

# Motility: Mobility as Capital\*

VINCENT KAUFMANN, MANFRED MAX BERGMAN and  
DOMINIQUE JOYE

## Introduction

It takes less than 24 hours to send an express package from Paris to an exact address in Berlin, Tokyo or Los Angeles. It takes a split second to send detailed financial information from the New York stock exchange to thousands of servers around the world. And it takes only a few weeks to mobilize and transport hundreds of thousands of US troops, including hardware, to any region in the world. All societies have experienced in various ways the significant changes that are due to ever-increasing displacements of goods, information and people. Increases in speed and distance, in conjunction with greater efficiency, have had a profound effect on the status of such entities. While these changes have introduced new dimensions, dependencies and dynamics to mobility, they have also obscured the construct in that new insights have enriched debates but also added to its conceptual confusion.

Our intention here is to explore mobility in terms of the dynamics of social structures in modern societies. Focusing on the relation between spatial and social mobility, we will argue that social structures and dynamics are interdependent with the actual or potential capacity to displace entities, i.e. goods, information or people. Our focus on spatial diffusion and exchange in this context is not limited to the analysis of the quantitative distribution of entities, but includes functional arrangements, hierarchies and potentialities. Accordingly, we will formulate a theoretical concept that outlines the correspondence between ecological and spatial arrangements of economic, social and cultural assets. Expanding on the links between urbanization, class and power as proposed by Manuel Castells (1977; 1978; *cf.* Urry, 2000), we will argue in this article that the spatial distribution of goods, information and people forms dynamic interdependencies with social structures.

With this article, we intend to make a contribution to the study of mobility as a geographic and social phenomenon and to anchor it in what Castells refers to in a more limited sense as the 'social production of spatial forms' (1977). In line with Castells, we are interested in 'the process of social production of the spatial forms of a society and, conversely, ... the relations between the space constituted and the structural transformations of a society' (*ibid.*:138). However, our focus in this article is limited to the exploration of the links and synergies between spatial and social mobility, developing further the work on the mobility of objects and people by John Urry (2000) and Martin Schuler and his colleagues (1997).

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## Time-space compression and social fluidity

The different theoretical points of departure relating to fluidification are often linked to particular social theories such as structural-functionalism, postmodernism, post-structuralism, etc., without acknowledging the potential contributions that competing paradigms could make. The lack of cross-fertilization is a result of the evolution in different fields which, according to François Dubet (1994), gives rise to important theoretical limitations. On the one hand, general theories are erroneously treated as midrange theories. On the other, intellectual fashions weaken the cohesiveness of paradigms in the social sciences, while concurrently reducing the choices of theoretical explanation and interpretation. In briefly outlining the central ideas of spatial and social mobility, we will demonstrate that these limitations are indeed profoundly rooted in some of the central debates within the two fields.

*Spatial mobility* traditionally refers to geographic displacement, i.e. the movement of entities from an origin to a destination along a specific trajectory that can be described in terms of space and time. Entities can be concrete (e.g. consumables, machinery or people) or abstract (e.g. information, ideas or norms). During this journey, entities may not only experience a change in status (e.g. value or importance), but the spatial mobility of entities may also influence the points of departure, traversal or destination.

Technical and logistical developments in transport and telecommunications technology have significantly changed the speed and trajectories of displacements of concrete and abstract entities. In a sense, increasing speeds and efficiency have compressed distances and made the diffusion of information and ideas quasi-immediate. Time and space are compressed and fused as a consequence of transnational economic and technological developments, which produce and are dependent on the speedy transfer of goods and information (Castells, 1977; 1978; 1996; Urry, 2000).

The social, cultural, economic and political consequences of these dynamics are much debated in the social and political sciences. For many scholars, the shrinkage of space-time alters our understanding of societies. David Harvey states:

We have been experiencing, these last two decades, an intense phase of time-space compression that had a disorienting and disruptive impact upon political-economic practices, the balance of class power, as well as upon cultural and social life (1990: 284).

Accordingly, changes in mobility patterns may be at the base of fundamental societal changes, whose consequences for people and territories are only now becoming intelligible.

Other theorists are less convinced about these effects and changes. Boden and Molotch (1994), for example, question the significance of time-space compression. They argue that the consequences of such compression:

for social life, whether benign or nefarious, have been exaggerated. The robust nature and enduring necessity of traditional human communication procedures have been underappreciated (1994: 258).

These two positions on social change and spatial mobility point to one of the most central controversies in modern sociology: Are we or are we not witnessing a social fluidification of societal structures based on the increasing mobility of goods, information and people? We believe that, to some extent, divergent results are not necessarily based on different research findings, but rather on divergent interpretations of similar evidence. For example, territories are often represented as physical, bounded and static entities, thus imposing wide-ranging theoretical and empirical limits on the concept (e.g. Wellman and Richardson, 1987; Montulet, 1998). Although urban sociology has attempted to introduce new conceptions of space by, for instance, proposing to replace the notion of cities as an areolar space with an approach that considers towns and cities as a transcendental space beyond a morphological materialization (Ascher, 1995; Remy and Voyé, 1992), empirical studies on territory

continue to subscribe to the areolar model. Thus, the notion of a geographically delineated neighborhood is still very much in use, although many researchers consider these units of analysis insufficient and, thus, inappropriate. Findings about the extent and effects of inequalities in urban space may often be misleading and contradictory because urban segregation studies maintain the traditional focus on communities or neighbourhoods as concrete and static territories (Grafmeyer and Dansereau, 1998; Roch, 1998). Consequently, disagreements about fluidification between the different camps may arise merely from an inconsistent conceptualization and study of territorial space. As we will show next, similar discrepancies have emerged in the field of social mobility.

*Social mobility* can be described most generally as the transformation in the distribution of resources or social position of individuals, families or groups within a given social structure or network. In most sociological applications, the term refers to *intergenerational* mobility, i.e. changes in the degree and kind of inheritance of advantage from parents to their children, and *intragenerational* mobility, i.e. changes of individuals' social position over a period of time. Social mobility of a collective over time is usually termed social change. The most frequently used indicators for the measurement of social mobility are occupational transitions among individuals, especially the movement between occupational groups or industrial sectors. Social mobility presupposes the existence of social stratification, i.e. an unequal distribution of resources, status or positions. Thus, any articulation of social mobility necessitates a theoretical conceptualization of social stratification.

As a research construct, social mobility harks back to Marxist notions of a classless society or, according to the liberal theory of industrialism, individual achievement based on ability and effort (*cf.* Goldthorpe, 1992). The majority of modern social theories favour fair accesses to opportunities and, thus, propose maximal social mobility as the most effective mechanism for a just, efficient and stable society. Originating in the 1920s in the works of Pitirim Sorokin (1927), social mobility refers to the movement of members of a society across axes or categories of social position, power or status according to meritocratic principles. This means that achievement and ability ought to replace or at least outweigh ascribed and inherited reward structures. Considerable effort has been invested in the theoretical and empirical study of social mobility (e.g. Lipset and Zetterberg, 1959; Blau and Duncan, 1967; Featherman *et al.*, 1975; Erikson and Goldthorpe, 1992). The normative direction of the often ideologically oriented works tends to regard social fluidity (or flux) positively in that flux is portrayed as a catalyst for the advancement of social justice in terms of more egalitarian resource distributions and reward structures. Empirical evidence about the actual degree of intergenerational mobility in modern societies tends to be mixed (e.g. Yamaguchi, 1987; Erikson and Goldthorpe, 1992; Xie, 1992; Vallet, 1999; 2001; Joye *et al.*, 2003), although most empirical sociologists in this field consistently uncover the predominance of parental inheritance of social advantage and inequality.

In contrast to these empirically oriented studies, social theorists, particularly those who subscribe to postmodern notions, suggest that socio-economic and political structures, if they exist at all in modern societies, are ephemeral, highly context-specific or rapidly changing (e.g. Lyotard, 1984; Touraine, 1988; Giddens, 1991; Beck, 1992; 1999; Bauman, 1992; 2000; Lee and Turner, 1996).<sup>1</sup> Focusing on the fluidification of social structures, Bauman states:

Previous emphasis on structurally determined constraints to interaction gives way to a new concern with the process in which ostensibly 'solid' realities are construed and reconstrued in the course of interaction; simultaneously, the ascribed potency of agency is considerably expanded, the limits of its freedom and of its reality-generating potential pushed much further

1 It should be noted that there are other ways to conceptualize social fluidity, for example those approaches which are interested in non-agentic action (e.g. complexity theory). These finer distinctions, however, transcend the goals of this article.

than the orthodox imagery would ever allow. The overall outcome of such revisions is a vision of a fluid, changeable social setting, kept in motion by the interaction of the plurality of autonomous and uncoordinated agents (1992: 54–55).

In contrast to Bauman's proposition on the radical fluidification of former social structures, Lyotard suggests that new entities have replaced conventional bases of power. He proposes that:

the status of knowledge is altered as societies enter what is known as the postindustrial age and cultures enter what is known as the postmodern age ... Knowledge is and will be produced in order to be sold, it is and will be consumed in order to be valorized in a new production: in both cases, the goal is exchange ... Knowledge ceases to be an end in itself, it loses its 'use-value.' Knowledge in the form of an informational commodity indispensable to productive power is already, and will continue to be, a major — perhaps the major — stake in the world-wide competition for power. It is conceivable that the nation-states will one day fight for control of information, just as they battled in the past for control over territory, and afterwards for control of access to and exploitation of raw materials and cheap labor (1984: 3–5).

As this brief sketch of social mobility and change suggests, similar contradictory notions about the significance, sometimes the very existence, of structures can be found not only in spatial mobility studies. Here as well, a substantial part of the disagreement between the camps may be traced to divergent starting positions. For example, social class, poverty or exclusion are usually constructed such that units (e.g. individuals, families or groups) fall within one of a small number of mutually exclusive categories. Such classification schemata tend to be insensitive to situational contexts and larger societal dynamics in modern societies, including the increased participation of women in the labour market, geographic socio-economic variations, and the change in the nature and significance of work. While some researchers focus on the consistency of occupational structure over time as measured by well-established class schemata, others explore societal changes, dynamics and variability. Accordingly, inconsistency in findings may be due in part to divergent interests and foci. Whether social structures exist or are changing will depend to a considerable extent on the theoretical habitus and, consequently, the strategic selection and presentation of empirical evidence.

More generally, the disagreement about the very existence of spatial and social fluidification is related to the nature of the theoretical framework from which concepts and their relations to each other are spawned. Certain oversimplifications of societal phenomena in modern societies and an overemphasis on static social structures have led Ulrich Beck to proclaim that these are nothing but 'zombie categories' and 'zombie institutions', which are 'dead and still alive'. Beck names the family, social class and neighbourhood as the foremost examples (Bauman, 2000: 6). As a response, many sociologists counter the fluidification debate with a slew of empirical evidence that points consistently toward the stability of social structures over time. Rather than choosing and defending an entrenched position, it may be time to recast these issues by asking more complex questions, e.g.: Which contexts condition societal fluidification and in what way?; What are the dynamics of the conditional impact of the space-time compression on a particular society or region?', etc.

Beyond the similarities in disagreement about the existence and extent of spatial and social mobility, there are a number of substantive parallels. First, both forms of mobility are concerned with structural change and social transformation. Second, both are concerned with preconditions and consequences of movement; spatial mobility includes transport and communication systems as reactants to, or moderators of, time and space, while social mobility proposes reciprocities between social background, institutional arrangements, inheritance and achievement. Third, both emphasize the importance of space (social vs. geographic) and time (temporal effects on social position and structure vs. speed of displacement of goods, information and people). Forth, mobility of both kinds comprises different spheres of activities, resources and institutional arrangements.

In sum, the debate on fluidification is far more encompassing than simply the differential displacement of entities or the transfer of individuals from one social class to another. It concerns all mobility potentials, constraints and margins for manoeuvre, and it includes a variety of social, cultural, political and economic aspects of mobility. As such, fluidification can be considered as one of the most fundamental issues for the social sciences in that it forces us to rethink the dimensionality of space and its relation to social phenomena and social structures.

So far, we have merely sketched a few parallels between spatial and social mobility. In order to advance further, we must now demonstrate the substantive interest in the link between spatial and social mobility, propose a dialectic relationship between theory and empirical research, and elaborate a more general framework for mobility theory and research.

## Motility as the link between spatial and social mobility

The profusion of ways in which we can think of mobility may be an advantage because it avoids a single connotation and, thus, permits alternative theoretical considerations. However, such wealth of possibilities complicates its study. How can we describe phenomena with precision with an imprecisely defined construct? The way in which mobility is conceptualized and operationally defined will effect its application and research findings, as research interests and empirical findings will effect definitions of mobility. This means that the epistemological basis of mobility is fundamentally linked with institutional research interests, practices and habits.

Numerous researchers favour a more holistic concept of spatial mobility (e.g. Brulhardt and Bassand, 1981; Schuler *et al.*, 1997; Remy, 2000). For example, Jacques Lévy (2000) proposes incorporating three components: possibility, competence and capital. To demonstrate the utility of this expansion, let us consider the four meanings currently in use in the social sciences to describe the mobility of people (Schuler *et al.*, 1997): (1) residential mobility (including residential cycles); (2) migration (international and interregional); (3) travel (tourism and business travel); and (4) day-to-day displacement (daily journeys such as commuting and running errands). Most studies of mobility are deficient in at least two ways.

Firstly, studies of spatial mobility tend to focus on movement in space-time rather than on the interaction between actors, structures and context. Socio-structurally embedded actors are central to spatial mobility, as are specific contexts that delimit or make possible movement. The reasons, constraints and effects upon larger societal processes will remain obscured if the geography of flows is considered in isolation, i.e. if we fail to examine the *modus operandi* of the societal and political logic of movements in geographic space.

Secondly, many spatial and social mobility studies tend to limit their scope by merely describing actual and past fluidity. As with other themes in the social sciences, the empirical observation and description of actual mobility (past and present) is insufficient to understand the impact of a particular social phenomenon. A study of the *potential* of movement will reveal new aspects of the mobility of people with regard to possibilities and constraints of their manoeuvres, as well as the wider societal consequences of social and spatial mobility. For example, knowledge about the territorial constraints for the movement of goods or people, or the conditions of social mobility within a particular regional context, may shed light on a field that has largely neglected contextual qualification. The inclusion of the dimensions and context-specificity of action windows in spatial and social mobility studies would go a long way in explaining inconsistent findings or unaccounted variances (*cf.* Bergman, 2003).

Based on these considerations, we propose a theoretical concept that conceives of spatial and social mobility as indicants of a more comprehensive form of mobility that

is not limited to actual or past displacements. The name of this construct shall be 'motility'. Motility<sup>2</sup> can be defined as the capacity of entities (e.g. goods, information or persons) to be mobile in social and geographic space, or as the way in which entities access and appropriate the capacity for socio-spatial mobility according to their circumstances.

The introduction of motility as a theoretical construct is justified in three ways. First, it describes previously unexamined phenomena that do not correspond to any existing definitions. Second, existing phenomena and their associations will be synthesized in an innovative way. Finally, the concept will help clarify the limits of existing concepts, notably spatial and social mobility.

Motility incorporates structural and cultural dimensions of movement and action in that the actual or potential capacity for spatio-social mobility may be realized differently or have different consequences across varying socio-cultural contexts. Empirical investigations will focus fundamentally on the temporal changes in the extent, reasons and manner of motility. Generally, motility encompasses interdependent elements relating to *access* to different forms and degrees of mobility, *competence* to recognize and make use of access, and *appropriation* of a particular choice, including the option of non-action. More specifically,

- *Access* refers to the range of possible mobilities according to place, time and other contextual constraints, and may be influenced by networks and dynamics within territories. Access is constrained by *options* and *conditions*. The options refer to the entire range of means of transportation and communication available, and the entire range of services and equipment accessible at a given time. The conditions refer to the accessibility of the options in terms of location-specific cost, logistics and other constraints. Obviously, access depends on the spatial distribution of the population and infrastructure (e.g. towns and cities provide a different range of choices of goods and services), sedimentation of spatial policies (e.g. transportation and accessibility), and socio-economic position (e.g. purchasing power, position in a hierarchy or social network).
- *Competence* includes skills and abilities that may directly or indirectly relate to access and appropriation. Three aspects are central to the competence component of motility: *physical ability*, e.g. the ability to transfer an entity from one place to another within given constraints; *acquired skills* relating to rules and regulations of movement, e.g. licenses, permits, specific knowledge of the terrain or codes; and *organizational skills*, e.g. planning and synchronizing activities including the acquisition of information, abilities and skills. Competence is multifaceted and interdependent with access and appropriation.
- *Appropriation* refers to how agents (including individuals, groups, networks, or institutions) interpret and act upon perceived or real access and skills. Appropriation is shaped by needs, plans, aspirations and understandings of agents, and it relates to strategies, motives, values and habits. Appropriation describes how agents consider, deem appropriate, and select specific options. It is also the means by which skills and decisions are evaluated.

All three elements of motility are fundamentally linked to social, cultural, economic and political processes and structures within which mobility is embedded and enacted.

2 The term motility is used in biology and medicine to refer to the capacity of an organism to move (such as the motility of a fish). In sociology, it has been used sporadically by Bauman in *Liquid Modernity* (2000) to describe the capacity to be mobile. It is also found in sociological analyses of the body (Mol and Law, 1999) to describe the body in motion.

## Motility as capital

Arguments for or against using the term capital to describe assets other than economic capital have rekindled since social capital has established itself in the mainstream social science literature. The clearest arguments against the use of the term beyond its economic form relate to substantive and epistemological arguments.

Substantively, it could be argued that social inequality in most forms as studied by the social and political sciences has its root in the lack of financial capital. It is often argued that financial capital can be exchanged for most other socially desirable resources, including education, health, safe and stable work, status, power, social integration, etc. More importantly, the relationship between economic capital and educational attainment or good health, for instance, is not reversible in that education or health will not necessarily lead to the acquisition of financial capital or other desirable social resources. For example, many students from less-advantaged backgrounds, if they complete a university degree, tend to select degrees or universities that lead to less financially and otherwise rewarding careers, compared to their counterparts. On the other hand, students from advantaged backgrounds are more likely to study medicine or law and are less likely to study sociology. Accordingly, the primacy of financial capital reflects its centrality in terms of the allocation of social position and reward distribution.

Epistemologically, financial capital is far easier to theorize, operationalize, measure and interpret than many other social science constructs, such as human, cultural or social capital (e.g. Bourdieu, 1983). Consequently, many proponents of this position believe that studies which go beyond the description of objective measures (e.g. income, household size, number of rooms in household) are based on conjecture and are, thus, unscientific. This position is frequently rooted in a rather simplistic interpretation of the Durkheimian proposition that the domain of sociology should be limited to the measurement and reporting of social facts. Another defence for objective measures links measurement and theory issues: a focus on economic capital reduces social exchanges to mercantile exchanges and, thus, facilitates the measurement and theorization in some popular theories that presuppose self-interest and the pursuit of maximization of positive rewards.

There are a number of counter-arguments against these two positions. First, it is extremely difficult to assess income as derived from work, benefits, assets and other possessions. Beyond the valuation of goods or assets, the weighting of income and assets of family or household members complicates the calculations, as does the geographic weighting due to spatial variations of costs and prices. Consequently, the assessment of the financial worth of a person will depend to a great extent on what limits and omissions the empirical researcher imposes on the measurement of the construct and does, thus, fail to free us from theorization and subjectivity. Second, social scientists are never interested in people's financial income *per se*, but rather what income represents in terms of constructs that are central to the social sciences, including poverty, social inequality, exclusion, etc. In other words, monetary income may be an excellent but incomplete indicator of social constructs that guide our interests more fundamentally. Third, many theorists have convincingly argued that financial capital is of interest insofar as it can be readily exchanged for other types of capital. Karl Marx, for example, studied the dynamic relations between labour, industrial, financial and landed capital, which create sectional conflicts of interest in capitalistic societies. Pierre Bourdieu (e.g. 1983) went further by criticizing the primacy of economic capital (i.e. capital that can be exchanged for money or property) and an overly narrow focus on markets. He suggested shifting the focus from economic capital to a more general examination of the societal distribution and maintenance of power in the form of economic, cultural and social capital. More recently, Amartya Sen and Robert Putnam<sup>3</sup> suggested that the relations and resource

3 Personal communications between one of the authors and Robert Putnam at the History Faculty and Lady Mitchell Hall, Cambridge University (30 October 2002), and with Amartya Sen and Robert Putnam at St John's College, University of Cambridge (11 March 2003).

exchanges between that which is derived from membership in social networks and other forms of capital justifies the use of the term capital when applied to social capital.

In line with these arguments, we propose to consider motility as a form of capital. In other words, motility forms theoretical and empirical links with, and can be exchanged for, other types of capital. Beyond the vertical or hierarchical quality that all forms of capital share (i.e. a distribution from low to high), motility has an additional vertical quality in that spatial constraints and other contexts impose a more differentiated perspective on this form of capital. More specifically, spatial and social mobility can be considered as multifaceted social phenomena. Not only are certain components and features of a mobility model interdependent but, forming higher-order associations, they are likely to interact in a more complex, conditional way. Thus, the main virtue of a systemic approach to mobility is the recognition that movement can take many forms, that different forms of movement may be interchangeable, and that the potentiality of movement can be expressed as a form of 'movement capital'.

## Empirical research and theory of motility

In works on fluidification, empiricism often occupies a paradoxical position. On the one hand, empirical evidence is a necessary but insufficient condition for demonstrating the validity of a model. On the other, however, empirical evidence is presented very selectively and strategically in order to support a specific model. Unsurprisingly, many theoretically and empirically grounded models are incommensurable, as they are the result of a priori and ad hoc theoretical positions and empirical procedures (*cf.* Coombs, 1964; Kaplan, 1996; Bergman and Joye, 2001).

The concept of motility allows for an alternative conceptualization of a number of sociological themes on at least two levels. On a meta-theoretical level, motility draws together different theoretical strands that, until now, have been considered either in isolation or in epistemological opposition to each other. Substantively, motility allows for more holistic explanatory models with regard to social inequality and stratification. In this sense, we propose empirical research within this domain to focus on how access, competence and appropriation are moderated by conditions across different spaces through, for example, technological innovation and its diffusion, geopolitical and spatial limitations, as well as other structural constraints. We can differentiate empirical research on motility not only in terms of its theoretical contributions, but also in terms of the level of abstraction. On a micro-level, access or competence may be studied in terms of the options and conditions of displacement possibilities of actors in relation to resource exchanges (time, money, status, education, information, etc.). A number of elements may be distinguished in this sense, including individuals' capacities and skills that either directly or indirectly influence physical or social mobility; knowledge or the recognition for the need of knowledge that is directly or indirectly related to spatial and social mobility; access to relevant tools or networks that facilitate mobility; and the recognition of the value and outcome within specific situational and local contexts based on which the selection of actual or potential capacities, skills, knowledge acquisition, tools and networks takes place. On a meso-level, the association between social and spatial mobility, their antecedents, and their consequences may be studied in terms of social networks, the family or small groups. For example, access to, and appropriation of, the means of spatial mobility may strongly depend on household arrangements, which will create different opportunities and constraints for social mobility across household members. On a macro-level, research on access may explore the links between national social and geopolitical policies and how these may influence social inequality across regions and conglomerates differentially, based on different options and conditions that prevail in specific local contexts.

An example will clarify these possibilities: spatial mobility is central to the multiple transformations in contemporary societies. Motivated by economic concerns and

stimulated by the diffusion of technical innovations, spatial mobility of people, goods and information has not only increased but impacted just about any aspect of social and economic life. One way to illustrate motility is to explore modern transport and telecommunications, which will reveal the importance of integrating the relations between the networks, context and social position in relation to motility. This can be accomplished on a micro-, meso-, as well as macro-level of analysis.

On a micro-level, motility, the actual and potential spatio-social mobility, can be differentiated between household members. For example, daily routines in families are extremely complex and interdependent, particularly in relation to the multitude of activity spheres of each family member (including school, work, household-related activities and leisure), as are the different spaces within which these activities occur. Thus, spatial movement according to activity sphere (e.g. getting the children to school, commuting to work, going to the shops, going for an afternoon swim) is often clearly demarcated by social roles and position. Reciprocally, activities also (re-)confirm social position and mobility potential based on negotiated and socially circumscribed rules and norms. Motility can reveal important aspects relating to quality of life in that it would be adapted to study activity sequences across space and related to stability and shifts in social position. The complexity of managing different social positions and spaces across contexts, often highly inventive in relation to its reliance on telecommunication and transport systems (e.g. laptop computers in commuter trains, car-pools for the school run), could be pursued in terms of access, competence and appropriation, as outlined above. Various behaviours and constraints could thus be highlighted, where actors seek to negotiate their mobility potential, socially and spatially, according to different contexts and possibilities (e.g. Kaufmann, 2002; Flamm, 2004).

On a meso-level of analysis, the maintenance and operation of social and spatial networks could be studied fruitfully with the motility concept. Large transport networks, such as the TGV or easyJet, link areas selectively and thus redefine distance and space, but, concurrently, create social and spatial segregation. They produce new ways to work and live, e.g. multi-residentiality (occupy several, distant residences), multi-occupationality (pursue more than one paid employment), or combine work and habitation in new ways. This phenomenon can be approached at the individual level (e.g. Perrot and de la Soudière, 1998) but an analysis on a meso-level, i.e. via networks, could be potentially more revealing in the examination of the relation between spatial and social movement. More specifically, multi-residentiality, for example, may produce new or alternative social networks by relativizing proximity not only to other network members but also to alternative networks. Studies related to this idea have revealed that displacement in itself, i.e. not only the point of departure or arrival, but contacts during transfer, lead to the creations of new linkages to alternative social networks (e.g. Meissonier, 1999; Bailly and Heurton, 2001). Important socio-professional relations formed in this way can be regarded as the result of the motility of the actors.

Another way to examine motility in relation to transport on a meso-level of analysis relates to new forms of space segregation. Multi-residentiality, multi-occupationality, or bridging relatively large distances between the place of occupation and residence is far more likely among certain categories of the population (e.g. certain households, specific household members, regions of residence, occupational groups). Suburban ghettoization and dependence on cars are but some of the consequences (Kaufmann, 2002) which, themselves, lead to yet further social differentiation. Here too, the concept of motility makes it possible to account for the strategies and constraints in the negotiation of social and geographic space in relation to territories and networks.

On a macro-level of analysis, social mobilities and space could be studied in relation to business corporations. The migration of a business could be compared with a social elevator: wealth or poverty, jobs, infrastructure, etc., were created or destroyed according to the geographical origin and destination of the corporate move (Bassand *et al.*, 1985). Geographic change went hand-in-hand with changes of occupation, employment status and social position. Nowadays, the situation is more complicated due in part to the capacity to act remotely, to be here and there at the same time

(Ascher, 2000), as well as the relative mobility of households to follow jobs. We have passed from a mode of territorialized spatialization to a dynamic reticular mode. The capacity to act remotely, a particular focus of motility, goes hand-in-hand with the development of technical networks of communication and transport, which makes this possible. A macro-analysis of motility in this vein may include the relations between legal and economic agreements between nations (e.g. NAFTA; European Union) and the resultant social change, particularly with respect to the differential use of space that these contracts will set into motion among both insiders and outsiders.

In sum, the concept of motility has three important advantages in relation to the empirical investigation of the links between stratification and space. Motility goes beyond a simplistic separation between social mobility and geographic space by integrating these on the level of actors, culture, networks, institutions and society, as well as permitting new forms of investigations relating to the links between communication networks and territories in a context of a multitude of existing and emergent communication systems. Finally, its conceptualization as a form of capital which can be mobilized and transformed into other types of capital (i.e. economic, human and social capital) allows motility to make original contributions in the research area relating to social inequality and social change.

## Conclusion

Spatial mobility is not an interstice or liaison between a point of departure and a destination. It is a structuring dimension of social life. Changes in kind and degree of spatial and social mobility have created fundamental societal changes that permeate all aspects of society. In this article, we argued that actual and potential socio-spatial mobility, termed motility, may be considered an asset. Depending on context, individual actors, groups and institutions differ in access, competence and appropriation, and have thus at their disposal different motility options. Just as economic capital is related to knowledge, cultural wealth and social position, so does motility represent a form of capital that may form links with, and be exchanged for, other forms of capital. Unlike economic, cultural and social capital, which deal mainly with hierarchical position, motility refers to both vertical and horizontal dimensions of social position. Motility represents a new form of social inequality. It is related to, but not subsumed by, social or spatial mobility. Motility as it relates to goods, information and people, is differentiated in terms of access, competence and appropriation, where the local and geopolitical context is emphasized as a fundamental consideration.

Motility adds a new perspective to empirical studies of spatial and social mobility because social and territorial structures form intricate relations that escape an analysis limited to spatial or social considerations. More generally, the concept represents an interesting alternative to binary theorization: the classical structuralist accounts of society on the one hand, and postmodern accounts on the other. In addition, it promotes a holistic perspective of inequality studies and it implies different levels of abstraction, ranging from the individual micro-level to the societal and global macro-level. Motility invites us to adjust our perspective to new dynamics of highly mobile, modern societies, and to develop pertinent conceptual and methodological tools without abandoning invaluable insights from studies on spatial and social mobility.

**Vincent Kaufmann** (vincent.kaufmann@mail.enpc.fr), Laboratoire de Sociologie Urbaine, Ecole Polytechnique Fédérale de Lausanne, Bâtiment Polyvalent, CH - 1015 Lausanne, Switzerland, **Manfred Max Bergman** (bergman@essex.ac.uk), Department of Sociology, University of Essex, Colchester CO4 3SQ, UK and **Dominique Joye** (Dominique.Joye@si-dos.unine.ch), Service Suisse d'Information et d'Archivage de Données pour les Sciences Sociales, Ruelle Vaucher 13, CH-2000 Neuchâtel, Switzerland.

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