



# URBAN FUTURES

Please join us for the upcoming event organised by the research project  
**Urban Futures: Imagining and Activating Possibilities in Unsettled Times**

**FELIX RINGEL**

## How to do an Ethnography of the Future?: Shrinkage, Sustainability and Future-Tricking in Post-Industrial European Cities

How do recent urban crises impact the lives of ordinary urban communities? In order to answer this question, this talk will take you to two different postindustrial German cities, whose fates have been dramatically influenced by urban decline and deindustrialisation. We will explore issues of time and the future, but also of doubt, failure and maintenance, in order to assess the different ways in which imagined and emerging urban futures affect people's prospects and everyday lives. I will reflect on the role the future plays in the context of my two fieldsites, the post-industrial German cities of Hoyerswerda and Bremerhaven. In 2009, Hoyerswerda was declared to be Germany's fastest shrinking city and I show how its citizenry has come to terms with the loss of its future. My interlocutors from Bremerhaven, in turn, have set their hopes on urban sustainability. Based on their experiences with making their city sustainable, I argue, that sustainability as much as other ideas of the futures need to be studied with acute empirical detail: taking into considerations its local upkeep, force and farsightedness. This will allow us to appreciate the complexity of human future-tricking - and other expressions of temporal agency. Despite its many shortcomings, sustainability, for example, remains a useful concept for the development and implementation of new (or old) ideas of the city's future. It orients human ideas of, and relationships to, the future in different, provocative and stimulating ways, and pushes the boundaries of temporal thought by considering the maintenance of the future in the future. When the future of the city is at stake, this is how far our own temporal thought will have to reach.



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**FELIX RINGEL**, PhD, is Assistant Professor in Anthropology at Durham University. He has conducted long-term fieldwork in two German postindustrial cities: Hoyerswerda, the GDR's former second socialist model city, more recently Germany's fastest shrinking city; and Bremerhaven, Germany's poorest city, currently aspiring to urban sustainability. In these settings he asks how urban communities overcome postindustrial decline by developing new relationships with the future. Ringel's work has been published in journals such as *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, *Critique of Anthropology*, *Anthropological Theory* and *Time & Society*. He is the author of [\*Back to the Postindustrial Future: An Ethnography of Germany's Fastest-Shrinking City\*](#) and the co-editor of *The Cambridge Journal of Anthropology's* special issue on "[Time-Tricking: Reconsidering Temporal Agency in Troubled Times](#)".

You are invited to a Zoom meeting  
**May 5, 2022 11:00 AM Europe/Zagreb (CEST)**

<https://us06web.zoom.us/j/81756359783?pwd=MEJWMHFEN29ueGpiYVBwZU9TNTdvQT09>

Meeting ID: 817 5635 9783

Passcode: 878330

