

# Benchmarking local network topology of sustainable heat supply: An open-source approach downscaling integrated assessment model results

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## Abstract

Aiming towards sustainable heat supply for residential/commercial buildings implies the necessity of decarbonizing heat production portfolios. Most decarbonization studies examine net-zero scenarios on a highly aggregated level using integrated assessment models (IAMs) with global coverage. To translate these high-level transformation pathways to policy measures at a local resolution, it is necessary to downscale results from an aggregated level to a higher granularity. This work's core objective is to examine the local network topology of sustainable heat supply and to identify the trade-offs for heat supply companies between low-carbon energy carriers, a significant heat demand reduction by building renovation, and a heat network expansion integrating renewable technologies such as geothermal and green gas high-efficiently. A two-stage analysis is proposed, including a downscaling algorithm for using IAM results for obtaining high spatial granularity using a novel downscaling technique accounting for the infrastructure requirements of centralized heat supply options and population density as criteria, and a benchmarking assessing network-based heat supply topologies. Using Austria as a case study, we downscale values projected by different decarbonization storylines from the H2020 openENTRANCE

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project. Results indicate that sustainable heat networks achieve only lower heat densities compared to existing networks, thus reducing infrastructure to supply ratio efficiency.

*Keywords:*

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## 1. Introduction

- Which downscaling method for the energy technology generation comes closer to predicting the nodal heat demand in the residential and commercial sector accounting for energy technologies' infrastructure needs on a high spatial granularity?
- What, if any, is the impact of using such downscaling methods to disaggregating the nodal heat demand on benchmarking network-based heat service provision focusing in particular on the district heating network?

have displayed good simulation performance based on the large scale features and patterns of synoptic activities, but they are unable to capture the meso-scale and micro-scale physical processes that influence local climate variables. the simulation suffer substantial from bias in specific and detailed regions to bridge this spatial gap

terms of statistical downscaling methods, the empirical relation ships between large-scale low-resolution climate variables (pre dictors) and local high-resolution parameters (predictands) in a particular domain are established using statistical approaches, and then applied to GCM outputs [41]. Due to the advantages of easy implementation, fast computing speed, and low time consumption, statistical downscaling methods are widely used in climate change projections, in which large numbers of GCMs with various sce narios are often considered [42,43].

## 2. Methodology

This section aims to describe the proposed approach to transform aggregated quantities of heat generation per technology to local heat network infrastructure topologies. The presented approach can be seen as a novel downscaling technique and is made, in particular, by two sequencing algorithms. Thereby, tailor-made indicators play a crucial role and serve as termination criteria for the downscaling process. Figure 1 illustrates the proposed idea to obtain local heat network topologies from IAM results. Thereby, *Algorithm1* transforms heat generation per technology from the region level (e.g., country) to the sub-region level (e.g., NUTS3) taking into account empirical settings for network infrastructure requirements of heat technologies on the sub-region level. Afterwards, *Algorithm2* disaggregates the results from the sub-region level to the small sub-region level (LAU) to obtain local heat networks and improve their network topology. The iterative application of the latter algorithm enables an improvement of the network topology by each iteration using a benchmarking with tailor-made indicators and leads to the local heat network topologies.

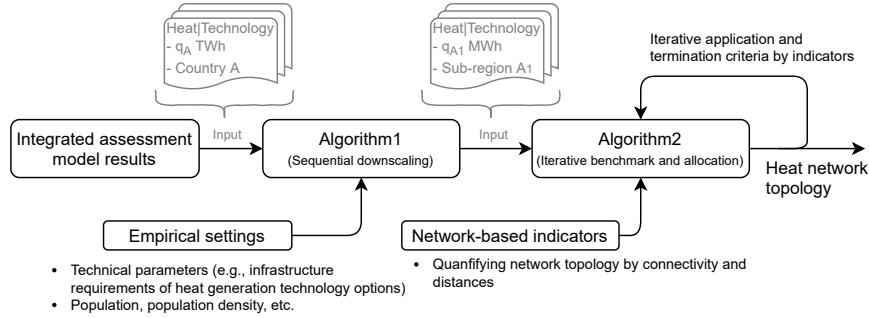


Figure 1: Basic concept of the downscaling technique using two sequencing algorithms

### 2.1. *Algorithm1: Sequential downscaling disaggregating heat generation per technology from the region to the sub-region level*

Here, we describe the technique to downscale IAM results of the low temperature residential and commercial heating sector from the region (NUTS0) to

the sub-region (NUTS3) level.<sup>1</sup> The idea of *Algorithm1* is to extend the well-known linear downscaling technique, which essentially takes into account a single proxy as the downscaling driver. The linear approach distributes the value to be downscaled linearly in respect to the distribution of the proxy. This has often proven successful in many fields of application. However, in particular, the specific investigation of heat generation per technology of the low temperature heating sector reveals a lack of the default linear downscaling method. Without any further adaption of this methodology, there would be an impracticable disaggregation of heat generation per technology across all sub-regions. This might lead to the fact that strongly grid infrastructure-dependent heat generation technologies provide low temperature heat in very sparsely populated sub-regions as a result of their small share in the proxy. At the same time, however, it might be assumed that heat network infrastructure is being only provided in areas with sufficient heat densities since only these areas represent profitable business models for network-based low-temperature heat supply and heat supply companies.<sup>2</sup> In this work, the idea of sufficient heat densities is adapted by using population density as the criteria for potentials of areas with network-based heat supply instead. There are essentially two main points for involving population density values as criteria. On the one hand, since population has established itself as the key proxy and downscaling driver along with GDP in the energy sector, the extension by population density seems to be consistent and the logical next step when focusing on spatial downscaling. On the other hand, the empirical data on the development of the population and thus on population density are often very well accessible and available. Furthermore, and this is especially the case for the analysis and empirical setting presented

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<sup>1</sup>In principle, different tuples of spatial granularity between the spatial level of values to be downscaled and the desired spatial level of disaggregation could be analyzed using our presented technique.

<sup>2</sup>This is also demonstrated by the open-source toolbox (<https://www.hotmaps.eu/map>) developed in the European H2020 project *Hotmaps*. On the interactive platform, one can find feasible areas for district heating networks on a high spatial granularity by selecting a specific heat density as threshold criteria and thus filtering out areas with insufficient heat density values.

here, the values to be downscaled themselves often implicitly include development/projections regarding heat demand and heat density (and thus can be seen to a certain extent inherent with IAM results). Algorithm 1 presents the sequential linear downscaling algorithm and each step from the IAM results to the heat generation per technology on the sub-region level.

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**Algorithm 1:** Sequential linear downscaling algorithm

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1  $t$ : Heat generation technology supplying heat service needs ( $t \in T$ );
2  $r$ : Sub-region (NUTS 3) within a country ( $r \in R$ );

input : Heat generation per technology on a country level obtained
         from IAMs: ( $q_t$ );
         Population density per region  $r$  ( $\rho_r$ );
         Total population per region  $r$  ( $p_r$ );
         Heat network infrastructure requirement of  $t$  ( $\sigma_t$ );
         Potential of heat network infrastructure at  $r$  ( $\pi_r$ );

output: Heat generation per technology on a sub-region level ( $\hat{q}_{t,r}$ );

Initialization:
Sort elements  $t$  in  $T$  descending by  $\sigma_t$ ;
 $q_r^{heat} \leftarrow \sum_t q_t \cdot \frac{p_r}{\sum_r p_r}$ ; // Downscale heat demand by population as proxy
3  $\tilde{q}_t \leftarrow q_t$ ; // Available heat generation per technology  $t$ 

4 begin
5   foreach  $t$  do
6      $List = []$ ; // Collect sub-regions that fulfill criterias
7      $demand = 0$ ; // Used to disaggregate heat generation
8      $R' = R \setminus \{\forall r \in R : \pi_r \leq \sigma_t\}$ ; // Filter sub-regions by criteria
9     foreach  $r' \in R'$  do
10      if  $q_r^{heat} \geq 0$  then
11         $List = List \cup r'$ ; // Sub-regions that fulfill all criterias
12         $demand += q_r^{heat}$ ; // Total demand of the sub-regions
13      end
14    end
15    foreach  $l \in List$  do
16       $\hat{q}_{t,r} = \frac{q_r^{heat}}{demand} \cdot \tilde{q}_t$ ; // Heat technology generation at sub-region
17       $q_r^{heat} -= \hat{q}_{t,r}$ ; // Reduce heat demand at  $r$ 
18    end
19  end
20 end

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In descending order of network infrastructure requirement, the heat generation

technologies are iterated (line 5 and initialization). All sub-regions are collected that fulfill the heat network infrastructure requirements of technology  $t$  (line 8). Then, those sub-regions with zero heat demand (e.g., as a result of the supply by other heat generation technologies and the sequential process) are not further pursued and removed from the collection of sub-regions (line 10 and 11). The total heat demand of all sub-regions that fulfill all criterias and provide proper settings (line 12) are used to disaggregate heat generation to the sub-regions accounting for the individual heat demand (line 16). Finally, the heat demand at the sub-region is reduced to ensure that the total demand is covered by the heat generation technologies. Wie bereits in Abbildung 1 angedeutet sind diese Ergebnisse, also auf NUTS3 Ebene die Inputdaten für Algorithm2. Dieser macht das und das und wird in der folgenden Section detailliert beschrieben.

## *2.2. Algorithm2: Iterative heat network benchmark and heat generation allocation on the small sub-region level*

Hier steht etwas.

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**Algorithm 2:** Iterative benchmark and disaggregation algorithm

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1   $s$ : Stage of iteration ( $s \in \{0, 1, *\}$ );
2   $G^s$ : Heat network graph at stage  $s$ ;
3   $N^s$ : List of nodes at stage  $s$ : ( $n^s \in N^s$ );
4   $L^s$ : List of lines connecting nodes  $k$  and  $j$  at stage  $s$ : ( $l_{k,j}^s \in L^s$ );
5   $Q^s$ : Centralized heat generation at stage  $s$ : ( $q_{n^s}^s \in Q^s$ );
6   $\tilde{Q}^s$ : On-site heat generation at stage  $s$ : ( $\tilde{q}_{n^s}^s \in \tilde{Q}^s$ );
7   $\Pi^s$ : Benchmark indicator values at stage  $s$  ( $\pi_{n^s}^s \in \Pi^s$ );

input :  $G^0 = \{N^0, L^0, Q^0, \tilde{Q}^0\}$ ;
output:  $G^* = \{N^*, L^*, Q^*, \tilde{Q}^*\}$ ;

Initialization:
 $s = 0, iter = True$ ;
8 begin
9   while  $iter = True$  do
10    foreach  $n \in N^s$  do
11       $\Pi_{n^s}^s = f(N^s, L^s, Q^s)$ ;           // Calculate indicator values
12    end
13     $i$  with  $\pi_i^s = \min(\Pi^s)$ ;           // Get index with lowest indicator value
14     $N^{s+1} = N^s \setminus i$ ;           // Remove index from list to obtain next stage
15     $\tilde{q} = \sum_{N^{s+1}} \tilde{q}_{n^s}^s$ ;           // Remaning on-site heat generation
16    if  $\tilde{q} \geq q_i^s$  then
17      pass
18    else
19       $\tilde{q} = q_i^s$ ;           // Limit quantity of centralized heat generation
20    end
21    foreach  $n^{s+1}$  do
22       $q_{n^{s+1}}^{s+1} = q_{n^s}^s + \frac{q_i^s}{\tilde{q}} \cdot \tilde{q}_{n^s}^s$ ; // Increase centralized heat generation
23       $\tilde{q}_{n^{s+1}}^{s+1} = \tilde{q}_{n^s}^s - \frac{q_i^s}{\tilde{q}} \cdot \tilde{q}_{n^s}^s$ ; // Decrease on-site heat generation
24    end
25     $L^{s+1} = L^s \setminus \{\forall l_{k,j}^s : k = i \vee j = i\}$ ; // Remove unavailable lines
26     $G^{s+1} = \{N^{s+1}, L^{s+1}, Q^{s+1}, \tilde{Q}^{s+1}\}$ ; // Create new network graph
27     $\Pi_{n^{s+1}}^{s+1} = f(N^{s+1}, L^{s+1}, Q^{s+1})$ ; // Calculate new indicator values
28    if  $mean(\Pi^{s+1}) \geq mean(\Pi^s)$  then
29       $G^s = G^{s+1}$ ;           // Set iteratively input network graph
30    else
31       $iterate = False$ ;           // Stop iteration if no improvement
32    end
33  end
34   $G^* = G^s$ ;           // Set improved network graph as algorithm result
35 end

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*2.3. Definition of benchmarking indicators to assess heat network infrastructure topology*

*2.4. Case study, scenario definition, and empirical settings*

*2.4.1. An Austrian case study obtained from the H2020 project openENTRANCE*

*2.4.2. Definition of the four decarbonization scenarios*

*2.4.3. Empirical settings and open-source availability*



### 3. Results

This section presents the results for the proposed Austrian case study for the target year 2050. Four different storylines are investigated covering a wide range of possible future developments of the European and Austrian energy system. Section 3.1 shows the heat generation mix of the low temperature heat supply on the national level. These results are subsequently used for the demonstration of the proposed downscaling methodology. Section 3.2 goes into a higher spatial granularity and shows the heat generation on the sub-region and small-subregion level. Section 3.3 presents the potentials of network-based low temperature heat supply as implication of the four different storylines and European deep decarbonization respectively. Section 3.4 presents the low temperature heat networks on the small sub-region level. Finally, Section 3.5 compares the results of the work with existing low temperature heat networks by using heat density as criteria.

#### *3.1. Low temperature heat supply in Austria 2050: four different decarbonization scenarios obtained from the H2020 project openENTRANCE*

This section presents heat generation mix of the low temperature heat supply in Austria for four different storylines. These storylines are developed in the H2020 project openENTRANCE. They are called as follows: *Directed-Transition*, *Societal Commitment*, *Techno-Friendly*, and *Gradual Development*. Each of them covers a specific fundamental development of the energy systems and aims for a sustainable transition of the provision of energy services. Note that the first three storylines consider the achievement of the 1.5°C global warming climate target. The latter storyline (*Gradual Development*) can be interpreted as a more conservative storyline and takes into account the 2.0°C target. In the following, the storylines are briefly described, before the quantitative results of the low temperature heat supply on the national level are presented. For a more detailed description of the storylines, it is referred to [1] and [2]. Further

informations also are available at the website<sup>3</sup> and GitHub.<sup>4</sup>.

The underlying concept of the storylines is a three-dimensional space spanned by the following parameters: technology, policy, and society. Each storyline describes a specific pathway to reach a decarbonized energy system taking into account a pronounced contribution of two dimensions. Regarding the third dimension, a development is assumed that leads to no significant contribution to the decarbonization of the energy system. The *Directed Transition* storyline looks at a sustainable provision of energy services through strong policy incentives. This becomes necessary because neither the markets nor society adequately push sustainable energy technologies. The *Societal Commitment* storyline achieves a deep decarbonization of the energy system by a strong societal acceptance of the sustainable energy transition. Thereby, decentralized renewable energy technologies together with policy incentives lead to a sustainable supply of energy service needs. Parallel, no fundamental breakthroughs of new clean technologies are within sight. *Techno-Friendly* describes a development of the energy system where a significant market-driven breakthrough of renewable energy technologies give rise to a decarbonization of energy service supply. Alongside, society acceptance supports the penetration of the clean energy technologies and the sustainable transition. *Gradual Development* differs from the other storylines as on the one hand, this storyline only aims for the less ambitious 2.0 °C climate target, and on the other hand, a little of each possible sustainable development of the energy system is described here. While all the three dimensions contribute to the decarbonization, they do not push it sufficiently and result in a more conservative storyline than the others.

Table 1 shows the low temperature heat technology generation in Austria for 2050 and the four different storylines. The values are obtained from the H2020

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<sup>3</sup><https://openentrance.eu/>

<sup>4</sup><https://github.com/openENTRANCE>

| Heat generation in TWh |                     | Biomass | Direct Electric | Synthetic gas | Heat pump (air) | Heat pump (ground) | Heat storage | Hydrogen | $\Sigma$ |
|------------------------|---------------------|---------|-----------------|---------------|-----------------|--------------------|--------------|----------|----------|
| Storyline              | Directed Transition | 5.37    | 2.13            | 0.36          | 22.73           | 19.50              | 14.84        | 1.03     | 25.90    |
|                        | Societal Commitment | 5.37    | 1.98            | 1.35          | 15.71           | 21.47              | 10.58        | 2.18     | 29.02    |
|                        | Techno-Friendly     | 5.37    | 1.53            | 2.79          | 25.95           | 6.69               | 16.36        | 7.43     | 19.49    |
|                        | Gradual Development | 5.37    | 1.81            | 5.35          | 9.68            | 21.21              | 15.57        | 8.65     | 35.23    |

Table 1: Low temperature heat technology generation in Austria for 2050 and the four different storylines. Values obtained from the H2020 project openENTRANCE and GENeSYS-MOD.

project openENTRANCE and are modeling results from the open-source model GENeSYS-MODv2.0 [3]. According to the definition of the storylines, the heat generation of the technology options differ in some cases significantly (e.g., hydrogen-based low temperature heat generation in *Directed Transition* and *Gradual Development* (7.62 TWh) or Heat pump (ground) generation in *Techno-Friendly* and *Societal Commitment* (14.78 TWh)). Consequently, that share of the heat generation that require a heat network infrastructure taking into account the assumptions of this work, also differs (see gray-colored column  $\Sigma$ ).

### 3.2. Decarbonized low temperature heat technology generation on different spatial granularity levels

This section presents and discusses the results of the low temperature heat technology generation on the region/country, sub-region, and small sub-region level. As already mentioned above, the sub-region level corresponds to small political districts and the small sub-region level to (small) municipalities. Note that in Europe, the NUTS classification (Nomenclature of territorial units for statistics) and corresponding codes are used for this purpose. Accordingly, the region/country level is defined in the NUTS classification by the NUTS0 code (e.g., AT for Austria), the sub-region level by the NUTS3 code (e.g., AT127 for South Viennese environs), and the small sub-region level by the local administrative units (LAU) code (e.g., AT127—Laxenburg for the municipality of Laxenburg).

Figure 2 shows the low temperature heat technology generation on different spatial granularity levels. Thereby, a two-dimensional matrix can be used for interpreting the figure. The vertical dimension considers again the four different decarbonization storylines. The horizontal dimension covers the different spatial resolutions, whereby the level of spatial details increases from the left to the right. On the far left, the low temperature heat generation on the country level is presented. In the middle, two different illustrative sub-regions are presented. The rural sub-region (NUTS3 code AT121 (Mostviertel-Eisenwurzen)) shows high shares of heat pumps (air sourced) and small-scale heat storage systems. In addition, synthetic gas and direct electric heating systems supply the low temperature heat demand. In contrast, the urban sub-region (NUTS3 code AT127 (South Viennese environs)) is mainly supplied by ground sourced heat pumps, biomass, and hydrogen. Moreover, air-sourced heat pumps and again heat storage supply the demand. In particular, the shares of heat generation technologies that require network infrastructure are highlighted and marked by the blue-colored edge. On the very right, an example of the resulting low temperature heat network on the small sub-region level for the four different storylines is presented. In the four subfigures presenting centralized heat networks (each for one storyline), the size of the points indicates the amount of centralized low temperature heat supply in a specific small sub-region. The comparably high demand in the *Gradual Development* storyline results in an extensive low temperature heat network infrastructure/topology (see lower right subfigure in Figure 2). In contrast, the other three centralized heat networks are characterized by fewer (less supplied small sub-regions) and smaller points (less supplied heat demand by the centralized heat network).

## Heat generation on the country, sub-region, and small sub-region level

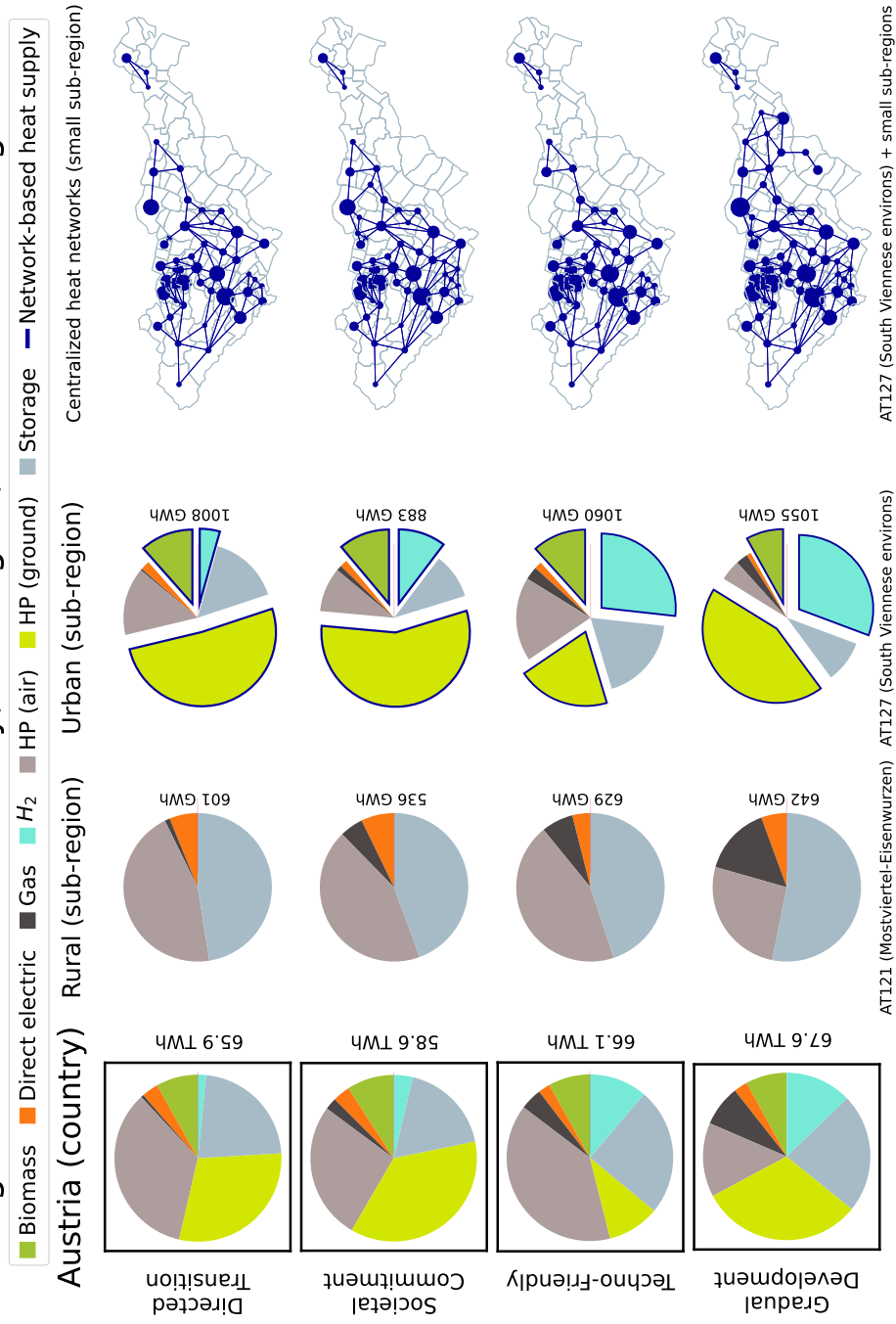


Figure 2: Low temperature heat technology generation on different spatial granularity levels for the four different storylines. left: heat technology generation mix on the country level. middle: comparison of technologies supplying the low temperature heat demand in a rural and urban sub-region. right: Centralized heat network topology (size of the points represent the amount of local heat demand supplied by the centralized heat network)

- 3.3. Austrian sub-regions with high potentials for centralized low temperature heat supply resulting from aiming the decarbonization*
- 3.4. Low temperature heat network topology on the small sub-region level*
- 3.5. Comparison of existing and future projections of low temperature heat networks using heat and population density*

# Centralized heat supply in Austrian NUTS 3 regions 2050 in TWh

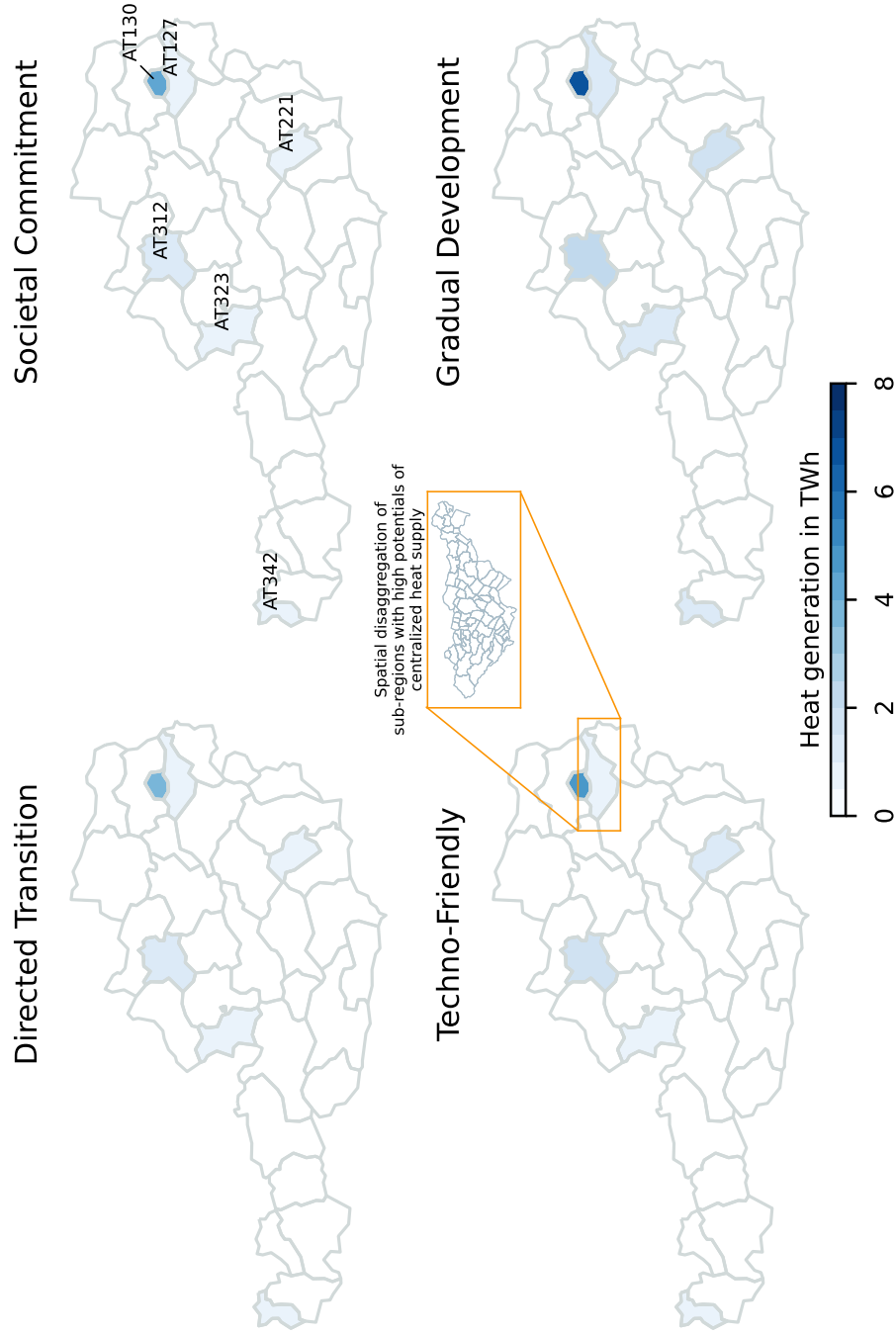


Figure 3: Low temperature heat technology generation on different spatial granularity levels for the four different storylines. Left: heat technology generation mix on the country level. Middle: comparison of technologies supplying the low temperature heat demand in a rural and urban sub-region. Right: Centralized heat network topology (size of the points represent the amount of local heat demand supplied by the centralized heat network)

## **4. Conclusions and outlook**

### **Declaration of interests**

None.

### **Declaration of Competing Interest**

The authors report no declarations of interest.

### **Acknowledgments**

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## **Appendix A. Validation of the downscaled results on the NUTS3 level**

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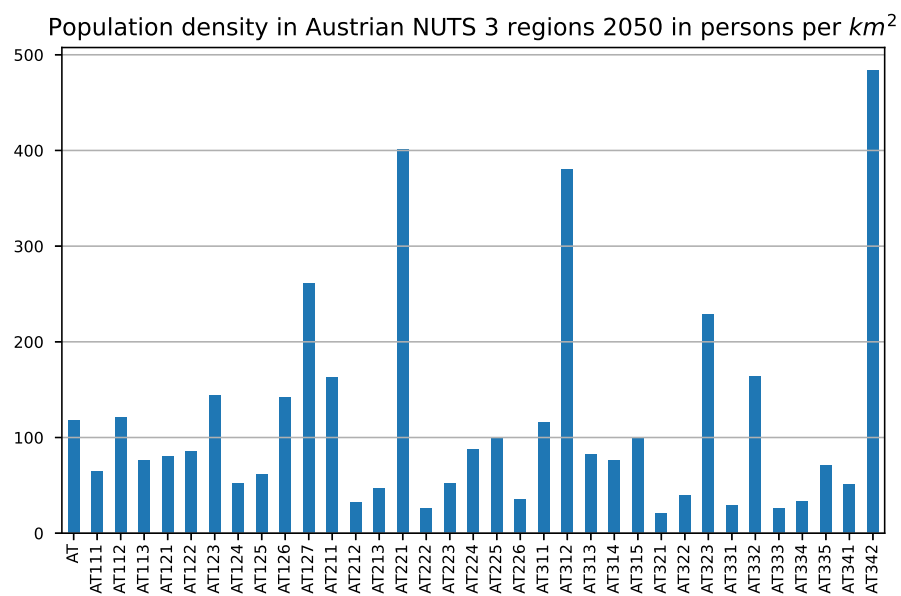


Figure A.1: Projected population density in Austrian sub-regions (NUTS 3) in 2050. For the sake of clarity, the value of Vienna - AT130 (5124 persons/ $km^2$ ) is not explicitly presented.