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Intermediate European Cities

Conditions Between Metropolis and Town

Angeliki Sioli, Sonja Novak and Giuseppe Resta
WORKING GROUP 2

Our Urban Condition

In 2007, for the first time in history, more people in the world lived in urban areas than in rural areas; by 2021, this figure had risen to 56.61 per cent of the world's population, and it is expected to rise to 68 per cent by 2050.¹ Cities of all scales have become increasingly strong magnets for people in the context of the twenty-first century. This comes as no surprise when we look at Europe in particular. The big capitals of all major European countries have long attracted hordes of people not only from within Europe, but from all over the world. Their historical, cultural, architectural, professional and infrastructural affordances have fascinated people from all walks of life for years. Novelists, poets, filmmakers and storytellers have given us mesmerizing depictions of the popular and prevalent or hidden and surprising aspects of these cities. For example, Leopold Bloom, James Joyce's famous protagonist, revealed intimate aspects of Dublin's streets and public life to readers all around the globe. The fact that the whole nation celebrates the famous Bloomsday as a national holiday on 16 June demonstrates the power of narrative to capture the multiple and

diverse identities of a place, but also its seductive capacity to add to and enhance those identities.²

In the Shadow of the European Metropolis

While the metropolises and capitals of Europe have fascinated us for a long time now, numerous smaller cities bloom beautifully in their shadow. Limerick and Cork in Ireland carry the marks of the unique historical developments of the country and have produced wonderful stories and narratives of their own.³ The Hague in the Netherlands is not only home to the Dutch parliament as well as to many international organizations such as the International Court of Justice, but exhibits a fascinating cultural and artistic life that extends beyond the boundaries of its territory.⁴ Osijek in Croatia is host to a multicultural population, a vibrant university student life, and the biggest zoological garden in the country. The article 'Mapping the Fictional and the Physical City: Spatiotemporal and Cultural Identity of Osijek, Croatia', also included in this publication, further discusses the multiple literary narratives in which the city features as a strong protagonist. Volos in Greece flourishes as a magnet for winter tourism, lying at the feet of the impressive mount Pelion, with contemporary novels and narratives containing the ancient mythological traces of the Argonaut Campaign and interpreting these in light of recent urban developments.⁵

The affordances and rhythms of everyday life in these smaller, but no less significant, cities are undoubtedly different from those of the metropolises and capitals as well as from the towns and villages of Europe. To say that the rhythm is slower or smoother and that the affordances are fewer or less up to date in comparison with the metropolises, is a generalization that fails to see the true potential of these places. If that was the case, these cities would not have survived over centuries of existence, becoming what issue 89 of the journal *OASE*, titled *Medium: Images of the Mid-Size City*, called the model of a resilient city, one with power in light of today's urban challenges.⁶ The articles of that issue explore how the mid-size city as a place with

an 'unexciting character' and a 'tempered urban experience' can currently be the object of urbanism and architecture. In addition to the adjective 'mid-size', some other denominations are put up for discussion, such as 'secondary', 'other', 'lesser known' and 'peripheral', placing the mid-size urban environments somewhere between the excitement of a big city and convivial suburbia, which is known for its tranquillity, greenery and security.⁷ More specifically, the mid-size city is seen as

a city with a specific historical and geographical ancestry that finds a new purpose in a European city archipelago, at times operating on its own within this new configuration, at times in networks. This makes the model of this European 'generic city' a resilient model, re-inventing itself precisely in light of contemporary urban problems . . . the power of the concept to project divergent – at times seemingly irreconcilable – meanings and desires onto the contemporary city . . . The mid-size city, but also 'mid-size urbanity' can serve as a useful lens in describing a broad section of the European continent, and in developing a design outlook freed from the overstrained reference framework of the metropolis, without lapsing into an oppressive discourse about small-town identity.⁸

Unconvinced of its 'unexciting character' and strongly believing that the future of the European urban condition lies in these very mid-size European cities, in 2019 the COST Action 'Writing Urban Places: New Narratives of the European City' embarked on a study of such cities around Europe, with a focus on narrative methods. By recognizing the value of local urban narratives, the COST Action brought together research in the fields of literary studies, urban planning and architecture, positioning this knowledge vis-à-vis progressive redevelopment policies carried out in mid-size cities in Europe.⁹ The aim was to discover the stories and narratives (official and unofficial) of these cities and understand their deeper urban characteristics.

Questioning the 'Mid-Size'

Our starting point was that the term 'mid-size' (which we started questioning very early on) refers to European cities, which are neither metropolises nor towns. They are separate entities lying somewhere in-between, but they cannot simply be defined by parameters of size and scale alone, such as the size of their population and number of inhabitants, the size of their territory, etcetera. Such quantitative parameters fail to capture their special urban and cultural character, a versatility so characteristic of the European context, which is built on diversity. At first glance, even the simple task of listing 'mid-size' cities was revealed as anything but simple. Capital cities such as Skopje, Ljubljana and Tallinn, for example, could in terms of population numbers be described as 'mid-size', but in their national context they do not fit this characterization, as they are both administrative capitals and the largest cities in their respective countries. On the other hand, explored through the perspective of their stories and narratives, these same European capitals seem much closer to cities like Limerick, Osijek or Volos. The way they are represented in literary narratives and the myths or stories about their foundation and origins as well as their physical, spatial and architectural characteristics are the reason for this paradox.¹⁰ If we adopt one quantitative parameter, the resulting pool of cities will be contradictory by nature, including capital cities, such as those in the Balkans, with an international resonance and infrastructure, but which at the same time have preserved a scale of walkable distances, integration with their natural surroundings, and architectural coherence in their central areas. For this reason, this paradoxical condition in which some European capitals undoubtedly fit the category of 'mid-size' cities can be explained, according to Mladen Stilinović, by the fact that, historically and culturally speaking, there have been regions identified as lacking a metropolitan culture, thus comprised of only 'mid-size' cities, with even capitals being 'mid-size' urban formations.¹¹ Stilinović illustrates this in the example of the Balkans, but this can also be perceived in some eastern parts of Europe. Hence, what makes a parametrical definition impossible

is also the trigger we used to stimulate a debate on how to render the mid-size condition alternatively.

As mentioned, some of the possible ways to define these cities can be developed if we agree that mid-size does not need to be defined in terms of quantity of population, geographical size or scope, but that there is a vast variety of qualities and variables that can be observed in mid-size cities. Thus, we decided that we should not aim for a definition, but for a set of conditions that should remain flexible and that are actually relational; they can both point towards what these cities are, but also to what they are not.

Urban Conditions under Discussion

In discussions within the wide interdisciplinary community of researchers that the COST Action 'Writing Urban Places' incorporates, such issues kept opening up new directions instead of narrowing down our path towards an encompassing definition of the term. Instead, we embraced the idea of offering a broad overview of these cities from different perspectives – narratological, sociological, architectural, urbanist, anthropological, etcetera – identifying and naming conditions that differentiate these cities from metropolises on the one hand, and from small towns on the other. Through collaborative discussions both in person and via online platforms such as Zoom, the Action's members suggested conditions based on the four following overall categories:

1. The inhabitants' or visitors' perception, experience, and feeling of the overall atmosphere of the city, such as wandering the city and being in-between complete anonymity and familiarity with others, owning the city over time, 'intimacy' and/or 'territorial awareness', 'care', 'belonging' and 'security'.
2. The tangible infrastructure, such as the availability of modes of transport characteristic to these cities (there is no metro, but there are

trams and buses, for example), accessibility to the airport(s), spatial urban figures like by-passes, markets, a river, etcetera, businesses (the existence of a certain number of specific amenities, such as a cinema), having only one main square and several small ones.

3. Their centrality or, in other words, the position of and within the city, such as the city as the centre of a region, the city as having an important historical centre, perceptual coherence in the positioning by its inhabitants, fragmentability or the lack thereof.
4. Their distinct capacities to deal with challenges or crises, such as community resilience, urban branding, the capacity to receive, being effective and affective, allowing the involvement in decision-making of a large number of inhabitants to a certain degree, dealing with the Covid-19 pandemic, and many others.

Indeed, if applied to specific cities and the fieldwork cases featured in various articles of this special issue, these categories of conditions are characteristic of the lived experience of the different stakeholders and diverse communities inhabiting these unique cities: Osijek's provinciality in relation to its broader context while having a regional centrality, its infrastructure, and its connection with nature rather than detachment from it; Çanakkale's peripheral role among other Turkish cities, but its cultural prominence as the place of Homer's grand epics and the historical value of the First World War Gallipoli campaign for the formation of the republic;¹² Skopje's struggle to form a coherent metropolitan system and emerge as a credible European player alongside its stunning brutalist heritage and the widespread creative initiatives that animate the urban environment. A strong suggestion that emerges from these conversations and fieldwork experiences was that the term 'intermediate', as being or occurring at the middle place, stage or degree, or between extremes,¹³ is more appropriate than 'mid-size' to describe the nature and character of the cities under examination. Conse-

quently, we proceeded with suggesting this alternative term and created an online platform on Padlet to define it further.

While working on this definition, we noticed that by looking at the case studies that we investigated as a network, one could make the argument that what we call the intermediate European city seems to carry some strong characteristics of pre-industrial times, such as a clearly legible historical centre or easy access on foot. However, the conditions we identified could also be observed in more recent urban developments as the Ruhr area (also referred to as the Ruhr district) in Germany. This polycentric urban area consists of 13 intermediate cities, as we argue, that since the nineteenth century have developed together within a diverse and extensive industrial landscape. Some of these cities have long-standing historical origins, while others have emerged more recently. Each city is its own administrative centre and within its boundaries the conditions of an intermediate European city are abundant.¹⁴ These separate, intermediate cities together create what contemporary research calls a horizontal metropolis: a larger urban conglomeration that attempts to 'upgrade the city-territory' in order to achieve 'spatial and social justice through equal accessibility and mobility across their landscape', as Sylvie Tram Nguyen explains in her contribution to the 'vademeccum' of minor terms, initiated and produced by the COST Action 'Writing Urban Places'.¹⁵ With all of this in mind, our working hypothesis was that intermediate European cities can function as separate urban entities or can work collaboratively to form larger metropolitan areas.

Seven Selected Conditions

Below, we present seven illustrative conditions, as captured by the voice of seven members of the COST Action, defining the cities we have explored, investigated and worked on over the last four years. These terms vary in focus and perspective as some approach the intermediate European city from the lenses of an experiential perspective, while others look at it more from a bird's-eye view, defining it in relation to its immediate surroundings

as well as in comparison with bigger metropolises. The first condition, a contribution by Michael G. Kelly, clarifies in concrete terms the argument that relates to the size and scale of these intermediate European cities. It explains why size is not an appropriate parameter to define the intermediate character of the cities under investigation and offers a reading of scale as a commodity instead of as a measuring unit. Moving from size and scale to the gravitational pull that a city may have, Kris Pint explains the gravity that an intermediate city possesses in attracting population, infrastructure and potential. In relation to these overall conditions, Saskia de Wit talks about 'perceptual coherence'. De Wit describes the intermediate European city in relation to its immediate surroundings and the physical and formal elements that make it a distinct and easily recognizable entity. Adding to the conditions that make intermediate European cities a distinctive entity, Mustafa Zeki Çirakli proposes a reading of these societies as 'open-ended images'. Contrary to the imposing symbolic images that European metropolises carry (Paris as the 'city of light', for example), intermediate cities are open-ended relational images that allow the inhabitant or visitor to become an active creator of such an image through their everyday encounters with them. Diving further into the experiential aspect of intermediate cities, Matej Nikšić focuses our attention on the walkability of these urban environments. Walking is easier in an intermediate European city than in a metropolis, but also richer and more layered than in a town. Sernaz Aslan proposes the condition of the 'parochial realm', discussing the experiential sense of commonality within the urban community, with its positive and negative features. Moving further into the experiential content of the city, Amer Obied looks at a condition we may prefer to overlook, namely conflict. He argues that the intermediate European city is not capable of sustaining conflict, maintaining instead a unified front unlike the larger urban entities.

The selected conditions, offered here *in lieu* of a conventional conclusion, showcase both the uniqueness and extraordinary potential of the intermediate European city. A place moderate and balanced in nature, avoiding

extremes and hyperboles, the intermediate European city emerges as the level-headed counterpart of the metropolises. It suggests the 'middle way' for a meaningful urban existence and for integrated urban narratives, which promote a diversity encompassed by care, a space of freedom surrounded by boundaries, and a future anchored in the shared stories of the communities. With this article we do not wish to argue that the intermediate city is solely a European condition. We would not be surprised if a study of North American or Asian contexts revealed similar urban conditions, at least in specific regions or areas. Our network, being composed of mainly European researchers, focusing on mainly European countries, and being able to visit European cities only, did not wish to expand this hypothesis to geographical contexts outside our direct accessibility, experience and understanding. With this in mind, we offer the reader the following seven conditions of the early twenty-first century European intermediate city.

1. Scale as commodity by Michael G. Kelly

The ambiguity of the designation of a European city as intermediate – in which the object is primarily a function of what it is *not* (neither a metropolis nor a town) – exacerbates the *othered* quality of these cities. This othering can be one of sheer size (though simple recourse to population numbers or surface area as an identifying criteria is problematic), one of economic or political power within the evolving structures and parameters of the state's dialogue with capitalist transformation, but is perhaps most interestingly one of how the intermediate European urban entity becomes the expression of a set of equilibria internal to the 'urban' scale. Linked to – but not necessarily a beneficiary of – the connection between this 'urban' scale and the 'new scalar hierarchies of state institutional organization and state regulatory activity',¹⁶ the intermediate city is potentially both an indirect symptom of and a partial antidote to the evolving urban condition more typically described and critiqued in relation to major cities. To cite one well-known analysis in this regard, Marc Augé's *Non-lieux* (1992) discusses a contemporary 'super-modernity' in terms of the emergence or predomi-

nance of seemingly frictionless (non-)places, structuring spaces of transition that are typically urban or peri-urban.¹⁷ These are contrasted with the idea of the *lieu anthropologique* (anthropological place) – the residual figure of the city that offers an experience of 'place' to its inhabitants – in which 'place' is the space where experiences and perspectives interact and modify each other, and where, potentially, quality and meaning are generated in the individual lives that they host. The 'super-modern' condition that gives rise to the figure of the non-place is consistent with the 'new scalar hierarchies' outlined by Brenner: in each, the city spatially embodies and enacts a logic of the contemporary economic, political or technological reality.¹⁸ In this respect, the intermediate city can be seen as a figure of equilibrium, as it develops on the margins of the 'problem', both as a (secondary) site of these changes and as a potential victim of the core or privileged intensities of the larger city. Bound up in change, the pace of change within this 'epi' or 'subsidiary' phenomenon may be moderated or attenuated in relation to the core of the 'urban' scale. Whether individual intermediate cities are net beneficiaries or casualties of the process depends on a range of individual properties, and in this respect urban destinies vary considerably.¹⁹ Faced with the spectrum of such destinies, it is interesting to reflect on how this 'epi' quality is itself subject to the processes of super-modernity, that is, becoming a transferable, alienable or marketable signifier.²⁰

The embourgeoisement or gentrification of certain intermediate European cities, as net beneficiaries of a concern for 'quality of life' and individual optimization in a process of ongoing transformation, could thus be seen as pointing to a destiny of 'scale' as *commodity*, where intermediate becomes imaginarily synonymous with a theme of human scale, proximity and reciprocity in a nonetheless 'urban' environment. This is a fungible notion of the safe or ideal distance from the fuller logic of the urban scale as bound up with the demands and logic of capital flows. Commodity, too, in the Franco-phone etymological sense of comfort and convenience, refers to the still-anthropological space of the city as offering the moral affordances of the

non-lieu, a protection from the very logic that produced it.²¹ In this respect, those 'mid-sized' cities that emerge as net 'losers' in the evolutionary processes of national or state territories – bearing the stigmata of decline, disinvestment and depopulation – are inverted confirmations of the same idea: the fungibility of the mid-size designation here means insufficiency of size, distance from power and lack of prestige, distinction or desirability in the spatial and social 'commodity market' to which the optimally skilled, employable or mobile subject has access.

2. Gravity by Kris Pint

It is always a broader geographical and cultural context that qualifies a European city as intermediate in relation to other cities in the same region or country. The term 'urban gravity' is used in demographical and transportation studies to determine the attractiveness of specific areas in analysing urban density. We want to argue that within a specific region, an intermediate city possesses a modest gravitational pull. The presence of another city can prevent it from fully developing into a 'big' city, because it cannot compete with the cultural and economic attractiveness of this nearby city. But at the same time, the intermediate city nonetheless creates enough gravity to prevent it from turning into a mere satellite city or commuter town. The 'gravitational pull' of a city is hard to quantify and operates on different levels. Obviously, there is socioeconomical gravity, both reflected in but also enhanced by the city's position, its population and its accessibility within a specific network of transportation. But more intangible forms of 'gravity' also play an important role. There is the cultural scene of a city, the way it is represented in culture, especially popular fiction such as movies or TV-series that help to give a city a specific identity. There is also a form of historical 'gravity', based on the city's role in (inter)national history. This is visible not only in actual historical buildings (often used for city branding), but more generally in the self-identity of its inhabitants, creating a stubborn sense of place that resists merging into a larger metropole. History also shows how 'gravity' can shift over time: an intermediate city may have been an important

regional and even international centre in the past, before its role was gradually overtaken by other cities. In Belgium, Bruges is a good example of this: the city was once a medieval metropolis, one of the biggest in Europe, but over the centuries it became an intermediate city, compared, for instance, with the now much larger Belgian cities of Antwerp, Brussels or Liège.

3. Perceptual Coherence by Saskia de Wit

Perceptual coherence addresses the physical-spatial aspect, the material realm of the city. That is, its physical-spatial characteristics – its appearance – make it perceivable as a coherent ensemble, different from its surroundings.²² The grammar of the form, of the context and of the world of perception can be unravelled as three dimensions of perceptual coherence; perception cannot be viewed apart from form, form not apart from its physical context.²³ Intermediate European cities can be understood as a particular and specific part of space, with internal characteristics, giving the city its own order. This order distinguishes the city from the next place, a periphery as the transitional zone between centre and surrounding landscape that is perceptually rich enough to add to the definition of the city, as well as externally connected to other places. On the one hand, they are components of a larger, hybrid and complex metropolitan landscape, which is a profound mix of city and landscape, nature and culture, spaces and flows. On the other they can be perceived as a unity with a distinction between centre and periphery, in terms of perception both by inhabitants (based on their deeper knowledge) and by visitors (at first glance). It is the unifying centre that distinguishes intermediate European cities from a metropolis, which has in essence a hybrid appearance consisting of different districts with their own centres, fringe areas and peripheries, and where inhabitants identify more with the centre of their district than with the formal city centre. Whereas on the other end of the spectrum, as a perceptual unity, it is not as singular as a small town, and the relation between centre, periphery and surrounding landscape is more layered and multidimensional than in small towns.

4. Open-ended Image by Mustafa Zeki Çıraklı

Drawing on literary terms and narratological notions, the characteristic of the particular 'image' or universal 'silhouette' (symbol) of an urban environment can be considered among the conditions of an intermediate European city. From a geographical perspective, places are social and spatial territories with relational boundaries that refer to how individuals perceive, imagine, experience and interact with the city. However, a place with a universal image and symbolic value may dominate or suppress the subjective, experiential and imaginative potential of a personal encounter. An intermediate city does not have a universal and fixed symbolic silhouette that governs the imagination of the citizens, inhabitants, residents or visitors. An image, by definition, is fluent, flexible and open-ended in a state of becoming, not a fixed and solid symbol (or symbolic silhouette). This open-ended image of a place is a particular narratological construction and an experiential accumulation, whereas the silhouette of a city is of symbolic value and universally circulates a figurative meaning. So, an open-ended image of a place is more subjective and experiential, while a universal silhouette of a city holds a collectively shared meaning and function. In the former, the inhabitant or the visitor is an active participant in the unique encounter with the city; in the latter, the participant is expected to be part of the prevailing silhouette with a grand narrative behind it. Narratives of intermediate cities, therefore, represent spatial, experiential, perceptive and fluid images of these cities in a narratological, psychological, phenomenological and aesthetic sense, and surpass any symbolic (universal) or collective metaphorical signification.

5. Walkable Distances by Matej Nikšić

Distance is a quantitative or qualitative measurement of the space between two locations. It can be a matter of objective measurement based on predefined measuring units, or a matter of subjective evaluation based on one's perception.²⁴ Walkable distances used to be essential for survival in the traditional city,²⁵ and it was not until the introduction of the widespread use of motor vehicles that walking truly became a matter of choice rather than

necessity.²⁶ Similarly, nowadays, types of urban development in accordance (or not) with walkable distances is a matter of choice, too. While in big cities the high-capacity transportation network is a key infrastructure for the functioning of the city as a whole, in intermediate European cities, walkable distances still play a significant role, not only in providing urban commodities to their users, but also as the basis for the specific environmental experience and lifestyle associated with these cities. By embedding the idea of walkable distances in their urban (re)development mindset, intermediate European cities are more likely to promote human-centred urban design and pay greater attention to the variety of specific needs of different user groups (senior citizens, families with young children, disabled people, etcetera). When addressing walkable distances, however, it is not only the distance that needs to be taken into account, but also what is on offer at the final destination that can be reached on foot, as well as the experiential pleasantness of the path that has to be taken to reach the destination.²⁷ The intermediate European city will normally offer many walkable final destinations (more than a small city), while also providing a perceptual experience to the walker that will be nicer than in a big city.

6. The Parochial Realm by Sernaz Arslan

In her article 'The Morality of Urban Public Life: The Emergence and Continuation of a Debate', Lyn H. Lofland distinguishes between three different realms: the private, the public and the parochial. She defines realms as social territories, each characterized by a distinctive relational form that refers to how individuals interact with one another.²⁸ Accordingly, the parochial realm is characterized by a sense of commonality among acquaintances and neighbours who are involved in the interpersonal networks that are located within communities. In contrast, the public realm is marked by a stranger, or categorical, relational form. It signifies the non-private parts of urban areas, occupied by individuals who are personally unknown or only categorically known to each other. Lofland's conceptualization of urban space is important for two reasons. First, she emphasizes the sociospa-

tiality of the city. For her, the city is characterized by a diversity of social spaces. The city includes the tribe, the village and the small town, which are dominated by private and parochial spheres. What is unique about the city is that it also includes public spaces that tend to be inhabited by strangers or people who know each other only in terms of professional or other non-personal identity categories. Thus, everyday life in the (big) city offers a distinctive variety of places and interactions that go beyond private and parochial spaces. Second, by differentiating between types of urban spaces, she provides a better understanding of sociospatial structures, boundaries and dynamics that are manifested in interpersonal relations. But what about the mid-size city?

The parochial realm could be a parameter to define the mid-size European city. On the one hand, it has positive connotations; like urban belonging, care, sense of a community, neighbouring practices. On the other it creates certain constraints, which are connected with known social positions, roles and smaller communities where residents know each other. It lacks the anonymity of urban space and anonymity among 'strangers' – hence freedom – provided by the metropolis. It is worth investigating whether the rules, meanings, expectations, physical structures associated with urban space, and community are relatively fixed, explicit and less fluid or loose in the mid-size European city.

7. Against Fragmentability by Amer Obied

One hidden side of European cities is their (dis)ability to maintain unity. Plato's *Republic* tells us how any city is, in fact, two: one for the rich and one for the poor. These two appear to coexist geographically, overlap in urban structure, but differ in accessibility to resources. While wanderers could always travel from the city of the poor to the city of the rich and vice-versa, they might find it extremely difficult to stay in the opposite city. During peacetime, the city presumes unity. During conflicts, however, the city shatters. Examining large, divided cities shows their capacity to split

geography, resources and infrastructure if and when a polarizing conflict occurs. These poles (usually ideological or religious) aggregate fragments to form emergent cities. Berlin, Nicosia, Belfast, Jerusalem, Beirut and, recently, Aleppo are examples of once or currently fragmented cities. Is 'fragmentability' characteristic of metropolises? Evidence seems to suggest it is. Heterogeneity, an abundance of resources, a large population, and a vast geographical and urban footprint are all contributing factors to inciting, prolonging and sustaining division. The resulting two cities (or even more than two, if we extend Plato's thinking to contemporary urban phenomena) are of course strongly contrasting in character and, unlike Plato's cities, are sharply demarcated to prevent potential overlap and unwanted porosity. It is interesting to look at how many points and lines of demarcation come to exist in the built urban infrastructure itself. Intermediate European cities, on the other hand, have different dynamics for conflicting groups; more often than not, one group prevails in winning or controlling the city as a whole, rather than dividing the territory. This is mainly due to homogeneity and scarcity of resources. In other words, while it is possible for intermediate cities to accommodate conflict, they cannot sustain it. Or rather, they cannot afford to be divided, because neither part can survive without the other.²⁹

- 1 Statistics Times, 'World Urban Population', statisticstimes.com/demographics/world-urban-population.php, accessed 12 December 2022.
- 2 Bloomsday is a national holiday in Ireland, but is also celebrated informally in many places around the world every year.
- 3 As most remarkable examples we can mention: Frank McCourt's *Angela's Ashes: A Memoir* (1996), a literary masterpiece capturing the social life and urban conditions of Limerick during the Great Depression; Sheila Connolly's *County Cork Mysteries Series* (2014-2017), three detective novels unfolding in Cork; and *Glorious Heresies* (2015) by Lisa McInerney, which captures the underbelly of the city of Cork with its drug and mafia networks.
- 4 Such as, for instance, the Royal Conservatory, the Royal Art Academy, and the Nederlands Dans Theater (Dutch Dance Theatre), the latter of which is known for its contemporary dance performances across Europe and around the world.
- 5 The most characteristic example would be the 2019 novel *Zaharias Skrip* by Dimitirs Karakitsos.
- 6 Bruno Notteboom, Klaske Havik and Michiel Dehaene, 'The Mid-Size City as a European Urban Condition and Strategy', *OASE* 89, *Medium: Images of the Mid-Sized City* (2013).
- 7 *Ibid.*, 2-9.
- 8 *Ibid.*, 9.
- 9 COST Action CA18126 'Writing Urban Places. New Narratives of the European City', 'Memorandum of Understanding', 2.
- 10 Such local stories include Tallinn in the myths of the Old Man from Ülemiste Lake or in the medieval story about the market square of MartBread; Skopje's legend of creation by a hero's spear or its Old Bazaar District; Ljubljana as the city of dragons founded by Jason. As for literary narratives, there are not as many as for European metropolises and big cities, which is exactly what makes them lesser known, much like the cities we can undoubtedly define as 'mid-size'. Nevertheless, there are some examples of novels set in these urban contexts. For Ljubljana, see: *Minuet for Guitar* by Vitomil Zupan and *Crumbs* by Miha Mazzini; for Skopje, *The Time of the Goats* by Luna Starova or *A Spare Life* by Lidija Dimkovska; and for Tallin, Indrek Hargla's medieval Tallinn in his series of crime novels.
- 11 Mladen Stilinović, 'Bitola: Shifting Images of a Western Balkan City', *OASE* 89, *Medium: Images of the Mid-Sized City* (2013), 40-48.
- 12 Çanakkale, like Istanbul, sits across continents with some districts on the European continent and others on the Asian one.

- 13 Merriam-Webster, 'intermediate', merriam-webster.com/dictionary/intermediate, accessed 12 December 2022.
- 14 For more information on the Ruhr area, see: Norman J.G. Pounds, 'The Ruhr Area: A Problem in Definition', *Geography* 36/3 (1951), 165-178.
- 15 Sylvie Tram Nguyen, 'Horizontal Metropolis', in: Klaske Havik et al. (eds.), *Vademecum: 77 Minor Terms for Writing Urban Places* (Rotterdam: nai010 publishers, 2020), 82-83.
- 16 Neil Brenner, *New State Spaces: Urban Governance and the Rescaling of Statehood* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 3.
- 17 Marc Augé, *Non-lieux: Introduction à une anthropologie de la surmodernité* (Paris: Seuil, 2004).
- 18 Brenner, *New State Spaces*, op. cit. (note 16).
- 19 Emeline Cazi, 'Les Français vivent de plus en plus dans les zones urbaines; les périphéries attirent davantage', *Le Monde*, 27 October 2020.
- 20 Achille Warnant, *Les Villes moyennes sont de retour* (Paris: Fondation Jean Jaurès, 2020).
- 21 Thus, to take a French example of the ambivalent relationship between this 'commodity' and the context in which it is produced, we see that smaller urban centres linked to the metropolis (Paris) by high-speed train (TGV) are most likely to benefit from this rebalancing, although it is important to note that this 'benefit' is not equally shared (often accompanied, for example, by increased difficulties in obtaining affordable housing for those who do not share in the metropolitan aura). Again, it is clear that government (and indeed EU) planning and infrastructure interventions can have a decisive impact on the value attached to individual cases of urban characteristics such as 'mid-size'. The EU-supported development of the motorway network in Ireland between several regional urban centres and Dublin, and to a lesser extent between these centres (Galway-Limerick, for example, but not yet Limerick-Cork), is arguably another example of this revised viability of the 'mid-sized' European city, albeit one that ideologically favours private over public transport, in this case.
- 22 Joseph A. May, *Kant's Concept of Geography and Its Relation to Recent Geographical Thought* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1970).
- 23 Saskia I. de Wit, *Hidden Landscapes: The Metropolitan Garden as a Multi-sensory Expression of Place* (Amsterdam: Architectura & Natura Press, 2018).
- 24 Jonathan R. Zadra, Arthur L. Weltman and Dennis R. Proffitt, 'Walkable distances are bioenergetically scaled', *Journal of Experimental Psychology: Human Perception and Performance* 42.1 (2016): 39.

- 25 Rebecca Solnit, *Wanderlust: A history of walking* (Penguin, 2001).
Joseph Amato, *On foot: A history of walking* (NYU Press, 2004).
- 26 Gerard Duc, Oliver Perroux, Hans-Ulrich Schiedt and Francois Walter (eds.), *Transport and Mobility History. Between Modal Competition and Coordination* (Editions Alphil., 2014).
- 27 Ann Forsyth, 'What is a walkable place? The walkability debate in urban design', *Urban design international* 20 (2015): 274-292.
- 28 Lyn H. Lofland, 'The Morality of Urban Public Life: The Emergence and Continuation of a Debate', *Places* 6/1 (1989), 18-23.
- 29 For more on the issue, see: Jon Calame and Esther Charlesworth, *Divided Cities: Belfast, Beirut, Jerusalem, Mostar, and Nicosia* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009); and the novel *The Fever in Urbicande* by Benoît Peeters and François Schuiten.