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# A "Motor" for the Neighbourhood? Urban Planning and the Challenges of Relocating Cultural Infrastructures

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## Abstract

In the past 40 years, alternative cultural institutions have been established in many Western welfare states to respond locally to the social and urban crises that have arisen in the post-war era. Community centres and workshops for local history and youth offer new opportunities for cultural and social participation and complement the offerings at more traditional cultural infrastructures such as art museums, theatres, and opera houses. Initially borne of grassroots movements that struggled for political recognition and necessary resources in protracted disputes with municipal authorities, these facilities now play important roles in the cultural landscape of many cities. In response to calls for a "democratisation of culture" and social development programmes targeting urban geographical inequalities, these institutions provide accessible and persistent spaces for socialisation, cultural empowerment, and negotiating community concerns. These facilities are often located on brownfields and are material manifestations of socioeconomic change and urban regeneration. Using the relocation of an established socio-cultural centre to a new neighbourhood in the city of Heidelberg, Germany, as an example, we seek to understand the evolving ways political and social relations are formed, negotiated, and challenged through cultural infrastructures. By analysing newspaper coverage, policy documents, and interviews with stakeholders from urban planning, city administration, community work, and resident populations, we map and evaluate shifting planning discourses and forms of embeddedness in the processes of de- and re-localisation. We end by reflecting on more open and nuanced understandings of cultural infrastructures that could generate multiple and diverse outcomes interacting and possibly outbalancing each other.

## Issue

This article is part of the issue "Localizing Social Infrastructures: Welfare, Equity, and Community" edited by Ebba Högström (Blekinge Institute of Technology), Lina Berglund-Snodgrass (Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences), and Maria Fjellfeldt (Dalarna University).

## 1. Introduction: Urban Policies and Cultural Infrastructures

Since the 1960s, urban cultural policy and planning agendas have shifted significantly in terms of rationales, instruments, governance modes, and socio-spatial emphases. Cultural policies reflect political histories; urban, social, and economic challenges; cultural sector specifics; and, increasingly, global discourses (Dubois, 2015). With the growing importance of sustainable development, urban planning is increasingly oriented towards integrated, mixed-use development that prioritises culture alongside ecology, society, and economy (Soini & Birkeland, 2014). This urban policy focus is particularly prominent in the United Nations' New Urban Agenda, which was adopted at the Habitat III conference in 2016

(UNESCO, 2016). The agenda advocates integrating cultural dimensions such as urban cultural heritage, cultural diversity, and cultural practices into urban planning to meet the Sustainable Development Goals. The relevant documents express confidence that considering cultural aspects can help further equity, welfare and shared prosperity, social and economic inclusion, high-quality liveable environments, vibrant public spaces, and sustainable local development (UNESCO, 2021).

A key component of this agenda is the provision of infrastructure and the management of equitable access to it (UNESCO, 2021). This accords with the social sciences' infrastructural turn, which drove increasing research on urban planning by including social and political dimensions in the dynamics surrounding the facilitation of cities (Steele & Legacy, 2017). This shift manifests both as a renewed and expanded conceptualisation of the importance of the built environment for social and economic relations and as a visualisation of how political and cultural relations are negotiated through infrastructures (Amin, 2014). Works examining infrastructures of public health, education, and culture highlight the role of urban spaces in affording social connection, political participation, and cultural vitality in the public sphere (Latham & Layton, 2019). Built cultural infrastructures like museums, libraries, theatres, community centres, culture houses, and art spaces not only represent prominent material facilities in city centres but also contribute decisively to neighbourhoods' spatial and social formation through their physical layout and functional orientation (Drozdzewski & Webster, 2021).

Following Latham and Layton (2022, p. 659), cultural infrastructures can be characterized as social infrastructures in that they are "places that allow people to crowd together, experience culture together…[and] support social connection and sociality." These infrastructures can provide accessible and persistent spaces for socialisation, cultural empowerment, and negotiating community concerns. However, these straightforward conceptions of social infrastructures are not uncontested. Middleton and Samanani (2022, p. 778), for example, urge us to think about the "what" and "where" of infrastructures' sociality as "the social" might get too easily imagined as "a relatively generic and circumscribed domain—internally similar and externally bounded" that can be pinpointed on a map. They argue for acknowledging various meanings and effects of social infrastructures and paying close attention to their relational diversity (Latham & Layton, 2019), different contextual registers, and multiple outcomes.

In this article, we aim to understand the evolving ways political and social relations are formed, negotiated, and challenged through cultural infrastructure. We argue that evolutionary and relational perspectives on the localisation and re-localisation processes of cultural infrastructures offer important insights into the changing and differentiated forms of their local anchoring in the respective neighbourhoods. The evolution-

ary perspective acknowledges that infrastructural developments are path-dependent and influenced, but not determined, by prior conditions and decisions. Phases of restructuring in terms of organisation, institutionalisation, and location shape infrastructures' trajectories and result in differentiated spatial outcomes (Grabher, 2009). To scrutinise the complexity of urban cultural policy, several schemes have been proposed that systematically dissect the dynamic processes to connect cultural infrastructures and their neighbourhoods for analytical purposes (Andres & Grésillon, 2013; Klein et al., 2019). Bain and Landau (2019a) employ embeddedness to systematically trace the different dynamics involved in affixing a cultural quarter to a neighbourhood.

We build on and specify these ideas of embeddedness in two ways. First, we analyse a single cultural infrastructure rather than multi-facility cultural quarters. Considering a specific cultural institution, we argue, offers a more granular understanding of how political and social relations are formed, operated, and contested in urban cultural planning (Healey, 2006; Mould & Comunian, 2015). Second, we specify the embedding of cultural infrastructures into neighbourhoods in temporal terms. We compare the emergence and localisation of specific cultural infrastructure with its re-localisation into another neighbourhood. Dissecting the features of a single cultural infrastructure's embeddedness over time allows us to ask how much rationales of urban cultural planning and policy are site-specific and path-dependent. From a planning perspective, this can help us to reveal different meanings and multifaceted demands on infrastructures that go beyond simple and fixed functional attributions (Krisch, 2019; Middleton & Samanani, 2022).

We use the Kulturhaus Karlstorbahnhof, a sociocultural centre in the city of Heidelberg, Germany, as our case study. The Kulturhaus was established in the 1990s in a derelict railway station near the city centre after many years of tension between cultural initiatives and the city over resources, political recognition, and location. In 2015, public controversies prompted the city council to relocate the Kulturhaus to a newly developing mixed-use brownfield site in a more remote part of Heidelberg by 2022.

Section 2 outlines the specific developments and conditions of cultural urban planning and policy in Germany due to the interactions among municipal, federal, national, and supranational influences. The sociohistorical trajectories of new cultural infrastructures that have emerged in the context of a "democratisation of culture" since the 1960s are emphasised. Section 3 outlines our analytical framework, presents socioeconomic information on the city of Heidelberg that contextualises the case study, and introduces our methods. Section 4 presents our results from comparatively reviewing the evolutionary phases of embeddedness that led to the location of the Karlstorbahnhof in 1995 and 2022. We end by reflecting on more open and nuanced understandings of cultural infrastructures that could generate

multiple and diverse outcomes interacting and possibly outbalancing each other.

## 2. Cultural Infrastructures' Role in German Urban Planning

Germany's federal government entrusts cultural policies to individual states, which are responsible for implementation and decentralised administration. Within this system, each municipality has a certain freedom in managing and regulating cultural infrastructures and subsidising cultural activities and events. While cultural policy in socialist East Germany was organised more centrally and rigidly, those states have basically followed the West German path since 1990. Until the 1960s, the state promoted the arts, subsidising works of high culture and establishing inner-city institutions such as theatres, museums, and opera houses. There was a period of conflict and revolt against traditions in the political, social, and cultural spheres between the mid-1960s and the late 1970s. The evolving new cultural policy in Germany promoted a democratisation of culture intended to enable equal access to high culture and to establish alternative forms of "culture for all" and "culture by all" (Glaser, 2003). On the one hand, this permitted broader segments of the population into traditional cultural institutions. On the other hand, it required new cultural infrastructures to be built that would allow "Spiel-" and "Freiräume" (spaces of free play) for as many people as possible, permitting them to enact their artistic and creative potential under the identity-forming reference to the community, district, or neighbourhood (van der Will & Burns, 2015).

These efforts established new cultural infrastructures, such as community centres, youth clubs, and culture houses, in many German communities as grassroots initiatives converted train stations, warehouses, and other brownfield sites into cultural spaces (Andres & Grésillon, 2013; Hoyler & Mager, 2005). Overall, while democratising culture into "socio-culture," urban cultural policies were increasingly used as rationales for social planning relevant to the quality of life and conveying democratic values at the neighbourhood and community levels (Glaser, 2003). According to this understanding, cultural infrastructures are places "of communication and socialization where active, spontaneous or improvisatory behaviour come into their own" (Glaser, 2003, p. 188), "places that support community life...[and] allow people to live comfortably alone and alongside one another" (Latham & Layton, 2022, p. 659). These integrating tasks of urban cultural policy were further reinforced by social inclusion questions about immigrants and other minority cultures (Hirvi-Ijäs et al., 2020), which also affected national policies from the 1980s onwards (Dubois, 2015). These policies signify a shift from a conservative "high culture" elitism to the promotion of everyday culture based on a more participatory socio-culture and the increasing commodification and commercialisation of both popular and high culture.

Culture-driven approaches to economic urban regeneration surfaced in Germany, as in other countries, in the 1980s (Evans, 2004). Spatial clusters of cultural industries and amenities in cultural districts were intended to contribute to economic diversification, and job growth and innovation activities indicate a tendency towards converging economic and cultural policies. From the 1990s onwards, these developments culminated in the "creative city" concept, which has proven a widespread and enduring urban policy principle in many German cities (Kunzmann, 2004). While the social planning measures of the welfare state primarily sought to reduce inequalities at the city district and neighbourhood levels, national policies supported concepts such as cultural clusters and creative cities, which were discussed and implemented as city-wide cultural-economic drivers (Stern & Seifert, 2010). Policy documents and creative economy reports discuss the workforce, value creation, innovation potential, networks, and creativity-enhancing locales. They are often framed as benchmarks against national and international competitors, attesting to the concept's widespread success as a rationale for cultural policies at the local, national, and, increasingly, international levels (Glückler et al., 2010).

Culture, no longer a matter of a specific sector of local governance but strategically connected to other areas of urban life, has gained prominence in cities' functioning (Chapain & Sagot-Duvauroux, 2020). As German urban planning becomes increasingly holistic, coordination and collaboration between different stakeholders are emphasised in city operations. One essential trajectory for culture to adopt a more strategic role in city development is recognising cultural infrastructures' potential for sustainable development (Kagan et al., 2018). The literature now widely documents that cultural facilities are places for cultural consumption and production (Comunian, 2011), symbolic resistance to gentrification (García, 2018), or public spaces, which offer familiarity and security during cultural activities (Latham & Layton, 2019, 2022). Conceiving cultural infrastructure as social infrastructure that "helps build into urban neighbourhoods the capacity for all sorts of ways of being with others" (Latham & Layton, 2022, p. 663) suggests an integrated approach to urban planning and community development that recognises the "mediation role played in culture-led development by physical facilities, cultural institutions, cultural activities and educational and community platforms" (Ferilli et al., 2017, p. 255). Work that directly linked cultural infrastructure to community and neighbourhood development gained prominence in Germany as the prevailing top-down logic imposing a set of circumscribed urban development goals gave way to more cooperative forms of local governance at the neighbourhood level (Porter & Shaw, 2013). Stimulating local stakeholders' participation further diversified the potential services urban cultural infrastructures would

be expected to serve. Studies on German urban planning focused on bottom-up approaches to neighbourhood change that were initiated and supported by local social and artistic movements and their struggle for cultural spaces (Scharenberg & Bader, 2008). Neighbourhood regeneration often occurs through participatory governance approaches involving artists, local businesses, and residents, who now drive place-making activities (Bain & Landau, 2019b).

## 3. Analytical Framework, Research Area, and Methodology

### 3.1. Analytical Framework

We employ an analytical framework based on the concept of embeddedness, which originated in the economic and organisational sciences "to avoid both undersocialized views of economic actions, as in neoclassical economics, and oversocialized views in sociology" (Hess, 2004, p. 170). Embeddedness studies apply relational views to the spatial anchoring of different entities and networks (Grabher, 2009). From this perspective, the embeddedness of actors becomes essential for understanding the evolution of social networking (Balland et al., 2016).

Othengrafen and Reimer (2013) argue that the analytical framework of embeddedness is helpful in analysing dynamic and complex processes in spatial planning. For Bain and Landau (2019a), embeddedness proves best suited to understand the development of social and cultural infrastructures at the level of cultural districts. They contend that considering the interplay of policy reverberations and the internal governance dynamics of cultural quarters, informal urban practices, social relations inside and outside the neighbourhood, and physical characteristics and spaces of the area is key

to understanding and assessing cultural quarter development. In our study, we build on these ideas by analytically dissecting a single cultural infrastructure's features of embeddedness to understand the ways political and social relations are formed, negotiated, and challenged. Table 1 presents the key features of our framework, which are not to be understood as mutually exclusive.

Moreover, our view of actors and processes is essentially evolutionary, which implies prioritising temporality by focusing the analysis on different phases of location and relocation of a particular socio-cultural centre. For this, we classify locational dynamics into temporal phases, that are characterised by specific decisions and action situations (criteria of differentiation), degrees of conflict between actors (consent/dissent between stakeholders), dominant civil society discourses, and specific network constellations of central actor groups (Mager, 2000; see Tables 2 and 3).

### 3.2. Research Area: Heidelberg as a City of Culture

The city of Heidelberg in Germany has a long history as a centre of culture and knowledge. Heidelberg hosts the oldest and one of the most renowned universities in present-day Germany, Heidelberg University, which was founded in 1386. During the 19th century, the university's reputation lured romanticists such as Clemens Brentano and Achim von Arnim to the city, shaping the school's image even now. Heidelberg has been referred to recently as a "pearl of knowledge" in the global network of cities (International Building Exhibition, 2018), i.e., a smaller city "with a high score on virtually all foundations, that are located very near a big agglomeration, with a good performance record" (van Winden et al., 2007, p. 540). Demographically, Heidelberg is one of the youngest cities in Germany, with an average age of 39.9 years (in 2020), mainly

**Table 1.** An analytical framework to assess the processes of embedding cultural infrastructures.

| Key features of embeddedness | Impact on the localising processes of cultural infrastructure |
| --- | --- |
| Political | Decisions are embedded in political negotiation processes; cultural concerns are reflected in policy documents |
| Social | Processes are integrated into social network relations; different social and cultural actors engage in exchanges or cooperation across the neighbourhood, urban, and regional scales |
| Organisational | Processes are embedded in organised structures, such as governance connections or associations' logic |
| Institutional | Externally intervening governance functions, such as regulations, laws, and funding measures; the concepts and schemes of planning actors; opportunities for and limitations of resource mobilisation |
| Geographical | The built environment and functional connections in the spatial context function as essential assets for place-making actions, site-specific characteristics (e.g., brownfield development, built environment, cultural heritage, landscape features) and causes and effects on different scales (local, urban, regional) |

due to the 38,000 students enrolled in the city's five universities (Stadt Heidelberg, 2021a). This affects various aspects of urban life, such as urban development and the availability of leisure activities. The motto of the International Building Exhibition, "*Wissen schafft Stadt*" ("Knowledge-based urbanism"), underscores the importance of the knowledge-based urban development that led to projects such as "The OTHER PARK" in the Südstadt district (Fröhlich & Gerhard, 2017). There, various green and open spaces, cultural institutions, and places of knowledge production, such as the College for Applied Sciences, the Mark Twain Center for Transatlantic Relations, the civic centre Chapel, and the Kulturhaus Karlstorbahnhof are located close together to facilitate knowledge exchange and provide opportunities to socialise (see Figure 1).

Heidelberg's cultural and creative sector is one of its economic strongholds, and it is closely linked to urban development. The European Commission ranks Heidelberg as the third cultural and creative city among all European cities with 50,000 to 250,000 inhabitants, after Lund in Sweden and Weimar in Germany (European Commission, 2019). Heidelberg scores highly in "cultural vibrancy," "creative economy," and "enabling environment" and was awarded the title of UNESCO City of Literature, in 2014. Today, it is a vibrant city with a population of about 160,000, housing high cultural amenities like the municipal theatre, the German-American Institute (DAI), and museums of science and regional history, as well as socio-cultural centres such as the Kulturhaus Karlstorbahnhof, municipal cinemas, and privately-run venues and clubs. To maintain the population's satisfaction with the city's cultural offerings, various institutes, associations, and cultural infrastructures of music, visual arts, theatre, film, and culture regularly receive funding (Stadt Heidelberg, 2021b, p. 11). These aspects are also reflected in the municipal guidelines for sustainable urban development, which aim to support cultural diversity, promote meeting areas, create free space for many cultural forms of expression, strengthen cultural life in the city's neighbourhoods, and improve access to cultural life in general (Stadt Heidelberg, 2018).

With the cities of Mannheim and Ludwigshafen am Rhein, Heidelberg represents a major urban core
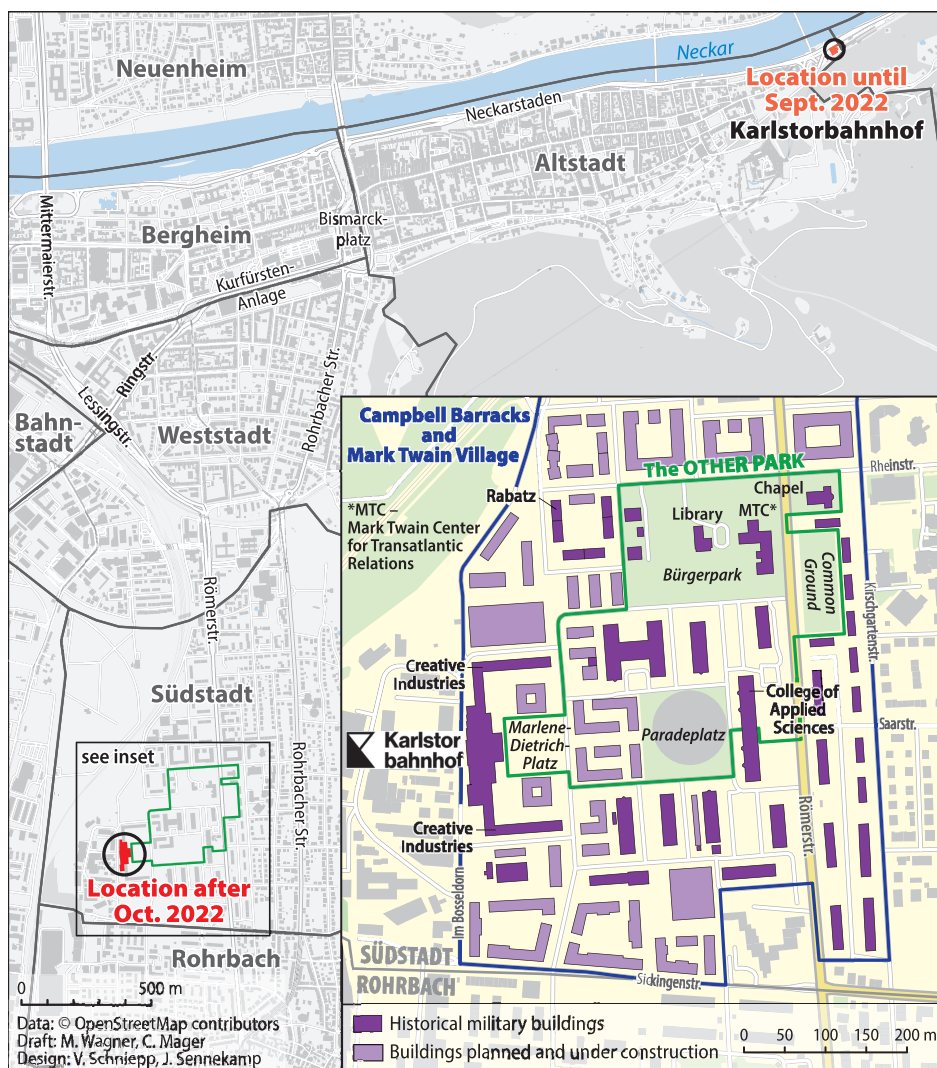


**Figure 1.** Old and new locations of the Kulturhaus Karlstorbahnhof in Heidelberg.

of the polycentric metropolitan Rhein-Neckar region. The Kulturhaus Karlstorbahnhof has been located in the Old Town since 1995; in 2022, it was relocated to a brownfield area currently under development in the Südstadt district. The area's history dates to the 1930s, when barracks for the German Wehrmacht were erected on the site. After World War II, American forces adopted the military facilities and converted them into NATO headquarters. The construction of residential buildings complemented the complex known as Campbell Barracks and Mark Twain Village. After the American forces withdrew in 2013, the city of Heidelberg acquired the site in 2016 and has since been developing it into a mixed-use urban neighbourhood. The 41-ha neighbourhood will ultimately include, in addition to the aforementioned The OTHER PARK, some 1,400 residential units, a shopping centre, room for local businesses and administration, and a centre for the cultural and creative industries (Fröhlich & Gerhard, 2017; "Wie soll es mit dem Karlstorbahnhof weitergehen?," 2014; see Figure 1).

### 3.3. Methodology

We triangulated the following methods in our research: (a) expert interviews with various stakeholders involved in the relocation process (Flick, 2021), (b) policy document analysis (Bowen, 2009), and (c) site visits to the old and new Karlstorbahnhof locations (Tabacková, 2021). This integration allowed for additional insights and contributed to the credibility of the results. We started by conducting 17 semi-structured interviews with administrative bureaucrats, planners, cultural stakeholders, and residents of the new neighbourhood. The interviews offered knowledge about, in particular, the integration of the relocation processes with social networks (social embeddedness) and organisational structures (organisational embeddedness).

In the second methodological step, documents were analysed through "skimming (superficial examination), reading (thorough examination), and interpreting" (Bowen, 2009, p. 32). We aimed to trace the political and planning negotiation processes of the location and relocation discussions (Atkinson & Coffey, 2004) and to "contextualise data collected during interviews" (Bowen, 2009, p. 30) based on municipal publications (e.g., the city gazette *Stadtblatt*), municipal council meeting minutes, and policy documents such as strategy and guideline papers for long-term cultural development. Additionally, we analysed newspaper reports between 1990 and 2000 and between 2014 and 2021, which allowed us to trace the course of events and the significance of various actors. We used articles from the local daily newspapers *Rhein-Neckar-Zeitung* and *Mannheimer Morgen* and additional material from the monthly culture magazine *meier* (published until 2012). Document analysis allowed us to obtain information about political decision-making (political

embeddedness), as well as institutional and organisational control mechanisms (institutional and organisational embeddedness).

Several site visits to the old location in the Old Town and the new location on the brownfield in the Südstadt district were conducted. As, at the time of writing, the new neighbourhood was still under construction, the newly planned built infrastructures were compared with the previous historic structures (military facilities) and mapped using photo documentation and paper and pencil sketches (Lawrenz et al., 2003). We focused on the area of The OTHER PARK, which is directly adjacent to the new location of the Karlstorbahnhof. We also scrutinised the Alte Kutschenhalle, the building into which the Karlstorbahnhof will move, to trace its spatial embeddedness in the emerging neighbourhood via explorative analysis. Thus, both the atmosphere of the place (the *genius loci*) and the overall images of the neighbourhoods were analysed during the site visit (Tabacková, 2021). The atmosphere of the places was captured by means of handwritten notes and photo documentation (see Figures 2 and 3). In conjunction with the insights gained from the semi-structured interviews and the policy document analysis, the location information was processed into a map (Suchan & Brewer, 2000; see Figure 1). Thus, the site visits particularly served to capture the spatial significance of the built infrastructure for the relocation process (geographical embeddedness).

## 4. Empirical Results

We present our results divided into the Kulturhaus's two time periods: from when it was established at the original location to 1995 (Mager, 2000) and when the Kulturhaus's relocation was planned, from 2010 to 2022. We use an inductively obtained phase classification that is informed by decisive steps of the planning processes and characterised by distinct degrees of embeddedness. In each case, we identify the prevailing issues in the policy discourses, the dominant levels of spatial governance and the affected stakeholders and their network connections (see Tables 2 and 3).

### 4.1. Location of the Karlstorbahnhof, 1970s to 1995

#### 4.1.1. Initial Phase: Grassroots Initiatives Looking for Space

The Kulturhaus Karlstorbahnhof had a bumpy start in the 1970s. At the time, the municipal cinema and the Collegium Academicum, a self-governing student initiative, had requested self-governed spaces for their cultural work. Like the contemporary social movements, these initiatives recognised life–world–local issues, such as urban planning and the commercialisation of culture, as motivation for their work (see Table 2, Dominant discourse). After the Deutsche Bundesbahn shuttered the Karlstorbahnhof station building at the eastern end of

**Figure 2.** Kulturhaus Karlstorbahnhof at its old location (1995–2022) at the eastern end of Heidelberg's Old Town. Source: Courtesy of Christoph Mager.

Heidelberg's Old Town due to rationalisation measures, the infrastructure was proposed for the first time as a possible location for cultural associations' initiatives. The new Green Party, which had been founded at the federal level shortly before, politically supported this idea (see Table 2, Embeddedness). The main actors in this initial phase were grassroots movements with rather limited civic organisation and political interest representation (see Table 2, Network).

4.1.2. Negotiation Phase: Negotiation Between Grassroots Actors, Politics, and Bureaucrats

With the Green Party's entry into the city council, demands for alternative cultural spaces gained a formal voice in local politics. Although these demands lacked majority support, the issue became embedded in formal politics, and the planning administration began to seek suitable spaces. The decisive turning point in the discussion came in 1990 with the changing political majority in the city council and the election of a new major from the Social Democratic Party who had supported the idea of a cultural centre during the election campaign. New institutional structures have been established as a result, including a newly created post to mediate between administrative and civic interests and develop a utilisation plan for the Karlstorbahnhof building to become a socio-cultural centre (see Table 2, Embeddedness). However, conflict arose when it became clear that the planned Kulturhaus would not be able to accommodate



**Figure 3.** Kulturhaus Karlstorbahnhof (in the centre of the photo) at its new location in Heidelberg's Südstadt. Source: Courtesy of Svenja Lier.

all of the interested cultural groups. During the negotiation phase, cultural actors succeeded in increasingly embedding their demands for a cultural centre at the local and federal levels and engaging the municipal administration in addressing their concerns (see Table 2, Network).

### 4.1.3. Decision Phase: Political Decision on Location

Based on a planning concept prepared by the municipal administration, the city council narrowly agreed to convert the former train station into a socio-cultural centre in 1995. The main actors in the decision-making phase were the political players, who, depending on their party, held different views on the Karlstorbahnhof project (see Table 2, Network, Embeddedness). Voices from the municipal council show that, in addition to concerns about the political radicalisation of cultural work, there were worries about cutbacks at other cultural institutions and the financial burden on the municipal budget (see Table 2, Dominant discourse; "Stimmen aus dem Gemeinderat," 1994, p. 2):

> Contrary to a widespread claim, the Karlstorbahnhof is not to become primarily a cultural institution, but rather a "political" youth centre….Both in terms of its objectives and its financial conditions, the Karlstorbahnhof is a big mistake, a disadvantage even for the cultural life of the city, since its high costs will prevent other cultural activities in the future. (Council member, CDU [Conservative Party])

There were sympathetic voices at the same time, those who saw the new cultural institution's potential to aid the future development of the city ("Stimmen aus dem Gemeinderat," 1994, p. 2):

> When the project…is finished…the cultural scene in Heidelberg will, of course, change, but not as seriously as some like to paint it black on the wall. Finally, there will be a permanent place where events of all kinds can take place from…cultural groups for whom there has been far too little space to perform in front of their audience. (Council members, SPD [Social Democratic Party])

> Anyone who is in favour of the Karlstorbahnhof is therefore not automatically against the theatre or other traditional cultural institutions. (Council member, FDP [Liberal Party])

### 4.1.4. Infrastructure Phase: Reconstruction of Building and Opening of Kulturhaus

After the city council decision in 1994, the city of Heidelberg and the Karlstorbahnhof Holding, an association of more than 50 organisations, initiatives, and individual actors, signed an agreement (see Table 2,

Dissent/consent between stakeholders). The agreement governed the reconstruction of the Karlstorbahnhof, which was completed in December 1995, and its operation. The renovation and technical equipment were financed with funds from the city and federal state subsidies, supplemented by personal contributions from association members and students. The Karlstorbahnhof housed various venues, a café, a cinema, an amateur theatre, seminar rooms, and offices for various cultural associations and civil society organisations. These processes embedded the Karlstorbahnhof socially, organisationally, and institutionally on the edge of Heidelberg's Old Town (see Table 2, Embeddedness).

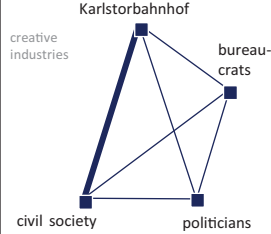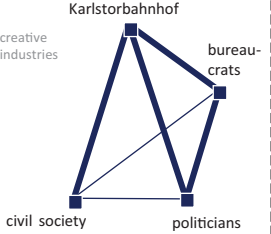### 4.1.5. Networking Phase: Institutionalisation of Cultural Work
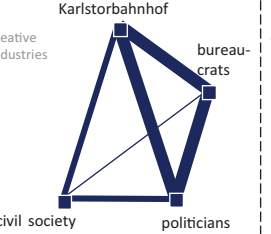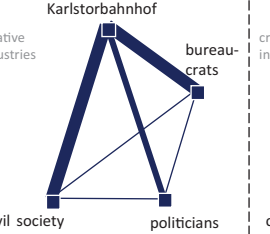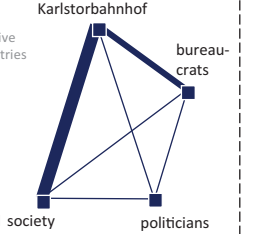
The employment of full-time staff after the Karlstorbahnhof opened marked the beginning of the professionalisation of cultural work, especially in the areas of programme planning, administration, and the coordination and supervision of the groups and projects in the house. In addition to securing basic financial support from the city, the cultural management of the Karlstorbahnhof had to acquire additional public- and private-sector sponsoring, fundraise, and execute advertising measures (see Table 2, Embeddedness). Since its inception, the Kulturhaus attracted around 100,000 visitors and participants per year to its performances, courses, workshops, and public discussion events, establishing itself as a central part of the city's social and cultural landscapes through extended networking with other cultural actors and the public (see Table 2, Dominant discourse). As a venue for major concerts and various festivals with regional and international characters, the Kulturhaus attracted audiences from beyond the city limits over the years (see Table 2, Level of scale).

### 4.2. Relocation of the Karlstorbahnhof, From 2010 Onwards

### 4.2.1. Initial Phase: Building Deficiency

The impetus to consider relocating the Karlstorbahnhof came from an EU administrative regulation in 2013. New fire regulations for buildings limited the capacity utilisation of the Kulturhaus so severely that it could no longer be operated profitably, and larger events had to be moved to other venues in the city (see Table 3, Dominant discourse). The initial considerations for the reconstruction and expansion of the building resulted in an architectural competition. The winning design envisaged lowering the existing hall, thus increasing the room capacity to adhere to the new fire regulations ("Wie soll es mit dem Karlstorbahnhof weitergehen?," 2014).

**Table 2.** Characteristics of the location phases of the Karlstorbahnhof.

| Location of the Karlstorbahnhof 1970s until 1995 | Initial phase | Negotiation phase | Decision phase | Infrastructure phase | Networking phase |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Criterion of differentiation** | grassroots initiatives looking for spaces | negotiation between grassroots actors, politicians and bureaucrats | political decision on location | reconstruction of building and opening of Kulturhaus | institutionalization of cultural work |
| **Time period** | 1970s/1980s | until 1993 | 1993 | 1993–1995 | 1995 onwards |
| **Embeddedness** | | | | | |
|    political | + | +++ | +++ | | + |
|    social | ++ | ++ | + | ++ | +++ |
|    organizational | + | ++ | ++ | +++ | ++ |
|    institutional | | + | + | ++ | ++ |
|    geographical | + | + | + | + | ++ |
| **Consent/dissent between stakeholders** | consent | dissent | dissent | consent | consent |
| **Level of scale** | urban | urban | urban | site | urban/regional |
| **Dominant discourse** | space requirements for cultural work | alternative culture vs. high culture | cultural expression vs. radical politics | creating sustainable cultural infrastructures | cultural networking in and beyond the city |
| **Network** |  |  |  |  |  |

### 4.2.2. Negotiation Phase: Identification of Competing Designs and Locations

With the departure of the US military from Heidelberg, brownfield sites became available for urban development measures. Instead of rebuilding the Kulturhaus, it became possible to speculate about relocating it. The corresponding negotiation and decision phases are difficult to distinguish as decisions were revised and extended several times, resulting in new negotiations being initiated (see Table 3, Dominant discourse). During the first negotiation phase between 2010 and 2015, different opinions were voiced in the city council, especially in the context of the 2014 local council elections. Although all parties recognise and appreciate the importance of the Kulturhaus in their statements, the development of the new neighbourhood and the consequences for the old location are seen as important decision-making criteria, in addition to financial considerations:

> We support a further development of the Karlstorbahnhof…as a driver of neighbourhood development in the new parts of Südstadt [rather than opting for] a purely technical patch-up job on a building that is too small. (Council Member, Die Grünen [Green Party]; Gonser, 2014, p. 2)

> A major reconstruction for 11 million euros is currently too expensive for the city alone. However, if the federal state provides support, the chances increase. Whether a relocation to the conversion areas is realistic can only be decided after the advanced planning for this area. (Council member, FDP; "Wie soll es mit dem Karlstorbahnhof weitergehen?," 2014, p. 7)

> For reasons of cultural diversity, it is important to us to preserve and keep the Karlstorbahnhof where it is now. Further alternative and commercial-free offers, especially for youth and young adults, must be created. (Council member, Die Linke [Left Party]; "Wie soll es mit dem Karlstorbahnhof weitergehen?," 2014, p. 7)

Citizens' initiatives also support the call for the Kulturhaus to remain at least partially at the old location, citing the importance of the historic location, its greater accessibility, and the danger of culturally eroding Heidelberg's Old Town (see Table 3, Network).

However, in 2015, the city council decided to relocate the Karlstorbahnhof to the Südstadt district. In addition to office communities, educational institutions, and cultural actors, municipal bureaucrats entered the discussion. It became apparent that the new neighbourhood should be characterised by mixed and sustainable use. Alongside housing for different income levels, opportunities for local supply, green and open spaces, social meeting places, and cultural offerings, the new Karlstorbahnhof was envisioned as the core

of cultural creative industry development in the neighbourhood. The policies developed during the negotiation phase were increasingly embedded politically as decisions that would support the Kulturhaus's success with a reliable planning perspective were expected. The managing director of the Karlstorbahnhof explains: "The Karlstorbahnhof did not say: 'We have to move,' but 'we have to do what is good for us'" (Interview No. 10, cultural stakeholder).

For some cultural actors, however, these decisions went too far. They believed that the conditions of the old location were insufficiently considered (see Table 3, Consent/dissent between stakeholders). However, the activation of political and social support was less successful than planned, not least because, from the perspective of urban planning, the geographical context at the new location seemed to favour relocation. The subsequent discussions about brownfield development and relocating the Karlstorbahnhof were characterised by attempts to keep at least parts of the Kulturhaus in the Old Town.

### 4.2.3. Decision Phase: Political Decision on Design and Location

The most important decisions regarding the relocation of the Kulturhaus were made between 2015 and 2019. At a municipal council meeting in July 2015, the first decision to relocate the Karlstorbahnhof was taken with only two abstentions. The municipal council resolution emphasised the close link between the new district and the neighbourhood even at that stage (see Table 3, Dominant discourse):

> The starting point for the profiling of the new Karlstorbahnhof is the anchoring of the Kulturhaus in the Südstadt district and the central function of the socio-cultural centre in the context of the creative and cultural industries. The relocation of the Karlstorbahnhof is of central importance for the formation of a new cultural identity for the Campbell Barracks conversion site and corresponds with the wish of the Südstadt civic association, resulting from citizen participation, that a cultural institution with relevance for the entire city be established on the site in the course of the conversion. (Heidelberg Municipal Council, 2015)

This assessment was supported by planning bureaucrats who envisioned the Karlstorbahnhof "as a powerful development impulse for the Südstadt district" (Interview No. 6, municipal bureaucrat). Progress in the planning phase entailed adjustments to the projected costs. This provoked further political action in 2017 and 2019 that resulted in decisions to relocate the Kulturhaus and cover the increased costs by applying for further state subsidies and drawing from the municipal budget (see Table 3, Network). After these final decisions were made, the opponents of complete relocation focused

on reusing the old Karlstorbahnhof appropriately. At the time of writing, the discussion about reusing the old site has not been concluded.

### 4.2.4. Infrastructure Phase: Reconstruction of Brownfield Site and Relocation

In 2019, the reconstruction of the halls began; these have accommodated the new Karlstorbahnhof since the summer of 2022. In addition to gutting the new building, a foyer was built in front (see Figure 3). The municipal budget and subsidies from the federal state covered these costs. During reconstruction, the Karlstorbahnhof organised various events with its future neighbours in the Südstadt district to increase awareness of the relocation (see Table 3, Network). The city-wide campaign "*Ab in den Süden*" ("Off to the south") was launched to raise funds for individual furnishings and crowdfund expenses that were not financed by the city. In addition to its institutional and organisational features, the social and geographical embeddedness of the Karlstorbahnhof in the new neighbourhood became apparent during this phase, creating a smooth transition to the current networking phase (see Table 3, Embeddedness).

### 4.2.5. Networking Phase: Embedding the Kulturhaus in the Neighbourhood

Unlike the previous phases, the networking phase of relocation is incomplete. Various expectations and worries have been expressed by different stakeholders in the Kulturhaus's new neighbourhood. For the urban development office, for example, the Kulturhaus offers many opportunities as the heart of a lively neighbourhood (see Table 3, Embeddedness):

> We believe that it takes a lot to make such a strong place successful. We think that this is an important design and development impulse….[But] we don't just want this to be a singular institution, we want to support it so that it becomes a motor for the complete development of the Südstadt district. We want to make use of the impetus generated by a cultural and creative industries nucleus. We want the impulse to become relevant for the overall development….This includes who is in the neighbourhood, so that it does not interfere, but enrich [it]. This includes which public space with which use will be able to develop appropriately. This includes where the public can participate and where private spaces are necessary. (Interview No. 6, municipal bureaucrat)

Others expect the Karlstorbahnhof to shape the neighbourhood as a cultural quarter:

> It is a chance…to appropriate these spaces, to say, ok we are now a cultural quarter, there will be many cultural actors, creative people, a colourful audience

and the hope that this will then also shape this district….And it's also a goal to play the squares…in front of the Karlstorbahnhof, but also the other places that arise around The OTHER PARK, other activities with Chapel, that new connections arise. (Interview No. 3, municipal bureaucrat)

Local residents often feel positively towards the cultural centre (Interviews Nos. 7, 8, 11, and 12). They express delight at the revitalisation of the neighbourhood and the cultural offerings within walking distance. However, there are some concerns about the evening noise and traffic pollution of having the venue in the immediate neighbourhood. In addition, individual voices are being raised that see established cultural structures being endangered by the move:

> I could imagine a negative scenario, that everything that takes place there is claimed by the Karlstorbahnhof. That it is too strongly dominated, that the competition is too fierce….Some build up a cultural scene and then the scene of the Karlstorbahnhof is used to maintain the legitimacy of what is happening there …. And that the visibility and the autonomy of the scene, which also arises in the context of the alternative housing projects, is pushed back a bit or gets into trouble. (Interview No. 2, former resident)

This perspective is not shared by others who see the Karlstorbahnhof as a central cultural institution with a "lighthouse character" but expect more cooperation between the various social and cultural offerings based on a complementary division of labour (Interview No. 13, member of the civic district association). However, residents also have concrete expectations of the Kulturhaus in terms of embedding itself in the neighbourhood. As one resident puts it, "There is a new player coming into the district—I already say 'our district'—I think, it would be the role of the Karlstorbahnhof to approach us now" (Interview No. 12; see Table 3, Network). The Karlstorbahnhof has already taken its first steps in this direction. In 2021, the Kulturhaus released a series of neighbourhood podcasts in which its new neighbours in Südstadt are introduced, and possible future connections are discussed. The managing director of the Karlstorbahnhof reports that a community work position will be established to build and coordinate networks within the neighbourhood. In addition, the operation and event times of the Kulturhaus will be adapted to neighbourhood users, who will also have access during the day (Interview No. 10, cultural stakeholder).

### 4.3. Summary

The founding of the Kulturhaus Karlstorbahnhof was driven by cultural actors' desire for sustainable open spaces. The socio-cultural centre could only be

**Table 3.** Characteristics of the relocation phases of the Karlstorbahnhof.

| Re-Location of the Karlstorbahnhof 2010 until 2022 | Initial phase | Negotiation phase | Decision phase | Infrastructure phase | Networking phase |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Criterion of differentiation** | building deficiency | identification of competing designs and locations | political decision on design and location | reconstruction of brownfield site and relocation | embedding the Kulturhaus Karlstorbahnhof in the neighbourhood |
| **Time period** | 2010 | 2010–2019 | 2015–2019 | 2019–2022 | 2022 onwards |
| **Embeddedness** | | | | | |
| political | | +++ | +++ | | + |
| social | | ++ | ++ | + | +++ |
| organizational | | + | + | ++ | +++ |
| institutional | +++ | ++ | ++ | ++ | + |
| geographical | + | +++ | +++ | +++ | +++ |
| **Consent/dissent between stakeholders** | dissent | dissent | consent | consent | |
| **Level of scale** | urban | urban | urban | neighbourhood | neighbourhood/ urban/regional |
| **Dominant discourse** | fire regulations and economic efficiency | socio-cultural motor for the new neighbourhood vs. desolation of the Old Town | nucleus for the creative industries and social infrastructure for the neighbourhood | Kulturhaus as integral part of sustainable neighbourhood development | |
| **Network** | Karlstorbahnhof; creative industries; bureaucrats; civil society; politicians | Karlstorbahnhof; creative industries; bureaucrats; civil society; politicians | Karlstorbahnhof; creative industries; bureaucrats; civil society; politicians | Karlstorbahnhof; creative industries; bureaucrats; civil society; politicians | Karlstorbahnhof; creative industries; bureaucrats; civil society; politicians |

established after fundamental discussions about its necessity in a traditional, culturally rather well-endowed university city. The discourses were strongly influenced by political discussions on the urban and cultural crises of the 1970s, questions of municipal budgeting, and planning uncertainties. In phases of evolutionary development, cultural and political stakeholders managed to counter these uncertainties by cultural lobbying on different spatial scales and the reorganisation of civil society networks and the municipal bureaucracy. Questions about the economic effects of the planned cultural urban development and the significance of the socio-cultural centre for a neighbourhood were notably absent from these discussions. The focus was on the creation of urgently needed spaces for many cultural and political associations in the city that had previously worked without permanent homes. Furthermore, the Kulturhaus complemented the more traditional cultural offerings in the city, provided rooms and a café for social exchange, and offered low-threshold counselling and support services for residents.

The relocation of the same Kulturhaus 25 years after its establishment was discussed more in socioeconomic than political-cultural terms. The Karlstorbahnhof, firmly embedded in the urban and regional cultural landscape by processes of institutionalisation, professionalisation, and marketisation of its work, no longer needed to strive for recognition, basic funding, or space. Initially, regulatory constraints on visitor capacity and the availability of a brownfield site made relocation attractive to both the Kulturhaus and the new neighbourhood that was developing. During the phases leading to the re-localisation, institutional and geographical forms of embeddedness played a more significant role than social and organisational links. Since the first considerations of relocation, bureaucrats from different administrative bodies were involved in interdepartmental planning processes and provided expert opinions to support political decisions. In addition, new stakeholders from the cultural and creative industries emerged and were able to take an influential role in decision-making due to the strong orientation of urban policy towards concepts such as the "creative city." The stronger geographical embedding is a result of, on the one hand, the Kulturhaus's firmly established role as an important venue and network hub in the city's cultural landscape and, on the other hand, its expected role as a part of the local neighbourhood's social infrastructure.

## 5. Conclusion: A "Motor" for the Neighbourhood?

From a neighbourhood planning perspective, simple but pivotal questions remain: Where should infrastructure be localised? What sort of infrastructure should it be, and on the basis of which social, cultural, and economic policies should it be established? Using the example of the Kulturhaus Karlstorbahnhof, a socio-cultural centre in the city of Heidelberg, Germany, we aimed to understand the changing ways these questions have been approached. Following recent studies emphasising a holistic view of urban cultural planning (Bain & Landau, 2019b; Klein et al., 2019), we employed notions of embeddedness of actors, discourses, and buildings to dissect the dynamic processes to connect cultural infrastructures and their neighbourhoods. Unlike existing analyses, which mainly focus on comparing different infrastructures in various urban contexts (Andres & Grésillon, 2013; Bain & Landau, 2019a), we focused on the trajectories and changing planning rationales involved in embedding a single cultural centre into different neighbourhoods. In this way, we sought to make current work on the embeddedness of cultural quarters in neighbourhoods more specific in two ways. Firstly, this represents a shift in scale from the quarter level to a single cultural infrastructure. It engenders the possibility of disentangling the complex formations of embeddedness in more detail and assessing the relational dynamics of smaller instances and informal processes (Mould & Comunian, 2015). Secondly, by comparing the processes of embedding the Kulturhaus during two different periods of localisation and re-localisation, we not only showed increasingly complex urban planning networks and shifting discourses over time but also how and to what degree these networks and discourses are path-dependent and temporally embedded in greater negotiation processes. This perspective allows for heightened sensitivity to past but still influential varieties of embeddedness and infrastructural localisation, which can help to assess and navigate the relational complexity of planning at the neighbourhood level.

By examining the interplay of political, social, organisational, institutional, and geographical dimensions of embeddedness in subsequent temporal phases, we have shown the extent to which rationales of infrastructural planning and policy endure and change over time. This is evident both when comparing Karlstorbahnhof's location and relocation processes and when attending to these two processes in more detail. Through dissecting embeddedness dynamics with special emphasis on network constellations of different planning actors, we have revealed how the infrastructural significance of the Kulturhaus has changed and expanded in the course of relocation. Based on considerations of the 1970s and 1980s, the founding as a socio-cultural centre followed particular planning rationales, which were to provide spaces for social communication, cultural self-expression, and political-democratic improvisation on the city scale. These notions of cultural infrastructure as social infrastructure played a specific but limited role in embedding the Kulturhaus, as they were not fully integrated into strategic neighbourhood planning. During the relocation phases, the position of the socio-cultural centre was increasingly discussed in the context of its integration into broader planning strategies. The relocation occurred in the context of multi-actor and multi-level planning discourses on the impact of creative

industries as well as the rise of sustainable, mixed-use neighbourhood designs in urban planning. As a result, different and partly contradictory expectations are linked to the infrastructure: social meeting place for the neighbourhood, provider of do-it-yourself courses, magnet for socially diverse new residents, source of high-quality cultural programmes for the entire city and region, multifunctional node in a beaded necklace of knowledge-related cultural institutions, and incubator for a lively creative industry, to name a few. This suggests that infrastructures such as socio-cultural centres cannot be understood as facilitating fixed or clear-cut "cultural" or "social" functions, but that a more open and nuanced interpretation is required to recognise multiple and sometimes conflicting demands and outcomes (Middleton & Samanani, 2022).

Based on the results of our study, we argue for an evolutionary and multifaceted perspective on infrastructures in urban planning that attends to more-than-cultural, more-than-social, and more-than-economic dynamics of neighbourhoods. As one of our interviewees from the municipal administration put it with regard to the future of the Kulturhaus: "We don't just want this to be a singular institution, we want to support it so that it becomes a motor for the complete development of the Südstadt district" (Interview No. 6). The metaphor only makes sense if this cultural motor is conceived of as a multifunctional engine with different drivetrains that need to be regularly maintained, checked, fine-tuned, and balanced to sustainably fulfil the expectations placed on it.

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## Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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