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[00:00:00] **Frank:** We should be able to adapt and adaptability is like this beautifully human thing. It's one of the most human things about us. And I think our governance should reflect that humanity too. Are you

[00:00:15] **Fanni:** interested in the difference among hope, knowledge, and prediction? What do you think about our responsibility in imagining better futures? How can we use predictions better to prevent nightmarish scenarios? Stay tuned for answers from Frank Elavsky.

[00:00:37] **Intro-outro:** What is the future for cities? Do you want to learn more about that?

[00:00:40] Do you want to know how others think about them? Do you want to be part of the conversation? Then this is the right place. Welcome to

[00:00:48] **Fanni:** What is the Future for Cities podcast. Today I will interview Frank Elavsky. An accessibility and data interaction researcher. We will talk about his vision for the future of [00:01:00] cities, epistemology, urban experimentation, AI, government as secondary to people, anarchist thinking, and many more.

[00:01:10] So let's start with a proper introduction. Frank Elavsky researches, designs, engineers, contributes to standards, and talks about things at the intersection of data, work, and accessibility. He considers himself a maker and a builder before anything else, but he likes to think he also does this work critically.

[00:01:34] Frank is a PhD student and researcher at the Human Computer Interaction Institute at Carnegie Mellon University. And with that, Frank, welcome to the podcast. Thank you so much for your time. I highly appreciate your appearance on the podcast. Let's jump right in. What does the future of cities mean to you?

[00:01:52] **Frank:** This is a good question. A big question. I thought about this obviously since we first talked because [00:02:00] it's so interesting. I think looking at my background is the best way for me to really say what it means to me. I spent several years as a community organizer, and that means that I worked with like neighbors or community members pretty locally situated near me.

[00:02:16] And we tried to take action to like, broadly speaking, make the world better, but specifically just improve our community in some way, shape or form. And that was on lots of ends of the spectrum. Sometimes it was as simple as we had the power to do something. We just did it. But other times it's like we're fighting a landlord or a slumlord or a corrupt mayor or whatever.

[00:02:35] We're trying to like politically have some action that changes things. And so that kind of building of support and working towards like safety and happiness and connectivity, a sense of belonging. All of that kind of goes into what I think of what is a city. Is like this collection of these small communities that all sort of come together.

[00:02:58] And then when I think about what's the [00:03:00] future, that's, I don't know, it gets interesting pretty quick. I like to use this quote by David Graeber all the time, and I think it really applies here. But when I think of the future, I'm thinking of possibilities, right? It's hopeful, a hopeful framing to me.

[00:03:16] Graeber's quote is, The ultimate hidden truth of the world is that it is something we make and could just as easily make differently. And I love that. It's just simple. And it's hopeful. He's an anthropologist and historian and talked some of like the worst sort of things throughout human history. And yet he has this really hopeful kind of message.

[00:03:41] And I think about that when I think about like, what does the future really mean? Why would you have a whole conversation with somebody about the future? Is it about what cities could be or what could become cities? Is a city really just about the physical place that we occupy together or is there something like really more [00:04:00] meaningful or more interesting to think about when we imagine the future of cities?

[00:04:05] And so I've kind of in this big blob of thinking about like, what could it be? It could be a lot of stuff. I definitely really go back to my organizing days about how we can just change the world around us. And so when I think about the future of cities, I think about how can we actually empower people to do more things.

[00:04:25] I think maybe to me the future of cities is about freedom of action and being able to make the cities what we want them to be. That's interesting to me, but also about who's involved in it and what a city allows us to do. I think it's an interesting kind of space to just stoop when we think about the future.

[00:04:46] What can we do because of our city?

[00:04:49] **Fanni:** That question, what can we do because of our city? Such a fascinating one. Isandutman on the podcast also talked about how she changes her [00:05:00] behavior depending on which city she is in.

[00:05:03] **Frank:** She also

[00:05:04] **Fanni:** said that we are the product of the city, of the culture we live in or we experience.

[00:05:11] Could you please give us a short description of your educational background?

[00:05:17] **Frank:** So educationally, I am presently a PhD student and I'm studying computer science, but I'm situated in human computer interaction and that's a broad space. So I could be doing human studies kind of research. So very science y stuff with people and experiments.

[00:05:33] I could be designing things, coming up with new ideas. And I could also be just like kind of a computer scientist who hopes to somehow study how technology interacts with people. And I'm kind of a mix of the last two presently, but I'm also very much interested in specifically accessibility. That's the area of research that I currently study.

[00:05:57] My larger research questions are like, how are people [00:06:00] with disabilities excluded from the use of technology or what are ways in which technology can facilitate better lives for people with disabilities, broadly speaking, my prior education that very messily led to where I am today, it started actually as an interest in theology and philosophy, so a little bit of religion, but I actually like leaned really heavy into the philosophy stuff.

[00:06:23] And also I had a second degree in my undergrad, so a B. A. Theology, Philosophy, and a B. S. in Computer Information Systems. And that led me to professional stuff, but I found that I can't escape like the philosophy stuff either.

[00:06:39] **Fanni:** Thank you for this description. I think it clears out our conversation much more about questions than about answers, I think.

[00:06:48] So you described the city as a collection of small communities to come together. So my question is, do you feel that the city is this kind of collection [00:07:00] currently?

[00:07:01] **Frank:** I think so. And I think broadly defined, yes, absolutely. Formally or otherwise. Sometimes there are cities will have like formal kind of neighborhoods or areas, but also there's just human relationships are often very fluid within cities and there's kind of groups or areas or regions with particular vibes, but also there's really small, super tight knit communities within cities.

[00:07:25] And I think that sort of the really interesting thing to me is how all of those things create this like tapestry that is a city, that it's hard to just talk about a city at a really high level without highlighting what I think are really interesting little pockets of that city that make it interesting or distinct or cute or fun or whatever.

[00:07:48] **Fanni:** I'm asking this because sometimes in my conversations, I get the feeling that Although the city should serve the people, it is not doing that. And that's why I'm [00:08:00] very happy that you said that you still think of the city as the connection of communities.

[00:08:06] **Frank:** Yeah.

[00:08:07] **Fanni:** And I also understand your hopeful approach to the future of basically anything I would assume.

[00:08:15] **Frank:** Probably, yeah.

[00:08:15] **Fanni:** I'm reading the book titled Beginning of Infinity from David Deutsch. He talks about how Everything is possible unless physics prohibits it.

[00:08:27] **Frank:** Nice.

[00:08:28] **Fanni:** Everything we think we can't do is just the figment of our imagination. So, it's a hopeful picture for the future. Do you feel hopeful about our future?

[00:08:40] **Frank:** Honestly, no. I think I'm rather grim about the future. I think the only thing we can do that is meaningful or actionable is hope. And is fueled by hope. So like, I'm like 98 percent probably not hopeful, but that 2 percent is what I live for [00:09:00] and what I take action on and what matters. And that I think a lot of possibilities exist for what the world could become and what our cities could be.

[00:09:09] And I hold on passionately on the things that I think it should be. And that, whether or not those things come true, I don't know. Yeah, whether or not I'm hopeful the majority of the time, I don't think should deter me from still acting on what is hopeful. That makes sense.

[00:09:28] **Fanni:** Could you please reiterate this last idea?

[00:09:31] **Frank:** Yeah, this actually comes from theology. This passage in the New Testament. It's very funny. I end up talking about theology sometimes I'm not religious. Not at all religious, but the religion is interesting, right? But there's this passage about faith the size of a mustard seed can move mountains And when you think of like, okay, you compare a mustard seed to what why is that such a comparative thing?

[00:09:57] Why not something that's non comparative? It's meant to make [00:10:00] you think small. Smallness can have huge impact in what you do, right? And so I think in the same terms, like, if I compare the mass of my body, I don't know, compared to the mass of mustard seed, I'm primarily non faith, right? Primarily non hope or something.

[00:10:14] Primarily non whatever. But that little piece is the thing, the thread that I think ends up sowing the future. It should be at least. People don't do much when they aren't hopeful. And I'm not hopeful, but what I do is done out of hope, usually.

[00:10:34] **Fanni:** Thank you for the allegory. Something like that. It makes it easier to understand.

[00:10:40] And then if this hope creates the threads to create the future in your understanding, what does hope mean to you?

[00:10:49] **Frank:** What does hope mean to me? Oh, interesting. What a good question. I think hope, it's a transient [00:11:00] thing concretely. It's largely felt. I can't escape a definition of hope that doesn't involve physiologically how I feel about the world.

[00:11:11] And I think I can intellectualize hope as some idea and set of concepts separate from my body. Sure. But like my body is very tied up within hope. So I just wanted to say that as a huge disclaimer, cause I am about to jump into ideas. But my body is, like, literally how I feel about stuff is what fuels what I have hope in.

[00:11:31] But what I would say, hope really means to me, it is a set of beliefs that may or may not be grounded in what is reasonable to assume happens. It's a set of outcomes or imagined futures that are believed to be better or ideal or good in some way. And hope in particular, separate from like an act of [00:12:00] prediction or knowledge, hope is different because it doesn't necessarily always have evidence.

[00:12:06] And hope is acted on without some sort of concrete knowing or safety or guardrails. We can kind of hope outside the realm of what might be possible or reasonable.

[00:12:20] **Fanni:** I will poke around this a bit more. In episode 222, Adam Dor talks about his hope, a brighter vision on the future. Which is based on scientific fact that we are going into a 10 to 15 year era when four very important fields of our lives, transportation, energy, food, and labor, Will be disrupted with clean technology.

[00:12:51] Even just one would change our whole lifestyles, but there are four of these. And his hope is very much based [00:13:00] on his scientific work. And you just said that hope is not the same as knowledge. How do you differentiate between the two? What does knowledge mean in this context and why do you differentiate the two?

[00:13:13] **Frank:** We can have so much hope that we think we know stuff. They're so convinced, I hope, that it kind of becomes the same as knowledge to us. That's just something funny we can do. But in this particular sense, from a philosophy of science, You would say that knowledge is awe posterior. It's stuff that already happened that we can know hasn't happened is awe priori.

[00:13:38] We don't know. We develop hypotheses. So a hypothesis is in a sense, a hope that a scientist has, but actually we really, I think, inject hopes into our hypotheses. Hypotheses are sort of the formulation of an idea that we might hope for. I would say you can absolutely have hope and science coexist. I would say though [00:14:00] that hope doesn't require science or evidence, but it's great when they work together.

[00:14:04] I would say that sounds like a great hopeful scientific future. I think that's lovely. I think that we have perhaps enough existing knowledge to say a reasonable prediction like that. And I still think it's hopeful. I would also say there's always a chance it won't happen and something terrible happens instead, who knows.

[00:14:22] **Fanni:** That's also fair. Before we move on to other stuff, you made the distinction between hope, knowledge, and prediction.

[00:14:31] **Frank:** Yeah.

[00:14:32] **Fanni:** What is prediction? Because that's also a very murky term, which we use out of the blue and without really differentiating between prediction, vision, foresight, insight, peeking into the future.

[00:14:46] What does prediction mean to you?

[00:14:48] **Frank:** I think prediction is one of the most powerful sort of things we do with, in the large space of what's called epistemology, but just knowing or development of [00:15:00] knowledge as humans. All machine learning is founded on statistical concepts of prediction, but also prediction fuels pretty much all of finance and economics nowadays.

[00:15:10] So prediction is super important. Prediction is essentially, you start with a set of observations, whatever those are. Could be data, formalized computational data, but it could also be just in the field observations like scientists might have. Start with observations, and you develop what you call a model, which is a theory about a relationship between those observations.

[00:15:34] And that model can then hopefully produce outcomes that we think will happen with a set of inputs that haven't yet happened based on our model. So like all these birds seem to fly south for the winter to get nice and warm. Is it opposite in Australia? Do they fly north? What do they do? I don't know.

[00:15:54] Anyway, so northern hemisphere, our birds fly south to get toasty for the winter. And [00:16:00] I guess if I was a northern hemisphere scientist, I would think all birds fly south, right? When the winter hits. And that is based on a set of observations, and my prediction is that any kind of bird that I meet that has a migratory pattern will travel south.

[00:16:13] That prediction can form a hypothesis and I might test it down in Australia. It turns out a lot fly north because of, you know, how the equator works, but yeah, that's just an example of kind of how predictions work and models as a concept pretty much fuel. I think most all major forces in technology and finance today.

[00:16:34] **Fanni:** I will give you another example where we use prediction in city planning and turn out to be bad. It's called the predict and provide approach. We analyze the data from the traffic. There are many more cars, there are traffic jams, so we provide more roads. However, then

[00:16:54] **Frank:** we

[00:16:54] **Fanni:** realize that there are more roads, so they are using their cars more, which creates all [00:17:00] more just traffic jams.

[00:17:01] Instead, we are providing them more opportunities in transportation. And for example, more public transport, active transport, whatever. You said that predictions hopefully bring us to a better future. How can we make predictions which bring us to a better future without repeating this huge, colossal mistake?

[00:17:25] In my opinion, that was a mistake, because we are now reaping the consequences of our cities not being able to serve the active transport need, or we need to use our cars to go to anywhere, basically. Not necessarily every city, but that could be a generalization. How can we make predictions which create more or better future scenarios?

[00:17:48] **Frank:** I love this question because I've been thinking about this sort of space of things philosophically for quite a while now. The very short answer that I would give before I talk a lot. [00:18:00] is that you should not always act based on predictions. And what I actually mean by that is that predictions, what I have just talked about, you take a set of things we have observed, you develop a model, you try and then use that to predict new things that happen.

[00:18:17] Where does innovation fit in a model of things already observed? It doesn't. Really good, divergent ideas cannot be predicted. And that means they're risky because they don't fit within the model. And I think that sometimes we need to innovate. And I think that that goes to the road problem, right? Like, adding more lanes is an obscene thing to do, in hindsight, of course.

[00:18:45] But it's because the model limits our imagination of what could be. And this is where hope comes in. This is where we're now no longer acting on prediction, we're acting on hope. Because hope doesn't have evidence. Or maybe it does, in the case of [00:19:00] public transit it does. This example, there's probably good things we can base our decisions on.

[00:19:05] But in some cases, cause I'm an inventor, right? I invent technology, it's what I do. And often times there is no model for the thing I want to explore. Why do we predict is an important question. Why would we do it? It's risk management. We predict because we want to know how things are going to be so that we can act accordingly to set up an ideal world.

[00:19:26] That's good and bad. It's good because it acts like an act of conservation, right? But it's bad in the sense when conservation shouldn't be the answer. We should not conserve roads for cars. That's bad. It's a bad use of things. We actually need something that is not conservative. A different type of approach.

[00:19:45] And I don't mean conservative just in the political sense. I mean in the philosophical sense of conservation. Keeping things going the way that they have been. And that's what models and predictions do. They keep things, we've developed a scope. And within this scope, we have a sense of [00:20:00] control and to some people, lawmakers, people with budgets, it is safer to imagine, well, let's just keep going this way, no matter what, because we don't know what will happen if we do this other stuff.

[00:20:13] **Fanni:** And you say that models can help us with experimenting with new ideas.

[00:20:18] **Frank:** I would say models don't. I say that that's the limit of models. Models are good when we want to explore a sort of conservation of things. Generative AI, not to just bring it up out of the blue, you might think, Oh, I go to mid journey.

[00:20:37] If you're familiar with that is where you can like give it a text prompt and it gives you an image and you think, well, that is a model producing something novel, right? Right. Yes and no. It's novel maybe in the sense that that particular arrangement has never happened, but the way it arranges has happened.

[00:20:55] And the things it is basing that arrangement on did all happen. [00:21:00] And so it is a reproduction and rearranging of existing stuff. In order for models, for example, in generative spaces like art to continue to be cool and interesting, we actually still need humans to make really provocative art down the road.

[00:21:16] And maybe we'll have truly generative models come about in our day and age. But up until now, the way we define models, they're just not capable of actual innovation beyond their set of observations.

[00:21:30] **Fanni:** Then how can we experiment with new ideas? You asked the

[00:21:34] **Frank:** right person. That's what I do. I experiment with weird little ideas.

[00:21:39] I'd like to think that's what I do. I would say the short answer when it comes down to it is the matter of investment and priority. It happens at the city level, especially when it's prioritized, but in research, a research environment, it's encouraged. We get funding to do this, right? What if cities had funding to explore?

[00:21:59] There's so [00:22:00] little room to make mistakes in cities, but it doesn't have to be that way. Cities can do more, and some do, right? Some really do experiment with like a new policy or a new way of arranging things, and I want more of that. I think some of the best advancements in the last several hundred years have been because somebody was like, what if we make a bus or what if trains could be in cities, but smaller, that kind of stuff that takes someone really having kind of a radical idea the first few times it happens.

[00:22:31] I want more of that. And it's really just money and priorities. It all comes down to politics and money.

[00:22:37] **Fanni:** I'm just bringing this up not to talk about smart cities because you haven't mentioned them. But Michael Haley in episode 165 talked about how their SMART program, SMART Christchurch program is the R& D department of their city or Christchurch City Council, which is just an amazing interpretation of an idea to experiment, [00:23:00] to see what's possible and then apply it on a wider scale.

[00:23:04] Before we move on, could you please explain to us what epistemology means?

[00:23:09] **Frank:** It's one of the major pillars of study in philosophy, and it is the study of how we know what we know, which is very broad. So science is a particular practice with a particular sort of set of epistemological concerns and methods.

[00:23:30] That isn't the only way to produce knowledge. Science isn't the only way we produce knowledge in a lot of different ways and have historically as well. What we even mean by knowledge or what we know, knowledge versus prediction versus hope, those all fall under epistemology as kind of an area of study.

[00:23:49] **Fanni:** We have danced around this area. What does innovation mean to you?

[00:23:54] **Frank:** Innovation can have a lot of broad definitions, but what it means to me, innovation is a [00:24:00] process actually that enables new possibilities. Innovation may itself produce a novel thing, but it also may produce new methods or new systems or new something.

[00:24:16] But really to me, innovation is about an expansion of what we can do. So in science, it's sort of an expansion of what we know. Or academia and research in general is often an expansion of knowing and within knowing also doing and innovation is an expansion of what we can do. I would say anything that allows us to do something we haven't been able to do before is innovation.

[00:24:42] We could use existing stuff to combine them in ways that allow us to do new things. Or maybe we have a new thing that allows us to do stuff we've never been able to do before. I'd say that all falls under innovation. Innovation is also contextual. So you might appropriate [00:25:00] technology or something from some other city.

[00:25:02] And innovate in your own city, you can even replicate innovation in your city, you maybe you just do the same thing some other city did, that's still innovating in your context, right? Because your city hasn't done it yet.

[00:25:14] **Fanni:** Maybe I'll get back to AI, but you said that you are 2 percent hopeful and 98 percent not so much.

[00:25:24] With this imbalance, I would say, what kind of future do you imagine for our cities?

[00:25:30] **Frank:** I would say it's our job to imagine the future in a way that's hopeful, even if we don't think we have the evidence of that presently, it is our job to innovate, to think radically, to make a better world. And that 2 percent is so important.

[00:25:50] What were the four pillars that your prior guest talked about?

[00:25:53] **Fanni:** Transportation, energy, food, and labor.

[00:25:57] **Frank:** Wow, that's really good, [00:26:00] actually. Those might be the four things I care most about in Cities, so that's great. I love that phrase. So if I think about the worst things It definitely falls into stuff like housing.

[00:26:12] It's all about space, right? The arrangement, the spatiality of a city is hugely important. It's also why no two cities should ever be the same because they geographically will always be different. And a city should sort of reflect that geography in thoughtful ways. But also, when it comes to space, one of the biggest things to me is housing.

[00:26:37] The people and where they reside in that space is hugely important. And then also the second thing is how you get around that in that space. So that's transportation usually, but you can even think more broadly about other things about getting around like internet access or other things about movement of the self, not just physically within physical space, but digitally [00:27:00] as well, whatever.

[00:27:01] In my least hopeful sense, I kind of look at the worst things about cities today, and it's often when it comes to housing, suburbs, I think are a state on the earth. They're just so bad and so inefficient and so expensive, none of them, like, economically are built to last, so they just keep becoming huge expenses on every city.

[00:27:22] They make so many people car dependent. So I would say suburbs aren't good. If I want to be hopeful about the future, we got to do something about those things. We got to somehow, I don't know, got to do something smart, abolish summers. No, that's extreme, but somehow make it so that we reduce the space between people that might be density.

[00:27:44] But it might just be better transportation, something that improves the spatial problem that suburbs create in cities, I think is hugely important. And then the other thing actually goes to labor. And I love that that's one of the four pillars, labor in a city, because I always talk about what can [00:28:00] a city help you do?

[00:28:01] That's largely a job. I have moved to a new city for work and the only other times I didn't do it for work, it was for college, which is basically work. And cities enable that to happen. I also think there's a lot of other reasons why what you can do in a city matters. Recreation, I think, and just other stuff that isn't work.

[00:28:23] But I think that what cities can enable you to do is ultimately, I think, what keeps cities alive. I think the cities that will last. That one, that's going to be the deciding factor in the future. If a city doesn't let you do anything and whether that's like restrictive, right? Like say it's just a super highly policed part of town.

[00:28:44] Nobody wants to live there. It's oppressive, literally. Why would you live in that part of the city? Sucks. Get out if you can. And that part of the city will die. Or is dying in a lot of places here in America, especially, but parts of the city that maybe aren't restrictive, well, those have a better [00:29:00] chance.

[00:29:00] And then the parts of the city that aren't just not restrictive, but actually actively empowering people in some way or another, those rule. And I think those will give a lot of life to cities. I hope that what you can do really matters in a city. What was the fourth one? Food. That's actually what I love about cities is eating.

[00:29:18] All I care about is eating. But I understand that that framing is probably more about the industry and the supply chains and all of the bigger picture, like agriculture, et cetera. But for me, I mean, like literally consuming good food matters.

[00:29:32] **Fanni:** You have been touching upon some of these. What are your three biggest fears or concerns regarding the future of cities?

[00:29:40] **Frank:** It goes to what I've already said, very short 1 2 3, and I'll maybe unpack them a little bit, but I really fear, I love and fear the space of smart cities, so technology has a lot of dangers associated with it, I think. The second one, and this is very American of me to say, so not a [00:30:00] lot of places will have the same relationship here, but it's policing, and then the third one is housing, and specifically landlords, and that's also very American in my framing because I don't know how landlords work across the world.

[00:30:13] This is an international audience that's going to listen to me talking about this stuff, so I just have to have a huge caveat on all of that, which it's very much framed by my American experience. Yeah, here in Pittsburgh, we have surveillance technologies that are exploited by the police literally just to oppress neighborhoods and surveil them to increase essentially quotas for the police station, but also just to incarcerate people.

[00:30:37] It's those projects are pushed forward under the guise of smart city stuff. It's bad. It stains the vision of what cities could be right and how we could use technology and just way better ways. And so for me, surveillance, technology, and police, the first two go hand in hand a lot. But police by itself, even without, like, the co opting of the smart [00:31:00] city vision, police are just super expensive.

[00:31:03] Like, most city budgets go to policing in the United States. You could do a million other things with that. Why? We're just wasting our money on policing. It's so unnecessary. It's so unnecessary. As a numbers guy, it drives me nuts. We gotta be able to spend our money on something more effective than this stuff.

[00:31:23] And then, obviously housing, I think that landlords do not provide much value to a city. They are largely an extractive force, and most cities only actually have a handful of very powerful landlords, which control typically large chunks of the city. I think this is bad. Why would we do that? We're like paying fealty to a small lord, literally.

[00:31:45] Why? I don't want to live like a peasant. Our city shouldn't encourage peasantry. There's other ways we can imagine housing. Even if we still have private ownership of like 25 percent of a city, which some American cities are just [00:32:00] dominated by certain people or families. And like, why, why not limit that? I love having a personal space.

[00:32:08] So I like the idea of owning your own thing. But owning someone else's space that they live in, that starts to get hairy to me, I don't know. There's this point at which in the scale where it gets really bad. Those are the three big ones for me, definitely. I think in like a hundred years, we're going to look back on landlording and be like, What were we doing?

[00:32:28] And policing, how much were we policing? We're going to look in the past and be like, Historians are going to write about just this like ancient, terribly primitive people. And those will be two of the main things I think historians will talk about.

[00:32:40] **Fanni:** Could you explain to us what Smart City means to you?

[00:32:43] **Frank:** So, PACT, again, I want to just talk about that hopeful slice, like what I want it to mean.

[00:32:50] Not necessarily what it does mean. Because what it does mean is it's so often co opted by corporations trying to essentially extract public data, for whatever [00:33:00] means. They're a data broker and they put little robots or cameras all over the place and they sell that data. Or sell it to police departments, which is the most common buyer of these types of data.

[00:33:09] So that stuff's bad, but there's a lot more we could do. One of the nicest things, it's a really simple technology I think a lot of us take for granted. One of the first things that I think made us city smarter is tap cards for public transit. Oh, you go to a city where they've got a good system for that.

[00:33:27] Oh, it's so nice. You can use any credit card or whatever. It's just so fluid and so free. It just enables you to go anywhere. Love that. Love it. Then you go to a city where it's terrible. Oh, you gotta like, get some weird special card. It expires in a set amount of time if you're a tourist. It's just, oh, it's so terrible.

[00:33:46] I hate your city. That, to me, is the cornerstone of a smart city. Is the technology itself enables movement and freedom new activities among people? [00:34:00] It also reduces tedium. That's huge. There's a lot of things that just suck. Nobody likes that whatever and like, yeah, let's find smart ways to get rid of whatever it is that that is.

[00:34:14] I think that also a lot of cities, there's a lot of ecological concerns for that city functioning properly. An example might be Mexico City, right, and the water situation. Or it could be LA and all of the horrible concrete kind of shoots throughout the city. But like a smart city could just have, it doesn't have to have like a high tech sort of digital smartness to it.

[00:34:36] It could just be really well designed with technology that already exists. It's not emerging technology. But it's something that's so good. You just don't think about it anymore. I think modern plumbing is an example of really what made a lot of cities smart. Nobody should think about plumbing at the citywide level.

[00:34:54] And when we figured that out, Ooh, human society got a lot better.

[00:34:58] **Fanni:** I assume based on your [00:35:00] answer that technology is more than just IT for you.

[00:35:04] **Frank:** Oh, absolutely. A hundred percent. I have a very broad view of technology. Linen is technology, a brilliant technology. Lots of people who are historians talk about how linen changed the world.

[00:35:16] A potato chip is actually technology. We consume it. But man, is that a brilliant piece of tech. I love a good potato chip. Mass produced potato chips are impressive. I love them. Incredible. Honestly.

[00:35:29] **Fanni:** Regarding policing, the main thing your numbers head is concerned about is the price of policing.

[00:35:38] **Frank:** Well, what the price buys you, what does it get you?

[00:35:42] The outcome really is what matters. And the outcome of American policing in particular isn't good. There's just tons of studies how more policing is just kind of bad for most communities. And I think that we can imagine what policing should do in new ways. Then [00:36:00] just sort of like enforcement of a particular set of things or like modern police officers do a million things that probably all should be separate jobs.

[00:36:10] Like traffic safety doesn't need to be the police. The same guy who can kill a bank robber is gonna catch me for speeding? That seems really weird. Like a huge waste of resources because the person catching me for speeding gets paid the same as a trained killer. I don't know if that needs to be the case, right?

[00:36:28] We're paying the salary of an extreme specialist to people who are actually generalists. That doesn't make sense. We need to cut that up. That's what a city should be doing anyway. One of the big things here in the States is you make a mental health check. Say somebody is having some trouble and you call and they send the police and often this ends in the police killing the person that came to help.

[00:36:51] Why? Why do we have these sort of roles when they should, I think, be when you call for a [00:37:00] mental health check, we should get a specialist specialized in mental health, somebody who's going to actually, I don't know, help the situation with their expertise. And they don't need a gun. If they needed a gun, you'd call the police, the gun guys, whatever.

[00:37:14] So I think what we get for our money is really poorly spent. Like, if I saw a business, any business that was trying to do everything at once and nothing really well, I wouldn't invest in that business. It's a terrible business. And that's what we do with our policing. Like, why don't we just run this more efficiently?

[00:37:32] **Fanni:** Thank you for the description. I have not much experience with policing, so thank you very much for explaining that. Which brings me to a question. What do you think the government's role is in establishing the future of cities?

[00:37:49] **Frank:** I always believe that governance is secondary to people in general, and this is very much to my like philosophical anarchist roots.[00:38:00]

[00:38:00] We created government. We preceded any sort of governance that's ever existed. And so, I really think the future of cities lies to us. And, government is a helpful tool in creating an ideal city that's great, but we don't need it. It's not necessary. It's really nice that some things are in place, and I love the idea of public transit, not private transit.

[00:38:27] There are some things where governance is probably the right path, but there are other cases where I think it might slow down progress, or you might get bad actors involved at a political level because there's money to be made resisting something, or there's money to be lost in letting something happen, and governance becomes that space of negotiation between these bodies of power.

[00:38:53] And I think sometimes, especially in my background as community organizing, you just got to bypass that and just do the thing that's good for the world. [00:39:00] I'm saying break laws, don't break laws. Don't get in trouble. I'm not going to tell all your listeners to go and break laws. But there's a lot of things you could do that just literally do not require the government.

[00:39:10] **Fanni:** I'm glad that we cleared it out, that government is a helpful tool and governance is a helpful tool, but not necessarily a compulsory action. And just secondary two people, which I assume it's an opportunity for our futures. What are the three biggest opportunities regarding the future of cities for you?

[00:39:31] **Frank:** I have one kind of silly answer and then actually three serious answers. My silly answer is just food. I just love food. Everywhere I go, anywhere I travel, all I want is good food. And honestly, my most hopeful opportunity is that every city has delicious food. That's all I want. That's it. Silly answer. Go on.

[00:39:52] So I think the opportunities are actually closely tied to my fears, for better or worse. So those three things I talked about. The first [00:40:00] one is that I think the biggest opportunity when it comes to technology is technology that's empowering. And it's specifically technology that allows people to do things that they couldn't have done otherwise, or it keeps people from doing things that they hated doing.

[00:40:14] Gets rid of tedium, whatever. I'd love for cities to do more of that stuff. And I think that, you know, it can be relatively low tech too. Public transit's often the thing, especially in America, you just need good transit, well designed transit, but also generally city planning and city design, I think ties into that pretty closely too.

[00:40:36] So the second thing I think is kind of a governance level thing, but it's not just divesting from police budgets, but I think reimagining what we could do with public service, I think would be huge. I don't know what libraries are like around the world, but I cannot stress enough that the American library is perhaps my favorite institution that we have conjured up as humans.[00:41:00]

[00:41:00] I love libraries. They don't just do books, right? People always think libraries are just books. They do so much. I think some communities are literally held together by their libraries and every library I have ever interacted with, save for a couple in rich suburbs, are severely underfunded. And I would just, the simplest thing I would do, take half the police budget, put it in the libraries.

[00:41:25] That's it. That's all I do. Super simple. Obviously, I think smart people should come in and maybe make really nuanced decisions, but if I was in charge, that's what I would do. And then the last thing is housing. I talked about how I think suburbs are bad, but really, I could imagine good cities still having suburbs, because what I want, I think, is held back by suburbs.

[00:41:49] But maybe not. And so the real hopeful thing I think is just what I talked about earlier, which is reducing that distance between people, I think is huge because [00:42:00] cities are about space, spatial relationships, and space determines what we can do, who we meet. So much and suburbs create distance. And so I'm not saying we all need to live in a hyper dense, like high rise tower in the center of town, but we need to be able to get around and be able to move.

[00:42:21] And we need to be able to make decisions and even move within our own city, like from apartment to apartment, whatever mobility is so key. And so I'm very hopeful actually in the future. I think the biggest opportunity is probably a movement housing, that space of things. I truly believe in the next hundred years we'll probably move beyond the concept of landlords.

[00:42:42] Hope. That goes hands in hands with my hatred of suburbs as landlords.

[00:42:46] **Fanni:** Coming back to reimagining public service and the policing and how we do these things, David Deutsch, the writer of Beginning of Infinity, he comes back to Karl [00:43:00] Popper's idea that Governance and politics shouldn't be about who should rule, but how we can remove bad policies and bad actors.

[00:43:12] And that should be the basis for our politics and for our governance.

[00:43:17] **Frank:** Primarily focused on removal is really interesting. I think that that's important, should happen. I think there's probably larger principles that I think are important to governance. One of them is the ability for people to intervene on governance is really important.

[00:43:35] I think healthy societies allow people to not just protest, but their protest has action. That goes hand in hand with removal of bad policies, right? Who gets to remove the policy and how does it happen? Is like 99 percent of all political problems. It's a huge, but then imagine we live in a perfect world.

[00:43:55] We've removed all bad policies. I do think governance is about [00:44:00] generative stuff too, like policies that enable people to do stuff. Some things, some policies are good for producing more ideal outcomes at least. So I do think there is something in there about not just removal. But also generation of good stuff.

[00:44:16] **Fanni:** That's also part of the idea. But do you think that we could get to a point where there is no need for removal?

[00:44:24] **Frank:** I wouldn't want to. I think we always should be willing to remove stuff. or re evaluate stuff. We as humans change all the time, but also so do our circumstances, the world around us, et cetera.

[00:44:39] We should be able to adapt and adaptability is like this beautifully human thing. It's one of the most human things about us. And I think our governance should reflect that humanity too.

[00:44:49] **Fanni:** Which brings us to my last three question, what are the three biggest strengths regarding the future of cities for you?

[00:44:57] **Frank:** Okay, this one very seriously is food [00:45:00] and not just my silly answer on food, but like very seriously saying food I think the location of a city Often determines the cuisine that is possible there, that's like cheap, it's affordable, it's scalable, it's fresh, it's healthy, whatever. And I think there's so much that holds back some cities because of availability, because of whatever.

[00:45:24] And so I think that one of the greatest things about one of the strengths of cities in general is how food culture emerges. But I think the future of cities really tackling that to me might be one of the ultimate quests of human life is How can we get good food everywhere? How can any city just have like wonderful cuisine?

[00:45:46] And I think that people think space is the final frontier and I think good food is I think Exploring the distant reaches of space. That's cool But what if we could do [00:46:00] really interesting things with food here? I don't know. I think food's just limitless what you can imagine. And yeah, I'd love to see what cities do there.

[00:46:08] I think that to me that changes the role of cities from just function to just pure joy. We connect over food. Religions have formed over food. Communion is like the central act in Christianity, and it revolves around eating together. And I just think that food was probably the very first thing that started cities.

[00:46:30] People wanted to eat together. I swear, that's probably it. And, you know, I don't know, I'm not a historian or anthropologist, but it's probably the last thing we want to do together, too. In the future, at the very end of humanity, the final thing we do is The embers are burning. The heat death of the universe is here.

[00:46:47] We probably want to have a nice meal with the people we love and it's the ultimate quest is food. So that's my very serious answer to that. Also kind of silly but is my [00:47:00] serious answer. I would also say my next one is pretty cosmic as well. It's just the general endurance of the human spirit we see in cities, especially in really good cities and healthy cities.

[00:47:10] What people are just capable of never ceases to amaze me. Like we do incredible things and I think we should continue to hope in that there's another quote I want to bring in here is Ursula Le Guin my favorite sci fi author of all time one of my favorite people of all time She gave a talk at a book awards and it's one of the best speeches I've ever heard but there's this section of it That's just remarkable She says I think hard times are coming when we will be wanting the voices of writers Who can see alternatives to how we live now and who can see through our fear stricken society and it's obsessive technologies to other ways of being.

[00:47:55] We live in capitalism. Its power seems inescapable, [00:48:00] but so did the divine right of kings. And then she goes on for a little while and the very sort of end of the speech is, she says, The name of our beautiful reward is not profit. It's freedom. And she's talking about writing, but this applies to cities too.

[00:48:16] I think cities like the real dream, the vision of a good city is freedom is what you're capable of in that city. And I agree there is not a city in existence that doesn't have hard times coming. That's just how the world works. And we absolutely need people who are capable of seeing alternatives for our cities and of dreaming of what could be.

[00:48:37] I would say that's just the general human spirit. We don't have cities without people. You can't have a city without people. I'm sure you know this is very nerdy. The old Latin, which I don't even know what the Latin is. I just know the origin of the word city. It referred to more of citizen. We get city from it.

[00:48:56] So it was really about community member is the [00:49:00] origin of the word city. We now refer to city as like the physical space of a thing, but it was really more about community community membership, which I think is sort of beautiful because cities are nothing without people. Then the last thing, it is closely related to that, but like, why do we come together?

[00:49:19] Why don't we just all live in the woods? Why do we live in cities? Why would we be a member of something? I think brings out whatever it means to the person who answers that question, why a city matters. Everybody's going to probably have a different answer to that. I think that, that coming together, whether it's love or work or food.

[00:49:42] Or belonging or any kind of hope we bring to a space, whatever. I think that the sort of origin of cities is one of the best strengths of cities and why I'm at least still hopeful about the future of cities.

[00:49:57] **Fanni:** This is beautiful. Going back [00:50:00] to the origin of the city expression, I think it comes from the Greek word polis and then from the Latin word urbis and the polis is a combination of people who can do stuff together.

[00:50:13] Yeah. Before I would ask you even more interesting questions, can you recommend us hopeful sci fi? Because I understand what the quote was about. But I also think that the past creators majorly created dystopian futures. And I would love to have at least a few recommendations which are hopeful, which show us that Yes, there are bad features, but we could also do some stuff.

[00:50:44] So it's not even the Brave New World kind of discipline, but still good. It's a hopeful sci fi. Could you recommend us some

[00:50:54] **Frank:** authors

[00:50:54] **Fanni:** like that?

[00:50:55] **Frank:** Left Hand of Darkness by Ursula Le Guin [00:51:00] is one of the most impactful things I've ever read in my life. I just love it. I read Dune and I was like, Oh, I should get into other sci fi, but I read this right after it.

[00:51:09] Dudes like nothing to me now. It's a famous piece of literature affected a massive amount of science fiction. But yeah, Left Hand of Darkness changed me. It's so good. I think, I would say as far as science fiction goes, not only is it one of the most hopeful pieces of science fiction out there, but also it is genuinely radical in how it views what the future could be.

[00:51:34] And it's not totally idealistic. It's a great exploration of alternative, but good, interesting futures. It's interesting you talk about the tendency of science fiction to be dystopian, and I think that's true. And if we had time for another two hours, I could talk about apocalyptic science fiction, which I care a lot about, a big area of study for me when I was in an undergrad.

[00:51:57] I still think about it all the time, but you know, why do we [00:52:00] dream of the world being destroyed in the future? That'd be the one thing that I'd say, that's a good starting point. But there's another good piece that it's less hopeful. But it's so good, and it's good, I think, to reflect on our world. It require a little more maturity.

[00:52:19] So it's not just a pure dystopian piece. It's cerebral, right? Like brave new world or 1984 or something. Those are good reads, but they don't teach you to hope or look for a better world. But I'd say the parable of the sower by Octavia Butler is the second thing I'd recommend. If you want good sci fi, those are the two really good.

[00:52:37] **Fanni:** Thank you for your recommendations. Finally, there is some good ones. One reflection on the dystopian ones from my side, and I would be curious, why do you think that human creativity has been much more interested in the dystopian ones? I think that it's probably because it's much more easier to agree on what we don't like than what [00:53:00] we like.

[00:53:01] What is your reason that we have so much more dystopian interpretations of the future?

[00:53:08] **Frank:** So again, this is theology, like you go back to the book of Revelation. In the New Testament, and it is apocalyptic. It's about like the end of the world. Pretty grim. Terrible. And I think at the time, that story really resonated with people because they were presently this sort of new kind of religious cult, basically.

[00:53:31] And they were being persecuted by the state, by the religion they have now left behind. They left Judaism to follow this new path. An apocalyptic future, it starts out really grim, and then it's like, oh, but we get to be the good guys in the end. I think that that story resonated. It is how it's framed, but that story resonated with people in that particular context.

[00:53:55] And I think that all apocalyptic literature has to be You have to [00:54:00] view it through the context in which it was written. And I would say that why do we, today, care so much about it? Like, why is The Walking Dead so big? Why have zombies been a constant fascination? And you might say, like, oh, well, it's because people staring at their phones become zombies.

[00:54:18] But we've had zombie apocalyptic literature, especially in movies. Before smartphones, right? Like why have we really cared about that? And another apocalyptic thing that's really big is citywide destruction. This might be more relevant actually to the podcast. So like Kaiju originated in Japan and it's the destruction of a city.

[00:54:36] And that one, the metaphor is pretty obvious. Post atomic bomb, Mike is processing the literal destruction of a city. What does it mean? What does that mean? And sort of a reclaiming of the narrative of destruction. Really interesting how sometimes Godzilla becomes like an anti hero and like saves people fighting off a worse evil.

[00:54:59] [00:55:00] Why in an American context, I've thought a lot about why do we care so much about apocalypse And I think it's because we're an empire that is aging, probably a little bloated and by a little bit, I mean very bloated. And so I think when you're a bloated giant empire, you start imagining what's it like when it all falls apart because that reality is right around the corner.

[00:55:24] And I think it's a way of like socially, culturally processing the very real possibility that it's all going to fall apart. And what do we do with that? How do we make a world? I think that zombie literature and zombie media is super hopeful about humans coming together. Usually they band together to fight in the apocalypse.

[00:55:43] And usually it's very tragic. People always die. But there's this need for humans to come together, even if everything falls apart. Even if the space of our cities is crumbling and filled with dangers, we still want to come together. And I think that there's something about that story that [00:56:00] reminds us of our humanity, despite all the odds.

[00:56:03] So even in dystopian literature, there's this, like, thread that's really always pretty hopeful through it. It's usually never fully nihilistic, right? Usually. Sometimes it is just terrible. Just really depressing. Like, wow. When I read that, like the road, God, don't read the road if you want to be happy for a year.

[00:56:23] That's my take. Obviously, I could talk about this subject for a long time. I love this subject.

[00:56:27] **Fanni:** Thank you for the short version. You said in your less than silly answer, food, that we have so much potential on earth instead of going out to space. What do you think about space exploration versus staying on Earth as humanity?

[00:56:44] I

[00:56:45] **Frank:** think space feels like a place you can imagine without as much complexity or guilt involved. So I know why science fiction spends so much time occupying itself in space. It's [00:57:00] empty. It's a canvas that hasn't yet been painted. So that feels so free to put a new world into space as a place for imagining.

[00:57:10] But I think that if you start to mature in imagination a bit, you start to become concerned with actionable real things in your life that's around you. Okay. Maybe I'll never go to space and start a colony or something and build the ideal world, whatever. But like, what can I do here right now that's meaningful and produces some sort of ideal.

[00:57:34] And this actually goes to what I think Ursula Le Guin is talking about. She actually would probably argue that space is a good thing for our minds to think about because it does allow us to dream unburdened and empty canvas. What would we paint? What would we create? And that is good. I think we need that kind of unburdened thinking.

[00:57:59] We [00:58:00] need to dream of going to space someday. That's good. It's good for our brains to do that. But also we need to do the exact opposite and think very concretely and maybe use those dreams to inform what are the things we can do right here, right now. And yeah, I always come back to food because I think it gives life to very real relationships on a small scale.

[00:58:21] And it gives life to a city on a large scale, too. It works at every level, or it should, I think.

[00:58:28] **Fanni:** And then coming back to the question we left behind, you described generative AI currently not creating new knowledge, but just combining existing knowledge in a maybe new way at that specific context. What is artificial intelligence for you and how close are we to artificial general intelligence in your understanding?

[00:58:56] **Frank:** Artificial intelligence, I think, is best understood by [00:59:00] first defining an artifact or a thing we've created. You can get really weird and philosophical and say that all intelligence has been produced by humans. As far as we know it, and so it's all artificial, but if you're not going to be annoying, because that's annoying, that's an annoying philosophy thing to do, and you want to say, like, okay, what's an artifact?

[00:59:22] We're usually talking about, like, some physical thing we've created. So if you say, okay, what's an intelligence that we've created, there's a broad spectrum of things that could fall under that umbrella. Stuff we've had around actually for a long time, AI has been around a really long time. And I think in recent years, we've made massive advancements because of language models, large language models in particular.

[00:59:48] And I think that there are limits to what language can do. And I think the hope of an LLM is that you could reduce anything to language. And so [01:00:00] language becomes an intermediary between anything. So images, if we talk about them enough, we can create them, right? That the language becomes a thing between all things.

[01:00:12] But actually, there's a lot of stuff. Language doesn't do justice. It's inadequate. And I think that LLMs are maybe going to hold us back from general artificial intelligence. Or Artificial General Intelligence, however you want to say it. I think that language is not the path forward. Because that's not how we first learn.

[01:00:33] This goes back to epistemology actually. How do people learn? We experience the world before we get language. Experience precedes language. But a model is built on language. Language precedes experience. That is wrong. That's the wrong way to build intelligence. I think it's super powerful what we can do with it.

[01:00:52] Incredible. Unbelievable stuff can be done with an L and probably a lot of things we can even fake a lot of stuff like good [01:01:00] enough basically works and it's a thousand times faster than a human so let's go but when we really talk about real intelligence humans we feel before we speak our bodies hurt before we learn the word paint and there's a sort of situated thing that happens as well like we exist in history and space that informs how we learn and even how we use language that current large language models, they are not situated.

[01:01:32] They are universal, right? They are a collection of knowledge from all situations. And I think that there's something limiting to that. I think that the real way that human beings learn and not to fully anthropomorphize an ideal, right? But I think if you're going to produce a general intelligence, same way we've done with current AI, You have to have some kind of model that is a theory to start with.

[01:01:54] And I think, theoretically, we're going to have to have machines that can feel. that can [01:02:00] be born, that experience before they learn how to speak. I don't know. We got to have some level of development before we just like, Oh, well, here's all existing human words. That's an obscene thing to think about as a process of learning compared to how every other creature on earth actually learns.

[01:02:20] In philosophy, you call phenomenology. It's about like situated bodies and feeling things as a part of our learning process. a pet project of mine. I'm very interested in the phenomenology of artificial intelligence. We'll see. I don't know. Today, somebody could just publish a paper. Hey, I made a general AI.

[01:02:40] So could be surprised at any moment.

[01:02:42] **Fanni:** In your understanding, until we find a way to include inexplicit understand into creating an intelligence, we can't really talk about a general artificial intelligence.

[01:02:57] **Frank:** I think that our theory [01:03:00] of how to model intelligence presently, artificial intelligence, needs to change.

[01:03:06] So I'll say that much. I don't know if it has to be this embodied phenomenological type of model. Maybe that's not the right one either. But I think that our current model, which is very much language based. LLMs are like embody it perfectly. I think it will be limited because not everything reduces to language.

[01:03:25] Actually I talk about this in prototyping because I'm an inventor. One thing I talk about is why would you prototype? Because you want to communicate. Prototypes are a communication tool and they often speak better than words ever could. You show somebody something, they can feel it. They can see it in a situation.

[01:03:45] They can interact with it. Language doesn't do that. And so there's something that's beyond language, but also alongside it, that's very important in our process of learning and developing a sense of knowing about things [01:04:00] that LLMs just don't have that. And there's this whole missing dimension.

[01:04:04] **Fanni:** I will push back a little and ask you whether you have heard of how different AI models were able to generate new knowledge.

[01:04:14] In the sense that they were, for example, able to solve an unsolvable mathematical problem which humans couldn't solve. Or when an AI produced new materials in the combination of molecules, which again, humans couldn't think of. We can discuss whether that's new knowledge. That's the first step. On the other hand, it's also a new approach, whether that's an AI.

[01:04:44] **Frank:** I think the short answer is you're absolutely right. There are lots of things we have used AI for. Even if it's philosophically limited, it produces something novel. And I don't know if that's Every time I hear or read a [01:05:00] paper on this, it feels like people got lucky. I know that's just probably so insulting to all the researchers who actually work really hard on this.

[01:05:08] It feels like they found the needle in the haystack. Wow, that's wild you managed to do this, but it is actually very hard to reproduce anything like that. And until we can get to something I see from a scientific perspective, models are pretty dangerous because we need reproducibility and often they are by nature stochastic, so they're pretty unpredictable until we can get a sense of like some operationalized production of knowledge.

[01:05:39] It doesn't have to be the same as scientific knowledge, but some way for people to take a model and then really meaningfully replicate or reproduce that model's performance in a new situation. Until we can get to that point, I'm not really going to be too convinced. But yeah, I think that to your answer, people use models all the time to solve hard problems.

[01:05:58] I think that is [01:06:00] actually what most people use AI for in a research sense.

[01:06:02] **Fanni:** David Deutsch also talks about that we are far from AI until we understand how human creativity works. Because we can't really reproduce this process.

[01:06:16] **Frank:** I love that. I talk about queerness, actually, as one of the most distinct things that human beings are capable of.

[01:06:23] Queering is a verb in philosophy. Of course, it's related to gender studies, but the act of queering is actively anti modeling. You have a model for gender might be a binary, and to queer that is to do something non binary. And there's something really interesting I think about. Models, it's really hard for them to do something that they have not explicitly been designed to do.

[01:06:49] And that requires creativity. It requires divergence. It requires you to just do something wild. I'm really interested, I think, in not to say we should have queer [01:07:00] machines, but maybe, maybe we should have queer machines because until then, I think we're just going to have machines that largely serve functions of conservation.

[01:07:11] and are used just in a predictive sense.

[01:07:15] **Fanni:** Frank, you have been very generous with your time, and I appreciate your answers and entertaining my questions. So as almost the last question, what is your role in establishing the future of cities?

[01:07:26] **Frank:** This is the question of yours I thought the most about. I don't know if I have a good answer because it's such a good question.

[01:07:32] All these questions are really good, by the way. I seriously appreciate them. This one though. What is your role? I love it because it's hopeful, but it's also a little imperative, right? It's kind of like you should do something, but also it's for the viewers too. Like they can stew on it and think in their own sense.

[01:07:51] Well, what could I do? I love that. It's so good. Rhetorically, I think you're just injecting hope into people. It's beautiful. [01:08:00] So just want to say that on the Meta. Love it. Also extremely hard to answer. What do I say to this? Honestly, eating food. That's the number one thing I'm going to do. I think it's the most important thing we could do is eat food, eat food with other people, sharing a meal, but also like really genuinely thinking about food and the health of the infrastructure of our food, everything that revolves around it.

[01:08:27] I think that passionately believing in food is a huge thing I will contribute to any city I live in. But also, you know, I work in accessibility and technology, so I think there's a lot of intersections there with cities in a very kind of like direct and maybe literal interpretation of what I could do.

[01:08:42] And the more I thought about this, the more I thought, my role is probably much more humble, and it's probably small in scale. But that still matters. And it's probably storytelling. I know that might seem like it's totally out of nowhere, but actually what I've spent [01:09:00] most of my life doing in my spare time is, I write fiction, and I make little games.

[01:09:05] And I share these with my friends, and I think that there's something about that that feels so meaningful to life, human activity, whatever. And I think that that sort of stuff, it's not like everybody has to be a storyteller, but you know, maybe you like to make coffee or you're a baker or something, but like this idea that I think that the real thing I do for establishing the future of cities is to give it a gift.

[01:09:34] Give the city what I believe is the thing I most enjoy about myself and doing that, living a life where I can do that is probably the best thing I can do for a city.

[01:09:47] **Fanni:** I could ask you for hours about accessibility and sci fi and dystopia and your gifts to the city, but I want to be respectful of your [01:10:00] time.

[01:10:00] As a last question, do you have any closing comments or requests for the audience?

[01:10:06] **Frank:** I would say this one might seem a little odd, but I'd encourage folks to read and a very particular piece of literature that I just think is good. And it's not directly related to cities. It's debt by David Graver. I mentioned a quote by him at the beginning.

[01:10:24] He's actually an anthropologist, but an anarchist philosophically. And I think that people might start to imagine better futures for their cities. When we start thinking a little more like anarchists, and I think a lot of people are going to hear me say that and think, what, why would you say anarchy?

[01:10:46] Isn't that everything that destroys a city is anarchy? But actually, that's not true. And I think that there's a lot of really kind of mature ways of viewing anarchism that actually might be at the heart of every good city. [01:11:00] is freedom and freedom from oppression and resisting structures of oppression and questioning the laws that don't make sense or the way we've built our city that doesn't make sense.

[01:11:13] That's all kind of an act of anarchy, really. I would really encourage all your listeners become a little more like an anarchist and maybe you'll improve your cities. Thank you so much, Frank. Thank you, Fanny. This was just lovely.

[01:11:32] **Fanni:** It was really interesting to hear from Frank about his description of innovation as the expansion on what we can do. Not to mention his anchor in the 2 percent hope for better futures. Adam Doerr based his hope in hard scientific facts in the four discussed areas, transport, energy, food and labour, in episode 222.

[01:11:55] You can find out more about Frank online, all the links are in the show notes. [01:12:00] What was the most interesting part for you? What questions did arise regarding Frank's approach to the future of cities? What have you learned from this interview? Let me know on Twitter at WTF4Cities or on the WTF4Cities. com website where the transcripts and show notes are available.

[01:12:14] You can also subscribe on the website not to miss any new episodes and leave some feedback. I hope this was an interesting interview for you as well, and thanks for tuning in.

[01:12:22] **Intro-outro:** What is the future for cities podcast?