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## Relations between cities

# The importance of relations between cities and their effects on urban development

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Small towns all throughout Europe are facing severe challenges. Many are shrinking in terms of population size, losing particularly the younger generation (Eurostat, 2017). This often results in a close-down of infrastructures that are necessary for local supply, education, medical care and public transport. This causes the well-known negative consequences on the quality of life of these places' inhabitants. Experts in the fields of urbanism, traffic planning and administration are actively engaged with studying these towns to find reasons for and possible ways out of this development. Often overlooked is the fact, that not only the conurbations themselves are changing, but that their transformation is linked closely to the surroundings. They are part of a territory that exists and functions as a unit - or not. The transformation processes of relations within a territory are directly related to the development of individual conurbations. In fact, territorial relations and, with them, everyday realities, and mobilities in and between European cities have changed at least as much as the situation within these cities themselves. While a classification of areas that no longer applies is still utilized.

What we witness is a hybridization and transformation in these categories, as one can be "rural through our residential and urban through our social practices...". In "Nouvelles rélegations territoriales" Daniel Béhar argues that in order to meet contemporary urbanistic challenges it is necessary to shift from the common static typology (the urban, the rural, the small and the big cities) to a typology of

relations. (Béhar, 2017: 17-26) Examining these relations holds the potential of depicting why some small cities are more successful in their development than others.

Following Béhar's line of argument, within the small towns a distinction needs to be made among those that remain under the influence of a dominant city (Urban Dependent), those that operate in a network of cities without true hierarchy (Network City) and those that are embedded in a local basin organized with strong internal relations (Local Basin). This is the first step to develop strategies on how to develop small cities in a future-oriented way and thereby improve access to opportunities depending on territorial conditions.

The analysis and comparison of Austrian examples for these three categories depicts three different strategies for the development and valorization of small cities, in order to strengthen their structure and thus helping them to become future-proof.

Wiener Neustadt – a small city dependent on the dominant metropole Vienna  
Early evidence of the strong connection between Wiener Neustadt and Vienna are the shipping canal and the railway line, both built in the nineteenth century to connect the two cities. The latter turned Wiener Neustadt's main station into a railway junction. To this day, Wiener Neustadt's main station is the most frequented railway station in the province of Lower Austria. Wiener Neustadt is considered an important center in the

industrial quarter south of Vienna and provides lots of jobs. It is also known for hosting educational facilities of national importance (such as the University of Applied Sciences and the European Storm Research Institute) and a center for ion and proton therapy ("MedAustron"). There are about 11,000 people that commute to work from Wiener Neustadt and even 20,500 who commute to Wiener Neustadt (Land Niederösterreich, 2017) every day. The majority of the (work and educational) commuters shuttle between Vienna and Wiener Neustadt.

According to Wiener Neustadt's urban development plan "STEP WN 2030" problems are mainly seen in the lack of connection of some residential areas to their neighborhood, the fact that commercial centers on the outskirts of the city are difficult to reach without a car and despite good public transport connections to Vienna and good conditions for cycling, motorized private transport is still dominant. In view of this, the aim of "STEP WN 2030" is to valorize existing housing estates, to link them more effectively via attractive public spaces and to improve the accessibility and quality of public space (Wiener Neustadt, 2018).

The analysis of Wiener Neustadt's urban development plan also shows that the qualities of local connections must not be neglected under any circumstances. Only in this way the development of an attractive residential environment with a contribution to social equality of opportunity and the completion of the traffic turnaround can succeed. The ongoing trend towards suburbanization,

which has been further enhanced in the recent past by the experience of the pandemic (Redl, 2020), favors and facilitates the development of "urban dependents." This is expressed in the Wiener Neustadt's residential population number, that has been growing constantly since the 1950s and has even picked up further since the turn of the millennium (Statistik Austria, 2021). The attractive connection to the nearby metropolis is considered as a success factor for this development.

Leoben, Bruck an der Mur and Trofaiach – small towns that operate in a network The region of Obersteiermark Ost, where Leoben, Bruck an der Mur and Trofaiach are located, is one of the strongest industrial and at the same time research and development regions in Austria. The three investigated municipalities are part of the region's network. The (commuter) relations within the network are by far more intense than those with the next major conurbation, Graz (KDZ, 2017). Although there is a certain competitive attitude, it is limited due to the different positions in the network.

The region of Obersteiermark Ost is shaped, structured and supplied by the central, urban Mur-Mürz axis. In fact, supra-regional services for bus, train and bicycle transport are oriented along the main axis only. There, the population density as well as the number of supply and educational institutions is high. Simultaneously the population figures are relatively stable, and the mobility supply is strong (Institute of Urbanism TU Graz, Kampus, 2019).

Leoben - the largest city in the region - as well as Bruck an der Mur are located at the region's central urban axis. They are both industrial areas offering numerous jobs, excellent connections to the regional and national railway network and educational facilities of regional importance. The University of Mining in Leoben is even of national significance.

Trofaiach is located about 10 km northwest of Leoben on the side arm of the region's urban axis. It occupies a special position in the system, as it does not have regional center functions and is located off the main axis. Trofaiach is a residential community with an almost stagnant population (Statistik Austria, 2021). It offers a public transport system that enables connections to the sub regional train station of Leoben every 15 minutes. The town center is continuously being strengthened through creating high quality public spaces and improving opportunities for start-ups.

The example of this region, which lost its economic basis with the end of mining in the sixties and eighties, and in particular of the municipality of Trofaiach, shows the potential and relevance of mobility connections as a basis for greater cooperation, dependence and regional profitability in the network of cities.

### **Wolfsberg – a small town embedded in a local basin**

The municipality of Wolfsberg plays a central role as supply, education, economic and transport center for all nine communities within its district. The municipality itself can be roughly divided into two areas: the main settlement area on the valley basin and the villages in the hilly surroundings. There are considerable commuter flows (work and educational commuters) to and from the city of Wolfsberg, most of which have their destination/starting point within the district (Statistik Austria, 2021).

In the city of Wolfsberg, vacancy is a growing problem. While the surrounding areas (above all the periurban directly bordering the city) are expanding. At the same time, a total population decline of 10 percent by 2040 is forecasted for the district of Wolfsberg compared to 2018 (ÖROK/Statistik Austria, 2019). While the supra-regional bus and train connections with the two conurbations of Graz and Klagenfurt are very attractive, the public transport connection within the surrounding communities is mainly dedicated to school transport. As a result, existing mobility patterns are dominated by motorized individual transport

(Monsberger, 2019; 111).

Initial efforts to make the center more attractive for businesses and more accessible for active forms of mobility (vacancy management and design of the main square) are the first steps towards an organized development of a more compact urban structure, which goes hand in hand with an increase in the quality of life in the municipality. Regardless of the predicted population decline, mobility between the surrounding villages and the center of Wolfsberg, as well as the upgrading of the center are seen as the greatest challenges for the development of the (in terms of area) large municipality.

In conclusion, it can be stated that the different categories of connections between small towns and communities require different strategies for their successful development.

As for "urban dependents," the relation to the nearby metropolis is the key element in their development, and it needs to be readable as a connection in the city's structure. The valorization of inner-city connections to the municipality's mobility node expresses the relation to and dependence on the metropolis. In order to pursue this goal Mario Stefan's master thesis "Potential einer kleinen Stadt – räumliche Gerechtigkeit in Wiener Neustadt" (Institute of Urbanism TU Graz, 2021) proposes a strengthening of the axial connections between the city center and the train station of Wiener Neustadt focusing especially on the improvement of the connection for active forms of mobility (bicycle and pedestrian traffic).

Small cities operating in a network need to establish a regular stable connection between them and work towards a fair distribution of the different amenities in order to consolidate themselves as a territorial unit. Trofaiach has taken a significant step in this direction by establishing an efficient public transport connection to Leoben every 15 minutes.

For the third category, the small town as the center of the "local basin," it is crucial to rediscover the proximity relationship with the surroundings. A shift of traffic mobility patterns towards active forms of mobility, exploits the potentials of the proximity relations and thus helps to reshape them. The central function of the Basin's centre is strengthened by increasing its accessibility for bicycle and pedestrian traffic. This makes meeting daily needs there more attractive, compared to doing so in larger agglomerations at greater distance or in peripheral shopping centers. Markus Monsberger's master's thesis



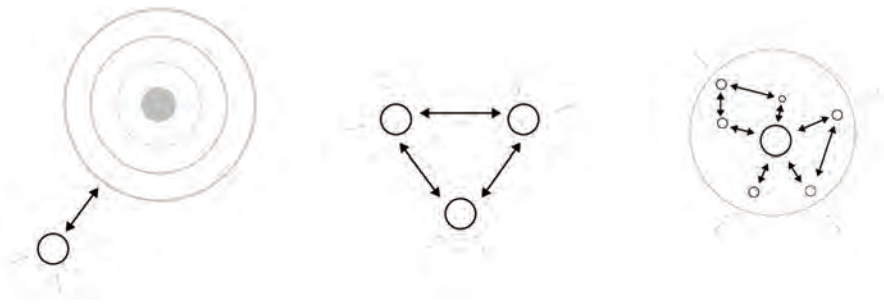


Fig1. / Schematic representation of the three categories. Source / Institute of Urbanism TU Graz 2020)

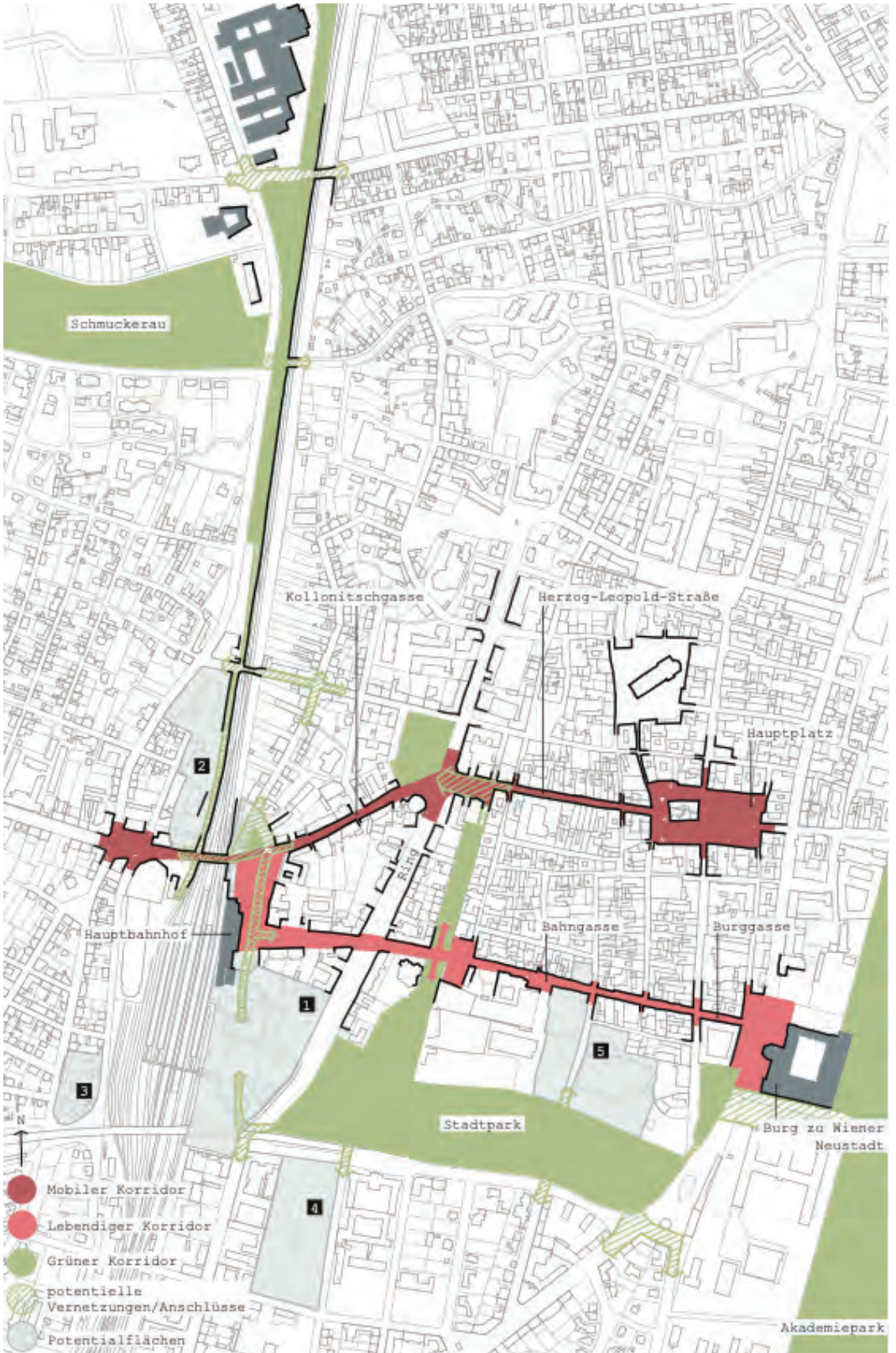


Fig2. / Spatial linkage of the station with the city center by means of three thematic corridors. Source / Mario Stefan, 2021)





Fig3. / Trofaiach Bus Terminal, stingl enge architekten 2018. Source / <https://oe1.orf.at/i/intro/f8/51/f851936034211850b978ad99e4e0b75b0a17d8ca.jpg>, © Foto Freisinger



Fig4. / Vision of the new meeting place in the municipality of Auen near Wolfsberg. Source / Markus Monsberger, 2019.

“Vademekum einer Kleinstadt | Raum+Rad für Wolfsberg” (Institute of Urbanism TU Graz, 2019) elaborated a manual for the design of public spaces in line with this very shift towards an increase of active mobility in Wolfsberg.

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