High Mobility in Europe
High Mobility in Europe

Work and Personal Life

Edited by

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Foreword

Migration is only one form of mobility that social scientists document as intensifying in the contemporary period; the focus of High Mobility in Europe encompasses another more routine form of mobility – travel to and for work, whether across national boundaries or not – while looking more holistically at the relationship between movement, employment and personal life. Debate continues about the consequences of mobility. For example, Claire Holdsworth\(^1\) notes ‘sweeping generalisations about the intensification of mobility at the expense of the family’ that provoked her own research (Holdsworth, 2013: 1). The authors of High Mobility in Europe demonstrate reasons for avoiding ‘sweeping generalisations’ along with the enormous importance of mobility for personal and family lives. Their original research shines a timely spotlight on patterns of mobility, weighing assumptions against the evidence. They look within and across nation-state boundaries in Europe to deliver an evidence-based account of who is mobile, and why. Their comparative and collaborative efforts put competing theoretical claims about what mobility means for our future to the test while asking their own brand of distinctive searching questions about the reversibility of mobility practices, spatially, temporally, socially and experientially. This is done without unnecessarily proliferating the growing set of neologisms already coined to capture the mobile characters of contemporary life – flying grannies, LATs (couples living apart together), astronaut parents and transnational families. The European residents who feature most strongly are long-distance commuters whose time away from home is extended by over two hours travelling both to and from work, the overnighters who regularly stay away from home for work reasons, and those in long-distance relationships where, again for work-related reasons, each partner has his or her own residence in geographically separate localities.

The nature of the evidence deployed by the authors – longitudinal surveys and qualitative interviews – offers breadth and depth, change over time and change across life courses. This provides multiple routes to explore reversibility, patterns that are subsequently undone. Sample diversity enables analysis by gender and socio-economic circumstances. The fact that mothers bringing up children alone are sometimes long-distance commuters defies common stereotypes and demonstrates how a feeling of entrapment in high mobility is more typical of those with
few resources. It is the more advantaged research participants who have a sense of choosing high mobility as a lifestyle or a life phase. The European countries involved – France, Germany, Spain and Switzerland – do not represent all the regions of Europe. Nevertheless, the detailed and comparative analysis offers food for thought to those of us outside these territories considering our own research evidence. The authors direct our attention to how the sequencing of mobility across the life course reflects differential socialisation that underpins a propensity to mobility, as well as how variations in gender divisions around caring and providing and the impact of recession are affected by different national contexts.

What is distinctly contemporary about mobility and its impact on social worlds and individual lives remains deeply contested. Contemporary patterns of mobility have encouraged some analysts to suggest abandoning the nation-state understanding of society as a conceptual blinker, even though state agencies continue to modify mobility across nation-state borders and to support local people differentially in their means and capacity for movement. The authors of *High Mobility in Europe* bring a new body of evidence to these debates and the data they provide within and across four nation-states demonstrates that freedom of movement within the European Union has not levelled out national differences in patterns of mobility, even between neighbouring countries.

*Professor Lynn Jamieson*  
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**Note**

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Vincent Kaufmann is Associate Professor of Urban Sociology and Mobility, Director of the Urban Sociology Laboratory (LaSUR) of the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology Lausanne (EPFL), and the scientific director of the Mobile Lives Forum. After completing his master's in Sociology from the University of Geneva, he went on to do his PhD on travel mode choices in everyday life at EPFL. He has also completed his postdoctoral studies at Lancaster University (2000) and Ecole Des Ponts et Chaussées (2001). He was invited as professor by Université Laval, Canada, Louvain-la-Neuve University Belgium, Nimegen University, Netherlands and Université de Toulouse Le Mirail, France. He has published widely in the fields of mobility and urban life styles, social and spatial mobility, public policy evaluation of transport and city planning, including Re-thinking Mobility in 2002 and Re-thinking the City in 2011.

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Stéphanie Vincent-Geslin obtained his PhD in Sociology from the University Paris-Descartes La Sorbonne. After five years as a scientific collaborator at the Urban Sociology Laboratory (LaSUR) of the Swiss
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