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The dimensions of mobilities: The spatial relationships between corporeal and digital mobilities[☆]



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ABSTRACT

The aim of this article is to study how the corporeal and digital mobilities are spatially organised in relation to each other in everyday life. The dimensions of mobilities are modelled by using survey data ($N = 612$) collected from Finland in 2011. Multiple Correspondence Analysis (MCA) and Multiple Regression Analysis (MRA). The results show that the combined use of corporeal and digital means of mobility affect the spatial organisation of mobilities only little. The results indicate that young people and students are more likely to benefit from their mobility in networking activities as they are equipped with a larger variety of mobility means than older people and pensioners. Lastly, women and people living in essentially urban areas are more likely to augment their physical travelling practices by using small-sized digital mobilities than men and people living in rural locations.

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1. Introduction

Recently a number of sociological inquiries have emphasised the complex interdependencies between corporeal and digital mobilities (e.g., Larsen et al., 2006; Kellerman, 2006, 2012; Urry, 2000a, 2007; Elliot and Urry, 2010). Various types of mobilities are said to make up a complex mobility system, and by studying this system it would be possible to better understand people's needs for travelling in contemporary societies in which daily undertakings, such as work, child care and leisure time activities, are spatially dispersed. Apart from these system-oriented approaches, multiple studies have analysed how information and communication technologies (ICTs) affect the formation of social networks in particular and social interaction in general (e.g., Castells et al., 2006; Carrasco et al., 2008a, 2008b; Mok et al., 2010).

The aim of this article is to study how the corporeal and digital mobilities, to borrow Urry's (2007) phrases, are spatially organised in relation to each other in everyday life. Hereafter, the term ICT will be used when referring to the means of digital mobility; physical movement is used synonymously with corporeal mobility. While previous studies have primarily approached the studied phenomenon by means of qualitative methods, this study adopts a different research strategy: the dimensions of mobilities are explored by using a structured survey and by applying a method of geometric data analysis to the research material collected.

Theoretically, the paper builds upon the mobilities paradigm and related studies dealing with how people live their lives today. This paradigm was largely formulated by Urry (2007) who, argues that sociologists have disregarded the role of mobility and communications in the contemporary globalised world. Increased mobility overall brings with it a loosening of the fixed structures of the industrial society (Peters, 2006; Sheller and Urry, 2006; Urry, 2007). However, critical voices remind us that mobility and fixity are historically and geographically perceived differently depending on national spaces (Skeggs, 2004, pp. 48–49). To manage this liquidity Bauman (2000) states that people can make use of multiple means of

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mobility; including but not limited to private cars, trains, buses, and a large number of small electronic appliances (e.g., mobile phones, laptops, tablet PCs and MP3 players). These devices make it possible to overcome distances in communicative and imaginary manners (e.g., Castells et al., 2006; Mok et al., 2010). The focus of this study is on what Kellerman (2012) calls daily spatial mobility: defined by two-way (e.g., journeys to work, school, or shopping and back) rather than one-way movement (e.g., change of residence) that takes place regularly (cf. vacation journeys).

To study the relationship between people's physical movement and ICTs in daily life the article uses nationally representative survey data ($N = 612$) collected from Finland in 2011. The study is based on a statistical method rooted in the French tradition (Benzécri, 1973), Multiple Correspondence Analysis (MCA), which aims to describe the relationships and distances between two or more categorical variables geometrically. In this, MCA is applied to substantiate, or to oppose or specify, explanatory theories (Le Roux and Rouanet, 2010) and not to predict causal relationships. In this case, it is the theory of mobilities that suggest that there are interconnected systems of mobilities that contribute to the building of networking capacity (or so-called network capital) (Urry 2000a, 2007; Elliot and Urry, 2010; Wellman and Frank, 2001; Quan-Haase et al., 2002).

The discovered factorial axes will then be analysed by applying Multiple Regression Analysis (MRA). This method is used to give a clearer picture of the socio-demographic predictors of respondents' positioning on each axis. Given the motivational basis of this study, Finland serves only as one example in the search for empirical evidence on the theory-related research questions, which will be formulated below.

The rest of this article is structured as follows. First, the study is situated in relation to previous literature on mobilities, travelling and ICT usage. Based on this literature review, specific research questions are outlined for the study. This is followed by the presentation of the data, measures and the applied statistical tools. The results of the multivariate analyses are presented before proceeding to a final discussion where the results are juxtaposed with prior knowledge.

2. Literature

2.1. Mobilities paradigm

John Urry formulated the mobilities paradigm for the first time at the turn of 21st century. Urry (2000a) posited that societal structuring and transformations are bound up with an idea of what it is to be a member of a given nation-state with certain social rights and duties. Multiple mobilities are transforming the historical subject matter of sociology, that is an individual 'western' society with its endogenous social characteristics (Urry, 2000b). The paradigm suggests that the 'social' should not be understood as 'societal' but rather as 'mobile' (Urry, 2003, p. 171).

In this new era, mobility should no longer be reduced to social mobility, referring to transformations in individual's social positions within a given social structure or network and enabled by educational and occupational achievements or meritocratic principles (Kellerman, 2006, p. 9). Along with social mobility, spatial mobility should be considered as a structuring dimension of daily social life (Kaufmann, 2002, and Kaufmann et al., 2004). Social structures and dynamics are, in fact, interdependent with individual's actual and potential capacity to displace entities, such as people, goods, and information (Kaufmann et al., 2004, p. 745). Ability to move material and immaterial entities affects to individual's social positions in a given society, just like we have used to think about the impact of education on social mobility. The mobilities paradigm directs the focus of sociology to this greater variety of mobilities and the ways in which they interact, and thus, constitute hybrid mobilities (Urry, 2000a, 2007), and reshape the social structures of contemporary societies and great new inequalities (Kellerman, 2006).

The mobility paradigm has made efforts to build a typology of mobilities (Urry, 2007, p. 47; Larsen et al., 2006, pp. 47–48 and Büscher and Urry, 2009, pp. 101–102), which is something new in the social sciences (Cresswell 2010, p. 18). However, the relationships between various modes of mobilities have not yet been geometrically modelled. The most recent and well-established version of the typology consists of five modes of movement. *Corporeal* mobility, or travelling, refers to the movement of people in terms of their work, family and leisure time as well as to various forms of human migration. The second mode of mobility is *physical* movement of objects, which refers to exchange of physical items between producers, consumers/ordinary people and retailers. *Imaginative* mobility occurs through images that are conveyed through media such as radio and television. *Virtual* mobility makes a stronger reference to movement that takes place in real time, typically on the Internet, and transcends social and geographical distances. *Communicative* mobility alludes to person-to-person communication. Communicative mobility is performed through such means as postcards, faxes, telephones, emails and the like. These five types of mobility are interdependent categories and coexist in everyday life (Larsen et al., 2006, p. 47).

The data used for this study permits us to examine the imaginary, virtual and communicative levels of movement. One mode of mobility, the physical movement of objects, is left outside the analysis for two reasons. First, while other modes of mobility can directly facilitate inter-personal relationships, the physical movement of objects can do so only indirectly. Secondly, the data collected does not contain a proper statistical measure for this modality.

2.2. The dimensions of mobilities

Whereas social network researchers have recently paid attention to the possibility of people facilitating interaction by initiating social events within their network by reaching others through ICT (e.g., Carrasco et al., 2008a), the mobility paradigm is more geared towards the analysis of mobility systems: how the physical movement of people and

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