

tal



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The *Tal* – an unresolved problem

in downtown Munich



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Here, in the historic center, this Metro

Jochen Boberg





opolis With A Heart has an open wound.



The street leading east to the Isartor, which bears the descriptive name *Tal* (valley), still shows all the ugliness that comes from allowing traffic to flow unchecked through the alleys of the old town.



The Corona crisis has made a long-known problem abundantly visible: Our inner cities are threatened with desertification because they have been converted into pure commercial areas and have lost their attractiveness as places of communication. Only with carefully dosed demolition measures will it be possible to give the old towns back some of their original function and their local charm.

The city of Munich is fortunate that when it was rebuilt after the war, the inner-city axes that had existed for centuries were adopted as the basic planning pattern and that the monuments that characterize the cityscape have largely been rebuilt. Munich can convey something of its history to its visitors more clearly than any other major city in Germany. However, unpleasant compromises had to be made in the major traffic calming project in the city center, and the gradual renovation has put the eastern part of the old town toward the Isar at a fatal disadvantage.



The urban dimensions of this conflict can best be understood if you briefly look back at the founding history of the city. In 1158, in order to be able to control the salt road leading through southern Germany, Heinrich the Lion destroyed the bridge over the Isar near Oberföhring, which was controlled by the Freising bishops, and had a new bridge built a little further south. The Salt Road, which came from the Salzburger Land, now led over this new bridge and at its end directly into the new city of Munich, which was founded on the bank of the river as a trading center and customs office. There, in the heart of the then still small town, the east-west road crossed a similarly important trade route leading from north to south, which Heinrich had also redirected through the gates of the city.

This simple inner-city street junction from the days of the city's foundation has survived all the expansion of the city area in the post-medieval centuries as a basic urban spatial pattern. The cosmopolitan city of Munich, which gained European renown as the royal seat of the Wittelsbach family and is celebrated today as one of the most important economic locations in Germany and as a leading cultural center, still shows in its old town the quasi small-town basic layout from the high Middle Ages with the two main axes intersecting in the center and the market square located directly at this intersection.

Fortunately, during the reconstruction after the war, the main streets of the old town that crossed at Marienplatz did not have to be brutally widened, as the main through traffic had already been directed via the Stachus, i. e. on the west side around the old town, before the war. When expanding the city center, the planners were able to think about further traffic calming at an early stage. The main shopping street leading west from Marienplatz to Karlstor was declared a pedestrian zone as the first representative street in Germany in its entire length as early as 1972, and together with Marienplatz it was converted accordingly.



It took different lengths of time for the three remaining axes to be included in the large-scale urban traffic calming project. Today the main streets leading north and south from Marienplatz have also been redesigned into pedestrian zones. Only the street leading east to the Isartor, which bears the descriptive name **Tal**, still shows all the ugliness that results when the traffic can flow unchecked through the lanes of the old town.

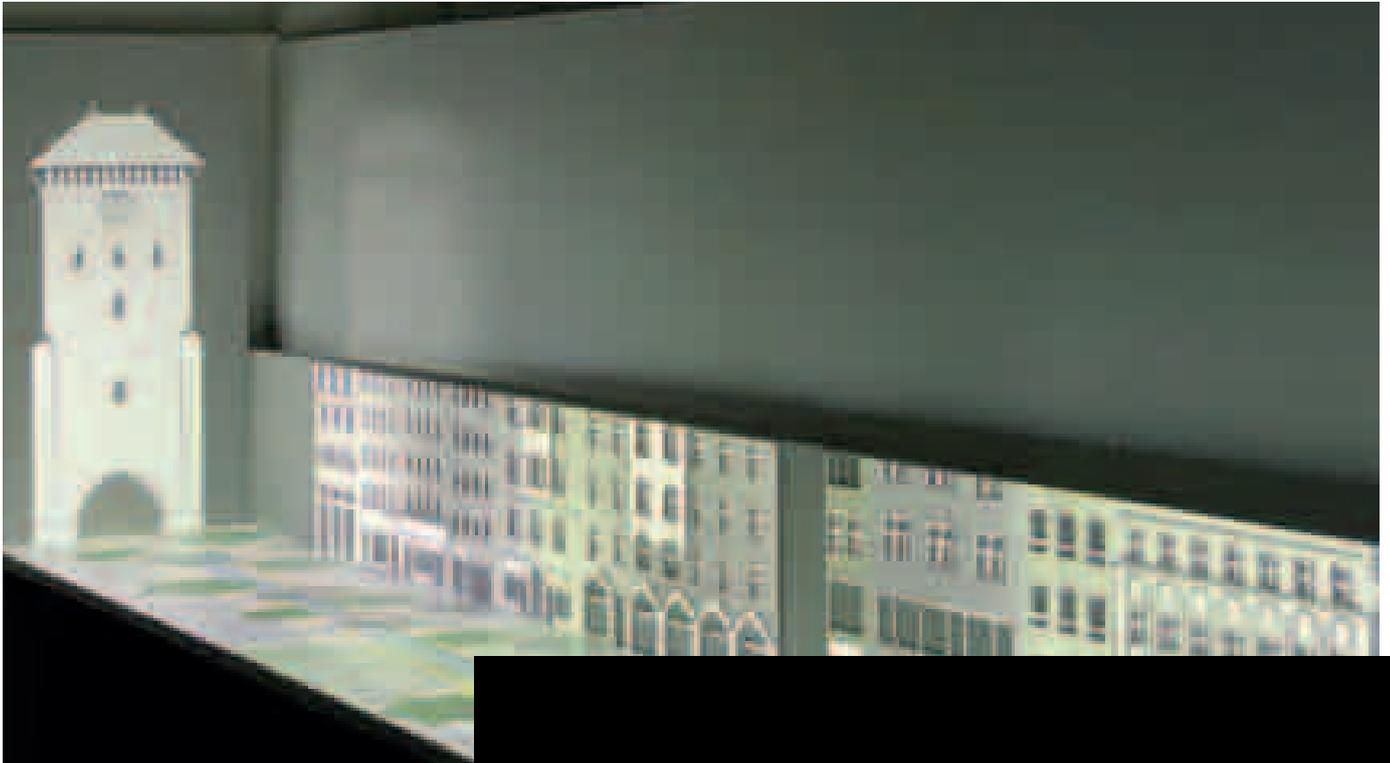
The **Tal** is the most neglected place in all of Munich's inner city. Those responsible in the city justify the fact that all considerations to convert this eastern arm of the old crossroads into a pedestrian zone have failed so far because of its infrastructural function for the adjacent inner-city quarters. But it was precisely these concerns that arose with the three other axes when they were considering possible traffic calming.

Yes, there the initial situation was sometimes even more complicated.

In the picturesque, slightly curved **Tal**, which leads to a mighty gate tower at each end, i.e. is almost magnetically aligned to two poles, the effect of the street space freed from motorized traffic would be even more suggestive than in the other inner-city streets, which have been handed over to the passers-by and strollers.

When redesigning this area, the planners could fall back on an atmospherically particularly lively element that was effective in the old town for centuries, but has now completely disappeared. One of the streams that flowed in the **Tal** up until the 19th century could be made to flow again there. The name **Tal** (*valley*) would then regain something of its former meaning and its poetic clarity. If you are thinking about calming traffic in the east arm of the ancient junction, you definitely have to include the gate at the end in the planning.

The Isartor with its mighty main tower, its two outward-facing flanking towers and the spacious fortified courtyard in between is the only medieval gate of the town that has largely been preserved in its original dimensions.



Anyone considering to calm traffic in the *Tal* must definitely include the Isartor, which is used to divert traffic into or out of the city today, into the planning.

As with all medieval city gates, at the Isartor the traffic flows coming from outside originally led head-on to the opening in the gate, or, more precisely, to the bridge that led over the moat to the gate. And whoever wanted to leave the city via the **Tal**, moved in a straight line towards the gate and then through its Arches out into the open.

If someone were to walk out of town through one of the *Gothic* ogival openings today, they would risk their life at the first step outside. Because right in front of the gate, the vehicles that are directed around the city center on the old city ring road shoot down the street.

However, road users who believe they can or have to drive into the **Tal**, i. e. into the old town, are directed around the free-standing gate. The unique monument of the passageway, the building that once served as a hole in the closed wall, is now a traffic obstacle. It stands isolated on an island which is circled relentlessly by vehicles and that is hardly ever stepped onto. The original function of the gate is completely reversed: it is still open and inviting, but nobody moves towards it or even through its openings.

It is therefore obvious that the city and traffic planners have seriously sinned at this gate, which can be described as the most important architectural legacy of the high Middle Ages in the city.

And since directly behind the gate the other stigma of recent Munich planning history, the **Tal**, presents its ugliness, one can only hope that the city will deal with this area and its massive problems in the foreseeable future.

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