

## Networking for a sustainable future

Building the sustainable network using LEGO® Serious Play®



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Workshop by Dr. Claudia Schmitt, Wolfgang Denzler and Cordula RÜth

Abstract

## **Shared Mental Models, Design Thinking and Serious Play: Using Lego® for Envisioning a Sustainable Future (I & II)**

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Research on team processes and performance shows that shared mental models play an important role for effectiveness and achievement (Mathieu et al., 2000). Design Thinking (Kelley, 2006; Brenner & Uebernickel, 2016) as well as Serious Play (Schrage, 2000) are recent trends not only in business organizations but also in educational settings to generate new insights and perspectives.

What if we use these findings, methods and tools for purposes such as envisioning a sustainable future? What if we (re)activate playful mindsets and collaboration techniques for creating shared models of how organizations dedicated to sustainable development would look and feel like? What if we can facilitate sustainability-oriented organizational development by applying innovation modes (cf. Schmitt & Palm, 2017)?

In this workshop, first a short introduction into the above mentioned theoretical frameworks is given; moreover, Lego Serious Play® (LSP) is proposed as one example tool for generating experiential knowledge, to develop new shared views and to discover hidden opportunities within transformational processes (cf. Dornaus et al., 2015): The practical section of this workshop offers the occasion to get familiar with basic LSP related to sustainable development challenges and visions. It shows one way of how inter- and transdisciplinary topics are approached within the HOCH<sup>N</sup> project, a research collaboration on fostering sustainable development at Higher Education Institutions, funded by the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF; [www.hoch-n.org](http://www.hoch-n.org)). A joint discussion on the models, team processes and method per se will be the closing section of this workshop.

Workshops I and II will be structured alike and will take into consideration for participants' interests and expectations; procedures and example topics are flexible and will depend on the needs of the participants.

### **Literature:**

Brenner, W. & Uebernickel, F. (Eds.) (2016). Design Thinking for Innovation: Research and Practice. Heidelberg: Springer.

Dornaus, C., Staples, R., Wendelken, A., Wolf, D., et al. (2015). Innovationspotenziale: entdecken, wertschätzen, nutzen! [Innovation potential: discover it, appreciate it, use it!]. Erlangen: FAU University Press.

Kelley, T. (2006). The Ten Faces of Innovation. Strategies for Heightening Creativity. London: Profile Books.

Mathieu, J.E., Heffner, T.S., Goodwin, G.F., Salas, E. & Cannon-Bowers, J.A. (2000). The Influence of Shared Mental Models on Team Process and Performance. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 85 (2), 273-283.

Schmitt, C.T., Palm, S. (2017, in press). Sustainability at German Universities: The Universität Hamburg as a Case Study for Sustainability-oriented Organizational Development. In Leal Filho, W. (Hrsg.). *Handbook of Sustainability Science and Research*. Berlin: Springer.

Schrage, M. (2000). *Serious Play: How the world's best companies simulate innovation*. Boston: Harvard Business School Press.

## LEGO-Serious-Play Workshop II for the 1<sup>st</sup> Hamburg Sustainable Development Summit

Network session “Networking on Sustainable Development: How does the ideal network look like?”

### Goal

Goal of the workshop is to introduce LEGO-Serious-Play (LSP)-method and create shared ideas. Small groups of participants are challenged to build a model of how an ideal network for sustainable development would look like.

### Structure

- Introductory talk about the “five minds for the future” model and how they relate towards creative thinking and working
- Introduction of the theoretical background of the LSP-method
- Playful introduction into the method with a short building exercise (skill-building)
- Introduction of the leading question
- Building of a shared group model for the university of the future with focus on one of the HOCH<sup>N</sup>-fields of action

### Results

Results sum up the experience of 1½ hours with the LSP-method. After building individual models the participants created their shared models for networking, each with the focus the group chose for itself.

### Video and background information

Watch the video of the LSP workshop and read more background information about the event: <http://uhh.de/knu-hsds-lego>



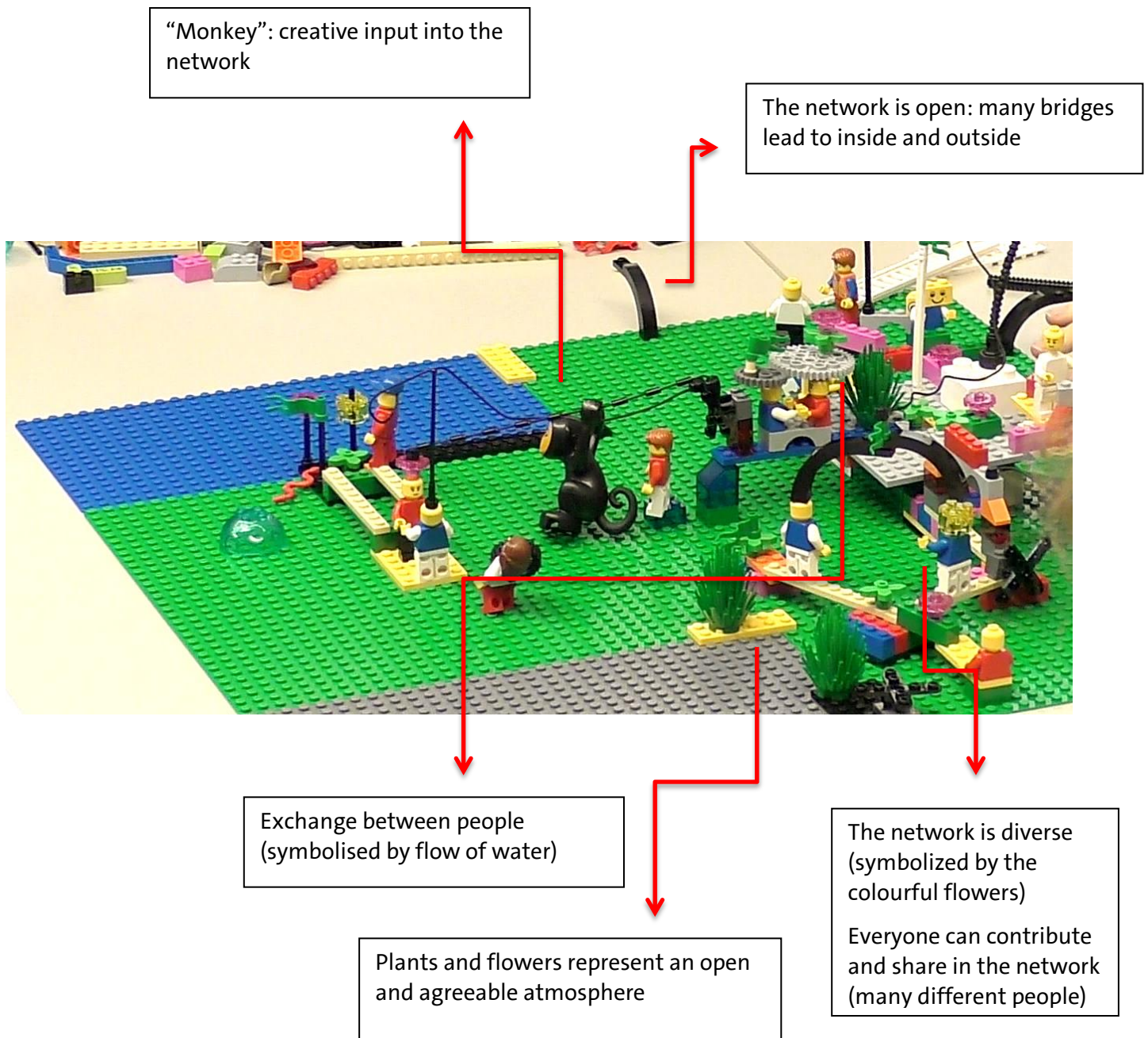
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You can find more about the five minds for the future [here](#).

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*Group 1*



Network session “Networking on Sustainable Development: How does the ideal network look like?”

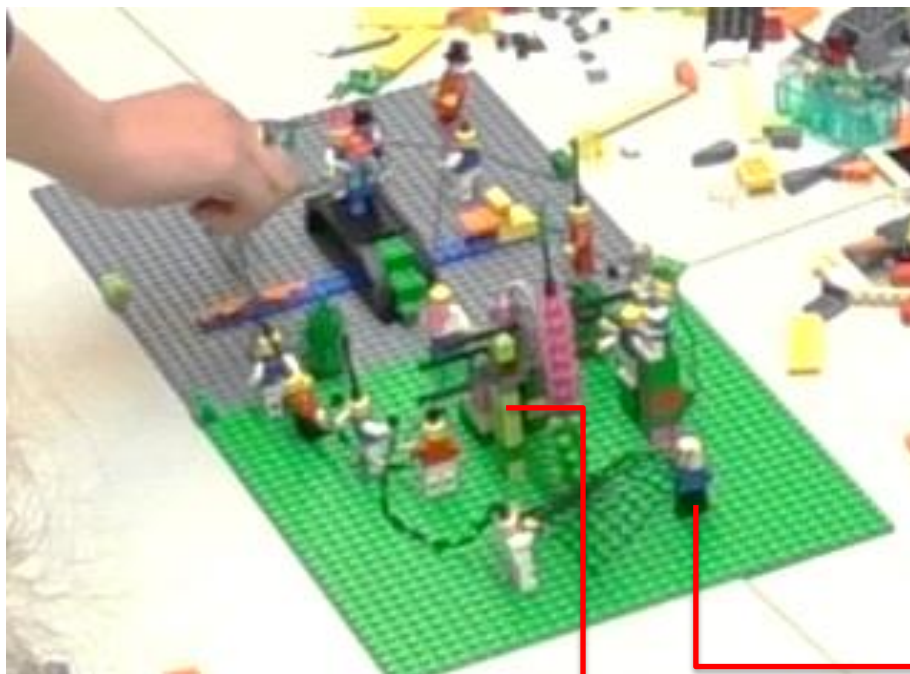
*Group 2*



The network starts with somebody's idea

On the bridge is a meeting point where people talk about the idea.

The people have flowers which stand for new ideas. So the basic idea grows.



After the bridge: safety-net. There is a wheel, which lifts the flower up. The safety-net has a green ground. In this area are many people who care for the idea by working on the wheel. If something got lost on the way, the people can propose it again.

In the safety-net everybody can talk with each other. So the network is open and new people can join.

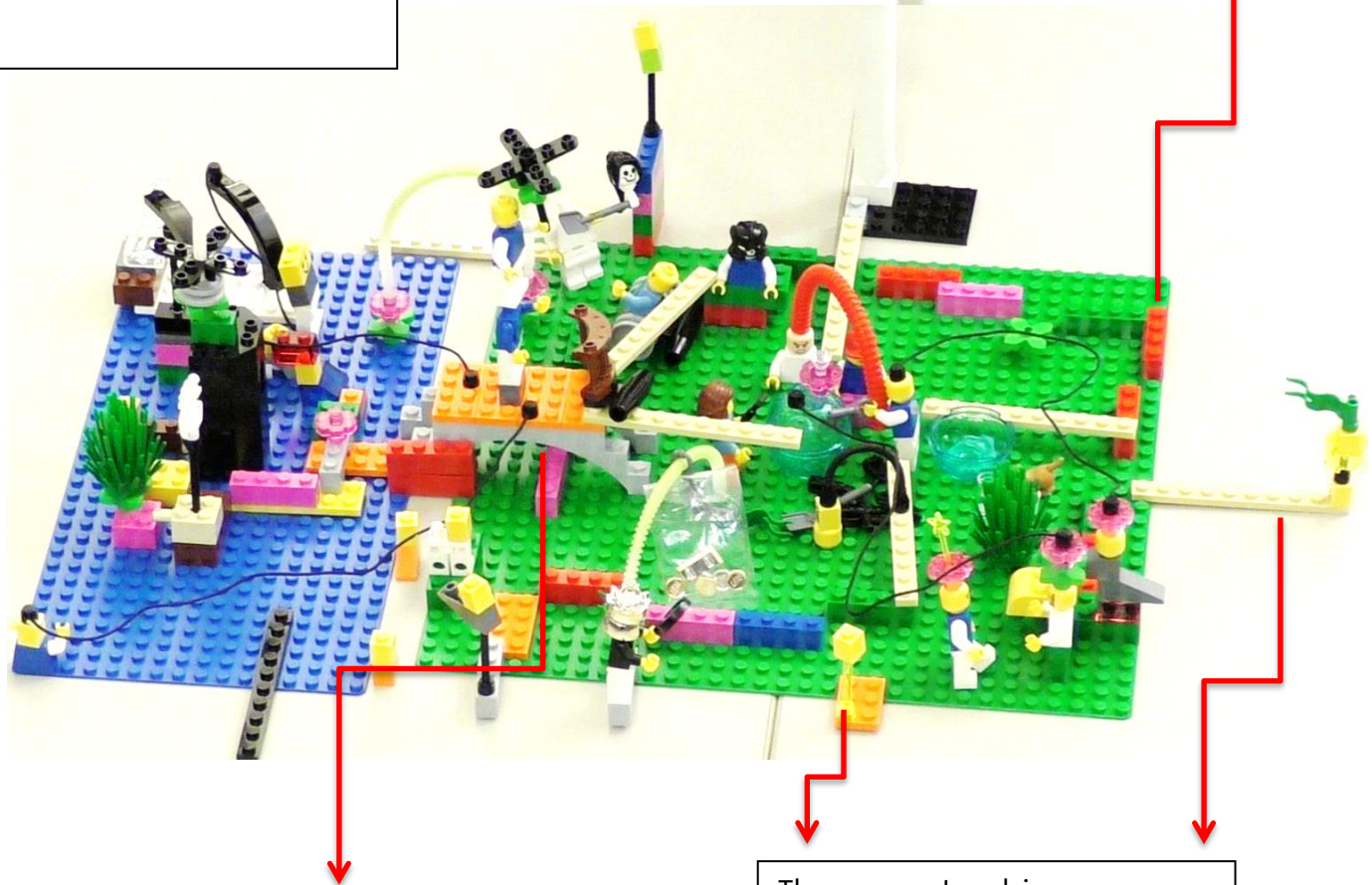
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### Group 3

A “wizard” has overview and helps people “saving the world”. He knows the different minds (cf. Five Minds for the Future) and can bring them together.

A wall around the network makes it a safe space, but it includes gaps to let people in or out.



Left: blue ground is “the city of the future”.

The green ground is the network. It leads to the city of the future.

There are bridges to get from present to future, which have to be built by the network.

The green network is a very complex set-up with different people that is watched critically from outside (=yellow eyes)

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In the network there are different characters. For example workers or someone, who takes care of the money.



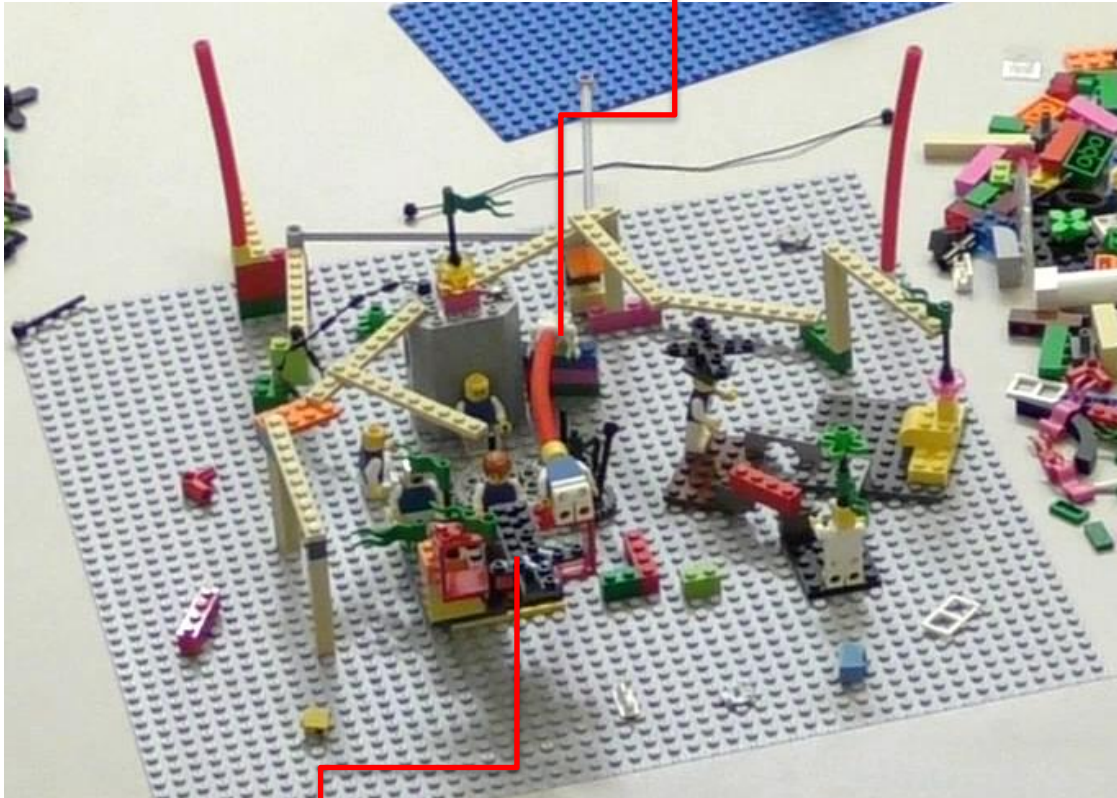
The network has a common goal (=the world) which is precious (symbolized by a diamond on top, and a pink blossom). People work together to save it.

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*Group 4*

Centerpoint of Knowledge: This is the centre of the network



Window of opportunity: Here people can see their visions and can mentally fly away.

The flags symbolize different ideas that influence visions.

Network session “Networking on Sustainable Development: How does the ideal network look like?”



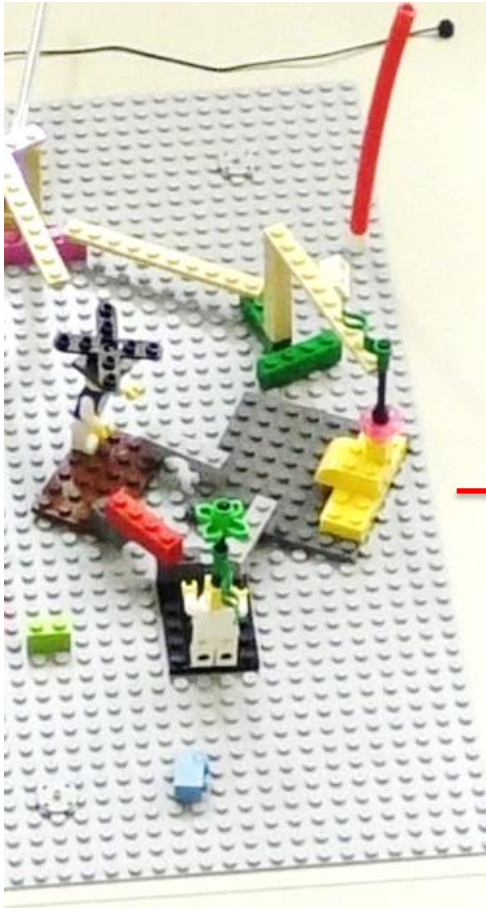
There are different types of centres of knowledge:

- 1) The tower or castle of knowledge
- 2) Knowledge of formal information
- 3) The dynamic centre of knowledge

If the people use all the knowledge and experiences, they get in an higher level (red tube)

This knowledge leads to the window of opportunity.

Network session “Networking on Sustainable Development: How does the ideal network look like?”



This is the second, separated network, like a sub network.

It symbolizes that networks have different centres, where things come together.

But the people there are integrated in the whole process.

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The main points that are included in the models of the different ideal networks are diverse and each group focussed on different aspects they deemed as important. The most prominent features of the models are summarised here.

Group 1: creativity and openness, a positive atmosphere

Group 2: the process of becoming part / building a network, safety, allowing for trying out new things

Group 3: the goal of a network (here the (sustainable) city of the future), and how to reach it by using the diversity of its members for a common goal

Group 4: the complexity of knowledge, and how to use the network to overcome and gain from it

According to the models built in the LSP session, key features of networks for sustainable development are

- process orientation
- overcoming gaps and barriers
- openness / exchange
- flexibility
- common goals