

# BACHELOR THESIS

The Economy for the Common Good as guideline for sustainable city development?  
An analysis of change in city administration based on Giddens' Theory of  
Structuration.

Course of study:

International Sustainability Management (ISM)

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*“Es ist an der Zeit, das Aufwand-Nutzen-Denken, dieses ökonomische Kalkül, welches uns bis in unsere privatesten Gedanken beherrscht, zu durchbrechen, um für das einzustehen, was wir für richtig erachten - egal wie hoch der Aufwand und wie klein der Nutzen!“*

(Kling 2009, p. 259)

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# Abstract

Given the decisive role of cities with regards to global sustainability, this thesis investigates current challenges in sustainable city development in Germany from a sociological perspective, both conceptually and empirically. In this qualitative research, Giddens Theory of Structuration was applied that describes the duality of interaction between structure, system and structuration and the dimensions of legitimation, domination and signification involved in social interaction. Representatives in city administration, institutions and circumstances under which they work were analysed, highlighting structural contradictions in the case of continuing land consumption and competition between cities. The results are discussed in combination with the concept of the Economy for the Common Good as multidimensional approach that could be guideline in sustainable, common-good oriented city development. Special emphasis is on understanding individuals' perception of their transformative capacity regarding social change.

*Keywords: sustainable city development, theory of structuration, duality of interaction, social change, economy for the common good*

## List of Abbreviations

CG	Common Good
ECG	Economy for the Common Good
GHG	Greenhouse Gas
ISEK	<i>Integriertes Stadtentwicklungskonzept</i> (Integrated Concept of City Development)
LEADER	<i>Liaison entre actions de développement de l'économie rurale</i> (Connection between actions for developing rural economy, a program funded by the European agricultural funds for the development of rural areas ELER)
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SMEs	Small and Medium Sized Enterprises
TOS	Theory of Structuration
UN	United Nations
UN DESA	United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs
WCED	World Commission on Environment and Development
WIFOE	<i>Wirtschaftsförderung</i> (office of economic development)

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# 1. Introduction

## 1.1. Sustainable Development and Cities

To „make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable“ is the eleventh of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) formulated by the United Nations (UN n.d.), an international agreement comprising social, ecological and political elements. Special attention is given to cities as more than half of the world’s population nowadays lives in cities, leading cities to account for the majority of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions that cause climate change (UN DESA 2019). This is a huge challenge to sustainable development. According to the Brundtland definition, the notion of sustainable development implies satisfying current needs while maintaining the ability for future generations to satisfy their needs (cf. WCED 1987). An over-exploitation of natural, limited resources that is connected to modern lifestyles is thus in the long run not sustainable. Notwithstanding that sustainability is declared a political goal, an according transformation of practices is still missing as changes remain incremental (WBGU 2011). The abstract idea of sustainable development must be put into practice on local level, for instance through development of cities. The physical and social infrastructure direct the way of life, that in turn have impacts on the natural and social environment. In this respect, this work shall focus on studying cities in Germany, given the personal experience and interest of the author.

## 1.2. Scientific Relevance: A Sociological Perspective

Despite general agreement with the need for sustainable development, unsustainable practices are still quite persistent (Blühdorn 2008). A sociological perspective attempts to explain underlying processes, relations and social practices that make change in general a difficult task. The Theory of Structuration (TOS), developed by Anthony Giddens, is nested into his analysis of the implications of modernity – high complexity and repercussions of behaviour that are not immediately visible but entangled throughout time and space, where social interaction shapes and is shaped by institutions that embody well-established social practices.

So far, there is no research investigating the dependencies between local and structural problems concerning sustainable development in city administration, but insights could be helpful for understanding and extracting more effective strategies. The first step requires a sound conceptual examination though, which will be a focal point of this study.

### 1.3. Practical Relevance: Municipalities for the Common Good

Special attention should be furthermore given to the question whether human settlements are arranged around consumption or places for good living (Korten 1996 in Wheeler and Beetley 2009). Because activities formerly taking place in households and communities have become increasingly monetised, so the social fabric deteriorates (cf. *ibid.* p. 228). What is labeled as (economic) development in many cases eliminates self-sufficient infrastructure for the sake of consumerism. To counteract this, public policy should promote a shift from over-consumption towards sustainable, balanced ways of living that fulfill basic human needs and those for social interaction. The “living world” is characterised by “balance, diversity, sufficiency, synergy, and regenerative vitality” and growth appears only “as a clearly defined segment of the life cycle of individual organisms”, as opposed to unlimited quantitative expansion of organisms or accumulation in the “money world” that indicate system dysfunction, bearing threat to the existence of the system itself (*ibid.* p. 227).

The Economy for the Common Good (ECG) is a movement that attempts to provide exactly this: a concept for an alternative economic system of value-driven and need-oriented business beyond growth. It combines the idea that humans are inherently collaborative, and a legal framework that supports this approach, based on the idea that competition is problematic, creating circumstances that do not reward common-good oriented behaviour but only following individual interest. For translating values such as ecological sustainability, human dignity and social justice into practice, the so-called Common-Good-Matrix (CG-Matrix) has been developed, trying to make those values tangible and measurable (Matrix Development Team 2017). A handbook for municipalities gives concrete examples how to holistically consider different functions of the city administration (Oberrauch et al. 2017), designing internal city life and beyond through its public procurement, relations to other cities and international positioning. Although their *raison d'être* is serving the common good, historic development of privatisations and overriding economic efficiency have come to harden this (Deutscher Städtetag 2013). A framework with concrete steps of action is suggested by the ECG to promote and reward responsible, solidary conduct.

This thesis will investigate the duality of interaction between individuals, institutions and conditions under which they operate and outline a multidimensional approach that could be guiding in transitioning towards sustainable and common-good oriented city development.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Milestones of Sustainable Development

The term sustainability is often dated back to Carl von Carlowitz, who defined it in forestry that is sustainable when only as many trees are cut as can regrow (Jörissen et al. 1999). In a broader sense, it denotes a way of producing goods and services not using irreplaceable resources or those that damage the environment in order to ensure the ability of continued existence (cf. Cambridge Dictionary: *Sustainability* 20.08.2019a). Since the so-called Brundtland-Commission announced its definition of *sustainable development* as „development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs“ (WCED 1987), it has become a widely accepted concept. Essentially, socio-economic development has to respect the limited ecological resources and avoid over-exploitation of those. But the consequence of growing world population, economic development and permanent „modernisation“ of lifestyles is a globally increasing resource consumption. This has already led to crossing two out of ten planetary boundaries (biodiversity loss and a balanced nitrogen cycle) that mark points after which damage is irreversible and endangering human existence. Climate change, another boundary, is mainly caused by human-induced CO<sub>2</sub>-emissions that reinforce the (natural) greenhouse gas effect, leading to rising temperatures. As counter mechanism, international agreements have been made, targeting the limitation of global warming to 2°C as compared to pre-industrial average temperatures (Sachs 2015).

In the Anthropocene, an era where humans have become a major factor influencing the local and global environment, a perspective of strong sustainability is fundamental. It acknowledges that the economy is embedded into society, which in turn is embedded into the natural environment, thus their existence is based on sustaining the natural environment (Olsson et al. 2017). In more adequate as compared to weak sustainability that treats ecology, society and economy as three aspects with sustainability as intersection of all, where chances are that economy is favoured over the others, and the total balance of a company can be positive even if negative environmental impacts occur.

Most recent is the adoption of the UN Sustainable Development Goals, also known as Agenda 2030, comprising environmental, social and political aspects and addressing developed as well as developing countries - still awaiting to be put into pragmatic strategies (UN n.d.)



## 2.2. Cities as Locus for Sustainable Development

*”Our struggle for global sustainability will be won or lost in cities.“*

Former UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon (UN 2012)

Given that more than half of the world's population is living in cities nowadays, in Europe even 70% (UN DESA 2019), it is easy to recognize that cities play a decisive role in the process of sustainable development. Cities are accounting for primary energy consumption at roughly 70% and for over 80% of emissions contributing to climate change (ibid.). Moreover, cities are place where culture is shaped, setting an example of lifestyles and social practices. Environmental and social impact is intense due to sheer density of population. This density can however be a great opportunity for starting close collaboration and dialogue between multiple stakeholders of private, public and civil sphere on how present and future needs can be fulfilled while conserving resources in the long term. The SDG 11 explicitly articulates the goal to make cities socially inclusive, ecologically sound and resilient to climate and other crises (UN n.d.).

In order to consider cities as source of positive impact towards ecological restoration, it is necessary to treat cities themselves as ecosystems with material- energy- and information streams circulating in and out (Newman and Jennings 2008). The Melbourne Principles for Sustainable Cities (ibid.) give an overview of salient aspects, starting off with a long-term sustainable vision including intergenerational and social justice, considering ecological impacts, providing social security and respecting (cultural) uniqueness, strengthening collaborative partnerships and establishing permanently improving governance processes through empowerment. The authors emphasize that fortunate human innovation imitates and is consistent with natural systems. It will be necessary not just to envision incremental but fundamental changes to achieve a sustainability transformation, whose governance requires continuous monitoring of advancement in terms of goals and their successful implementation.

Currently, the discussion about improving cities is often tantamount to ways on implementing a transition to smart cities. The focus is thereby mainly on creating smartness through digitalisation, align with a pure market logic (Deakin 2014). Instead of technology-focused development, a community-focused one is suggested. This implies stressing social interaction, open innovation and active citizen engagement, by making use of tools such as platforms for networking, knowledge sharing or co-creation, but not seeing technologisation as an end in itself. Deakin also states the necessity for models that enable systematic support for the evolving process. One has to be careful not to purely focus on the means of communication and how to „smarten“ them, since

replacing interhuman encounters through web-based services, delivery and communication is not smart in cultural and environmental terms, and hardly more inclusive. Concluding, Deakin stresses to organise the cities' learning communities' intellectual capital towards wise creation of wealth and to be "harbingers of standards within the public realm which govern over the knowledge production of regional innovation systems." (Deakin 2014, p. 231). Thereby, knowledge needs to be explicit to be of use for the entire community. This opposes the danger of economising such value as in an "entrepreneurial city" that "translate[s] creative and cultural asset and expressions into commercial values" (Kourtit et al. 2014, p. 213). Rather, a "liveable city" is favoured, striving for climate neutrality and creating cities as appealing places for living and working as in the classification of policy visions for future-proof cities (cf. *ibid.* p. 211).

Hence, it is important to design these structures to be socially inclusive, as Polèse and Stern (2010) prove. That future-compatible cities have to be socially sustainable is non-negotiable, not only from an ethical reasoning, but also given that social injustice and the lack of social cohesion decrease the quality of life. Ecological sustainability often coincides with social one, and vice versa: it is often socio-economically marginalised groups that are affected most by environmental stress factors like pollution, pointing towards the inextricable interrelation of social, economic and environmental aspects (*ibid.*). Current interdisciplinary openings in environmental economic geography try to pay more attention to disentangling interdependencies „between economic opportunity, socio-environmental inequality, and spatial justice“ (Braun et al. 2018) and counteracting correspondingly.

Nevertheless, an image of an ideally conflict-free city should not be intermediate target for ultimately external positioning through increased attractiveness based on apparent social cohesion, but much more a process of empowering various (collective) actors to develop capabilities for engaging in the active creation of social justice. This in turn can be source of re-gaining skills and knowledge and employing wasted creative potential in co-creating a place of connectivity, turning confidence into entrepreneurial activity in terms of social innovation. Social cohesion within the city thus makes sense economically (Amin and Graham 1997).

As aforementioned, this study shall concentrate on cities in Germany. An approach that has been followed by various German cities over the last decade are Integrated Concepts of City Development (ISEK). They have been identified as central management tool in sustainable city development (Deutscher Städtetag 2013). Those are usually created under diverse forms of citizen engagement, based on the belief that participation as form of active creation of the own living environment is beneficial, creates collective identity and a sense of place in the ecosystem city. An ISEK can be crucial in addressing current challenges. Globalisation has lead to a theoretically

unlimited mobility of companies, especially in modern societies that are strongly shifting towards knowledge- and service based industries that are not bound to physical conditions, causing a fallout in municipal tax revenues and insecurity in planning (ibid.). Socio-politically, a crisis in legitimation is expressed in lowering political participation; parallely, the repercussions of the economic and financial crisis in 2008 as expression of market failure have returned importance to public services to provide human needs as housing. Sustainable city development must therefore enable economic sufficiency and crisis-proofness while maintaining or improving the quality of life. Seven major challenges defined by the *Deutscher Städtetag* are:

1. Globalisation, internationalisation and thereby increased competition
2. Growing gap and polarisation between rich and poor
3. Deficits in education causing further social disadvantages
4. Individualisation and alienation/ split within the city
5. Socio-demographic change
6. Climate change and urgently necessary measures for both mitigation and adaptation
7. Loss of control in public administration due to privatisation and economisation of tasks that hardens effective and comprehensive coordination

These challenges shall not be discussed in detail, but rather kept in mind as setting under which current city administrations have to operate.

In a report by an expert circle on city development (KfW Bankengruppe 2006), the regionally very different rates of growing and shrinking cities and areas are shown that require customized development programs (cf. Appendix 8.1.). Especially a policy of austerity over the last years had lead to deficits in material investments that would have been urgently necessary. The promotion of integrated concepts is as well hardened by a departmental structure and an organisational separation of cities and their surroundings. Therefore, it is important to create flexible funding programs that can correspond to different needs and promote better regional cooperation (KfW Bankengruppe 2006). A transformation of shrinking regions predicates on a profound transformation of infrastructure, modes of production and lifestyles to overcome path dependencies. Nonetheless, disruptive alteration requires high effort, so the costs of renovation are avoided or postponed. Here, considering more decentralised organisation would allow for finding reasonable extent of regionalisation and overregional division of labour (Hahne 2014).

In a discourse analysis of the German cities Dresden and Münster (Sturm 2018), the author illustrates that federal policy can provide a framework and guidelines, but the interpretation and implementation still depend on local strategies that must be context-specific. Moreover, the discourse on climate policies determines whether those are portrayed as too ambitious, demanding and unrealistic or become integrated into the strategic development. She also stressed the historic heritage of a strong environmental movement beginning in western Germany in the 1980s, while eastern Germany lacks this early impetus, with a crucial impact on the discourse on environmental policies to date. This approach gives first hints about the importance of discourse, the perceived leeway of action in city administration and why studying it from a relational perspective can be enlightening.

## 2.3. Theoretical Framework: Giddens' Theory of Structuration

### 2.3.1. Characteristics of modernity

First of all, Giddens gives an understanding of modernity. Society as specific system of human interaction is nowadays characterized by a lack of orientation due to the impression that knowledge about the organisation of society is not achievable as it is just too complex. One root cause is the *impact of unintended consequences*, that make gaining (sociological) knowledge challenging.

The implications of modernity are more far-reaching than they used to be, which is expressed in globalisation as significant disruption of traditional social order (Giddens 1990). It now provides the opportunity to freely chose a secure environment or place for living (although this can be contested, considering socio-economic inequality that limits this choice, see gentrification<sup>1</sup>). Besides, the dynamic of modernity, a loop of investing, earning and re-investing connected to the trend of decreasing profit rates, creates a permanent pressure to grow. In combination with the nature of modern institutions, namely the establishment of nation states, a high degree of industrialisation and dependence on energy input, this has lead to ubiquitous commercialisation. This in turn requires ever more natural resources, and maintaining this level of growth on a planet with limited resources has lead to an imperative of technological innovation and striving for efficiency.

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1 Gentrification is defined as „the process by which a place, especially part of a city, changes from being a poor area to a richer one, where people from a higher social class live“ (Cambridge Dictionary: *Gentrification*, 20.08.2019b). Consequently, the people who used to live there cannot afford it anymore.

Some other terms have to be defined for further understanding. *Disembedding* of social relations implies their detachment from the local towards being spread throughout time and space. This is on one hand enabled by universal tokens or symbols such as money. On the other hand, so-called *expert systems* (either material infrastructure or knowledge-based) replace direct human interaction. These systems are normally controlled by *monitoring institutions* for protecting laws. Both properties rely on *trust*, which is employed in a setting of risk, seeking highest possible security. *Access points* are the nexus between normal individuals or groups and key persons in organisations, that are vulnerable but can also be place for building trust and legitimation (cf. Giddens 1979 p. 88). Meanwhile, the economic system has become disparate from the political and other social spheres, and the main connection is overriding private property, however the creation of private property is only meaningful in a setting of scarcity. Giddens emphasizes that scarcity is nothing absolute, but „[w]hile some resources are intrinsically scarce, most are not, in the sense that, except for the basic requirements of bodily existence, ‚scarcity‘ is relative to socially defined needs and to the demands of specific life-styles" (ibid. p. 166, italics in original). It also leads to the existence of competition as a struggle for anything that only allows one winner exclusively, while other stakeholders automatically lose something; competition will be given further attention later.

### 2.3.2. Dualities of structure

Giddens' Theory of Structuration (TOS) provides deeper insight into the perpetuation of structures and systems, throwing light on the complex relation between actors and institutions which they are part of and that they shape simultaneously, what he calls the „*duality of structure*“ (Giddens 1979, p. 5). Structuration denotes how social practices are recursive, as they are at the same time the transmitting instrument and result of continuation. Moreover, social practices coincide with the perception of normality, where *mutual knowledge* is an underlying precondition. Institutions are in this sense established practices in time-space and widespread within a society, practically the organisation of collective action in everyday life (a wide spectrum from nation states to businesses to language). It is important to acknowledge that action and structure require each other. Social action implies some deliberate voluntarism, nevertheless it is subject to norms in two ways: as incorporated personal traits and as characteristics of society. *Agency* in turn, is not discrete action but rather constituted through an ongoing stream of behaviour embedded in happenings in the world, put differently through social interaction that predicates on time-space dimensions.

What Giddens illustrates as stratification model of action (Fig.1) is an unawareness of the frame of action or circumstances, within which three steps are involved in acting: motivation,

rationalisation and reflection of action. Similarly „unintended consequences of action" (ibid. p. 56) remain unreflected and turn again into circumstances. From this circular *interdependence of action* follows that a change in one place can lead to change in another one, which then again has an impact on the original place.

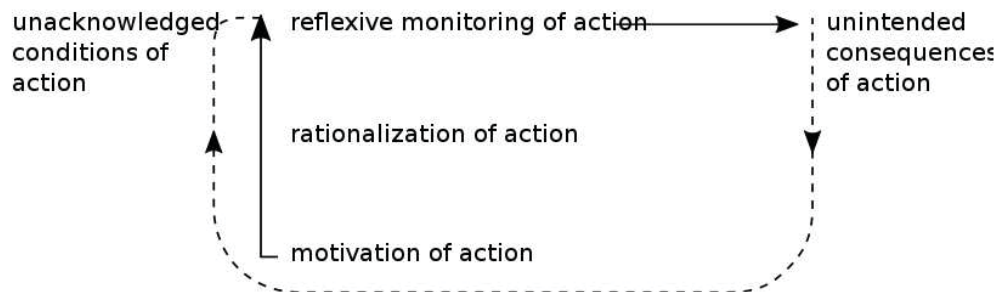


Fig.1: Stratification model of action (Giddens 1979, p. 56)

The unacknowledged conditions of action appear in different dimensions of social organisation (cf. ibid. p .66):

- *Structure* refers to rules (including norms and values) and resources (specified later) that appear in form of structural properties, thus subject-independent
- *Systems* are organised through social practices that reconfirm the relations between actors and collectives
- *Structuration* are the circumstances determining the perpetuation or change of structures, and therefore the continuation of systems

Again, the „duality of structure in interaction“ (Giddens 1979 p. 81) describes that there are two dimensions determining interaction: the aspects of structuration are reassured through actors' interaction while they are instrument for reproducing structural properties.

Furthermore, structure can be specified in the following way:

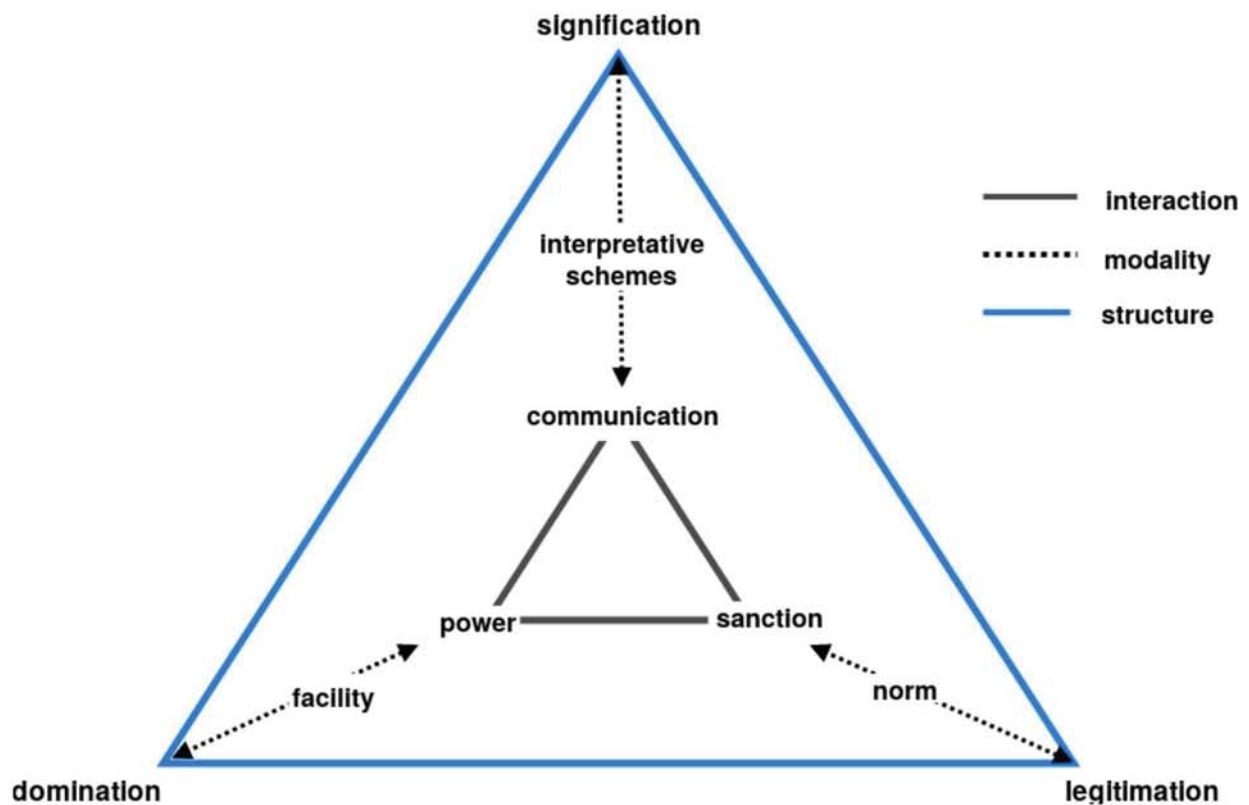


Fig. 2: Dimensions of interaction, adapted from Giddens 1979, p. 82

Fig. 2 illustrates that social interaction as the communication of meaning is bound to power relations and normative sanctions<sup>2</sup>. Interaction and thereby the replication of social practices follows rules in two ways: firstly, it creates meaning and secondly implies sanctions. An example would be perception of „being funny“: firstly, it depends on the definition of funniness (that could be telling a joke that makes people laugh), secondly on the contextual appropriateness (whether at a gathering with friends or at a funeral). „*The context of interaction is in some degree shaped and organised as an integral part of that interaction as communicative encounter*“ (Giddens 1979 p. 83). The interpretative scheme denotes practical, mutual knowledge that is implied in communicative encounters, whereby the context is both inherent and influenced.

<sup>2</sup> The English term *sanction* can mean both approval or penalty, which differs from the German use of *Sanktion*.

### 2.3.3. Underlying: norms and power in practices

Actors actively reconfirm meaning in the course of time, internalizing what happened in the past and anticipating future happenings as response to their current conduct. Thus, complying to rules refers to sense-making in the given context and the anticipation of (dis)approval according to the adequateness of behaviour. Concerning norms, there is a continuum of acceptance from the motivation of fulfilling norms as moral duty up to compliance with regard to penalty in case of breach. Normativity implies the re-confirmation of rights and implementation of obligations, although their interdependence can be imbalanced in practice. Structurally, this creates legitimation, while looking at intentional behaviour, it expresses claims and in how far these are fulfilled through others' reactions. These reactions of approval or disapproval are again sanctions, that can be overt or subtle, as for example no contradiction usually means agreement.

*Power* is always a dual relation between autonomy and dependence inherent to interactive procedures, and employed for achieving desired outcomes. It is both an organisational property in interaction and a means for achieving certain results through activities. Any action interrupts the world happenings with a certain intention, and the *transformative capacity* is the potential success (cf. *ibid.* p. 88). Power is obviously employed in decision making, but also underlying in uncontested practices. However, power itself is not a resource but the application of resources that simultaneously replicate structures of domination, and a way of exploiting their transformative capacity for achieving their desired results in relation to others' conduct. The amount of power might differ significantly between actors, but is still always reciprocal.

Hence, structures of *domination* are an asymmetric resource distribution in relational power. Giddens distinguishes between *allocative* and *authoritative* resources, describing *authorisation* as capability to control people and *allocation* as capability to control material objects. Their assertion is connected to the complementary modes of coercive and induced sanctions. Interhuman communication draws upon *signification* systems, whereby signification is contextual and transmitted by help of language and signs. In other words, messages are communicated through multifarious codes as shared rules of understanding (reproduced in duality). *Legitimation* is more precise than assuming the agreement on values that harmonize the opposition between individual and collective interests, because legitimation acknowledges a meshing of value-standards and partial interests.



### 2.3.4. Institutions and reproduction

For distinguishing institutions that make up the entire society, Giddens shows that they all have the three elements of signification, dominance and legitimation but with their analysis on different focuses. The analysis of symbolic orders or languages focuses on signification, the study of law the way of legitimation. The understanding of political and economic institutions concentrates on mobilising respectively authoritative and allocative dominance. An adequate conception of society as a whole sees it as sum of outcomes from individual and collective interactions, respecting the role of tension arising from power relations.

Mostly, conduct and especially social conduct appears as practical action, where unspoken knowledge is applied. It is opposed to *discursive consciousness*, denoting the ability to articulate knowledge. Thereby, an underlying assumption is that agents in society are aware of reproductive patterns in the community they are part of, though that knowledge can be unconscious. Denying this would be a devaluation of individuals' perspectives. Everyone has a certain degree of influence on the social form surrounding them. Therefore, actors also have leeway in which they can bargain about the interpretation of rules. On the other hand, social reproduction predicates on actors' active implementation of rules, thus "*[c]hange, or its potentiality, is [...] inherent in all moments of social reproduction*" (Giddens 1979 p. 114, italics in original). The constellation of individual and social system is foremost created through practices, that shape and are shaped by role prescriptions as well as rules and resources.

### 2.3.5. Routine and social change

Firstly, routine implies stability in terms of durability over time. Time is traditionally not a disparate element, but the temporal dimension of social life means an entanglement of past and present. For understanding the interconnection of reproduction, persistence and transformation in social system, two ways of analysis are necessary (cf. *ibid.* p. 216):

1. How rationalisation of action happens as re-confirming and legitimizing certain practices through the actors' interaction with institutions, imitating them and thereby enabling their reproduction. Although actors know a lot, they are unaware of underlying settings.
2. How uncontrollable repercussions of actions caused by routinized processes can be put in context of the wider social systems they constitute, especially through reflexive self-regulation (being conscious of feed-back loops)

Routine action, demonstrated in the self-evidence of conformity, is embedded in the stratification model of action, built as basic security system from early childhood on. It provides both security and ease, since normal behaviour does not require any justification but is based on mutual implicit accord. Besides, routine that can also be labeled „habit“ that expresses the absence of concrete motivation in established conduct, whereby normality remains uncontested. The most rigid routine is assured through tradition, linking past and present.

If habits are as settled, then how does change ever happen? What Giddens calls *critical situations* (ibid. p. 124), a setting that heavily interrupt habits in every-day life, exhibit momentum of change. Change is for once triggered through external incidents requiring de-routinisation (for example natural catastrophes) in form of adaption to different circumstances. This normally does not question tradition, but substitutes one tradition by another, whereas three forms of internally motivated social change exist (ibid. pp. 220): First, upcoming different interpretations of existing norms (whereby literacy or awareness are salient), creating *traditions* as opposed to tradition, which is essential for social movements that *can* lead towards transformation. Secondly, denying the legitimacy of traditions, which can lead to profound change; not only de-mystification, but also developing a consciousness and subsequently a proactive mobilisation of collectivities for aspiring their own transformation. And lastly, migration as time-space encounters and movement in physical space engaging collectivities is a form of social movement that can trigger de-routinisation. Whether to classify social movements as internal or external changes depends on adopting a basis of territorial enclosure in combination with administrative centralisation for distinguishing inside and outside. However, societies and nations are always in relations of independence and reliance, and internationalisation automatically leads to some subsystems existing inside, outside or between.

Just as there are critical situations in direct encounters, there are critical phases - transitions - in which radical social change happens by transforming important institutions. Thereby, reflection is a premise that then enables activism in manifold ways of collective organisation. For instance, organisations are a result of intentional social innovation in modern society.

### **2.3.6. Contradictions**

Contradictions are defined as incompatibility between structural principles that form the system, coexisting in respect and opposition of each other. In contrast, conflict implies „struggle between actors or collectivities expressed as definite social practices“ (Giddens 1979p. 131). He identifies as intrinsic contradiction the opposed interests between *private appropriation* and

*socialised production*, while the latter is a premise for enabling the first. Contradictions emerge during the process of structuration, and „survive“ as long as they are separated, which is facilitated through disembedding mechanisms and abstraction through expert systems. But contradictions come to the surface in phases of transition and the more they overlap, the likelier it is that actual conflict arises. Domination as asymmetrically distributed resource is established through contradiction; precisely its establishment is one reason why following the business-as-usual is source of trust and security.

To conclude, Giddens' Theory of Structuration provides a theoretical framework for analysing complex relations between individuals, groups and institutions, as well as the role of power, legitimation and resources in their interplay.

## **2.4. The Economy for the Common Good**

The ECG is a civil society movement initiated in 2010 by Christian Felber and a group of entrepreneurs, trying to establish a more ethical and sustainable economic system. Therefore, they have created an instrument that serves originally for corporate sustainability reporting. Considering the four value categories 1) human dignity 2) solidarity & social justice 3) ecological sustainability and 4) transparency and co-determination, it is a very holistic approach (ECG Association n.d.a). This is applied to the five main stakeholder groups of a company (see Table 1 and Appendix 8.2.). Crossing the values with each stakeholder group, a table with 20 topics results, the so-called Common-Good-Matrix. Each theme is specified through elaborate indicators, questionnaires and concrete steps of development („evaluation levels“) and assigned points, that are in sum the total Common-Good balance (Matrix Development Team 2017).

A major critique of the current economic system is that the free market directed by an „invisible hand“ as imagined by Adam Smith has not had the desired impact of perfectly regulating supply and demand, mainly based on opaque information and externalisation of costs (Felber 2014). The ECG attempts to

- a) make the vaguely defined concept of sustainability measurable and comparable
- b) enable continuous monitoring (within companies regarding their own process and between companies regarding their relative performance); thereby serving as tool for conscious organisational development and
- c) create transparency and fair competition with internalised costs that eliminates the current competitive advantage of companies disregarding negative externalities.

Tax regulations are envisioned that reward responsible business conduct and tax companies with a low Common-Good balance. For avoiding that poor performance in one topic can be easily outweighed by good performance in another, negative aspects are assessed that give relatively high minus points - align with the idea of strong sustainability.

Besides, this model has already been applied to municipalities, that however work according to different principles than companies, since they are not focused on profit generation but on the “Common Good”. This is especially challenging, since they must not follow an individual interest, but manage the manifold interests of city stakeholders. These stakeholders have been identified as good as possible, although it is a lot harder to say where those begin and end.

<b>Stakeholders for companies</b>	<b>Stakeholders for municipalities</b>
Suppliers	Suppliers in public procurement, service providers
Owners and financial partners	Donors, creditors and financial partners
Employees	Employees and political mandate holders, honorary posts coordinated by the municipality
Customers and business partners	Citizens, inhabitants (including, guests, commuters, asylum seekers), independent voluntary actors; private sector and settled companies; sovereign other communities and offices
Entire Society	Community and environment, neighbor and other municipalities and offices, regions, state, nature, future generations

*Table 1: Stakeholders in companies and municipalities, adapted from ECG Association 2017 and Oberrauch et al. 2017*

It thereby addresses the need for urban sustainability reporting which is required for tracking improvement, justifying past and future spending of public means as well as maintaining trust into politics: Maclaren (2009) illustrates the importance of developing adequate sustainability indicators through integration of various stakeholders for ensuring their trustworthiness in the „value-laden and context-sensitive concept“ of sustainability (ibid. p. 287). Good indicators enable to monitor development by considering past development and future trends. Such indicators must also differentiate between respectively local and broad causes and impact, emphasizing the different strategies needed for coping with phenomena inside the system of the city and beyond, because these imply whether strategies for internal development that are within the realm of actors or

transgressive measures with external actors have to be chosen. Further research supports this argument by proving the relevance of accountability in creating mutual trust between politics and citizens and that empowerment and collective intelligence emerge under virtues like common-good orientation, collaboration, self-determination and active contribution (Sztompka 2010).

Several municipalities have by now created a communal CG-report that can serve others as best-practice example (ECG Association n.d.b). The process has reportedly had many positive impacts, foremost the increased awareness among the employees in the administration, and beyond, partner cities as well as suppliers of public procurement. However, those are comparatively small municipalities, while this study examines large towns, aiming at finding differences and similarities between each other and in comparison to small municipalities.

The administration of the municipality is economic actor with respect to their public procurement; additionally, the office of economic development in municipalities is an interesting nexus between public and private sphere. In the past, a paradigm of competition and an imperative of innovation that both imply practical constraints has emerged, and is opposed to pluralist economics, viewing the municipality as complex socio-economic setting. With this perspective, the communal office of economic development (WIFOE) should focus on contributing to implement generic goals of sustainable development in service of the common good (Dewald and Rother 2019). An alternative WIFOE will still make use of technological innovations (e.g. digitalisation), but as tool for enabling social innovation towards new forms of self-organisation and not for the sake of itself. It will moreover shift to promoting regional value creation through alternative ways of self-determined organisation, possibly considering other forms of „economy“ as allocation of resources rather than concentration of capital. Another benefit of regional value creation is the networking effect for interhuman encounters, and a focus on local knowledge, particularities and reasonable adaption. This technically suggests shifting towards redeveloping inner needs. It is however unlikely that the WIFOE is going to adopt this almost opposite stance of rejecting further growth, as this is part of its communicated legitimation. For global competitiveness, attractiveness to the outside is the guiding objective.

The common path of „green economy“ focusing merely on efficiency and technology optimism ultimately reproduces a mode of economic growth (Olsson et al. 2018), contrary to limited and increasingly scarce resources, space and workforce. It makes a difference whether the goal is to enter new markets through ecological innovation, which targets again expansion, or to aim at reducing the absolute resource consumption for natural conservation. Similarly, a focus on high-tech innovation as purpose in itself for external recognition often neglects the importance of investing into public and social services or manufacture (Dewald and Rother 2019).

## 2.5. Linking the Elements - Research Question

Firstly, the acknowledgment of unintended consequences of action can be related to global climate change, as sum of CO<sub>2</sub>-emissions caused by human activity, artificially reinforcing the GHG effect. Since the consequences are widespread over time and space, it is especially hard to trace it back to individual action (Olsson et al. 2018). And although science has by now proven the human cause for climate change (Sachs 2015), the actual linkage is still hard to grasp, as it is neither spatially nor temporally immediate.

However, change overall in social practices (since these can shape the structuration) is urgently necessary for emission reduction that is critical to keep global warming below 2°C. As stressed before, urban areas as concentration of lifestyles play a decisive role, although one cannot draw a clear line between the inside and outside of cities but rather overlapping of various systems: they can be seen as subsystems of the nation state they are situated in, or as system whose subsystems are the surrounding communities. In a wider context, cities have become dots in a globally interconnected society, being source of demand for manifold goods and services and producer and provider of many others, which relates to Newman's and Jennings' conception of the city as an ecosystem. The city administration is main coordinator of the above mentioned, thus it will be interesting to investigate the perception of representatives in local public administration on their leeway of action for social change. Furthermore, transformation is mostly a political goal but lacks operationalisation and this gap generates insecurity. Simultaneously, routine and regulations form an underlying paradigm with tacit knowledge seen as self-evident – leading to collective problems impeding a change in agency (Süßbauer 2014). Although the author focuses on climate adaptation measures and the spectrum between adaptation and transformation, her findings are applicable to general city development.

Secondly, the ECG can be considered as translation of Giddens' rather abstract structuration theory into a pragmatic tool. It equally regards both what kind of conduct entire organisations (let it be companies or municipalities) promote and the role of individuals within, accounting for the impact of these organisations on the environment and the entire society. Social change requires parallel action at various entry points, for creating an economic and political framework (*structuration*) that promotes and rewards values such as solidarity and cooperation for enabling humans to flourish and develop while respecting natural resources. It also stands out against the SDGs and ISEKs, as it overtly contests the paradigm of economic development, enriching the discourse by an alternative vision and asking what is supposed to be sustained: „Is it nature, the human species, our current way of life, or capitalism?“ (Barthold 2018). The value-orientation of

the ECG leads to a different starting point in addressing systemic problems that other approaches ignore.

Therefore, this study will examine the duality of relations between individuals, structures, system and structuration. Linking the formerly mentioned theory, literature and context, the following research question arose:

*Which challenges currently exist in sustainable city development of German large towns and how can they be addressed by help of the concept of the Economy for the Common Good?*

*An analysis of change from the perspective of city administration representatives based on Giddens' theory of structuration.*

## **3. Methodology**

### **3.1. Research Design**

After the initial literature research and choice of the theoretical framework, the empirical part was led by the research question suggesting to choose a qualitative approach. In the conceptual part of this work, the data was analysed by means of the TOS with regards to the duality of structure in interaction, set into context of sustainable city development in public administration and eventually comparing it with the approach of the ECG. For further research, it would be interesting as well to investigate people from city councils, but this was out of the scope of this work. The city council as institution of the political sphere works not as much as the administration with a long time horizon and long-term orientation, which is thus interesting starting point for analysing a specific form of institutional social practices. A multi-stakeholder analysis for one city could be fruitful as starting point for long-term strategy.

Seven interviews have been conducted with „experts from practice“ (six representatives from different professional positions in various cities), with the focus of this paper on comparing their perceptions of city development and the ECG not just as a reporting tool, but the underlying broader social vision. Half of them were chosen to be familiar with the ECG already, the other half was introduced to the basic concept before the interview via mail. This was motivated by the assumption that there are similar challenges and needs, and to avoid having biased attitudes in favour of the ECG model. Additionally, a speaker of the project „Gemeinwohl-Region Höxter“ was interviewed for receiving extended insight into regional development strategies making use of the concept of the ECG.

The interview questions in the first part covered general goals in city development, the relation to regional development, inquiry into current challenges, relations between offices, the presence of environmental and social topics within the WIFOE. The second part was dedicated to the Economy for the Common Good, including an evaluation of the possible functions, obstacles in the implementation and the perception of competition between cities (Questions in Appendix 8.3.). The interviews were semi-structured, and the interviewees were given the questions in advance, allowing for better preparation. The interviews were conducted in German, as native language of both interviewer and interviewees; and quotes used were translated by the author.

For better comparability, the cities were chosen out of German large towns between 100.000 and 500.000 inhabitants (the lower limit being Flensburg with 97.000 inhabitants, where the mayor was identified as key person with exemplary approaches stated in former interviews). The interviewed respondents were

- A) from the city administration in Mannheim
- B) from the city development in Wiesbaden
- C) from the city development in Halle an der Saale
- D) the mayor of Flensburg
- E) from the *Wirtschaftsförderung* (office of economic development) in Bonn
- F) the mayor of the environmental department of Karlsruhe
- G) a speaker of the LEADER project “Gemeinwohl-Region Höxter”

Subsequently, the interviews were transcribed (Appendix 8.5.) and analysed by means of structuring and explicative content analysis according to Mayring (Flick 2014). This included a paraphrastic coding and formulation of categories matched to Giddens' TOS. Since a mayor interest of this work was to analyse reasons for continued unsustainable practices and leverage points for social change, the categories „reflection“ and „change“ were treated separately. The initially deductive approach was extended by the particular findings of the examined cases for refined categories, resulting in a mixed form of deductive-inductive categorisation (Kuckartz 2018, p. 95).

A case\*category matrix was created for a better overview and enabling case summaries and category summaries (as suggested by Kuckartz 2018). The complete case\*category table can be found in the appendix (8.4.).

Eventually, the following categories were applied:



	Category	Description	Subcategories
I	<b>Structure</b>	Structure exists in form of structural properties, referring to rules (including norms and values) and resources. They are independent from subjects (cf. Giddens 1979, p. 66)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Allocative resources</li> <li>• Authoritative resources</li> <li>• Rules and value-standards<sup>3</sup></li> </ul>
II	<b>System</b>	„Reproduced relations between actors or collectivities, organised as social practices“ (ibid. p. 66). In application, this category included processes of communication, what was called 'normality' as well as the subcategories of relations between the following:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• representatives and the institutions they represent</li> <li>• the representatives and the entire society</li> <li>• different offices (institutions)</li> <li>• different cities</li> </ul>
III	<b>Structuration</b>	„Conditions governing the continuity or transformation of structures, and therefore the reproduction of systems“ (ibid. p. 66)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• perceived responsibilities beyond the own 'system'</li> <li>• obstacles of structural nature</li> <li>• legal framework and practical constraints.</li> </ul>
IV	<b>Reflection</b>	where the interviewees reflected on e.g. processes and goals or expressed awareness of unintended consequences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Meta-level or personal reflection</li> <li>• goals of their institution</li> </ul>
V	<b>Change</b>	internal and external social change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• change that has happened in the past or is happening</li> <li>• Current challenges to change within the respondents' realm</li> <li>• desired change, what the respondents named as change they wished or hoped for</li> </ul>

Table 2: Categories for analysis

3 Though Giddens prefers legitimation over value-standards as norms that follow with sanctions in response to interaction, because it allows to describe more precisely what is legitimate depending on actor and context and does not claim a universal social consensus, plus it shows that something can be legitimate norm for one person but given factual property for another person. Keeping this in mind, the author nevertheless uses value-standard but as limited to the interviewees surrounding/ institution instead of the entire society.

## Quality criteria

The classical criteria of reliability, validity and objectivity (Flick 2014) are reflected on: It is as in many qualitative studies hard to ensure diachronic reliability, since interviews are intervening observation, making it impossible to repeat the same experiment or interview under the same preconditions. In this case, the ECG as partially new concept was introduced, whose recognition would influence future research. Reliability is rather guaranteed through precise research methods and procedures.

The transcription of the interviews would theoretically allow for another researcher to scrutinize it and then checking whether it leads to similar results. The separation of the data analysis and the interpretative result part aims at guaranteeing objectivity as far as possible. However, objectivity was found to be reasonable only in a realist framework as accordance in meaning from several researchers (ibid.). This is also linked to the procedural reliability, recognising that the qualification of the interviewer is also a long-term process resulting from experience.

Concerning validity, one cannot exclude the possibility that the researcher's personal background influences in some way the research, given that the object of study is chosen according to personal interest. The use of a theoretical framework ensures however high accountability. Lastly, procedural validity is given by in the process of data collection by listening closely and not interrupting, to ensure that the interviewees' opinion is not influenced.

## 3.2. Data Analysis

An approach of wide explicative content analysis was applied with the objective of setting the observed phenomena in context of the TOS for understanding hidden general patterns.

General findings were the overall goal of ensuring future-proofness and quality of life through city development, with a high concern for social values (such as providing living in dignity and social justice) and a wish for stronger prioritisation of environmental aspects (in terms of CO<sub>2</sub>-emission reduction up to neutrality and conservation of local nature). Structural obstacles were seen in European law, limited control of the public administration and the pressure of economic efficiency. Cooperation already exists between offices, although it is not self-evident to have shared paramount topics integrated (align with the idea of high specification in expert systems). Between cities, both competition and cooperation are practiced according to different topics. Especially the signification of sustainability differed between the representative of the office of economic development and the other interviewees.

### 3.2.1. Case analysis

Respondent A (Mannheim) emphasized the principle of public value<sup>4</sup>, and uttered critique of privatisation and neglecting of public value in the past. Hence, it has by now become a value-standard with a clear legitimation that asks the public administration to use their allocative domination in the interest of the (city) community. However, since this still leaves some room for interpretation, the definite signification of public value was translated into according strategies.

The successful strategic management was also seen as distinctive from other cities and reportedly serves as best-practice model others are interested in adopting. Concerning reporting tools, he expressed the need for comprehensive but concise standardisation, illustrating the necessity of reinforcing the signification of total balancing for organisations with an agreed understanding of sustainability concepts. A change towards a more integrated mindset was initiated by the mayor, leading to an increased awareness of unintended consequences, as expressed in the sentence „Simply the change of mindset has been of use, because people now consider in how far their actions have an impact on others“.<sup>5</sup>

Respondent B (Wiesbaden) showed high personal awareness and care for environmental issues and the wish for the city taking a stronger stance, prioritizing environmental considerations instead of making concessions, as it were making use of their transformative capacity by means of coercive sanctions (or prescriptions).<sup>6</sup> Possibly, a communisation of land was stated to be required for the city to have the power of setting such criteria. Major challenge faced at the moment is the housing shortage and high demand for land due to the continuous increase in population (social movement) that is welcomed though. She mentioned the value of openness, with the signification that the power has to be employed accordingly for providing public services, housing and employment. An awareness of unintended consequences despite good intentions stood out in expressing that they (the city development office) are convinced of doing something good for society in the long term, even if processes take time and the purpose is not always immediately visible<sup>7</sup>. She also saw the legitimation of the city administration in advocating the stakes of those

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4 Public value is “characterised by claims of *rights by citizens* to services that have been authorised and funded through some *democratic* process. [.. it] is the analogue of the desire to maximise shareholder value in the private sector“ (Coats and Passmore 2008, p. 4)

5 “Allein schon die Veränderung des Mindsets hat da viel gebracht, weil sich die Leute jetzt schon überlegen, inwiefern mein Handeln auch Auswirkungen auf andere hat.“ (Appendix 8.5. A, ll. 183).

6 “[...] aus meiner Sicht sollte sich das auch als Kriterium durchsetzen, dass man eben mal schaut bei Unternehmen, wie sind die denn mit Umweltschutz aufgestellt, oder wie bereit sind die auch, unsere Anforderungen zu erfüllen. [...] oftmals gehen die da nicht mit, und da ist ja die Stellschraube, dass die Stadt eben nicht ständig dann noch etwas zugibt über die Verträge sondern eben auch mal eisern bleibt“ (Appendix 8.5.B, ll. 257).

7 “[...] auch wenn unsere Prozesse lang dauern und wir nicht immer so direkt auch den Sinn dessen sehen, was wir tun, [...] ist es aber doch so, dass wir alle davon überzeugt sind, langfristig und am Ende des Tages etwas Gutes für die Gesellschaft getan zu haben“ (Appendix 8.5.B, ll. 191).

who cannot articulate it themselves (nature, animals) as part of the common good. Due to the inherent common-good orientation, she rather saw use of the ECG for the private sector and envisioned the city (i.e. the WIFOE) to have a choice between companies regarding their total balance.

Respondent C (Halle) stressed economic viability as highest priority, although it being essentially an intermediate step towards autonomy and for reinvestment into social infrastructure. The ongoing demand for land despite a saturation of available space was seen as biggest challenge. But due to practical constraints, economic efficiency is still strived for even at the expense of ecological factors.<sup>8</sup> He also uttered the wish for companies to take an initiative towards CG-oriented business, seeing more transformative capacity and initial responsibility in others. Within the public administration, a narrow focus is prevailing despite close cooperation that is rather project-related than paramount though.

Respondent D (Flensburg), emphasized social justice and cohesion within the city, while also facing the challenge of increasing population that requires the city to provide necessary offers (especially affordable housing). This creates a field of tension between legitimation that is based on addressing the needs of new dwellers while ensuring quality of life for the citizens, which is also the *Leitbild* of their ISEK, „organising growth and creating qualities“ (Stadt Flensburg, 2018). This supports Giddens argument of social movements triggering de-routinisation. The interviewee uttered a wish for change in the European law, with respect to public procurement regulations (that harden reasonable regional self-sufficiency) and incentives for value-driven business, rewarding local responsibility which is expected to be more fruitful than competition; as well as more regional cooperation instead of competition and a paramount vision of sustainable development.<sup>9</sup>

Respondent E (Bonn) named as the only task of the economic development the settling of companies by providing space and serving their needs in terms of consulting or networking. Environmental and social concerns were seen to only fall within the competence of the respective offices.<sup>10</sup> The responsibility of companies was seen in ensuring their own existence, while he explained that small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs), that make up more than 95% of German businesses, are voluntarily socially committed. Sustainability reporting was useless in his opinion, instead, laws were seen as only effective and sufficient measure, therefore no need for change was

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8 “[...] man wird bei bestimmten Dingen darauf dringen, dass man erstmal wirtschaftlich ein bisschen vorankommt, mitunter vielleicht auch ohne das andere, das andere so vertieft zu betrachten, Umweltaspekte oder dergleichen. Das wird man dann vielleicht im Zweifel, in der Abwägung ein bisschen hinten anstellen“ (Appendix 8.5.C, ll. 246).

9 “[...] wenn wir andere Anreize schaffen, zum Beispiel [...] Standortverantwortung belohnen, dass das völlig neue Ansätze sein können, die uns aber viel fruchtbarer sein könnten“ (Appendix 8.5.D, ll. 271).

10 “Aber es ist in primärer Sicht weder unsere Aufgabe, Ökologie durchzusetzen noch irgendwelche Sozialstandards durchzusetzen. Das machen dann die Kollegen in den jeweils anderen Ämtern“ (Appendix 8.5.E, ll. 105).

identified in this area. Concerning the form of ECG reporting, he saw the only use in creating rankings for comparing cities or companies – which might be a motivation, triggering competition to be „the greenest“, but it thereby becomes rather a marketing tool than a guideline for structural transformation (cf. Barthold 2018).

Respondent F (Karlsruhe), strongly emphasized ecological aspects, also by accompanying new housing with creation of green in the city. She also saw the responsibility of the city in contributing to global climate protection through local action. Most important impulses were said to come from the city council. She wished for a higher prioritisation of environmental issues and favoured not to follow an active growth policy, but also reflected on the boundaries of her realm and responsibilities.<sup>11</sup>

### 3.2.2. Comparison of the cases

Under *structure*, respondents A-D named the ISEK, developed under citizen participation, as guideline in city development which can therefore be considered as important form of legitimating upcoming strategies, while the integrated approach also tries to reconcile claims of dominance between different stakeholders. Allocative resources such as time, human and financial resources were named as decisive, and their scarcity evidently poses a challenge to introducing new tasks. Another allocative resource is the availability of land and space (whether mentioned explicitly or not) for developing the city and corresponding to increasing demands for businesses, housing and green. Aspects like providing affordable housing were categorised as part of the values, namely social justice and living conditions in dignity. Ecological values were expressed by reduction of CO<sub>2</sub>-emissions or nature conservation. Case F stood out by also naming the responsibility of making a contribution to global climate change. All respondents except E showed explicit agreement with the values suggested by the ECG, pointing towards their legitimation. E in turn focused on compliance with laws, denoting a higher signification of explicit rules as source of legitimation than intangible values, suggesting that this is a structural property in his context.

The *system* in terms of social practices was characterized by a strong regional cooperation, in the immediate surrounding as well as on supraregional associations as the *Deutsche Städtetag*. This exemplifies the mutual autonomy and interdependence of power between those levels of subsidiarity. On the other hand, competition between cities was perceived as normal, illustrating the role of sustaining allocative domination as means to attracting (as a city) people and businesses, that

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11 “Ich versuche natürlich in meinem Rahmen, im Rahmen meiner Möglichkeiten, meiner Zuständigkeiten, die Nachhaltigkeitsthemen zu stärken, aber immer dort wo natürlich andere Dezernate mit betroffen sind, muss ich mich dann auch mit denen abstimmen.“ (Appendix 8.5.F, ll. 153)

in turn provide the city with resources for offering public services which is their source of legitimation. Cooperation was also named as practiced regularly between offices, but not as common integration of a shared vision. The economic promotion was described as autonomous and not primarily considering environmental concerns, which illustrates that in the current system, their legitimation is guaranteed without such considerations. According to D and E, non-profit-companies and SMEs usually reinvest their revenue for the common good.

Concerning the *structuration* (including responsibilities on a higher level), a main point was that the decision and law making takes place in the political sphere, between the level of communal city councils that create the *Flächennutzungsplan* (land-use law) and the European level (regulations on public procurement or neutrality of competition) and is therefore a responsibility outside the city administration (as executive). The predominance of economic efficiency was described by all, align with privatisations in the past that led to the city administration having little control over setting decision criteria. The uncontrollable increase of population due to the trend of urbanisation was furthermore mentioned by several.

In *reflection*, all respondents showed awareness that unintended consequences *exist* in one way or another. A *goal* in city development that was mentioned explicitly by all except E was sustainable development (including emission reduction, future compatibility, maintaining quality of life and in case of Flensburg and Karlsruhe climate neutrality until 2050 i.e. 2040). Aside from that, the reflections differed quite a lot:

- B reported the questioning of the continuous population growth during the process of city development, where the final decision was to stay open and work on fulfilling the corresponding needs.
- Respondent C from Halle solely described the current challenges as a burden, which can be linked to the financial concerns, that virtually enforce a focus on practical constraints, reinforcing its priority in structural duality. He saw the concept of the ECG potentially useful within city development for evaluating projects or investments and called it interesting that it is questioning economic growth for a deeper purpose<sup>12</sup>. He described as primary goal economic improvement and budget consolidation for enabling reinvestment into social infrastructure and a higher degree of autonomy.

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12 “[...] das ist sicherlich ein interessanter Aspekt, der im Hinblick auf diese sonstige Wirtschaftswachstumsrederei und dem immer nachzukommen, nochmal einen anderen Aspekt mitbringt, was soll das eigentlich alles, was hat das eigentlich für einen, einen tieferen Sinn als nur um Geld zu machen.“ (Appendix 8.5.C, ll. 200)

- D reflected on life in a village as more self-sufficient than in a city. As mayor of Flensburg in Schleswig-Holstein, she regularly faces exchange on a wider regional level with smaller municipalities. Moreover, she mentioned the vicious cycle of people moving away from villages, causing offers to leave, making the living more unattractive, causing more people to leave. Therefore, social security would be required for companies to settle in rural areas. She appreciated about the ECG the “structural“ approach, where reporting is not a readjustment but value-orientation as source of value-creation<sup>13</sup>.

*Changes* desired by all except E were a higher priority for environmental concerns as well as more holistic considerations and investment into fostering value-oriented incentives in relation to higher-level laws. B and D besides mentioned a re-communisation, which proves that a lack of allocative resources (land in municipal possession) is bound to lacking the legitimate capacity of prescribing certain standards with according sanctions. According to E, companies constantly have to adapt for „surviving“ by fulfilling changed demands, for staying competitive or for employee retention. It exemplifies Giddens‘ understanding of agency as continuous stream of behaviour, and that change is to a certain extent always attributed to external change.

Major *challenges* for all were continuous demand for space and thus land consumption. A need for effective reporting was indicated by A, C, E and F. Concerning the ECG reporting, they favoured different functions according to their position and tasks, but saw as main obstacle the limited time and human resources. Besides, A and D noted that the size of the city does make the coordination and collective action more complex, however the principal structure was seen as similar: the public administration is organized in topic-related departments and offices, while from a certain size onward (according to D’s evaluation), a district-specific organisation and monitoring are necessary in addition.

## 4. Results

### 4.1. Structural Contradictions

Generalisations are hard to make, as the interviews were rather explorative within a new field of research. Still, some insights have crystallized.

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13 “[...] dass wir nicht nur über Berichte sozusagen nachsteuern, sondern, dass wir von vornherein Werte in unser Wirtschaftssystem installieren, die wir dann in der Wertschöpfung schon gleich nutzen.” (Appendix 8.5.D, line 299)

Foremost, the challenge of land consumption reveals a structural contradiction. The federal strategy to significantly lower land consumption has been insufficient so far (Umweltbundesamt 2019). Although it is communicated as a problem that has to be solved, it is perhaps unsolvable as the interpretative scheme is linked to the uncontested paradigm of growth and competition. On the other hand, the perceived scarcity of space could be a chance for new positioning and creative reuse and thereby re-evaluation of space through pioneers (Kühnel 2014). Several respondents uttered a desire for change towards more cooperation, and the interview with the representative of the LEADER project on creating a common-good region illustrated how this is aimed at. As he described and as it is currently under implementation within the project in the region Höxter, a holistic approach does require action on various levels, geographically by addressing whole regions and organisationally by addressing distinct stakeholder groups. This pioneer project exemplifies the interrelation between various actors and the importance of all stakeholders pulling into the same direction, demonstrating multidimensional action towards sustainable change.

Applying Giddens' TOS, a second structural contradiction stood out: the values such as ecological sustainability or social justice that were named by five out of six are in many cases in competition or even conflict with economic interests. In the case of city development, this was exemplified by the privatisation of public goods and services in the past, that is now seen more critically since it constrains public control over the design of those.

It stood out that E saw no need for promoting values in a stronger way, but was relying on legal regulations (such as an anticipated CO<sub>2</sub>-tax) to do its part and cause environmental innovation. A recent analysis of climate policy in different cities has led to the conclusion that the perception of the own responsibility has an influence on the perception of others' responsibility as well: while the German federal government encouraged climate protection operations beyond national guidelines, city development actors concentrated more on problems (declaring advised climate policies as unrealistic or over-demanding) than on positive elements, engaging the whole citizenship to work on solutions (Sturm 2018). It also proves that there is some leeway to either implement or reject suggested climate policies. The answers of the representative of the economic promotion differed in several cases from the others, exhibiting attitudes typical for conventional economic promotion such as a focus on external positioning and competitiveness (Dewald and Rother 2019).

The mindset in the economic promotion might change in the future through external disruptions such as cities proclaiming a state of climate emergency (Spiegel Online 2019) and increased public pressure, but currently the paradigm of growth and global competition impede critical reflection. From an ethical perspective though, economic success can only be considered



legitimate if it is based on value creation for the society (Dewald and Rother 2019) – which can lead to fundamental controversies (when considering for example the cigarette industry). This epitomises a structural contradiction between fields that are still rather kept separate, the economy and its wider philosophical or ethical legitimation. The more interdisciplinary the study of these fields becomes, the more apparent irreconcilable differences become that have to be addressed rather sooner than later.

## 4.2. Social Change

Change was experienced in one way or another by all: A change of mindset happening in Mannheim was attributed to the mayor, meaning a top-down process triggered by a single person due to particular awareness and reflection on hitherto uncontested social practices. An increased environmental awareness can also be related to higher knowledge gained on the impacts of human activity on the global ecosystem. D mentioned the creation of a climate compact as private-public association founded 10 years ago, indicating a longer examination of this topic. It also turned out that many changes are happening at the moment, as a shift towards more integrated approaches to city development (ISEK), and especially B and D mentioned just being at the beginning of implementing measures as result of the respective ISEK - it is therefore not possible yet to evaluate its practical relevance and reach of impact. The mayor of Karlsruhe named as one measure of greening the city unsealing soil, so to speak questioning past practices. She also exhibited an above-average awareness for far-reaching repercussions of social practices, as also became clear in her goal to foster fair trade, which widens the horizon to global interconnectedness (and deduced responsibilities).

As mentioned before, social reproduction predicates on actors' active implementation of rules, hence the potentiality of change resides in every moment of social interaction and reproduction. In practice, it is however more complex, as role prescriptions within institutions are connected to a certain degree of conformity and compliance as condition for legitimation. A collective transformation of interpretative schemes is thus required for profound change.

Thus, the initial research question:

*Which challenges currently exist in sustainable city development of German large towns and how can they be addressed by help of the concept of the Economy for the Common Good?*

can be answered as follows: current challenges are a meshing of factual, physical challenges (excessive land consumption under limited natural resources) with the influence of individual and

collective lifestyles (social practices), that are shaped by the perception of individual actors and the dominant discourse within the main institution they adhere to (based on their role prescription). Therefore, the ECG can *theoretically* provide support through the holistic and multidimensional approach that integrates the role of individuals, system and structuration, helping to solve a structural contradiction between values and structuration. *Practically*, however, it needs further development and improvement to even more concise indicators, which relies on experimentation in practice. The decisive aspect though is the process-orientation, as it cannot be stressed enough that structure, system and structuration are shaped through interaction, and collective change therefore requires a procedural approach. The ECG provides a guideline for multifarious stakeholders and can support consequent transition towards more sustainable development – in cities and beyond. It is disruptive by contesting the legitimation of the current economic paradigm, but at the same time pragmatic by addressing the leeway of interpretation in current rules to direct more signification to social and ecological concerns towards genuine sustainable development.

## 5. Conclusion

Giddens Theory of Structuration is helpful in understanding the phenomenon of unsustainability, expressed overall in modern social practices. It requires a high level of awareness and reflection to question the social practices within the system, and the capacity to grasp the possible repercussions of the own actions on an abstract and practical level to make the unintended consequences known, and subsequently to consider a change of actions.

City administrations play a crucial role in implementing local measures towards global sustainable development, however, institutionalised practices are hard to alter as they are characterised by rigid markedness and uncontested patterns of reproduction, for example in ongoing competition with other cities or continued settling of companies despite land scarcity.

The primary data confirmed that city administrations are facing some similar issues:

- limited control over land and public services that oppose implementing urgent action (with regards to measures effective towards climate protection)
- moving in a contradictory situation of simultaneous competition and cooperation with other cities
- a legal framework that favours economic interests over ecological and social ones

A general tendency towards more awareness and integrated concepts is visible, but judged by remarkably more sustainable development, rather cautious and incremental changes prevail, which is understandable given the high effort of investing into profoundly transformative change. The analysis showed that the perception of the own responsibilities and leeway of action determine the attitude towards change. Much about transformation towards more sustainable city development depends on whether urban transformation is seen as a happening or process that can and has to be actively shaped. Adhering to institutions, transformative capacity is somewhat only used within the borders of legitimation and common interpretative schemes, as those are well-established. Creating spaces for openly communicating about the implicit signification of certain practices and interactions could be a starting point for initiating conscious processes of reflection on the ways of social reproduction, possibly questioning the status quo. This could happen between offices within city administrations as well as between cities.

### **A common-good oriented process**

The ECG as multidimensional concept addresses multiple spheres: the economic, public and civil. In particular municipalities, serving the common good *per se*, could take on a more proactive role in promoting a CG-orientation within its realm of public procurement or business settlements. Nevertheless, municipalities are part of the wider social system, and the corresponding structuration of increased privatisation has led to changing priorities and diminishing control over public affairs relevant to the basic needs of people (most significantly in housing). It seems to be worth considering a re-communisation of public goods and services for designing them stronger in the sense of the common good.

Although the process-orientation is already stressed on the part of the ECG, it should be given even more attention as compared to the quantification of values as help for developing concrete strategies. The ECG balancing process can be a useful tool in making underlying processes and structures better visible, especially because routinized processes are little reflected on, thus actors in institutions relevant to city development can be more conscious of unintended consequences of action. As mentioned in the beginning, the goal is not a conflict-free city in perfect harmony, but a process of bringing to light and discussing implicit practices including their legitimation based on potential unintended consequences, and subsequently deliberately deciding on their continuation or transformation. A quote by the speaker of the LEA DER-project summarises it quite well:

“It is not just ‘we are counting peas’, how much CO<sub>2</sub>-consumption does the municipality or a company have; instead it is about following a bigger societal vision. The values are quite normative, which the ECG is every now and again reproached for, but this is exactly it: looking how we can agree on these values and whether we can work towards filling them with life.”<sup>14</sup>

## 6. Limitations and Outlook

During the research, it became clear that a broad, comparative study was useful in an explorative sense, confirming the presumption that cities face many similar challenges. However, it turned out not to be adequate for understanding the specific situation and requirements of a certain city with its local uniqueness. Furthermore, it became apparent that the city development is always embedded in the wider context of regional development and therefore always has to consider the relation between the city and its surroundings, in terms of environment, people and other physical resources flowing in, thereby flowing out of another place, and to keep the city as an ecosystem in balance. Due to restrictions in time and scope, this could not be scrutinized, and neither a more differentiated in-depth analysis of the respective positions in city administrations. A discourse analysis of secondary sources also could have delivered deeper insights into the congruence between plans and actions (of city development) or between prevailing paradigms (in the offices of economic development).

Especially for addressing the complex issue of city development and applying the holistic model of the ECG, an in-depth approach would be more appropriate. Inquiring various stakeholder would yield more differentiated perspectives on to needs, interests, common ground and potential conflicts. Besides, little attention was given to the role of the city council, on one hand because it was not initially defined as a key stakeholder in city development and because members are changing, which does not suggest to talk of rigid institutionalised social practices.

Giddens’ thoughts on the consequences of modernity furthermore draft a “post-scarcity paradigm”, that could be interesting for discussing policies on scarce resources keeping in mind the idea that scarcity is mostly socially constructed and can thus be deconstructed as well.

The ECG handbook for municipal reporting is currently under re-development and it will be interesting to examine the improvements, feedback on usefulness in practice and to observe whether

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14 “Es ist nicht einfach 'wir zählen hier die Erbsen', wieviel CO<sub>2</sub>-Verbrauch hat die Kommune, oder hat ein Unternehmen; sondern es geht darum, eine größere gesellschaftliche Vision zu verfolgen. Also die Werte sind ja auch recht normativ, was der GWÖ ja auch immer mal wieder vorgeworfen wird, aber genau das ist es, zu schauen: können wir uns auf diese Werte vereinbaren, und können wir darauf hinarbeiten, dass wir die mit Leben füllen.“ (Appendix 8.5.G, ll. 133)

it faces higher acceptance than so far. Collaborations with like-minded approaches could also be promising, as for example under the program „Wirtschaftsförderung 4.0“ that focuses much on regional value creation and could be a leverage point (Dewald and Rother 2019). Alike, the ECG concept applied in peer-to-peer process could be a point of synergy with regional currency systems, that then guarantee a shared value basis. One might say that those are rather futuristic ideas – but perhaps, future-proofness requires more audacious alternatives.

Further reading could consider applying the concept of Resonance developed by Hartmut Rosa (2016), both a philosophical and sociological idea of the actual goal in life as creating experiences of resonance based on a mode of resonance, meaning the capacity to be in a resonating relation with the world (along different axes of resonance). It shines a new light on perceptions of “good living” and human needs. His elaborations on politics assume that different interests are not inherently antagonistic, but can be aligned by creating space for resonance. This refers both to physical space as well as to institutional processes.

In the future, more attention must also be given to how to organise processes for a more balanced social dynamic regarding (de-)urbanisation, with the goal of maintaining rural areas. Therefore, a paramount vision of sustainable development is needed in combination with decentralised, locally specific solutions and value-orientation for changing social practices to be future-compatible.

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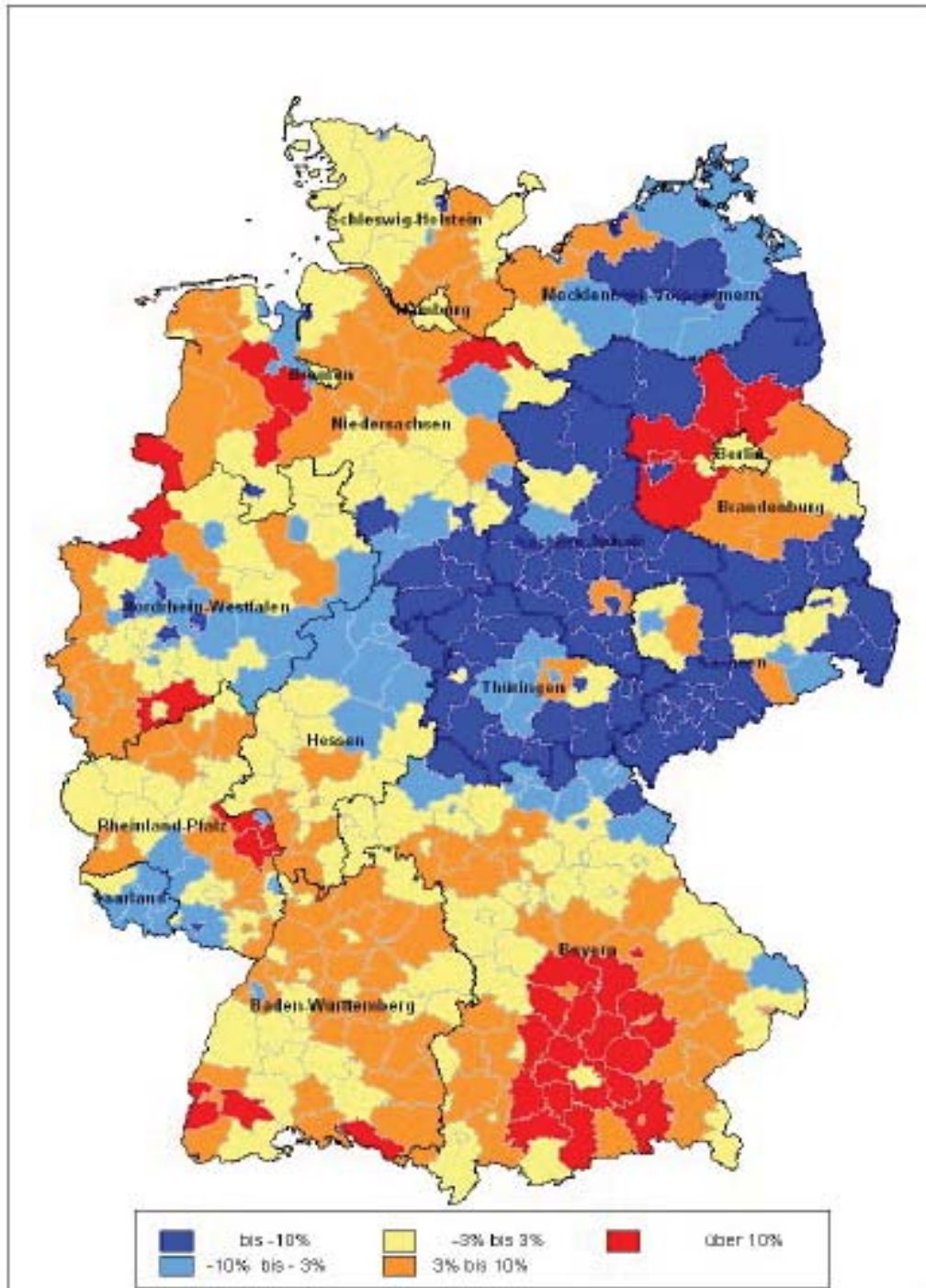
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## 8. Appendix

### 8.1. Change in population between 2002 and 2020 in administrative districts



Datenquelle: Bundesamt für Bauwesen und Raumordnung (Hrsg.): Raumordnungsprognose 2020/2050. CD-ROM. Bonn 2006.

Retrieved from: KfW Bankengruppe 2006, p. 15

## 8.2. Common-Good-Matrix Version 5.0

VALUE	HUMAN DIGNITY	SOLIDARITY AND SOCIAL JUSTICE	ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY	TRANSPARENCY AND CO-DETERMINATION
STAKEHOLDER				
<b>A: SUPPLIERS</b>	<b>A1</b> Human dignity in the supply chain	<b>A2</b> Solidarity and social justice in the supply chain	<b>A3</b> Environmental sustainability in the supply chain	<b>A4</b> Transparency and co-determination in the supply chain
<b>B: OWNERS, EQUITY- AND FINANCIAL SERVICE PROVIDERS</b>	<b>B1</b> Ethical position in relation to financial resources	<b>B2</b> Social position in relation to financial resources	<b>B3</b> Use of funds in relation to the environment	<b>B4</b> Ownership and co-determination
<b>C: EMPLOYEES</b>	<b>C1</b> Human dignity in the workplace and working environment	<b>C2</b> Self-determined working arrangements	<b>C3</b> Environmentally friendly behaviour of staff	<b>C4</b> Co-determination and transparency within the organisation
<b>D: CUSTOMERS AND BUSINESS PARTNERS</b>	<b>D1</b> Ethical customer relations	<b>D2</b> Cooperation and solidarity with other companies	<b>D3</b> Impact on the environment of the use and disposal of products and services	<b>D4</b> Customer participation and product transparency
<b>E: SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT</b>	<b>E1</b> Purpose of products and services and their effects on society	<b>E2</b> Contribution to the community	<b>E3</b> Reduction of environmental impact	<b>E4</b> Social co-determination and transparency

Retrieved from: ECG Association n.d.b