Built heritage makes the town unique and contributes to the sense of place of its inhabitants. It is a source of pride to the inhabitants.

Heritage adds to the physical uniqueness of towns by offering aesthetic and sensual qualities with a high recognition value (Tweed & Sutherland, 2007).

¹ See Battis-Schinker et al., 2021 for a detailed overview of the initial five domains of quality of life which we started our inquiries with.

Thereby, heritage can contribute to an increased sense of place and local pride, which are positively related to quality of life.

Concepts of sense of place typically encompass both place identity and place attachment (Lengen, 2019, p. 123; Scanell & Gifford, 2009). The centres of historic SMTs are oftentimes mnemonic places with a symbolic value for the local community, conveying information from the past. This reference to cultural history can foster feelings of group identity and belonging (Scanell and Gifford 2009, p. 4). In that sense, built cultural heritage is of particular importance for the sense of place of long-term residents (Wildner, 2012). Furthermore, heritage can serve as a means of self-assurance and self-reflection (Siebel, 2018). In sum, heritage has the potential to strengthen both place identity and place attachment of town dwellers by making places unique and distinguishable (McLean, 2006). The resulting meaningful *sense of place* is of particular importance for the quality of life in a globalised world with high migration flows and seemingly interchangeable locations (Bruns & Munderlein, 2019, p. 113; Lengen, 2019). Moreover, a high sense of place is positively related with civic engagement and social cohesion.

While the sense of place is about internal feelings of identification and rootedness, pride is more outward directed, focusing on the external representation of a place by local actors. Notwithstanding this conceptual differentiation, sense of place and pride are highly interdependent (Sektani et al., 2022). Studies indicate that heritage supports local pride (HLF, 2015; Wallace & Beel, 2021).

Domain 2: Civic engagement and social cohesion

The town's inhabitants actively and jointly engage in the preservation and use of the town's built heritage

Civic engagement and social cohesion are two concepts related to the bonds, associations and networks people form within social contexts. While both concepts are related, civic engagement refers to active efforts and action undertaken to make a difference in a community. Social cohesion describes the degree of integration of a community, as broadly expressed by communication and mutual understanding, common activities and collaboration. Civic engagement and social cohesion are 'powerful drivers affecting

the quality of life among a community's, a city's, or a nation's inhabitants' (Prewitt, et al., 2014, p. 15).

Civic engagement tends to be higher in SMTs than in larger cities (Oliver, 2000). The small size and compact urban structures equally foster social cohesion (Richards & Duif, 2019). Involving people in local affairs is crucial for establishing positive, meaningful bonds with a place. The participation of citizens can compensate for deficiencies in public service provision. This is particularly relevant in peripheralised towns that are struggling with shrinking budgets, while being faced with growing social needs. Civic engagement can have a positive impact on diverse areas of town life, improving both the physical and the social living environment (Fertner et al., 2015; Schlappa, 2017).

Beyond its positive effects on the local community, volunteering in itself is a means of increasing individual happiness and well-being, which are expressions of a high quality of life. Nevertheless, civic engagement is not typically included in inquiries on quality of life (Brereton et al., 2011, p. 213).

Urban heritage conservation in particular offers manifold opportunities for participation. Heritage conveys a shared history and serves as an anchor point for discussions on the past and on the future development of a community. It thus has the potential to stimulate civic engagement and to foster social cohesion (BMUB, 2015, p. 7; Hełpa-Liszkowska, 2013; Kłosek-Kozłowska, 2011; Murzyn-Kupisz et al., 2013; Tweed & Sutherland, 2007).

Domain 3: Urban fabric, functions and uses

The historic centre plays a crucial role in the daily life of the town's inhabitants. It hosts the most important administrative, social, cultural, spiritual and commercial facilities of the town besides offering attractive housing, working and public spaces. The centre and the facilities located within the built heritage are widely used by all age groups of the town's inhabitants for leisure, cultural and educational activities.

The impact of the built environment, including built heritage, on the quality of life of urban dwellers is widely recognized in social and spatial sciences (Pacione, 2003a; WHO, 1998). Heritage is the subject of diverse planning, policy and practice approaches. Improving the design, coherence and functionality of

(historic) spatial configurations has positive impacts on the local communities (Swiss Confederation, 2018; BMUB, 2015; HLF, 2015). Medieval town centres contribute to the functioning of town life by their uniqueness and compactness, which ease orientation and which lead to an improved manageability of spatial structures (Gatzweiler et al., 2012, p. 110; Lindner, 2010, p. 89; Puissant & Lacour, 2011; Richards & Duif, 2019). Hannemann (2002, p. 20) finds that the compactness of small town centres is one reason for their 'central significance for the everyday life of the residents', favouring walkability and social interaction. A socio-spatially integrated urban life at the human scale can only be maintained, though, if the historic built structures are filled with contemporary everyday-life functions and facilities. Accordingly, built heritage only enhances the functionality of historic towns if it hosts diverse social, cultural and commercial facilities, as well as attractive housing, working and public spaces that are being used by different groups of the local population (HLF, 2015).

Domain 4: Economy

The town's built heritage is relevant to the local economy by offering job opportunities in the construction, tourism and event sectors. It helps to attract businesses and investments.

Quantifiable, economic data, such as national or individual income, employment or consumption have a long tradition when it comes to evaluating the success of a place. Economic indicators are typically included in concepts of quality of life, even though their relative importance has been questioned (Layard, 2010, p. 534).

With its contribution to the attractiveness of cities and towns, built cultural heritage constitutes a soft location factor for residents and businesses. Furthermore, heritage can be promoted as a tourist attraction. Cultural heritage contributes to the creation of job opportunities, not only in the tourist and event sector, but also in the building sector, including traditional crafts required for the preservation of the historic built fabric (Broński, 2006; BMUB, 2015; Gołędzinowska, 2015; HLF, 2015; Roders & van Oers, 2011; Tweed & Sutherland, 2007).

The question is *if* and *how* the potentials of built cultural heritage sketched in Domain 1–4 translate into actual contributions to the quality of life in a

context of peripheralisation. The empirical case study presented in the following addresses this question.

Empirical case study

A transdisciplinary approach

The transdisciplinary research forwarded in this paper builds on socio-spatial challenges in historic, peripheralised towns along the southern part of the German-Polish border. It is problem-focused and strives towards a translatability of the research findings into local action. Therefore, a micro-scale level and a particular domain of investigation have been chosen: the historic centres of small and medium-sized towns.

According to Wickson et al. (2006), transdisciplinary research is marked by the following three characteristics: (1) problem focus, (2) evolving methodology and (3) collaboration. The (1) problem focus of the research presented in this paper relates to the quality of life in historic towns at the socio-spatial peripheries of Central Europe. Built cultural heritage is considered as an endogenous resource with the potential to improve the quality of life in such towns.

The (2) methodology was not set at the very beginning of the research process. Exploring the towns in collaboration with local stakeholders led to an increased problem awareness and focus among the research team. The continuous interaction allowed for the implementation of a dynamic, responsive and problem focused methodology that evolved over the course of the project.

The (3) collaboration of researchers and local stakeholders was a crucial element of the research process. All towns participated on a voluntary basis. With the participating three research institutions being based within the greater study area, cooperation between some of the participating towns and research institutions had been going on for years. Most researchers involved in the project thus already had profound insights into socio-spatial development challenges and potentials of towns in the study area at the outset of the project.

The two-year project (2018–2020) behind the study comprised both scientific elements and practical measures to improve the heritage-related quality

of life in the towns. Practical measures comprised ‘action days’, inviting locals and visitors to experience the towns’ historic centres. Each town additionally conceived individual measures adapted to the local needs, e.g. the restoration of built heritage assets.²

Study area and cases

The study area is marked by a mountain range in the south and by plains in the north, with the German-Polish border following the Neisse River. The area is characterised by a dense network of historic SMTs and by an absence of large cities. Many of the towns were established as planned settlements during the medieval colonisation of East Central Europe, receiving town privileges between the mid-thirteenth and the early fourteenth century (Murzyn, 2004). Connected by supra-regional trade routes, the area flourished economically from the late middle ages to the sixteenth century. The most significant economies, besides agriculture, were based on trade-related through traffic. Industrialisation and the connexion to the railway in the mid-nineteenth century induced an economic boom and urban expansion of some larger towns. Others barely benefitted from these developments. Nowadays, the study area is marked by processes of peripheralisation, which have been fuelled by the post-socialist economic restructuring in the 1990s. Driven economically by brown coal mining for decades, the region continues to be affected by structural changes related to the phasing out of fossil energy sources. Related to the economic decline, many towns in the area are marked by outmigration, population decline (see Table 1) and symbolic devaluation (Kantor-Pietraga, et al., 2012; Markwardt & Zundel, 2017; Szmytkie, 2016).

The case study comprises ten historic towns located in the German federal State of Saxony (Bautzen, Görlitz, Reichenbach, Zittau), in the Polish Voivodship of Lower Silesia (Bolesławiec, Gryfów Śląski, Kamienna Góra, Chełmsko Śląskie

² Refer to the project website for detailed insights into practical measures and strategic recommendations that have been developed within the project: <http://revival.ioer.eu/>

Table 1 Country and population of the case study towns

Town	Country	Population size 2019	Population dynamics 2011 – 2019 (%)
Bautzen	DE	38,425	–4.27
Bolesławiec	PL	38,872	–3.11
Görlitz	DE	55,980	+3.13
Gryfów Śląski	PL	6,617	–6.21
Kamienna Góra	PL	18,840	–8.33
Chełmsko Śląskie	PL	1,936	–10.25
Lubomierz	PL	2,004	–0.74
Reichenbach	DE	3,671	–5.46
Zittau	DE	25,086	–5.48
Żary	PL	37,304	–4.93
Averages		22,874	–4.57

2019 was chosen as the year of reference for the latest population size as the focus group workshops took place in 2019 and 2020. Sources: Statistisches Bundesamt (Destatis, 2020) for the German towns and Bank Danych Lokalnych (BDL, 2020a) for the Polish towns

2011 was chosen as a reference point for the initial population size as it was the year of the last European census. The census resulted in corrections of population statistics in many cases. Sources: Destatis (2013) and BDL (2020b)

Chełmsko Śląskie is a district within the urban–rural community of Lubawka. The population data has been retrieved from the Municipality of Lubawka

Reichenbach was administratively enlarged in 2014. The population of the new district in 2019 (retrieved from the Municipality of Reichenbach) has been subtracted from the entire town's population in 2019 for a portrayal of the actual population dynamics, without administrative distortions

(Lubawka), Lubomierz) and in the Polish Voivodship of Lubusz (Żary) (see Fig. 2).³ Preconditions for the inclusion of towns in the case study were (a) their location in the study area, (b) having a medieval origin, and (c) having preserved considerable parts of the historic centres dating back to that time (see Fig. 3).

The towns under analysis vary in size, ranging from less than 2,000 inhabitants (Chełmsko Śląskie) to over 56,000 inhabitants (Görlitz). With the exception of Görlitz (slight growth) and Lubomierz (stable), all towns have been shrinking between 2011

³ See <http://revival.ioer.eu/> for details on the study area, on the towns and on project activities.

and 2019. The centres of the participating towns are all formally classified as heritage and protected as historic ensembles. All medieval centres comprise a market square, usually with a central town hall and an adjacent church precinct. With the exception of Reichenbach and (probably) Chełmsko Śląskie, the towns were originally fortified. Parts of the town centres' built fabric were destroyed and rebuilt throughout history. Yet their urban structures were maintained.

Combat during World War II and subsequent vandalism lead to different degrees of damage. After World War II, the German–Polish border was shifted west to cut straight through the region. This resulted in a population exchange in the formerly German towns that were under Polish sovereignty from then on.

Mainstream socialist urban planning approaches led to a far-reaching neglect of the built heritage, sometimes accompanied by significant urban remodelling. In some case study towns, this neglect spurred civic engagement for the preservation of the historic urban fabric since the 1980s (Roos, 2010; Eysymontt, Popp, & Klimek, 2018). In the German towns, the preservation efforts accelerated after reunification in 1990, supported by important public funding schemes. Since the early 2000s, both the Polish and the German towns have been benefitting from European funds.

The towns under analysis are located outside the immediate catchment areas (50 km or more) of the closest large cities, Dresden and Wrocław. Many of them are economically weakened and affected by an ageing population and out-migration. Furthermore, the towns struggle with a loss of functions in their centres, aggravated by recent urban developments such as the construction of shopping facilities or single-family houses on the towns' fringes. These processes pose a risk to the preservation of the built cultural heritage and of the formerly vital town life.

Data collection and analysis

With the aim of obtaining in-depth insights into the heritage-related quality of life, focus group workshops were conducted in each of the case study towns. The domains of quality of life introduced above were put to discussion during these half-day long, guideline-based workshops. The workshops took

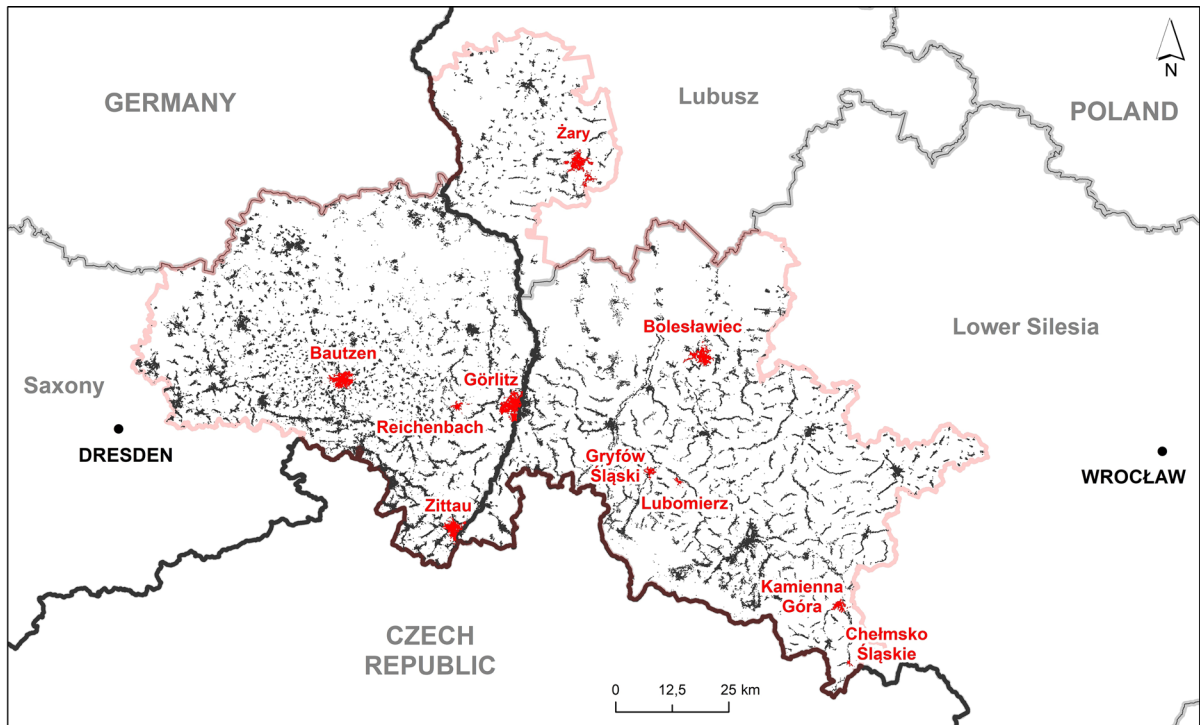


Fig. 2 Study area with case study towns marked in red (own elaboration based on OpenStreetMap)

place between October 2019 and January 2020. The focus group participants (6–12 in each town) were selected by stakeholders from the towns' administrations. The stakeholders were involved throughout the entire transdisciplinary research process. They can be regarded as intermediaries between the research team and the local population. These stakeholders seemed most appropriate to choose the participants from 'their' respective towns when it came to composing the focus groups. The selected focus group participants were to have a certain expertise regarding the towns' societies and development, be it due to professional involvement or due to personal interest and engagement in the towns. Thus, an overarching validity of their perceptions that goes beyond personal opinions can be assumed. While a broad range of professional and socio-demographic backgrounds was aspired for, the focus groups do not represent local societies by composition.

The following characteristics of the 89 participants from the ten focus groups were registered: gender, age, profession, place of growing up, current place of living (divided in historic city centre, other parts

of town or surrounding areas) and duration of residence (see Table 2). The share of female and male participants was nearly equal, with a slight surplus of male participants. The average age of the participants was significantly above the average age of the population at the respective regional level.⁴ While the highest educational achievements were not recorded, the professions of the participants indicate an inclination towards higher qualifications. Only 11 of the 89 worked in non-academic professions. Two thirds of the participants lived within the towns they represented; the rest lived in the towns' immediate hinterland. Only 20% lived directly in the historic centres of the towns. The average duration of residence of the participants in their towns amounted to 41 years. While the high average age and long duration of residence favours the local expertise and knowledge

⁴ The overall average age of all focus group participants amounted to 54 years and was thus more than 7 years above the average age in Saxony/Germany (46,8) and almost 12 years above that in Lower Silesia/Poland (42,2) (Statistisches Landesamt Freistaat Sachsen 2020, 16; Polska w liczbach 2021).



Fig. 3 Impressions from the case study towns

of the participants, it might also be indicative of a rather entrenched perspective on the towns' developments – a perspective that might differ from that of other population groups, such as younger generations or newcomers to the towns. The characteristics of the participants were comparable between the Polish and the German focus groups. Two separate research teams moderated the focus group workshops, one team for the Polish focus groups and one team for the German ones. The discussions took place in the corresponding national language. Notwithstanding, the inquiries followed a coordinated methodology. The research teams were in a steady exchange in the course of the inquiries. Correspondence between them mostly took place in English language.

At the beginning of each workshop, the statements conveying the potentials of built cultural heritage to contribute to a high quality of life were presented (see section *Domains of quality of life*). The participants

were asked to consider the applicability of the potentials in a local context. As subjective estimations are essential in measuring quality of life, the participants were asked for their personal perceptions regarding the potentials.

The crucial content of the ensuing discussions was saved on moderation cards and documented on meta plan tables by the research teams. All assertions were categorised as either positive, negative or neutral, depending on the conveyed effect on the quality of life. The focus groups also ranked the domains of quality of life according to their local applicability.

Following the workshops, the collected data was structured and condensed in the course of a qualitative content analysis by the research teams. The results are summarised in the following section, structured along the domains of quality of life that have been presented in the first part of the paper.

Table 2 Focus group compositions

Town	Focus group participants (selection of characteristics)					
	Total number	<i>From that female</i>	<i>From that male</i>	Professions	Average age	Average duration of residence in town
Bautzen	6	2	4	Business development (2), architect, pensioner, not specified, city developer	58	40
Bolesławiec	7	5	2	Teacher (2), accountant, philologist, civil servant, economist, art historian	57	53
Chełmsko Śląskie	7	3	4	Lawyer, pensioner (2), teacher (2), civil servant, not specified	47	35
Görlitz	11	5	6	Administration employee, head of quality assurance, insurance broker, broker, employee, office worker, banking specialist, active citizen, cultural manager, marketing director, managing director	49	27
Gryfów Śląski	10	4	6	Political scientist, mechanic (3), farmer, administrative assistant (2), librarian, business economist, cultural manager	58	48
Kamienna Góra	9	6	3	technician, teacher, pensioner (2), accountant, employee NGO, economist, engineer, textile specialist	68	53
Lubomierz	10	6	4	civil servant (2), gardener, teacher (2), farmer (2), journalist, business person, physiotherapist	41	22
Reichenbach	12	5	7	engineer (2), mayor, administrative assistant, customs official, artist, cosmetician, baker, self-employed, teacher (2), physiotherapist	60	50
Żary	10	2	8	art manager, civil servant (2), engineer (2), economist, historian, teacher, theatre instructor, not specified	54	46
Zittau	7	3	4	city developer, managing director (2), mayor, town planner, clerk, university lecturer	49	34
Averages	8,9				54	41
Percentages		46%	54%			

Empirical findings: contributions of heritage to the quality of life in the case study towns

The output from the ten focus group workshops has been grouped for the following presentation of results.

Domain 1: Sense of place and pride

Across all towns, identification, as one facet of the sense of place, was described to be primarily rooted in individual historic places or buildings of particular significance. A common example of such a place is the medieval market square. In some cases, the

entire historic urban landscape, including the town centre and its natural surroundings, was referred to as a basis for the sense of place of the inhabitants. Attributes favouring this perception comprise the old town panorama, architectural harmony and aesthetic values, as well as the peacefulness and quietness in the centres, combined with a low level of commercialisation and good access to nature. In the German towns, the awareness for and pride in the built heritage has risen significantly with the intensification of preservation measures before and after reunification. In line with that finding, decay was unanimously negatively connoted (see Fig. 3b and d). Dilapidated historic buildings were even perceived as materialised symbols of socio-economic failure in one of the German towns. In some cases, revitalisation measures provoked criticism, though, mostly because of an overtly artificial character of the concerned buildings and places. Recent real estate developments in the historic centre were perceived to be intrusive by two focus groups. Others pointed at successful compromises between the conservation of the historic urban fabric and its adaptation to contemporary needs. These findings point at the delicate balancing act for the revitalisation process to contribute to the identification of different groups of population in the towns.

Identification with the towns and their heritage further seemed to be affected by the forced resettlements following World War II. The inhabitants of all Polish towns under analysis have been replaced nearly completely, while the German towns were the destination of thousands of refugees. According to the Polish focus groups, the sense of place and of belonging of the inhabitants was consolidating only now, in the third generation after the resettlement. In this context, a reconfiguration of tangible and intangible heritage assets was reported, resulting from an ‘import’ of traditions and their subsequent interfusion with local material heritage assets.

Comparisons of local (small) town life with urban dynamics in bigger cities were occasionally mentioned to result in feelings of inferiority among the local communities. Related to that, specifically younger generations were reported to display low levels of place attachment, which is an indicator for a weak sense of place in this age group.

Generally, the identificatory potential of the built cultural heritage seemed to emanate less from the

historic buildings and places themselves, but from the appropriation of that heritage as well as from its retrofitting to contemporary uses. Against this background, built cultural heritage seems to have a specific potential for catalysing meaningful constitutions of place. On similar lines, pride was more apparent in the well-preserved towns that have managed to meaningfully position their built heritage within contemporary schemes of use.

Several aspects beyond the built cultural heritage were mentioned as important drivers for the sense of place and pride. They range from the picturesque landscape surrounding the towns, across their economic situation to their external image. Heritage is thus only one element in a complex set of factors relevant to the sense of place and pride of the inhabitants from the case study towns.

It needs to be stressed that the heritage-related sense of place is not always positively connoted, and that instead of pride, the researchers also encountered feelings of inferiority and repudiation. Changing such negative socio-spatial narratives remains challenging, particularly in a context of peripheralisation. Despite certain limitations, the assumption of built cultural heritage being a driver for the sense of place and pride of inhabitants in historic, peripheral towns was generally confirmed in the case study. On average, sense of place and pride were ranked to be the most relevant domain of all regarding the actual benefits heritage brings to the quality of life.

Domain 2: Civic engagement and social cohesion

Active engagement of the local communities was reported in 9 of the 10 case study towns. It needs to be added that most focus groups did not strictly distinguish between civic engagement in general and between an involvement with built cultural heritage in particular. In two towns, however, heritage was emphasized explicitly as a starting point for various civic initiatives in the late twentieth century. This engagement has decreased in recent years, though. Only one focus group reported far-reaching grievances in civic engagement.

While the existence of diverse opportunities for participation was highlighted in 5 of the 10 towns, these opportunities only occasionally seemed to be paired with a corresponding degree of engagement amongst the local population. Accordingly,

prevailing sensations of a fragility of civic engagement could be discerned in most workshops. These sensations stemmed from a lack of overarching engagement and from the related failure to integrate vast parts of the local population: in half of the towns, civic engagement was centred around a few engaged individuals only, who acted as role models, capable of carrying others along with their actions. A point that was problematised in most German towns was that the engaged individuals or initiatives were poorly interlinked, limiting their impact and possibilities for action. This weak integration of initiatives might be indicative of low levels of social cohesion in the towns. Adding to that, six focus groups considered the institutional framework for participation in their towns to be deficient. Hampering aspects included regulations (in particular monument protection), the problematic communication with local authorities, a lack of administrative transparency and inadequate financial support. The importance of an encouraging atmosphere for civic participation became particularly evident in one Polish town: inflexible and poorly communicated urban development decisions, paired with a lack of financial resources and a destructive relationship between inhabitants and local authorities, impeded civic engagement in the town. Contrarily, in one of the German towns, formalised offers for civic participation in the urban development process were paired with numerous active associations and initiatives focussed on the built cultural heritage and its preservation.

In line with their low degree of place attachment (Domain 1), younger generations were reported to lag behind in engagement in five focus groups. Only one – comparably young – focus group explicitly mentioned younger generations to be the driver of several heritage-related civic initiatives in town. In this case, older generations were criticised for their inflexible attitudes towards heritage-related innovations and new urban developments.

Overall, the potential of heritage to bolster civic engagement and social cohesion is not fully exploited in the towns under analysis. While a certain degree of engagement was discernible in all but one town, in most cases, this engagement is limited to individual initiatives or even to individual persons. What seems to be lacking is a collaboration of the fragmented approaches, flanked by supportive

public agencies. An increased degree of engagement and collaboration would potentially also bolster social cohesion in the towns under analysis. Notwithstanding, the focus groups ranked civic engagement and social cohesion to be the second most important heritage-related contribution to a high quality of life in their towns.

Domain 3: Urban fabric, functions and uses

Almost all focus groups agreed that the compact and unique urban structures in their towns eased navigation and orientation, an advantage that was further enhanced by historic landmarks (e.g. churches). Three focus groups highlighted the positive effect of the small town size on the accessibility of facilities and services—at least if they were still concentrated in the centres. The former town fortifications, now equipped with green spaces or walkways, were reported to improve the quality of life in two cases. Despite such positive examples, several focus groups pointed at a devaluation of the quality of stay in the historic centre due to a lack of attractive public spaces, including a lack of outdoor furniture. A particular lack of meeting places for young people was identified. This is in line with the observed low degrees of place attachment and engagement of younger generations.

Some focus groups mentioned bureaucratic and legal barriers, including noise protection regulations, to prevent them from the appropriation of historic public spaces. On the other hand, noise pollution was reported to hamper the quality of life of residents living in the historic centres. Further conflicts of use in the historic centres mostly concerned socio-cultural vs. commercial activities.

Concerns about the accessibility of the historic urban fabric were equally raised: the poor condition of sidewalks and/or the prevalence of historic cobblestone pavements were described as physical barriers to certain user groups (e.g. seniors, bikers) in 3 of the 4 German towns. Furthermore, the intellectual accessibility of the historic urban fabric to a broad public was repeatedly problematised: improvements in signage and interpretation facilities were proposed as a means to overcome this deficiency. A limited physical and intellectual accessibility of the historic building stock usually coincided with a poor state of conservation and with severely restricted financial scopes of the towns. Socio-economic issues of accessibility

were raised in one German town: here, both the gastronomic and retail offer in the medieval centre were criticised for being too high-end. The offer was perceived to be focused on tourists to such an extent that some local inhabitants even avoided the historic centre.

All towns struggled with a loss of functions in their historic centres due to population shrinkage, suburbanisation and a shift towards e-commerce. Nevertheless, most centres still hosted a variety of administrative, social, cultural, spiritual and commercial facilities, but at different degrees and with divergent development dynamics. The larger towns all provided gastronomic and retail facilities. In the smaller towns with less than 20,000 inhabitants, shortcomings in the gastronomic and in the retail offer were reported, along with a lack of culture and leisure amenities. Two focus groups problematised undeveloped fallow land in their centres. Others, on the contrary, pointed to a lack of building plots for new developments and for the integration of contemporary urban functions.

Most focus groups problematised a general lack of liveliness in the towns. While occasional festivities and events took place in every historic centre, particularly the winter months seemed to be characterised by a pronounced lack of vitality. In the extreme case of one Polish town, the market square was even judged to be ‘dying’. In a minority of towns, however, the centres have regained their position as vivid and multifunctional spaces in recent years. One focus group wished for a reduction in car traffic volume around the market square to boost its quality of stay. Others requested even more car parking spaces in the historic centres, however. The focus on car transport that became evident in the focus groups can at least partly be explained by deficient public transport infrastructures, which have been criticised repeatedly.

Housing was provided in all of the historic centres. With the exception of one German town, the living conditions were described as positive. The central location and resulting walkability, comfort and aesthetic value of the historic scenery were highlighted as particular advantages of living in the centre. Shortcomings concerned a lack of greenery, a lack of daylight in the houses, an outdatedness of floor plans, comparatively high rents and maintenance costs, increased noise exposure during weekends or events and, sometimes, a dilapidated building stock in the immediate surroundings.

Overall, the historic centres’ potential to contribute to a high quality of life by its specific spatial structures and related social functions and uses was far from being fully exploited in the towns under analysis. Nevertheless, the historic centres were still perceived as the towns’ actual centres in all cases. This illustrates the maintenance of their identificatory virtue (Domain 1), even in case of contemporary functional shortcomings. In comparison of all domains, the focus groups considered the historic urban fabric and its current functions and uses to be of intermediate relevance for the quality of life in the towns.

Domain 4: Perceived economic conditions

Likewise the other three domains, the economic effects of heritage on the quality of life are taken into account from the subjective perspective of town dwellers in the present study. While economic variables are commonly measured by objective economic indicators, this approach is in line with studies pointing out the independent effect of *perceived* economic conditions on the subjective well-being of people (Fernandez-Urbano & Kulic, 2020). The title of Domain 4 has been changed to *Perceived economic conditions* in the presentation of the findings for that reason.

Most focus groups estimated the economic benefits derived from the towns’ built cultural heritage to be very limited. In five towns, mostly the larger ones, the participants acknowledged the importance of heritage for the local tourism sector. Nevertheless, this sector was not considered to be specifically beneficial for the local labour markets, neither with regard to the quantity nor to the quality of jobs created. In the remaining five towns, mostly the smaller ones, tourism infrastructures were regarded to be deficient, and tourism hardly seemed to play a role for the local economy.

Focus groups from both countries reported that heritage-related economic activities contributed to buffering the (industrial) job losses that came with post-socialist restructuring after 1990. Jobs in the traditional craftsmanships as well as in the construction and restoration sector were highlighted in this context. These sectors were even estimated to suffer from a lack of skilled workers. Several focus groups related this lack of workforce to the outmigration of younger generations. The situation seems paradoxical

considering the relatively high unemployment rates which characterise the entire region.

In two of the larger towns, a positive influence of the built heritage on the attractiveness for investors was reported. The (mostly smaller) towns with higher vacancy rates and prevalent signs of decay seemed to be unattractive for investors, though. Furthermore, it was noted that investments sometimes failed due to bureaucratic or legal barriers, often related to monument protection. In one smaller town, the historic built fabric was even considered ‘more burden than pleasure’.

Altogether, it became evident that the heritage itself was barely regarded as a direct driver for the towns’ economies. If at all, it supplemented prevailing economic dynamics, reinforcing positive or negative developments. As heritage was not perceived to significantly improve the economic conditions in the towns, the respective effect on the quality of life can be considered as marginal, too.

Discussion

The cross-town analysis provides insights into the heritage-related quality of life in peripheralised SMTs along the southern German-Polish border. Socio-spatial logics influencing the interplay of heritage and quality of life were discerned. The contributions and limitations of the analysis will be discussed below.

The focus group discussions revealed that the contribution of heritage to the quality of life differs across the four domains under analysis. It is more pronounced on emotional terms than on transactional ones. On an emotional level, heritage significantly contributes to the sense of place and pride of the inhabitants (Domain 1). Its effect on meaningful constitutions of place is at least partially decoupled from processes of decline, disconnection and devaluation, as they are at the core of concepts of peripheralisation. It follows that such meaningful, emotional bonds should be considered when rating the success and well-being of a place. They constitute a viable resource for the development of peripheralised towns.

Built cultural heritage furthermore has a share in catalysing civic engagement and social cohesion (Domain 2). However, this potential was only partially exploited in the case study towns. Taking into account that SMTs are typically marked by a high

degree of social integration and of engagement of the local communities (Oliver, 2000; Richards & Duif, 2019), superordinate logics of peripheralisation possibly have a share in this context. The identified transactional benefits heritage can bring to local communities were only partially exploited in the case study towns. The medieval town centres favour the provision of certain urban functions (Domain 3), like unique housing and, in the larger towns, gastronomic and retail facilities. The provision of other functions seemed to be hampered, however, by physical particularities of the historic urban fabric and by restrictions of use. An economic contribution of the heritage was largely refuted by the focus groups (Domain 4). This insight points at superordinate effects of peripheralisation which superimpose the endogenous potentials of heritage to contribute to a high quality of life.

It became evident in the course of the analysis that the link between built heritage resources and the quality of life in a town is neither innate nor causal. On the contrary, the case study emphasizes the diverse, sometimes even ambiguous, relations between heritage and quality of life in historic towns. The contribution of heritage to the quality of life is associated both with superordinate processes of peripheralisation and their local interpretation, as well as with socio-spatial specificities at the local level. In the extreme case, structural depreciation can even reverse the potential of heritage to improve the quality of life, turning the heritage into an additional burden for a town’s development.

Most of the larger towns rate better in the heritage-related quality of life than the smaller ones. This is in line with common findings from research on peripheralisation: while larger towns in the socio-spatial peripheries continue to concentrate inhabitants, economic power and institutions, smaller places are most affected by population losses and a decrease of functions, with negative effects on the quality of life.

The national context only played a marginal role for the heritage-related quality of life in the towns – despite the cultural rupture that came with the population exchange after World War II in all Polish towns under analysis. One exception of this pattern was observed in civic engagement and social cohesion (Domain 2), which was more pronounced in the German than in the Polish towns. This fits into overall lower levels of civic engagement in Poland (Köcher & Haumann, 2018). The contribution of heritage to

the quality of life of younger generations turned out to be comparatively low in all domains under analysis. In a context of peripheralisation, with the outmigration of young, qualified people characterising the affected places anyways, this finding deserves specific attention.

The following methodological limitations might have impacted the presented results: first, the empirical inquiries were undertaken with current inhabitants from the towns and from their immediate hinterland, i.e. with people who chose to live in the region at some point in their life cycle, and who did not reverse this decision. With most towns being marked by negative migration balances, this focus on current inhabitants might skew the results of the analysis towards a more favourable perception of the quality of life in the towns. People who have left the towns are likely to have more negative perceptions. Furthermore, a methodological bias towards older generations in the focus groups may have a share in the rather critical perception of younger generations and their heritage-related quality of life in the towns under analysis.

The transdisciplinary project behind the study took a perspective on heritage as an endogenous resource with the potential to promote a high quality of life in peripheralised towns. This perspective did not seem to be common in the participating towns: narratives of being left behind and feelings of inferiority partially dominate local discourses and self-perceptions, including the built cultural heritage. By encouraging a different perspective, the project aimed at initiating positive changes in peripheralised towns in a transformative sense.

Summary and conclusion

This paper set off to explore the heritage-related quality of life in peripheral(ised), historic SMTs. The research was centred around an empirical case study of ten historic towns along the southern German–Polish border. Stakeholders from each town were actively involved in the transdisciplinary research process. Built cultural heritage was identified as an endogenous resource of the towns with the potential to enhance the quality of life — despite prevailing processes of economic and demographic decline, political disconnection and symbolic devaluation. Four heritage-related domains of quality of life have been

assessed empirically in the towns, namely sense of place and pride; civic engagement and social cohesion; urban fabric, functions and uses; and economy.

The presumed potential of built cultural heritage to contribute to the quality of life in peripheralised SMTs was partially confirmed in the empirical case study. However, not all heritage-related potentials that had been identified in the desk review were equally well exploited in the towns. Accordingly, heritage enfold its potential for a high quality of life more strongly on emotional terms, i.e. regarding the sense of place, pride or social cohesion.

The analysis illustrates that the contribution of heritage to a high quality of life does not rely on the mere existence of heritage assets themselves. Instead, both superordinate socio-spatial structures and dynamics and local specificities and perceptions affect the heritage-related quality of life. More research is needed in order to systematically grasp the logics behind the interplay of heritage and quality of life in peripheralised towns. One step in that direction is a consistent integration of built cultural heritage in studies on quality of life (Książek et al., 2022).

Altogether, built cultural heritage is a resource with diverse potentials to increase the quality of life. Nevertheless, exploiting its potential remains context dependent, and peripheralised SMTs are faced with particular socio-spatial challenges in this regard.

Funding Open Access funding enabled and organized by Projekt DEAL. This work was supported by the European Fund for Regional Development (EFRE) within the program Interreg Poland-Saxony 2014–2020.

Declarations

Conflict of interest The authors have no relevant financial or non-financial interests to disclose.

Ethical approval All procedures performed in studies involving human participants were in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional and/or national research committee and with the declaration on Ethics in Social Science and Humanities issued by the European Commission in 2018. Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

Open Access This article is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License, which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons licence, and indicate if changes were made. The

images or other third party material in this article are included in the article's Creative Commons licence, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the article's Creative Commons licence and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder. To view a copy of this licence, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>.

References

- Bandarin, F., & van Oers, R. (Eds.). (2015). *Reconnecting the city: The historic urban landscape approach and the future of urban heritage*. Wiley Blackwell.
- Bank Danych Lokalnych (BDL). (2020a). *Population by sex and age group. 31.12.2011*. <https://bdl.stat.gov.pl/BDL/dane/podgrup/tablica>
- Bank Danych Lokalnych (BDL). (2020b). *Population by sex and age group. 31.12.2019*. <https://bdl.stat.gov.pl/BDL/dane/podgrup/tablica>
- Battis-Schinker, E., Al-Alawi, S., Knippschild, R., Gmur, K., Książek, S., Kukuła, M., & Belof, M. (2021). Towards quality of life indicators for historic urban landscapes – Insight into a German–Polish research project. *Environmental and Sustainability Indicators*, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.indic.2020.100094>
- Bell, D., & Jayne, M. (2009). Small cities? Towards a research agenda. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 33(3), 683–699. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2427.2009.00886.x>
- Borys, T. (2008). Propozycja siedmiu typologii jakości życia. A proposal for seven typologies of quality of life. In T. Borys (Ed.), *Gospodarka a Środowisko: Zarządzanie środowiskiem - jakość życia - Zarządzanie jakością. Economy and environment. Environmental management - quality of life - quality management* (pp. 125–134). Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Ekonomicznego we Wrocławiu.
- Brereton, F., Clinch, J. P., & Ferreira, S. (2008). Happiness, geography and the environment. *Ecological Economics*, 65, 386–396. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecolecon.2007.07.008>
- Brereton, F., Bullock, C., Clinch, J. P., & Scott, M. (2011). Rural change and individual well-being. *European Urban and Regional Studies*, 18(2), 203–227. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0969776411399346>
- Brichetti, K. (2009). *Die Paradoxie des postmodernen Historismus. Stadumbau und städtebauliche Denkmalpflege vom 19. bis zum 21. Jahrhundert am Beispiel von Berlin und Beirut*. The paradoxie of postmodern historicism. Urban regeneration and urban monument protection from the 19th to the 21st century at the example of Berlin and Beirut. Schiler.
- Broński, K. (2006). Rola dziedzictwa kulturowego w rozwoju lokalnym. Doświadczenie polskie doby transformacji (po 1989 r.). The role of cultural heritage in local development. The Polish experience of transformation (after 1989). *Zeszyty Naukowe Akademii Ekonomicznej W Krakowie*, 706, 7–26.
- Bruns, D., & Münderlein, D. (2019). Internationale Konzepte zur Erklärung von Mensch-Ort-Beziehungen. International concepts for explaining person-place relationships. In M. Hülz, O. Kühne, & F. Weber (Eds.), *Heimat: Ein vielfältiges Konstrukt* (pp. 99–119). Springer VS.
- Statistisches Bundesamt (Destatis). (2013). *Gemeindeverzeichnis-Sonderveröffentlichung: Gebietsstand: 31.12.2011 (Jahr)*. Municipal directory special publication: Territory status: 31.12.2011 (year). Wiesbaden. <https://www.destatis.de/DE/Themen/Laender-Regionen/Regionales/Gemeindeverzeichnis/Administrativ/zensus-gemeinden.html>
- Statistisches Bundesamt (Destatis). (2020). *Städte (Alle Gemeinden mit Stadtrecht) nach Fläche, Bevölkerung und Bevölkerungsdichte am 31.12.2019*. Cities (all municipalities with city rights) by area, population and population density on 31.12.2019]. Wiesbaden. <https://www.destatis.de/DE/Themen/Laender-Regionen/Regionales/Gemeindeverzeichnis/Administrativ/05-staedte.html?sessionid=45F3E5E0F6BF5636090259B975F951B5.live711>
- Bundesinstitut für Bau-, Stadt- und Raumforschung (BBSR). (2019). *Zukunft Kleinstadt: Potenziale von Kleinstädten in peripheren Lagen*. Potentials of small towns in peripheral locations. https://www.bbsr.bund.de/BBSR/DE/veroeffentlichungen/sonderveroeffentlichungen/2019/zukunft-kleinstadt-dl.pdf?sessionid=BD890C1AF4356D8646B6E9791D72169F.live11313?__blob=publicationFile&v=1
- Bundesinstitut für Bau-, Stadt- und Raumforschung (BBSR). (2021). *Laufende Stadtbeobachtung – Raumabgrenzungen*. Ongoing urban monitoring - spatial delineations. <https://www.bbsr.bund.de/BBSR/DE/forschung/raumbcobachtung/Raumabgrenzungen/deutschland/gemeinden/StadtGemeindetyp/StadtGemeindetyp.html>
- Bundesministerium für Umwelt, Naturschutz, Bau und Reaktorsicherheit (BMUB). (2015). *Städtebaulicher Denkmalschutz. Positionspapier der Expertengruppe 2015. Das Erbe der Städte – eine Chance für die Zukunft*. Urban heritage protection. Position paper of the expert group 2015. The heritage of cities - an opportunity for the future. https://www.staedtebaufoerderung.info/SharedDocs/downloads/DE/ProgrammeVor2020/Denkmalerschutz/memorandum_positionspapier_2015.pdf?__blob=publicationFile&v=2
- European Commission. (2017). *Cultural heritage: Report* (Special Eurobarometer No. 466). https://institute.eib.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/Eurobarometer_en_final.pdf
- Eysymontt, R., Popp, D., & Klimek, S. (2018). *Städte Niederschlesiens im Luftbild*. Cities of Lower Silesia in aerial view. Herder-Institut.
- Swiss Confederation. (2018). *Davos Declaration 2018*. Davos. https://davosdeclaration2018.ch/media/Brochure_Declaration-de-Davos-2018_WEB_2.pdf
- de Noronha, T., & Vaz, E. (2020). Theoretical foundations in support of small and medium towns. *Sustainability*, 12(13), 5312. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su12135312>
- Demazière, C. (2017). Small- and medium-sized towns: The ignored challenge of the next decades? *DisP - the Planning Review*, 53(2), 56–57. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02513625.2017.1340699>

- Interreg Europe. (2020). Built Cultural Heritage. Integrating heritage buildings into contemporary society. https://www.interregeurope.eu/sites/default/files/inline/Policy_brief_on_built_cultural_heritage.pdf
- Fernandez-Urbano, R., & Kulic, N. (2020). Requiem for a dream: Perceived economic conditions and subjective well-being in times of prosperity and economic crisis. *Social Indicators Research*, 151, 793–813. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11205-020-02404-w>
- Fertner, C., Groth, N. B., Herslund, L., & Carstensen, T. A. (2015). Small towns resisting urban decay through residential attractiveness. Findings from Denmark. *Geografisk Tidsskrift-Danish Journal of Geography*, 115(2), 119–132. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00167223.2015.1060863>
- Fischer, N. (2010). Mittelstadt und Metropolregion. Medium-sized town and metropolitan area. In B. Schmidt-Lauber (Ed.), *Mittelstadt: Urbanes Leben jenseits der Metropole. Medium-sized town. Urban life beyond the metropolis* (pp. 158–173). Campus Verlag.
- Gatzweiler, H. P., Adam, B., Milbert, A., Pütz, T., Spangenberg, M., Sturm, G., & Walther, A. (2012). Klein- und Mittelstädte in Deutschland - eine Bestandsaufnahme. Small and medium-sized towns in Germany - a stocktaking. *Analysen Bau.Stadt.Raum* (10).
- Ginzarly, M., Houbart, C., & Teller, J. (2019). The Historic Urban Landscape approach to urban management: A systematic review. *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, 25(10), 999–1019. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13527258.2018.1552615>
- Gołędzinowska, A. (2015). *Przekształcenia przestrzeni publicznej miasta średniej wielkości w warunkach gospodarki rynkowej w Polsce*. Transformation of public space in medium sized town in conditions of market economy in Poland. Politechnika Gdańska.
- Görmar, F., & Lang, T. (2019). Acting peripheries: An introduction. *ACME: an International Journal for Critical Geographies*, 18(2), 486–495.
- Gražulevičiūtė, I. (2006). Cultural heritage in the context of sustainable development. *Environmental Research, Engineering & Management*, 37(3), 74–79.
- Hannemann, C. (2002). Die Herausbildung räumlicher Differenzierungen – Kleinstädte in der Stadtforschung. The formation of spatial differentiations - small towns in urban research. In M. Löw (Ed.), *Differenzierungen des Städtischen. Differentiations of the urban* (pp. 265–278). Leske + Budrich.
- Heffner, K. (2016). Obszary wiejskie i małe miasta: Czy lokalne centra są potrzebne współczesnej wsi? Rural areas and small towns: Are local centers needed in today's countryside? *Studia Ekonomiczne. Zeszyty Naukowe Uniwersytetu Ekonomicznego W Katowicach*, 279, 11–24.
- Helpa-Liszkowska, K. (2013). Dziedzictwo kulturowe jako czynnik rozwoju lokalnego. Cultural heritage as a factor in local development. *Studia Oeconomica Posnaniensia*, 1(6), 5–18.
- Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF). (2015). *20 Years in 12 Places: Improving heritage, improving places, improving lives*. https://www.heritagefund.org.uk/sites/default/files/media/attachments/final_4-hlf_20-years_12-places-access_0.pdf
- Kantor-Pietraga, I., Krzysztofik, R., Runge, J., & Spórna, T. (2014). Problemy zarządzania miastem kurczącym się na przykładzie Bytomia. Problems of managing a shrinking city on the example of Bytom. In T. Markowski & D. Stawasz (Eds.), *Spółeczna odpowiedzialność w procesach zarządzania funkcjonalnymi obszarami miejskimi. Social responsibility in the management processes of functional urban areas* (pp. 162–175). KPZK PAN.
- Kilkenny, M. (2010). Urban/regional economics and rural development. *Journal of Regional Science*, 50(1), 449–470. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9787.2009.00661.x>
- Kłosek-Kozłowska, D. (2017). Dziedzictwo kulturowe miast wobec strategii zrównoważonego rozwoju. Cultural heritage and the strategy of the sustainable development. *Studia KPZK*(142), 293–307.
- Knippschild, R., Rößler, S., & Zöllter, C. (2020). Renaissance of Third-Tier cities through in-migration? *DisP - the Planning Review*, 56(1), 44–52. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02513625.2020.1756630>
- Köcher, R., & Haumann, W. (2018). Engagement in Zahlen. In T. Klie & A. W. Klie (Eds.), *Engagement und Zivilgesellschaft. Engagement in numbers. Engagement and civil society* (pp. 15–105). Springer VS.
- Kolb, A. (2007). Die Kleinstadt auf dem Weg in die Moderne. The small town on the way to modernity. *PRO-REGIO-ONLINE. Zeitschrift Für Den Ländlichen Raum*(4), 12–134.
- Kotzeva, M. (Ed.) (2016). *Urban Europe: Statistics on cities, towns and suburbs*. Eurostat. <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/3217494/7596823/KS-01-16-691-EN-N.pdf>
- Książek, S., Belof, M., Maleszka, W., Gmur, K., Kukuła, M., Knippschild, R., Battis-Schinker, E., Knoop, B., & Al-Alawi, S. (2022). Using indicators to evaluate cultural heritage and the quality of life in small and medium-sized towns: The study of 10 towns from the Polish-German borderland. *Sustainability*, 14(3), 1322. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su14031322>
- Kühn, M. (2014). Peripheralization: Theoretical concepts explaining socio-spatial inequalities. *European Planning Studies*, 23(2), 367–378. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09654313.2013.862518>
- Kühn, M., Bernt, M., & Colini, L. (2017). Power, politics and peripheralization: Two eastern German cities. *European Urban and Regional Studies*, 24(3), 258–273. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0969776416637207>
- Kühn, M., & Lang, T. (2017). Metropolisierung und Peripherisierung in Europa – eine Einführung. Metropolisation and peripheralisation in Europe - An introduction. *Europa Regional*(4), 2–14.
- Kühn, M., & Weck, S. (2012). Peripherisierung – Prozesse, Probleme und Strategien in Mittelstädten. Peripheralization - processes, problems and strategies in medium-sized towns. *DisP - the Planning Review*, 48(2), 14–26. Doi: <https://doi.org/10.1080/02513625.2012.721600>
- Layard, R. (2010). Economics. Measuring subjective well-being. *Science*, 327(5965), 534–535. <https://doi.org/10.1126/science.1186315>
- Lengen, C. (2019). Heimat und mentale Gesundheit: Wie place identity unser Heimatgefühl und Wohlbefinden beeinflusst. Heimat and mental health: How place identity influences sense of home and well-being. In M. Hülz, O. Kühne, & F. Weber (Eds.),

- Raumfragen. *Heimat: Ein vielfältiges Konstrukt* (pp. 121–146). Springer VS. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-658-24161-2_7
- Lindner, R. (2010). Maß und Mitte – Middletown Revisited. Measure and mean - middletown revisited. In B. Schmidt-Lauber (Ed.), *Mittelstadt: Urbanes Leben jenseits der Metropole. Medium-sized town. Urban life beyond the metropolis* (pp. 38–51). Campus Verlag.
- Markwardt, G., & Zundel, S. (2017). Strukturwandel in der Lausitz – Eine wissenschaftliche Zwischenbilanz. Structural change in Lusatia – a scientific mid-term evaluation. *ifo Dresden berichtet* 24 (3): 17–22. <http://hdl.handle.net/10419/170224>
- Mayer, H., & Knox, P. (2010). Small-town sustainability: Prospects in the second modernity. *European Planning Studies*, 18(10), 1545–1565. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09654313.2010.504336>
- McLean, F. (2006). Introduction: Heritage and Identity. *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, 12(1), 3–7. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13527250500384431>
- Murzyn, M. (2004). Die Einstellung der lokalen Bevölkerung zum Kulturerbe in einer niederschlesischen Kleinstadt. Das Beispiel Schömburg. The attitude of the local population towards the cultural heritage of a Lower Silesian small town. The example of Schömburg. In A. Langer, *Der Umgang mit dem kulturellen Erbe in Deutschland und Polen im 20. Jahrhundert. Dealing with cultural heritage in Germany and Poland in the 20th century* (pp. 201–223). Instytut Sztuki Polskiej Akademii Nauk.
- Murzyn-Kupisz, M., & Działek, J. (2013). Cultural heritage in building and enhancing social capital. *Journal of Cultural Heritage Management and Sustainable Development*, 3(1), 35–54. <https://doi.org/10.1108/20441261311317392>
- Noll, H.-H. (2000). *Konzepte der Wohlfahrtsentwicklung: Lebensqualität und "neue" Wohlfahrtskonzepte*. Concepts of welfare development. Quality of life and "new" welfare concepts. Wissenschaftszentrum Berlin für Sozialforschung (WZB).
- Okulicz-Kozaryn, A. (2015). *When Place is Too Big: Happy Town and Unhappy Metropolis* [Conference Paper]. 55th Congress of the European Regional Science Association: "World Renaissance: Changing roles for people and places", 25–28 August 2015, Lisbon, Portugal. https://www.econstor.eu/bitstream/10419/124581/1/ERSA2015_00148.pdf
- Oliver, J. E. (2000). City size and civic involvement in metropolitan America. *American Political Science Review*, 94(2), 361–373. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2586017>
- Pacione, M. (2003a). Quality-of-life research in urban geography. *Urban Geography*, 24(4), 314–339. <https://doi.org/10.2747/0272-3638.24.4.314>
- Pacione, M. (2003b). Urban environmental quality and human wellbeing: A social geographical perspective. *Landscape and Urban Planning*, 65(1–2), 19–30. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0169-2046\(02\)00234-7](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0169-2046(02)00234-7)
- Polska w liczbach. (2021). *Województwo dolnośląskie w liczbach. Lower Silesian voivodship in numbers*. <https://www.polskawliczbach.pl/dolnoslaskie>
- Porsche, L., Milbert, A., & Steinführer, A. (2019). Einführung. Introduction. In L. Porsche, A. Steinführer, & M. Sondermann (Eds.), *Kleinstadtforschung in Deutschland: Stand, Perspektiven und Empfehlungen. Small town research in Germany: Status quo, perspectives and recommendations* (pp. 5–15). Akademie für Raumforschung und Landesplanung (ARL).
- Prewitt, K., Mackie, C. D., & Habermann, H. (2014). *Civic engagement and social cohesion: Measuring dimensions of social capital to inform policy*. National Academies Press.
- Puissant, S., & Lacour, C. (2011). Mid-sized French cities and their niche competitiveness. *Cities*, 28(5), 433–443. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cities.2011.05.008>
- Richards, G., & Duif, L. (2018). Small cities with big dreams: Creative placemaking and branding strategies. *Routledge*. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781351201193>
- Roders, A. P., & van Oers, R. (2011). Bridging cultural heritage and sustainable development. *Journal of Cultural Heritage Management and Sustainable Development*, 1(1), 5–14.
- Roos, J. (2010). *Denkmalpflege und Wiederaufbau im Nachkriegspolen: Die Beispiele Stettin und Lublin*. Monument preservation and reconstruction in post-war Poland. The examples of Szczecin and Lublin. Diplomica Verlag.
- Sanetra-Szeliga, J. (2022). Culture and heritage as a means to foster quality of life? The case of Wrocław European capital of culture 2016. *European Planning Studies*, 30(3), 514–533. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09654313.2021.1959724>
- Scannell, L., & Gifford, R. (2010). Defining place attachment: A tripartite organizing framework. *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, 30(1), 1–10. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jenvp.2009.09.006>
- Schatz, L. K. (2010). *What helps or hinders the adoption of "good planning" principles in shrinking cities? A comparison of recent planning exercises in Sudbury, Ontario and Youngstown, Ohio* [University of Waterloo]. [uwaterloo.ca. https://uwaterloo.ca/handle/10012/5199](https://uwaterloo.ca/handle/10012/5199)
- Schlappa, H. (2017). Co-producing the cities of tomorrow: Fostering collaborative action to tackle decline in Europe's shrinking cities. *European Urban and Regional Studies*, 24(2), 162–174. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0969776415621962>
- Schmidt-Lauber, B. (Ed.). (2010). *Mittelstadt: Urbanes Leben jenseits der Metropole*. Campus Verlag.
- United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). (2011). *Recommendation on the Historic Urban Landscape*. <https://whc.unesco.org/uploads/activities/documents/activity-638-98.pdf>
- Sektani, H. H. J., Khayat, M., Mohammadi, M., & Roders, A. P. (2022). Factors linking perceptions of built heritage conservation and subjective wellbeing. *Heritage & Society*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/2159032X.2022.2126225>
- Servillo, L., Atkinson, R., & Hamdouch, A. (2017). Small and medium-sized towns in Europe: Conceptual, methodological and policy issues. *Tijdschrift Voor Economische En Sociale Geografie*, 108(4), 365–379. <https://doi.org/10.1111/tesg.12252>
- Siebel, W. (2018). Die Europäische Stadt: Wandel und Werte – eine europäische Perspektive. The European city: change and values - A European perspective. In *Europäische*

- Stadt: Wandel und Werte.: Sonderheft zum Europäischen Kulturerbejahr 2018. European city: change and values. Special issue for the European Heritage Year 2018* (pp. 45–52). Bundesministerium des Innern, für Bau und Heimat (BMI).
- Śleszyński, P. (2017). Wyznaczenie i typologia miast średnich tracących funkcje społeczno-gospodarcze. Determination and typology of medium-size cities losing their socio-economic functions. *Przegląd Geograficzny*, 89(4), 565–593. <https://doi.org/10.7163/PrzG.2017.4.3>
- Statistics Poland. (2018). *Basic urban statistics 2016*. Warsaw / Poznań. <https://stat.gov.pl/en/topics/other-studies/cities-voivodship/basic-urban-statistics-2016,3,7.html>
- Statistics Poland. (2020). *Demographic yearbook of Poland*. Warsaw. <https://stat.gov.pl/en/topics/statistical-yearbooks/statistical-yearbooks/demographic-yearbook-of-poland-2020,3,14.html>
- Statistisches Landesamt des Freistaates Sachsen. (2020). *Sonderheft: 7. Regionalisierte Bevölkerungsvorausberechnung für den Freistaat Sachsen bis 2035*. Special issue. 7th regionalized population projection for the Free State of Saxony until 2035. https://www.bevoelkerungsmonitor.sachsen.de/download/RBV%20Sachsen/sonderheft_statistik-sachsen_7RBV.pdf
- Steinführer, A., Sondermann M., & Porsche, L. (2021). Kleinstädte als Forschungsgegenstand. Bedeutungen und Zugänge. Small towns as a research subject. Meanings and approaches. In A. Steinführer, L. Porsche & Sondermann, M. (Eds.). (2021). *Forschungsberichte der ARL: Vol. 16. Kompendium Kleinstadtforschung. Compendium of small town research*. ARL - Akademie für Raumentwicklung in der Leibniz-Gemeinschaft.
- Steinführer, A. (2019). Urbanität und Ruralität. Urbanity and rurality. In L. Porsche, A. Steinführer, & M. Sondermann (Eds.), *Kleinstadtforschung in Deutschland: Stand, Perspektiven und Empfehlungen. Small town research in Germany : status quo, perspectives and recommendations* (pp. 17–19). Akademie für Raumforschung und Landesplanung (ARL).
- Szmytkie, R. (2016). Depopulacja zespołów miejskich w sudeckiej części Dolnego Śląska. Depopulation of urban agglomerations in the south part of Lower Silesia. *Konwersatorium Wiedzy o Mieście*, 29(1), 75–83.
- Tweed, C., & Sutherland, M. (2007). Built cultural heritage and sustainable urban development. *Landscape and Urban Planning*, 83(1), 62–69. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.landurbplan.2007.05.008>
- United Nations Environment Programme. (2020). *2020 Global Status Report for Buildings and Construction: Towards a Zero-emission, Efficient and Resilient Buildings and Construction Sector*. https://globalabc.org/sites/default/files/inline-files/2020%20Buildings%20GSR_FULL%20REP.ORT.pdf.
- Wallace, C., & Beel, D. (2021). How can cultural heritage contribute to community development and wellbeing. In M. Cieslik (Ed.), *Researching happiness: Qualitative, biographical and critical perspectives* (pp. 133–154). Bristol University Press.
- Werlen, B. (1993). Gibt es eine Geographie ohne Raum? Zum Verhältnis von traditioneller Geographie und zeitgenössischen Gesellschaften. Human geographies without space? The relationship between traditional geography and late-modern societies. *Erdkunde*, 47(4), 241–255. <https://doi.org/10.3112/erdkunde.1993.04.01>
- Wickson, F., Carew, A., & Russell, A. W. (2006). Transdisciplinary research: Characteristics, quandaries and quality. *Futures*, 38(9), 1046–1059. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.futures.2006.02.011>
- Wildner, K. (2012). Transnationale Urbanität. Transnational urbanity. In F. Eckardt (Ed.), *Handbuch Stadtsoziologie. Handbook urban sociology* (pp. 213–229). Springer VS.
- Wirth, P., Elis, V., Müller, B., & Yamamoto, K. (2016). Peripheralisation of small towns in Germany and Japan: Dealing with economic decline and population loss. *Journal of Rural Studies*, 47, 62–75. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrurstud.2016.07.021>
- World Health Organization (WHO). (2021). *Measuring Quality of Life*. <https://www.who.int/tools/whoqol>

Publisher's Note Springer Nature remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.