SCENARIOS AS NARRATIVES OF REACTIVE SEQUENCES

Lessons from historical social science

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Scenario Approaches

- Many types of scenarios and ways of categorising scenarios
  - Scenario cartwheel (van Notten et al. 2003)
  - Historical schools of scenario development (Bradfield et al. 2005)
  - Typology from the user perspective (Börjeson et al. 2006)
  - Eight types of scenario techniques (Bishop et al. 2007)
- Distinction: end-state scenarios / event sequence scenarios
  - End-state: structural description
  - Event sequences (future history): What could historical social science contribute?
Three Concepts from Historical Social Science

1. Reactive sequence
2. Narrative explanation
3. Causal mechanisms
1. Reactive Sequence

- “chains of temporally ordered and causally connected events” (Mahoney 2000)
  - Sequence where each event is a reaction to the previous one and a cause of the next one
- Importance of timing and order of events
- Conjunction: intersection of sequences

Sequence 1: A → B → S → T → U → V

Sequence 2: M → N → O

Conjunction (Mahoney 2000, 529)
Reactive sequence continued into the future
Example: The ‘Right to be Forgotten’

Legislative and political processes:
- 1995 EU Data Protection Directive 95/46/EC
- 2000/2009 EU Charter of Fundamental Rights
- March 2010: Mario Costeja González complained about outdated search results, case taken to ECJ
- January 2012: European Commission presents proposal for EU General Data Protection Regulation
- March 2014: European Parliament adopts General Regulation: ‘right to erasure’
- May 2014: ECJ rules on right to ask search engines to remove results
- May 2014: Google executives criticise ruling, Google implements RTBF on European domains
- 2014-2015: Pressure on Google from politicians, media and civil society: transparency, freedom of expression, access to information, expand delisting to all domains
- July 2014: Google launches Advisory Council
- February 2015: Advisory Council report: limit delisting to Europe, increase transparency

Google’s actions:
- 2009: Mayer-Schönberger: Delete: The Virtue of Forgetting in the Digital Age
- 2015/2016: expected adoption of EU General Data Protection Regulation

Civil society and academia:
- Lobbying from interest groups

Sequence of the ‘right to be forgotten’
External processes to the ‘right to be forgotten’
2. Narrative Explanation

- Narrative explanation ≠ fictional narrative
- Linking events together with causal explanations to build an analytic or causal narrative from a sequence of events
  - Analytic narrative: theoretically structured story about coherent sequence of motivated actions (Aminzade 1992)
  - Causal narrative: “orderly analysis of the sequence of events and the causal processes that connected them, leading from a set of initial conditions to the outcome in question” (Little 2014)
3. Causal Mechanisms

- “Cogs and wheels” behind phenomena
- Narrative explanations are built “brick by brick” (Griffin 1993): mechanisms are the bricks
- Possibility of generalising

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Discussion

• Practical implication for scenarios: take into consideration in collecting data (e.g. Delphi questions) and building scenarios
• Benefits of integrating these concepts into scenario building
  • Breaking processes into sequences of events
  • Clarifying claims about causality
  • Highlighting the importance of timing and order of events
• Possible drawbacks
  • Short time horizon
  • Not suitable for all topics
  • Assumption that history provides insight into futures: limiting?
• There is no ultimate scenario approach: depends on context and aims
References
