

Urban Maestro

New governance strategies
for Urban Design

Baukollegium Zurich

Independent design advisory board (CH)

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1. SUMMARY

The Zurich *Baukollegium* is a design advisory board that provides independent advice to the Zurich City Council. It assists the City Council in evaluating the design quality of projects and urban design concepts by offering non-statutory recommendations via a peer review system. In this way, the *Baukollegium* assists with optimising design outcomes, complementing the planning and construction regulatory processes with informal design advice. The advisory board is composed of members of the City Council of Zurich and external experts from the fields of architecture, spatial planning and urban development.

2. CONTEXT AND ADMINISTRATION

In terms of administrative structure, the state in Switzerland is organized into 3 administrative levels, the federal government, 26 cantons and 2300 municipalities, which together cooperate and comprise the Swiss Confederation¹. Below the federal level, the canton constitutes the state level with its own government and legislative institutions. In turn, the cantons are sub-divided into municipalities, the smallest administrative unit in Switzerland. Following a decentralized model, the political and legislative powers are distributed to the three levels in accordance with the principle of subsidiarity (e.g. the Federal Spatial Planning Act defines the assigned tasks for each administrative level).

2.1. Federal government

According to the Swiss Constitution, the federal government has the responsibility of defining the conceptual nature of the spatial planning policy and its main principles at the national level². Specifically, the Federal Office for Spatial Development (ARE) is the national authority tasked with handling issues concerning spatial development,

¹ Introduced in 1848, the federal system plays an important role in maintaining social cohesion in Switzerland due to the existence of four national languages. For more information see: <https://www.ch.ch/en/demokratie/federalism/>.

² The Swiss Constitution (art.° 75) defines that the federal government shall lay down the principles on spatial planning, which are binding for the Cantons, and serve to ensure the appropriate and economic use of the land and its properly ordered settlement.

mobility policy, and sustainable development³. Within the cultural sphere, the Federal Office of Culture is the strategic body responsible for drawing up and implementing the Swiss national cultural policy—its promotional activities comprise two areas: cultural heritage (heritage protection and historic monuments, museums and collections) and cultural creativity (films, prizes and awards, etc.).

Following two previous initiatives promoted by the Swiss Association of Engineers and Architects (SIA)⁴, the federal government decided to develop a national policy for *baukultur* (building culture) in 2015⁵. *Baukultur* is a German expression, a broad concept that can be translated into English as *building culture*, and which encompasses any human activity that changes or alters the built environment, at any scale from architectural detailing to spatial planning, referring not just to the built environment itself but also to the processes that create it⁶. In January 2018, in the framework of the Davos World Economic Forum (WEF), the Swiss Federal Office of Culture invited the European ministries of culture for an international conference on ‘how to achieve a high building culture’, with the aim of politically and strategically promoting the concept of a high quality *baukultur* in Europe and to promote the concept beyond German-speaking countries. This two-day international conference culminated in the adoption of the ‘Davos Declaration on *Baukultur*’ by the European ministers of culture⁷.

In February 2020, following a public consultation document⁸, the Swiss Federal Council formally adopted its first ‘Interdepartmental strategy for the promotion of building culture’⁹. Arguing that to achieve a high quality *baukultur* the federal government should be the one to set the example, given that the policy connects all *baukultur*-related operations of the different federal offices, defining seven strategic goals and 41 measures, with the aspects of public engagement, interdisciplinarity, capacity-building and cooperation being particularly based on the use of informal tools.



Fig. 1 – Swiss interdepartmental federal strategy for baukultur (2020)

³ The Federal Office for Spatial Development (ARE) works alongside Switzerland's cantons and communes, also taking the lead on international cooperation in spatial planning matters. For more information: <https://www.are.admin.ch/are/>

⁴ See: <https://www.sia.ch/de/themen/baukultur/>

⁵ This decision was foreseen in the Swiss Federal policy on the promotion of culture 'Cultural Message 2016-2020', approved by the Parliament in December 2015:

<https://www.parlament.ch/de/ratsbetrieb/suche-curia-vista/geschaefte?AffairId=20140096>

⁶ This means that *baukultur* is a holistic concept that includes all aspects of design of the built environment involving a wide range of actors and stakeholders, which integrates architecture, civil engineering, urban and regional planning, heritage conservation, landscape architecture, interior design and art for public buildings (*Baukultur! Planning and Building in Germany*, 2007).

⁷ In January 2018, under the framework of the Davos World Economic Forum (WEF), the European ministers of culture signed the Davos Declaration on *Baukultur*, which calls for the introduction of better strategies that embrace the concept of building culture and incorporate the vision of a high design culture as a primary political goal.

⁸ For more information <https://www.bak.admin.ch/bak/de/home/kulturerbe/zeitgenoessische-baukultur/strategie-baukultur.html>

⁹ For more information: <https://www.bak.admin.ch/bak/de/home/kulturerbe/zeitgenoessische-baukultur.html>

2.2. Cantonal government

Below the federal level, the Swiss cantons (states) possess a high degree of decision-making power, holding competences in several policy areas, namely in budget, political system and taxation. In addition, the cantons also share competences with the municipalities in several policy domains, such as infrastructure and education¹⁰. Similar to all Swiss cantons, the canton of Zurich has three administrative branches - the government, the parliament and the courts - and its citizens are able to influence how the politics of the city are shaped through instruments of direct democracy that allow them the right to elect representatives, to request a referendum and to propose a popular initiative¹¹.

Related to the built environment, the cantons possess several policy competences, including, among others, on spatial planning policy, landscape and townscape protection. In the former, each canton has its own Planning and Building Act approved by the cantonal (state) parliament. Furthermore, the cantons develop structural plans that guide and inform the municipalities (Kiessling & Pütz, 2020), especially where local zoning plans must comply with the cantonal guidelines for urban development and infrastructure (Muggli, 2004). In the latter, the cantons are responsible for the inventorying of urban areas and buildings that are important for the townscape from a supra-municipality perspective (cantonal townscape inventory), and for ensuring coordination with the federal inventory for protected townscapes (ISOS)—this means that within protected areas and buildings, an additional permit from the Cantonal Office for Spatial Development is mandatory in order to obtain a building permit in Switzerland¹².

2.3. City government

Zurich is the largest city in Switzerland and the capital of the Canton of Zurich¹³. To support the executive branch and implement its policies, the local administration is divided into nine departments responsible for implementing the city policies and the city parliament's decisions. Within this organizational structure, the Building Department (HBD) of Zurich is responsible for the planning, building and management of the municipal real estate as well as for ensuring legal compliance

¹⁰ For more information see: <https://www.ch.ch/>

¹¹ For more information see:

<https://www.ch.ch/en/demokratie/political-rights/>

¹² For more information see: <https://www.zh.ch/de/politik-staat.html> (accessed 2/08/2020)

¹³ The Canton of Zurich is subdivided into 12 districts and 162 municipalities; German is the official language.

with the planning framework and the building permit procedure¹⁴. HBD employs around 800 people and is subdivided into four major offices:

- *Office for Building Permits* - supports builders, deals with building applications, legal remedies and project authorizations for lifts and checks the construction work;
- *Office for Urban Development* - coordinates public and private interests and projects of architectural and urban planning, cultivates a building culture and care for heritage as well as enables the realization of forward-looking construction projects;
- *Office for (public) Building* - a construction service provider that develops and erects landmark buildings for Zurich. Among several other tasks, it promotes an average of ten design competitions for the new public sector projects and for non-profit developers every year;
- *Real Estate of the City of Zurich* (IMMO) is the owner representative and manager of the assets of the administrative assets entrusted to it, such as schools, administrations, sports, health, social welfare, etc.

Among these four, the *Office of Urban Development* is responsible for urban and spatial planning, heritage protection and design advice on new public and private building proposals¹⁵. This *Office* ensures the supervision of design quality proposals as well as the 'quality of the structural changes in Zurich', providing advice to the *Office for Building Permits*, which is responsible for processing and issuing building permits. Among other tasks, the *Office of Urban Development* promotes urban studies and organizes design competitions, as well as the architectural and urban planning review of building applications. The *Office of Urban Development* is supported by the *Baukollegium*, a design advisory body that provides non-statutory design advice and expertise to the Office and the building permit authority, which will be examined in the following section.

¹⁴ For more information see: https://www.stadt-zuerich.ch/portal/en/index/politik_u_recht.html (accessed 22/10/2019)

¹⁵ The Office of Urban Development includes around 120 employees and has the following tasks: i. Create the basis for urban planning and monument preservation; ii. Coordinating

the planning in development areas; iii. Building codes and zoning plans; iv. Spatial planning and district plans; v. Urban studies and competitions; the Architectural and urban planning review of building applications and publicity; Construction consulting and inventory regarding the preservation of monuments; Archaeology, underwater archaeology and dendrochronology; and maintaining the Architectural History Archive.

2.4. Cooperative planning

In the last thirty years, numerous areas of the city of Zurich have witnessed a significant transformation, accompanied by a general improvement in the quality of its public spaces and services provided¹⁶. One of the key ingredients to this development, among others, was a paradigmatic shift in the spatial planning policy of the City Council of Zurich that gradually changed from a top-down hierarchal planning policy to a cooperative planning approach. According to Devecchi (2012), the urban policy in the 1980s did not allow for any form of informal discussions or negotiations with private developers about building and urban proposals (e.g. the type of development, the intended uses, the shape of the buildings, etc.). The private projects were entirely handled by the developers and their consultants with almost zero interaction with the local administration. Following its submission, the projects would then be assessed and decided upon by an opaque local planning authority (Ibidem).

Since the early nineties, a cooperative planning approach began to be employed by the City Council's officials (Eisinger & Reuther, 2007, p. 91). Based on a consensus-building method (Katsakou, 2019), the *Office of Urban development* promoted a variety of participatory initiatives with local stakeholders for debating and discussing future urban developments, such as workshops, meetings and forums. Launched in 1996, the 'City Forum for Zurich West' marked a new era in the city planning process (Katsakou, 2019). For the first time, it brought together all key local stakeholders to discuss the urban development strategy for Zurich West, involving ten workshops with the aim of defining recommendations and a future vision for Zurich West (Devecchi, 2012).

The new urban policy goal was “to create a broad basis for discussion between politics, administration and private individuals, which should take up all existing interests and enable a more goal-oriented agreement on possible development projects” (Devecchi, 2012, p. 5). As Martin Heller (2007) notes in an interview with the Urbanism City Councillor: “A culture of discussion based on ideas of content had to emerge as the core of this new-self-image (...) so that there could be an eye-to-eye debate with the outside - property owners, developers, planners, and architects, the construction business as a whole”. Throughout the years, this collaborative environment that had been established between the City Council and private developers has helped direct private investment towards the urban renewal of old

¹⁶ According to Mercer's 2020 Quality of Living Ranking, Zurich ranks second in its ranking of the quality of life of world cities.

industrial areas as well as towards the improvement of several urban and suburban areas across the city (Katsakou, 2019).

Building on this experience, the *Office of Urban Development* has continued to develop a proactive and collaborative planning approach towards high-quality development. Before defining an urban strategy for a certain area, the Office typically organizes meetings and workshops with all involved parties and designers (Eisinger & Reuther, 2007, p. 91). By assuming that the private investment is a necessary condition for urban transformation, the urban plans and zoning regulations are now “negotiated in a process-like manner at a round table and then officially decreed, often with special building regulations in the form of design plans” (Ibid).



Fig. 2 – Internal meetings with developers and designers at the City Council (source: City Council of Zurich)

Responsible for the promotion and supervision of the design quality of the built environment of Zurich, the *Office of Urban Development* promotes a ‘customer-friendly’ service where it provides direct enabling and advice to developers’ design teams¹⁷. For this purpose, the Office assumes two functions:

- prior to the building permit request - it advises potential builders as early as possible at the beginning of the preparation and planning phases of their projects;
- during the building permit process - it reviews and assesses the design quality of submitted projects for the *Office of Building Permits*.

In both functions, the *Office of Urban Development* is focused on supporting developers and its design teams in improving the overall quality of building and

¹⁷ According to the leaflet about the role of the architectural services of the Office of Urban Development. See: <https://www.stadt->

[zuerich.ch/hbd/de/index/bewilligungen_und_beratung/beratungsangebot/architektonische_beratung/best_practice_architektur.html](https://www.stadt-zuerich.ch/hbd/de/index/bewilligungen_und_beratung/beratungsangebot/architektonische_beratung/best_practice_architektur.html)

urban development projects. According to its website, every year the *Office* manages around 600 planning applications for design examination and around 500 planning applications for monument preservation. In addition, it receives around 1000 requests per year for outdoor advertising. Considering the need to inform the *Office for Building Permits*, which is responsible for issuing the building permits, on the design quality and urban integration of planning applications, it may request independent advice from the *Baukollegium* on complex projects or those that may be located in sensitive areas, the role of which will be examined below.

3. OBJECTIVES

Established in 1896¹⁸, the mission of the *Baukollegium* – also referred to as the Design Advisory Board - is to review the design quality of new building projects and urban developments as well as to avoid undesirable proposals in architecture and urban planning. Considering that design quality is a vague and subjective term that raises many questions about whose judgement of good design quality should be followed (Cousins, 2009, p. 1), the aim of the Design Advisory Board is to provide independent design advice to the City Council of Zurich by offering recommendations via a peer design review system and assistance with optimizing the planning application and construction processes.

According to its regulation¹⁹, the specific tasks of the *Baukollegium* are defined as follows:

- 1) Provide advice to the City Council and the Building Permit Authority on questions of urban planning and architecture developing corresponding recommendations;
- 2) Provide comment on construction and planning projects as well as on urban planning concepts and mission statements if their importance requires it or if they give rise to critical questions.

¹⁸ According to the minutes of the City Council (7 January 2015) about the role of the Baukollegium:
https://www.gemeinderat-zuerich.ch/Geschaefte/detailansicht-geschaefte/Dokument/9653fa94-bd0d-4c0c-8cbc-e5fcc0999272/2014_0340.pdf

¹⁹ Rules of Procedure for the Baukollegium of Zurich (Geschäftsordnung für das Baukollegium), from March 22, 2017. For more info see: https://www.stadt-zuerich.ch/portal/de/index/politik_u_recht/amtliche_sammlung/inhaltsverzeichnis/7702/160.html



Fig. 3 – Family picture of the *Baukollegium* for the 2018-2022 mandate (Source: Zurich City Council website)

Although the *Baukollegium*'s advice will inform the formal planning process, its recommendations are not binding nor does it have any decision-making competences. The informal nature of the design advisory board enables soft powers of negotiation and persuasion between the City Council, the developers and their designers based on a peer review process regarding the design quality of building and urban projects and their relation to their close surroundings²⁰. Nonetheless, as will be seen below, only a small percentage of projects or urban development concepts are submitted to the *Baukollegium* design review process, as this board only provides advice on projects that may have a significant impact on the built environment or if they may be located in sensitive areas.

²⁰ Besides the *Baukollegium*, the Office of Urban Development of Zurich also coordinates a 'Heritage Commission' which advises the City Council on monument preservation issues, namely making recommendations on protection proposals or removals from the heritage inventory, assessing major renovation projects and taking a stand on questions of monument conservation.

compensate for the investment in the higher quality of the schemes, the improvement-based changes, and the time spent on the design review process.

Therefore, according to the City Official (*ibidem*), only a small number of applications are submitted to the Baukollegium, around 40 projects per year. Nonetheless, the design review process and advice are a valuable contribution for local officials negotiating and influencing developers and designers to heighten their ambition for major buildings and urban proposals that have a strong impact on the city.

4.2. Composition

The Design Advisory Board is composed of five external experts from various disciplinary fields, with recognized experience and curriculum, and members of the administration, some with only an advisory vote²³. The Board is chaired by the head of the Building Department (HBD) of Zurich and its members are appointed by the City Council for four year-terms, according to the following structure:

A. Voting members:

1. Head of the Building Department (as President);
2. Head of Civil Engineering and Waste Management;
3. Director of the Office of Urban Development;
4. Five external specialists from the fields of urban planning, architecture, monument preservation and open space design.

B. Members with an advisory vote: Deputy Director of Grün Stadt Zürich;

1. City Engineer, Civil Engineering Office;
2. Manager of Urban Development Department (from the Office for Urban Development);
3. Lawyer of the Legal Department of the Building Department;
4. Secretary.

The five external experts are appointed by the City Council based on their experience and curriculum within the different fields. According to the type of the project, additional experts may be appointed to participate in the sessions with a voting role²⁴. The external expert members are compensated for their time, as well as

²³ The composition and tasks of the Design Advisory Board (*Baukollegium*) are regulated by a specific ordinance. See Note 18.

²⁴ See note 18.

for travel expenses incurred by attending the meetings in the course of their mandate. The fact the five experts are not selected by an open call procedure has raised some criticisms from local opposition councillors who have argued that the selection process is not transparent enough, among others, since it is not clear what the eligibility criteria for the selection are and how to ensure the independence of the experts²⁵.

Addressing this issue, the City Council official (interview: 2021) stated that the selection of the external experts is a complex process because they must be replaced every four years, which means that there is not a gradual transition between the panels and the transmission of knowledge to the new members. In addition, the experts must be able to communicate easily their ideas to the promoters in a constructive manner. This means that the five external experts are selected not only based on their education and expertise, but also on their communicational and interpersonal skills since the Design Advisory Board should work as a coherent group of experts and not as several independent voices that are not able to discuss and assume positions in a collegial manner.

4.3. Procedure

Following the initial contacts between the promotor and the *Office of Urban Development* about the type of planning constraints that apply to the site and their intentions of development, if the project is considered to have a strong impact on the built environment due to meeting one of the criteria described previously, the Office will inform the promoter that the project needs to be submitted to the Design Advisory Board for an expert opinion about its design quality. If the promoter agrees to go forward, since they can always decide not to submit the project or opt for a design competition (as will be discussed later), its design team will prepare all the necessary sketches, documents and models to be submitted to Advisory Board for a design review. After receiving the proposals, the secretariat sends a copy of all the documentation to the five experts so they may analyse the project prior to the review.

The Design Advisory Board usually meets once a month according to a predetermined agenda defined by the *Office of Urban Development*, which is responsible for the administrative tasks, such as the preparation of the activities and meetings, managing the secretariat, preparing site visits, catering, etc. Usually, the

²⁵ See reply from the City Council: https://www.gemeinderat-zuerich.ch/Geschaefte/detailansicht-geschaefte/Dokument/9653fa94-bd0d-4c0c-8cbc-e5fcc0999272/2014_0340.pdf



Design Advisory Board reviews three to four projects in each meeting, some of which can be repeating entries from previous reviews.

The agenda of the Design Advisory Board is divided into two parts. During the morning session, there is a site visit to the different locations, with a mini-bus provided by the City Council. For each site, the Office of Urban Development describes the local constraints, explains the different projects, and the experts have the opportunity to obtain a better perception of each place (Fig. 4 and 5).



Fig. 4 and 5 – Examples of a Baukollegium site visit to proposed locations, Zurich (source: Eisinger & Reuther, 2007, p. 254)

In the afternoon period, the promoters and designers are invited to present their projects to the Design Advisory Board within a slot of 15 minutes. Following their presentation, the members of the board have the opportunity to make brief questions and then the promoters and designers need to leave the room for the members of the board discuss the project. In private, again within a slot of 15 minutes, the members discuss and deliberate the needs for improvement and whether the project will receive a positive or a negative review from the board. Finally, the results of the deliberations are communicated verbally to the interested parties immediately following the meeting and in written form some days after.



Fig. 6 – Example of a presentation session to Design Advisory Board of Zurich (source: Eisinger & Reuther, 2007, p. 254)

As stated previously, for assessing the proposals, the Design Advisory Board supports its recommendation based on the plans and models submitted by the *Office of Urban Development*, which were received from the building promoter and their design team. For deciding on the different recommendations, and whether a project is approved or rejected, the Advisory Board follows the following procedure:

1. The Design Advisory Board passes its resolutions with the votes of the voting members;
2. The Design Advisory Board has a quorum, in addition to the chair, if at least three non-executive members with voting rights are present;
3. The voting members are required to vote in all voting decisions;
4. The decisive factor is the majority of voting members present; in case of a tie, the chairman has the tie-breaking vote.

4.4. Design review process

The Design Advisory Board reviews and assesses the submitted projects in two subsequent phases: urban design and architecture. In the first phase, the review is focused on the urban design aspects of the proposals, including its relationship with its surroundings, the added value for the public realm, accessibility and connectivity, the type of uses, scale, density, etc. Only after the project's general layout and urban design aspects have received a favourable review will the project progress to the second phase focused on architectural aspects, including the relationship with the ground floor, functionality, its internal layout, materials, façade, etc. According to the City Official (interview: 2021), there is a risk that the design teams will have to present a very detailed proposal in the first phase as the Advisory Board usually requests certain improvements to the overall concept and layout. Therefore, to avoid any setbacks or frustration, the design teams are advised to focus on the urban design aspects and general principles in the first proposals, which should be seen as an opportunity to improve the projects based on constructive criticism and dialogue (Ibidem).

According to the City Official (interview: 2021), each project can be presented to the Design Advisory Board a maximum of four times. This means that if a project is rejected, after introducing the necessary improvements, it can be submitted for another review until the four-session limit is reached. If a project is not able to obtain a favourable approval at the end of those four reviews, the project will be rejected by the City Council (although the municipality can always decide otherwise, as the recommendations of the Design Advisory Board are non-binding).

In those cases where the project fails, in order to be able to obtain progress on the building permit process, the developer has to organize a design competition to

guarantee that a high level of quality will be achieved. Nonetheless, if the developer accepts doing so, the competition has to be organized with the help and participation of the staff of the Office of Urban Development, to assure that the public's concerns are taken into account in the definition of the competition brief, the pre-selection of proposals and the jury's final decision (Ibidem). See: the next section on design competitions.

4.5. Relation to other informal design governance tools

To complement the description of the Zurich Design Advisory Board and the urban design governance context within which it operates, some additional information is provided regarding the relationship of the Advisory Board with to informal urban design governance tools used by the City Council.

Rating tools (design competitions)

Building on a national tradition, the Office of Urban Development employs design competitions as a tool for promoting innovation and high-quality developments on a regular basis. In fact, since the beginning of the 20th century, Switzerland has been organizing design competitions for key public buildings and urban developments (Katsakou, 2013). Amongst European countries, Switzerland holds one of the largest number of competitions per year²⁶, where above a defined threshold public bodies typically promote a design competition (Van Wezemaal & Silberberger, 2015). According to the City Council's webpage, the Zurich *Office for (public) Building* announces an average of ten competitions per year for new public building projects and for interested non-profit property developers²⁷.

Within the formal building permit process, the *Office for Urban Development* is regularly solicited by private investors for organizing design competitions for complex buildings, a procedure considered as an alternative to the Design Advisory Board review process, that does not review projects resulting from a design competition. For this option to be accepted, the design competition must be carried out in accordance with the accepted rules, with the participation of the *Office for Urban Development* in the jury, and if the resultant project follows the

²⁶ According to Rönn et al. (2013), around 200 competitions per year are held in Switzerland.

²⁷ See: <https://www.stadt-zuerich.ch/content/hbd/de/index/hochbau/wettbewerbe.html>

recommendations of the jury. Nonetheless, for the purpose of quality assurance, submitted projects resulting from a design competition may be submitted to the Design Advisory Board for assessment in the following cases:

- a) on a reasoned decision of the Board;
- b) a change of the architect;
- c) with significant changes in usage or utilization;
- d) when significant parts of the project are changed;
- e) for the materialization of prominent or important projects.

Although developers do not submit their projects to the Design Advisory Board on their own free initiative and will, this route continues to be appealing to developers for several reasons (City Official, interview; 2021). Firstly, the work of the Design Advisory Board is a public service paid for by the City Council, given that the costs of holding a design competition must be supported by the investor. Secondly, the organization of a design competition involves a complex process, meaning it is more time consuming. Thirdly, developers tend to view the design review process as an opportunity to negotiate and force their designers/architects to strive for a higher quality project that in the end will facilitate the procurement of the building permit.



Fig. 7 – View of the new University UZH Forum and open public space, a design selected through a two-phase design competition, Zurich (source: © herzog & de meuron; status: project from 2018)

However, as mentioned previously, if the Design Advisory Board rejects a project at the end of the four review sessions, the developers will need to organize a design competition to ensure that the project will have a high-quality design. In this context, design competitions can be organized beforehand as an alternative to the review process, or afterwards, as a consequence of negative advice. The main aim of both

processes is to ensure that those development projects with a strong impact on the built environment will positively contribute to the city of Zurich. Nonetheless, in 2012 at least, most of the design competitions promoted by the City Council together with private investors have followed restricted procedures (competition by invitation), which reduces the number of entries and proves an impediment to the inclusion of young designers (Katsakou, 2013, p. 57).

Design competitions have also contributed to the improvement of the city's housing supply and have represented an important tool for promoting urban regeneration processes in the periphery and disused areas. According to Katsakou (2013), design competitions are typically a part of “urban policies that aim to transform and regenerate broader urban and suburban areas of the city”. In part, the high number of housing competitions results from the obligation for housing cooperatives to organize a design competition to be able to access public land²⁸. In fact, nearly a quarter of the entire city's housing supply are non-profit rental apartments, which are managed directly by the city council administration or by one of the many non-profit housing cooperatives (Streite, 2019). Additionally, the provision of public land to housing cooperatives takes shape through long-term leasing contracts, where the City Council imposes the obligation of organizing a design competition as a way of assuring high-quality projects (Idibem, p. 37).

Information tools

Similar to other design review panels, the meetings of the Zurich Design Advisory Board are not open to the press or the community and its recommendations are not made public. In addition, its members are required to maintain confidentiality about both the content and the outcome of their deliberations, as it is considered to be a private matter of the promoter (City Official, interview: 2021). From time to time, professional designers criticise the ‘opacity’ of the Baukollegium design review process²⁹. For example, for the Baukollegium of Berlin, established in 2008, both the first part (presentation of the projects) and the final part (the results of the review) of the meetings are open to the press and public³⁰. Although the City Council has promised to make the work of the Design Advisory Board more transparent through

²⁸ In the last fifteen years, according to Katsakou (2013), housing design competitions in Zurich have typically been organized on a four-to-five-times a year basis.

²⁹ See: <https://www.swiss-architects.com/de/architecture-news/meldungen/qualitaet-nicht-ohne-fachperson> (Last accessed: 2020/08/21)

³⁰ In the Baukollegium of Berlin both the presentation of the projects by the building owners and the follow-up recommendations made by the Board are publicly available. Only the discussions of the Board regarding the projects take place internally. In this way, the Berlin *Baukollegium* contributes to the “qualification of the building culture debate in Berlin and strengthens the awareness of good architecture and urban design in the public, politics and administration.”

the publication of regular reports, this has not yet materialized, except for a report published in 2004 with a review of the 2002-2004 period³¹.

Despite the lack of regular publications regarding the activity of the Design Advisory Board, the Zurich Building Department offers a large number of publications about the urban built environment, such as 'Baukultur guides' about the architecture and urban projects in Zurich³². It also publishes several brochures about the work of the Department, which explains the basic building and planning principles and regulations. In addition, being responsible for the management of the city 'architecture and building history archives', the City Council usually publishes thematic book series about the history of the city of Zurich, with the last one having been titled "Urban history and urban development in Zurich".

Persuasion tools

The members of the Design Advisory Board do not participate in other initiatives outside their design review mission, as is the case with other countries. Nonetheless, the City Council has developed several awareness-raising initiatives directed towards promoters and developers to pay attention to quality. For example, in 2016, the City Council of Zurich promoted the "Award for Good Buildings" competition, which intended to promote a high building culture (baukultur) in Zurich. Architectural firms and building owners were able to participate through an open call for high-quality projects realized and completed between 2011 and 2015. An interdisciplinary jury gave awards to the best buildings and designed open spaces, which resulted in a series of cultural initiatives, such as an exhibition, publications and conferences.

The City Council of Zurich also promotes a culture of design through direct support to cultural institutions, initiatives and events. Since 2018, the City of Zurich has supported the new 'Zurich Architecture Centre' (ZAZ) (up to mid-2021) with 1.658 million francs. ZAZ's mission is to present architecture and urban development themes not only to a specialist audience but also to the wider public through temporary exhibitions, events, lectures, Open Houses, conferences, etc.³³ Nevertheless, the broad interest in architecture and urban design is also present in

³¹ At the beginning of the 2004, the City Council invited the media to one of the closed meetings of the Design Advisory Board, subsequent to which it published a report that allows interested parties a look "behind the scenes" of the Baukollegium for the 2002-2004 period.

See: <https://www.stadt->



[zuerich.ch/hbd/de/index/staedtebau/archaeo_denkmal/publikationen/schriftenreihe/heft_6.html](https://www.stadt-zuerich.ch/hbd/de/index/staedtebau/archaeo_denkmal/publikationen/schriftenreihe/heft_6.html)

³² See: https://www.stadt-zuerich.ch/hbd/de/index/staedtebau/archaeo_denkmal/publikationen/baukultur.html

³³ The new architecture centre is supported by the *Architekturforum* Zürich, the architecture department of the ETH Zürich, BSA Zürich and Swiss Association of Engineers and Architects - SIA Zürich. For more information see: <https://www.zaz-bellerive.ch/>

professional bodies and civil society (e.g. until recently, the Centre Le Corbusier in Zurich was privately owned)³⁴.

Exploration tools (Zurich 3D)

One type of project that must be submitted to the Design Advisory Board is high-rise buildings³⁵. To better frame the rules that apply to these projects, the City Council developed high-rise building guidelines and defined specific development areas where high-rise buildings are allowed. As a basis for the updating of the high-rise building guidelines and a coordinated adaptation of the construction and zoning regulations, the Office for Urban Development carried out a two-stage test planning regarding a selective procedure with external planning teams. For this, it developed a web application, the high-rise viewer, which displays a citywide overview of all existing and selected planned skyscrapers.



Fig. 8 –3D visualization of the Zurich city centre (source: City Council of Zurich)

This web application includes an interactive 3D map, which is linked to a diagram of the height and year of a building's construction³⁶. This 3D map is available to professionals to be used as an experimental and visual communication tool for the efficient handling of important construction projects, namely for design competitions and projects with an impact on the built environment.

³⁴ Already in 1987, a group of enthusiast architects established the 'Architecture Forum Zurich' that still operates today, as a "platform for current statements and debates, but also an instrument for influencing planning and building policy." The *Architekturforum Zürich* has been supported by around 800

members of the sponsoring association for over 25 years. For more information see: <http://www.af-z.ch/geschichte/>
³⁵ According to the Cantonal Planning and Construction Act, buildings are considered high-rises from a height of 25 meters.

³⁶ See: https://www.stadt-zuerich.ch/ted/de/index/geoz/geodaten_u_plaene/3d_stadtmodell.html

5. RELATIONSHIP WITH FORMAL (REGULATORY) TOOLS

Although the advice of the Design Advisory Board is not binding for the City Council administration and development actors, in practice, its recommendations complement the work of the *Office of Urban Development*, which has a formal design review function. As previously mentioned, for projects with a strong impact on the built environment or those that may be located in sensitive areas, the *Office of Urban Development* requests independent design advice from the Board, which will inform the formal (regulatory) process and strongly influence the decision of whether or not to grant the building permit. Nonetheless, this informal advice is an effective counterbalance to the formal design review processes, assisting public officials with mediating and negotiating with private developers the need to improve the quality of complex projects, and who most of the times have to work as facilitators and educators of development actors (Kim & Forester, 2012). This means that the work of the Design Advisory Board is a practical method to bring different interests about design goals and constraints to the same table (Beeck et al., 2016).

6. ALLIED FINANCIAL MECHANISMS

The Design Advisory Board does not have any allied financial mechanism to promote, negotiate or facilitate urban development. Nevertheless, the activities of the Design Advisory Board are publicly funded, the non-administrative expert members are financially compensated for attending the meetings and their travel expenses are covered by public expenditure³⁷. In an indirect way, by influencing the design quality of the building projects, the Design Advisory Board is contributing to high-quality urban environments that will bring better economic benefits for developers, neighbourhood landowners, residents and, ultimately, the inhabitants of Zurich.

³⁷ According to Art. 24 of the Rules of Procedure, the level of compensation is based on the hourly rate at the functional level for occasional services to third parties. Half-day sessions are credited with a maximum of four hours and full-time sessions with a maximum of eight hours; travel expenses are reimbursed.

7. CHALLENGES AND EQUALITIES ISSUES

The question of independence represents one of the key challenges the Design Advisory Board faces given that it is managed by City Administration and its external members are appointed by the City Council. Although the five external experts are recognized professionals in their field (academics, designers with a relevant building portfolio, etc.), there have been some criticisms regarding the nomination process of the experts, namely why their selection is not based on a public procedure. The City Council has presented the argument that the appointed external members are always recognized experts and that they are chosen not only based on their experience and education, but also by their communication profile. The experts are supposed to focus on the qualitative aspects of the proposals and not only on aesthetic or stylistic issues, offering arguments and advice that may critically improve the proposals. As a former Zurich Design Advisory Board administrator (and current Berlin Senate Building Director) explained about the *Baukollegium* expert's selection:

"When choosing the experts, I make sure that they are able to formulate their criticism respectfully so that everyone can save face. The special quality of the committee is that we first look at the properties, then the projects. Then we enter into the discussion with the actors. At this moment of exchange, the decisive thing happens. It's an absolutely creative process in which the recommendations are worked out."³⁸

Another challenge is the short period of the time that the Design Advisory Board members have to examine the proposals and that the members must formulate their recommendations directly at the meetings. After the presentation of the project by the developer and/or their design team, the Board members debate the qualitative aspects of the proposals in a very short period (pre-defined as 15 minutes) and the recommendations are verbally communicated to the interested parties just after (and in written form thereafter). The pressure caused by the short session for debate among the members sometimes does not allow for a deeper debate about the proposals under consideration (City Official, interview: 2021).

³⁸ Newspaper interview with Berlin Senate Building Director Regula Lüscher about the role of the Berlin *Baukollegium*.

Available in: <https://www.nzz.ch/feuilleton/das-berliner-baukollegium-stadtkultur-als-diskussionskultur-ld.155390>

8. KEY INNOVATIONS, SUCCESSES AND IMPACTS

Although the Baukollegium's recommendations are not binding for the City Council, which may always decide otherwise, its advice usually has a strong influence on the subsequent formal decision. According to the City Official (interview: 2021) obtaining an independent opinion of a panel of experts is an important contribution when evaluating the design quality of complex building projects as it helps to sustain the formal assessment of the City Council. In addition, the Board's recommendations are used as discursive arguments in persuading, mediating and negotiating with the promoter and their design team the need to improve or alter the design of their proposals.

Furthermore, most of these projects tend to have a strong presence in the media, which is important for the City Council to base its decisions on the advice of experts and not only in the public officers' review. In addition, within the Swiss political context, public referendums are regularly held to ensure that the local citizens participate in major decisions about urban transformation (e.g. buildings above a certain height, with a strong impact on city image or in a sensitive area)³⁹. This means that the validation of the Design Advisory Board is an important element to obtain a positive vote in local referendums.

As most informal design governance tools, the impact of design review panels is difficult to assess (Carmona, 2016; Carmona et al., 2017). The Zurich Design Advisory Board delivers an important advice complement to the design review function of the services of the City Council of Zurich by adding capacity to the statutory planning system and supporting the urban development department. In this framework, the Design Advisory Board delivers an important role of providing expert advice to municipal authorities on architecture and spatial development projects when requested. Nevertheless, the Design Advisory Board may not, on its own initiative make statements to state authorities and public institutions, as well as, make those statements public. This is a strong limitation on a more expansive role of design advice and promotion, which diminishes its impact on wider projects and public opinion. In this view, the Design Advisory Board of Zurich may have a direct impact on the design quality of development projects submitted to the municipality, but has a limited impact on the wider development process and mind-set of public and private stakeholders.

³⁹ The Swiss political system is a semi-direct democracy. In addition to parliament, the electorate also has instruments to

influence political affairs of the federal government, cantons and municipalities (such as constitutional or legislative changes, projects, and/or investments).

9. KEY LESSONS AND TRANSFERABILITY

One of the key responsibilities of local authorities is to supervise the quality of architecture and urban design and to promote high-quality built outcomes. To achieve these goals, statutory planning frameworks foresee formal processes of design review to ensure compliance with planning regulations and minimum standards. Setting up a design advisory board offers opportunities for a professional peer group to review built environment projects that complement those obtained through the formal design review functions of local authorities. In doing so, advisory boards add further capacity to the statutory planning system and support the urban development department in reviewing the design quality of development projects whilst also influencing subsequent negotiations and drafting reports on formal applications.

Considering that design quality cannot be defined by statute, hybrid models of design review have the potential to offer room for negotiation and compromise among development actors. In addition to those formal design review processes with a direct regulatory function and impact, informal design reviews have developed as an advisory and discretionary practice outside of statutory regulatory frameworks. They provide a means of evaluating projects through impartial expert opinions in order to offer critiques and constructive advice to development teams. Therefore, informal design review should be seen as an improvement design governance tool, focused on adding value to developments prior to their submission for regulatory consent (Carmona, 2017).

Although the structure and remit of the design advisory boards vary according to the specific context wherein they operate, this tool is being increasingly used by a wide number of medium and large cities across Europe, with a high prominence in German-speaking countries. In most cases, design advisory boards are not compulsory by law and may or may not be appointed according to the willingness of the City Council. According to the Austrian experience (UM Workshop 3, 2020), advisory boards function well in environments where the concern for design quality is already high on the political agenda, as in other cities politicians or developers may not be interested in setting up such structures. Nevertheless, in those cities that have one, it appears to work well and positively influence the outcomes.

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KEY ONLINE RESOURCES

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URBAN MAESTRO

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