

“Scripts for Postindustrial Urban Futures: American Models, Transatlantic Interventions”

Graduate Research Group funded by the Volkswagen Foundation

Principal Investigators: Barbara Buchenau (Speaker), Jens Martin Gurr (Co-Speaker), Kornelia Freitag, Walter Grünzweig, Randi Gunzenhäuser, Josef Raab, Michael Wala



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1. Object of Study: Scripts for Creative, Sustainable and Inclusive Post-Industrial Urban Futures

Stories matter in times of urban revolutions. Narratives, figures, and media, whenever they are at their best, help to imagine viable paths into a better future. When they are at their worst, they unleash anxieties and build scenarios that propel further segregation, conflict, and economic disintegration. In an era in which shrinking cities trouble the former Western centers of industrial production, bringing fear especially to the homelands of car and steel manufacturing, a new faith in **imaginative forms of procedural knowledge** built on stories, figures, and media has emerged. The belief is that this procedural knowledge, usually termed **script**, can bring about urban revitalization for so-called “legacy cities – older industrial cities that have experienced sustained job and population loss over the past few decades” (Mallach/Brachman 2013, backcover; Florida 2011; Berking/Löw; Peck 2005 and 2007). These scripts for postindustrial urban futures find real world applications, wielding substantial power in and beyond the urban spaces for which they were designed. City scripts work to bring about a paradigmatic shift that urban planner and geographer Michael Batty has described as “the transition from a world based on energy to one based on information: from an industrial to a postindustrial world” (Batty “Future Cities” 2013, 191). Scripts thus serve to give new storylines to cities that lost, or continue to lose, their lifeline industries – and it has also been a crucial component of the work of these scripts that they additionally seep into the self-definition of cities that lack an industrial heritage.

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Most recently, a narrative and ethnological turn in urban research (e.g. Throgmorton 1996 and 2003; Sandercock; R. Lindner/Moser 2006) has further encouraged a growing number of municipalities, urban developers, creative industries as well as NGOs in the fields of culture, society, and the environment to embellish their plans and schemes for urban life after deindustrialization with good stories, strong images, and connective media. This postindustrial professional and academic turn to cultural scripts as a means to bring about a better future, most charismatically undertaken in the (in)famous American rust belt, is the subject of our Graduate Research Group initiative.

Especially in postindustrial cities, the deployment of optimistic scripts for urban futures frequently clashes with historical and concrete realities as they become manifest in closing factories and long dismantled assembly lines. In these cities, successful scripts need to anticipate antagonistic voices by integrating self-irony in strategic places, or downsizing the utopian bent usually animating urban planning discourses (compare Schwanhäuser 2008). Collective self-descriptions in the once proud industrial cities, the crumbling powerhouses of the old West, favor narratives of economic decline. They court figures of social disintegration and they employ media that capture ruination in aestheticizing and fetishizing ways. Well known examples of scribal self-denigrations that rapidly assumed fame in the postindustrial urban include Camilo Vergara's *The New American Ghetto*, 1997, Herbert Grönemeyer's song "Bochum," 1984, Charlie LeDuff's non-fictional narrative *Detroit: An American Autopsy*, 2013, or Tim Sohr's Ruhr region novel *Woanders is' auch Scheisse*, 2014. These titles alone suggest that crisis narratives and dystopian figurations, just as parodic and satiric understatement, are part of the complex scripts for urban futures. It is the competition and interaction between different forms of writing and distinctive styles of mediation that affects urban spaces most substantially (Binder 2009; Schwanhäuser 2010; Rolf Lindner 2008 b).

The graduate research group serves as a test case for a transatlantic cooperation between the scholarly fields of American literature, culture, media, and history on the one hand and the professional fields of urban development, urban planning, city administration, urban art collectives, and social NGOs on the other. Graduate students participate in a transnationally defined American Studies program, integrating practical training in Germany and the US into research questions which can only be appropriately answered if accompanied by a practice-based sustained conversation with the primary agents that script futures for urban communities struck by deindustrialization.

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2. Core Concept: “Script” as Procedural Knowledge, Self-Description, and Blueprint for the Future

Our understanding of ‘scripts’ deliberately combines descriptive as well as prescriptive definitions of the term from a range of fields and disciplines. Thus, the notion of a ‘script’ as the “typescript of a cinema or television film; the text of a broadcast announcement, talk, play, or other material” (OED) already contains the more descriptive sense of a transcript, but also the prescriptive sense of an instruction to be carried out, of a pre-defined sequence of actions and dialogues appropriate in a specific setting. The sense in which ‘script’ is defined in social psychology as referring to “generic schemata of social events” (Whitney 2001, 13522) and to “symbolic and nonverbal elements in an organized and time-bound sequence of conduct through which persons both envision future behavior and check on the quality of ongoing conduct” (Gagnon 61) also combines the descriptive sense of ‘script’ as procedural knowledge as well as a more prescriptive sense of appropriateness and social control. As for the adaptability of scripts, Gagnon notes: “The flexibility of scripts in terms of their internal order and their capacity to be assembled or disassembled in creative or adaptive responses to new circumstances is a critical element in our capacity to manage a changing internal and external environment” (Gagnon 62). In a related sense, artificial intelligence researchers Roger Schank and Robert Paul Abelson (1977) define “script” as “a standard event sequence” thus as a form of procedural knowledge. Thus, the notorious example of the restaurant script states that going to a restaurant involves a fairly fixed sequence of actions: sitting down, choosing from the menu, ordering, eating, paying the bill, leaving. Based on this notion, script also came to be used to refer to cultural models as powerful unconscious or semi-conscious guides of individual and collective human behaviour (see Quinn and Holland). In the field of sociology, the term ‘script’ competes with Ervin Goffman’s classic theorization of the “frame” as a guide for the human perception of social interactions (Goffman, *Frame Analysis*, 1974).

We thus understand a ‘script’ as a combination of procedural knowledge, self-description and blueprint for future development oscillating between and suggestively – if sometimes problematically – fusing descriptive and prescriptive components.

Closer attention to the detailed narrative, figurative, and medial processes at the core of each script can show how scribal agency and modes of scripting and deciphering are usually bound rather strictly by legal codes which regulate the underlying obligations and rights of the producers and the users of texts and images: who is allowed to write/read; which kind of

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authority is obtained by the act of writing/reading; who gets to keep the document; which rights are given to the holder of the document, etc.?

Thus noting that the frequently scripted nature of urban transformations relies on narrative acts, generic formula, medial forms and structures, figural thought, and cognitive models, and thus on processes of narrativization, mediation, and figuration (both in the sense of personification and condensation into figures of thought), we suggest that these three components – all core competencies of literary, cultural, and media studies as well as historical research – require the sustained disciplinary attention of scholars in American Studies, if we are to understand processes of urbanization, in which US models are still powerful, whether as blueprints or as emblems of developments to be feared (for narratives, media, and figures in (anti)urban developments, see Buchenau/Gurr 2016 and 2018; Buchenau 2017; Gurr 2016).¹

3. Structure, Work Program, and Role of the Internships

Our transatlantic research forms its research questions from the work encountered in the internships, using the opportunity to translate specific insights from scholarship to and for professional fields outside academia. The practical training brings concrete insights into the ways in which scripts are made to work, and it invites scholars to ground their transnational work on the scripting functions of figures, media, and narratives for postindustrial urban futures in theory *and* practice. The (post)doctoral projects will examine the discursive, medial, and historical complexity and contingency as well as the interpretive willfulness, coercion, and scheming that are an integral part of urban renewal projects in the US and Germany. In support of this goal, the qualification program surveys urban phenomena in seminars and workshops on urban imaginaries, scripts and scripting, discourses of sustainability, urban creativity, social and cultural inclusiveness, urban hermeneutics and other approaches in literary and cultural urban studies. It is also designed to coach on the further development and refinement of the individual doctoral projects.

¹ We thus also seek to counter two short-sighted conceptions of the role of literature derived from the consensus about the social production of the city, either an inaccurate genre-based division of labor in which literature proper writes from below while urban planning determines change from above, or a purely instrumental understanding of literature as a tool of persuasion in planning and (re-)branding efforts.

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In the second year, doctoral candidates complete transatlantic internships/fieldwork of six to twelve months to develop first-hand knowledge of the professional contexts in which texts and media are put to work in the city. The internships are based on coach-trainee relationships that are mutual: We conceive of the internship partners as tandem partners in knowledge exchange with the doctoral candidates: The internship partners act as coaches in preparing doctoral candidates for fields of employment outside academia (the creative economy, cultural management, municipalities, urban consulting and knowledge management, project development, foundations engaged in urban development). Conversely, with their expertise on the cultural discourses employed in the specific professional field explored in the internship (cultural discourses of sustainability, of inclusive urban development, or of the role of creativity in urban development), the doctoral candidates act as coaches for the internship partners. In each of these fields, *scripts* function as powerful cultural tools suggesting, accompanying, framing, or plausibilizing specific paths towards the future of post-industrial cities. In many cases, practitioners are aware of the importance of such scripts – with their specific narratives, media and figures – to their practice, without being experts in *how* they function. This, however, is precisely the key qualification of doctoral candidates in Urban American Studies. The working relationship between internship partners and doctoral candidates functions as a mutually beneficial exchange based on complementary knowledge and experiences, regardless of the seniority of internship partners in their organizations. Thus, the internships are integral to the corresponding doctoral projects in that they serve as case studies for the doctoral theses.

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Fig. 1: Work Plan per month with major phases, milestones and formats

Work Plan per Month		
Month	Milestone/Key Activity	Phase
1	3-Day Research seminar: Urban Imaginaries, Scripting, Sustainability (candidates, supervisors)	theoretical foundations, refinement of research proposal
2	Input-Workshop: The Creative City (1 day; candidates, supervisors)	
3	Input-Workshop: The Sustainable City (1 day; candidates, supervisors)	
4	Input-Workshop: The Inclusive City (1 day; candidates, supervisors)	
5		
6		
7	Method Workshop: Urban Hermeneutics	theoretical foundations, study design, preparation of internships and field research (including meetings/skype meetings with internship partners)
8		
9	"Proof of Concept" Workshop/Validation of Study Design (candidates, supervisors, U.S. mentors)	
10		
11		
12		
13		internships/field research
14		
15		
16		
17		
18		
19		
20		
21		
22		
23	3-Day Workshop in Detroit (candidates, supervisors, U.S. mentors, selected internship partners)	writing phase: individual mentoring and advising, submission and revision of chapters
24		
25		
26		
27		
28		
29		
30	3-Day Research Retreat: "Theories and Practices of Reading the City"	
31		
32		
33		
34		
35		
36		
37		completion phase
38		
39		
40		
41	candidates submit draft versions of dissertation	
42	supervisors' comments on draft versions due	
43		
44		
45	revision phase	
46	submission of theses	
47		
48	thesis defences, presentation of results, essays final collection of essays due	

4. Potential Non-University Career Fields

The following non-university fields of employment will become accessible for our graduates: municipalities (Office of Urban Development, Environmental Office), urban development agencies, urban consulting, project development, foundations with a focus on urban development, cultural management, centers for the creative economy, business administration. Given the candidates' transnational humanities approach to urban practice, they can provide their future

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employers with a decisive foundation for specifying in which ways imaginative and artistic procedures of scenario building, risk evaluation, premediation, and trial action are effectively able to change the prospects of the urban spaces and the postindustrial conflicts under scrutiny.

5. Doctoral Projects

Project 1: Artsy Rust Belts – dissertation working title: “Narratives of the Creative Class in Post-Industrial Cities from a Transatlantic Perspective”

Supervision: Prof. Dr. Walter Grünzweig, TU Dortmund University, Prof. Dr. Barbara Buchenau, University of Duisburg-Essen; Internship at Dortmunder U – European Centre for Arts and Creativity; U.S. Mentor: Prof. James Throgmorton, University of Iowa

From a transatlantic angle, this dissertation project engages with the script of and for the “creative class” in its multiple manifestations in post-industrial urban areas in the US Rust Belt and the Ruhr region. Based on Florida’s vague if influential notion that the gap left behind by traditional industries can be filled with “creativity”, the “creativity script” (Peck 2007) has become central to attempts at “reinventing” post-industrial “legacy cities” (Mallach/ Brachman 2013) with all their challenges. One of the key questions addressed will be how the (rather simplistic) script about a group of people – defined as “pioneers” – taking over an area often referred to as a “frontier”, thus, a quintessentially US story, could have such an impact in Europe and specifically in Germany. It will also discuss specifically “European” or “German” reversals and revisions of this script as used, for example, in the context of such large-scale investment projects as the European Capital of Culture. The internship at “Dortmunder U – Centre for Arts and Creativity” (www.dortmunder-u.de), which has assumed a central role in attempting to turn its neighborhood into a “creative quarter”, will allow for unique insights into the internal make-up of a self-proclaimed “Centre for Creativity” as well as its marketing as such.

Project 2: Green Metropolises – dissertation working title: “Conserving Whose World? Sustainability Standards in the United States and Europe”

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Supervision: Prof. Dr. Randi Gunzenhäuser, TU Dortmund University, Prof. Dr. Jens Martin Gurr, University of Duisburg-Essen, Internship at Ökozentrum NRW, U.S. Mentor: Prof. Thomas Heise, Pennsylvania State University.

Based on an internship in both a German and the American office of Ökozentrum NRW (<http://www.oekozentrum-nrw.de>), the project examines German, European, and US engineering scripts for sustainability. Green building is connected to diverse engineering fields and their respective, sometimes mutually exclusive notions of the world as a ‘green’ albeit mostly urban place. These fields and applications – from impact and life-cycle assessments across healthy workplace and living conditions and safe materials, quality, risk, and environmental management, to socioeconomics and corporate development strategies – have different priorities concerning the aspects of the living world that deserve protection; moreover, their priorities and institutional importance differ between Germany and the US. Given the rapidly growing importance of the practice of consulting individuals, corporations, and public institutions about sustainability certificates, the project addresses the following questions: What are the ideological scripts of these certification practices? What are the interests of different groups involved in these building projects? What kind of future do they envision for whose world?

Project 3, Engaging Cities – dissertation working title: “Transatlantic Implementation and Adaptation of “Collective Impact”: Initiatives in the Urban Social Spaces of Metropolitan America and the German Ruhr Region”

Supervision: Prof. Dr. Kornelia Freitag, Ruhr-University Bochum, Prof. Dr. Josef Raab, University of Duisburg-Essen, Internship at RuhrFutur, a regional cooperation for more equitable education, U.S. Mentor: Prof. Paula Moya, Stanford University

The project is designed as a cross-cultural comparative study of collaborative projects for social change, the “collective impact” initiative, in the Ruhr region and in selected US cities such as Detroit, New York and Los Angeles. It builds on an internship with “RuhrFutur” (www.ruhrfutur.de), a project for increased social equity in education, and on research on different US initiatives such as “StriveTogether,” a nation-wide initiative for improved social equity in education, or “Living Cities”, with its focus on socioeconomic inequality in all its forms and aimed at transforming urban areas. The project is based on the assumption that scripts and their

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underlying stories are crucial to facilitating social transformations in the first place by allowing urban spaces to be literally rewritten and thereby the value of previously marginalized groups to be reconsidered or divisive stereotypes and biases to be overcome. More specifically, it seeks to analyze how scripts and the media, figures and narratives they employ construct different forms of urban social spaces in the respective urban environments. By also considering the respective challenges that the proponents and practitioners of an educational script face in differing socio-spatial contexts, these analyses are expected to yield important insights into how national, regional and local urban contexts affect the implementation of such social equity initiatives.

Project 4: Jazzing Up the Climate-Friendly City – dissertation Working Title: “Scripts for Sustainable and Climate-Friendly Rehabilitation in Detroit and the Ruhr”

Supervision: Prof. Dr. Barbara Buchenau, University of Duisburg-Essen, Prof. Dr. Michaela Wala, Ruhr-University Bochum, Internship at Zachary Associates, Detroit, British Mentor: Prof. Michael Batty, University College London.

Based on an internship with Zachary & Associates in Detroit (www.zacharydetroit.com), urban development and planning consultants with a focus on sustainable restoration, as well as on field work in the Ruhr region (especially Innovation City in Bottrop), the project studies the scripts deployed in order to generate stake-holder buy-in and support for projects of sustainable and climate-friendly urban development. Depending on local contexts, such projects may primarily make use of technology-driven visions of ‘better living’ or may appeal to – or ‘invent’ in the first place – a specific neighborhood heritage and “the cumulative texture of local urban culture” (Suttles 1984) to generate a sense of belonging and shared responsibility for a district. The project thus addresses questions such as the following: Which groups do such projects primarily seek to address as early adopters and multipliers? How do they make use of site-specific narratives of an industrial past to project a ‘better future’? How are the ensuing scripts for a climate-friendly city mediated in planning documents, municipal policy papers, or advertising products?

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Project 5: Diversity Gardening / Gemeinschaftlich Gärtnern – dissertation working title: “Validating the Script of ‘Green Strategies for Inclusive Urbanism’ in Portland, Oregon, and Essen, Germany”

Supervision: Prof. Dr. Jens Martin Gurr, University of Duisburg-Essen, Prof. Dr. Randi Gunzenhäuser, TU Dortmund University, Internship at Green Capital Agency, City of Essen, U.S. Mentor: Prof. Hajo Neis, University of Oregon.

Building on an internship with the environmental office of the City of Essen (European Green Capital 2017 – www.essengreen.capital) and on fieldwork with the Collaborative for Inclusive Urbanism in Portland, Oregon, a role model for green urbanism, the project practically supports *and* analyses approaches to using local “green” initiatives as instruments of socially inclusive urban development. These include water-sensitive public spaces (playgrounds, parks), community gardens, collective clean-up-the-city initiatives, publically supported activities aimed at greening neighborhoods etc. Based on comparative research, the project thus examines the impact of local political regulations and governance structures as well as culturally divergent practices and patterns of civic engagement on the possibilities and the limits of such attempts at harnessing green strategies for inclusive urban development.

Project 6: Spectacularizing Ethnicity – Dissertation working title: “Raising Ethnic Voices: Counter-Discourses in the Contemporary Cultural Scenes of New York City and L.A.”

Supervision: Prof. Dr. Josef Raab, University of Duisburg-Essen, Prof. Dr. Kornelia Freitag, Ruhr University Bochum, Internship at Quilomboarte Collective, New York, and Tía Chúcha’s Centro Cultural, Los Angeles, U.S. Mentor: Prof. Stephanie Leigh Batiste, UCSB.

Building on an internship with the Afro-Latino, Mexico City-born rap artist, poet, essayist, filmmaker, and lecturer Bocafoja [Aldo Villegas] and his Quilomboarte Collective (www.emancipassion.com) in New York City, as well as with Tía Chúcha’s Centro Cultural in L.A. (www.tiachucha.org), this project focuses on the non-white creative classes scripting two major US cities today. The candidate will be involved in critical interventions in hegemonic (city) discourses by offering oppositional scripts (in Spanish and in English) that draw attention to ethnic inequalities. Moreover, the dissertation project will also examine the interplay between such initiatives and “hegemonic” discourses and practices of urban planning. The scripts examined

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in this project will highlight ethnic pride, social inequality, police repression, gang wars, drugs, crime, violence, poverty, shattered dreams, and visions of a different America. These productions in music, literature, film, performance art, visual art and other media will underline that scripts for post-industrial urban futures need to heed ethnic difference in the city in order to be relevant—in the United States and elsewhere.

Project 7: Waterfront Reconquista – dissertation working title: “Creative, Sustainable and Socially Inclusive? Conflicting Scripts for Waterfront and Port Developments in Harbor Cities”.

Supervision: Prof. Dr. Michael Wala, Ruhr-University Bochum, Prof. Dr. Walter Grünzweig, TU Dortmund University, Internship at duisport AG, U.S. Mentor: Prof. Jon Heggland, Washington State University.

On the basis of an internship with duisport group/Duisburger Hafen AG (www.duisport.de), national contacts such as HafenCity Hamburg, and field work in the US (for example New York City, “Vision 2020”), the dissertation project should analyze waterfront development projects in former port cities as well as in still operational port areas based on their rich social, political, economic, and environmental history. Waterfront projects should be researched in their theming and imagineering that are using the past to fashion the three guiding principles of postindustrial urban development while reconciling their latent or inherent contradictions. These projects are almost invariably marketed as ideal locations for the “creative economy” (“media harbors”) and – increasingly important for the frequently upmarket clientele – as sites of sustainable living, e.g., by virtue of advanced building technologies used in renovation, by incorporating historical buildings and other artefacts. At the same time, and in order to work against the public image as gentrified elite spaces, they are frequently projected as family-friendly and socially inclusive, not least by romanticizing the harbors’ past as sites of physical labor, while also addressing imaginations of “exotic” encounters with foreign places, and often as areas for relaxed social norms. Such efforts to reconquer the waterfront for the affluent, particularly where operational ports still exist, and even where the harbor as a means for providing jobs and income has ceased to be all-important, frequently make claims about their role for the overall development similar to other postindustrial cities.

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6. Postdoc Project

Project 8: Postdoctoral Research on any of the three scripts central to the Graduate Research School or on their intersection

Academic Advice: Prof. Dr. Barbara Buchenau and Prof. Dr. Jens Martin Gurr, University of Duisburg-Essen; internships are possible at Zachary Associates (Detroit), Regionalverband Ruhr (RVR), and Stiftung Zollverein; depending on the project selected, these can also be combined; other internships may also be possible; International Mentors: tbc, depending on the project selected; for the potential mentors, cf. the names indicated for the doctoral projects.

Candidates for the postdoc position are expected to submit a proposal for a project of their own in the scope of the Graduate Research School. This may focus on one or more of the scripts analyzed in the Graduate Research School and may be centered on one or more of the model regions/cities; a transatlantic perspective is strongly encouraged.

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