Networking – a plea for the extended mind[1]

Case: A network of 31 small German towns with historical centre in the State of Brandenburg

To enter into an international dialogue in China with a German strategic model shaped by a Western Europe perspective on life and thought is daring, but also challenging. The subject seems to be familiar. At the same time it is rather complex with regards to different cultural, social, economic and religious contexts, national governance and geopolitical interests. Thus, I start my contribution with information on some German conditions. They focus on spatial planning and the meaning of *Baukultur* (building culture) as a systems approach to restructuring cities. This background helps to understand the following example: a network of 31 small towns with historical centre in the state of Brandenburg. It operates as a bottom–up initiative to maintain and develop the unique urban structures and monuments as future capital. I will close my contribution with some reflections upon issues to continue the dialogue.

1. Preliminary remarks on regional and structural conditions

The spatial perspective concentrates on the capital region of the Federal Republic of Germany, formed by two states (Länder) of a federation of 16 states – Berlin and Brandenburg. They have different constitutions but – and this is unique – decided to install a joint planning department, working on one State Development Plan Berlin-Brandenburg (LEP-B-B 2009)[2] for the territory of both states.

Figure 1: Capital region of Germany in the centre of Europe.
Source: Raumordnungsbericht 2008, Potsdam 2009. Joint Planning Department Berlin-Brandenburg

The capital region, with approximately 6 million inhabitants, is a region of contrasts in relation to its spatial structures and the 'altitudes' of perspectives; a metropolitan global outlook on one side correlated to provincial points of view on the other.

Table 1: Capital region Berlin-Brandenburg

2009	Inhabitants	Area	Inhabitants per km²
Berlin:	3.4 Mill.	892 km^2	3.800/km^2
Brandenburg:	2.5 Mill.	29.480 km^2,	87/km^2

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Source: www.berlin-brandenburg.de/daten-fakten; 2011

Brandenburg is a thinly populated state, shaped by a diversity of mostly rural cultural landscapes, in contrast to Berlin, which until World War II used to be an industrial metropolis. To some observers Berlin appears to sit like a 'spider in the net' of Brandenburg. All traffic lines to the outer world cross Brandenburg.
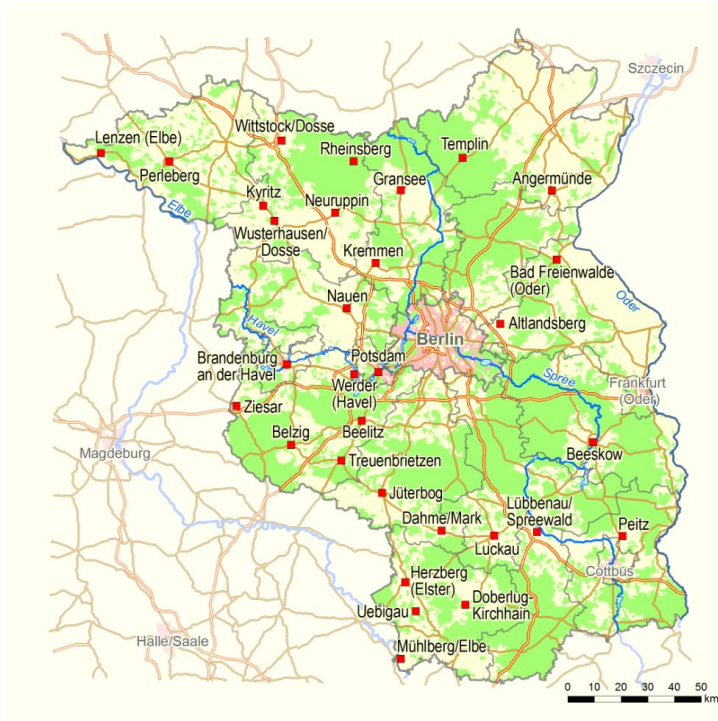

Figure 2: Map of the network of 31 towns with historical centres in the State of Brandenburg
Source: MIL/LGB, GB-G I/99

The settlement structure of Brandenburg is characterized by small-sized towns. Their population varies between 1,000 and 10,000 inhabitants. The only exceptions are 4 larger cities with about 60,000 to 150,000 inhabitants. Looking back over 20 years of urban development in Brandenburg since the German reunification, the expected up-current has not occurred. In fact the pressure of competition within the developing global market has led to a massive structural break-down in the economy and the labour market in Brandenburg. The implications for the living conditions in shrinking cities are visible: ever growing wasteland, derelict industries and the closure of public services. Additionally, demographic changes have worked to amplify the problems in terms of: the ageing and shrinking population in the periphery, and the migration of the young highly-skilled people into the centre of the metropolitan regions. In the peripheral parts of Brandenburg the small towns are intended to function as an 'anchor' in the region to guarantee at least the fundamental amenities of life, such as: schools, medical care, the supply of everyday goods and services and public transport commodities. Shrinking processes with social, economic and physical implications strike at the very foundations of towns. The form, the function and the meaning of towns and the traditional interaction within the system are questioned. Some of the main topics of building culture are on the agenda.

2. Building culture – a systems approach as policy field

Building Culture is an open term. It describes a dynamic social performance of the physical environment – landscapes, townscapes, and buildings – in the past, present or in future planning. At the same time building culture defines the result of the process – a product – in

a normative manner. The special interplay of functions, construction modes, design qualities and symbolic values is viewed, for example, as an icon for urban or rural lifestyles, as a physical or social landmark, as a political or religious symbol or as an economic trade mark for investors (see Fritz-Haendeler 2003; 2006: 471 f). Local opinion leaders and majorities might influence the dogmatism of preservation and fashions of styles. But there is no universal recipe.

The process of performance and the quality of the product are correlated. The result depends on local logics of governance – values, habits, private and public interests, alliances of actors, regulation systems and financial capacities (see Berking/Löw 2008). Thus, urban settlement structures and urban architecture become textbooks of local societies and can be read by people if one knows about the specific cultural 'pattern languages' within a town, a region or a nation. The built environment operates like a bookmark, indicating predominant power structures, openness and the modes of respect for cultural heritage of a society (see Schlögel 2003). In Germany a new debate on building culture came up some time after the reunification of the two German states (1990), when the restructuring of shrinking cities in the eastern parts of Germany required a system of criteria for sustainability to decide on the demolition or revitalization of buildings and of historical urban structures.

In 2001, almost 100 years after the first national trade marketing at the beginning of the 20th century, 'Baukultur' was reloaded by the national government mainly for three similar reasons[3]:

- To present national architecture and engineering competence on the international stage.

- To promote a national public debate on good planning and building regarding design qualities, based on public interest in greater social awareness and judgment of the rehabilitation of cultural heritage, as well as the dynamic restructuring of towns.

- To push the development of technological innovations, environmental protection and energy saving knowledge.

This ambitious field of political action was supported by the building industry and the chambers of architecture and engineering, it was pushed forward nationally by a federal initiative which was put in place in 2000. Building culture became a matter of public interest, integrated into the national building law (2004) and the national urban development policy (2007). The federal parliament passed a law to found a public trust (Stiftung Baukultur 2007)[4], charged with the national mediation. *Quote: The former Minister of Transport, Building and Urban Affairs, Wolfgang Tiefensee (2007: 5):* "The term Baukultur (building culture) describes how our society deals with the built environment. Baukultur covers not only the planning, construction and maintenance of the built environment, but also the flow of information: How do we exchange ideas on the built environment and its development? How important is the topic to us as a society? Who is involved in the planning, building and maintenance processes? And how broadly based is the dialogue on the quality of the built environment in which we live our lives?"[5] The quotation configures the comprehensive claims to communicate the new policy field. The first experiences show that people obviously tend to reduce complexity.

3. A network of 31 small towns with historical centres in Brandenburg

Turning points (see Wendepunkte 2009) of national political systems, regulation and finance like the German reunification in 1990 – from a planned economy in East Germany to a democratic federal state – compel both partners to rethink the old performances and top-down modes of town planning. The new authorization for local self-government provided the municipalities in the eastern parts of Germany with more power to decide on urban

development – bottom-up. Financial incentives by the national state encouraged networking to improve the competence of small towns for self regulation. National laws on private property rights and money spending together with special laws of the 'Länder' for preserving cultural heritage framed the general settings.

In the year 1991, a new national programme to subsidize urban monumental rehabilitation for the new states of the federation proved positive for the situation in Brandenburg; in particular for small medieval towns with distinctive historical sites. The programme (1991) defined the relevant criteria and the main direction of networking: the rehabilitation of the urban structure and the preservation of remarkable historic buildings and ensembles; the strengthening of urban functions and the promotion of private initiatives. The programme focused on modernizing and maintaining urban monuments and important historic ensembles within a legally defined territory of the inner cities.[6] A cooperation of historical centre in the partner state of Northrhein-Westfalia acted as a model. However the starting conditions in Brandenburg were different. Most of the small towns in the peripheral areas of Brandenburg had survived in the lee of the planned socialistic economy. Hence they generally kept their typical urban morphology of 'European Towns' of the 12th – 14th centuries[7], but in poorly neglected conditions. Some of them bore witness to historical new town policies in the Middle Ages to colonize the eastern parts of the German territories.

Figure 3: Wittstock Urmesstischblatt 1825
Source: Kart. N 729 – Blatt 1393, 1825; original: Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz

In the year 1992 – animated by the state of Brandenburg – 19 mayors founded a consortium of Cities with Historical Centres ('Arbeitsgemeinschaft Städte mit historischen Stadtkernen in Brandenburg', see www.ag-historische-stadtkerne.de).They were interested in networking and joint activities to exchange ideas and experiences for a common purpose: the maintenance and renewal of their historic central sites. To invest in a building culture of the past was regarded as a sustainable investment in the future of the towns. The association elected a mayor as a leading chairman and installed an office.

Figure 4: Wittstock historical centre – aerial view 2008
Photo: Kannenberg, Fliegerclub Wittstock, 2008

Performance Phase 1: In the beginning actual stocktaking of the historical centre determined work and debate. Consultants were architects, town planners, professional partners from universities, and curators of preservation of historical monuments.

Main features of the first phase: Rediscovering urban history was the subject – a public process of self perception in history combined with a strong motivation to work on town renewal, with an openness to new forms of governance and an optimistic view on future growth.

The cooperation between the towns was based on a set of instructions and criteria to select new members. A special group of experts is tasked with consulting, preselecting and evaluating the applicants. Member assemblies are held twice a year to decide on the annual action programme and the newcomers. The network convinced other historical towns to cooperate and the number of participants grew from 19 to 31 towns in the years 1992 – 2009. The privileged financial support by the state was a driving force.[8] The results were visible, presentable to the public and attractive for tourism campaigns.

Criteria of acceptance:

- "Visibility of historic town grid,
- Predominance of historical buildings,
- Coherent townscape,
- Clearly definable historical town centre,
- Willingness to conduct urban renewal schemes with regard to monument conservation,
- Willingness to give priority to city-centre development,
- Willingness to review any developments with regard to the effects on the historical centre." [9] (see www.ag-historisch-stadtkerne.de)

To qualify for the public financial grants the Ministry requested a general master plan for the rehabilitation of the city centre as part of an integrated strategic concept of urban development. Attractive modes of public relations and political lobbying turned out to be

essential to maintain distinctive urban ensembles of function, form and meaning. A local systems approach affords a creative multi-dimensional interaction between the municipality and the local civic society. To prevent parish-pump politics a system of mutual assistance and professional consultation from outside was installed. Thus, building culture as public interest functions as a multi-component glue for joint activities in recent years:

- Improvement in visibility of the historic town centre
- public actions and cultural events
- participation at state campaigns
- print-products and information material
- public relations (e.g. TV presentations and guidebooks)
- tourism marketing
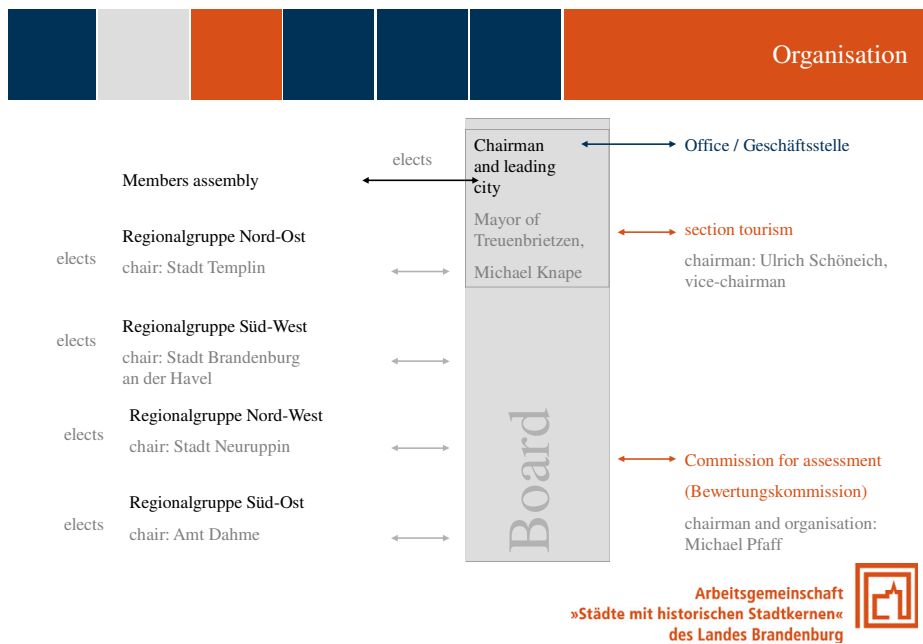- joint lobbying[10] (see www.ag-historische-stadtkerne.de)

Figure 5: Organizational structure of the network of 31 towns
Source: AG Towns with Historical Centres, Folio 5, 2009

Performance Phase 2: At around the turn of the last century the assumption of local continuity in development was severely interrupted by regional structural breaks in economics and labour markets in Brandenburg, due to competition from the global market and the shrinking processes in the rural parts of the state. As a result the government of Brandenburg revised its spatial reconciliation policies thoroughly. It decided to concentrate on strengthening the promising economic sites, combining science and technological clusters with prospects on global markets.

Main features of the second phase: *The members of the alliance were forced to adopt a more comprehensive understanding of urban dynamics within a global market, and to recognize the significance of joint integrated actions and lobbying on a wider scale.*
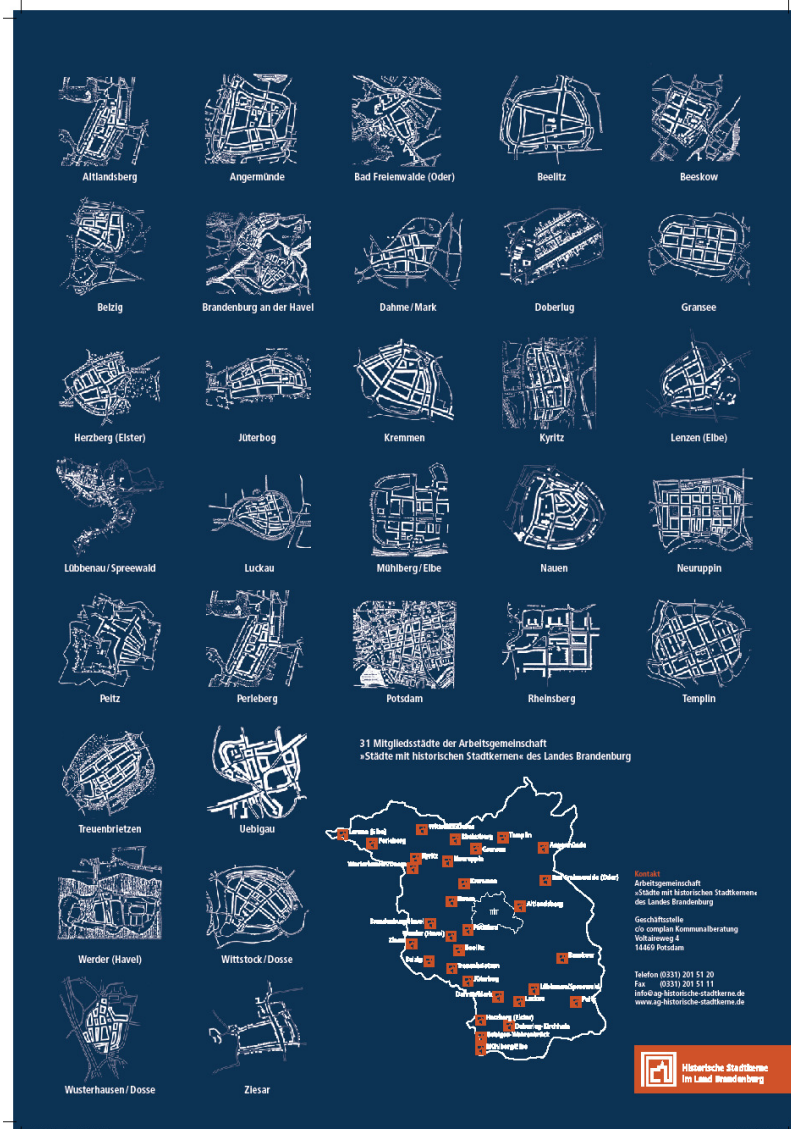
Figure 6: Morphology of 31 historical centres of the network. Source: AG Towns with Historical Centres, 2009.

The public relations of the association operate under one corporate identity label with a multifold strategy to open the eyes of inhabitants and visitors. The annual roof campaigns of 'Kulturland Brandenburg e.V.'[11] (see www.kulturland-brandenburg.de) encourage crucial impulses for joint marketing. The campaigns stimulate the municipalities to research and to present their urban history under special aspects. Such a mutually inspiring collaboration of two networks is only one example of a creative interplay of public and private actors on various local and regional levels. Historical research, imparting knowledge, public debates, marketing for tourism, fostering and profiling the image of the cities generates new synergies.

Contemporary state – provisional appraisals: Long term effects of the global financial crisis cannot be forecasted. The financial turbulences provoke the need for more flexible responses to futures developments. 'Driving on visibility' is the governmental advice in Germany; the investment in existing power sites the consequence.

The government gives preference to support 15 growth centres in Brandenburg as hopeful nodes of knowledge and as promising motors for new technology. Improving the 'hard' public infrastructure of the sites – transport, logistics and communication – determines the political agenda. The international demands of trade, new industries and knowledge economy require quick adaptability.

Meanwhile the metropolitan fringe of Brandenburg increasingly suffers under disinvestment, migration and ageing. Small rural towns have lost their traditional market functions; 'Going online' the agricultural sector no-longer needs them.

Nevertheless, the 'soft' factors seem to still be an essential demand for social cohesion in a shrinking society, together with a sustainable fostering of the cultural landscapes surrounding the metropolitan centre of the Capital Region. Collective memory of origin and traditions of self perception – expressed in building culture, cultural practice, attitudes and familiar commodities of urban life – have been shown to retard as well as promote future development. So how to deal with ambivalent and contradicting demands of different velocities? Odo Marquard (2000: 66-78), a German philosopher, reflects on well-considered compensation strategies, to reconcile the rapidity (future) and the slowness (origin). Indeed a sophisticated challenge for the 'navigators' of small towns.

Following the arguments of Josefina Süssner (2002: 199-206) the 'soft' factors are valid as background music rather than multifunctional elements, and are reviewed only to support conservative power structures. Small German towns are embedded in a national welfare state system, vested with a special authority for their territory within a set of federal instructions. Strong regulations and small local budgets as such sometimes prevent openness for new ideas and change. Shrinking population in the periphery is correlated to 'brain drain' of active and young mostly female people in Brandenburg. Public financial means are diminishing to compensate effects.

*Contemporary feature: Under such circumstances the marketing of the 31 towns for new inhabitants, new enterprise and investment is expanding. Online 'Real Estate Market Place' for the historic centre was installed (*www.altstadtboerse.de *).*
A regional network of cycle routes to the 31 centre initiated a new discussion to rehabilitate the public space to the demands of slow moving traffic. This should also attract new tourists. However, tourism is the message but not the remedy for all towns. Prospects for development depend on size, location as well as on favourable structural conditions – public infrastructure, services and accessibility.
A sustainable development of cultural landscapes and their potentials offers new perspectives for cooperation and profiling. The city dwellers from Berlin and their demands for recreation, sports and wellness are challenging. The development of wind and solar energy plants in the rural parts is provoking. What counts for all actions, more than ever, is an open performance on local level with a realistic self assessment within a global world.

Local logics and performance are sometimes intimidating with respect to tolerance of new architecture, strangers and new impulses from outside**.** The preferences remain trapped in the old homogenizing vocabulary, although the options and the instruments have been given "to create a place of present time" instead of "a self referential remake" of the past (Pehnt 2010: V2/4). "No disturbance please" seems to be a common response. But exclusion of new ideas cannot be an appropriate attitude in global times.

Figure 7: Treuenbrietzen 2008, Photo: Mathias Marx, Geltow 2008

4. Reflections on issues for mutual exchange

Networking – "the extended mind" – is once again forecasted to be the essential condition of world innovation. It is supposed to emerge from social clusters (Brooks 2010: 2). Networking in Brandenburg is compulsory, especially for small towns, to maintain and improve central service functions for the surrounding areas and to rehabilitate their distinctiveness. If European centered considerations and solutions give a clue to an international dialogue, remains up to the partners to decide. It's the context that differs.

'Future needs origin' – but how much origin is needed for future?
"In Esperanto we construct a transnational language following the law of the least resistance" (Meyer 1926, quoted by Oechslin 2000: 87).Globalization seems to level the physical identity and the distinctiveness of metropolitan centre all over the world. Nowadays historism becomes an international countercurrent. What could be common basic topics for an international dialogue? 'Rehabilitating' for an uncertain future? Reflecting on the role of urban cultural heritage as a social 'care package' to compensate for the deficits of familiarity within a rapidly changing world? (see Fritz-Haendeler 2007: 15-21)

Systemic thinking
'Think global and act local' – the ecological paradigm asks for multi-level strategies and for a comprehensive assimilation of knowledge with trans-disciplinary approaches. Networking means: perceiving and understanding the 'other' with a mutual knowledge of differences. Deeper rooted 'cultures of view' (see Belting 2008) are supposed to define regional and local logics of performance and governance – attitudes and traditional habits – that cannot be transferred to other cultures. With such conditions in mind some topics of our actual German debate might be worth considering internationally:

- Sustainability and urban history

- Identity and global change

- Regional embedding

- Design qualities

- Planning modes

Rehabilitation for an uncertain future
In his essay "Planning for an Uncertain Future" Eric Wirén (2002) describes a necessary triad for risk management: "knowledge, consensus and ability". "The fact that we plan what we know something about, what we agree needs planning and what we expect to be able to do something about". If one or two of these components are weak or absent, qualifying is needed to reach an optimal result, he said.

Regarding my experiences these thoughts apply to building culture in Brandenburg, meant as systems approach. The result depends on a local interplay of education and knowledge, on tolerance and democratic modes to reflect private and public advantages / disadvantages of local actions, with regards to a sustainable urban and regional development. "It's the spirit that creates the body" (Friedrich Schiller 1796-1841: Wallensteins Tod) – a challenge for a cosmopolitan dialogue on conditions and possibilities with an 'extended mind'.

Endnotes:
1   revised version of an essay; Fritz-Haendeler, Renate: Building Culture - a systems approach
        to restructuring Cities. In: Reicher, Christa, et al. (eds.): Planning Spaces through intercultural
        Dialogue (2010:14-29). Klartext Verlag Essen

2   Came into power 31/03/2009. See: Joint Planning for Berlin and Brandenburg. Capital
        Region Berlin - Brandenburg Ministry for Infrastructure and Agriculture / Senate Administration
        for Urban Development (eds.) Potsdam 2010

3   See: 3 reports on 'Baukultur in Deutschland' 2001, 2005, 2007 of the German Federal Ministry
        of Transport, Housing and Urban Affairs (BMVBS) and the arguments for the law to establish a
        public trust 2006

4   A special law: Gesetz zur Errichtung einer Bundesstiftung Baukultur
        (Bundesgesetzblatt 2006, Teil I Nr.62.Bonn (21/12/2006: 3177f)

5   Preface of the Federal Minister Wolfgang Tiefensee (2007:5) In: Baukultur! Planning and
        Building in Germany. English version

6   See: Bilanz und Perspektive. Städtebaulicher Denkmalschutz (2008:14f). Evaluierung des
        Programms. Drost/Michalski

7   Characteristic street pattern system, market square, church, town hall, small private plots of
        land surrounded by walls

8   According to the Ministry of Infrastructure and Spatial Planning (MIR) State of Brandenburg
        (2009): Within the period from 1991 – 2012 there will be a total donation of 560 Mill.€, financed
        by the Federal Government and the State of Brandenburg (40:40), completed by 20% of local
        municipal input. The Federal Government decided 2011 to reduce the federal means for
        town development in 2012.

9   Quotation: AG Historische Stadtkerne in Brandenburg: list of criteria of acceptance. Power
        point presentation nr.4 (English version) 2009

10   Quotation: AG Historische Stadtkerne in Brandenburg: List of joint actions. Power point presentation nr.10 (English version) 2009

11   Network of cultural networks in the State of Brandenburg, sponsored by the government of the state and a savings bank. Themes of the annual roof campaigns of 'Kulturland Brandenburg e.V.', e.g. "Landscape and Gardens"(2004), "Heaven on Earth" – 1000 Years of Christianity in Brandenburg" (2005), "Building Culture" (2006), "Focus Water" (2007), "Metropolis and Province" (2008), "Democracy" (2009),"Women in Brandenburg" (2010), (see www.kulturland-brandenburg.de)

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