

1. Videos

Thinking from and with mobilities through the notion of dwelling

By
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Using the concept of dwelling, Mathis Stock proposes to approach mobility both through travel and through the relationship of people to the different places that give rhythm to their lives. The result is an approach that is more in line with contemporary lifestyles, characterised by the multiplication of places where daily life takes place, long-distance tourism and permanent connectivity. By linking movements and places with the question of lifestyles and the meaning that individuals give to their movements, dwelling sheds new light on our understanding of mobility practices.

Transcription

My name is Mathis Stock, I am a professor of tourism geography at the Institute of Geography and Sustainability at the University of Lausanne, and my research focuses on different forms of mobility, including tourist mobility, which I approach from the point of view of dwelling.

The concept of dwelling: a global approach to mobility

What does dwelling mean? Dwelling here does not mean residing. Dwelling means the practice of space in general, to exist in relation to space, to include the question of the relationship to space in mobility research. For example, questions of accessibility, of boundaries, of crossing boundaries, of locations, all these elements that are related to space are integrated into this notion of dwelling. Why apply the concept of dwelling to mobility studies? Mobilities do not exist on their own, they are always adapted to geographical spaces, to how places are practised, and that is why it is important to connect mobilities and geographical places. This approach has consequences, in particular on how we integrate mobilities and locations. The important point is not to work on an isolated movement, but to connect it to other forms of mobility, such as tourist mobilities, work-related mobility, leisure, family mobility, but also migrations and residentialities. It is thinking about all the movements together which is the main message. One of the advantages of this approach is understanding substitutions between different movements, for example between professional mobilities and migrations, and also to consider how telecommunications come into play in possible substitutions between physical mobilities - active movement, effective movement - and means of communication, by telecommunications, and today by digital tools. Example: telework currently is a way of replacing work-related trips with telecommunications.

Polytopic dwelling at the heart of contemporary lifestyles

We can question whether there is increased mobility in contemporary societies. As societies develop, does mobility play an increasing role for individuals? And can we also identify and characterise post-sedentary lifestyles? In order to address the question, I introduced the notion of polytopic dwelling styles to precisely say that there are multiple places and multiple mobilities that today shape everyday life. The question of the elsewhere is also raised here in the sense that a familiarisation with distant places can also be integrated into everyday life. It is not just a vision of the near as the everyday and of the far as less frequent; a new understanding is possible with these polytopic dwelling styles.

In particular, we conducted research in Lausanne and Geneva around Lake Geneva and found several examples of polytopic dwelling styles, including a 39-year-old woman resident in the suburbs of Lausanne, who has 4 main dwelling places: her home, her partner's home, her workplace in Lausanne and then a workplace in London where she goes regularly. The distinctive feature here is that she only uses two modes of transport: the plane and the car. And she systematically combines business trips and leisure practices, shopping practices, things like that. Then there is a second, very different example: a young man living in the suburbs of Lausanne, who has two daily places centred on work and residence, and the rest of his time is devoted to leisure, especially sports: he goes out every weekend to go climbing in the surrounding area, in the Alps, but also even further afield. So it's a style of dwelling that is centred around leisure. That is also interesting, lifestyles where leisure takes precedence over everything else in a way. And then we have a third example, in Geneva, a woman in her fifties who has developed a way of life, a dwelling style centred around two places: Geneva, where she resides, and Crans-Montana where her family has a second residence. Here we have what could be called a "duo-centric" dwelling style: she spends practically the same amount of time in Crans-Montana as in Geneva. And what is also very interesting in this example is that the family only travels by train, they know the train schedules by heart, so there is a certain skill developed around mobility, a certain "travel know-how" which helps master this particular style of dwelling.

The dwelling regime: an ever-changing norm

Mobility is not just a matter of individual decisions but rather it is inserted into societal contexts which are constantly changing. Society changes and therefore the political, social, cultural, technological and economic contexts change. So mobility also depends on these societal changes. As a geographer, I focus on the changing conditions from the standpoint of geography, i.e. geographical conditions that change over time. We could call it a geographicity regime, or a dwelling regime, i.e. the different relationships to space that change over time and that are the conditions for lifestyles, for dwelling styles, for mobilities. What is therefore very interesting is that technological changes lead to increased accessibility. This is one of the contemporary geographical conditions, the ease of access to places. In the literature it is sometimes termed time-space compression or convergence of space-time. And indeed we can precisely quantify the gains in terms of costs or in terms of time in the accessibility of places. In 1800 it took 16 days to go from London to Geneva while today it takes 2 hours by plane. This considerably changes the conditions for exercising mobility, but also the practice and the meaning attributed to tourist practices.

Dwelling regime and tourist mobilities in the digital age

This increased accessibility is also important today, with the so-called Easy Jet generation that is able to swap cities in one or two hours. This affects how people practise these cities and it changes the meaning of mobilities. Moving quickly from one city to another is no longer a problem, it is done with great ease, which is of course linked to what we call low-cost air travel, with costs that have dropped dramatically in the past thirty years.

There is also a link between the dwelling regime and tourist mobilities. Tourism is currently being criticised, in particular with regard to sustainable development. On the one hand, air travel is criticised in terms of CO2 emissions, and on the other tourism is now accused in certain European cities of causing over-tourism. This highlights the resistance, the contestation of tourism by residents in certain

European cities, for example in Barcelona, Venice, Berlin, where residents bemoan the touristification of daily life, with ordinary shops being replaced by tourist shops, gentrification, competition on the real estate market between short-term rentals and long-term rentals, and public nuisances. So it is a set of elements, of phenomena associated with mass tourism in European cities that is being opposed today. A study by my doctoral student Florian Eggli on Lucerne was able to show the different strategies implemented by the residents of Lucerne to appropriate tourism, but also their methods of contesting and resisting the tourist phenomenon. For example, a festival called Pax Festival is organised to occupy the street and force tourists, for once, to also find their way through the crowd. Plays are organised around the theme of tourism. This is therefore one of the cities where there is a tension between contestation and appropriation of tourism by residents.

How digital technology has changed our ways of dwelling

Another aspect of this contemporary dwelling regime concerns the ubiquitous use of digital technologies. Here too, this has a consequence on tourism which initially or traditionally is in fact a break with everyday life. Tourist practices establish a break between the daily and the non-daily by virtue of this displacement. And this traditionally clear break is now harder to maintain because of the continuous use of digital technologies, for instance with newsfeeds that keep arriving, or social networks that make this break much harder between the daily and non-daily, even when we are away. So that ultimately raises the question: does tourism still exist after the digital revolution? One of my doctoral students, Morgane Roux, conducted a research project in Banff National Park on the use of these digital technologies by tourists and she found that there is practically no disconnection whatsoever. Most communications are maintained – either with family, or with friends, or even with the professional sphere. So that raises the question of tourism in a dwelling regime which is today characterised by the continuous use of digital technologies.

The mobility regime: unequal norms

The dwelling regime is also linked to what is called in the literature a mobility regime, that is a set of mobility regulations which create unequal treatment between different forms of mobility and are also the expression of different power relations pertaining to these mobilities. This also has legal aspects. Certain forms of mobility are encouraged or facilitated by legal regulations, for example business trips or tourist mobility. Conversely certain mobilities, such as migrations, are hindered or even criminalised in some cases.

After the pandemic, a transformation of dwelling?

As a geographer I was struck by the dramatic and brutal effects of the COVID 19 pandemic on mobility. Regulation in particular is an important element for mobility. Moreover, in geography we are now increasingly looking at these legal dimensions, in a field known as legal geography. We understand that mobilities are also regulated practices and the pandemic showed how the government intervened in the regulation of mobility. With the lockdown, people's freedom of movement was restricted. Mobility was constrained by state power. What is particularly striking about this regulation during the pandemic was the unequal treatment of different mobilities. Some types of mobility were maintained, such as international business trips, or medical emergencies or family care, but other forms of mobility such as leisure or tourism were prohibited. This raises the question of the legitimacy of certain forms of mobility compared to others, and therefore the question of the delegitimisation of certain forms of mobility compared to others. This also raises the question of the dynamics of change brought about by the health crisis. Has the dwelling regime changed following the health crisis, in the sense that a new dominant relationship to space emerged, with for example city centres becoming less desirable than before, and the countryside becoming more desirable than before, or forms of teleworking (and therefore telecommunications) being preferred to forms of physical mobility? These would be the elements of a new dwelling regime.

Thinking from and with mobilities

Finally, I like to use the formula "thinking from and with mobilities" which means that we must not only constitute mobilities as an object, that is to question their characteristics, value, differentiations, inequalities, but also apprehend other phenomena through mobility. This means thinking of the city as a set of mobilities, instead of thinking of the city as a morphological space, and thinking of lifestyles as being informed by mobility. Human societies are ultimately only a set of mobilities. So that is the important point: thinking from and with mobilities.

Mobility

For the Mobile Lives Forum, mobility is understood as the process of how individuals travel across distances in order to deploy through time and space the activities that make up their lifestyles. These travel practices are embedded in socio-technical systems, produced by transport and communication industries and techniques, and by normative discourses on these practices, with considerable social, environmental and spatial impacts.

En savoir plus x

Movement

Movement is the crossing of space by people, objects, capital, ideas and other information. It is either oriented, and therefore occurs between an origin and one or more destinations, or it is more akin to the idea of simply wandering, with no real origin or destination.

En savoir plus x

Teleworking

The remote performance of a salaried activity outside of the company's premises, at home or in a third place during normal working hours and requiring access to telecommunication tools.

En savoir plus x

Lockdown

The lockdown measures implemented throughout 2020 in the context of the Covid-19 crisis, while varying from one country to the next, implied a major restriction on people's freedom of movement for a given period. Presented as a solution to the spread of the virus, the lockdown impacted local, interregional and international travel. By transforming the spatial and temporal dimensions of people's lifestyles, the lockdown accelerated a whole series of pre-existing trends, such as the rise of teleworking and teleshopping and the increase in walking and cycling, while also interrupting of long-distance mobility. The ambivalent experiences of the lockdown pave the way for a possible transformation of lifestyles in the future.

En savoir plus x

Associated Thematics :

Lifestyles

- Diversity of lifestyles
- Leisure & tourism
- Digital technologies
- Rhythms of everyday life

Theories

- Concepts



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