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# A masterplan for urban resurgence: The case of Mönchengladbach, Germany (2008–2019)

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## Abstract

This paper investigates how an urban masterplan can be used to catalyse civic and entrepreneurial engagement to trigger a broad resurgence process within a medium-sized city. Therefore, it dwells on the masterplan project MG 3.0 in Mönchengladbach, which is often described as the initial impulse of a dynamic resurgence process—a confident statement the authors want to question. The exploratory case study applies the “urban health” concept by Glaeser and Gottlieb and highlights the significance of place-based leadership as well as entrepreneurial engagement in terms of Corporate Urban Responsibility in developing an overarching vision of the urban future.

## KEYWORDS

corporate urban responsibility, masterplan, Mönchengladbach, place-based leadership, resurgence

## JEL CLASSIFICATION

R1; O18

## 1 | INTRODUCTION

“Cities (...) have complex economic development processes that are shaped by an almost infinite range of forces” (Storper, 2011, p. 333). A general assumption or rather common wisdom is that urban development is mainly driven by economic aspects, respectively the rise and fall of economic sector (Schöler, 1999). Those are largely influenced by exogenous forces, such as globalization and individualization (Hohn, Lötscher, & Wiegandt, 2006). Nonetheless,

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several studies showed differences in economic growth between entities with similar preconditions on the regional (Rodríguez-Pose, 2013) as well as on the city level (Grillitsch, Rekers, & Sotarauta, 2019; Power, Plöger, & Winkler, 2010). In this context, several theoretical concepts highlight the role of human agency<sup>1</sup> or rather leadership in urban development, such as the concept of organizing capacity (Van den Berg, Braun, & van der Meer, 1997) or the “trinity of change agency” approach in evolutionary economic geography (Grillitsch & Sotarauta, 2019). The authors share the opinion that important explanations for the different advancement of spatial entities that are comparable at one point in time can be found by analysing actors and processes on the micro-level and that “a city that is responding to an urban crisis with dedicated, well-prepared and innovative approaches is thus likely to outperform its peers with similar problems” (Plöger, 2013, p. 188). Understanding the power of these actor-related innovative approaches for urban development is of special interest for cities in stagnation or even decline, where the successful implementation of new growth paths<sup>2</sup> is closely related with the hope of an (economic) resurgence (Hassink, Isaksen, & Tripl, 2019).

One group of cities typically discussed in the context of decline and stagnation are the so-called “old industrial areas” undergoing structural change. “Old industrial areas” are regions or cities that became prosperous during the time of industrialization but then fell in decline (Friedrichs, 1993; Hamm & Wienert, 1990) and were or still are struggling to initiate resurgence processes (Power et al., 2010). In this context, Großmann, Bontje, Haase, and Mykhnenko (2013) identify the role of urban governance as a main research gap, demanding an intensive examination of the decision-making and modes of cooperation of policy actors. A further research gap in understanding urban development and the creation of new growth paths is described by Hassink et al. (2019), wondering about the contribution of shared expectations, visions and conventions in mastering resurgence. The authors share the view that collaboration is mandatory to achieve urban resurgence. No interest group can steer something as complex as local economic development alone. Closely related is the reflection regarding suitable instruments to strengthen the collaboration between different actor groups to elaborate common solutions for their city (Albers, 2011; Power et al., 2010), especially in view of diverging motivational backgrounds.

Based on these reflections, this paper is dedicated to the question how a masterplan can be applied as an innovative tool to catalyse civic and entrepreneurial engagement to create a common urban vision for an old-industrial medium-sized city and thereby drive a broad resurgence process. In a second step, the paper also reflects on the question whether signs of recovery can be identified and whether they are already being reflected in economic indicators. Overall, this paper needs to be seen as an additional puzzle piece to the overarching aim of “identifying to what extend and how various actors and actor groups can shape regional growth trajectories” (Grillitsch et al., 2019, p. 5). To deal with these research questions the authors selected the city of Mönchengladbach with the masterplan project MG 3.0 for an exploratory single case study.

Section 2 introduces relevant theoretical and conceptual frameworks, followed by some methodological explanations in Section 3. The main part, Section 4 is dedicated to the case study analysis, briefly presenting the historical and economical background of the city of Mönchengladbach, the masterplan as an initiative aiming at resurgence as well as quantitative indicators illustrating the urban development over the last 15 years. The paper concludes with a discussion of implications and future research perspectives.

## 2 | PUTTING THE RESEARCH QUESTION INTO THEORETICAL CONTEXT

“For almost as long as we have had cities, we have predictions of their decline and, for almost as long ... we have had prophecies of resurgence” (Storper & Manville, 2006, p. 1269) This quote illustrates the complexity of urban

<sup>1</sup>Human agency is defined as “the ability of people to act, usually regarded as emerging from consciously held intentions, and as resulting in observable effects in the human world” (Gregory, 2009, p. 347). Change agency refers to actions aiming at a shift from the status quo in terms of reworking or resisting rather than coping with current development paths (Coe & Jordhus-Lier, 2011).

<sup>2</sup>Path creation or new path development is defined as “the emergence and growth of new industries and economic activities in regions” (MacKinnon, Dawley, Pike, & Cumbers, 2019, p. 115).



development and the challenge in predicting future developments in terms of decline or resurgence. According to Cheshire (2006, p. 1231) city resurgence is “a hard concept to define precisely”. And truly, up to now, the authors could not find a universal definition of “urban resurgence.” Expressions like “urban renaissance,” “urban rebound” or “urban resurgence” are used synonymously, describing a turnaround in spatial population and employment developments (Siedentop, 2008, p. 193).

Especially, in the context of “old industrial areas” strategies and approaches promoting resurgence are of special interest. Depending on the location and its economic, social and political preconditions, the adjustment processes in so-called “old industrial areas” proceeded and still proceed very differently. Thereby, the concrete solutions and strategies are as manifold as the starting positions. Three typical overarching strategies consist in the attempt to slow down the structural change with government interventions allowing for a gradual adaptation, fighting not the structural change itself, but its social consequences with measures in the social and health care sector and focusing on the creation of a competitive environment for enterprises. Furthermore, one can distinguish between top-down and bottom-up approaches. Typically, the first approach goes along with a territorial classification, helping the government to identify critical regions with a set of ranked indicators. Regions identified as “lagging regions in need for revitalization” can then gain access to national support measures. In contrast, bottom-up approaches focus on strategies exploiting the regions' endogenous potential. While the traditional focus in post-communist countries used to be more on sectoral measures and improvements of hard infrastructure, the Western European countries focused more on the endogenous development potential. This includes the strengthening of soft location factors as well as intersectoral and integrated strategies requiring the initiative and collaboration of different governmental and nongovernmental actors (Lintz, Müller, & Schmude, 2007). According to Lintz et al. (2007) decentralized approaches, which are regionally embedded and intersectorally organized, are more promising. This also justifies the focus on regionalization in the European Union. Specific examples for concerned cities in Germany and their success factors are discussed among others by Bartholomae, Nam, and Schoenberg (2017).

The authors support the argument that urban resurgence is a manifold process. In accordance with Grillitsch et al. (2019), it is important to distinguish the impact of external changes, structural features and the results of (un)conscious human agency. With this in mind, the development of new growth paths “can (...) be seen as the nexus of intentional, purposive and meaningful actions of many actors, and the intended and unintended consequences of these actions” (Grillitsch & Sotarauta, 2019, p. 4). This thinking emphasizes the importance of actors on the micro-level for the understanding of path emergence or rather resurgence from the bottom up.

While van den Berg et al. (1997) use “leadership” as an overarching term in the concept of “organizing capacity,” Grillitsch and Sotarauta (2019) further distinguish three different types of (human) change agency—the so-called trinity of change: the Schumpeterian innovative entrepreneurship, institutional entrepreneurship and place-based leadership. In the context of the paper on hand the last mentioned concept is of special interest. Place-based leadership is not connected to a specific actor group. It encompasses actions aiming at the transformation of places via the integration of competencies, powers and resources in order to contribute to the actors' individual objectives as well as the regions' objectives (Grillitsch & Sotarauta, 2019). Resurgence is - as mentioned before - a collaborative effort, “a multi-actor construction” (Grillitsch & Sotarauta, 2019, p. 5) and can be defined as an ongoing process dealing with the mobilization, co-ordination and promotion of new paths (MacKinnon et al., 2019). Therefore, the importance of place-based leadership orchestrating agents and their actions cannot be highlighted enough.<sup>3</sup> When companies engage in place-based leadership, the concept of corporate urban responsibility (CUR) comes into play, referring explicitly to the voluntary engagement of companies in their surrounding urban development processes

<sup>3</sup>In line with these thoughts is the definition of “organizing capacity” by van den Berg et al. (1997, p. 253): “the ability to enlist all actors involved, and with their help to generate new ideas and develop and implement a policy designed to respond to fundamental developments and create conditions for sustainable development”.



(Albers & Hartenstein, 2017). CUR relates the concept of corporate social responsibility<sup>4</sup> to the spatial dimension of cities and became increasingly important in recent years; among others due to tight municipal budgets (Hohn et al., 2006, p. 10).<sup>5</sup>

Regardless of which actor group initiates the resurgence process, the development of an urban vision, also called *Leitbild*, can help to set a strategic framework for future action. The terminology *Leitbild* has been used in spatial planning since the second half of the twentieth century with the idea to condense contents in an eye-catching fashion. A *Leitbild* consists of an abstract but striking presentations of future conditions and main planning features that are comprehensive, realistic and contain objectives and a long-term vision. It has an integrating function strengthening interdisciplinary collaboration and the development of a common reference framework. This common vision can serve as a helpful communication tool, that is precise enough to be discussed but too general to specify detailed planning. *Leitbilder* are increasingly applied in decision-making processes and public proceedings to secure general support and the implementation (Reicher, 2017). One way to concretize this high-level vision is a masterplan. It deals with the building structures, its character and usage in subspaces or a city as a whole, pointing out potentials and perspectives for future development. Furthermore, the integration of specialist planning allows statements regarding additional aspects such as transportation and open space planning. A masterplan provides guidelines for the city administration communicating clear spatial orientation patterns and can include specific recommendations for action or propose concrete implementation measures, development priorities or time lines. It is an informal, not legally binding planning tool with no fixed prescribed elaboration procedure. While no consistent definition regarding neither the contents nor the form of presentation of a masterplan exists, it usually emphasizes a high level of readability and very explicit statements, which makes it an excellent information tool and orientation framework for actors. Additionally, the lack of strict (legal) provisions allows a flexibility, which makes it a powerful mediation instrument between actor groups such as administration, citizens, business community or others, aiming at results that are capable of consensus. To that end masterplans often include process elements such as citizen participation and discussion rounds within the city administration (Reicher, 2017).

### 3 | METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

In order to answer the research question, the authors chose an exploratory single case study design. The masterplan project in Mönchengladbach was selected due to its particularity in terms of its supra-regional role model function and public attention.<sup>6</sup> The project's idiosyncrasy expresses in a twofold way. First of all, the process itself is acting as a precedent, especially in terms of the high civic and entrepreneurial commitment. Second, a major success lies in the actual implementation of the proposed measures of the masterplan.<sup>7</sup> Therefore, this case study can help to improve the general understanding of masterplan projects and highlights important effects of it.

Another reason for the selection lies in the city itself. Mönchengladbach used to be characterized as an old industrial city in decline (Hamm & Wienert, 1990) or rather stagnation (in recent years). Therefore, it fits a typical extreme case profile suitable for the investigation of the effects of stakeholder agency described by Grillitsch et al. (2019, p. 8): "medium-sized regions with a high share of manufacturing employment" that were challenged by increasing "global competition with resulting reallocation of standardized production."

The scope of the case study is the masterplan process itself, its perceived consequences within the city boundaries and a quantitative assessment of the effects on urban development over the last 15 years by a set of economic

<sup>4</sup>The European Commission (2001, p. 6) defines corporate social responsibility as "a concept whereby companies integrate social and environmental concerns in their business operations and in their interaction with their stakeholders on a voluntary basis." Accordingly, the companies complement their core mission of earning economic profit by supporting societal welfare (Bassen et al. 2005).

<sup>5</sup>This shift also reflects the change of perspective from government to governance giving credit to the growing importance of civic as well as entrepreneurial engagement in urban affairs (Hohn et al., 2006).

<sup>6</sup>This was also part of the justification for its selection in the competition "Economy and City Development" by the Federal Ministry of Construction (Hartmann, 2013).

<sup>7</sup>One major criticism concerning masterplans usually is the lack of or only partial implementation, as in Cologne (Kruppa, 2018).



indicators.<sup>8</sup> The analysis is based on desktop-research of documentation and archive material as well as statistical time-series analysis of quantitative data. The findings are verified via triangulation between the sources (quantitative data, documentation, archival records), so that converging lines of inquiry can be secured.

## 4 | CASE STUDY

### 4.1 | Historic and economic context

Mönchengladbach is an important regional centre with approximately 260,000 inhabitants. The city is located in the West of the German federal state of North Rhine-Westphalia (NRW) in the city triangle of the state's capital Düsseldorf, Cologne and Aachen and only 25 km away from the Dutch border. Nowadays, Mönchengladbach accommodates some big globally operating companies, but is predominantly marked by medium-sized companies. Leading branches are logistics, information and telecommunication technologies, health care, mechanical engineering and textiles and clothing. The latter is still an important image carrier as it has a long tradition in the city going back to the sixteenth century. At the beginning of the nineteenth century Mönchengladbach was described as the "Rhenish Manchester" marking the top of its economic prosperity thanks to the textile and clothing industry (Quack, 1963). Since the 1960s liberalization of world trade and globalization caused a mayor crisis in the textile and clothing industry (Rouette, 1996), not just in Mönchengladbach but also in other German and West-European textile regions. Hamm and Wienert (1990) conclude that three aspects drove the crisis and turned sectoral problems into regional ones, preventing a fast adaptation in Mönchengladbach: the lack of diversity in the economic structures (dominance of the textile industry), misjudgements of companies' management and the city's government at the beginning of the crisis and urban infrastructure deficits.

During the 1980s mechanical engineering—especially the world-wide exports of textile machinery—became the new hope to end the structural crisis in Mönchengladbach (Hamm & Wienert, 1990). But unfortunately this hope has not materialized and the city kept struggling. The decades of structural change also affected the city budget, leaving little room for manoeuvre in terms of costly initiatives by the city government (Jüngermann, 2009). In 2000 local politicians and the city administration attempted to develop a vision for the future urban development but failed in implementing it (Schmidt, 2013). They participated in an ideas competition called "Stadt 2030" tendered by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF). Mönchengladbach was selected for the programme in 2003 with the aim to develop a mid and long-term city development concept involving internal as well as external experts but also citizens. Despite these efforts no lasting guideline was established and the city continued without a clear strategy and isolated actors. One reason might have been the complicated political situation between 2004 and 2012 with a social-democratic mayor often lacking political support after decades under Christian-democratic leadership (Jüngermann, 2014). The political division fuelled the dissatisfaction with the local politics but at the same time it was apparently the trigger for some citizens to get active themselves by starting a bottom-up citizens' initiative: the masterplan project (MG 3.0 Masterplan Mönchengladbach e.V., 2016b).

### 4.2 | Project MG 3.0

#### 4.2.1 | Pre-phase

The masterplan project MG 3.0 started in 2008 as an initiative of the city's architecture association "Architektenschaft Mönchengladbach e.V." with the objective to come up with new ideas on how to develop the city

<sup>8</sup>In order to set the more recent developments into context with the city's historic and economic development, some explanations prior to this specific time period will be added. But they are not in the focus of the analysis.



and to create a common vision showing the city's potential (Kreuder & Otten, 2013). The choice of name comes from the idea that Mönchengladbach was first founded by monks; than experienced a second phase of prosperity in the nineteenth century thanks to the textile industry and then needed a third impetus from among the citizenship (Kreuder & Otten, 2013).

In October 2008 the members of the association publicly voiced the idea of a privately financed urban masterplan for the first time (Brings, 2013). The first half of the year 2009 was used to address two key aspects: the active search for benefactors within the civic and business community as well as the securing of financing.<sup>9</sup> For this purpose a brochure explaining the undertaking was designed and distributed and supporters of this idea actively used their private as well as professional networks to convince potential supporters (Brings, 2013).

The 6th of November 2009 marked the official birth for the initiative "Masterplan Mönchengladbach" with 28 selected representatives from the business community and culture, who agreed to support the new masterplan association ideationally as well as financially (Brings, 2013). They agreed on four principals: first, the masterplan should be developed together with the citizens. Second, it needed to be independent of personal interests and initiated by the citizens themselves to the benefit of the city. Third, a well-known external urban planning office should elaborate and communicate the masterplan. Forth, the masterplan should be adopted as a binding decision-making tool by the city government. This event led to the foundation of the initiative "Masterplan Mönchengladbach" in January 2010 (Brings, 2013) and finally to the foundation of the association "MG 3.0 Masterplan Mönchengladbach e.V." on the 29th of November 2010 (Otten, 2013). The first half of the year 2011 was spent with the preparation and implementation of the selection of the architectural office. On the 9th of July 2011 the team of Sir Nicholas Grimshaw was awarded the contract, among others due to its collaboration with two local partners from Düsseldorf (Faltin, 2013).

## 4.2.2 | Project Phase

The first project workshop was held in September 2011. The one year planning process was structured along four events aiming at including the public, also called public dialogs (impulses, ideas, sketch and vision). In parallel a round table of politicians was implemented giving feedback after each public dialog event. Expert hearings and key interviews were also part of the process, as well as a website presenting the current results. The public dialogues were held between November 2011 and December 2012. The last event was used to present the masterplan to the public.

A complex project such as the masterplan requires a multi-actor approach. The association MG 3.0 Masterplan Mönchengladbach e.V. "received great support by the Chamber of Industry and Commerce (IHK) 'Mittlerer Niederrhein'", which provided the operative head office as well as the provisional management (Kreuder & Otten, 2013, p. 42). Also the city administration and related institutions such as the business development agency "Wirtschaftsförderung Mönchengladbach GmbH" (WFMG) and the city's development company "Entwicklungsgesellschaft der Stadt Mönchengladbach mbH" (EWMG) were involved in the project. Further expertise was brought in by external experts. The civic society's input was gathered via the public dialog events as well as the website.

The main objective was to come up with new ideas on how to develop the city while engaging civic society. From the beginning the initiators believed in the necessity to involve citizens, politicians and administration in order to work successfully on the city's future development (Kreuder & Otten, 2013). Based on the charter of urban living (vision) five overarching strategic objectives were developed, concerning: (i) diversity and revitalization; (ii) connectivity and mobility; (iii) hand print of green areas; (iv) inner city development; and (v) identity and character

<sup>9</sup>First estimates for the elaboration of an urban masterplan in July 2009 mentioned around 500,000 euro (Jüngermann, 2009). Overall the association raised around 1,3 million, which is remarkable for a city of SMEs with no DAX-listed company. The additional money was used for the support of singular projects in the implementation phase (MG3.0\_Masterplan Mönchengladbach e.V., 2019).



(Kreuder & Otten, 2013, pp. 130-135). On the 3rd of July 2013, the city council committed itself to consider the masterplan as an informal planning concept in urban planning decisions, which marked the starting point of the implementation phase (Rat der Stadt Mönchengladbach, 2013).

### 4.2.3 | Implementation Phase

In November 2013 the city received financial support from the Federal Ministry of Construction. Mönchengladbach was one out of nineteen selected projects from the competition "Economy and City Development". One justification for this decision was the role model function of the masterplan process in Mönchengladbach for the nationwide city development. Within this competition 160,000 euro were invested for the implementation of the masterplan. In order to support the implementation the city government installed a masterplan advisory board<sup>10</sup> (Hartmann, 2013; MG3.0\_Masterplan Mönchengladbach e. V, 2019b). The association focused not just on the implementation of ideas voiced in the masterplan but also supported co-operation projects.<sup>11</sup>

In the next three years the administration further developed the ideas of the masterplan and integrated them in the overall concept for the future city development of Mönchengladbach. The official city development strategy was published in summer 2016 under the title "mg+ – Wachsende Stadt" (mg + – Growing City), with a focus on qualitative growth (Stadt Mönchengladbach, 2016). At the beginning of 2018 the association decided on a realignment. Since the masterplan mission was accomplished the seemingly successful model should be applied on the new topic "smart city" (MG 3.0 Masterplan Mönchengladbach e.V., 2018). But after in-depth discussions, the idea was withdrawn (MG3.0\_Masterplan Mönchengladbach e. V, 2019b) and in February 2019 it was decided to dissolve the association (MG 3.0 Masterplan Mönchengladbach e.V., 2019a).

### 4.2.4 | Effects

The question to be answered after the previous description of the master plan process is whether signs of an economic and social revival can be observed in the city of Mönchengladbach. It must be stressed, on the one hand, that it is generally difficult to prove clear causal relationships in this context. And on the other, the period of time since the beginning of the master plan project is still too short to arrive at final results - at best, an interim conclusion is possible today. Taking into account these general restrictions, however, several relevant aspects can and shall be mentioned.

First, the masterplan project delivered not just a masterplan, but a vision for Mönchengladbach's urban development. This extensive process could not have been financed by the city government. The elaboration of a common vision strengthened the network within the city by uniting various actors from the civic society, the business community and the city government and administration. This way the masterplan process provided fresh impetus for a new atmosphere of departure. This aspect is hardly measurable in numbers, but nevertheless very important.

Second, the masterplan served and still serves as an excellent (marketing) tool to attract investments and companies. It can therefore contribute to the improvement of the internal as well as external city image (MG3.0\_Masterplan Mönchengladbach e. V, 2019b).

<sup>10</sup>The advisory board first met in February 2014 and continued with nine further meetings until April 2016. It was composed by the mayor, the head of the construction and planning committee, representatives of all council parliamentary parties, the city administration, the business development agencies WFMG and EWMG, the masterplan association and the office of the masterplan advisory board (MG3.0\_Masterplan Mönchengladbach e.V, 2019)

<sup>11</sup>Among others the masterplan for short-range mobility, a city wide concept of bike and walking traffic, which was approved by the city council on the 20th of December 2017 (Stadt Mönchengladbach, 2019) or the mobile think tank in cooperation with the city administration and the competence centre Social Design of the University of Applied Sciences Hochschule Niederrhein (MG 3.0 Masterplan Mönchengladbach e.V.). The latter was also supported by the Federal Ministry of Construction as part of a pilot project. Its objective was to test a new participation format by going on tour in a black bus for discussions with the citizens (MG 3.0 Masterplan Mönchengladbach e.V.).





Third, the masterplan was adopted into the official city development strategy, which provides for its continuity and implementation of urban planning ideas (Stadt Mönchengladbach, 2016). Several elements of the masterplan were already implemented or are currently in a status of implementation or planning (MG 3.0 Masterplan Mönchengladbach e.V., 2016b; MG3.0\_Masterplan Mönchengladbach e. V, 2019b). Among the current lead projects inspired by the masterplan are “Seestadt mg+” as residential mixed-use quarter with up to 2000 new apartments and additional office spaces, the “Maria-Hilf” area as new residential quarter with up to 400 new residential units, the “19 houses” project in front of the train station, the new market hall and the new city hall (EWMG, 2019).

And finally, the masterplan process also functioned as a role model for further citizen participation procedures (Hartmann, 2013). The successful approach inspired further citizen participation processes during the implementation phase, in particular the mobile think tank, but also in other urban planning projects (MG3.0\_Masterplan Mönchengladbach e. V, 2019b).

Points of criticism of the masterplan project concern the depth of citizen participation (could all social levels be reached?), the democratic setting-up (especially of the non-public advisory board) and the threat of an over-proportioned interference of the business community.

Despite these critical aspects, the masterplan can be described as a catalyst of resurgence. It allows synergies between the communal planning sovereignty and entrepreneurial engagement, which leads to improvements on the tangible side of urban development but also a better investment climate in general and an improvement of the urban self-confidence (Hartmann, 2013; MG 3.0 Masterplan Mönchengladbach e.V., 2016a). Nonetheless, it is no universal remedy and even great supporters are aware that not all the manifold challenges of structural change can be solved at once (Faltin, 2013; Schmidt, 2013). Time lags between the starting point of the masterplan and the empirical evidence of success must be expected. While the positive radiance of the new vision might have a motivational effect straight away, the construction measures need more time. Especially since not all the measures proposed by the masterplan were or rather are being implemented at the same point in time. Consequently, their effects are also spread over time. The implementation of several masterplan subprojects will only start in the near future, so that its full potential cannot yet be seen. Nevertheless, the considerations above show signs of urban resurgence since the beginning of the master plan.

### 4.3 | Grey zone of resurgence—evidence in economic data?

Using a system of indicators to evaluate urban resurgence the following subsection examines whether hard statistical facts can already confirm or at least strengthen the qualitative resurgence tendencies discussed above. A suitable concept to quantify the phenomenon of resurgence is the measurement of urban health—a concept developed by Glaeser and Gottlieb (2006). In the context of this case study, resurgence is defined as an improvement of urban health within a specified period of time. Because of restrictions of data availability some modifications were necessary to use this system of indicators for shedding some more light on the possible resurgence process in Mönchengladbach.

The first indicator of the urban health concept is population growth, which also is the most common indicator in the discussion regarding city shrinkage (Turok & Mykhnenko, 2007). Additionally, the comprehensive measurement of urban health suggested by Glaeser and Gottlieb (2006) comprises income development and development of housing prices. They argue as follows: “Nominal income growth implies rising productivity. Housing price growth implies a greater willingness of consumers to pay to receive a place’s bundle of wages and amenities. Population growth captures the quantity side of popular demand to live in a city. No measure on its own implies success but, taken together, the combination of rising population, income and jobs suggests urban health” (Glaeser & Gottlieb, 2006, p. 1277) Although Glaeser and Gottlieb argue that employment is not a relevant indicator due to its high correlation with population, the authors think that it is worth adding employment as an indicator for resurgence as analysing total employment and employment by industries allows a more detailed look behind the scenes.



### 4.3.1 | Population development

As at 31 December 2018, the city of Mönchengladbach has around 261,500 inhabitants (IT.NRW, 2019), which is almost the same as in 1960. Over the last 60 years the city lived through two mayor waves of population increase and decrease (see Figure 1).

The first wave was probably connected to structural changes in the city's textile and clothing industry: Mönchengladbach's population increased until 1973. Then the numbers dropped by 11,000 to about 250,000 by 1987. After 1987 population recovered probably partly as a consequence of German re-unification. In 1996 the number of inhabitants was about 267,000, surpassing the original number of the 1960s. Then a second wave of decrease started, finding its lowest point in 2011 after having lost 4.5% of its population (12,000 inhabitants). Ever since a third wave started its upwards movement so far adding more than 7,000 inhabitants (2.9%). So, the first indicator in use—population development—seems to indicate resurgence.

Nevertheless, a structural aspect of population development should be added: The absolute number of German inhabitants in Mönchengladbach has kept decreasing since 1995, meaning that the German population has not been part of the recent upturn. In contrast, the absolute number of foreign-born population increased continuously (25,400 in 2011 to 41,700 in 2018) leading to a shift in the population structure—the share of the German population decreased from 89% in 2008 to 84% in 2018. Thus, the above evaluation of the resurgence indicator “population development” must be seen against the background of the changing population structure. This change positively means that the city has become more multicultural and diverse; but also means additional integration requirements.

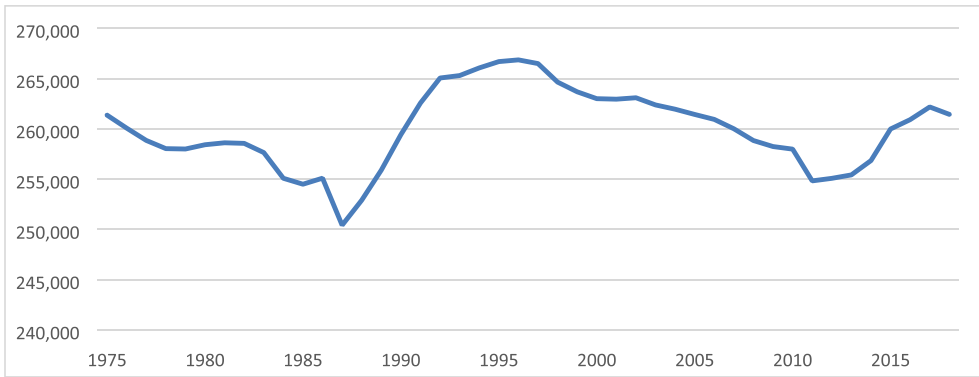
### 4.3.2 | Income development

As Glaeser and Gottlieb (2006) point out, the income development is an appropriate indicator for urban health, respectively resurgence. Often gross domestic product (GDP) *per capita* is assumed to be a suitable income indicator. Figure 2 shows the relative development of GDP *per capita* in the city of Mönchengladbach<sup>12</sup> in comparison to the North Rhine-Westphalian GDP for the period from 2000 to 2017. The diagram illustrates that the GDP *per capita* in Mönchengladbach was and still is below the North Rhine-Westphalian average. It can also be seen that the relative position of Mönchengladbach deteriorated between 2000 and 2006. From 2006 to 2011 the relation is relatively stable, that is, the developments in the city and the federal state were very similar. From 2014 to 2017 a gradual improvement of the Mönchengladbach position can be seen. Therefore, the developments in the city must have been better than in the federal state. The relative improvement of GDP *per capita* is another result pointing to a process of urban resurgence.

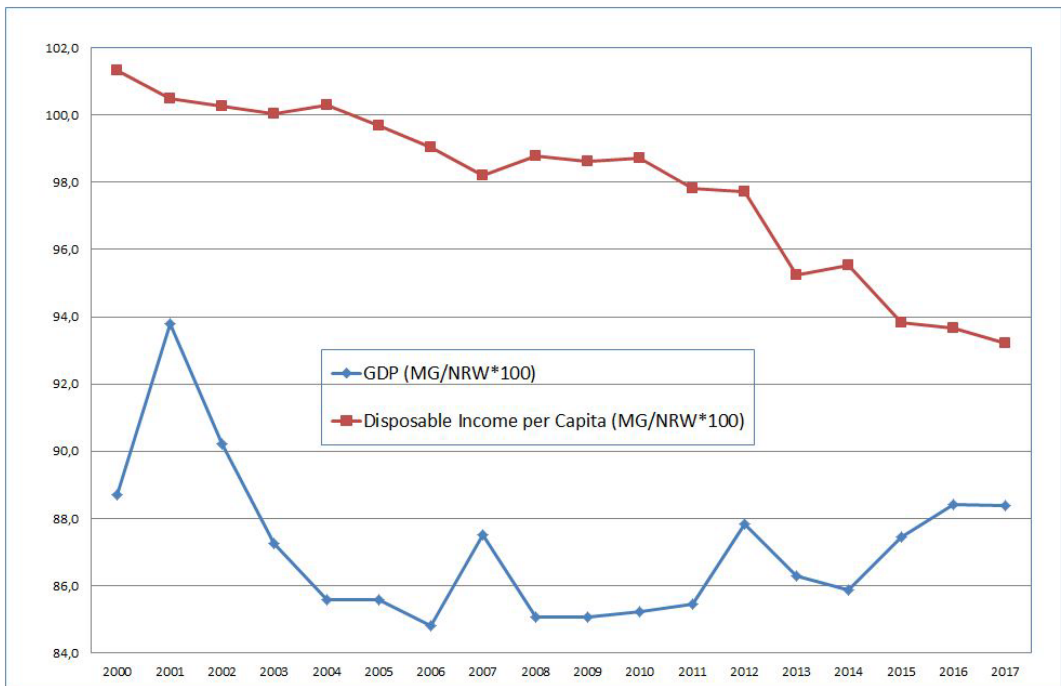
However, as with population development relativizing is necessary. Official statistics also provide data on disposable income *per capita*. The relative development of this indicator is also depicted in Figure 2 (IT.NRW, 2019). It can be seen that in 2000 the disposable income in Mönchengladbach was slightly higher than the North Rhine-Westphalian average. Over the whole period from 2000 to 2017 however, the city-federal-state-ratio decreased, meaning that the development of disposable income *per capita* must have been worse in Mönchengladbach than in the North Rhine-Westphalia.

The apparently divergent developments of two indicators supposed to indicate similar things or even the same might find an explanation by thoroughly thinking about their definitions: the GDP is determined according to the domestic concept. In concrete terms, the results mean that the *per capita* economic output generated within the city limits of Mönchengladbach has developed more favourably than the North Rhine-Westphalian average in recent years. However, the *per capita* income available to households in Mönchengladbach has developed less favourably

<sup>12</sup>Relative development means the development of the relation (GDP *per capita* Mönchengladbach / GDP *per capita* North Rhine-Westphalia) × 100.



**FIGURE 1** Population Development in MG (1975–2018) as at 31 December 2018



**FIGURE 2** Development of GDP and income *per capita* (Mönchengladbach compared to North Rhine-Westphalia—2000–2017)

than in the federal state. Theoretically this can have two reasons: One possible reason would be a continuously rising positive commuter balance over time—which, however, cannot be seen in the commuter statistics. The other reason is that a relatively increased economic output or added value of firms in Mönchengladbach has not yet been reflected in a similar development of the relative household incomes. Many of the new jobs created in Mönchengladbach have been created in the area of goods distribution and logistics; qualifications and salaries of the persons employed there are likely to be comparatively low.



### 4.3.3 | Housing price development<sup>13</sup>

In addition to the development of income, Glaeser and Gottlieb (2006) regard the real estate prices as a suitable indicator for assessing urban health. For a city in resurgence, increasing demand for flats and houses can be expected and as a consequence, rising real estate prices. The purchase price per m<sup>2</sup> for one and two-family houses in Mönchengladbach amounted to € 2.451 in the third quarter of 2019. Thus Mönchengladbach occupies a place in the lower third in comparison with other North Rhine-Westphalian “Kreisfreie Städte” (district-free cities)—living in Mönchengladbach is therefore comparatively inexpensive. Figure 3 compares the development of purchase prices (indexed to the year 2004) for one- and two-family houses in Mönchengladbach with the average of the district-free cities in North Rhine-Westphalia.

In fact, prices for one and two-family houses in Mönchengladbach rose by around 31% between 2004 and 2019. However, this increase clearly lags behind the average for district-free cities in North Rhine-Westphalia (44.3%). A closer look at Figure 3 and the data used reveals the following:

- Between 2004 and 2008 the development of real estate prices in Mönchengladbach was considerably less favourable than in comparable North Rhine-Westphalian cities. In the price ranking for North Rhine-Westphalia, the city slipped to penultimate place in 2008.
- Since then, developments in Mönchengladbach have been similar to those in the other district-free cities. Especially since 2015 there has been a comparable increase in real estate prices. The position in the ranking of North Rhine-Westphalian cities improved slightly but noticeably in 2019.

In sum this means: houses in Mönchengladbach are still cheaper than in many other cities in North Rhine-Westphalia. The latest price developments, however, can—with due caution—be interpreted as a sign of a resurgence process, though they are less pleasing for prospective buyers.

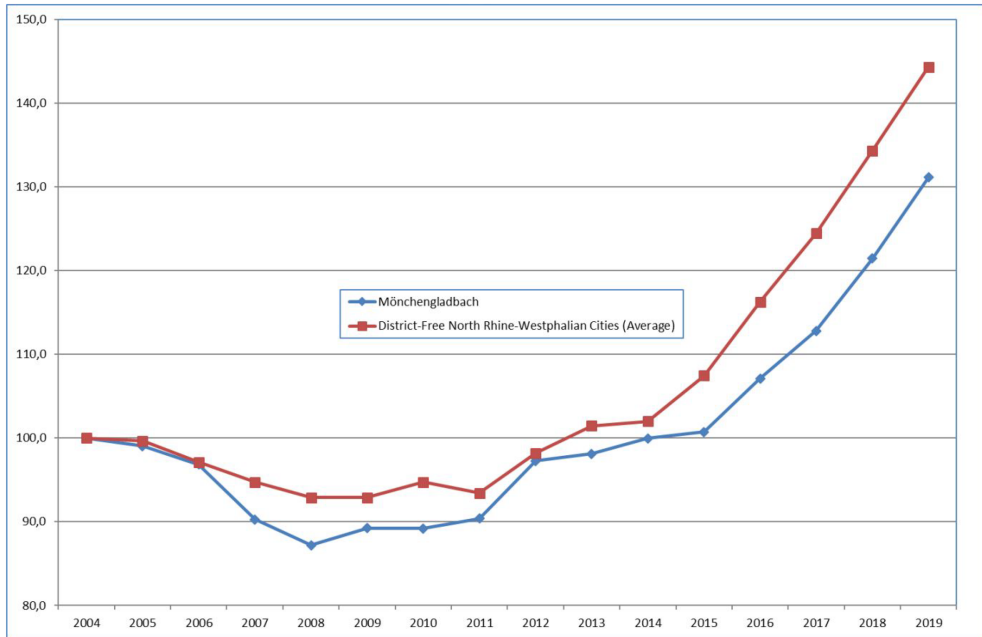
### 4.3.4 | Employment

Development of employment is an indicator for resurgence suggested in this paper. Comparing the employment development of Mönchengladbach with that of the federal state of North Rhine-Westphalia shows that Mönchengladbach was lagging behind between 1990 and 2000—there is a gap of –8,2%. Between 2000 and 2010 the difference is still negative, but considerably smaller (–1,3%). However, between 2010 and 2017 one can realize that the development in Mönchengladbach was very similar to that of North Rhine-Westphalia—it was even slightly better and a lead can be seen since 2013 (see Table 1).

Overall the development of total employment gives a hint on urban resurgence. But this result should be judged more sceptically, especially in view of the explanation for the identified catching-up process:

- It can be seen that employment in manufacturing in Mönchengladbach decreased even after 2010 and that the city's industrial development was lagging behind North Rhine-Westphalia between 2010 and 2017. This applies also for mechanical engineering—the meanwhile most important branch of manufacturing in Mönchengladbach. In both cases, the employment figures of Mönchengladbach fell between 2010 and 2017, while they rose in North Rhine-Westphalia. While the backlog for the entire manufacturing sector has continued to widen after 2013, it has after all narrowed in the mechanical engineering sector.
- The picture is somewhat different for services. Overall, they developed better than the North Rhine-Westphalian average between 2010 and 2017; the lead was 2%. Mostly, this can be attributed to the sectors “transport and logistics” (+ 89.2%) and “banking” (+ 40.1%; a large Spanish bank has established its German headquarters in

<sup>13</sup>The data used for the purchase prices of one and two-family houses come from “empirica regio”. They were kindly made available to the authors free of charge by empirica ag.



**FIGURE 3** Development of purchase prices for one and two-family houses (Mönchengladbach compared to the average of district-free North Rhine-Westphalian cities—2004–2019)

**TABLE 1** Employment development in selected sectors for Mönchengladbach and North Rhine-Westphalia (indexed to 100 over the period 2010–2017; IT.NRW, 2019)

		2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Total Employment	MG	100.0	101.8	102.8	104.1	106.3	109.8	111.4	114.4
	NRW	100.0	102.5	104.3	105.3	106.9	108.9	111.4	113.9
	Dev. Gap (%)	0.0	-0.7	-1.4	-1.1	-0.5	0.8	0.0	0.4
Manufacturing Industry	MG	100.0	97.9	97.6	96.3	96.6	95.9	95.1	95.4
	NRW	100.0	101.8	102.9	102.9	103.3	103.9	104.6	104.6
	Dev. Gap (%)	0.0	-3.8	-5.2	-6.4	-6.5	-7.7	-9.0	-8.8
Tertiary Sector	MG	100.0	103.6	104.7	106.5	109.4	114.4	116.6	120.3
	NRW	100.0	102.8	105.0	106.5	108.6	111.4	114.6	117.9
	Dev. Gap (%)	0.0	0.8	-0.2	0.0	0.7	2.6	1.7	2.0

Mönchengladbach). Among the other tertiary sectors there are some (retail, other services) that are lagging behind, others—such as the health sector—that can keep pace with the federal state's development.

Summarizing the results of the employment development analysis, weak hints for resurgence can be identified. According to the results to date, however, this is by no means an industrial resurgence, but it is rather based on the development of a few service sectors—one being low paid, the other being a result of a single firm decision. One might doubt, whether logistics and the settlement of a headquarters are a satisfying base for a durable resurgence in the long run.

## 5 | CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE FIELDS OF RESEARCH

This case study, especially the qualitative analysis, illustrates that place-based leadership is of special importance when it comes to developing an overarching vision on how to shape urban resurgence, including the greatest



possible number of actors. Furthermore, the case study emphasizes the driving force of the business community, which is not limited to its financial resources but is also highly related to its hands-on entrepreneurial spirit.

Moreover, the case study shows that a privately financed masterplan—an embodiment of corporate urban responsibility—can be a suitable tool to pool civic as well as business engagement. Via its catalyst function it can trigger and drive change processes leading towards urban resurgence. Among its positive effects are the surmounting of city budget restrictions, the elaboration of a strong vision unifying many actors behind a common goal, more concrete planning concepts and the creation of a new atmosphere of departure that can motivate actors on all levels to collaborate. Also the masterplan is a good marketing tool to entice investors. Furthermore, it promotes the consolidation of participatory approaches in urban planning processes. Nonetheless, a masterplan is only one puzzle piece in the complexity of urban resurgence and cannot solve all challenges related to structural change.

The question if the economic data actually indicates a resurgence for the city of Mönchengladbach can be answered with a cautious yes (since 2013). The population increases since 2011 and employment also improved in recent years. Mönchengladbach profited from the overall positive economic situation in Germany, including the historically low level of interest rates facilitating construction investments. But the city also used the time to catch-up compared to federal and national state levels (in terms of GDP per inhabitant). Important conditions for this positive development are the attraction of logistics and transport companies.<sup>14</sup>

But a closer look at the data also justifies some question marks as pointed out in the analysis of the quantitative data. There is obviously a time gap between the implementation of measures promoted in the masterplan and the reflection of their effects in economic data. Some bigger projects are still in the beginning of the implementation phase. Therefore, no assertion regarding its overall effect on the city's resurgence can be made. But given the current situation, the authors want to give some critical comments.

The first remark concerns social aspects. While there is the hope that the increase in GDP also leads to an increased level of welfare in terms of income, this does not reflect in the data yet. The population development also leaves room for speculations regarding the future development of the social structure in the city with a constant outflow of German inhabitants since 1995. Resurgence in terms of social aspects will not happen by itself or as a side effect of economic growth, but requires special attention.

Second, the increase in employment is not evenly distributed over many branches but mostly limited to logistics and banking. A resurgence in the secondary sector cannot be confirmed. This includes the risk of becoming depended on one specific branch (again). The future will show, if the city is capable of broadening its basis of economic drivers. With its focus on the logistics industry, it deliberately used its geographical position to its advantage, creating many jobs for its (at the time low-skilled) workforce. But in the medium and long term the aim should be to strengthen other branches as well and to create jobs for the highly skilled.

Third, as Glaeser and Gottlieb (2006, p. 1277) point out, an increase in urban health or rather a city's resurgence does not only lead to positive effects. There is always a downside to economic and population growth, including among others congestion, pollution and segregation, providing for new challenges to be tackled.

Therefore, it will be exciting to see the city's development in the next years: whether it manages a broad and sustainable resurgence or if exaggerated expectations fail to materialize as was the case in the 1980s with the mechanical engineering industry. A continuous and more in depth quantitative analysis of Mönchengladbach's economic developments—perhaps including further indicators—will therefore be the first task of future research. The results of this research would not only give information to local actors and thus help to design future activities, but it would also help to improve the general understanding of urban resurgence processes. A second possible field of future research is of special interest for the regional science community, but for practitioners and regional actors as well. It focuses on the actors involved in resurgence processes and questions the actors' motives and obstacles, the possibilities to encourage them to try new solutions, the role of the business community and non-firm actors, how successful structures of collaboration should look like and if policy makers can actively support such processes.

<sup>14</sup>In this context, the (over-)heated market in neighbouring cities (Cologne, Düsseldorf, Bonn) probably helped to position Mönchengladbach as a less expensive alternative location.



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**Resumen.** En este artículo se investiga cómo se puede utilizar un plan maestro urbano para catalizar la interacción entre la sociedad civil y el sector empresarial para desencadenar un amplio proceso de resurgimiento dentro de una ciudad de tamaño medio. Por lo tanto, el artículo se centra en el proyecto del plan maestro MG 3.0 de Mönchengladbach, descrito a menudo como el impulso inicial de un proceso de resurgimiento dinámico, una afirmación enérgica que se quiere cuestionar en el artículo. El estudio de caso exploratorio aplica el concepto de "salud urbana" de Glaeser y Gottlieb y destaca la importancia del liderazgo basado en el lugar, así como la interacción con el sector empresarial en términos de Responsabilidad Corporativa Urbana para el desarrollo de una visión global del futuro urbano.

**抄録:** 本稿では、市民と起業家の関与を触媒し、中規模都市での広範な再生プロセスを引き起こすためには、どのように都市マスタープランを使用できるかを検討する。そのため本稿では、ダイナミックな再生プロセスの初期の衝動といわれることが多いメンヘングラートパッハ市のマスタープランプロジェクトであるMG 3.0(我々が疑問を抱いている自信に満ちた声明)について論じる。この探索的ケーススタディでは、GlaeserとGottliebによる「健康都市」の概念を適用し、将来の包括的な都市像の設定における、Corporate Urban Responsibility的な観点での場所に基づくリーダーシップと起業家の関与の重要性を強調する。