

## **Applied mobilities, transitions and opportunities**

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# Editorial: Applied Mobilities, Transitions and Opportunities

Malene Freudendal-Pedersen, Kevin Hannam, Sven Kesselring

## Introduction

The mobilities paradigm has, during the last decade, proven its usefulness in investigating how the socio-material mobilities of modern societies have transformed fundamental aspects of social interaction, communication and exchange (Cresswell 2006; Hannam, Sheller, and Urry 2006; Sheller and Urry 2006; Adey et al. 2013; Sheller 2014; Sheller and Urry this issue). The multiple dimensions of contemporary mobilities have been investigated by scholars from many different disciplines and it has been shown to be an ambivalent and reflexive phenomenon (Kesselring 2008; Freudendal-Pedersen 2014). Mobilities have brought about positive economic and social effects, such as wealth, international cultures of collaboration and exchange. But at the same time, issues such as increasing inequalities, climate change, urban sprawl and highly mobile energy-consuming lifestyles have put questions of sustainability centre stage.

Historically, mobility has contained the idea and promise of frictionless movement, freedom and speed (Leed 1991; Urry 2007; Rosa and Scheuerman 2009; Jensen and Freudendal-Pedersen 2012), as that which would lead to better lives. Instead, visions of 'seamless mobility' and a 'zero-friction society' (Hajer 1999) intensify risks of congestion, noise, urban degradation and environmental disasters (Urry 2011; Adey et al. 2013). The spatial and technological extension and speeding-up of mobility systems has also led to intensified mobile forms of working, living and tourism (Kesselring 2006; Hannam 2006; Urry 2007; Freudendal-Pedersen 2009; Beaverstock et al. 2009). On the one hand, this has opened up hitherto unforeseen spaces of opportunity for new mobilities regimes for economies, transnational cultures, forms of intimacy and love, communication, communities and social networks (Mai and King 2009). New 'cultures of immediacy' (Tomlinson 2004), dealing with distance and connectivity are emerging. But, on the other hand, the possibilities of facilitating interaction from almost every place in the world have propelled a sort of 'banal cosmopolitanization' (Beck 2008) that has quietly changed the social routines and the spaces for lived everyday life (see Freudendal-Pedersen this issue). For example, the boom of peer-to-peer online platforms such as HomeExchange, CouchSurfing and Airbnb have arguably led to alternative models of hospitality (Russo and Dominquez 2016) which have in turn transformed entire urban neighbourhoods in major cities such as London, Barcelona, Paris and New York.

The large number of new social opportunities and choices involve various complex mobilities to make them work and then often lead into further mobilities to secure their continuation – second and third order mobilities. Nevertheless, people and materials have to be put in place and ordered so that occurrences can be planned for and made happen. This involves proactive planning which is shaped by the memories and disturbances of past events, management and organisation in the present; and also involves projections into the future. In short, various mobilities inform systems, infrastructures and

technologies which enable other mobilities which lead on to further systems, infrastructures and technologies in an on-going process of formation, critique, development and dissension (see Birtchnell this issue). Mobilities and the acquisition of them have become a defining feature of contemporary life, bound up with our pursuit of new identities (Kesselring 2008; Freudendal-Pedersen 2009; Elliott and Urry 2010; Salazar 2010; Kellerman 2012; Cohen, Duncan, and Thulemark 2013; Milbourne and Kitchen 2014; Taipale 2014).

The number of opportunities provided by mobilities - as well as the different scales - also leads to various stresses: in terms of transport systems through congestion, in terms of security through geopolitical systems of control as well as in terms of individual's abilities to cope with attending multiple events at the same time or working in multinational environments and on the move (Adey et al. 2013; Schier, Schlinzig, and Montanari 2015; Nadler 2016; Hannam, Mostafanezhad, and Rickly 2016).

Cultures of mobilities are influenced by thoughts or feelings of freedom, autonomy, flexibility, and happiness. This stresses and also problematizes societal concepts of what it means to be free. Sager (2006, 465) has argued that: 'Freedom as mobility is composed both of opportunities to travel when and where one pleases and of the feasibility of the choice not to travel.' Engaging with the freedom to do something, as Bauman (1988) has noted, ultimately leads us into various unfreedoms (Freudendal-Pedersen 2009; Kannisto 2016). For example, we can engage in new communities through our mobilities but this may lead us to become obligated to attend further events, which we may not (really) want to attend. Mobilities exist in various foldings and unfoldings through time and space which are slippery in our attempts to control them through contemporary scheduling, as much as they are subject to regional, national and international structures and policies (Fallov, Jørgensen, and Knudsen 2013; Kesselring 2016).

We argue that mobilities are in no way just a marginal or a highly specific applied topic. In fact, mobilities must be considered as being a general principle of modern societies. As such they place key issues regarding the future of modern organizations, communities and institutions onto the scientific, political and social-organizational agenda. The question of how everyday lives can be sustainable in a constantly changing world of omnipresent ecological, economic, cultural and terrorist risks and threats will be decisive for democracy and modernity in the 21st century, both for those deemed cosmopolitan as well as those who are more marginalized.

### **Applied Mobilities**

The journal *Applied Mobilities* has been launched to address this field of contradictions and ambivalences concerning the benefits and risks of mobilities. With a focus on applied perspectives our aim is to utilize the connections between the theoretical and the empirical to highlight, emphasize and develop a greater understanding of the transition of mobility systems towards sustainable practices and the socio-political consequences of diverse mobilities. The mobilities field is trans-disciplinary by nature, and *Applied Mobilities* seeks to

reach out to praxis and demonstrate how a deeper understanding of current social, economic, political and environmental issues provides opportunities to shape future sustainable mobilities. Sheller and Urry are picking up on this point in their article and highlight the importance of working with praxis (see Sheller and Urry this issue).

The trans-disciplinary character of mobilities research has been demonstrated through the development of mobile methods in particular. An emphasis has been on how mobile methodologies can create opportunities for understanding the consequences of mobile societies and their specific risks and conditions. This entails the opportunity and the obligation of dialogue within and outside the field of mobilities research. Ways of doing this have been shown through recent innovative co-working between artists and social scientists who, through their often much more visual and tactile approaches, have a different reach and audience (Witzgall, Vogl, and Kesselring 2013; Tolia-Kelly 2008; Myers 2011; Thompson, Hannam, and Petrie 2012). Working within action-oriented 'futures workshops' is another option, where the co-creation and strengthening of future scenarios is in focus (Freudendal-Pedersen, Hartmann-Petersen, and Nielsen 2010). Furthermore in this issue Manderschied proposes a re-engagement with quantitative methodologies as an applied political strategy. These methods offer the possibility to involve, for example, politicians, planners, and people, in the process of creating new ideas or further evolving methods and assessment tools.

Thus, *Applied Mobilities* aims to reach out not only within scientific communities, but also in the field of practice. It addresses those places, institutions and organizations where frames, infrastructures and resources for possible future practice already exist, and where they are being formed or shaped. What makes *Applied Mobilities* specific here is its ability to publish theoretically ambitious scientific work that bridges the gap to and connects with praxis contexts. New developments, innovative solutions, policies and applications will be discussed in relation to the mobilizations and the fundamental transformations of modern societies, economies and cultures. *Applied Mobilities* is driven by the assumption that better evidence of how mobilities are 'made', socially constructed, appropriated, embodied and managed leads to new, exciting and transformational perspectives and applications. *Applied Mobilities* puts the dialogue between theory and praxis centre stage and provides opportunities to analyze and influence how different mobilities are unfolded, rationalized, and imagined for the future. In order to become this platform for knowledge transfer, *Applied Mobilities* focuses on four main areas: planning, design, technologies and culture.

## **Planning**

In planning theory a significant change has taken place over the last 30 years. The modernist optimism of finding one-best-way solutions, optimum planning instruments, the perfect model and the flawless simulation of socio-spatial and socio-economic processes within societies has lost much of its former legitimacy. It has been replaced by a more doubtful, self-critical and reflexive approach to the instrumental rationalities and the power of planning (Nowotny, Scott, and Gibbons 2001; Flyvbjerg, Landman, and Schram 2012). In the Conversation

section in this issue two Danish architects discuss how the one-best-way approach is no longer conducive for the planning of future cities. They question how or if there is a way out of planning cities primarily to accommodate the white middle class (see also Waitt, Kerr and Klocker this issue). This resonates with the fundamental uncertainties as to what extent modern planning capacities are able to solve the problems of modern societies in the age of sustainability and climate change (Bertolini 2010; Urry 2011) and links mobilities theory, risk society theory (Beck, Bonss, and Lau 2003), complexity theory (Urry 2003) and the argumentative planning paradigm (Fischer and Forester 1993; Healey 1997; Hajer and Dassen 2014). Instead of heading for evermore complex models and simulations the authors of these approaches consider and sometimes also offer new visions or 'mission statements' of how and where cities and regions may develop. Strong narratives or 'stories' (Sandercock 2003), can be seen as powerful planning instruments which might lead out of the inertia in which urban mobility politics finds itself nowadays (Jensen and Richardson 2003). Here, *Applied Mobilities* invites research that discusses and presents ways out of the situation of increasing uncertainties and insecurities about future developments. Mobilities theory can be applied to re-think, re-organize and 're-invent' urban and rural planning as a social and interactive societal process of making the future of mobilities (Sandercock 1998; Forester 1999; Healey 2010; Kesselring 2016).

## **Design**

Within mobilities research another emphasis has been put to target research towards the material and design-oriented dimensions of mobilities (Birtchnell and Urry 2012; Jensen 2014; Jensen and Lanng 2016; Jensen and Lanng this issue). This research has had multiple directions. One approach has focused on the material aspects that influence the emotional and embodied aspects of everyday transport, for instance in relations to cycling (Larsen 2015; Spinney 2011; M. Cook and Edensor 2014) or car driving (Sheller 2004; Conley and McLaren 2012). Another strand has focused on exploring experimental and creative approaches within art and design to find potentials for innovative research, policies and planning (Wilken 2010; Kesselring and Vogl 2013). Design has also been used as a methodological approach with an emphasis on designing interdisciplinary methodologies and thinking (Büscher et al. 2001; Simonsen et al. 2010).

These different approaches may provide opportunities to, for example, better understand the contested design of spectacular mega-events with their related security concerns or the ethical implications of socio-technical innovations that connect communities in crises with professional responders (Büscher, Liegl, and Thomas 2014). Such events and crisis management involve the development and re-design of complex mobilities to manage both participants and spectators to gather and disperse (Currie and Shalaby 2012; Elliott and Radford 2015; Cidell 2016).

In this issue Jensen, Lanng and Wind see a new emerging field of 'mobilities design' arising that can explore the borders between architecture, urban design, planning, and infrastructure design. Through both focusing on the inspiration

from design on methodologies as well as in understanding the materialities of practices, the 'mobilities of design' open up the opportunity to ask questions on the taken-for-granted usages of spaces for mobility and transport.

Applied mobilities thus can be understood as much more than an undifferentiated flow, and rather as a series of identifiable activities, designs and, indeed, technologies that might concern a particular organization or institution. For example, in this issue, Hofmann develops a critical analysis of the design and subsequent mobilities of the everyday object of the spoon through the geopolitics of bombs in Laos. He shows how historical events over distance emerge in the everyday lives of people through the conceptualization of 'flat ontologies'.

### **Technologies**

Throughout the last century many western cities have been planned to facilitate car transport (Urry 2007; Conley and McLaren 2012; Newman and Kenworthy 2015). The path dependencies derived from this are deeply incorporated into the backbone of everyday life, planning and policies. Indeed, many mobilities scholars have investigated the significance of the car in contemporary society (Sheller 2004; Freudendal-Pedersen 2009; Pearce 2012; Collin-Lange 2013; Manderscheid 2014; Kent 2015). Even in cities where other modes of mobilities, like cycling, are increasingly dominant the car still plays an overarching role (Freudendal-Pedersen 2015a). At the same time the use of various mobile technologies has increased significantly in both western and non-western contexts (Collins 2009). A decade ago there was still a belief that virtual co-presence would mean less physical mobilities. Today we know that on the contrary virtual mobilities has also created new physical mobilities where individuals move to interact physically and/or virtually, with or within their virtual communities (Licoppe 2012; Licoppe and Morel 2012). Germann Molz and Paris (2015, 173) have further noted how the proliferation of digital devices and online social media and networking technologies has altered practices of travel in recent years such that independent travellers 'are now able to stay in continuous touch with friends, family and other travellers while on the move,' leading to a 'new sociality: virtual mooring, following, collaborating, and (dis)connecting.'

Information and communication technologies has altered the opportunities for how to use different transport modes and the idea of moving from ownership to access, that previously has been widely discussed within environmental science, now seems to be having an impact on car producers' business strategies (see Canzler and Knie this issue). The current debates on the sharing economy of mobility and the electric car show that significant changes in the cultural concept of mobility are occurring. In the future, car ownership may not any more be the main focus for car producers or those who buy cars. The electric car stands in many ways for a cultural change. The electric car changes the 'affordance character' (see Jensen, Lanng, and Wind this issue) of a combustion engine ready to go wherever the driver wants to. Instead, the electric car must be considered as an 'actor' which calls for more sophisticated planning responses and initiates 'multi-mobilities'. Electric cars only make sense in relation to other mobility

systems such as public transport, aeromobilities, virtual communication or even shared mobilities. The 'Day of the German Automotive Industry' in November 2015 was a remarkable event as a representative of the board of the BMW Group publicly announced that in fifteen years mobility would be their product, rather than just cars. Moreover the Volkswagen 'dieselgate' affair has been not only a significant sustainability and credibility crisis for a global car producer but also an indicator for social change and the necessity to adapt to a new reality for the automotive industry. Through an applied perspective on these mobilities it is possible to investigate how embodied practices and experiences of different modes of physical or virtual travel are facilitated and emerge through technologies.

## **Cultures**

*Applied Mobilities* also seeks to understand how global orderings are networked culturally. It is not just about recognizing the interconnections between different forms of mobility, but also developing a more sophisticated ontology of the movement cultures of people, places and things (see Hofmann, this issue). Cultural mobilities pay attention to the distinct social spaces or 'moorings' that orchestrate new forms of social and cultural life (Hannam, Sheller, and Urry 2006; Kesselring 2009; Merriman 2005; Obrador-Pons, Crang, and Travlou 2009). It draws attention to moments of stillness and of waiting: an 'animated suspension' in 'which the event of waiting is no longer conceptualized as a dead period of stasis or stilling, or even a slower urban rhythm, but is instead alive with the potential of being other than this' (Bissell 2007; Bissell and Fuller 2015). Furthermore, such hyper and hypo mobilities as well as their potentialities and motilities enter into connections with various governmental plans and policies even as they are striated by gender and ethnicity (see Waite et al, this issue).

Mobilities are embedded in all sorts of social functions and pursuits which create significant memories, from travelling to work and numerous leisure activities, to going on holiday, leaving a country in search of work or sanctuary, to get to the supermarket or buy groceries online. As Hebbert (2005, 581) has noted 'memory and identity are rooted in bodily experiences of being and moving in material space.' These different mobilities entail different (or sometimes maybe the same) cultures, and create various meanings and resonance (Freudendal-Pedersen 2015b; Jensen 2009; Vannini 2012). Some mobilities are unnoticed everyday activities, others have more dramatic outsets – from frantically leaving one's home to escape from a mudslide, to embarking on a protest march (Lamond and Spracklen 2014; N. Cook and Butz 2015).

The opportunities and consequences of such applied mobilities have recently been highlighted in the debates regarding the access of migrants, refugees and asylum seekers in Europe. On the 4th September 2015, large numbers of refugees who had been attempting to board trains to Austria and Germany at the Keleti Railway Station in Budapest decided to walk instead. The depiction of the mass movement of people marching down motorways led to further political debate about the EU 'migrant crisis' with countries beginning to agree on 'quotas' of refugees. The EU itself has been much criticized for not doing more to

prepare Europe for a refugee crisis, with chaos on the ground, as one European country after another has built fences and re-introduced border controls across the continent's supposedly border-free Schengen area, in an attempt to maintain national security (Hannam 2016).

### **Conclusions: Transitions and opportunities**

*Applied Mobilities* wishes to pay special attention to the sustainability of future mobilities. In examining the possible transitions and their opportunities and consequences or even a lack of transition and the consequences that this might entail, an applied perspective provides us with an insight into the challenges of present social and material practices. Today, planning mobilities are most often based on the present, of what we already know to be 'true'. Through an interaction with practice, knowledge sharing might result in the development of visions of desirable futures (Urry 2011). We cannot be sure what the future will bring, but as Beck (1992) pointed out, there is a difference between non-knowledge (*Nichtwissen*) – those things we don't know, yet, but we can possibly know – and those things we definitively won't be able to know about in the future (*Nicht-wissen-Können*).

As the current events taking place across Europe in terms of the refugee crisis suggest, these dimensions are not discrete but intimately connected. The politics of the interruption of traumatic migration from Syria involves a significant transition, educational as well as emotional, for the refugees themselves. These are framed within particular geopolitical discourses and practices – governmobilities of movement and mobility regimes – which seek to codify the materialities and memories of freedom and unfreedom. Mobilities, planned and unplanned are always being and becoming through design, technologies and cultures.

Against these backgrounds sustainable mobilities are in many ways a challenging and uphill project. In the current sustainability strategies of cities, the overall emphasis is on how to earn money through green and smart strategies. But living in a neoliberal society constitutes a dilemma: can we continue as consumers and still expect to create sustainable futures? (Jackson 2009). Through interactions with praxis *Applied Mobilities* aims to generate knowledge on the planning, design, technologies and cultures of mobilities. In this way it contributes to the discovery of possible ways out of contemporary and future crises.

Hence *Applied Mobilities* is not only a peer reviewed journal for high quality scientific work. It is also a place for dialogues and interaction. In this issue we begin a series of conversations with two architects from Copenhagen, Tina Saaby, the city architect of the Danish capital, and Jesper Pagh, the CEO of the Danish Association of Architects. One of the goals with this conversation space is to show how ideas of mobilities and the mobilities of ideas challenge the concepts and perceptions of what can be called 'influential movers'. The extended book review section also aims to support the dissimulation of literature that engages with mobilities concepts. We also aim to report from past conferences (see Daniel Normark's reflections in this issue on the 2015 joint



T2M/Cosmobilities conference on 'The Future of Mobilities: Flows, Transport and Communication') as well as forthcoming mobilities conferences and events.

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