Special Issue: Places and Mobilities - Studying human movements using places as entry points

Beyond Outmigration

Im/Mobilities and Futures in Peripheral Postindustrial Cities

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Abstract

This paper explores negotiations of futures within and beyond Germany's formerly fastest shrinking city, the East German city of Hoyerswerda. Originally built for the German Democratic Republic's miners and energy workers, its model socialist New City attracted tens of thousands of people in the latter half of the 20th century. In the wake of German reunification, this direction of mobility reversed. Economic transformations resulted in widespread unemployment and subsequent outmigration. Mostly the young and well-educated left the city, as reunified Germany saw millions of East Germans move 'to the West'. Beyond outmigration, those staying behind continued to face their city's presumed loss of the future. However, widespread expectations of better futures elsewhere did not necessarily result in ever more people leaving. Futures elsewhere were contrasted to futures elsewhen: hopeful local futures different to the one of continuous decline so commonly predicted. Based on long-term ethnographic fieldwork, I explore these entangled practices of place- and future-making and map the different expectations of im/mobility that make up a surprisingly complex local regime of im/mobility. I do so in order to ascertain what keeps peripheral postindustrial cities like Hoyerswerda going amidst accelerated urban decline and ubiquitous outmigration.

Keywords: anthropology, im/mobility, outmigration, urban decline, shrinking cities, future-making, place-making, East Germany

Introduction

This paper starts in the staircase (*Aufgang* or *Treppenhaus*) of a 1980s apartment block in the East German city of Hoyerswerda, the German Democratic Republic's former second socialist model city. This staircase looked - and smelled - like any other staircase in any of the ten living districts (*Wohnkomplex*, WK) of *Neustadt*, Hoyerswerda's new city. In autumn 2008, this particular staircase in 6 Albrecht-Dürer-Street was about to cease its usual function. All but one of the apartments it served had been abandoned. The whole block was being readied for demolition, just over two decades after its construction with industrially prefabricated concrete units (*Platten*). Paradoxically, Neustadt's youngest WK would soon be the city's first district to be demolished area-wide - *flächendeckend,* as the German language has it - including its former kindergartens, lampposts, streets and pavements.

Frau Meyer and her young son were this entrance's last inhabitants. Top floor, apartment to the right as seen from the front entrance. As many WK X inhabitants, they had enjoyed great views (and sunsets!) over the fields to the west of the city. They really liked their flat, Frau Meyer told me, and would have loved to stay. But that was not to happen. Frau Meyer had finally received the official letter from the cooperative landlord that informed her about what she and her former neighbours had been expecting for a long time: their block's and the WK's further *Rückbau* (literally 'back-build' or demolition). The letter, she had known, would entail the offer to rent another flat by the same cooperative landlord in a different district, most probably one in an already renovated apartment house. This new flat would most certainly come with a higher rent. The one they were eventually allocated to was in WK IV, near Neustadt's city centre. Not her preferred choice, Frau Meyer underlined, but it would do. With the arrival of the letter, the landlord would at least have to cover the removal costs.

Frau Meyer's relocation from one district to another introduces what this article continues to explore: Hoyerwerda's local regime of im/mobility. It is symptomatic for what played out not just in Germany's then fastest shrinking city in the wake of reunification, but in many cities throughout the former Eastern bloc: the social, spatial and, to some extent, temporal re-stratification of postsocialist respectively postindustrial urban communities. In Hoyerswerda, where inhabitants once had comparable incomes, lived in equally modern apartments and aspired to similarly better futures, people suddenly found themselves in a very different situation: different incomes allowed for different im/mobility choices and different future aspirations. The main result of the city's as

well as the GDR's wholesale and hardly cushioned inclusion into the global capitalist political economy: unforeseen levels of outmigration. This widespread mobility regime unfolded uniquely in each setting - and in Hoyerswerda continued to shape what would during the time of my fieldwork become identifiably as the city's own local regime of im/mobility.

The unequal redistribution of local im/mobility abilities, or 'motilities' (Kaufmann et al. 2017), in Hoyerswerda is, indeed, strongly embedded in wider regional, national and international 'regimes of mobility' (Glick-Schiller and Salazar 2013, 189) - enduring constellations of political, administrational, economic and other factors that affect and normalize individual mobilities (and immobilities for that matter). Apart from ongoing global trends like urbanisation, the most important regime in post-1990 Germany manifested in millions of East Germans migrating from East to West, for new employment. This enormous migration to former West Germany remains understudied due to its intranational character and as it does not fit easily into standard approaches to studies of im/mobility (Dahinden et al., this issue). Its local repercussions in postindustrial cities like Hoyerswerda remain even more neglected.

However, it is worth exploring the massive redistribution of the local population, too, and scrutinise how people navigate these complex spatiotemporal as well as socioeconomic processes. As I show below, the im/mobility decisions of those staying in Hoyerswerda follow a similar temporal logic to those leaving the city. Both combine im/mobility considerations with expectations of better, in local terms: more stable and secure, futures. Place- and future-making in postindustrial cities are intertwined as it is exactly the future that these cities seem to have lost. Imaginations of better futures, as, for example, Francis Pine (2014) underlines, are more often than not at the core of migration. This particular city, however, provides one of many examples in which the choice for mobility is not framed as one of worse versus better futures, but one of having a future in the first place. The context for these considerations is not war, famine or a catastrophic event, but ongoing economic decline and outmigration. Indeed, whether to stay in Hoyerswerda or to go was a question that most of my interlocutors were forced to consider. But even when staying, im/mobility continued to matter, as this article explores.

I base the following analysis on sixteen months of fieldwork in Hoyerswerda in 2008 and 2009 (Ringel 2016, 2018), which included in-depth and longterm participant observation and countless interviews. In addition to these standard tools of ethnographic inquiry, I lived with seven different host families, all distributed throughout the City: three families in Hoyerswerda's old city,

with one of them moving within Altstadt during my stay; three in Neustadt in WKs Ve (‘e’ for *erweitert - extended*), VIII (on the WK I side) and X, in both renovated and non-renovated houses (all of the latter families have since moved apartments at least once); and one in a little GDR detached housing estate north of Neustadt. My host families’ experiences already mirror central aspects of the local im/mobility regime: In all but one of these families, I was hosted in the rooms of children who had already left the city (an ethnographer’s practical luxury in a shrinking field site). Only four of the altogether 18 host siblings were still around during my time in Hoyerswerda. All others had moved away and would return for more or less regular visits during holidays. Needless to say, in the meantime two of my temporary Neustadt homes have already been deconstructed, and by now all of my host-siblings had at least temporarily left the city. Three, interestingly, have returned to Hoyerswerda where all older family members had remained.

With these glimpses of local life in mind, I return to Frau Meyer and her staircase in the next section. I describe her particular case as one example of a negotiation of local im/mobility choices - complex consideration of whether, where and when to move within Hoyerswerda. Frau Meyer was one among many inhabitants, I argue, who managed to counter - by *not* leaving the city - what could, with Jane Guyer’s help, be described as the city’s dominant form of ‘temporal reasoning’ (2007): the widespread expectations of further shrinkage and decline that led to outmigration in the first place. People like Frau Meyer are forced to engage with their city’s dire prospects, but still continue to find their place in it. From the outside, this might look like a form of immobility and Frau Meyer might be seen as someone who just has not left yet. However, as I show below, Frau Meyer is not immobile at all. Even her strategic waiting for the letter was not a simple refusal of mobility. As her carefully enacted im/mobility choices only make sense relationally (Salazar 2021), i.e. in relation to other (and others’) mobility and immobility choices, I continue to use this special issue’s central concept of im/mobility.

I return to Frau Meyer’s farewell in the following section. After a short historical account of Hoyerswerda’s relevant preceding im/mobility regimes in, I will continue to embed her agency within further im/mobility regimes and debates - local, regional and national. I will show how they help her to challenge the ubiquitous expectations of outmigration, intervene in Hoyerswerda’s im/mobility regime and question its temporal and spatial ramifications. In the section before the conclusion, I explore what kinds of politics of im/mobility (Creswell 2010) have more recently become possible when holding those accountable whose decisions facilitated or at least condoned

large-scale outmigration. Local critiques of these past decisions do not fundamentally challenge or reverse the city's and region's comprehensive 'de-economisation' (Hannemann 2003). They still constitute an important step towards coming to terms with the city's recent fate. The attention to local im/mobility negotiations underlines that even radically shrinking cities like Hoyerswerda are not just places from which outmigration happens.

The last *Hausordnung*

I had chatted to Frau Meyer several times whilst visiting an international art residency project that took place in the blocks adjacent to hers. The project organisers, West German art students in their early twenties, had originally looked for abandoned detached or semi-detached privately owned houses, i.e. materialisations of West Germany's infamous *Eigenheim* ideal, fashionable since at least the post-World War II *Wirtschaftswunder* years. By chance, they had come across Germany's then fastest shrinking city and decided to locate their project in abandoned socialist apartment houses - the built dreams and ambitions of a rather different state and ideology. Frau Meyer had observed the artists from all around the world, and visited their studios whilst packing up her own things. She moved some time after her short-time international neighbours had returned to their art schools elsewhere, leaving their paintings, sculptures and installations to be demolished with the buildings that had housed them temporarily.

The many unexpected encounters of the art residency, including the similarly transient ethnographer, are not what I wanted to start this paper with. To explore this shrinking city's im/mobility regime further, I rather focus on Frau Meyer's own farewell to her old home - a meaningful act of material and, incidentally, mobile agency. This act of agency took place at the intersection of many different kinds of 'im/mobilities' (again, in Salazar's helpful [2021] relational definition of the term), that to great dramatic effect converge at this occasion. On that day in September 2008, Frau Meyer went up to her apartment (all six floors!) to check the taps, enjoy the view from her balcony once more and then, finally, unscrew her nameplate from the apartment's front door. She then cleaned her apartment - despite knowing that the finally empty house only faced demolition. After locking the door with the key, which she would soon return to the landlord, she took broom, hand brush and dustpan, and did her last *Hausordnung*[i]: sweeping the staircase all the way from top to bottom. I could hear the rhythmic noise of the broom hitting the metal banisters

slowly descending to ground level. With a satisfied smile and her head held high, she swept up the remaining dust and professed, at least she was leaving the house in a clean state.

Frau Meyer's small act of defiance captures just one of the many individual fates taking place in this peripheral postindustrial city. Beyond outmigration, her attachment to her home and her pain of involuntary expulsion position her squarely in the city's local im/mobility regime, which is sustained by, among others, her friends and family members, her colleagues, the two local housing companies, the city's administration, regional and national policies and broader economic factors. Her steadfast continuation with the move, in turn, expresses a relation to a local future that matters so much for those staying in Hoyerswerda. By unpacking these relations, I follow the editors' invitation (Dahinden et al., this issue) to see what kinds of insights and analyses an im/mobility lens affords when applied to a particular place like this staircase in a soon-to-be demolished district of a former socialist model city. As common within the new mobilities paradigm (Sheller and Urry 2006), such analysis aspires to capture both, the experience *and* agency of those subjected to an im/mobility regime. What kinds of local and translocal flows or hops (Ferguson 2006) of people, things, finances, matters and futures had to converge for Frau Meyer's last *Hausordnung* to become a meaningful act? How can, indeed, must these forces be emplaced, both in where they originate from and where they yield effects?

In Hoyerswerda, forms of im/mobility relate in one way or another to the problem of the future. Whilst in most cities up- or downward mobility are also expressed spatially through voluntarily and involuntarily im/mobility, the im/mobility regimes of shrinking cities reallocate its citizens first and foremost to houses that have a future from those that do not. Both landlords and the municipality have adapted this as an official strategy as much as the people moving themselves. The example of a single mother and her son reluctantly moving to a renovated flat in the context of unprecedented urban decline invites us to reconsider the relationship between different people's im/mobilities and the concrete places in which they unfold. In shrinking cities like Hoyerswerda, as in other places were futures seem lost, these relations have a surprising quality: it is not the place itself that is stable, say, by not offering chances for a better future, and mobility that offers change. Rather, in Hoyerswerda, moving inside as well as away from the city is aimed at evading change in form of further decline and at regaining stability by having a future in the first place. This is the case because the place one moves away from is characterised by instability, a lack of prospects and

further decline. In Hoyerswerda, people move because they seek stability, not change, or, indeed, stability as change (Ringel 2014).

To position Frau Meyer's experience of im/mobility (which included her long wait for the letter as well as her final move), I will unpack the city's im/mobility regime in established anthropological fashion by dissecting my fieldsite. Any such place would necessarily be continuously constructed by those who, like Frau Meyer, live in it (think of Appadurai's famous 1995 idea of the 'production of locality' or, more recently, Lem's 2018 reflections on 'place-making'). It would as necessarily be defined by change, heterogeneity and complexity, which, beyond "sedentarist metaphysics" (Malkki 1992), exist irrespective of a place's size or its connections to other places. For an ethnographer, complexity lies within. The question this special issue raises is therefore how in any such place, different local and translocal regimes of im/mobility overlap with, restrict and co-constitute one another in uniquely local ways. To draw an analogy to a recent argument in the anthropology of time (Ssorin-Chaikov 2017), the exercise should, however, not be to find ever more regimes of im/mobility (either within or without), but to ascertain how the ones identified relate to one another in any given situation.

Acknowledging these different and always related - as in: relational - im/mobility regimes and practices (see for example, Ahbe 2006; Reeves 2011; also Salazar 2021), in turn, allows us to reconsider the agency that is involved in people navigating this complexity. By focusing on the agency deployed in local negotiations of often conflicting expectations of other futures, places and lives (see Ringel 2021b), I am not trying to confine myself to a subject-centred, phenomenological approach and neglect the broader political-economic factors that have shaped life in and the decline of Hoyerswerda over the last three decades. Rather, I follow my interlocutors' more recent thoughts about what determines their hometown's futures (see Ringel 2021a) and make sense of Frau Meyer's poignant intervention in a place of abandonment.

Her dignified response to enforced im/mobility will not stop capitalism's continuous "accumulation by dispossession" (Harvey 2003) or neoliberalism's "creative destruction" (Harvey 2007) that have reigned supreme in places like Hoyerswerda ever since German reunification in 1990. It still points to the ways in which the current political economy specifically effects people's lives in particular places. The emphasis on specificity and place prevents the politically problematic reification of neoliberal capitalism and the constant reproduction of the (very much correct but still) repetitive analyses of the failures of the capitalist political economy (see Ferguson 2010). It forces

scholars interested in im/mobilities to yet again emplace these ominous forces in their own concrete contexts (Strathern 1995), for analytical, methodological as much as political purposes.

Similarly, rather than simply seeing the city as a place of those left behind, who would be defined by their involuntary immobility and more or less existential stuckedness (Hage 2008), I want to allow for local complexity in order to show that, beyond omnipresent outmigration, there is more going on in this particular city. The feeling of being left behind definitely plays a role in local im/mobility 'imaginaries' (Salazar 2011). Despite that, as Frau Meyer's example shows, Hoyerswerda's inhabitants still live their lives and work on their futures within the city. A focus on these place- and future-making practices offers insights into how different and often conflicting expectations of elsewheres and elsewhens, of other places and other futures, are at the core of local im/mobility considerations. Expectations of other places are intimately linked to expectations of other futures (Pine 2014). One only makes sense in relation to the other, and the vision of a better future elsewhere does not necessarily lead to leaving Hoyerwerda. It can as well inform the expectation of different local futures. As I trace below: Hoyerswerda is constituted as a place with a particular future exactly through these diverse im/mobility negotiations.

A very short History of Im/Mobility in Hoyerswerda

Frau Meyer's move to WK IV can be read against a rather eclectic local history of im/mobility, that begins, surprisingly, with vast immigration. Until World War II, the originally small city of Hoyerswerda had boosted approximately 7000 inhabitants. After the end of the war, that number was more than halved. It initially rose again with the arrival of Germans forced to leave the Reich's former eastern provinces. Ever more immigration took place with the construction of Neustadt, starting in the 1950s. By the 1970s, the number of Hoyerswerda's inhabitants had grown tenfold to over 70000, with people having arrived from all over the young socialist republic. They came to the city of the *Berg- und Energiearbeiter* (miners and energy workers) for two reasons: jobs in the open-pit mines, power plants and industrial complexes in Hoyerswerda's vicinity, and the city's modern apartments, with 'hot water from the tap' (*heißes Wasser aus der Wand*) and no chimneys - attractive features during a post-war housing crisis. Hoyerswerda was a vanguard city then, a prime example of modern urban planning. Mostly young couples and families arrived in this ever-growing city of the future. Married couples were treated preferably in the allocation of apartments. They

soon had children of their own. This demographic and material growth happened at an unprecedented speed. In Germany's demographically youngest city, the new population grew up in an environment determined by work, with the three daily columns of buses that transported the proud miners and energy workers to and from their respective shifts as its industrial heartbeat.

There were also new inhabitants from further afield who had migrated to the city: socialist contract workers from Hungary, former Yugoslavia, Vietnam, Algeria and, later, Mozambique. Their time in the city was supposedly limited by the end of their contracts, but the fate of the city overall would change even before most of these contracts ran out. These changes reversed the prospects of most of its inhabitants, including the international contract workers. With the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and subsequent German reunification, the city entered a new phase in its history. Back then, it was not clear yet where the journey was going. But everybody was aware that everything would be different. With rising unemployment numbers and a more general lack of orientation, the first years of the postsocialist era were characterised by disillusionment, hardship and - infamously - violence. In September 1991, Hoyerswerda featured the first large-scale attacks on people deemed foreigners in reunified Germany, a pogrom against not just their former colleagues from other socialist countries but also newly arrived asylum seekers, supported by many local bystanders (Lemke 2021; Ringel 2021a). The overwhelmed police forces and politicians decided to 'evacuate' the attacked to undisclosed locations instead of sanctioning the perpetrators.

Because of unprecedented levels of unemployment, many Hoyerswerdians would leave the city during the years after the pogrom. The unemployment had resulted from the GDR economy's failed privatisation and its arguably accepted, if not planned de-economisation (Hannemann 2003). Especially the Mozambican evacuees faced a much worse fate than their former East German colleagues, as Grit Lemke, a local author, filmmaker and trained ethnologist, underlined in her recent book (2021). Based on interviews with some of these returnees, she recounts how they were deported back to Mozambique without their documents and most of their belongings. In Maputo, they faced discrimination by the anti-socialist regime that had won the civil war in the meantime, and disallowed them to work despite their skills and education. Although entitled to (East) German unemployment payments and pensions, reunified Germany never lived up to its financial responsibilities. Those still alive are impoverished and immobilised after the expulsion from their own short-lived socialist global mobility regime.

The city's rightwing reputation was fostered in the September days of 1991, which saw the exodus of those considered foreign. Many Hoyerswerdians believe that this bad reputation added to the city's economic and demographic decline. Some of my interlocutors still talk about how they were shunned in the 1990s for having a Hoyerswerda licence plate. Others named the terror inflicted by local neo-Nazis as one reason why they had left (Lemke 2021) or why it would be good for them to leave the city. Even my younger friends would avoid saying that they are from Hoyerswerda even two decades after the dreadful events. And Hoyerswerda's reputation was dealt further blows: The formerly vanguard socialist apartment houses were now perceived through a West German lens as 'social housing'. The aforementioned *Eigenheim* became the gold standard, whose constructions were heavily subsidised by state funding throughout East Germany despite apparent concerns about an increasingly difficult if not already collapsing housing market. Living in a small city, which had lost its model character and economic base, soon contrasted to the lives promised by proper (i.e. non-artificial) cities like nearby Berlin. Why would anybody want to live in a small, insignificant town at the periphery of Germany, without direct access to the motorway and barely connected by train to the rest of the country? Frau Meyer has most probably faced these kinds of questions, too, and experienced friends and family leaving the city for these reasons. She still preferred to stay.

By the time I started my fieldwork in 2008, the city had lost more than half of its population. A third of Neustadt had already been demolished and the overall population had doubled its average-age to over fifty within the course of a few decades. With the partial closure and modernisation of the industrial complex and the privatisation of the mining company, most of the former more than 30000 miners and energy workers had lost their job. Economically and demographically, Hoyerswerda had become a city of no future. Throughout the 1990s and 2000s millions of East Germans were forced to find jobs elsewhere, mostly in West Germany[ii]. As a local idiom had it: they followed the work (*sind der Arbeit nachgezogen*), particularly those whose expectations elsewhere seemed most promising: the young and well-educated (*die jung und gut ausgebildeten*).

These high levels of outmigration continued over at least two decades. Outmigration became a fully accepted part of local life. Almost all of the teenagers who I met during my fieldwork, irrespective of whether they lived in the old or new part of the city and irrespective of their family's financial situation, were expecting and planning to leave the city, first for education, but most

certainly for good. Frau Meyer's son certainly was to join the crowd, too. In contrast to the many local efforts to convince the local youth to stay (csee below), in most families there was never much talk about a future for them in the city or region. Even their parents' generation - whose parents had initially immigrated to Hoyerswerda - had to consider that if their job situation changed, they might have to leave the city as well (including one of my host fathers, who was already commuting every day to Berlin for work). All of them took leaving Hoyerswerda as a probable option with surprising ease. Only senior citizens seemed economically secure enough, due to their generous miners' pensions. Frau Meyer's last *Hausordnung* took place in this context of differing but shared expectations of im/mobility: unforeseen levels of actual and predicted outmigration, in which those remaining in the city were often perceived as 'losers' and 'left behind'; the city's continuous demographic implosion, vacancy and destruction; and an on-going sociospatial re-stratification of people and their prospects in the city itself. But how do different im/mobilities and futurities amongst those staying in Hoyerswerda look like? And how are they negotiated?

Moving to the Future

Although the migration from East to West Germany was the dominant form of early post-reunification mobility, people still moved within the city as well: Those who could afford it moved to bigger apartments or newly-built detached houses at the outskirts. During my fieldwork almost twenty years after the fall of the Wall, however, local mobility had changed again: moves now did not so much target bigger apartments but those that were were deemed secure and not in danger of demolition. Moving in space, to some extent, also meant moving in time. Frau Meyer had suggested as much: the best thing about the new apartment was that they would not have to move again, at least not in the foreseeable future.

The actual demolition of apartment blocks had started in the late 1990s. A decade later, the decay of non-renovated, mostly emptied houses, the preparation for their deconstruction and their actual cracking and crunching disassembly had become everyday occurrences in Neustadt. Whilst only a few inhabitants have (mostly unsuccessfully) challenged their block's demolition plans, others either proactively moved out as soon as they could or, like Frau Meyer, waited until they were officially informed about the demolition, enduring months and sometimes years as one of the last inhabitants of a specific entrance or even a whole block.

For a long time the local government as well as the two landlords (one cooperative: the *Lebensräume eG;* one communal: the *Wohnungsgesellschaft mbH Hoyerswerda*), which own most of Hoyerswerda's housing stock, shied away from communicating any details of their state-subsidised demolition strategies that were to deal with unprecedented vacancy levels, introducing even more insecurity into the local im/mobility regime. But people navigated the limbo in which they were kept. Some districts, for example, showcased high levels of renovation. Particularly the oldest and most central districts, WK I, II and III, promised stability. There was obviously no guarantee against future demolition, but once the similarly state-funded renovations had taken place, houses had to survive for at least another twenty years. Many who did not want to leave Neustadt and could afford it would try to find an apartment there.

Other signs of care (versus the lack thereof) were also quickly decoded, and the two landlords introduced them in their competition for ever fewer tenants. The cooperative landlord's strategy included the introduction of concierge services and an emphasis on age-adequate restorations for the ever ageing tenantry. Their headquarter boasted a showroom with a whole range of possible technical and infrastructural solutions to the concerns of elderly renters. The communal landlord rather focused on the quality of their retrofit. However, particularly in the early years of shrinkage the landlords failed to coordinate their efforts. WK IX, for example, featured two renovated high-rise blocks by one of them, whereas the surrounding ones owned by the other were slowly taken away. With their disappearance, these remaining two high-rise blocks, material remnants of a high-density urban past (in the 1970s, the neighbouring district WK VIII held the world's second highest population density after a district in Tokyo!), seemed very much out of place.

Moving to a renovated house offered not so much a more luxurious living environment, but stability - a future that would neither be in limbo nor foreseeably face demolition. This stability was the actual luxury in Hoyerswerda. Moving from WK X to WK IV, like Frau Meyer did, was indeed a move into a future, where she would not have to move again. The same expectations would repeat themselves: you would be safe if you moved into your own semi-detached or detached home in the outskirts of Hoyerswerda or one of the villages surrounding the city. Even better: if you moved to the Old City. The Altstadt, with its recently renovated market square, castle, churches and picturesque alleyways, will still stand, many predicted, when Neustadt will be gone. Indeed, the new city's total disappearance was not deemed impossible by many.

But not all people liked to leave Neustadt. Kerstin, one of my host mothers, was sad to leave WK X. She had brought up her two sons there, who had long ago moved to nearby Dresden. I had lived with Kerstin for three months in an almost empty block. We had shared our entrance with at first two families, later one. The experience of living in an increasingly abandoned house was eery at points, but you could definitely get used to it. Kerstin loved her flat. The cooperative landlord had even allowed her to use the empty flat next door as a studio for her art projects. The flat she was later reallocated was next to the old city's centre, but expensive and small. When I bumped into her years after her move, she still reminisced about the freedom she had in WK X. These spatial excesses, others agreed, were disappearing in the late 2010s to the detriment of those who had used them in their own creative ways.

A similar attachment to the declining district was formulated by the former district mayor. Like Frau Meyer, he and his wife also lived in a 6th floor apartment. They were the once drawing my attention to the fabulous WK X sunsets, comparing them to the ones they had seen on the popular tourist destination of Mallorca. His memories of what he still refers to as 'his' district are filled with children's play and laughter, WK feasts and tight-knit *Hausgemeinschaften* (the community of inhabitants sharing an entrance). At the time of my visit in 2008, they were one of three remaining tenants in their entrance. Their two daughters had moved to Munich. As they were expecting to receive their demolition letter shortly, they asked themselves why not move to their daughters already? Work was not keeping them here and they wanted to be close to their future grandchildren. In a not too distant future they might also depend on their daughters' care. Munich, however, seemed quite far, and they contemplated to venture for Dresden first, staying somewhat closer to what they still considered their 'hometown'.

As I have tried to elicit in this section, like expectation of futures elsewhere, wished-for local futures also had to promise stability and an end to the constant expectations of further instability and decline. This logic applied to considerations of moving within Neustadt as well as from it, across the river into the Old City or to one of the surrounding villages. These considerations are not specifically about lifestyle (Salazar 2014), nor are they in many cases strictly economic. They express a longing for a stable future, a future of trustworthy immobility, an elsewhen rather than an elsewhere - a different future rather than a different place. Having 'followed the work' throughout the 1990s , arguably, was also a search elsewhere for future stability - in some ways a

return to the stability that work had provided during the socialist-industrial era, with constant income, an everyday rhythm and predictable personal and collective futures.

Paradoxically, the place under consideration here, Hoyerswerda, has appeared to be much more complex with regards to im/mobilities than expected. Any move within and away from the city was to offer stability. The change it was to provide was continuity, an expectation that makes sense when one's present is predicted to consist of further decline (Ringel 2014). In this particular context, 'mobility' did not happen between the stable units of two places. As the places themselves turn out to be more complex, details and nuances come to the fore that create a more contradictory idea of what constitutes im/mobility. A whole variety of local elsewheres (another WK, the other side of the city, rural outskirts, surrounding urban metropoles or the other half of the country) compete for constituting most convincingly an elsewhen that fulfils the right expectations. This is, as I show in the next section, clearly a matter for social negotiations.

Making People stay

The logic response to the city's problems with outmigration was to work on the expectations of those most tempted by it. There are many local efforts in Hoyerswerda that aspire to making people stay. They do so by trying to evoke and concretise ideas of local futures rather than futures elsewhere. There is sometimes confusion with regards to who should be targeted by these efforts. As the headmaster of one of the three prestigious local A-level schools remarked, it is not his students. For him, the current state of the local economy has clear consequences for his pupils' prospects. The kinds of jobs that A-level students should aspire to, i.e. jobs for which you need a university degree, are rare in Hoyerswerda. As a local council member, he repeatedly underlined that it is the often neglected comprehensive schools that should get the necessary funding and attention.

Local entrepreneurs and companies, in turn, have a rather different understanding of the regional economy. As many rural areas and smaller cities in East Germany, they describe the then current and still ongoing situation as one of *Fachkräftemangel* (skilled labour shortage). Too many young people, in their eyes, have been trapped for too long in the narrative that there are no jobs in the area. Indeed, unemployment numbers had declined considerably after the 1990s and remained low in the 2010s. In order to attract more local youth to stay, the chamber of commerce organised

annual job fares to facilitate a relation between local and regional employers and their hoped-for future employees. The fares I have visited featured the usual stalls, leaflets and colourful slogans such as "Your Future Begins Here!" (*Deine Zukunft beginnt hier!*). Frau Meyer will have read about them in the local newspaper and her son will have experienced them some time after their move.

One local group of entrepreneurs developed their own outreach project. The group's name is telling - *StadtZukunft e.V.* (the CityFuture registered club) - their project's title even more so: *Jugend hat Visionen* (Youth Has Visions). These competitive visions of Hoyerswerda's future should have resulted in participants seeing a future for themselves in their hometown. The club members believed that by changing the youth's expectations of local economic futures, they could counter ideas of futures elsewhere. But telling local youth to stay was often not enough if you could not prove to them that 'stability' was part of the future here, too. That ideally should have included a definite stop to - if not reversal of - the city's decline more generally. Others, in contrast, challenged the idea that such efforts should try to convince people to stay.

The sociocultural *KulturFabrik e.V.* (CultureFactory, subsequently KuFa), for example, drew a different conclusion about why they ran their art, youth and community projects about Hoyerswerda's future, like their 2007 Third City (*Dritte Stadt*) project with its dedicated Future Laboratory (*Zukunftswerkstatt*). As their CEO Uwe had it: if the youths have to go no matter what, then it is his club's duty to give them a really good time so that they take their experiences from Hoyerswerda to wherever they go in the world. This should not be read as a sign of resignation, although Uwe was very aware of the fact that many clubs and societies in Hoyerswerda, too, faced a shortage of young people amidst an ageing member body. Rather, it shows an acceptance that one can neither change the political economy (and related im/mobility regimes) in which Hoyerswerda finds itself nor force people to stay. In a 2009 project in an abandoned WK X apartment block, Uwe cut out from an abandoned carpet the silhouette of the famous 'refugees welcome' sign (the one depicting a family hurriedly running to the left) and glued it to the wall of a former living room. He paired it with a shortened quote from a song of a famous local singer-songwriter, Gerhard Gundermann, which summarises his approach and helps to depict a much less restrained im/mobility regime. It reads: All those, who want to go, shall be able to go / all those who want to stay, shall be able to stay / all those, who want to come, shall be able to come (*Alle die gehen woll'n, sollen gehen können / alle die bleiben wollen, sollen bleiben können / alle die kommen woll'n, sollen kommen können*).

As a powerful critique of the city's excessive outmigration, it provides only one of many examples of how he and his club members continue to intervene in discourses about local futures, partially by deproblematising the future. Unexpectedly, many of my interlocutors said it was institutions like the KuFa that made them stay in Hoyerswerda in the first place, and in some cases even return to it. It seems like Uwe circumvents a further problematisation of the future and allows a more relaxed focus on what is already going on in Hoyerswerda, working on the basis of an already existing elsewhen. His club's continuous interventions in the debates on the city's decline had become one important form of continuity. Their work changed the present by providing stability in their form of place-making that sidestepped the usual concerns with the future. Still, were there no further and perhaps fundamental challenges to outmigration and the different ways in which it affected people's decisions to stay or leave?

A Place for Capitalism

As shown above, Frau Meyer's move from WK X to WK IV followed a temporal logic that depicts stable futures in particular parts of the city rather than elsewhere. Her own spatiotemporal agency, from waiting to doing the last *Hausordnung*, was entangled with other responses to expectations of Hoyerswerda's further decline. In her case, her landlord did not want to lose her as a renter, the city didn't want to lose her as a tax-paying citizen, and her friends and family wanted her around. As the local chamber of commerce and the sociocultural activists from the KuFa from above, they were all in one way or another working towards her staying in the city - and they all had to tackle Hoyerswerda's loss of the future. Its lost future and further decline have for long been accepted as the status quo, something that cannot be changed and will have to be endured. However, more recently and almost three decades after the event, people all over East Germany are finally talking about this massive loss of local population and what might have caused it. Rather than a passive experience of capitalism, many people are currently revisiting what has actually happened in 1990 and how that relates to the many specific fates that East Germans and their cities suffered since reunification.

(East) German human geographers Bernt and Holms (2020) have recently argued for a distinct political economy approach to housing in East Germany. They recount the somewhat absurd story that the 1990 reunification contract (*Vereinigungsvertrag*) declared the state-owned GDR

housing companies to be indebted to the same state's central bank and that these debts were to be sold post-reunification to private banks. These private banks suddenly owned debts of a previously 'people-owned' (*volkseigen*) central bank. When the East German housing market started to collapse in the mid-1990s, the (East and West!) German tax payer had to pay off these artificial debts. Housing companies only received financial support for the clearance of these debts when demolishing empty buildings and reduce their housing stock. But this was not just a failure of an ominous market. It was the consequence of the decisions by those who had negotiated the reunification contract. Critiques have become possible also because historians are now able to access the archives of the institutions that oversaw these processes of the form GDR's outright de-economisation, foremost the *Treuhandanstalt*, the "Trust Agency", in charge of the GDR economy's privatisation (Ringel 2020). These decisions, to a certain extent democratically legitimised, are at least one of the reasons why Frau Meyer's flat, entrance, block, district and hometown have suffered from outmigration, decline and demolition in the first place.

Whilst it is important to look at how outmigration plays out specifically within affected cities and places, it is as important to be similarly specific about these political-economic processes that helped to create and sustain them. These processes occur and materialise in specific places, too. This is exactly what many of my interlocutors have been tracking lately. They look back at the past and fathom what had determined the structural changes they had to endure largely without financial and conceptual help from central government. I agree with Bernt and Holm: we should develop a decisively East German perspective to account for the specific ways in which capitalism has affected and transformed the former GDR, and has initiated the movement and reallocation of millions of people in spatial, social and temporal terms.

Even though Frau Meyer's agency does not pose a fundamental threat to capitalism, which continues to rule supreme, there is still a need for giving capitalism a place, too, and hold accountable those that have overseen its introduction, knowing the consequences that they would have for the inhabitants of an industrial city like Hoyerswerda.

Conclusion: Beyond Outmigration

This article started with an account of one person's individual response to her involuntary relocation from an abandoned, soon-to-be demolished flat to a renovated apartment in a different district. This

simple relocation in a context of shrinkage and decline provided an entrance into many further local considerations and negotiations of im/mobility. As in any other shrinking city, outmigration was always an option, and thus everybody was forced to ponder it. Most citizens of Hoyerswerda engaged with the instability of the places they lived and worked in. They all had to weigh up what kinds of futures their remaining in respectively leaving Hoyerswerda would entail. Different people were differently positioned in these kinds of negotiations, but all were affected by them.

As a place, then, Hoyerswerda appears much less like a homogenous, stable geographical unit, from which outmigration happens. Rather, very different kinds of im/mobilities were enacted within in order to relocate one's position in life, time and the city. The most pressing question raised was what kind of future a potential move would entail. This problematisation of the future intimately links considerations of any elsewhere with expectations of an elsewhen. It forced people to take into account the future options that would stem from their decisions. These intimately entwined practices of place- and future-making are thoroughly embedded in the context of a postindustrial city, whose fate was dramatically altered by political and economic changes that occurred more than three decades ago. Whilst one could easily describe contemporary Hoyerswerda as a place of those left behind - after all, tens of thousands of people have left the city since 1990 - it would be misleading to single out just this one form of mobility (outmigration) to characterise the city. Rather, different im/mobility considerations and practices interact and are being negotiated in the city, circumscribing an actually much more complex local im/mobility regime. Some of the resulting narratives are bleak, others more hopeful. Accounting for complexity and nuance allows us to create a different picture of what I have described as a local im/mobility regime beyond outmigration.

There is no glamour in my interlocutors resisting to move away or to having to be mobile (although a true luxury for some that is!). Rather, the way that certain im/mobility regimes interact and come to bear on a city like Hoyerswerda is complex and sometimes contradictory. The different expectations entailed within a local im/mobility regime offer sometimes more detailed, sometimes slightly vaguer ideas of a future, whose evaluation is determined by many different factors. Mobility can, indeed, be expected to result in comparative stability despite the changes it necessarily entails; and the decision to stay might be seen as a path to further decline. However, the agency deployed in negotiating these conflicting notions already shows initial cracks in the dominant expectations of, for example, the youth's unquestioned future choice for emigration or the

city's further decline. And even in a shrinking city like Hoyerswerda, expectations are best kept open to a certain extent. Very much unexpectedly, 2015 saw the population numbers in Hoyerswerda rise again for the first time in 25 years: The arrival of several hundred asylum seekers affected the city as a place shaped by im/mobility yet again. But even these more recent changes will allow those affected by them to consider, yet again, different futures, places and im/mobilities both within and outside of the city.

The author reports there are no competing interests to declare.

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[i] The term *Hausordnung* refers to the weekly cleaning of the staircase by the people living in the same entrance. It excludes the basement, whose less frequent cleaning was called the *Kellerordnung*. During socialist times, the *Hausordnung* was observed by virtually everyone, but after t1990 and the hiring of private cleaning companies (whose costs were covered by increased rents), only a few entrances in Hoyerswerda still followed these practices. Some of those even continued using their old *Hausordnungsuhren*, little hand-made clock-like devices that indicated whose neighbour's turn it was in a particular week.

[ii] As the article 'The East West Exodus' in *zeitonline (*30.05. 2019) suggests: more than 3.5 million of the formerly 16 millions GDR citizens moved to the West in the three decades after reunification.