URBAN LABORATORIES WITHOUT PEOPLE. FROM THE GERMAN QUARTER IN UTAH TO THE SMART CITY IN NEW MEXICO

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Aerial View German and Japanese Villages (May 27, 1943)

A long time ago I read [Dead cities. Ecology, catastrophe and revolts](#). Some of the stories detailed by [Mike Davis](#) are creepy, especially in everything that has to do with the use of the central desert of the United States as hidden territory for carrying out nuclear tests. The book is a compendium of uneven stories about Las Vegas, Los Angeles, and also contains **a surprising story**. The [German Village in the Utah desert](#), built in early the 1940s at the [Dugway Proving Ground](#) (the book you can [read in PDF](#) and the chapter is titled *Berlin's skeleton in Utah's closet*):

Berlin's most remote, secret and orphaned suburb is in the salt desert, approximately ninety miles southwest of Salt Lake City. "The German Quarter," as it is officially referred to on declassified US Army Dugway Proving Ground maps, is the remnant of a large German/Japanese "doomed quarter," built by Standard Oil in 1943. This quarter played a crucial role in the last great public project of the New Deal government: the incineration of the cities of eastern Germany and Japan.

The US military government needed to **verify the deadly effect of its new war materials** which it wanted to apply in the blood and fire bombardment of Nazi Germany. It was necessary to **bomb the large urban population centers**, in order to break the social support of the population towards the regime. Attack cities with the highest deadly capacity possible. To do this, it was necessary to have a **test bench** that resembled the construction details of typical German cities in terms of distance between buildings, façade and roof materials, type of windows, etc. Davis' account abounds in detail, some terrifying: the hiring of [Mendelsohn](#) as director of construction, the role of the British government in promoting this solution to bombing German cities, the construction of a replica of a Japantown,...

Why has this come to my mind? Because it had to come: we already have the [announcement of a private corporation](#) willing to **build a city for 350,000 inhabitants, but which will have no residents**. This is how it is presented by **[Pegasus Global Holding](#)**. It is about building a "city" that serves as a **technological laboratory** for experimenting with new technologies for the city. Also in the desert, of course. It's not exactly the idea of a city as a laboratory. Without inhabitants, there is no city. Without inhabitants, there is no intelligence. An experimental city to test potential technologies in a vacuum can only generate passive solutions for buildings and infrastructure for utilities. Which isn't too bad either. But possibly it is much more effective to think about technological testing models opening them from the beginning to real situations, with real people using, transforming and appropriating the possibilities of the city and its resources. The connection between both projects is forced, but it is worth it if only as an excuse to learn about the hidden history of the military tests of the Second World War, and to dedicate a few lines to something that is obvious: that the city is people and the Technologies are for people. From the looks of it, the project is still a happy idea in its early stages, but it is symptomatic.

P.S. In a post by [Treehugger < /a>in which they echo the theme, I discover that, apparently, in the latest installment of **Indiana Jones** a ghost town also used for nuclear tests appears. I wonder if Dugway was the inspiration for the script?](#)

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