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Webinar 10**

TIME AND THE SOCIAL SCIENCES: STUDYING THE FUTURE AND SUSTAINABILITY IN THE ANTHROPOCENE

Abstract

How do you do the future? This is a question many social scientists have recently raised. The anthropocene and other current crises have prompted us and our interlocutors to reconsider how we approach the future and engage with it critically. In this presentation, I will reflect on the role future plays in the context of two of my field sites, 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 sustainability. Based on their experiences with making their city sustainable.

I argue, that sustainability - as much as other futures - needs to be studied with acute empirical detail: taking into consideration its local upkeep, force and farsightedness. Despite its many shortcomings, sustainability remains a useful concept for the development of an ecological episteme. It orients human ideas of, and relationships to, the future in different, provocative and stimulating ways, and pushes the boundaries of temporal thought by, for example, considering the maintenance of the future in the future. When the future survival of humanity is at stake, this is how far our own temporal thought will have to reach.



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Professor Felix Ringel is an Assistant Professor in Social Anthropology at Durham University. He obtained his PhD. from Sidney Sussex College, Cambridge and held a fixed-term lectureship at the University of Vienna (2012-2016). He was awarded the Marie Curie Fellowship at Durham University from 2016 to 2019. He has authored a number of international journal articles and book chapters.

Professor Ringel's research interests include time, sustainability and urban development in post-industrial Europe. In 2018 he published his first monograph "Back to the Postindustrial Future: An Ethnography of Germany's Fastest-Shrinking City" which investigates the effects of severe population shrinkage in the German city of Hoyerswerda. The book is available for purchase at <https://www.berghahnbooks.com/title/RingelBack>

24th of February 2022
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via Zoom

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