Chapter 3
A 'Small World' – Reconstruction and Meaning of the Hansards' Social Networks

The objective of this chapter is to further elaborate on various sorts of personal relationships between the merchants of the Hanse. Kinship, friendship and social proximity were the typical ingredients of Hanseatic social networks, which in turn supported trade in quite a substantial manner by connecting merchants with potential trading partners and providing them with business opportunities and all kinds of information. Therefore, in this chapter we will present an overview of the appearance of social networks in the Hanseatic world during the late Middle Ages and discuss the methods that can be used to reconstruct them. After a brief introduction to the sociological approach of network analysis, several examples are given of social networks that emerged in Hanseatic regions. These cases prove how such late medieval social networks can still be grasped by modern historiography, and they also focus on the availability and validity of the sources that are used to reconstruct social networks.

Network Analysis as a Method to Describe Social Structure

The Theoretical Concept of Social Networks

An understanding of the basic concepts underlying the network analysis approach is fundamental to comprehend the formation and meaning of social networks within the Hanse.[137] Similarly to 'system' and 'social capital', the term 'network' is very popular and is widely used as 'social network' in the social sciences and in history. Because of this popularity it appears to be a well-defined and clear concept, even though a broad range of meanings

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137 For an introduction to social network analysis see e.g. BERKOWITZ 1982; BURT 1982; PAPPI (ed.) 1987; WELLMAN / BERKOWITZ (eds.) 1988; WASSERMANN / FAUST 1994; WASSERMANN / GALASKIEWICZ (eds.) 1994; CARRINGTON / SCOTT / WASSERMANN (eds.) 2005; TRAPPMANN / HUMMELL / SODEUR 2005; JANSEN 2006; SCOTT ³2013.

are attributed to it. But what exactly is a social network? How can it be described? Which methods can be used to analyse it?

The social network approach claims to be both a theoretical and methodological concept. Social network theory deals with the definition and meaning of networks as specific social configurations. Network methodology develops techniques and provides tools for the analysis of such units. First of all, a network in the exact sense of the word is a complex system of crossing lines.[138] Within a social network these crossing 'lines' are relationships because they consist of "a finite set or sets of actors and the relation or relations defined on them."[139] Social networks are nonetheless distinct from groups and organisations, although these two forms could be described in much the same way. However, the way in which both membership and relationship are defined makes the difference. An organisation has formal criteria of membership, whereas social networks do not. In organisations, relationships between members are formally defined, but in social networks, relationships are informal. However, it is not this informality alone that distinguishes social networks from other social units. In groups all members interact with everyone else, whereas in social networks, interaction can be indirect and mediated by other members.

The beginning of social network analysis as a defined approach of social sciences only dates back to the 1970s, and it is marked by an increasing number of studies on modern networks and on the methodology of network analysis.[140] However, social network analysis follows the traditions of sociometric research and social anthropology, and the understanding of such networks is based on sociological concepts such as social relationships, closeness and interdependence. These sociological concepts were formulated much earlier in the writings of Max WEBER, Georg SIMMEL and George C. HOMANS. For the historical sciences, Wolfgang REINHARD's[141] study on the entanglement of Roman city elites in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was a sort of milestone, as it was the first time that the

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138 Cf. PAPPI 1987, p. 12.
139 WASSERMANN / FAUST 1994, p. 20.
140 Cf. HOLLAND / LEINHARDT 1970; 1979; LAUMANN / PAPPI 1973; 1976; HUMMELL / ZIEGLER 1977.
141 Cf. REINHARD 1979.

methodology and potential of social network analysis were presented in the context of a historiographical study. In recent years, along with a growing interest of historians in applying both the concept of social networks and the methodology of social network analysis to historical cases, a vivid discussion evolved on the significance of social networks in historical contexts on the one hand and on the practicability of a structural analysis of historical network data using formal methods and graphical tools on the other.[142]

A Brief Sketch of the Methodology of Social Network Analysis

With the formation of social network theory, formal methods to describe the structure of networks were introduced into sociological research.[143] These techniques were derived from graph theory, group theory and matrix algebra. A set of relationships of a certain number of persons is depicted in a graph. The graph's nodes represent individuals and its edges represent the relations found between them.[144] Two structural measures are typically calculated from such a mathematical (and graphical) representation of a network. The network's overall density is the actual relationships' (edges) share of the number of all relations possible.[145] The more potential connections there are between individuals, the more dense the network is. Centrality measures how easy it is for a network member to get in contact with other participants in the network. Path distances within the network are commonly used for this.[146] For example, a person who has personal relationships with every other member would obtain the highest possible degree of centrality because she/he can reach everyone else directly. Since networks are often constructed using sampling and survey techniques in sociological research, problems of measurement error, validity and reliability

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142 Cf. ERICKSON 1997; WETHERELL 1998; GOULD 2003; BARKHOFF / BÖHME / RIOU (eds.) 2004; GORISSEN 2006; BOYER 2008; NEURATH 2008; NEURATH / KREMPEL 2008; REITMEYER / MARX 2010; SELZER / EWERT 2010; STARK 2010; DÜRING / STARK 2011; LEMERCIER 2012; DÜRING 2013; DÜRING / VON KEYSERLINGK 2015.

143 A very good overview of the techniques used in social network analysis can be found in TREZZINI 1998.

144 Cf. KAPPELHOFF 1987.

145 Cf. PAPPI 1987, p. 28.

146 Cf. FREEMAN 1978/79, pp. 215–239; PAPPI 1987, pp. 25–36.

of the data do arise. The analysis of historical social networks is naturally restricted to those pieces of social structure documented in the surviving sources. Therefore, shortcomings of the data may also cause difficulties. As re-sampling of new data is impossible in historical research, the problems that arise because of limited or biased data can only be overcome with careful interpretation. In applying the network concept to historical networks, it is important to know the following basic differentiations concerning the scope of and the methodology made within social network analysis.

A structural analysis can be performed for either a global or an ego-centred network.[147] For complete or global networks, an excellent source material would be needed – a source or sources that reveal all extant informal relationships. Criteria for differentiating between the members of a network and non-members would have to be defined as well. Even in the application to modern networks, neither the source problem nor the problem of membership definition can be solved satisfactorily. Instead, ego-centred networks are often analysed. Such an ego-centred or personal network comprises only the set of relationships that a certain person has. Given the rather scattered information on the personal relationships of merchants, focussing on ego-centred networks seems to be a reasonable approach to Hanseatic commercial exchange networks.

Networks can also be reconstructed on the empirical basis of either a single type of relationship or multiple sorts of personal connections.[148] A network that is based on just one type of relationship is called a one-mode network. However, when a person possesses relationships of different types to other individuals, it is called a two-mode or a multi-mode network. Both approaches can also describe historical, informal social structures. One example of a one-mode network is the common membership of Hansards in the towns' official societies or fraternities, which will be discussed in greater detail below. Kinship and commercial exchange relationships, for instance, would constitute a two-mode network. Two-mode networks are in a sense 'real' networks because, following the definition of social networks, several distinct layers of social structure are interwoven in them.

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147 Cf. Trezzini 1998, p. 380.
148 Cf. Trezzini 1998, p. 379 f.

Finally, closeness within a social network can vary depending on whether the measurement of closeness is relation-based or position-based.[149] In a relation-based approach, closeness of network members is thought of as cohesiveness. Individuals are close to each other because they are located near to each other within the network and because they have intensive personal contact. This method can be used for identifying and describing the social networks of Hansards as far as opportunities to get in contact, either personally or by letter, are analysed. In contrast, with a position-based approach, people are connected through structurally equivalent positions within a social network, not by personal contact. Hence, closeness by this definition is not a result of personal relationship, it would stem exclusively from structural equivalence. By this approach social roles are identified. However, this approach goes beyond the original idea of a social network being based on social contact. The position-based approach nevertheless can be used to analyse councillors and mayors of different Hanse towns, for instance, but even these people were connected by personal relationships, too, as will be seen below.

Social Networks within the Hanse – Examples and Corresponding Sources

Conditions of the Emerging Networks – Population Growth and Migration

The non-scientific but popular view of medieval society usually depicts it as very rigid and nearly immobile. This interpretation, however, is an over-simplification because even in the high and late Middle Ages, social structure was a flexible and ever-changing matter. Such a prejudice ignores the huge demographic and social dynamics that unfolded all across Europe, especially from the eleventh century onwards. A constant increase in population, a huge expansion of arable land, the foundation of hundreds of towns and a sustained economic growth resulting from this formed the socio-economic background of what was a significant societal take-off in the high Middle Ages. A further consequence of this process was the re-establishment of long-distance trade, an issue that, following the seminal

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149   Cf. Trezzini 1998, p. 382 f.; Kappelhoff 1987, pp. 39–41.

analysis of Robert S. Lopez, is referred to as the 'Commercial Revolution of the Middle Ages'.[150] This general economic take-off initially occurred in West Europe and the Mediterranean, but it eventually spread over most of the continent and reached the Baltic within the first half of the twelfth century. Both the political integration of the Baltic regions and the conversion to Christianity of the Slavic people were important prerequisites to the further economic development of the sparsely populated coastal areas and their hinterland. Numerous villages and towns were then founded along the Baltic coast between Lübeck and Reval / Tallinn until the late thirteenth century.

For people from the more densely populated areas in West Europe, the new settlements in the Baltic revealed much better economic opportunities and offered migrants the chance to begin a new life. Count Adolf II of Holsatia[151] founded Lübeck in 1143 by using the name and a castle of a long existing Slavic settlement. This was, in many respects, the very model of Christian expansion into the coastal areas of the Baltic. More importantly, along with the foundation of Lübeck, the West European concept of making the classic medieval town a law-protected permanent market was transferred to the Baltic region. Based on this model, within only a century almost every important Hanse town along or near the southern Baltic shore had been founded or had received municipal law – Riga (1201), Rostock (1218), Danzig / Gdańsk (1224), Wismar (1229), Stralsund (1234), Elbing / Elbląg (1237), Stettin / Szczecin 1243, Greifswald (1250) and Königsberg / Kaliningrad (1255).[152] The first western people who settled in Lübeck were of Rhinelandian, Westphalian and Saxon origins. Most of the other towns along the Baltic coast were founded according to the same or a fairly similar pattern. The new arrivals joined an already settled Slavic population. The western geographic origin of settlers can be traced by their surnames. In these times surnames were not yet of a character specific to the family bearing it. In their new places of residence, western immigrants were

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150 Cf. Lopez 1971.

151 Cf. Hammel-Kiesow 2000, pp. 27–30.

152 And of course also the re-establishment of the newly founded town of Lübeck in 1158/9 by the Saxon Duke Henry the Lion, after it had been destroyed by a fire. Cf. Hammel-Kiesow 2000, p. 34.

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typically marked by their respective place of origin. A well-known family of municipal councillors in Lübeck, for instance, was named *Warendorp*, which was the contemporary name of a Westphalian town nowadays named 'Warendorf'. Similarly, in Thorn / Toruń there was a councillors' family with the surname *von Soest* ("of Soest", also a town in Westphalia).

Kinship Networks among Hansards

Population growth, eastern-bound migration and settlement were vital for the emergence of social networks among the Hansards. Another aspect of western immigration to the Baltic – a region that would become the realm of the Hanse – was its endurance for several generations. This migration process was even prolonged as members of following generations also headed northeast, which likely promoted the foundation of many subsidiary towns. Therefore places like Wismar, Rostock or Stralsund were not only connected to their hometown Lübeck by sharing a common municipal law, but also because of the multiple inter-town kinship bonds that had emerged as a by-product of continued eastern-bound out-migration. The continuance of migration also meant that after some time migrants' relatives would follow them to their new places of residence in the Baltic. Additionally, some of the migrants or their children would also return to their western places of origin, if, for instance, the expectations of increasing personal wealth and improving social status there exceeded the opportunities in Baltic towns. In fact, the populations of those towns that would later become members of the Hanse were already interrelated through a wide range of family bonds long before the Hanseatic League emerged as an association of cities and towns. Thus, some citizens from Danzig / Gdańsk and Hamburg very correctly claimed to have relations in many other Hanse towns. Genealogical research, which is often not taken seriously enough, provides important and lucid insights into this kinship-based interweaving of Hanseatic town populations, which is very pertinent to the issue of Hanseatic social networks.

Kinship networks inside the Hanse can also be analysed by way of considering the kinship relations of citizens from the older western towns instead of focusing solely on the relationships of citizens in the new Baltic settlements. Hereditary matters are a good source for pinpointing this. Quite often, the emigrants' relatives still living in the western towns of

origin were named as their heirs. A particularly good example of this was the council of the Westphalian town of Soest, which repeatedly received letters called *Toversichtsbriefe* ('letters of confidence') from Baltic towns, announcing wills of former emigrants in favour of Soest citizens. These letters were collected and can be used as a graphic representation of the kinship bonds by which many citizens of Soest were connected to citizens of other Hanse towns. The resultant graph – which is printed in the publication of Emil DÖSSELER – has a radial appearance with edges that represent kinship relations leading from Soest to almost all the Hanse towns in the Baltic.[153]

An illustrative and well-documented example of a wide-reaching Hanseatic kinship network is the family named *Plescow*.[154] Although the last name refers to the town of Pleskau / Pskov in North Russia and thus suggests a family of Russian origin, it seems much more likely that the family originally came from Visby on the Swedish island of Gotland, where it can be proved that the earliest family members had lived. In this particular case, *Plescow* as a surname does not indicate the family's origin but the place where family members traded. A branch of the family then emigrated from Visby to Lübeck by the end of the thirteenth century. In Lübeck as well as in Visby, the *Plescow* family was part of the local ruling class. As a result, in both towns, male members of the family repeatedly held the official duty of a councillor or a mayor. Among them was the mayor of Lübeck, *Jordan Plescow*, one of the most prominent Hanse politicians, who died in 1425. Many additional kinship bonds with families in other Baltic towns were established, mainly through marriage, with councillor's families in Stockholm for example.

The network effect on the political organisation of the Hanse should be considered first, before turning to specific kinship-based relations between Hansards and their meaning to both structure and organisation of trade. Kinship was a natural vehicle to unite councillors and mayors from various Hanse towns and cities, at least in particular regions of the Hanse's realm.[155] A good example of such a personal kinship-based political network is that

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153 Cf. DÖSSELER (ed.) 1969; DÖSSELER 1988.
154 Cf. WIEGANDT 1988.
155 Cf. FAHLBUSCH 2005.

of *Arnd Sudermann,* who was mayor of Dortmund and died in 1473.[156] His family ties were a basis for his political bonds. Like many other families in Westphalia, the *Sudermann* family had established a family branch in Thorn / Toruń in which close connections existed. Although this had already happened a generation earlier, *Arnd Sudermann* and other family members in Dortmund as well as in Thorn / Toruń still felt as though they were part of the same clan. Apart from that, the local political network of *Arnd Sudermann* also covered his co-mayor *Christoph Hengstenberg*, who was his brother-in-law. *Hengstenberg* also had some relatives in Prussia, so beside his own relationships *Sudermann* had through *Hengstenberg* a second tie between Dortmund and the eastern Hanse towns which could easily be activated via his brother-in-law *Hengstenberg* if it was needed. A third dimension of network structure is the regional aspect of kinship-based relationships, since people from other towns in Westphalia and the Rhineland were also bound to the *Sudermann* family. Both *Arnd Sudermann's* sister and his daughter were each married to mayors of the town of Soest. Moreover, by that time his cousin *Heinrich* was a councillor several times as well as a mayor in the city of Cologne.

It is likely that since these local politicians were commissioned to represent their respective hometowns at the diets of the Hanse in Lübeck, a group of persons who met for political talks, they could rely on somehow firm kinship bonds. This must have had a lasting impact on Hanseatic politics and diplomacy. The kinship-based political networks worked as a sort of mediating instance. This can explain Hanseatic decision-making and enforcement better than before. For a long time, the Hanse was predominantly considered a hierarchical-bureaucratic organisation, economically as well as politically. Political decisions were commonly assumed to have been made at the annual Hanse diet in a quasi-parliamentary procedure. In contrast, recent studies like that of Dietrich W. Poeck demonstrate the importance of family bonds and other informal connections between the members of the leading groups of Hanse towns for the political structure of the Hanse to persist. More precisely, these politicians were the ones who, because of their mutual kinship-based connections, negotiated internal set-

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156   Cf. Fahlbusch 2002, p. 47 f.; 1994.

tlements between towns and were able to get even unpopular compromises accepted in their hometowns. Those who formed the Hanseatic leading group by sticking together because of family ties became the core of the Hanseatic political system. Interestingly enough, this group was referred to by contemporaries of the sixteenth century as *de herre der Hense* ("the masters of the Hanse").[157]

Wills as a Source of Network Reconstruction – the Case of Lübeck

Wills have been used only during the last two decades as important sources of social and economic history. Prior to that time, it fell to legal historians to analyse this sort of documents. From a socio-historical perspective, wills offer insights into peoples' belief and piety, but they can also answer many other questions regarding the history of everyday life. Compared to other types of sources of the history of the Hanse, wills have survived in large numbers. By far the biggest German late medieval corpus consists of approximately 6,400 wills from Lübeck, all originating from before the year 1500.[158] Their serial character makes these documents attractive to historians. Men and women living in Lübeck – rich merchants, craftsmen, but also servants – decreed in their wills how their property was to be handled after their death. Consequently, wills reveal the testators' social connections, especially when they include relatives living in distant places, former trading partners or illegitimate children. Because of such documents, it was possible, for instance, to reconstruct the commercial relationships of a group of merchants from Lübeck and Stockholm in 1350, the year of the Black Death.[159]

Additionally, another group of people appears in almost every known will from Lübeck. These are the executors of wills who were called *vormund* ("guardian") or, in Latin, *provisor*. Being chosen to execute a will

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157 Cf. Poeck 2002; 2010.
158 A good overview of the surviving archival material can be found in von Brandt 1979. Of the more recent studies see for Hamburg, Cologne, Lüneburg, Lübeck and Stralsund Riethmüller 1994; Klosterberg 1995; Mosler-Christoph 1998; Weidemann 2012; Noodt 2000; Meyer 2010; Lusiardi 2000.
159 Cf. Koppe 1933; Cordes 1998.

was a demanding and often rather tricky task. The will of *Hinrich van dem Braken*, who died in 1413, is a good example of this. The men he had named to execute his will had to spend part of his money for devout and charitable purposes, not only in Lübeck, but also in Osnabrück and in the more distant town of Bergen. They were also requested to arrange a marriage for *Hinrich's* daughter and to care for her until she was married. Finally, they had to administer the parts of *Hinrich's* assets that he wanted his two sons to have after they had come of age.[160] From this example it is clear that a testator had to be confident in his or her choice of guardian. A plausible *ad hoc* hypothesis would be to assume that testators generally commissioned their relatives with this kind of trustful duty. In reality, the opposite was true. Relationships between testators and executors were very rarely kinship-based. By taking a closer look at the problem, it is clear that honesty and willingness were not the only requirements for a potential executor or guardian to meet. A testator also had to be sure that the person he or she wanted to execute his or her will would be able to get the provisions accepted by the testator's creditors and debtors as well as by his or her possibly reluctant relatives.

Because of these requirements, analysing the choice of guardians is very promising. Firstly, one would naturally expect to find in such an analysis individuals who were men of high standing within their peer group. Not surprisingly, in some cases councillors and mayors were commissioned with guardianship because of their affiliation with the leading social class of Lübeck. Yet more interestingly, some of the executors and guardians were not chosen because of their official town duties. Instead, they were chosen because they were highly respected due to the more informal position they had within the society of Lübeck. The works masters of the parish churches were examples of this kind of executor, especially those at St. Mary's and St. James'.

In general, a works master managed technical problems and economic issues that arose in everyday church operation. However, he was neither the master builder of the church nor the holder of the city's church administration office. The latter was officially responsible for the financial assets of the

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160   Cf. Meyer 2002; 2005; 2010.

church. Usually, this office was shared by two city councillors who held it alternately. Although the churches' works masters were of a lower social rank within the society, compared to city councillors or master builders, they were highly esteemed within their home parish. A really outstanding example of the linking position these works masters held is that of the executor choices made in Lübeck between 1400 and 1450, as noted in Gunnar MEYER's in-depth analysis. For this particular period, the choices of citizens mostly favoured *Hermann Robecke*, who was the works master of St. Mary's, and his colleague *Godeken Steenbeke*, who held the same office at St. James'. If all the choices drawn from the surviving wills are represented in a sociogram[161], the following becomes clear: only a few of the testators made mutual choices for an executor or guardian. Thus, an overall look at wills does not offer much insight into the sketch of the networks of citizens from Lübeck during the first half of the fifteenth century. However, this information indicates possible ways social networks could have been used by citizens for all kinds of purposes. Although the works masters were not in the centre of a specific social group, they functioned as a sort of bridging person to connect separate networks with each other because of their high standing.

Restricting the sample to those testators already connected by professional, social or political matters would be a much better approach to the reconstruction of citizens' networks on the basis of wills. Gunnar MEYER also performed such an analysis for the group of merchants from Lübeck who specialised in trade with Bergen. Although not all the wills belonging to the people in this group survived, the final sample consists of 109 wills, 82 of which show a testator's choice of a fellow member of this group of traders for the execution of one's will. The corresponding graph[162] only depicts these choices, but some of the wills contain additional information that would be relevant to social network issues, such as business connections to other group members. Thus, testators' choices of executors can add much to the reconstruction of merchants' multi-mode social networks.

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161 This sociogramm is depicted in MEYER 2002, p. 289.
162 Cf. MEYER 2005.

Social Proximity vs. Spatial Vicinity –
Societies and Neighbourhoods

One approach to reconstructing the social networks of Hansards is to examine membership in societies and fraternities, which gives an indication of the social proximity between the members of these institutions. Membership could improve the quality of social networks in Hanse towns because it was extremely important for the informal communication within the political and economic leading groups. A majority of the councillors of Lübeck, for example, were also members of the distinguished *Zirkelgesellschaft* ('society of the circle').[163] In the Prussian towns of the Hanse, town councillors, lay assessors and merchants met in the so-called *Artushöfe* ('King Arthur's courts')[164] and were always members of the fraternities belonging to these courts. As was customary, they would bring guests to the meetings, and travellers and strangers were generally allowed to join such functions as well. The institution of the *Artushöfe* thus also enabled interurban social contacts.

A good example of how effective and sustained such contacts were can be seen in the *Schwarzhäuptergesellschaft* ('black head society') of Riga. This society was a popular meeting place for experienced long-distance traders and their young apprentices. The latter were usually sent to the Baltic region to learn more about the goods and practices of Hanseatic trade with Russia. Two of these young men, *Hans Swaneke* from Danzig / Gdańsk and *Johann van dem Springe* from Lübeck, potentially met each other for the first time in 1419 in Riga at the meeting place of the *Schwarzhäuptergesellschaft*. There, the two of them might have also met a third person, *Gerd von Borcken*, a citizen of Riga. The acquaintance of these three Hansards and especially the way in which they became acquainted is important to better understand their business relationship, which can only be verified over a decade later. In 1430, *Gerd von Borcken* sent wax to *Johann van dem Springe* in Lübeck, and part of this delivery was done by order of *Hans Swaneke*.[165]

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163 Cf. DÜNNEBEIL 1996.
164 Cf. SELZER 1996; 2003b.
165 Cf. BRÜCK 1999, p. 118.

Instead of relying only on social proximity, social networks could also be based on spatial vicinity. Towns possessed quarters with either expensive or cheap lodging and could therefore be divided into commendable and disreputable neighbourhoods, a fact not only relevant in modern cities[166], but also, in Hanse towns, where specific quarters were rated differently by citizens. In the same way that a person's clothing indicated social status, the location and appearance of a dwelling were commonly seen as a status symbol. A house built of stone, for instance, elevated the owner or tenant within the town's social hierarchy over those who still lived in wooden buildings. The prestige derived from a dwelling's location inside the town was highest in the centre around the market place, at the town hall or the parish church and along the main streets of the town. The prestige of a dwelling place also decreased as the distance to the city centre increased, so the least reputable areas were usually found near the town walls. The differing esteem for particular locations within the town affected the social character of a specific neighbourhood. In 1582, a travelling Swabian noticed that the members of Rostock's upper class spoke in a much more distinguished manner than the people living in Fisher's street, and that the latter again talked differently compared with the inhabitants of the harbour quarter of Warnemünde in the seaside port of Rostock.

Since both the purchase and sale of houses required a special juridical protection, real estate transactions were already being recorded by the end of the thirteenth century. For Lübeck, these property transactions can be found in the *Oberstadtbuch*, a book in which notaries of the city council wrote down all kinds of legal transactions relating to houses. Ownership can be established for each house in Lübeck from 1284 onwards based on the series of the annual records which survived without gaps. The records of the *Oberstadtbuch* provide historians with valuable information, for instance about the ups and downs of the real estate market. Also, in assessing the remains of medieval buildings, information on ownership can be useful to find former owners of fire walls or mural paintings[167], things typically discovered in archaeological diggings. Finally, these data also offer information for a socio-historical analysis. With respect to dwelling loca-

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166   Cf. KENT / KENT 1982; Igel 2007.
167   Cf. HAMMEL 1987; HAMMEL-KIESOW 1988.

tion it becomes possible to reconstruct the inner-urban spatial distance that existed between citizens, for example between merchants from a particular group of traders, craftsmen or members of a certain guild or fraternity. The results can be depicted on a street map, and such a social topography of the town helps to discover the spatial dimension of social networks.[168]

An interesting case for this pattern can be studied with data from the Pomeranian town of Greifswald around the year 1400. With the surviving administrative records it is possible to establish the dwelling places of the members of the town's leading class and to map these locations, something which has recently been done by Karsten Igel.[169] On the resulting map it can easily be seen that town councillors and mayors lived exclusively in the eastern parts of the town. They mostly resided at the market place and in *Knopfstraße*, which was a street connecting the market place with the neighbouring area. In contrast, the western areas of the town had a completely different social character because there craftsmen dominated the neighbourhood. Additionally, it can be shown that a rise within the town's social hierarchy due to a person's economic success usually meant that said person moved from the west side to the more reputable east side of Greifswald. Therefore, it is plausible to assume that spatial vicinity or even a direct neighbourhood of the councillors and mayors of the town would have increased the frequency of social contact as well as improving the density of their social network. In terms of sheer numbers, this situation cannot be compared to modern cities because even the medieval city of Lübeck, one of the larger examples, is estimated to have only had about 25,000 inhabitants, while the population of a town like Greifswald was likely to have only been about a quarter of Lübeck's, in the range of 5,000 to 6,000 inhabitants. Given these relatively small population figures, communication between the inhabitants of the town should have been possible, which makes the pronounced spatial and social segregation in such a small town all the more astonishing. And, compared to Italian towns of those days, which were very often divided into separate neighbourhoods each dominated by a powerful family of the town's ruling class, the social

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168   See pp. 123–282 in Meinhardt / Ranft (eds.) 2005.
169   Cf. Igel 2002; 2005; 2006; 2007; 2008; 2010.

networks of Hanseatic leading families were not only based on social nearness but also on spatial vicinity within the town.

The fact that both elements – social proximity and spatial vicinity – were often combined in the social networks of Hansards, can be explained by the case of those merchants from Lübeck who travelled to or traded with Bergen. The 'oldest men' (*Ältermänner*) in this merchants' company, who stood in the centre of a sustained social network, usually also occupied a leading political role in the city of Lübeck, and they and their descendants lived for a very long time – well into the nineteenth century – near to each other in only a few streets in the inner city of Lübeck.[170] A more in-depth investigation of this social network made up of merchants who traded in the same area was undertaken by Mike BURKHARDT, and uses graphical and mathematical techniques of social network analysis. This analysis reveals a strong coherence of social proximity, kinship bonds and commercial cooperation around a core of a few families for the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, and also reveals a visible change towards a less kinship-based trade pattern during the late fifteenth century.[171]

Social Networks of Hansards as a 'Small World'

As already seen in Chapter 2 with the case of the *Veckinchusen* family and its commercial relationships within the extended family, and again in the present chapter with the example of the merchants' triad consisting of *Gerd von Borcken*, *Johann van dem Springe* and *Hans Swaneke*, it's obvious that Hanseatic merchants intensively used their personal networks for commercial purposes. Of course, it goes without saying that the Hanse itself, being the aggregate of all these personal networks, was a large social network. However, this observation is of little validity, theoretically as well as empirically. In theoretical terms, every human society can be described as a social network, because there are always various informal social ties between members, but this is a rather weak argument. Empirically, social network characteristics would have to be specified more precisely, in order to turn the weak argument into a valid statement. So, one of the main features of

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170 Cf. ASMUSSEN 2002.
171 Cf. BURKHARDT 2009; 2012.

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the Hanse's social networks was their high degree of segregation into many subgroups, which nonetheless still could have been linked to each other quite easily. Thus, Hanseatic trade networks as a whole appear to have been a so-called 'small world'[172], as they allowed each merchant to contact any other network member through only a few mediating persons, despite having a weak overall density and despite having been fragmented into many separate subgroups. In theory at least, this 'small world' of the Hanse consisted of multiple interrelated layers, those primarily based on economic exchange, for instance, and those based on either kinship bonds, common membership, social proximity or simply on spatial vicinity. Kinship networks evolved through eastbound migration, whereas friendship networks developed from a common economic interest. However, making use of kinship bonds, social ties and political connections for business was not a practice unique only to Hanseatic merchants; other groups of medieval and early-modern traders also relied on social networks.[173] Networking alone certainly was not the very principle of conducting business among Hansards. Nevertheless, this 'small world' fulfilled a very practical and sustaining function for their network trade system. The 'small world' was not only determined by the all too common overlap of family and business but was also shaped to a large extent by the manifold social institutions that were created such as societies, associations or fraternities, and by political institutions such as the town councils, all of which recurrently provided opportunities for merchants to get in contact with each other, to exchange business information or information on other merchants' reputations, or to intensify existing social ties and to cultivate friendships. This was necessary for the functionality of the business network organisation, proving both the social embeddedness of the network trade system and the strength of weak ties, as Mark Granovetter has put it.[174]

This is, however, a qualitative statement, mainly because a firm quantitative analysis of the multiple layers of Hanseatic social networks seems

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172 Cf. Watts 1999, pp. 495–498; Selzer / Ewert 2001, p. 147.
173 See e.g. Rolley 1995; Dahl 1998; Markovits 2000; Schulte Beerbühl / Vögele (eds.) 2004; Baghdiantz McCabe / Harlaftis / Pepelasis Minoglou (eds.) 2005.
174 Cf. Granovetter 1973; 1985.

almost impossible to carry out, given the scattered and all too often incomplete network data that is provided by the surviving sources. Interurban connections of family members, wills, membership in societies and the social topography of Hanse towns are promising points of departure for reconstructing social networks, but certainly these sources do not show the full picture of the complex economic, social and political interrelatedness of Hansards. Even though some vigorous attempts have been made to apply the sophisticated quantitative and graphical techniques of social network analysis to various networks of Hansards – the above-cited study of Mike BURKHARDT is one such example –, it becomes obvious that the number and quality of sources in general do not allow for a proper assessment of all the existing layers or the full spectrum of a social network. However, the sociological concept of network analysis helps to identify clusters of persons and different types of relationships, and this makes the concept extremely valuable in supporting the qualitative conclusions on the structure and function of the Hanse's 'small world' that are drawn from a historical case analysis.