Scripts

1. Definition

In the conctext of planning, a script is a suggestive recipe for urban development that combines a self-description or self-position-ing as well as a plausible path from the past through the present and into the future, all packaged into a compelling story. For their persuasiveness, scripts frequently rely on an oscillation between descriptive and prescriptive components. Many globally current recipes or blueprints for urban development – from the 'sustain-able city' through the 'creative city' to the 'smart city' – can best be understood as 'scripts'.

2. Example

In 2017, the city of Essen was the European Green Capital. The first paragraph of the application for the title submitted to the European Commission in 2014 states:

> From green to grey to green: The successful 150-year transfor-mation story, from a city of coal and steel to the greenest city in North Rhine-Westphalia, is a role model of structural change for many cities in Europe. […] Green infrastructure is the motor for our sustainable urban development. […] The people's 'ability to change' is the key to the success of this process of transfor-mation.

This brief passage (1) provides a self-description of Essen as a city in structural transformation, which today has become remarkably 'green', (2) invokes the knowledge about the hardships and challenges of structural transformation and (3) tells a story which makes plausible a development from the past into the present and suggests a way into the future, all combined into the kernel narrative "from green to grey to green", encapsulating the 150-year transformation from pre-industrial "green" via industrial "grey" to the post-industrial "green" city. This combination of self-description, process knowledge and the suggestive invocation of a future-oriented development, rendered in a mini-narrative, is a prototypical example of a 'script'.

3. Explanation

The notion of scripts in urban development combines descriptive as well as prescriptive definitions of the term from a range of fields and disciplines (including literary studies, social psychology, law, biblical scholarship, and artificial intelligence research). 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"[83] 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. In a related sense originating in artificial intelligence research, a "script" is defined as as "a standard event sequence"[84] and as a form of procedural knowledge. The classical 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.[85]
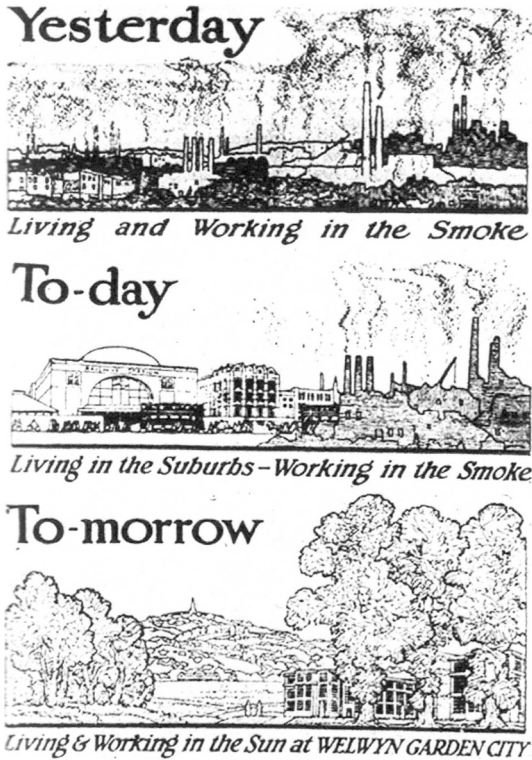
The sense in which the term script is defined in social psychology as referring to "generic schemata of social events"[86] and to "symbolic and nonverbal elements in an organized and time-bound se-

quence of conduct through which persons both envision future be-
haviour and check on the quality of ongoing conduct"[87] combines the
descriptive sense of a script as procedural knowledge, as well as a
more prescriptive sense of appropriateness and social control. In the
related psychological field of transaction analysis, script is the term
used for the study of unconscious life plans developed in response to
education and early experiences, plans that can be made conscious
and can to some extent be rescripted or at least modified.[88] Trans-
ferred to cities, this notion suggests that path dependencies do play
a significant role but that there is nonetheless no complete determin-
ism. Finally, the notion also resonates with the related term scripture
in the sense of Holy Scripture and suggests a piece of writing with a
claim to authority or one that is perceived as being sanctified or be-
yond critique.

A script can be understood, then, as a combination of procedural
knowledge, self-description and blueprint for future development,
based on an understanding of a city's past and its potentials (see fig.
16). Scripts thus oscillate between *descriptive* and *prescriptive* compo-
nents. In keeping with the notion that scripts can be modified, plan-
ners and city officials have frequently sought to change the script be-
hind their cities' development, for instance by describing a way for-
ward for postindustrial cities in the U.S. rustbelt, the German Ruhr
region or the English Midlands.

In the field of urban planning, Christopher Alexander's notion of
"patterns" can be seen as a closely related concept: Here, a pattern is a
modular solution, blueprint or recipe for a specific design challenge,
a solution that can be replicated or adapted in comparable contexts
to address comparable problems.[89] This notion of a hierarchically or-
dered system of patterns as a language – with a specific vocabulary,
grammar and syntax and a formulaic way of outlining them, their
contexts and applications – has been widely adopted as a travelling
concept in other disciplines, most prominently in software engineer-
ing.[90]

Fig. 16: This 1920s advertising poster for Welwyn Garden City traces a path from "Yesterday: Living and Working in the Smoke" via "Today: Living in the Suburbs – Working in the Smoke" to "To-morrow: Living & Working in the Sun at Welwyn Garden City" and thus explicity frames a blueprint for urban development as a path from a dark past into a bright future.

Source: 1920s advertisement for Welwyn Garden City; Monclús and Díez Medina 19[91]

Scripts in the way we understand them are also inherently performative: If persuasive enough, they bring about what they often merely purport to describe. If a way to do things is described as be-

ing pervasive in a large number of cities, this may lead other cities
to pursue similar policies. This is particularly evident in the case of
the creative city script as outlined and promoted by Richard Florida:
While in parts allegedly *describing* a pattern of urban development –
the accumulation of the so-called creative class in particularly attrac-
tive locations offering the "three T's" of "Talent", "Technology" and
"Tolerance"[92] – these standardized "creative fixes"[93] quickly became
a blueprint and recipe for cities to follow, rolled out in numerous con-
sulting projects by Florida himself and by global consulting firms in
his wake. The characteristic oscillation between description and pre-
scription inherent to scripts led to a self-reinforcing global hype of
urban development strategies geared towards the attraction of the
desirable creative class segment.

These multi-authored, multi-interest scripts operate along the
literary lines of epic, tragic, and melodramatic patterns and conven-
tions. If, for instance, urban development narratives are formulated
in terms of growth, agency or attainment of potential, then these are
the generic terms of the 19th-century *Bildungsroman* as the narrative
of emergent self-confidence and agency.[94]

4. Applications

The frequently scripted nature of blueprints for urban development
relies on narrative acts, generic formula, rhetorical strategies, per-
sonification, metaphors and visualizations and other profoundly lit-
erary devices. Several globally pertinent patterns of urban develop-
ment can be understood as scripts: For instance, waterfront redevel-
opment, and the transformation of former port areas into upmar-
ket residential or mixed-use districts – with iconic early examples
in New York City's waterfronts or the London Docklands – has long
been a globally circulating blueprint. Although this development can
simply be seen a case of similar (obvious) solutions to the identical
challenge of finding new uses for abandoned former port areas in
potentially attractive locations on the water, such an understanding
significantly underestimates the impact of powerful narrative and
visual strategies, leading to remarkably similar iconographies of suc-

cessful development, frequently with virtually interchangable architecture in very different locations. The concept of 'scripts' can thus also help to understand the global diffusion of recent and current models of urban development.

Related entries: Future Narratives, Genre, Narrative, Path-dependency, Scenario, Travelling Models

Further Reading

Buchenau, Barbara, Jens Martin 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 [open access: https://www.taylorfrancis.com/chapters/oa-edit/10.4324/9781003111009-8]

Herman, David. "Scripts, Sequences, and Stories: Elements of a Postclassical Narratology." *Literary Theory: An Anthology*. Ed. Julie Rivkin, Michael Ryan. Chichester: Wiley Blackwell, 2017. 230–247.

Katzenberg, Chris, Kornelia Freitag. "Scripting the Inclusive City, Narrating the Self: Contemporary Rust Belt Memoirs in Poetry and Prose." *City Scripts: Narratives of Postindustrial Urban Futures*. Ed. Barbara Buchenau, Jens Martin Gurr, Maria Sulimma. Columbus: Ohio State University Press, forthcoming.