

Soutenu par les Equipes Cost et Date

**16th MSFS symposium on “Spatial mobilities: data collection, analysis and processing methodologies”**

8th and 9th November 2018, Faculty of Law, Economic and Social Sciences, University of Tours

**Issues and topics**

An increasing amount of research on spatial mobilities over the last twenty years has addressed the notion of “mobility turn” (Urry, 2008) or forms of “a society of mobile individuals”. Mobility as the norm, as a principle of managing distances, as the basis of lifestyles, or as a factor in the reorganisation of contemporary territories, has made the relationship of societies to movement a central and cross-cutting subject in Human and Social Sciences.

From quantitative approaches to comprehensive methods drawing on various models (constructivism, phenomenology, ethnomethodologies, symbolic interactionism, pragmatism), current research highlights the diversity of theoretical and epistemological positions, of methodological frameworks, and more broadly, of conceptions of spatial mobility. They also reveal the diversity of ways that knowledge is constructed and investigated: the organising role of flows, mobility and socialisation behaviours, experiences of mobility and immobility, construction of lifestyles and territories, production of public spaces and urban forms, innovation and energy transition, etc. The contributions of interdisciplinarity, of systemic thinking and of pragmatism, and the rise of qualitative approaches concerned with the experience and the underlying logic of mobility actions, have profoundly changed the concepts and approaches to mobility.

At the same time, many studies seek to decompartmentalise the perspectives and main thematic approaches of mobility (migrations, tourism, residential, daily life, etc.) and bring them together in new forms of dialogue in order to grasp a complex reality.

By analysing and clarifying the methodologies (for collecting, analysing and processing research data) that have been developed in spatial mobility research, the aim of the 16th *GT Mobilités Spatiales, Fluidité Sociale* symposium is to examine the theoretical and epistemological frameworks underlying the work of researchers. As observed by S. Duchesne (2017: 4), “[while] the method sections [of publications] generally show the scaffolding that led to the results, our aim is to examine the construction of the scaffolding”. Rather than merely describing and taking a technical approach to the methods that are used, our aim is to encourage researchers to explain their choices, procedures, and tools and the way they use them in their research. What led them to adopt a particular approach or method? What theoretical arguments does that approach support? What questions does it inform? How can one be sure that the chosen methodology is relevant to the question? Finally, which conception(s) of mobility does this method relate to?

While researchers working on spatial mobilities come from various and often very different disciplines, cultures and methodological backgrounds (from statisticians working from GPS recordings to sociologists who are familiar with semi-structured interviews or with ethnographic work), in principle they are all working on a common subject, namely mobility. Consequently, how can they understand each other and make themselves understood? How can one ensure “coherence” in the field of mobilities? How can complementarities be brought into play? By encouraging and exchanging different answers to these questions, the aim of this symposium is to help give structure to research on mobility. It is organised by the UMR CITERES as part of the research programme entitled *“Mutualisation et méta-analyse de corpus qualitatifs sur les mobilités quotidiennes dans les territoires dépendants de l’automobile”* (Pooling and meta-analysis of the qualitative corpora on daily mobilities in automobile-dependent areas), and it is funded and scientifically supported by the [Mobile Lives Forum](http://en.forumviesmobiles.org/), a research institute financed by the SNCF.

**Topic 1. “Back to basics: materials and collection methods”**

The aim of this topic is to put ideas about collection methods and materials back on the agenda. On the one hand, the rise of qualitative research into mobility as an overall social fact raises questions about the value of material arising from ethnographic surveys, participant observation, forms of experimentation, interviews or life stories. It encourages us to explore new areas of meaning, notably what we can learn about mobilities from literature, cinema, photography, and artistic production in general. It also leads us to explore and use other data capture modes (photography, videos, games, tablets, etc.) in our protocols, thanks to miniaturisation and new technologies. What is the contribution of these new technologies? How do they change our survey methods? Are they a technological mirage, or do they provide an opportunity for knowledge building? For what research issues or objectives?

Moreover, digital technology has become a rich source of information, or even a highly promising albeit still very complex methodological tool. Thus, the collection and use of data produced by sensors (GPS, GMS, etc.) has proliferated, but the diversity of protocols, processes and aims has not been clearly defined. For example, how do data collected via “passive” sensors and those obtained second-hand differ in the way they are used and processed? How can spatio-temporal data be enriched when they are in principle limited in content? The wealth of information collected by GPS tracking devices and the way that this is used in composite protocols lead to a broad range of qualitative and/or quantitative uses. However, this interaction remains fragile and insufficiently exploited/discussed, both in the data production phase and in the processing and analysis phase. What are the benefits of bringing together GPS and other forms of recording (photos, videos, sound recordings, interviews)? How do these interactions make it possible to map both spatially and temporally the routes, the purpose of the movement and the individual’s accounts of them?

*Big data* opens up avenues of research for researchers seeking to develop the quantitative analysis of mobility practices and to grasp the uses of digital and/or telecommunication technology that are closely linked to them. Following this line, questions remain about access to the massive data collected by operators and the actual data-processing procedures, as well as how to implement a procedure where the types of groups that come together as a result of flows can no longer be understood in terms of social or biographical contexts. Consequently, how can these digital data be used to renew/reinforce the longitudinal approaches required to understand how mobilities change over time, or even how behaviour patterns related to movement change?

Another aspect of renewal arises from the direct observation of mobilities. Thinking about the routes, the perception of movement and/or of the intervening spaces, or about the uses of the movement in relation to space and time, has led to the idea of capturing mobilities in situ (Pradel et al., 2015) and the development of “mobile methods” (Buscher et al., 2010). At the methodological level, these can take the form of a walking interview, on-board interviews, or setting up ad hoc situations. What do these “on-the-move” survey methods tell us about mobilities? What can we expect of them and what is their benefit? What distinctions should be made between methods involving “everyday” mobility (on-board interviews) and those involving movement in reconstructed or ad hoc situations (guided tours)?

Particular thought should be given to all the materials used in the qualitative methods to encourage the participants to express and refine their ideas: photos, hermeneutic maps, videos, posters, etc.

Finally, “secondary” materials could also be of interest, such as those collected by one researcher but processed by another (as part of the same project, or of a secondary analysis); should these materials be considered as specific and treated differently from “primary” material?

**Topic 2. “Data processing and hybridisation of approaches”**

If there is indeed a black box, it is the one for processing survey data, while data-management plans require the nature and objectives of the processing to be defined in detail. In fact, scientific publications often fail to justify and explain the methods used for processing and interpreting material. This is particularly true for qualitative methods where the means of understanding and constructing evidence from discursive material are rarely described in detail, even though they should provide the keys or framework for scientific transfer and discussion.

The aim of this topic is precisely to explain and foster discussion about the conditions for implementing the widely used methods and their efficiency: statistical data processing, analysis of log books and GPS data, interpretation of qualitative materials, counting or observation techniques, etc. The aim is also to provide an overview of methodological innovations based on hybrid, composite or mixed methods: combined quantitative and qualitative methods; quantitative exploitation of qualitative material; comparing direct observations with narrative material from interviews; combining observation techniques and data collected from interviews, etc. This will involve examining the scientific interest, the prerequisites and the limits of such hybrid methods.

Another issue concerns how the survey material can be represented or displayed: graphs, sketches, diagrams, models, maps, etc. Cartography, which is very widely used to show individual or collective mobility patterns, deserves particular attention: What status is given to the map and for what objectives? In what way can cartography be a data analysis method in relation to mobility? What questions can it be used to address? What content, metric, spatial scale, time scale and information should be retained? What representations of mobility systems does cartography provide? Are the maps the final outcome of interpretation or an intermediate step for data mining? What are the constraints and limits linked to data collected at the individual level?

**Topic 3. Inter- and multi-disciplinary approaches and knowledge building**

From the start, researchers in the field of spatial mobilities have come from different disciplines: sociology, geography, psychology, urban planning, political sciences, information technology, etc. These different backgrounds lead not only to different ways of theorising about spatial mobility, but also to different survey methods. Moreover, there are numerous examples of collaboration between researchers from different disciplines at the national and international level (Ramadier et al., 2007; Depeau et al., 2017; Fol et al., 2017; Ortar et al., 2015).

The objective of this topic is thus to reflect on these cross-disciplinary exchanges, based on concrete examples of inter- and multi-disciplinary research. How is this research set up and how does it work, from collection to processing and interpretation of the data? What are the benefits of bringing together different theoretical frameworks and methodological approaches (Dupuy & Duchesne, 2017)? What are the potential limits and misunderstandings? Is it possible for a common language to emerge?

This topic also concerns exploring how theoretical frameworks and methodological tools can be brought together, looking at the circulation of concepts, ideas, and explanatory models and their possible use or misuse. Does meeting and collaborating with researchers from other disciplines lead to incorporating the concepts and methods of those disciplines? For example, is the geography of mobilities, which is increasingly concerned with the question of social markers and inequalities, becoming “sociologised”? Likewise, are sociologists working on mobility integrating the effects of territory and the organising role of mobilities in their analysis?

We will also explore the impact of these disciplinary interconnections in terms of methodological innovation and the extension of methods that can be used to study mobility. Does interdisciplinarity open up perspectives in terms of reducing “methodological path dependence”?

**Topic 4. Pooling, sharing and secondary analysis of research data**

Promoted by various French research institutes such as the CNRS and INRA, data sharing has different objectives: financial, by optimising data mainly produced through public funding; scientific, by participating in the transparency of scientific procedures; educational, by enabling data to be used in various teaching structures.

Sharing research data raises ethical and legal issues (Bishop & Kuula-Luumi, 2017; Huyghe et al., in press); it also requires methodological considerations regarding the conditions of re-use (or secondary analysis) of the data. In particular, this topic covers two problems identified by J. Heaton (2008), namely *data fit*, and the problem of *not having been there*.

What are the conditions and precautions needed to re-analyse, cross-reference and compare data produced by different studies under different circumstances (place, sample, methodology)? Is it possible to envisage a diachronic analysis of such data? Under what conditions and using what methodology? How can a “meta-corpus” be created, bringing together data from different studies? What is the area of relevance of such a meta-corpus?

What are the conditions and precautions needed in order to re-use data produced by another researcher? How can the aims of sharing a data set be reconciled with the constraints linked to respecting personal data obtained from surveys? How can these data be best recontextualised, considering notably the initial, and particularly historic, context of the survey?

Finally, what methodologies can be used to process a large amount of qualitative and mostly textual data (semi-structured interviews, on-board interviews, etc.)? Likewise, how can textual analysis software be used for secondary analysis of these data?

Examples of re-using research data for secondary analysis or methodological training will provide valuable material to enhance discussion on this topic.

**Topic 5. “Survey samples and locations: adaptation of methods”**

As we have seen, a wide range of methods and approaches are used to understand the mobility phenomenon. While some studies use traditional or well-proven methods, others propose new, innovative, or adapted methodologies. This applies notably to research in “special” contexts, with specific groups of people or in areas that are not readily accessible.

It is the way these studies are conducted that concerns us here: the questions raised, the hesitations and difficulties encountered by researchers working in these specific contexts, the negotiations and choices they have to make. Compared to the groups that are traditionally surveyed in relation to mobility (active adults), how can researchers work on the mobilities of “specific” groups? For example, how can they access and carry out on-going studies of nomadic groups, Roma or the homeless? How can they track the everyday movements of tourists on holiday? How can they comply with ethical requirements when analysing data about everyday movements and activities (collected by GPS sensors or interviews)? This question is particularly relevant with regard to children. How can the work be organised in order to guarantee the rights of the participants regarding use of and access to their personal data?

Furthermore, how can researchers work on spatial mobilities that are characterised by constraints or threat (migrations) or that occur in areas that are not easily accessible, or that carry an element of “otherness” and/or insecurity for the researcher (war zones, areas where the researcher is not welcome)?

**Some references (non-exhaustive)**

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**Submission procedures**

This symposium is intended for researchers in the human and social sciences working on issues of spatial mobility. Doctoral students and young doctors of philosophy are strongly encouraged to submit papers and to participate in the debates.

Draft papers must be submitted on the symposium’s website (<https://msfs2018.sciencesconf.org/>), on the “*Soumettre une contribution*” page **by 15th May 2018**. Proposals should be in the form of abstracts with up to 3,000 characters (including spaces), in French or English. They must have a title, three to five keywords, and a bibliography with five to ten references. The abstracts must be **anonymous** (no indication of surname, first name, or affiliation of author(s) in the abstract).

**Organisation of the symposium**

In order to enhance scientific discussion, the symposium will be organised as much as possible on thematic round-table discussions rather than on individual presentations. Sessions where this is not possible will be organised on more traditional lines.

Prior to the symposium, speakers will be invited to produce a text that will be reviewed and uploaded. Each round-table session will be led by two facilitators who will raise three or four cross-cutting questions related to the topic and invite the authors to respond in turn (using visual aids if necessary); the focus will be on exchange of views between the participants and with the audience.

The pre-symposium phase will be organised as follows:

* 15/05/2018: deadline for submission of abstracts on the symposium website
* 01/06/2018: reviewers’ feedback sent to authors
* 30/09/2018: deadline for submission of papers (15,000 to 25,000 characters) on the symposium website
* 20/10/2018: submission of three or four questions to the authors
* 8-9/11/2018: Symposium

**Organisation committee**

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