Vision Paris 2050, Vincent Callebaut

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Offen im Denken

Kompetenzfeld Metropolenforschung

Narrative Strategies and Strategic Narratives in Urban Transformations

Prof. Dr. Jens Martin Gurr

Brno, December 9, 2022

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Overview

1. Introduction/Research Contexts
2. The Role of Narratives in Urban Development
3. Suggestion: 'Scripts' in Urban Development (B. Buchenau, J.M. Gurr)
4. Case Study: The “Smart City”
5. Conclusion/Summary

Research contexts

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- Planning Theory:
  - "story turn in planning" (L. Ameel, J. Throgmorton, B. Eckstein, L. Sandercock, M. van Hulst, …)
  - "Global Urbanism" (M.P. Smith, D. McNeill, C. Hein, E. McCann/K. Ward …)
- Policy Mobility Research (political science, economics, human geography, sociology …)
- Literary Urban Studies
  - Narratology of planning (L. Ameel, B. Keunen …)
  - Literary modelling, scenario building (J. Gurr, B. Michel, L. Mattheis)
  - "scripts" in urban development (B. Buchenau, J. Gurr)
- General theory of models (Stachowiak, Mahr, Wendler …)

=> A literary studies contribution to research on urban development

Three conceptual trajectories

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- From “how does the city shape literature” to “how do texts shape the city”
- From “texts as descriptive models *of* the city” to “texts as prescriptive models *for* the city”
- From “studying literary texts on the city” to “applying literary studies methods to pragmatic/non-literary texts” (planning documents)

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Literature and scenario building

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- 'scenario building' and the testing of alternative parameter settings
- Literature as a form of symbolic action, as a social experiment free from the constraints of everyday life – literature as ‘depragmatised behaviour in rehearsal’, which makes it possible symbolically to try out in fiction different scenarios or potential solutions for key societal issues (K. Burke, D. Wellershoff, W. Iser)
- Wellershoff's classic formulation: literature as a “space of simulation for alternative behaviour in rehearsal at reduced risk” (Wellershoff 1973, 57, my translation)

Herman Kahn and Narrative Scenarios

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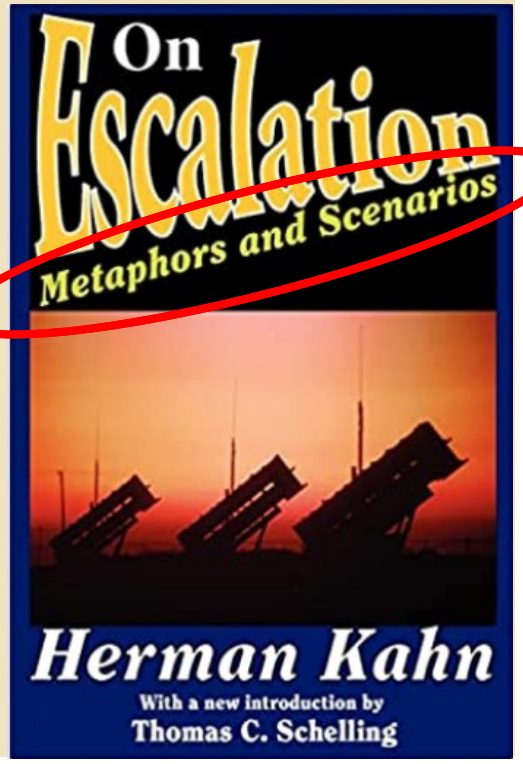
- Since the 1940s: Herman Kahn (1922-1983), U.S. defense analyst, “tells stories” to develop scenarios for nuclear warfare (among other fields)
- Close interaction with screenwriters and filmmakers in California
- Later (1960s): dozens of alternative scenarios in the form of story forecasts

1965



Narratives and scenario building

HOW? Bringing it all together - 5 Scenarios

TRANSLATE
INTO THE MODEL

VALIDATE
THE RESULTS

All: NEMO Graphics, 2018

Alexander Schmidt, Florian Fuchs, Minh-Chau Tran

Source: J. Alexander Schmidt, Janka Lengyel: City Planning and Urban Design, UDE

Narratives and

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HOW? Bringing

ISLATE
E MODEL

VALIDATE
THE RESULTS

Source: J. Alexa
Design, UDE

Urban

The "Story Turn" in planning and the importance of narrative

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- J. Throgmorton. "Planning as Persuasive Storytelling in a Global-Scale Web of Relationships". *Planning Theory* 2.2 (2003): 125-51.
- L. Sandercock. "From the Campfire to the Computer: An Epistemology of Multiplicity and the Story Turn in Planning". *Multimedia Explorations in Urban Policy and Planning*. Ed. L. Sandercock, G. Attili. Dordrecht: Springer, 2010. 17-37.
- M. van Hulst, Merlijn (2012). "Storytelling, a Model of and a Model for Planning". *Planning Theory* 11.3 (2012): 299-318.
- ….

⇒ **“planning IS story-telling” (analysis of narratives in planning texts)**

⇒ Uses of literature in promoting plans (Helsinki, Emscher …)

Narratives – and Genres – in Urban Planning

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J. Throgmorton "Planning as Persuasive Storytelling" (2003)

"I would suggest that at least five broad narratives are commonly told about urban areas in America […]

- the city as a site of opportunity and excitement […]
- the city as a nightmare […]
- the city as a site of injustice, oppression, and exclusion (but also hope) […]
- the environmentalists' interpretation. According to it, the city is a site of activities that are rapidly eroding the ecological base upon which those activities are founded. Cities, human progress, and all they entail are rapidly destroying or taming wild nature.
- the city of ghosts. This offers a narrative of memory, of loss, of small towns drying up and blowing away, of farmland disappearing from the urban fringe, of neighborhoods being destroyed by urban renewal and interstate highway construction, of other neighborhoods being eviscerated by deindustrialization." (142f.)

Urban Planning Narratives and Path-Dependencies

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- Example "pioneers on the new urban frontier"
  - And who – if the city is the frontier – is the enemy ("the hostile Native American")?
- Other example: "the tragedy of Detroit"
- **Which outcomes/path dependencies/inclusions and exclusions are suggested by specific narratives, metaphors, images?** (for ideological implications of modes of emplotment, cf. Hayden White, *Metahistory* (1973); for the "ideological baggage" of narratives and metaphors, cf. Ameel 2021)

A recent US example: 9/2017

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Detroit redefined: city hires America's first official 'chief storyteller'

Irritated by the relentless focus on ruin porn, or pre-emptive stories about the city's tech resurgence, Aaron Foley will attempt to offer a more nuanced portrait

An image from Kathryn Bigelow's new film Detroit, which some critics say mischaracterises the city. Photograph: Francois Duhamel/eOne

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Script: origins and meanings – I

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1. Originally (since the 14th century): "Scripts" as "something written, a piece of writing" (*OED*)
2. Since the 19th century: use as a legal term, meaning the original of a legal document (normative implications: original as the true or authoritative version as opposed to derivative rescripts)
3. Related notion: "scripture": sacred writings, any writings that appear unassailable, sacred, authoritative, beyond critique
4. Film industry and film studies: “script” as the “typescript of a cinema or television film; the text of a broadcast announcement, talk" (*OED*) – both descriptive (transcript) and prescriptive (an instruction to be carried out, a pre-defined sequence of actions and dialogues)
5. Psychology/transaction analylsis (Eric Berne, 1970s): "script” as an unconscious life plan formed early in life – a plan that can be discovered, modified, and thus rescripted.

Script: origins and meanings – II

6. Social psychology: script as “[t]he social role or behaviour appropriate to particular situations“
7. Artificial intelligence research: "script" as "a standard event sequence" and thus a form of procedural knowledge (Schank and Abelson 1977) – the "restaurant script" (sequence: sit down, order, be served, eat, pay, leave) [how much of human behaviour is "scripted"?]

Script: Synthesis

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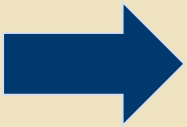
- "Script" as procedural knowledge, self-description and template/manual/recipe



- Scripts combine documentary **and** normative in unmarked transitions (descriptive and prescriptive)
- Scripts make use of and are coded in and transmitted through Narratives, Media and Figures (of thought and speech, figurations)

A current example: Essen European Green Capital

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VON GRÜN ZU **GRAU** ZU GRÜN

Die Wandlung der Stadt Essen von einem vorindustriellen Stift mit Äbtissinnengärten und Kaiserparks über eine Kohle- und Stahlmetropole zu einer grünen Stadt ist beeindruckend. Um 1900 war Essens Stadtbild geprägt durch die Kruppsche Gussstahlfabrik, durch enge Quartiere nahe der Altstadt und große Krupp-Kolonien wie den Nordhof, den Schederhof und den Kronenberg, durch Schlote der Kokereien und Gestelle der Hochöfen, durch Fördertürme und Halden. Die grüne Entwicklung von Essen ist untrennbar mit den sozialreformatorischen Idealen und Zielsetzungen von Robert Schmidt (1869–1934) verbunden. Robert Schmidt und andere Städtebauer im Ruhrgebiet stellten sich die Frage, wie die ideale Industriestadt aussieht, wie sie zu organisieren und zu einem lebenswerten Ort für die Einwohnerschaft zu gestalten sei. Große, langgezogene Grünflächen wie das Siepental in Bergerhausen oder der Haumannpark in Rütenscheid brachten Luft in die Stadt. Die Wälder kamen unter Schutz. Grüne Viertel wie die Margarethenhöhe oder das Moltkeviertel entstanden. Mit Schmidt setzte in Essen eine Stadt- und Raumplanung ein, die sich am Menschen und seinen Bedürfnissen nach Grün, Gesundheit und Erholung orientierte.

UNESCO-Welterbe Zollverein, Blick auf das Fördergerüst von Schacht 3/7/10 Richtung Gelsenkirchen-Rotthausen

"The successful 150-year story of transformation from a city of coal and steel to the greenest city in NRW is a model for many European cities undergoing structural transformation. […] Our green infrastructure is the engine of sustainable urban development. The competence for change of our people is the key to success in this process of transformation.

- **Process knowledge**
- **Self-description**
- **Story connecting past, present & future**

Research Group "Scripts for Postindustrial Urban Futures: American Models, Transatlantic Interventions" (Volkswagen Foundation, 2018-2022)

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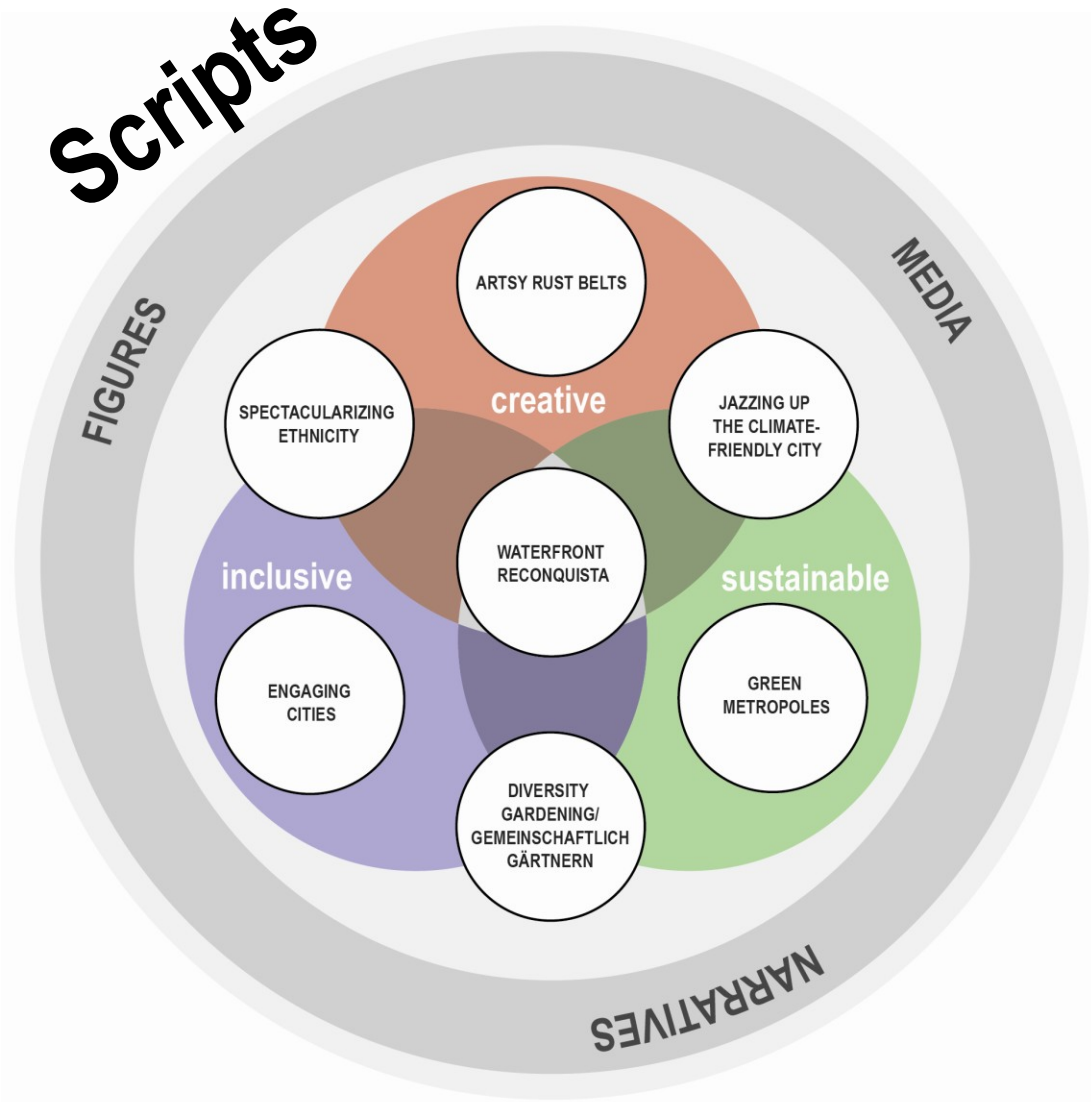

- Manuals for "success" copied and adapted across cities
- "Creative", "Sustainable“, "Inclusive" and “Smart” city as some key recent ‘scripts’

Sample Projects

- Using "sustainability" to further "inclusive" urban development in Essen ("community gardening")
- Using local narratives ("Jazz Quarter") to support sustainable development
- Sustainable, creative and inclusive Waterfront Development (HafenCity Hamburg)
- …

A recent German example – HafenCity Hamburg

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Nachhaltig und regional im Überseequartier

Auf dem Überseeboulevard haben ein Öko-Wochenmarkt und ein Bio-Supermarkt eröffnet

Der eine biet
aus dem Al
Weizen- und
Hamburgs p
ein Bio-Fleis
gehören zu d
das lokale u
Überseequa
18 Uhr könn
Vielfalt regio
deren Herst
Betreiber ist
der in ganz H
len vertreter
zwischen de
fenamt hat
HafenCity e
er ein Sortir
zu einem Fri
gegenüberlie
bergeführte
Food-Truck-
zum Profil de
Besuch lohn

Apfelsaft, Honig und Gemeinsinn

„Urbane Gemeinschaftsgärten sind Experimentierräume für ein gutes Leben in der Stadt", heißt es in einem Manifest. In der HafenCity machen „Kick'n'Plant" und die „Freunde des Lohseparks" den Praxistest

„Creative Blocks" Baakenhafen

ige Wohn- und Arbeitsformen
dem Manufakturwerk

nufakturwerk" bildet das kreative
eines Gebäudeensembles, in dem
e Baugemeinschaft Platz findet und
t rund 180 Wohnungen entstehen, ein
von öffentlich gefördert. Seit Mai 2017
h die Architektur fest: KSP Jürgen En-
tekten (Braunschweig), WERK Arkitek-
nhagen) und kister scheithauer gross
en und stadtplaner (Köln/Leipzig) wer-
Baufeld mit insgesamt circa 26.000 qm
g" auf circa 4400 qm BGF ein für
hungen entstehen Räume für nachbar-
othek, ein Raum für Familienfeiern und
Wohnprojekt umsetzen, das besonders
tivwirtschaft, Architektur, Wohnen und
ihre kleinen und mittelgroßen Unter-
ber drei Geschosse reichende, 300 qm
Stadtteils offen, etwa für Flohmärkte
ist für 2018 geplant.

Source:
HafenCity News 47 (7/2017).

Travelling Concepts, Models, Policies in Urban Development

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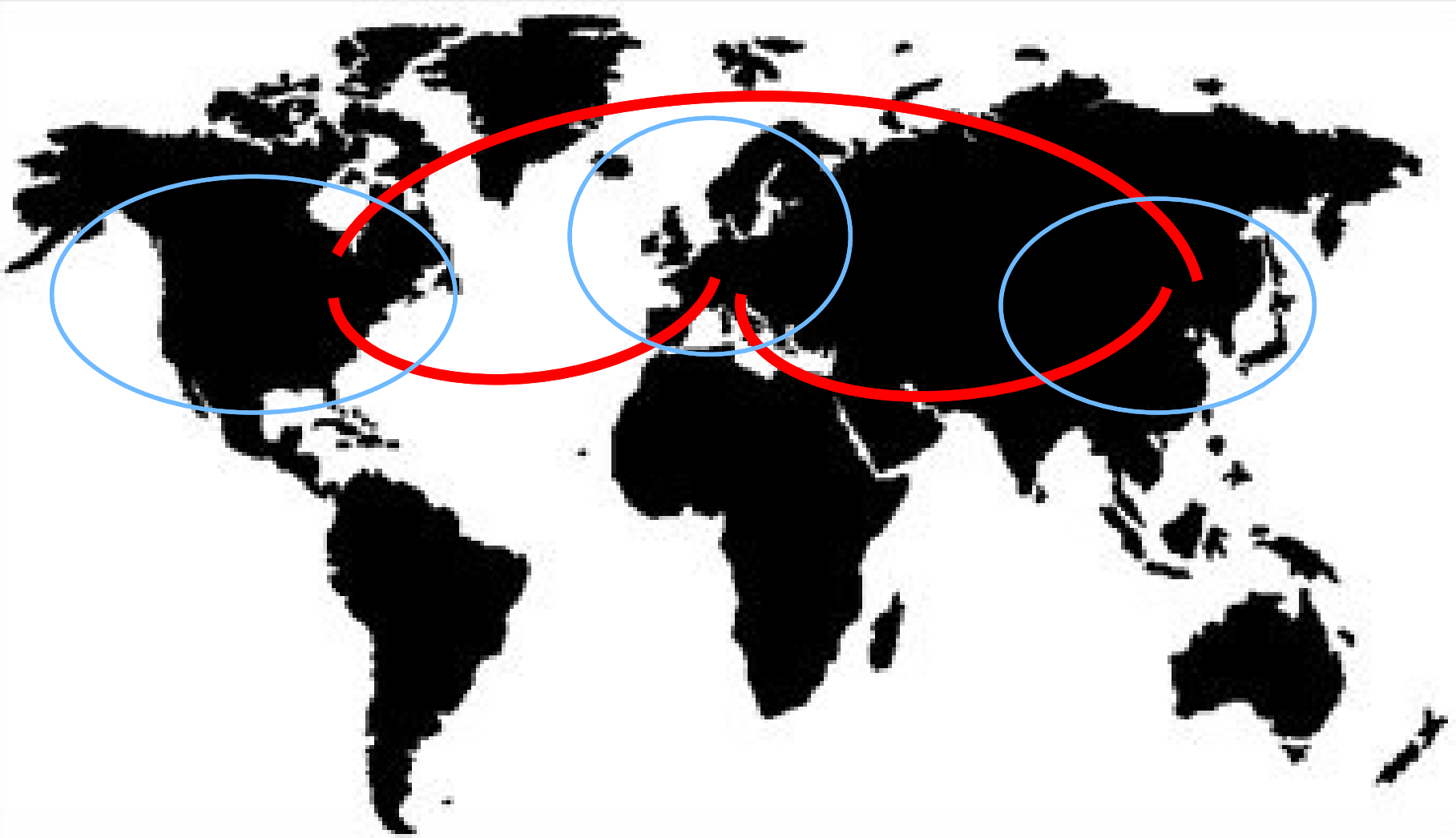

On the Global Transfer of "Scripts"

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1. “All this talk of best-practice sharing is pure intellectual laziness. It ignores the fact that local context is everything in urban development – and that cannot be transplanted.” (Arun Jain)
2. Structures of innovation, civic engagement, urban and rural imaginaries, cultural preferences etc. function very differently in different context – but they have a crucial impact on the acceptance of scripts and models in urban development.
3. "Scripts" are too often transplanted without regard for local context – and then frequently don‘t work as expected
4. Conflicts between different scripts are frequently ignored: “creative” and “sustainable” development is frequently socially exclusive (“green gentrification”)

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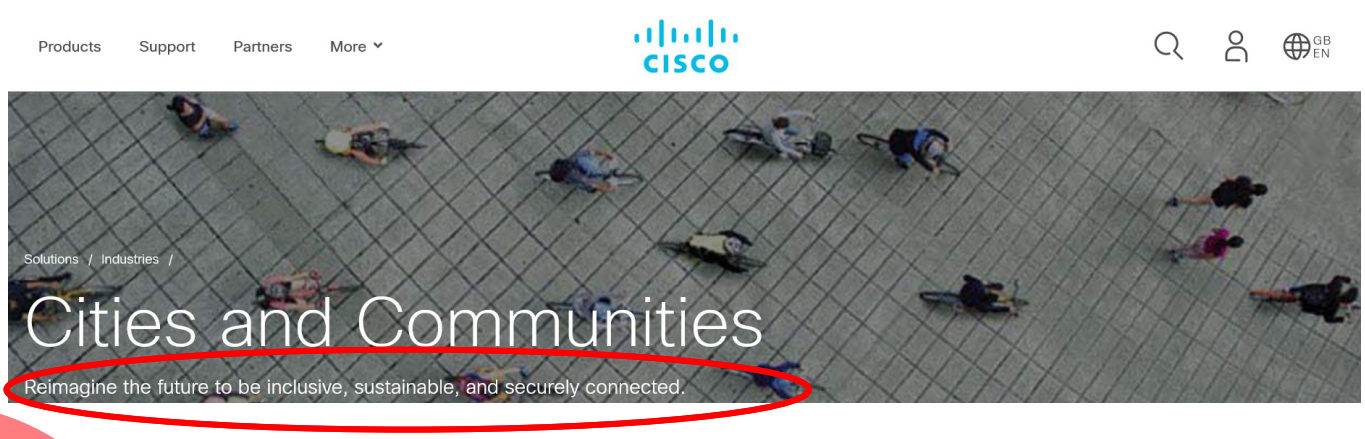
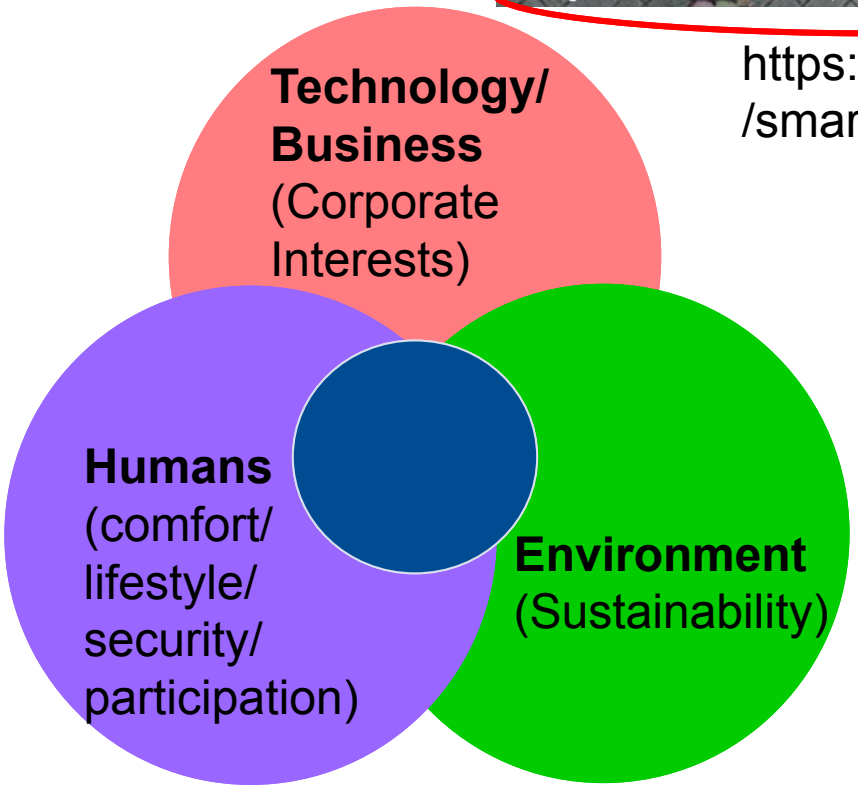
Smart City: The Promise



https://www.cisco.com/c/de_de/solutions/industries/smart-connected-communities.html



Smart City: The Promise

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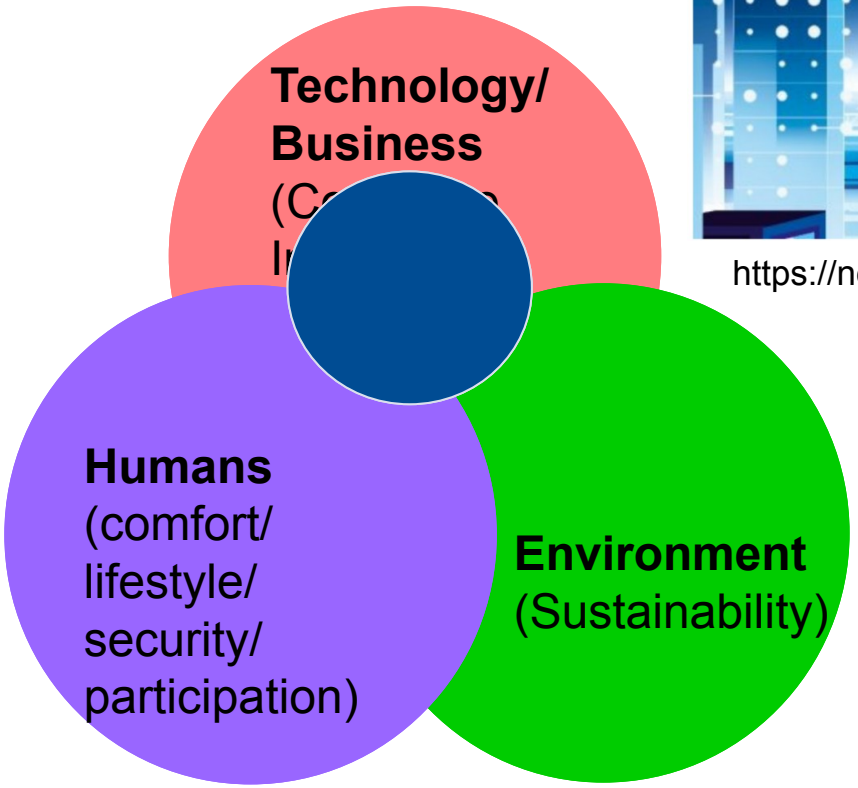
SIEMENS

Suchen

Willkommen in der Stadt 4.0

https://new.siemens.com/de/de/unternehmen/stories/infrastruktur/2018/welcome-to-the-city-4-0.html



Smart City: The Promise

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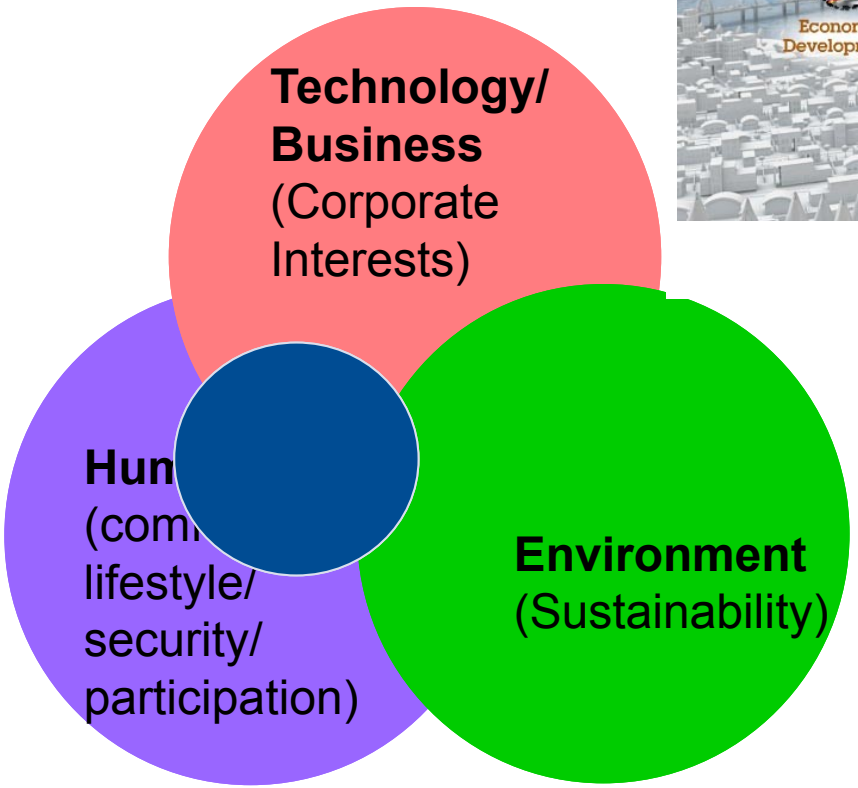
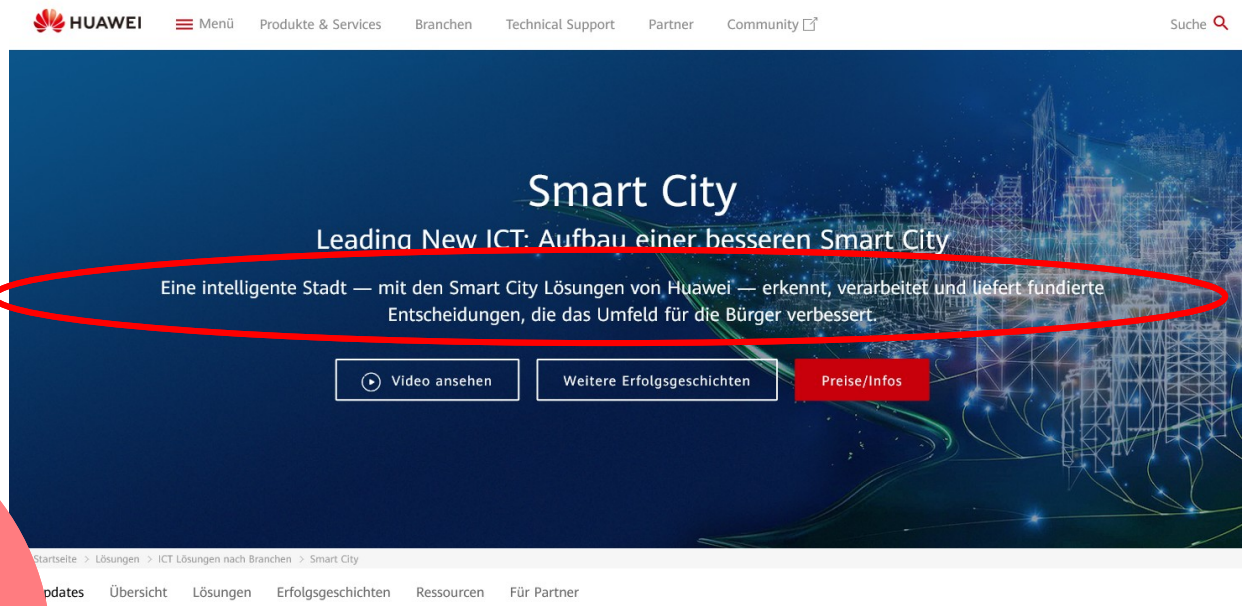
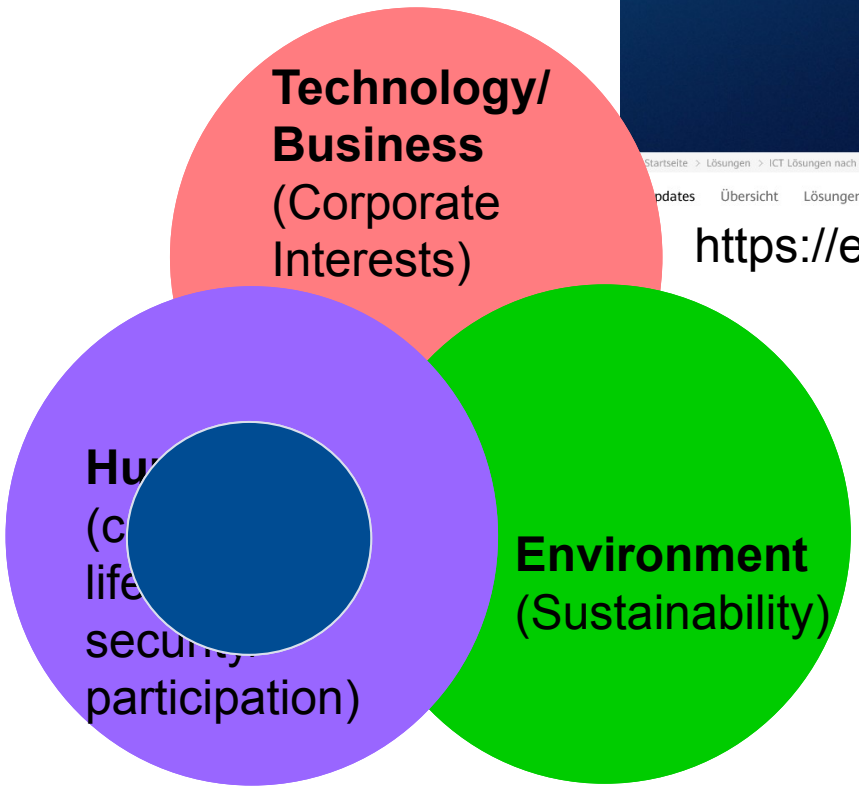
www.ibm.com



Smart City: The Promise

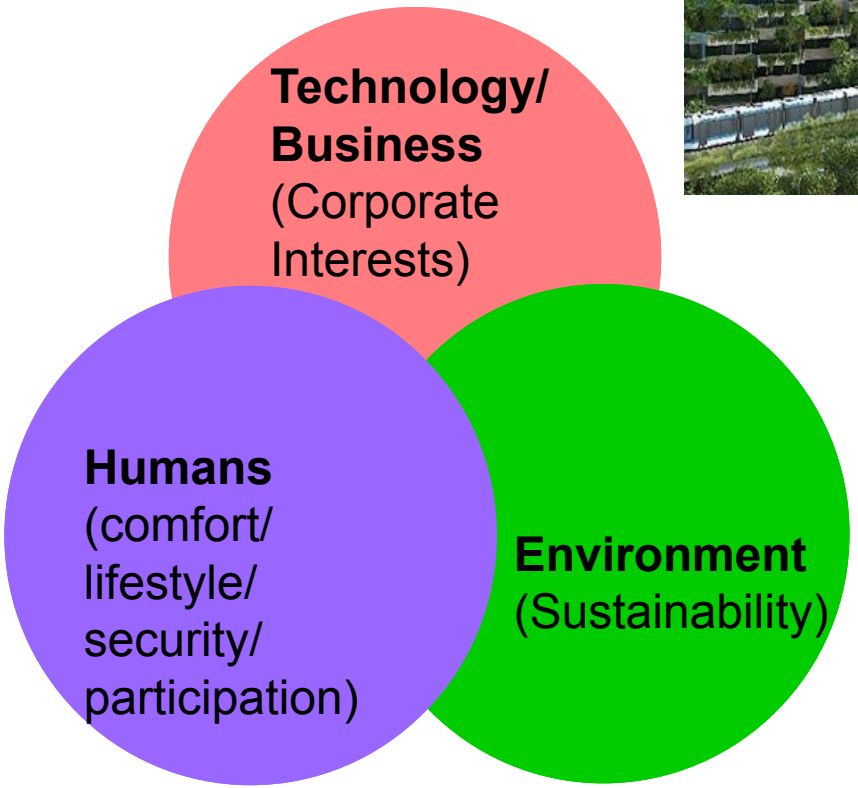


https://e.huawei.com/de/solutions/industries/smart-city



Smart City: The Promise

Liuzhou Forest City, China (Visualisierung)
Stefano Boeri Architects
https://www.archdaily.com/city/liuzhou



Research on “Smart City as Corporate Storytelling”

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(Selection)

Söderström, O.T. Paasche, F. Klauser. “Smart Cities as Corporate Storytelling.” *City* 18.3 (2014), 307– 320.

Wiig, A. “IBM’s Smart City as Techno- utopian Policy Mobility.” *City* 19.2/3 (2015): 258– 273.

Sadowski, J.W., R. Bendor. “Selling Smartness: Corporate Narratives and the Smart City as a Sociotechnical Imaginary.” *Science, Technology, & Human Values* 44.3 (2019), 540-563.

Smart City: What has become of some major projects?

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- Songdo IBD, Südkorea
- Masdar City, UAE (N. Foster)
- Quayside Toronto, Canada (Sidewalk Labs [alphabet/google])
- Sino-German Eco-Park (Qingdao, gmp) (and other Smart/Eco Cities esp. in China, e.g., Lingan, gmp)
- The Line, Saudi Arabia (not yet built, but the image film will strike many as dystopian …)

=> Altogether, results have been rather sobering (promises have largely remained unfulfilled or have been retracted; targets and expectations have been drastically reduced; projects are either dramatically delayed or have been cancelled altogether)

Preliminary Findings: Some critical questions on the "Smart City"

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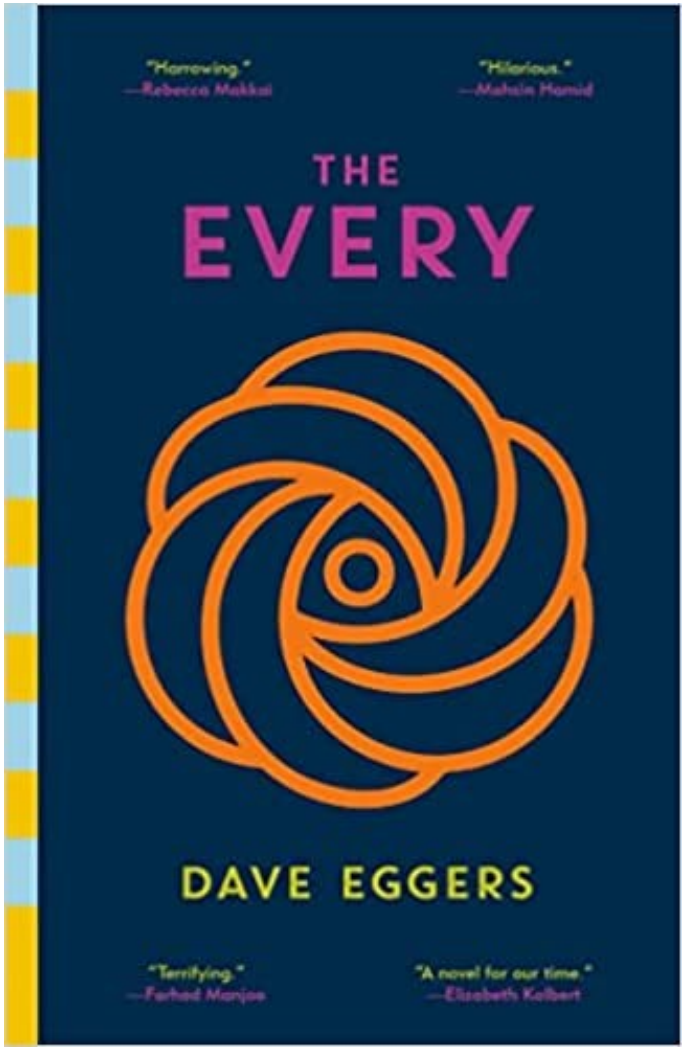
1. What are the aims – and whose aims are these?
2. Was is meant by "smart city" – only technology or more?
3. Who speaks of the "smart city"? IBM, Siemens, Cisco and Huawei mean something rather different than, say, Richard Sennett
4. What has become of the major projects?
5. 'Smart City' strongly relies on major plans and plannability – but hasn't 20th-century planning history rather shown us the limits of planning and plannability?
6. What room do smart city technologies leave to human autonomy, spontaneity, privacy …?

‚Smart City‘ in the Novel



2021

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Conclusions

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1. Narratives play a crucial role in urban transformations – they cannot replace strategy, but even compelling strategies need persuasive narratives.
2. The rationalist assumption that the models that globally travel are the ones that best solve a given problem is overly optimistic and empirically untenable – it overlooks questions of power, financial resources, marketing and persuasiveness.
3. Most research in the field overlooks or underestimates the importance of storytelling, suggestive images and corporate marketing.
4. The spread of the “smart city” concept is not least the result of corporate storytelling backed by enormous financial resources.

Benefits

1. Urban Development as an innovative field of employment for graduates
   New materials, new methods for research
2. Strengthen integration of "systemic disciplines" (economics, planning, sociology, literary and cultural studies)
3. Strengthen the connection between urban practice and research in cultural studies
4. Improved urban development strategies in different regions (better awareness of different cultural and political contexts, e.g., different cultures of planning, participation etc.)

B. Buchenau, J.M. Gurr. “City Scripts: Urban American Studies and the Conjunction of Textual Strategies and Spatial Pro-cesses.” *Urban Transformations in the U.S.A.: Spaces, Communities, Representations*. Ed. Julia Sattler. Bielefeld: transcript, 2016. 395-420.

B. Buchenau, J.M. Gurr. “On the Textuality of American Cities and their Others: A Disputation.” *Projecting American Studies: Essays on Theory, Method, and Practice.* Ed. Frank Kelleter, Alexander Starre. Heidelberg: Winter, 2018. 135-152.

B. Buchenau, J.M. Gurr. “’Scripts’ in Urban Development: Procedural Knowledge, Self-Description, and Persuasive Blueprint for the Future.” Jens Martin Gurr. *Charting Literary Urban Studies: Texts as Models of and for the City*. New York: Routledge, 2021. 141-163.

“A great city may be seen as the construction of words as well as stone.”

(Yi-Fu Tuan 1991: 686)

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