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AEROMOBILITY AS A LIFESTYLE: HYBRID GEOGRAPHIES OF FREQUENT FLYING IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC AND SLOVAKIA

Dizertační práce

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Abstrakt

Táto dizertačná práca sa zaoberá aeromobilitou ako životný štýlom, pričom sa zameriava najmä na miestotvorné významy, aké aeromobilné elity pripisujú rutinne navštevovaným letiskám. V humánnej geografii a širších spoločenských vedách majú teoretizácie letísk v kontexte elitnej mobility tendenciu reprodukovať dobre známu konceptuálnu opozíciu miesta voči mobilite, teda sedentárneho bezmiestia alebo nomádskeho romantizmu. Táto práca ponúka alternatívu prostredníctvom prístupu "hybridných geografí", a to jednak ako rámca pre skúmanie komplikovaných vzťahov tvoriacich postmodernú sociálno-priestorovú realitu, ako aj spôsobu, akým možno v geografii praktizovať nebinárny výskum a prekračovať hranice protichodných myšlienkových smerov. Kolekcia štyroch autorských článkov je uvedená teoretickou diskusiou o vývoji ne-kategorického myslenia v humánnej geografii, ktorá túto prácu situuje na križovatku dopravnej geografie, mobilitných štúdií (informovaných "mobilitným obratom") a kultúrnej geografie miesta. Na prepojenie všetkých článkov do koherentnej argumentačnej línie bol použitý kvalitatívne zameraný multimetodický prístup, ktorý začína (1) diskurzívnou analýzou aeromobilnej terminológie s cieľom špecifikovať cieľovú skupinu pre ďalšie fázy výskum, pokračuje (2) (auto)etnografickým zhusteným popisom elitného rutinného prechodu letiskom v jeho stelesnenej a performatívnej povahe; (3) multi-source analýzou, ktorá skúma aeromobilné praktiky českých a slovenských frequent flyers v ich regionálnom kontexte a v kontexte vnútornej hierarchie populárnych vernostných programov, a napokon (4) identifikáciou a interpretáciou troch vybraných hybridných konštelácií miestotvorných významov, ktoré sa objavili v skúsenostiach 21 účastníkov výskumu. Aeromobilný životný štýl účastníkov výskumu bol rámcovaný ich elitným členstvom vo vernostných programoch klasických „full-service“ leteckých spoločností v Česku a na Slovensku. Regionálny kontext postsocialistickej Európy významným spôsobom odráža nerovnnosť topológie „hub-and-spoke“ systému globálnej leteckej dopravy a tým, že dáva hlas tzv. „spoke travellers“, vhodne zdôrazňuje tranzitný charakter letiska v rámci (elitnej) aeromobilnej skúsenosti. Triangulované výsledky jednotlivých štúdií tak rozširujú geografické poznatky o tom, čo formuje vzťahy leteckých elít k letiskám a aké podoby môžu tieto vzťahy nadobúdať.

Abstract

This dissertation focuses on lifestyle aeromobility, particularly on the place-related meanings that elite frequent flyers ascribe to routinely visited airports. In human geography and the broader social sciences, theorisations of airports in the context of elite mobilities tend to reproduce a well-known conceptual binary of place versus mobility, of sedentary placelessness or nomadic romanticism. This dissertation offers an alternative mode of understanding through the conjunctive approach of 'hybrid geographies', both as a framework for studying complicated entanglements of postmodern socio-spatial reality and as a way of practicing non-dualist geographical research that crosses the boundaries of opposing scholarly traditions. The collection of four original articles is introduced by a theoretical discussion of non-categorical thinking in human geography, situating this work at the intersection of transport geography, mobility studies (informed by the 'mobility turn') and cultural geographies of place. A qualitatively driven multimethod approach was used to link all the articles into a coherent line of argument, starting with (1) a discursive analysis of aeromobile terminology to specify the target group for further investigation, continuing with (2) an (auto)ethnographic thick description of elite routine airport passage in its embodied and performative nature; with (3) the multi-source data analysis that examines the aeromobile practices of Czech and Slovak frequent flyers in their regional context and within the internal hierarchy of popular frequent flyer programmes, and finally with (4) the identification and interpretation of three selected hybrid constellations of place-related meanings of airports that emerged in the experiences of 21 research participants. The lifestyle aeromobility of research participants was framed by their high-level membership in frequent flyer loyalty programmes of full-service airlines in the Czech Republic and Slovakia. The regional context of post-socialist Europe importantly reflects the uneven topologies of the hub-and-spoke system of global air transport and, by giving voice to 'spoke travellers', appropriately highlights the transitory nature of much of the (elite) airport experience. The triangulated results of all the individual studies extend the geographical knowledge of what shapes the relationships of aeromobile elites to airports and what forms these relationships can take.

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V Brne, dňa 27. júla 2023 ……

Mgr. Veronika Zuskáčová

OBSAH

1 INTRODUCTION

"Airworld is a nation within a nation, with its own language, architecture, mood, and even its own currency - the token economy of airline bonus miles that I've come to value more than dollars."
(Walter Kirn 2001: 5)

"Had one been asked to take a Martian to visit a single place that neatly captures the gamut of themes rmobiounning through our civilisation - from our faith in technology to our destruction of nature, from our interconnectedness to our romanticising of travel - then it would have to be to the departures and arrivals halls that one would head."
(Alain de Botton 2009: 13)

When the first commercial flight took off in January 1914 between the two American cities of St. Petersburg and Tampa, the man who initiated it, Percival Fansler, said in his speech: "...what was impossible yesterday is an accomplishment of today, while tomorrow heralds the unbelievable" (as quoted in Tyler 2014). And indeed, from one passenger and one route covering 33 kilometres in 1914, the airline industry grew to more than 3 billion passengers a year and 40,000 routes covering more than 37 billion kilometres a century later (Tyler 2014, IATA 2013). At the turn of the millennium, there were 360 000 passengers, the equivalent to a substantial city, in flight above the United States alone at any day or nighttime (Urry 2007). The steady growth in global air travel peaked in 2019, just before another milestone of 5 billion passengers carried in a calendar year (IATA 2023), when the Covid-19 pandemic situation caused the worst downturn in the history of commercial aviation. Now, three years later, air travel is on the rise again, with the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO) predicting a full recovery to pre-pandemic levels on most routes by 2023, and even a growth of around 3% by the end of this year (ICAO 2023). While the global figures mask large discrepancies and inequalities between countries, regions, and individuals (Gössling and Humpe 2020), over the years air travel has grown from small beginnings to become "the industry that stands for and represents the new global order" (Urry 2009: 26). Society has, as many social scientists claim, become *aeromobile* (Cwerner 2009a, Urry 2007).

The 'anyone can fly' attitude, or the proclaimed banality and mundanity of air travel, however, still only applies to a small proportion of the world's population. New peripheries and new social hierarchies are being formed along the lines of the flight. Places are connected to global air networks with varying degrees of centrality and peripherality, so that while some cities thrive on the excellent global connectivity of their hub airports, others appear as 'holes' in the system of world cities, only loosely

connected to the global airline system (Adey et al. 2007). Moreover, as Gössling and Humpe (2020) show, even in countries with a long history of air travel, such as the US, UK, or Germany, more than half of the adult population does not fly at all, while the cosmopolitan elites who fly internationally on an annual basis represent only about 3% of the global population (Peeters et al. 2006). And while the global 'kinetic elites' - the wealthy and powerful groups of highly mobile professionals - move smoothly and comfortably through the high-speed corridors of their borderless world, the masses of the kinetic underclass move at a much slower pace, their mobility easily disrupted by delays, intrusive security checks, long queues, even detention and deportation (Adey et al. 2007, Sparke 2006).

The social effects of aviation have long been under-researched, overshadowed by technological inventions, strategic proposals, and aviation history. Nevertheless, the last two decades have seen a surge in social science interest in the role of air travel in modern social life, partly, as Cwerner (2009a) writes, as a result of the 'mobility turn', a new mobilities paradigm that has given rise to a holistic and systematic approach to travel, including its relationship to other mobilities, networks and systems (Urry 2000, Sheller and Urry 2006, Cresswell 2006). Positioned by Mimi Sheller and John Urry (2006) as an interdisciplinary approach to studying the increasingly mobile world and challenging the 'a-mobile' nature of much of the social sciences, this new paradigm proposed a change in both the object of research inquiries and its methodologies to take into account mobilities across all scales. As such, it aimed to fill in the major research gap also in the geographical study of travel and transportation by opening a range of topics beyond 'traditional', predominantly quantitative transport geography (Shaw and Hesse 2010). In the field of air transportation, newly emerging *aeromobilities* began to be recognised as both a distinct field of social research and a key issue in the development of social theory and knowledge in an increasingly complex, mobile world (Cwerner 2009a).

When I started my doctoral studies in 2012, I was very much inspired by this new current of mobile thinking, which was only slowly entering the consciousness of Czech and Slovak geographers. Working under the supervision of Daniel Seidenglanz, the pioneer of the mobilities approach in Czech transport geography, I got to read the key texts of aeromobilities research, and, above all, I was fortunate to have his constant encouragement to experiment with mobile methods and ideas. Part-time employed as a Customer Care Specialist for the Lufthansa Group, handling frequent flyer enquiries, my trained geographer's curiosity was piqued by the very specific geographical perceptions of this highly aeromobile group of elite travellers. The way they valued proximity and distance, the way they expressed their relationship to airports and other airspaces, and the way their identity ostentatiously revolved around their aeromobility and the privileged spaces of frequent flyer programs, simply seemed to have no equivalent in anything I had known before. I was fascinated by their world, and as I began to fly more often myself during this time, I became fascinated by airports and air

travel in general, extending my curious interest into the formulation of my dissertation project, which is now coming to an end.

It is interesting to see how this enthusiastic perspective of mine, as well as academic (and public) attitudes towards frequent flying, have evolved over the 10 years I have been working on the subject. Mobility continues to be recognised as a "brute fact - something that is potentially observable ... an empirical reality" (Cresswell 2006: 3), but the novelty and oppositional stance of the mobility turn is gradually being replaced by balanced, collaborative studies that value the 'new' and the 'traditional', the mobile and the sedentary elements of social reality (Shaw and Hesse 2010, Evans and Jones 2011, Merriman. 2012, Gustafson 2014, Edensor et al. 2020). Elite frequent flying is still associated with glamour, cosmopolitanism, luxury, and detachment from the flyover world (Fuller and Harley 2004, Lassen 2009, Wilts 2020), but its downsides and environmental responsibilities are increasingly being highlighted, particularly with the rise of the 'flight shaming' movement (Cohen and Gössling 2015, Gössling et al. 2020, Higham and Font 2020, Björkvall and Westberg 2021). Similarly, my own fascination with airports, aeromobile lifestyles and the mobility turn has gradually evolved more and more in the direction of hybrid geographies, both as a framework for studying the complicated entanglements of postmodern socio-spatial reality and as a way of practising non-dualist geographical research that crosses the boundaries of opposing scholarly traditions.[1]

In this dissertation I present a commented compilation of four original articles, either my own or co-authored with my supervisor, which I have arranged chronologically[2] to document the evolution of my research interest both theoretically and methodologically. From my attempts to find out what the term 'aeromobility' actually stands for in the scattered theoretical accounts of aeromobilities studies, through my (auto)ethnographic experience of routine circulation within the privileged airport spaces, questioning the place(less)ness of international airports, through an examination of the regional context of air transport accessibility, which inevitably translates into very different aeromobile practices and experiences of Czech and Slovak frequent flyers, and finally by applying all this knowledge in my interviews with elite

[1] 'Hybrid geographies' as a specific term refers to the relational ontology proposed by Sarah Whatmore (2002) and further applied (and transformed) by Mei-Po Kwan (2004) or Daniel Sui and Dydia DeLyser (2012), as I elaborate in Chapter 2 of this thesis. Furthermore, and particularly in the title of this thesis, I also use 'hybrid geographies' to refer to the unique, differently hybridised lived and practised geographies of my research participants. In line with the common use of singular geography and plural geographies in much recent geographical research, I also use both forms throughout my thesis, with singular geography referring to the overarching disciplinary unity and plural geographies to the postmodern sensitivity to difference reflected in the theoretical and methodological plurality within the discipline (Hubbard et al. 2002, Matlovič and Matlovičová 2015).

[2] The order of the articles reflects a chronology of my theoretical, methodological, and empirical work rather than my actual publication history, as this was heavily dependent on the length of the peer-review process in individual journals.

members of frequent flyer programmes in the Czech Republic and Slovakia, in order to investigate the meanings they ascribe to the airports they routinely travel through. Each of the articles was intended to represent an individual chapter of this thesis, so that while they can certainly be read as standalone articles, they present a coherent line of argument that makes the most sense when read progressively as a whole.

In the same way, each article makes its own, individually formulated contribution to the field of (aero)mobilities studies, geography, and the social sciences. At this point I will only briefly sketch out the highlights of why I think my research on aeromobile elites, and their specific worldview is relevant to social geography, and what it can add to our knowledge of postmodern people's relationships to places. First, at a time of increasing concern about the environmental impacts of carbon-intensive industries such as aviation, social geography needs to pay more attention to aeromobile lifestyles, to the motivations, diversities, practices, and experiences of these frequently flying 'high emitters' (Gössling and Humpe 2020), as they contribute disproportionately to the overall volume of global air traffic. In order to propose and communicate acceptable solutions for the future (or at least to participate in such debates), we must first develop a deep, non-judgmental understanding of their geographies. Second, as important as elite research undoubtedly is, it is also a difficult practical task for a researcher to get close enough to elite circles to obtain valuable empirical data. This research provides a rare empirical insight into the privileged airspaces and authentic geographical experiences of the highly aeromobile few, challenging many popular abstract claims that have long shaped our understanding of their social and cultural geographies. Last but not least, non-categorical thinking does not have a long tradition in Czech and Slovak geography, where the boundaries of individual sub-disciplines and scholarly traditions are still reinforced and defended in polarising debates, rather than really being transgressed. In my dissertation I draw attention to the value of what Mei-Po Kwan (2004) has termed 'hybrid' geographical research; of the 'creative tension' (Edensor et al. 2020) that arises from theoretical, methodological, and empirical entanglements across different subfields of academic knowledge in order to explore the otherwise hidden interrelationships of complex human experience in the postmodern world. In the following section, I will present the aims and objectives of my dissertation project, as well as an outline of the structure of this dissertation, in more detail.

1.1 Research problem, aims and research questions

The **topic** of this dissertation, or in the terminology of qualitative research, the **research problem**[3], is a very specific type of person-place relation - that between the

[3] Boudah (2010) defines the research problem (or a phenomenon) in qualitative research as the topic that the researcher wants to address, investigate, or study, whether descriptively or experimentally. For

highly aeromobile elite and the airports they routinely traverse. While much of the social science literature on airports suggests a detached, non-place-like appreciation of airports, particularly in the context of frequent elite air travel (Augé 1995, Crang 2002, Fuller and Harley 2004, Laing 2008, Lassen 2009, Kesselring 2009, Pütz 2011), my experience of working with frequent flyers suggests that their relationship with airports may not be as straightforward as is often assumed. In order to narrow down this research problem, the focus of this dissertation project is placed on the experiences framed by high-level membership in frequent flyer loyalty programmes of full-service airlines in the Czech Republic and Slovakia. The regional context of peripheral Central Europe makes the research problem even more interesting (and important), as it strongly reflects the unequal topologies of the hub-and-spoke system of global air transport. Furthermore, the experiences of 'spoke travellers' (Cidell 2017), whose travel routines almost inevitably involve one or more en-route stops, provide a particularly valuable source of information for examining the place(less)ness of airports in the context of elite aeromobilities, as they appropriately highlight the transitory nature of much of the (elite) airport experience.

The **main aim** of this dissertation is to deeply understand the meanings that Czech and Slovak elite frequent flyers ascribe to airports, and in doing so to extend our knowledge of postmodern person-place relationships in their complexity, fluidity, and hybridity. Within the main aim, **four objectives** are defined, each of which is specified in several points and by specific research questions I have extracted from relevant articles. The order in which the individual objectives are presented below corresponds to the order in which they have been examined and in which they are also presented in the following chapters:

1) A comprehensive review of the aeromobilities literature in order to:
   - identify and synthesise different discourses on aeromobility, together with the interpretation of their standpoints, their contributions and biases, and possible future directions,
   - to draw attention to the lack of critical discussion of aeromobility as a scientific term and to open it up as a concept with socio-cultural implications,
   - to encourage more abstract thinking about aeromobility and its role in the production and reproduction of knowledge, to avoid falling into the trap of a 'great word' with an assumed common-sense meaning,
   - to make the case for studying aeromobility at the individual level as a particular lifestyle with specific geographies.

Merriam and Grenier (2019), it is an issue or a gap in the knowledge base that is investigated using qualitative, discovery-oriented data collection and analysis methods.

Research questions:
How do social scientists construct and use the term aeromobility in their work?
a) What language do social scientists use to describe aeromobility?
b) What cultural or theoretical influences and interests might affect their understanding of aeromobility?

2) Confronting the predominantly distant theoretical claims about elite aeromobilities as they are performed and experienced at the airports through my own mobile (auto)ethnographic immersion in the flows of routine elite airport passage in order to:

- explore how a repeated mobile performance of the passage through the elite spaces and corridors of one of the world's busiest airports might gradually shape its perception as a place,
- to counter the general tendency of mobilities scholars to focus on only one aspect of the (elite) passenger experience, such as embodiment, habitual structures or placemaking strategies, and to draw attention to their mutual interconnectedness, coexistence and co-activity,
- to confront my own fascination with airports and to develop a more sensitive position as a researcher in order to ask relevant, empirically informed questions in the next stage of my dissertation project and to interpret its outcomes accurately.

Research questions:
Where am I as a frequent elite passenger when I pass through the international airport?

3) Multi-source data analysis in a mixed-method research design to examine the variability of aeromobile practices among Czech and Slovak frequent flyers and place them in a regional context of uneven accessibility of air travel services and the internal hierarchy of popular frequent flyer programmes.

Research questions:
a) What practices do Czech and Slovak frequent flyers employ to cope with the uneven accessibility of air travel services in their region?
b) Does their frequent flyer status affect the spatiality of their journeys and if so, how?

4) Identification and interpretative description of selected examples of hybrid constellations of place-related meanings of airports that emerge in the highly aeromobile travel experiences of Czech and Slovak frequent flyers, in order to:

- demonstrate how the context of departure, transit, and arrival, previous aeromobile experiences and patterns of air travel, the cultural stylisation of airlines and airspaces, and the emotional relationship to the cultural region in which the airport is located strongly influence the meanings of particular airports,

- contribute to the scholarly discussion on airports with a post-phenomenological focus on experience, a highly mobile experience in this case, that slips any easy generalisations of airports from a single, one-sided theoretical perspective

Research questions:
a) What meanings do the interviewed Czech and Slovak frequent flyers ascribe to airports they routinely travel through?
b) Where are these airports *placed* within their specific aero*mobile* experiences?

1.2 Structure of the dissertation

The chapter that follows this introduction (Chapter 2) is devoted to a brief outline of non-categorical thinking in geography and the social sciences, as it is the leitmotif of binaries and their transgression that runs through all the articles and binds them together. Since each of the articles includes a theoretical part in which key concepts are introduced and discussed, and since one of the articles (Article 1 on aeromobile terminology in Chapter 4) is purely theoretical, I thought it more useful to provide a broader introduction that situates my work at the intersection of three subfields of human geography - transport geography, mobility studies (inspired by the 'mobility turn'), and cultural geographies. For this reason, in the two following subchapters (2.1 and 2.2) I pay particular attention to two well-known binaries in human geography, namely the binary of quantitative and qualitative approach, represented by the (still common) oppositional stance between mobility research and transport geography; and the binary of sedentary and nomadic thought, which separates the 'old' and 'outdated' perspectives of humanistic geography on place from the 'new' approaches that give analytical priority to mobility and movement. In this chapter, I draw largely on the work of Tim Cresswell, one of the leading scholars of the 'mobility turn' in geography, whose enormous scope and range of published texts provide an excellent opportunity to witness both the (re)production of the above-mentioned binaries and the efforts to transgress their long-held boundaries.

In Chapter 3, I introduce the qualitatively driven multimethod approach that I have used in this thesis, combining several methods to address different facets of the main research question, and triangulating their findings to form a comprehensive whole. All the methods are briefly described in the chapter, but since each of the articles contains its own methodological discussion, I will focus more on the autobiographical line of my own methodological progress over the course of this dissertation project. For this reason, in contrast to the rest of the thesis, this chapter has a strong autobiographical tone (although it is not a full autobiography as in Paasi 2022 or Soja 2009) and is not divided into sub-chapters. The methodological overview is then followed by four studies in the form of research articles that are either published (Article 1 in Chapter 4, Article 2 in Chapter 5, and Article 3 in Chapter 6) or under review at the time of writing this thesis (Article 4 in Chapter 7), and each study is presented as a separate

chapter. The author of this thesis is the sole author of three articles (Article 1 in Chapter 4, Article 2 in Chapter 5, and Article 4 in Chapter 7) and the main author of the co-authored article (Article 3 in Chapter 6). The form of the published articles has remained mainly unchanged, with only minor changes to the formal structure in order to maintain a consistent graphical presentation and a consistent citation style. All figures, tables and footnotes are numbered consecutively throughout the dissertation. Due to the considerable overlap of sources cited, only a single list of references is provided at the end of the thesis. After the concluding chapter I include four appendices – the contribution of all authors to the presented articles in Appendix 1, the anonymised table of research participants in the final study in Appendix 2, the outline of the semi-structured interviews used in the pilot study in Appendix 3 and in the final study in Appendix 4.

2 BEYOND BINARIES. NON-CATEGORICAL THINKING IN GEOGRAPHY AND THE SOCIAL SCIENCES

"The history of human geography has been waymarked both by binary thinking and by exhortations to bridge philosophical and material polarities emerging from such thinking;"
(Cloke and Johnston 2005: 5).

Since its beginnings as a scientific discipline, geography has oscillated between synthetic and analytical paradigms, between holistic and systematic intellectual endeavours (Harvey 1997). The ancient geographical accounts of Strabo and Pliny, as well as the early modern work of Alexander von Humboldt or Carl Ritter, emphasised the synthetic, integrative, almost omnivorous (Demeritt 2005) nature of geographical inquiry, focused on a broad understanding of the uniqueness and unity of a place/region. With the rise of mechanistic reasoning in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, such a holistic "totality of interrelationships that make up a particular location" (Johnston 1986: 3) was replaced by a systems-based analysis of discrete, identifiable parts, the layers of situated geographical information that interact in an orderly manner as can be seen in the work of Alfred Hettner or Richard Hartshorne (Harvey 1997). The view of place as a mechanistic 'sum of interrelated parts' (Hartshorne 1939) made it easy to isolate one part from another and opened the way for narrow specialisations within the field of geography. As Turner (1989) writes, the question of specialisation versus synthesis soon began to dominate the heated debates about the future course of geography, unfortunately not in a dialectically productive way. The mutual disrespect between the proponents of synthesis and specialisation therefore led to a further isolation of the two approaches (Turner 1989). This duality became a contradiction that in many ways has persisted throughout the history of geographical thought (Harvey 1997, Turner 1989, Cloke and Johnston 2005, Sui and DeLyser 2012, Cresswell 2013).

With the continual emergence of different distinctive theoretical perspectives articulating new visions of what geography is or should be, and with further antagonistic debates that often followed in response, many more areas of geographical inquiry gradually drifted further and further apart in the intellectual landscape of the discipline (Kwan 2004). Differences and boundaries between new and old perspectives, reinforced by processes of purification (Latour 1993) and canonisation (Kwan 2004), have helped to shape the identities of both scholarly traditions and individual geographers in terms of "counterpositional, A/not-A binaries" (Massey 2001: 13) that are perceived as incompatible or conflicting. Particularly since the 1980s, as Cresswell (2013) writes, geographers have increasingly struggled with the problem of dualistic thinking, mainly around three central binary divisions of

structure/agency, culture/nature, and realism/social constructionism. Along these divisive lines, Kwan (2004) argues that two major rifts in geography have had a lasting impact on the discipline: the division between physical and human geography, and the separation of spatial-analytical geographies from social, cultural and political geographies. Although, she goes on to argue, the reality of actual research practices is less binary than the conflictual rhetoric often conveys, these divisions remain deeply entrenched in contemporary geography, leading to mutual indifference and a lack of dialogue that is even more difficult to overcome than antagonism.

Divisions remain just that: divisive (Sui and DeLyser 2012), overlooking not only the connections between things on either side of a dualism, but also the multitude of differences that exist within what is supposed to be the same (Cresswell 2013, Sayer 1991). For this reason, relational thinking began to (re)emerge in geography, emphasising the co-constitution and mutual entanglement of often distant phenomena, relational becomings rather than rigid fixities (Soja 1996, Massey 1997, Murdoch 2006, Thrift 2008, Whatmore 2002), together with a (re)turn to synthesis and holism (Gober 2000, Clarke 2011, Sheller and Urry 2006, Cresswell 2010, in Czech geography Sýkora 2010). Among other conceptual frameworks that have been proposed to practise this 'new' non-categorical synthesis in geographical research[4], hybrid geographies have become one of the most popular.

The notion of hybridity was very much in the air in the early 2000s, as Demeritt (2005) notes, spanning a wide range of fields from feminism (Haraway 1991) and postcolonial identity politics (Bhabha 1994, Ang 2003) to bioengineering, science fiction, computer science and environmental studies. In the most essential terms, hybrids "transgress and displace boundaries between binary divisions and in so doing produce something ontologically new" (Rose 2000: 364). Hybridity then is a concept that "confronts and problematizes binaries, although it does not erase them" (Ang 2003: 8). This understanding of hybridity based on the one-plus-one logic, thus of "conceiving every hybrid as a mixture of two pure forms" (Latour 1993: 78), has been challenged by Bruno Latour (1993) and especially by Sarah Whatmore (2002), both of whom offer a more robust theoretical exploration of hybridity.

In her groundbreaking book *Hybrid Geographies*, Whatmore develops a relational ontology in which hybridity signals "not just the interconnectedness of pre-given entities" (2002: 161), where things are imagined having once been discrete and only afterwards do their boundaries blur. In her view, things are and have always been 'impure'. As Demeritt notes, her conception of hybridity contrasts with the underlying essentialism of earlier hybrid accounts in the social sciences, where things were placed

[4] In geography and the broader social sciences, we can find several such conceptual and methodological approaches, such as paradoxical space (Rose 1993, Mahtani 2002), actor-network theory (Latour 1993), third space (Soja 1996), multipolar coexistence (Verrest and Jaffe 2012), constellations (Cresswell 2002, 2010), third culture (Sui 2004), or non-representational theory (Thrift 2008).

in a dialectical relationship: “orange may be hybrid, but it is produced only by the synthesis of two pure and primary colours” (2005: 819). In Whatmore's relational ontology, even the primary colours red and yellow are relational and fluid achievements. Pushing further beyond the clear-cut geometry of Latourian networks, her hybrid geographies emphasise the need to acknowledge the “immanent potentiality” (Whatmore 2002: 161) of the chaotic, pulsating, playful, undrawable entanglements of the “crazily hybridised” world (Philo 2005: 826). As she writes:

> “In place of the geometric habits that reiterate the world as a single gird-like surface open to the inscription of theoretical claims or universal designs, hybrid mappings are necessarily topological, emphasising the multiplicity of space-times generated in/by the movements and rhythms of heterogeneous association. The spatial vernacular of such geographies is fluid, not flat, unsettling the coordinates of distance and proximity; local and global; inside and outside;”
> (Whatmore 2002: 6).

Yet she insists that not everything is in flux, acknowledging the many ‘territorialisations’ (Deleuze and Guattari 1994) that humans and their institutions impose on the world in order to stop it. And perhaps most importantly, Whatmore goes far beyond making such claims in the abstract to making them concrete, clearly demonstrating why it is important to recognise that the world is much more hybridised than the conventional lexicons of science, politics and policy allow (Philo 2005).

Such notions of hybridity and hybrid geographies were soon taken up by other geographers with diverse research interests to encompass a wide range of predominantly empirical accounts that challenge existing boundaries and forge creative connections within geographies - physical and human, critical and analytical, qualitative, and quantitative - to integrate perspectives on space, place, flow and connection. While some have continued to build directly on Whatmore's ideas (Cloke and Jones 2004, Woodyer 2008, Maalsen and McLean 2016, Booth 2013), others have used hybrid geographies as a synonym for (and call for) an engaged pluralism in geography (Kwan 2004, Kwan and Schwanen 2016), a framework to “practise this new synthesis in geographical research” (Sui and DeLyser 2012: 112). Perhaps, as Cresswell (2013) writes, we are returning to the world that Humboldt and Ritter would have recognised, where nature and culture (and other binarized categories) are part of the same intellectual domain. As promising as this sounds, single-minded synthetic approaches do not necessarily serve the discipline well, as Turner (1989) has argued. Or, as Wyly so pointedly asks: “How can we ever find the time to master the dizzying array of traditions and techniques required to create truly hybrid geographies without giving up the depth that comes with specialisation in social theory or spatial econometrics or feminist ethnography or participant observation or policy analysis or the list goes on?” (2020: 319). And, above all, how to avoid falling into the same trap of antagonism between synthesis and specialisation?

In the following two sections of this chapter, I briefly discuss two conceptual divides, the binaries of geographical thought, that have shaped my dissertation project from its inception to the current form presented in this thesis. First, there is an apparent divide between transport geography and mobility research (shaped by the 'mobility turn' in the early 2000s), broadly corresponding to the quantitative-qualitative divide in human geography that has made the case for Kwan's (2004) call for engaged hybrid geographies. And second, there is a binary of sedentary and nomadic metaphysics (Cresswell 2006), represented by the longstanding but slowly fading ideological battle of place against mobility and vice versa, which correlates with Whatmore's notion of 'impure' entities and the fluid entanglements that harbour their emergence. The following sections also further explain my own use of hybrid geographies as both a way of framing postmodern people-place relations and a way of practising hybrid geographical research. While my overall focus here is on synthesis (Sui and DeLyser 2012), on transgressing such binaries, I simultaneously seek to maintain balance by genuinely recognising geographical specialisation as equally valuable as synthesis and building on a deep level of specialisation rather than opposing it.

2.1 Transport geography and mobility studies

> *"All the world seems to be on the move. Asylum seekers, international students, terrorists, members of diaspora, holidaymakers, business people, sports stars, refugees, backpackers, commuters, the early retired, young mobile professionals, prostitutes, armed forces - these and many others fill the world's airports, buses, ships and trains. The scale of this travelling is immense;"*
> *(Sheller and Urry 2006: 207).*

When Mimi Sheller and John Urry wrote their 'Manifesto' with these opening lines, they articulated the emergence of a new paradigm in the social sciences, the 'new mobilities' paradigm, which refocuses the interest of social science on mobility as a central fact of modern and postmodern life. This 'mobility turn' aimed to bring together different forms of movement and circulation across scales and to theorise them holistically and relationally, rather than as separate, discrete forms of action. Recognising that life consists of mobile practices, it emphasised practice, the meanings, subjectivities, and spaces of movement in all its various forms, whether writing, walking, dancing, driving, travelling, exploring, emigrating and so on (Castree et al. 2013). Since then, the mobility turn has gained prominence across the social sciences, and particularly in geography, where it has attracted a growing number of proponents. Networks of scholars have emerged alongside a dedicated journal, *Mobilities*, launched at the 2006 AAG Annual Conference and co-edited by Urry (Shaw and Hesse 2010).

In the first of his three *Progress in Human Geography* reports on 'mobilities', Cresswell (2011) goes to great lengths to explain how this new paradigm differs from other approaches to forms of mobility, such as migration or transport, which have traditionally been important aspects of geographical research. In particular, transport geography and transport-oriented research feature in his text as the backdrop against which he positions the mobilities agenda - from linking social science more to the humanities than to "mappable and calculable movement" (Cresswell 2011: 552), to integrating different scales of movement as opposed to transport geography's tendency to focus on particular forms of movement, to using new mobile (implicitly qualitative) methods. In his view, whereas transport geography is mainly concerned with finding out how to get from A to B efficiently, the mobility turn "is about *more* than just getting from A to B" (Cresswell 2011: 554, emphasis added, see also Adey 2010). And while he articulates the importance of 'building bridges' between mobility studies and transport research, for him this is primarily a call to action for transport geography, "the child of a positivist spatial science" (Cresswell 2011: 554), to engage more with the meanings and politics of movement. Or as he writes elsewhere: "Transport researchers … have developed ways of telling us about the fact of movement, how often it happens, at what speeds, and where. … They have not been so good at telling us about the representations and meanings of mobility either at the individual level or at a societal level. Neither have they told us how mobility is actually embodied and practised" (Cresswell 2010: 19). Such a conceptualisation of mobilities, as Kwan and Schwanen (2016) argue, reinforced particular representations of transport geography and transport research as not only partial and situated - as any practice of academic knowledge production inevitably is (Haraway 1991) - but also severely limited. This implied a paternalistic opposition rather than a contrast (Stengers 2011): transport vs. mobility studies.

The sub-discipline of transport geography has previously been criticised, even by its own peers, for struggling with the legacy of the quantitative revolution of the 1950s and 1960s, for being theoretically light and detached from key developments in conceptual thinking in other areas of human geography, and for seeking refuge in its links with economists and civil engineers (Hanson 2003, Goetz 2006, Vowles 2006, Hall 2010). Many transport geographers have therefore welcomed the mobility turn in its efforts (and success) to elevate mobility - the long-accepted precondition of all transport - to a class of core geographical concepts that also includes space, place, network, scale and territory (Kwan and Schwanen 2016), and have seen it as an opportunity to reposition transport geography (Shaw and Hesse 2010).

Yet such stereotypical views of transport research, together with the common paternalistic, even pejorative (Hall 2010, Shaw and Hesse 2010), oppositional stance of mobility studies, have provoked similarly stereotypical oppositional responses from mainstream transport geography. As Shaw and Hesse write, the ongoing suspicion of the status of data collected through methods such as auto/ethnography, or of

arguments based on the practices of a single respondent, has shaped the view of some transport geographers of mobility research as "over-theorising and over-conceptualising issues at the expense of a solid, empirically based assessments of how mobility works" (2010: 308). Thus, while many transport geographers tend to view mobilities as being 'too cultural', mobilities scholars tend to view transport research as being 'too traditional'. And while one side lamented about being "conspicuously under-represented" (Shaw and Hesse 2010: 306) in the pages of the *Mobilities* journal, the other side complained about not being included among the major paradigms in the sub-disciplinary progress reports (Cresswell 2011).

In many ways, these tensions echoed the long-standing dualistic opposition between quantitative spatial-analytical geographies and social-cultural qualitative geographies, symptomatic of binary identities and derogatory terms such as 'social theorists' or 'postmodernists' on the one hand, and 'quantifiers' or 'GISers' on the other (Kwan 2004). However, as Schwanen and Kwan (2009) show, there is no point in antagonistically positioning spatial analysis as incompatible with the spirit of critical geography, since critical geography can be done with numbers, too. And qualitative analysis can be used to inform quantitative modelling (Goetz et al. 2009, Aitken and Kwan 2010), extending its impact on key policy decisions (Shaw and Hesse 2010). Similarly, in response to the transport/mobilities dualism, Kwan and Schwanen (2016) criticise conceptualisations of mobility such as Cresswell's for separating movement from discourse and bifurcating mobility between an object and a subject, between an abstracted "cold fact of movement" and the lived meanings or embodiments of mobility. But, they go on to ask, what if the lived and the abstract are not really in opposition? What if movement, meaning and practice are to be understood as "truly entangled and mutually implicated in ways that language struggles to make graspable?" (Kwan and Schwanen 2016: 245). Such alternative imaginaries would then allow scholars to think differently about different ways and traditions of researching mobility, creating different abstractions through their particular methodological practices, thus turning oppositions into contrasts (Kwan and Schwanen 2016).

In Czech and Slovak transport geography, the 'traditional' transport research agenda based on quantitative methods strongly dominates the sub-discipline. In his report for the *Journal of Transport Geography*, Seidenglanz (2014) identifies three key research topics of Czech and Slovak transport geography - the geographical patterns of public transport (especially rail transport) relationships within the settlement system, their development and role in the spatial (re)organisation of regions, and finally, transport accessibility. Awareness of the topics and methodologies associated with the mobility turn, he continues, has been slow to enter expert discussions and lectures and they still play a very marginal role within and beyond Czech and Slovak transport

geography[5]. As Chmelík (2016) argues, while the critique of transport geography's over-reliance on positivist epistemologies has been noticed and acknowledged in our region, along with the (rather proclaimed) need to engage more with 'softer' qualitative methods, there seems to be general agreement that quantitative data analysis will always remain superior for this sub-discipline (see also Dobruszkes 2012).

Thus, although no real opposition has formed to challenge the dominant quantitative tradition in Czech and Slovak transport geography, this could be seen in a positive light. In recent years, a growing number of mixed-methods studies have emerged, mainly in collaboration with urban geographers, to critically address issues of daily mobility in urban, suburban and peripheral locations (Temelová et al. 2011, Novák and Temelová 2012, Mulíček et al. 2013, Mulíček et al. 2016, Osman et al. 2020, etc.), creatively mixing 'traditional' transport geography interests in traffic flows, timetables and accessibility with interview-based investigations of everyday mobile strategies, embodied experiences and imaginations of (urban) space. Skipping the phase of mutual antagonism between 'too traditional' quantitative and 'too cultural' qualitative approaches within Czech and Slovak geographical research on movement and mobilities (although such polarising oppositions are still very real in other areas of Czech and Slovak geography) represents a very promising position for future collaborations and fusions to emerge and continue to be creatively productive. For, as Kwan and Schwanen (2016) insist, engaged pluralism (of hybrid geographies) - a conversation across dividing lines and unequal positions that is as open as possible and excludes no mode of abstraction - can become the norm, enacted above all in research practices rather than articulated in an abstract vision of the future.

2.2 Mobility and place

When Sheller and Urry proclaimed the 'new mobilities paradigm' as an approach that challenges the predominantly 'a-mobile' character of social science research, they positioned it as a way of moving "beyond sedentarist *and* nomadic conceptualisations of place and movement" (2006: 2014, original emphasis). They claimed to oppose a sedentary, static worldview that had long underpinned social, cultural, and geographical thought, and at the same time to avoid romanticising and celebrating mobility by paying attention to its highly unequal politics. In one of the leading book-length contributions to the mobility turn, Tim Cresswell (2006) devotes an entire chapter to a detailed review of what he calls the 'metaphysics of fixity and flow',

[5] As an illustration, to date there have been no contributions from the Czech and Slovak geographical provenance in any of the journals dedicated to mobility studies, such as *Mobilities*, *Applied Mobilities* or *Transfers*, except for the very recent ones (Zuskáčová 2020, 2023), which present a part of this thesis.

sedentarist and nomad thought, as two principal ways of thinking about mobility in the modern Western world.

The term 'sedentarist metaphysics' comes from the anthropologist Liisa Malkki (1992) who, writing about refugees, identifies a tendency to think about mobile people in ways that assume the moral primacy of fixity in space and place and actively territorialise identities in property, region, nation - in place. The notion of place typically serves as an explicit reference to such sedentarist thinking in human geography. While early regional geography approached the place as a unique, distinctive entity and produced detailed idiographic descriptions of particular places on the Earth's surface, it was the humanistic geography that for the first time engaged with the conceptual Place (Cresswell 2004) and linked it closely to sedentary values. Inspired by philosophies of meaning, in particular phenomenology and existentialism, humanistic geographers such as Yi-Fu Tuan (1977), Edward Relph (1976) or Anne Buttimer and David Seamon (1980) have embraced a way of thinking in which fixity, stability and boundedness represent central values around which culture, the world and the whole of human existence are organised. In this vein, they also conceptualised place as the essential need, the centre of meaning around which (and around which only) human identity can be formed (Relph 1976, Tuan 1977).

For Tuan, the concept of place is central to our understanding of how humans transform the (apparent) chaos of nature into culture by making it their home. Place, Tuan argues, "is an organised world of meaning. It is essentially a static concept. If we see the world as process, constantly changing, we would not be able to develop any sense of place" (1977: 179). "Modern man", he continues, "might be so mobile that he can never establish roots and his experience of place may be all too superficial" (1977: 183). Similarly, Relph (1976) attempts to describe the essence of place and its significance for human experience by distinguishing between authentic, meaningful place and inauthentic, meaningless placelessness. Place, home, and roots are described by him as fundamental human needs: "to have roots in a place is to have a secure point from which to look out on the worlds, a firm grasp of one's own position in the order of things, and a significant spiritual and psychological attachment to somewhere in particular" (Relph 1976: 38). In humanistic geography, places were experienced, they incited a sense of attachment and belonging, they were the centres of value, care and meaning for people, they were authentic, rooted and bounded. Mobility, on the other hand, as Cresswell (2006) summarised, implied a series of absences - the absence of commitment, attachment, and involvement - a lack of significance. Places of intensive mass mobility such as highways, railways, or airports "cutting across or imposed on the landscape rather than developing with it" (Relph 1976: 90), were therefore blamed by humanists for destroying authentic senses of place and causing the spread of *placelessness*. They were seen as placeless sites of absolutely weakened identity that "look alike and feel alike and offer the same bland possibilities for experience" (Relph 1976: 90).

Yet, as Cresswell goes on to argue, there is also a long history of positive valuing of mobility as freedom, change and progress that runs parallel to the sedentary worldview. Such ways of thinking, which privilege mobility and flow over stasis and attachment, he calls 'nomadic thought', which he argues has become more prominent in the increasingly mobile world. In contemporary social thought, even in much of everyday social representation: "If something can be said to be fluid, dynamic, in flux, or simply mobile, then it is seen to be progressive, exciting, and contemporary. If, on the other hand, something is said to be rooted, based on foundations, static, or bounded, then it is seen to be reactionary, dull, and of the past" (Cresswell 2006: 25). The nomad is a central figure in the theorisations of Deleuze and Guattari (1986), which Cresswell uses to illustrate these new modes of mobile thinking. In their *Nomadology*, Deleuze and Guattari distinguish between the ordered and hierarchical state (and royal science) and the inventions of the 'war machine' (the nomad science and art). The sedentarist state is the metaphorical enemy of the nomad in its efforts to enclose space and control all flows, whereas "the postmodern nomad attempts to free itself of all roots, bonds and identities, and thereby resist the state and all normalising powers" (Best and Kellner 1991: 103). Thus, while the sedentarist migrant goes from place to place, moving with a resting place in mind, the nomad uses points and locations to define paths.

The sites and landscapes such as motorways, motels, bus stations and airports that have appeared as placeless in the work of humanistic geographers (Relph 1976) have become contemporary symbols of flow, dynamism and mobility in postmodern thought. As social theorist Ian Chambers writes regarding airports: "With its shopping malls, restaurants, banks, post-offices, phones, bars, video games, television chairs and security guards, it is a miniaturised city. As a simulated metropolis it is inhabited by a community of modern nomads: a collective metaphor of cosmopolitan existence where the pleasure of travel is not only to arrive, but also not to be in any particular place" (1994: 57-58). Anthropologist Marc Augé also takes the airport as a leading example of his *non-places* - the unrooted sites of mobility and travel that "are there to be passed through" (1995: 104). He argues that places, embedded in the fantasy of a "society anchored since time immemorial in the permanence of an intact soil" (Augé 1995: 44), are receding in importance in the era of 'supermodernity' and are being replaced by the "fleeting, the temporary and ephemeral" (Augé 1995: 78) non-places. In geography, Nigel Thrift (1994) has adopted this nomadic perspective. For him, mobility is a structure of feeling that emerged with modernity and has taken on new characteristics at the turn of the millennium. Asking what the role of place is in this 'in-between' world, he concludes that place is "compromised: permanently in a state of enunciation, between addresses, always deferred" (Thrift 1994: 212).

In undertaking a (necessary) critique of place-based identity, as Cresswell (2006) concludes, the proponents of the 'nomadic metaphysics' have repeated the same universalising assumptions as the committed 'sedentarists', ignoring the fact that

mobility is also socially differentiated. The 'new mobilities paradigm', as articulated by Sheller and Urry (2006), therefore seeks to avoid such nomadic 'grand narratives' of mobility, deterritorialisation, fluidity or liquidity (Baumann 2000) and commits to a critical examination of the politics of mobility and its uneven distribution, as well as the complexity of mobile systems that inevitably rely on immobile 'moorings'. However, as Franquesa (2011) has also noted, it is far from achieving the goal of overcoming the sedentarist/nomadic binary. On the contrary, mobility scholarship ostensibly asserts a greater value for mobility and gives analytical priority to the study of mobile flows, while relegating immobile fixities to a passive, under-theorised position (Franquesa 2011) with implicitly negative connotations - either as necessary preconditions for mobility to exist (such as ground infrastructures) or as barriers and handicaps to be overcome.

This line of critique seems to be gaining more attention recently within (and beyond) mobility studies, and efforts to reconcile the competing ways of thinking about place and mobility, both theoretically and empirically, are on the rise. This fusion of thinking is, however, not entirely new in human geography. Since humanistic geography, the synthesis of place and mobility understandings has developed, for example, in the work of David Seamon (1980), who invokes the mobile metaphor of dance, the 'place ballet', to describe how the mobilities of bodies in space and time combine to produce existential insideness - the sense of belonging to the rhythm of life in place. Most iconically, Doreen Massey (1997) formulated the 'global sense of place' - an extroverted notion of place as open and hybrid, a process rather than a fixed and static entity, a place of multiple identities and histories, defined by its relations and interactions with the outside. In recent years, along with Tim Cresswell (see especially Cresswell and Verstraete 2002), other geographers and mobilities scholars have begun to develop the idea that "place and mobility are not antithetical but co-constitutive" (Cresswell 2014: 65). In an impressively rich collection of contemporary accounts of place edited by Tim Edensor, Ares Kalandides and Uma Kothari (2020), many such ideas have been expressed, whether it is Kim Dovey presenting a conceptual framework of place as assemblage that "cuts across any binary between place as roots or routes, open or closed" (2020: 21), Ares Kalandides (2020) revisiting Massey's global sense of place to assess its contemporary relevance, or David Bissell (2020) using an empirical example of mobile mining work in Australia to show how typically sedentary and nomadic meanings of place can (and do) become inextricably mixed.

In Czech and Slovak human geography, place has been a rather marginal topic with a predominantly regional and educational focus (Siwek and Bogdová 2007, Matlovič and Matlovičová 2007, Hynek and Svozil 2008, Kasala and Lauko 2009, Vávra 2010). More recently, a growing interest in geographies of place can be observed, along with a conceptual and methodological diversification. While there are examples of explicit engagement with phenomenological place, such as Petr Gibas's (2010) ethnographic accounts of a Prague suburban locality through the lenses of place-ballet

and placelessness, the predominant body of recent geographical (or interdisciplinary) research examines place in close connection with the concept of spatiality and/or heterotopia (Hejnal 2013, Gibas 2014, Osman et al. 2016, Vašát et al. 2017, Novotný 2019). And while some studies reproduce the binary of a (sedentary, ordered, disciplined and significant) place and a (mobile, chaotic, meaningless) non-place in the context of homelessness (Vašát et al. 2017), others focus on its blurring by pointing to the internal paradox of home as both a stable place of roots and a rhizomatic place of temporality and transplantability (Gibas 2019).

This ideological battle between place and mobility, between sedentary and nomadic worldviews, between order and chaos, as Tuan (1977) or Deleuze and Guattari (1986) put it, together with the continuous attempts to bridge this dualism, beautifully illustrates one of the main arguments of Sarah Whatmore's 'hybrid geographies' that things are, and always have been, 'impure'. Place and mobility are, and have always been, co-constitutive (Cresswell 2014). What keeps this opposition still alive in and beyond geographical research, then, may simply be a question of values. The contemporary world, as Cresswell (2006) has argued, could be seen as placing more value on progress and dynamism - on mobility - yet, as Edensor et al. (2020) have noted, the heightened existential 'angst' that currently binds people to the fate of their places is causing an observable resurgence of sedentary values (although they have never really disappeared), articulated in many forms of reactionary localisms, regionalisms and nationalisms against the mobile forces of globalisation and/or the mobile 'others'[6]. If we can thus acknowledge place as constructed through mobilities across scales (Seamon 1980, Massey 1997), and mobilities as inevitably dependent on immobile moorings (Sheller and Urry 2006), what if we similarly acknowledge the 'immanent potentiality' (Whatmore 2002) of differently hybridised meaningful worlds of individual human beings? And perhaps more importantly, what if even the two extremes of 'topophilia' (Tuan 1974) and 'tropophilia'[7] (Anderson and Erksine 2014) are to be acknowledged as equally present and equally valuable (for geographical inquiry), without claiming the moral (or analytical) superiority of one or the other? This dissertation aims to do just that, enriching ongoing discussions of place and mobility with yet another synthesising study that brings together the 'traditional' phenomenological focus on meaning and experience with the 'new mobilities' agenda, and 'traditional' qualitative research with 'new' mobile methods, as I will now elaborate.

[6] Or, as Bissell (2021) reminds us, not so long ago, in many regions of the world, mobility (especially of other people) became a threat again, a problem of all kinds during the Covid-19 outbreak.

[7] Anderson and Erksine (2014) introduce the neologism 'tropophilia' in their study of lifestyle mobilities to refer to the individual's love of mobility, change and transformation in the person-place relationship, as a parallel to a humanistic 'topophilia' (Tuan 1974) as the love of rootedness, dwelling and habitation within a secure geographical location.

3 ON COMBINING METHODS

> *"The complex problems of our times will demand both the greatest creativity and the greatest diversity of approaches – not a new paradigm or a new methodological 'revolution', but instead an embrace of engaged methodological pluralism, where different and divergent methods flourish to tackle issues from different angles;"*
> (Sui and DeLyser 2014: 303).

The theoretical debates about moving beyond division towards 'hybrid geographies' (Kwan 2004, Sui and DeLyser 2012), as outlined in the previous chapter, have inevitably extended to methodological discussions about pluralism and openness to, and even synthesis of, methods held apart by (perceived) epistemological oppositions. As Philip (1998) writes, it has been common practice within academic communities of geographers and social scientists to associate particular epistemologies with particular methodologies and to encourage researchers to choose either quantitative or qualitative methods for their research. This (self-imposed?) dichotomy is still commonly reinforced by material and institutional practices within the field of human geography that tend to treat quantitative and qualitative methods as distinct entities. They are mainly discussed separately in methodological textbooks; they are taught separately in geography courses. Yet, as Philip (1998) or Brewer and Hunter (2006) describe the numerous examples from the history of geographical thought and practice, multi-method research is by no means a novel approach to geographical inquiry. For a very long time it was in fact the norm, even if it was not reported as such. The more recent call for social scientists (and social geographers) to develop strategies for combining different styles and methods in the same research project - for multimethod research - was therefore rather a call to "more fully, systematically, and consciously what many had done before" (Brewer and Hunter 2006: xiv).

The term multimethod research refers to a research design that combines two or more methods within a single research project (Philip 1998, Morse 2003, McKendrick 2020). It can be used to bridge the qualitative/quantitative divide, or it can be used within either of these camps (McKendrick 2020, Morse 2003). By using more than one method within a research project, Morse (2003) argues that we can get a more complete picture, a better understanding of the research problem and achieve the research goals more quickly. Compared to a single method, the scope of the research is less likely to be limited by the method itself. Perhaps the best-known strategy for combining methods is mixed methods research design, which is sometimes used interchangeably with multimethod design. However, there are differences that define each of them. According to Philip (1998), mixed methods refer to a situation where all methods are used to address the research question at the same stage of the research process, in the same place and with the same research subjects. In multimethod design, on the other hand, the methods are used to address different facets of the research

question or to address the same question from different perspectives, they may be used at different times during the research project, and they may focus on different places and/or different research subjects. For Morse (2003), in a mixed methods design, one main method forms the 'core' and other methods are supplemental - they provide clues that are followed up in the core method, but they are not saturated so that they cannot stand alone as studies in their own right. A multimethod design, on the other hand, is the conduct of two or more research methods, each of which is rigorous and complete in itself. The results are then triangulated to form a comprehensive whole (Goffman 1989).

This dissertation project started as a mixed-methods research, in line with earlier tendencies of a "more positivist methodological orientation" (Hesse-Biber 2010: 457) in mixed-methods designs, where the task of qualitative data was to illustrate quantitative 'expert' findings, thus assigning them a secondary role of supplementing material, of narrative examples (Giddings 2006). Therefore, in the first years of my doctoral research, I was mainly concerned with the question of whether aeromobility in the Czech Republic and Slovakia is measurable at all (Zuskáčová 2013). My spatial focus on the Czech Republic and Slovakia reflected, first and foremost, the practicalities of researching in my native language and against the familiar backdrop of the societies and cultures that I have been involved with since my childhood. It also responded, at least in part, to the growing interest in human geography in realities and geographical knowledge produced outside the typical Anglophone strongholds.[8] As Kraft and Havlíková (2016) argue, countries such as the Czech Republic and Slovakia have experienced a very specific development in the field of air transport, resulting in lower accessibility of air transport services compared to Western Europe and their uneven distribution within the region. The study of aeromobility in this particular region therefore seemed highly relevant.

In order to measure aeromobility, I first had to clarify what I meant by the term and to whom (or what) I could apply the label 'aeromobile'. In reviewing the scattered accounts of aeromobility scholarship in search of a definition of aeromobility on which to build, I was surprised to discover how little attention aeromobile terminology is given in this emerging field of research, and how very differently individual scholars understand and use it. My early attempts to make sense of this inconsistency focused on scale. By distinguishing between *the global scale of aeromobility*, that is, the global society reaching the milestone of available aeromobile technology, *spatially and socially selective aeromobility*, where certain aeromobile societies consider flying as a normal, easily accessible mode of transport, and *individual aeromobility,* where the habitus of intensive flying is developed on an individual scale, I aimed to make the case

[8] See, for example, Hall's (2010) review in the Journal of Transport Geography, which highlights the importance of studying tourism, migration and mobility in the 'New Europe' of post-communist transition, which is still poorly represented in the English-language literature.

for studying aeromobility as a lifestyle (Zuskáčová 2013, Zuskáčová 2014). Frequent flyer programmes offered a unique opportunity to frame lifestyle aeromobility, as they provide both an institutionalised measure of individual travel history[9] and a highly effective platform for the (re)production of elite identities among highly active air travellers (Thurlow and Jaworski 2006).

Having received justified criticism of my early attempts to clarify aeromobile terminology as being overly simplistic and potentially misleading, I continued to search for another way to address the problem of inconsistent aeromobile terminology. In the meantime, I enrolled on a course in qualitative methodology, which significantly changed the trajectory of my further research steps. By familiarising myself with a wide range of different methods for collecting and analysing qualitative data sets, I was able to start experimenting with what could be explored and what new knowledge I could access using purely qualitative tools. In one of my first experiments with qualitative methods, I tried to untangle the confusion around aeromobile terminology using **discourse analysis** (Willig 2008, Zábrodská and Petrjánošová 2013), as I realised that there is no 'objective' answer to the question of who can be labelled aeromobile. It is us, the academic community, who produce and reproduce the meanings of scientific terms. Discourse analysis is based on the constructivist paradigm and focuses on the role of language in the construction of social reality (Willig 2008). And academic studies are as good a source of the construction of social reality as any other record of verbal or written communication. They too represent a social interaction - that between the authors and their academic audience, the readers. There are cultural influences and power dynamics at play, too. In Chapter 4 I present the results of this discourse analysis, which covered a total of 92 academic articles, book chapters and conference proceedings in geography and the wider social sciences that work with the terms 'aeromobility', 'aeromobilities' and/or 'aeromobile'. Aeromobility as a lifestyle emerges here as a specific discourse within the aeromobilities literature (along the mobility system, the social norm, and the embodied practice), which associates aeromobility with a privileged way of living and working, that favours flying over other modes of transport and drives the willingness, even enthusiasm, to fly frequently.

Another important milestone in the course of my dissertation research was my research stay at Royal Holloway, University of London, in the spring of 2015. Attending regular 'Landscape Surgery' classes, which served as a platform for post-disciplinary thematic discussions between PhD students and senior researchers from different corners of the social sciences, arts and humanities, I began to see the value of engaged conversations (and collaborations) across the long-established boundaries of scholarly traditions and distinctive fields of study. I also began to engage more with geographical

[9] However, this is subject to significant limitations, as frequent flyer programmes only take into account travel on a particular airline or within a particular airline alliance, excluding low-cost, charter or private flights.

thinking about place, particularly through the work of Doreen Massey and Tim Cresswell, both of whom integrated the seemingly antithetical perspectives of sedentary placeness and dynamic mobilities to produce new (hybrid) accounts of the role of place in the increasingly mobile, globalised, yet unevenly experienced contemporary world. This fusion of thinking led me to ask whether and under what circumstances airports could also be meaningful and significant places in the worldview of aeromobile elites. Much of the social science literature on airports tended to suggest the opposite, reproducing popular metaphors of airports as non-places specifically in the context of frequent elite air travel (Augé 1995, Crang 2002, Fuller and Harley 2004, Laing 2008, Lassen 2009, Kesselring 2009, Pütz 2011, etc.). Towards the end of my stay in London, therefore, I embarked on another experimental qualitative endeavour, this time intensive (auto)ethnographic fieldwork at London Heathrow Airport, with the main research question (see Chapter 1.1) already in mind.

According to Herbert (2000), **ethnography** is a uniquely useful method for human geography because it provides unreplicable insights into the place-bound and place-making processes and meanings that undergrid socio-spatial life. It is generally recognised as a method based on participant observation, in which the researcher spends considerable time observing and interacting with a social group in order to uncover what the group takes for granted (Herbert 2000). This intense engagement with the lived experience of a group in place means engaging with its emotionality and full sensuality - the sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and tactile sensations that bring a way of life to life (Adler and Adler 1994). Autoethnography, in contrast to ethnography, as Besio (2009) writes, is distinguished by its explicitly self-referential mode of writing, which blurs (or even ignores) the divide between participant and observer, and the text produced refers explicitly to the author. It articulates the intersection of cognitive and somatic experience (Pensoneau-Conway 2023). There are several types of both ethnography and autoethnography (Herbert 2000, Besio 2009). I used a combination of mobile ethnography (Novoa 2015, Gottschalk and Salvaggio 2015) and analytical autoethnography (Anderson 2006) to frame my experiment at London Heathrow Airport. However, this was not a research decision made in advance. As I describe in my 'warts and all' report (Zuskáčová 2015), I had to develop and adapt my ethnographic techniques in response to the rapidly changing and highly monitored environment of the busy international airport, as well as my own physical and mental capacities.

Although my data collection techniques evolved during the 30 days of fieldwork in May and June 2015, my main methodological intention remained the same: I needed to break my fascination with airports in order to get closer to the routine and mundane reality of my target group. Moreover, as Kubátová (2006) puts it, all great concepts become surprisingly simple in domestic settings. Therefore, I also wanted to 'domesticate' the airport, especially in the context of elite frequent flying. I gradually purchased 5 fully flexible Business Class tickets to different Schengen destinations,

each from a different terminal and with a different airline, and I used these tickets repeatedly according to their terms and conditions, in order to repeatedly undergo the same passage through the elite airport spaces as most elite frequent flyers do. In my everyday embodied, sensual, and emotional interactions with the airport environment during the different stages of elite passenger processing, I have repeatedly asked myself *"where am I?",* what kind of place is this (for me) and what place-related attributes does it offer me in my role as an elite frequent traveller.

Equipped with a pen and diary, a small laptop, and a smartphone, I recorded my daily routines, thoughts, observations, feelings, and encounters. In addition, I photographed places, situations, my own possessions, or settings with my smartphone (Figure 1) and occasionally recorded the atmosphere and soundscape of my passage through unproblematic public areas as short videos. In order to maintain the ethical responsibility of my fieldwork, I followed the three principles suggested by Pospěch (2012) - the *principle of anonymity* towards sensitive locations, airlines and other companies as well as individuals[10], the *principle of remaining unfocused* in terms of not taking the initiative to obtain information other than any other Business Class passenger would normally encounter, and the *principle of not harming* any company or individual, directly or indirectly, by disclosing sensitive information about them. In the high surveillance environment of an airport, all my ethnographic practices, such as moving around, resting, observing, taking notes, photographing, videotaping, or engaging in informal conversations with fellow passengers and airport staff, could never deviate from the normal and generally acceptable behaviour of a Business Class traveller, nor could I ever reveal my identity as a researcher. As such, my approach can be classified as covert participant observation, which has been deemed justifiable when used responsibly in situations where there is no other way of accessing the phenomena under study (Calvey 2002, Scheper-Hughes 2004, Lugosi 2006, Pospěch 2012). During my ethnographic fieldwork at Heathrow, I collected 85 pages of field notes, 442 photographs and 70 minutes of audio-visual recordings, which I analysed using coding as suggested by Fetterman (2010), and which I have continually rethought in the years since. After my return from London, I was initially overwhelmed by the intensity of my own experience of inhabiting the airport for such a long time (compared to the usual stay of no more than a few hours when I actually travel somewhere by air) and adapting to its rhythms and places, that it became, in a way, a

[10] Using visual methods of data collection (photography, audio-visual recording), I focused on places rather than people, and in cases where people could not be excluded, I focused on larger groups rather than individuals, and I photographed/recorded them from a distance, ideally from behind, to ensure their anonymity. None of the visual data was made visible in the published article. For Figure 1 of this paper, the format of selected photographs has been significantly reduced to blur potentially sensitive details.

home for me (Zuskáčová 2016, Zuskáčová 2017[11]). Later, I focused more on the ethnographic observations of passenger travel in the context of arrival (Zuskáčová and Dujka 2017), to finally combine both perspectives into the (auto)ethnographic account of elite airport passage that I present in Chapter 5.

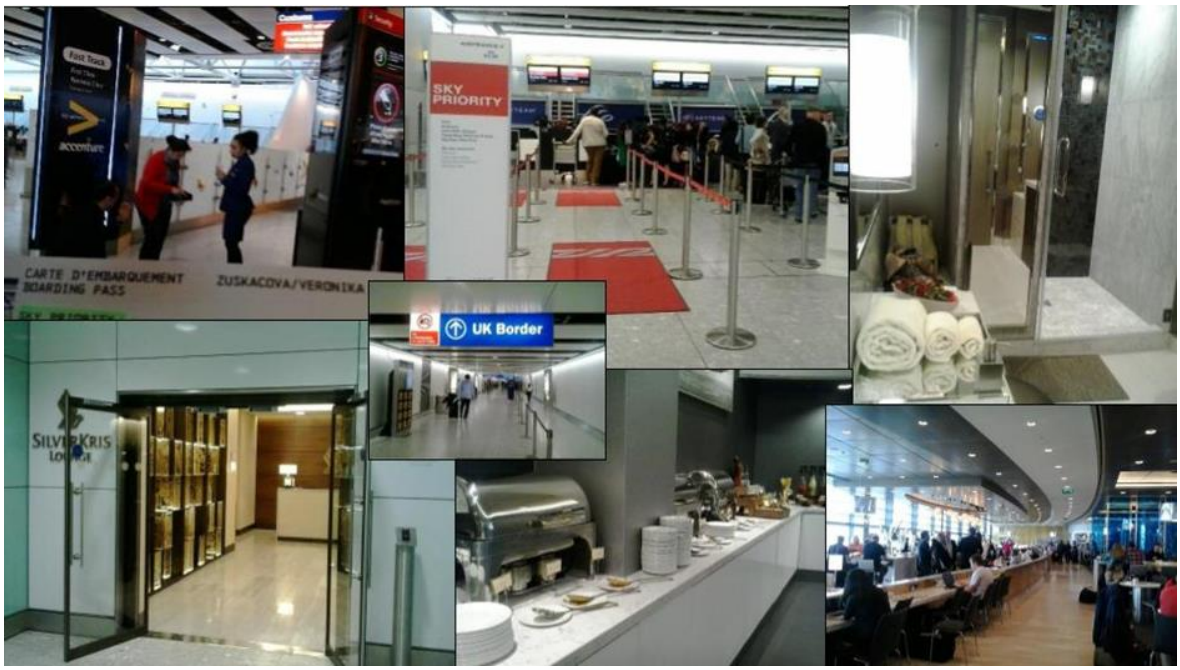

Figure 1. Selection of visual data from (auto)ethnographic fieldwork at London Heathrow Airport in May and June 2015. (Photo: author)

Building on the insights gained from my ethnographic experience of routine circulation in elite airport spaces, I began to test interviewing Czech and Slovak frequent flyers, which from the outset was intended to be the main source of data for my dissertation project. **Interviews** are, according to Sui and DeLyser (2014), one of the most established and enduring methods of qualitative geographical research. As Hitchings and Latham (2020) conclude, for many geographers, interviews have become such a natural way of doing research that it is no longer considered important to justify their use or to provide extensive procedural details about the interview process. Talking to people is simply an excellent way of gathering information (Longhurst and Johnston 2022), and in my research they allowed me to access the authentic experiences of elite frequent flyers in our region and directly interrogate the meaningful nuances of their relationship with airports. There are three types of interviews used in qualitative research - structured, unstructured, and semi-structured interviews, which can be placed along a continuum (Longhurst and Johnston 2022). Initially, I designed my pilot

[11] With this unpublished paper, I won second prize in the Postgraduate Paper Prize competition at the 2017 RGS-IBG Annual Conference in London.

interviews as in-depth, loosely semi-structured [12] conversations (see interview questions in Appendix 3) that would provide me with the broader context for choosing an aeromobile lifestyle, a detailed overview of recent air travel history, and a narrative detail of how such journeys typically unfold. I recruited my first research participants from March to July 2016 through referrals from mutual acquaintances, taking into account three criteria: (1) at least 40 individual flights in the last 12 months, (2) at least a 2nd tier membership in a frequent flyer programme (FFP), and (3) usual residence in the Czech Republic and Slovakia. My intention was to capture experiences that simultaneously reflect the high intensity of flying over a sufficiently long period of time, the established elite identity in relation to air travel, and the specific context of the Czech and Slovak peripheral location within the global network of airports.

At this stage, I did not focus specifically on airports, as I was more interested in how the placeness of airspaces in general unfolds during the mobile act of travel in the context of highly (aero)mobile lifestyles. The elite passenger experience does not begin and end at the airport, and I saw this as the major limitation of my ethnographic study at London Heathrow. The interviewees were first asked to draw a schema of their travels over the past 12 months, then my follow-up questions focused on the lifestyle elements of their travels (purpose and style of travel, frequency and attitudes towards frequent flying and travel in general), and finally they were asked to reconstruct their most recent trip in as much detail as possible (their itineraries, micro-practices, encounters, sensations, thoughts, etc.). I stopped the pilot interview process after 5 personal interviews for two reasons. Firstly, the narrative style of the interviews proved inefficient, as a considerable amount of the (usually limited) time these busy aeromobile elites were willing to spend with me was wasted on too much empirical detail. And secondly, the pilot interviews revealed a striking difference between two types of frequent flyer, and there seemed to be an interesting spatial connection between the two types of experience and their regional context that I felt deserved more attention.

I approached the data collected in the pilot interviews with two research questions, aimed at the different practices of the research participants and the spatialities of their travels in relation to their FFP status (see Chapter 1.1). In addition, I invited my first supervisor, Daniel Seidenglanz, an expert in classical transport geography methods, to collaborate on a **mixed-method case study** that would combine insights from different datasets, namely from the provision of flight data at the airports available to Czech and Slovak frequent travellers and from the analysis of the main FFPs offered by three major airline alliances commonly used by Czech and

[12] As described by Brinkmann (2020), interviews in a semi-structured format increase the potential for knowledge production, as they allow the interviewee to pursue any angle that he or she deems important, while at the same time allowing the interviewer to focus the conversation on issues that he or she deems important in relation to the research project.

Slovak frequent travellers. At this point, I must emphasise that I did not personally apply these two quantitative methods, but only further shaped the interpretation of their results. The outcome of our joint efforts is presented in Chapter 6 as a case study of Czech and Slovak frequent flyers that draws attention to the internal hierarchy of FFP members and the very diverse spatiality of their aeromobile practices, critically addressing the binary of elite and non-elite aeromobilities from a Central European perspective.

I returned to interviewing Czech and Slovak frequent flyers in November 2019 with an improved interview structure that focused much more on the meanings research participants ascribed to frequently visited airports (see Chapter 1.1 on research questions). Compared to the pilot interviews, I lowered the minimum number of individual flights to 30 flights in the last 12 months to better match the requirements of most FFPs to qualify for elite membership. The other two criteria remained the same as for the pilot interviews. Another change concerned the location of the interviews. As Longhurst and Johnston (2022) argue, the method of interviewing people tended to be mainly face-to-face, but since the recent Covid-19 outbreak, geographers have increasingly moved to online platforms using various audio-visual interfaces. Similarly, I decided to abandon face-to-face interviews, mainly because of the practical difficulties of synchronising the often extremely busy schedules of my research participants, but also because a significant proportion of the interviews were conducted during the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, and I had to comply with the requirements of various national lockdown policies. As a result, only one of the 19 interviews I conducted between November 2019 and June 2020[13] was a face-to-face interview, while the rest were conducted either by phone or via Skype, Google Meet or Messenger Call (see Appendix 2). The research participants were recruited from the specialised online discussion forums Airways.cz and Akcniletenky.cz, through personal acquaintances and snowballing. All research participants were fully informed about the purpose and aims of this dissertation project, the content of the interview, its voluntary nature and the anonymity of all data provided during the research event. Verbal informed consent was obtained from each research participant prior to the interview.[14]

[13] During this period, I conducted 3 additional interviews with travellers who did not meet one of the above criteria, i.e., either they were FFP elite members but had not accumulated 30 individual flight segments in the last 12 months, or they had accumulated 30 individual flight segments in the last 12 months but did not qualify for elite membership in any FFP. This decision was deliberate as I wanted to test the appropriateness of my selection criteria. These 3 additional interviews were not included in the analysis, but as the experiences described in these interviews were quite different (mainly on the issue of elite identity and/or the everydayness of air travel), they served their purpose well.

[14] Instead of the standardised signed consent form, which was difficult to administer in the virtual environment, all research participants were asked to provide written consent in email or chat conversations prior to their interview, and to repeat their consent verbally at the beginning of the

All 19 newly recruited research participants were again asked, ideally prior to the interview, to provide a detailed schema of their air travel over the previous 12 months, including outbound and inbound flights, any transit airports and individual airlines, the purpose of the trip and the type of service on board, as well as the frequency or seasonality of particular flights. These schemas of individual air travel networks served as important material for the identification of distinct air travel patterns, which inevitably translate into meaningful nuances of place-based airport experiences. The semi-structured interviews followed up on these schemes to clarify emerging patterns and ask about specific aeromobile practices. Further, I focused on the most frequent journeys and questioned the meanings associated with the place(less)ness of well-known airport terminals, which the interviewees expressed in our conversations mainly through their emotions (emotional attachment/detachment, favour/disfavour, familiarity), sensual perception of place-making features, perceived geographical self-location in different contexts, etc. (see all interview questions in Appendix 3).[15]

The interviews lasted from 40 minutes to 2 hours, and the interview process was stopped when the information obtained from new research participants began to be predominantly repetitive, while at the same time I aimed for an equal distribution between Czech and Slovak participants, and between residents of the capital and other metropolitan areas in both countries. Out of a total of 21 interviewees, six were based in the Prague metropolitan area, four in the second largest Czech city of Brno, another four in Bratislava, the capital of Slovakia, five in the second largest Slovak city of Košice, and two in smaller regional centres in Slovakia, Nitra and Prešov. All semi-structured interviews were transcribed using InqScribe software, and the total of 21 transcripts[16] were then qualitatively analysed using elements of grounded theory. Although I do not consider my final analysis to be grounded theory and do not refer to it as such in the resulting manuscript (Chapter 7), grounded theory techniques were of great inspiration to me during the process of both data collection and qualitative data analysis as a benchmark manual (Osman 2014) for the discovery of new theory. In an attempt to be as transparent as possible about my methods, I include a very brief

recording (see Newman et al. 2021 for ethical advice on virtual qualitative research during the Covid-19 pandemic).

[15] The interviews consisted of two interrelated parts, as can be seen in Appendix 4. The first part of the interviews was devoted to the issues of airport accessibility in our region and the mobile strategies that research participants use to cope with the peripherality of their residence. For reasons of time, the qualitative analysis in this dissertation mainly concerns the second part, which focuses on the place(less)ness of frequently visited airports.

[16] In addition to the 19 interviews conducted in 2019-2020, I also decided to include 2 pilot interviews from 2016 in the final analysis, as they both contained beautiful, very detailed reflexive descriptions of categories that gradually emerged from the main body of empirical data.

introduction to the essentials of the method itself to provide an overview of the points of contact and divergence with my actual research design.

Grounded theory is by far the most cited qualitative research method across different disciplines (Bryant and Charmaz 2007), which became one of the main forces in establishing qualitative research as a distinct field of inquiry (Moonesirust 2017). However, as Charmaz (2008) writes, many researchers today adopt only a few of the specific methodological strategies proposed by Glasser and Strauss (1967) or alter the original strategies beyond recognition. As Geiselhart et al. (2012) argue, a crucial feature of grounded theory is the great freedom within its approach, which requires the researcher to take considerable responsibility for continuous reflection on the research process. Defined as "a qualitative research method that uses a systematic set of procedures to develop an inductively derived grounded theory about a phenomenon" (Strauss and Corbin 1990: 24, emphasis omitted), it is both an emergent method that begins with the empirical world and builds an inductive understanding of it with open-ended results (Charmaz 2008), and a systematic approach that provides a sequential (though interactive) set of stages in the analysis of purposefully collected empirical data (Yeung 1997).

One of the main principles of grounded theory is the idea that empirical data provide a basis for theory formulation, so that phenomena should not be examined in the light of pre-formulated initial hypotheses (Geiselhart et al. 2012). In my analysis, although all categories emerged directly from my empirical data, I cannot confidently claim that I approached the data purely inductively. As I wanted to look for hybrid constellations of meanings that transcend the binary of sedentary and mobile values, I applied a loosely preconstructed framework of All figures, tables and footnotes are numbered consecutively throughout the dissertation 'hybrid geographies' during the process of data collection and coding. This means that I specifically asked the interviewees about both polarities (e.g., place/non-place) and further explored the evidence in our conversations that suggested their hybrid entanglements, and I coded the data with a clear focus on such (presumed) hybridity of place-related meanings.

While grounded theory has a cyclical character, where data collection, coding and analysis are meant to be practised simultaneously, allowing the researcher the flexibility to return to the field to saturate an emerging theory (Charmaz 2008), my analytical process at this stage was more linear. I collected the data first, and although some preconceptions of emerging categories evolved continuously during the data collection phase (allowing me to focus on them more intensively in the interviews), I only coded my data afterwards to formally create clear analytical categories. In addition, I skipped the phase of extensive line-by-line, word-by-word open coding of all actions that might have the slightest theoretical potential, in order to focus more on selective coding, but in line with the grounded theory approach of coding for actions and analytical possibilities rather than for themes and topics as in other types of qualitative analysis (Charmaz 2008). Selective or focused coding allows larger amounts

of data to be sorted and synthesised with greater relevance to theory building, thereby speeding up the analytical work. By scrutinising and constantly comparing the 32 focused codes that I worked with in my analysis to assess their 'carrying capacity' - the ability to bear the weight of the analysis (Clarke quoted in Charmaz 2008) - I constructed three major groups of related codes - the categories, in other words the hybrid constellations of place-related meanings of airports that I wanted to discover. These categories are considered theoretically saturated when new data analysis returns codes that only fit into existing categories, and these categories are sufficiently described in terms of their properties and dimensions (Birks and Mills 2015). Once this stage was reached, I proceeded to present my findings in manuscript form, while continuing to refine the interpretations of particular categories. The result, although still a work in progress, forms Chapter 7 of this dissertation.

To summarise the methods, I have used in my dissertation project and discussed in this chapter, I return to Morse's (2003) explanation of multimethod research. In total, four different methods have been used within the same topic of this dissertation project, each of which has been rigorously and completely conducted in its own right to be presented (and published) in a separate research article. Their results are triangulated [17] in the final chapter to form a comprehensive whole. The main theoretical drive of the whole project has been inductive, resulting in the qualitatively driven multi-method design (Hesse-Biber 2010), so even though some parts of the project are confirmatory or deductive, the main agenda remains that of discovery. Using a schematic visualisation as suggested by Morse (2003) and Hesse-Biber et al. (2015), the overall structure of my dissertation project takes the following form:

$$\text{qual} \rightarrow \text{qual} \rightarrow \text{mixed (qual} \rightarrow \text{quan + quan)} \rightarrow \text{QUAL.}$$

The methods of each study were applied sequentially, as indicated by the arrow (except for the mixed methods case study where two quantitative methods were applied simultaneously), with the method that theoretically drove my project being applied at the very end (capital letters indicate the main method). This contrasts with the usual multimethod research design, where the main method is usually carried out first, and subsequent methods are designed to address problems uncovered in the first study or to provide a logical extension of its findings (Morse 2003).

This dissertation project is, however, not just a research design. It has also been a path of one novice researcher, of gradually acquiring knowledge about different aspects of the complex research problem under investigation, of building methodological confidence in using different previously unknown social research methods, and of gradually accessing the field of elite frequent flying, which initially

[17] Triangulation refers to the combination of findings from two or more rigorous studies to provide a fuller understanding of phenomena than either study could provide alone (Morse 2003). Such comparing and/or contrasting of multimethod findings is seen in qualitative research as a way of improving the validity and reliability of the overall argument (Yeung 1997, Denzin 1989, Goffman 1989).

seemed very distant, exotic and difficult to access, in order to come as close as possible in the end to the main goal - a deep understanding of the (hybrid) geographies of elite aeromobile lifestyles in our rather peripheral Central European region. In the following chapters, the milestones of this journey will be presented in the same sequential order as my methodological progress unfolded, in order to finally acknowledge and combine their contribution to my final argument.

4 HOW WE UNDERSTAND AEROMOBILITY. MAPPING THE EVOLUTION OF A NEW TERM IN MOBILITY STUDIES (ARTICLE 1)

VERONIKA ZUSKÁČOVÁ

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Abstract: Ever since the term 'aeromobility' was first used in the early 2000s as a parallel to automobility, it has developed into a multilayered concept and even an individual field of research. Yet, the meanings ascribed to the terms 'aeromobility', 'aeromobilities', or 'aeromobile' vary significantly depending on the scale, context, and approach of particular studies and their authors. Using elements of discourse analysis, the article explores these meanings across a wide range of academic publications and identifies four main discourses of aeromobility in mobility studies. These are the mobility-system, the norm, the embodied practice, and the lifestyle discourse. While synthesizing the different discourses, their contributions, biases and possible future routings, the article intends to inspire more abstract thinking about aeromobility and offers several suggestions to open it up as a concept with socio-cultural implications.

Keyword: aeromobility, discourse analysis, lifestyle, mobility-system, mobility turn, norm, practices

Introduction

As with every mode of transport and communication, air transportation has changed the way the world works as it has changed its geography. Not only are the physical landscapes transformed by often remarkably extensive infrastructures of airports but together with the possibility of a high-speed movement by airplane along with the ever-increasing yet still selective accessibility of air travel in contemporary society, they (re)define the spatial and social relations at all scales. Air travel has become an industry "that stands for and represents the new global order" (Urry 2009), making modernity more of a 'gaseous' term with the emissive, gravitating, and turbulent fluids that define today's world (Bryant 2007). In other words, social scientists often describe contemporary society as *aeromobile*.

The adjective 'aeromobile' is, however, not the invention of the new millennium. It appeared in the scientific vocabulary as far back as 1969 (Bertelsen 1969), and since then, it has mainly been used in aeronautical engineering, in medical or military studies (aeromobile medical troops, aeromobile resuscitation units), or in the field of technological innovations (AeroMobile software). As such, 'aeromobile' has for many decades referred to a capacity of an object or a person to be able to move or to be

transported by air, which corresponds with the long-standing understanding of mobility in natural sciences.[18]

In humanities, the term 'aeromobility' was first used only at the very beginning of the 2000s by Norwegian energy and transport planner Karl G. Høyer (2000) in his article (and his later doctoral dissertation) on sustainable mobility as a simple parallel to automobility. It was his reader Claus Lassen who adopted this new term to his thesis on mobile knowledge workers and introduced it to the scholars of mobility turn. "What a great word, this aeromobility, I love it," (Lassen 2019: 172) was reportedly John Urry's reaction to one of Lassen's early manuscripts. In the following few years, aeromobility became one of the key terms of the mobility turn, and the efforts symbolically culminated in September 2006 when the first interdisciplinary conference on aeromobilities was held at Lancaster University. Afterward, the first book on aeromobilities was published from its proceedings in 2009, which manifested the establishment of aeromobilities as an independent field of research (Cwerner 2009a).

The two main theoretical inspirations of the newly developed concept of aeromobility, namely automobility and mobility, were both very sophisticated and theoretically rich concepts. The scholars writing on aeromobility claimed to build upon these two sources, and therefore, they usually limited their conceptualizations to the basics.[19] As a result, we have many valuable empirical as well as theoretical contributions to the aeromobilities research, yet, the clarification of its key term remains rather scattered, intuitive, and often adjusted to the needs of particular empirical data or theoretical arguments. Moreover, we can witness in the aeromobilities literature that different meanings are being ascribed to the same term. Although this variety of meanings points to the semantic richness of the notion of aeromobility, it needs to be approached consciously and critically. Therefore, the aim of this article is, first, to call attention to the lack of critical discussion on aeromobility as a scientific term and to open it up as a concept with socio-cultural implications. Second, with an extensive literature review, it aims to address this gap in order to recognize and synthesize the different discourses of aeromobility along with the interpretation of their viewpoint, their contributions and biases, and possible future routings. In so doing, the article intends to inspire more abstract thinking about aeromobility in mobility studies and its role in the production and reproduction of knowledge to avoid falling into the trap of a 'great word' with an assumed common-sense meaning.

The article begins with a short introduction to the methodology, namely how the elements of discourse analysis as per Carla Willig (2008) have been used to identify

[18] On the meaning of mobility in English dictionaries, see Tim Cresswell (2006).

[19] For exceptions, see Adey et al. (2007), Chapter 7 in Urry (2007), or some parts in Adey (2009).

meanings that social scientists ascribe to aeromobility by studying the written formulations of their ideas in academic articles. The 'we' in the title, thus, refers precisely to the academic audience as a source of empirical data for this analysis as well as to the target group to discuss its conclusions. Each of the following four sections is devoted to one of the main discourses identified in our analysis—aeromobility as a mobility-system, aeromobility as a norm, aeromobility as an embodied practice, and aeromobility as a lifestyle. The concluding section offers a brief summarization of the main findings and proposes several suggestions for mobility scholars to further rethink aeromobility.

Approaching terminological questions qualitatively

Discourse analysis, the method adopted in this article, is based on the constructivist paradigm. How social reality is constructed, represented, reproduced, or transformed depends greatly on the language and other semiotic systems that people use to communicate. The focus of discourse analysis is, therefore, on the language and its role in the construction of social reality. It works with the transcripts of verbal communication as well as with written texts of any kind where it draws attention to the culturally shared patterns of meaning (Potter and Wetherell 1987). Parker defines discourse as a "set of arguments that construct an object." (1994: 245). Therefore, in the discourse analysis, we look for these sets of arguments that construct an object in a particular way that differs from other sets of arguments that construct it differently. The aim is not to find the 'right' meaning but instead to use the inconsistencies to identify and interpret the discourses and their function. The use of language plays a crucial role in discourse analysis. Every word that is used is a choice from many available alternatives, and this choice impacts the version of social reality that is being constructed. Even the seemingly evident and commonplace expressions, stylistics, and grammar can pose rich material for analysis (Zábrodská and Petrjánošová 2013).

Academic studies can be as good a source of social reality construction as any other record of verbal and written communication. After all, they, too, represent a social interaction—the one between the author and its academic audience, the readers. There are cultural influences and power dynamics at stake here, too. Therefore, this article explores the question of *"How do social scientists construct and use the term aeromobility in their work?"* This main research question is supplemented by two additional questions: *"What language do social scientists use to describe aeromobility?"* and *"What cultural or theoretical influences and interests might impact their understanding of aeromobility?"* A total of 92 individual academic articles, book chapters, and conference proceedings in social sciences that are accessible via online academic platforms (Web of Science and SCOPUS databases, Google Scholar search engine) have been selected for the analysis. The sole criterion for this selection was the usage of the term 'aeromobility' or its equivalent in languages other than English in the

main part of the text, which was later extended to also use the terms 'aeromobilities' and 'aeromobile'.

The analytical part adheres to the suggestions of Carla Willig (2008), which could be summarized into the following points. The first layer of the analysis includes short notes for each text capturing the initial impressions on the author's construction of aeromobility in the context of their empirical data and the aim of their article. In the next step, only the quotations, which included the words 'aeromobility', 'aeromobilities', and 'aeromobile' have been abstracted. Repeated reading of quotations while looking for similarities and contradictions in the understanding of aeromobility was supported by the method of open coding (Glaser 2006) in Atlas.ti software and led to the identification of several groupings along with their brief description. Based on the method of constant comparing, the four main discourses on the terminology of aeromobility within the studied literature finally emerged—the mobility-system, the norm, the embodied practice, and the lifestyle discourse[20]. All discourses received in-vivo titles that are grounded in the analysed quotations, and thus, these labels have been used in relation to aeromobility by at least one scholar of each discourse. As the last step, the aeromobility discourses have been set into the context of scholarly traditions in social sciences in an attempt to move beyond the particular texts toward a more generalized level of their interpretation. Finally, the article presents the discourses in the order adhering to the perceived impact on the further reproduction of their terminology in aeromobilities literature.

Before proceeding to the results, the reader should be aware that writing this article was itself a constructivist process, hence there might be disagreements about the choices and interpretations presented by the author. To minimize the possible ambiguity and misinterpretation, the analysis relies primarily on the most specific statements about the understanding of aeromobility and works with rather short quotations that directly contain the term aeromobility or its derivatives. This analytical choice simultaneously presents the main limitation of the results. The theorization of aeromobility does not rely on one term exclusively, however, there are many texts equally important for its conceptualization that have slipped through the sieve of the aeromobile terminology. Yet, this pioneering attempt to uncover some of the meaningful differences can help raise important questions about the theoretical resources of scholarly thinking on aeromobility.

[20] The boundaries of these discourses are, however, not strictly clear-cut, and they overlap to some extent. Many of the scholars contributing to the aeromobilities literature also tend to switch their discursive focus regarding the aeromobile terminology in different articles, even within individual articles (see, for instance, Frérigny 2017, Cidell 2017 or Edwards 2016a).

Aeromobility as a mobility-system

One of the first systematic and detailed theoretical accounts on aeromobility was offered by John Urry (2007) in his book *Mobilities*, particularly in the chapter devoted to, as he writes, 'flying around'. This chapter, as well as the whole book, is not only essential for the understanding of society as mobile, it also presents a specific and indeed very influential view on mobilities as *systems*. Acknowledging the system theory and the theory of complexity as important theoretiMecal resources of his ideas on mobilities, Urry considers the systems to be the key feature of mobilities. "In the modern world automobility is by far the most powerful of such mobility-systems, while other such systems include the pedestrian-system, the rail-system and aeromobility" (Urry 2007: 51).

Urry clearly formulates his understanding of aeromobility as one of the *mobility-systems* equal to automobility, pedestrian-system, and rail-system. Interestingly, he does not include the suffix 'system' when he speaks of car and air transportation. For him, the system is already incorporated in the meaning of the notions of automobility and aeromobility. Urry's definition of automobility is a good example of how he describes these mobility-systems, which he defines as a "self-organizing autopoietic, non-linear system that spreads world-wide" and includes "cars, car-drivers, roads, petroleum suppliers and many novel objects, technologies and signs" (2007: 118). Although Urry never defined aeromobility in such a way, for him, it embodies similar characteristics—the assemblage of travelers, aircraft, and infrastructure, together with the countless other components, their relations, rules, signs, and various actors that constitute a dynamic complex system self-expanding in contemporary global society he refers to as 'aeromobility'.

John Urry's systematic approach of aeromobility inspired many other scholars. The essential features that he considers to be defining aeromobility—the grouping of parts, the interdependence with other systems, and the autopoietic—are frequently reproduced within the aeromobilities literature. Maurie J. Cohen, for instance, speaks about (personal) aeromobility as "an increasingly stable socio-technical regime with an interlinked network of companies, personnel, customers, manufacturers, airports, agents, brokers, publications, trade associations, financial institutions, and legal conventions" (2010: 464). Similarly, in his numerous texts, Weiqiang Lin repeatedly points out the complex character of aeromobility, claiming, for instance, that "extending from this technical realm are yet other legal and operational elements, including air rights, airways, control zones and air traffic control procedures, which just as crucially order the conduct of aeromobilities" (2016: 93). Julie Cidell adds another important "*component* of the aeromobility system that is most relevant to non-travelers . . . the noise" (2013: 539, emphasis added).

In her later study, Cidell (2017) also reveals the interdependence of car and air transportation systems, suggesting the notion of aero-automobility. Ole B. Jensen (2011) considers the natural environment to be equally a part of the complex socio-technical system of global aeromobility as its human and non-human agencies, while Lin and Harris (2020) unearth some of the extra-sectoral constituents of the aeromobility system in the field of (geo)politics and political economy. All these authors, as well as several other scholars (e.g., Birtchnell and Büscher 2011, O'Regan 2011, Kloppenburg 2013, Edwards 2016a), describe aeromobility at some point as a system or an assemblage, even a regime, consisting of many elements that are interlinked and dependent on each other, while the whole system interacts in the same way with other complex systems. Moreover, we can witness the tendency to bring attention to the 'hidden' and extra-sectoral elements that remain rather overlooked—the noise, the air rights, the selling agents, the raw material extraction sites, etc.[21]—to demonstrate the vast complexity of the aeromobility-system.

The global or macro-level view of aeromobility as being conductive of the contemporary global order appears to be typical for the systematic approach, often featuring references to the "modern aeromobile society" (Vainikka 2010: 9), the "aeromobile world" and "(aero)mobile society" (Budd et al. 2009: 432) or the usage of the term global aeromobility (Urry 2010, Budd et al. 2011, Jensen 2011, Edwards 2016b). Unsurprisingly, many of these articles were published as a reaction to the system breakdown during the Eyjafjallajökull volcano eruption in May 2010 and reflect global society's dependence on aeromobility (Jensen 2011, Martin 2011, O'Regan 2011, Vainikka 2010, Birtchnell and Büscher 2011). A perceived connection between the global and the systematic is expressed explicitly by Jensen (2011) by referring to the *global system of aeromobility*[22], as well as by other authors writing in the context of regional and urban development. In the case study of Mexico City Airport, Claus Lassen and Daniel Galland have, for instance, shown that "the city, the region and the nation prioritize to be connected to the global corridor system of aeromobilities" (Lassen and Galland 2014: 150). Furthermore, a sense of self-reproduction and expansion of the system is being addressed in this regard—accessible air transport has boosted the people's will to fly, creating demand for more airports in smaller cities and bringing new places into the growing and expanding system of aeromobility which again, conveniently, makes air transport accessible for more people (Cwerner 2009a). Aeromobility is thus being understood as a centripetal self-expanding system similar to Urry's description of automobility as autopoietic.

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[21] Cohen 2010, Cidell 2013, Lin 2016, see also Lin and Harris 2020 for further review of the aeromobilites literature focusing on different constituents of aeromobility-system from airport design to drones.

[22] Yet he makes an interesting point on how our perception of "the global" is "biased and skewed" (Jensen 2011: 71) as the volcano eruption in Iceland hit the transatlantic nerve system and caused mostly European and North American flights to be grounded.

Setting the systematic approach to aeromobility into the context of discourses within academic thought, we may find it very close to what Urry called the complexity turn (Urry 2003). He argues that twentieth-century science had moved from reductionism to the study of complex, emergent, dynamic, self-organizing, and interdependent systems. The awareness of the complexity of today's products and processes involving a vast number of components, cybernetic architectures, and sociotechnical hybrid systems, as well as of the unpredictability of the changes in society are just some of the processes that Urry claims have put complexity notions onto the intellectual map of modern social science.

The constant reminder of the incredibly complex character of aeromobility by examining the not-so-obvious relations, elements, and processes in which air travel is embedded, can be considered the main contribution of the systematic discourse in aeromobilities research. In fact, this discourse is not so much about flying per se, as Lin and Harris (2020) put it. Rather, it studies what makes flying possible (and its costs) in the first place. As such, the systematic discourse continues to be a vivid part of the aeromobilities research pushing the boundaries of the field further to unexplored territories. And there is still a lot to study in this regard. Although there are several very illuminating studies introducing some of the perspectives of the Global South on aeromobility-system(s) (see e.g., Hirsh 2016, Lin 2016, Lin 2014), the scholarly focus remains strongly Western-oriented and Anglophonic[23]. Yet even in North America and Western Europe there are significant differences between particular regions and within most communities regarding accessibility and effects of air travel. The discourse will therefore benefit from more attempts to move beyond the Anglophonic (re)production of knowledge as well as from more critical accounts on inequalities and injustice within the aeromobility-system to further challenge the idea of a global aeromobile society.

Aeromobility as a norm

The analogy between aeromobility and automobility that has been brought forward by John Urry in his writings about the mobility-systems grows even stronger in the work of authors taking a slightly different path to define what both terms stand for. In the case of automobility, we can witness that for decades the term is not exclusive to academic and expert use. It has made its way to the common language expressing "the use of automobiles as the major means of transportation" (Merriam-Webster Dictionary). Aeromobility, however, is a much newer term (as is the aeromobile technology itself), and so far, it has been cultivated mainly by social scientists in

[23] In terms of English-speaking countries as well as of English as the dominant language of academic literature (such as in West Nordic countries).

academic debates[24]. Nevertheless, in the era of cheap air tickets bringing masses to travel by plane every day, the transport systems of the car and the airplane create the most hegemonic kinds of contemporary mobility, as Peter Adey (2009) concludes. Hence, his definition of aeromobility builds on this analogy and greatly reflects the common understanding of automobility stated above: "aeromobility—a term we use here to refer to the dominance of flying as the normal international mode of travelling (in much the same way that automobility refers to the dominance of the motor car as a means of personal transport)" (Adey et al. 2007: 774).

One of the keywords that the collective of authors around Adey uses to characterize aeromobility and automobility appears to be *dominance*—a dominance in terms of the sheer volume of users of air (and car) transportation worldwide, as well as a dominance in the way of thinking about travel in everyday life strongly influenced by dominance in terms of representation of long-distance (or personal for cars) transport. Flying, they argue, has become a normal mode of traveling in international traffic, a norm rather than an exception reserved for the wealthy few. Such a specific view on aeromobility as a dominant norm of traveling behavior can be found in publications of several other authors, too. Saolo Cwerner writes, for instance, that "aeromobilities . . . have become routine, matter-of-fact, effectively banal" (Cwerner 2009a: 6). Jean-Baptiste Frétigny sees aeromobilities "as the dominant mobilities of international travel" (2017: 123). Thomas Birtchnell and Monika Büscher even argue that "with the onset of dominant aeromobilities Bauman's 'liquid modernity' has been superseded by . . . 'gaseous modernity'" (2011: 3).

Flying and aeromobility are thus not in the equation in this approach. While traveling by airplane could have been an adventurous, luxurious, or even mundane experience for certain types of travelers some decades ago, only when the aircraft started to be one of the dominant modes of mass traveling can we speak of a certain society as becoming aeromobile. An excellent illustration of this point is presented by Lucy Budd and Phil Hubbard when they write about the rise of the 'biz-jet' market, claiming that "harking back to the early days of passenger flight when flying was adventurous, exciting, fashionable, and fun, the acquisition of a private jet is being promoted as a way to reclaim some of the glamour of flight which has been lost in an age of deregulation and mass aeromobility" (2010: 95). Budd and Hubbard thus explicitly connect aeromobility to the movement of masses, and they contrast the "age of aeromobility" against the early days of flying, with each connoting different attitudes. Similarly, Lucy Budd, Morag Bell, and Adam Brown (2009) refer to an "era of mass aeromobility" when examining the new technologies of surveillance at the UK airports that aimed to limit the spread of infectious diseases after the SARS outbreak in 2002–2003, and they tend to use expressions evoking the growth and speed of

[24] Although there is evidence that the adjective 'aeromobile' has its use in the field of military practices and medical care.

changes in the society in relation to air travel to support this claim [25]. Here, aeromobility gains its meaning and terminological purpose with its massiveness in volume, scale, and effects on the global processes (as compared to the early days of a rather extravagant flying).

The proclaimed dominance, banality, and massiveness of air travel is, however, not applicable to every community across the world or to every individual within various social hierarchies. Whereas some of the accounts of this discourse look upon aeromobility as a *global* phenomenon of recent times (as demonstrated above), there is a growing number of studies that set the norm of aeromobility reflectively into a particular geopolitical or social context and understand aeromobility to be highly *selective*. In Adey's (2008) view, Western societies are held and maintained by aeromobilities, while Høyer speaks of "aeromobility familiar to the rich countries of the world today" (2000: 155). From this perspective, selected macro-regions, countries, or nations with intensive air travel can be given the attribute 'aeromobile' or, more precisely, some regions can be considered more aeromobile than others.[26]

A few other authors similarly point out that this selection does not only occur spatially but also socially. James Higham and Xavier Font (2020), for instance, reproduce the definition of aeromobility as a norm by Peter Adey, Lucy Budd, and Phil Hubbard (2007) to address the generally accepted practice of high academic aeromobility in Sweden as being an unspoken norm that needs to be broken. James Faulconbridge similarly explains the executive aeromobility in the UK as a "normalized practice" that has become "so taken-for-granted that decisions are not rationally made about whether to and how to engage in the practice" (2014: 172). Implicit suggestions about the existence of a norm of aeromobility, even a demand of aeromobility being placed upon knowledge workers, are also to be found in the work of Claus Lassen (2009), who also refers to aeromobility as a social practice.

Indeed, there are many overlaps to be found in the theory of social norms and social practices. While social norms are being described as informal rules that guide and govern behaviour in social groups (Bicchieri et al. 2018), the practice theorists argue that the practices of individual human beings, in aggregate, create and reproduce a social structure in which their actions are embedded (Postil 2010). Particularly the concepts of (social) practice and habitus by Pierre Bourdieu (1980) imagine society as being organized by the successful practices of social actors, which develop their predisposition to act in certain ways, and the habitus significantly contributes to the

[25] E.g., "highly aeromobile 21st century," "increasingly interconnected aeromobile world," "growing anxiety," "increasingly aeromobile society," "rise and expansion of aeromobility" (Budd, Bell, and Brown 2009: 426)

[26] See, for instance, O'Regan (2011) on European society or Lin on the struggles of regions outside the "rich Western world" (2014: 95) such as Singapore; or the references to the more and less aeromobile societies in Higham and Font (2020).

production of their strategies (although their free will and agency is not completely erased). As such, both the practice theories and the social norms share the argument that what people do is always, to some extent, predetermined by their past actions as well as by the actions of their peers producing relatively stable and routine patterns of behavior.

Thinking and writing about aeromobility in the discourse of a norm, therefore, reflect the cultural background and social atmosphere of the society that creates these norms while simultaneously (re)producing norms of their own. This discourse, for instance, created the only widely accepted and often reproduced definition of aeromobility that has been formulated by Adey, Budd, and Hubbard (2007)[27]. Written from the perspective of well-educated and internationally active professionals based in Western Europe, especially in regions with a long-standing tradition of international air travel, this definition quite naturally builds upon their lived experience of the 'flying norm'. Interestingly, their precondition of international movement has been substituted for long-distance travel by Julie Cidell (2017) to capture the slightly different norm of intensive national air travel in the North American context.

The contribution of this discourse to the theorization of aeromobility lies (among others) in the reflective recognition and understanding of these underlying social structures, be it norms or social practices, which can offer a vivid starting point for further thinking on the future development of societies and air travel (even to call for its change). Nevertheless, to avoid the bias of truncated generalizations based on the privileged Western perspective, there is again a great need for more detailed accounts on how and if aeromobility enters the social norms and practices in other regions and societies.[28]

Aeromobility as an embodied practice

The theories of practice mentioned in the previous approach are also connected to another discourse of aeromobility that was very common in the studied literature, yet it was the most implicit one and, therefore, uneasy to grasp. It is, however, a different kind of practice than the rather collective structuralist view (or the constructivist structuralism of Pierre Bourdieu) that has been recognized in the following examples. The practice that, although not completely free from reproducing existing structures, takes a much more creative and performative role—the experienced and embodied

[27] For examples of its reproduction see Budd et al. (2009), Budd (2011), Sulmona et al. (2014), Frétigny (2017), Higham and Font (2020) or Cidell (2017).

[28] To mention some of the pioneering efforts, Lin and Harris (2020) touch upon the normality of labor migration by air from Bangladesh, India, and Nepal to the Gulf States (although their approach is rather systematic), Burrel (2011) examines the practice of aeromobility of Polish migrants to the UK, and Zuskáčová and Seidenglanz (2019) describe the frequently flying commuters from the regional airports in the Czech Republic and Slovakia.

practice of movement within the airspaces. As such, it mainly evokes the ideas of Tim Cresswell (2010) on mobile practices as a part of his 'constellation of mobility' that present human mobility as practiced, enacted, and experienced through the body. In Cresswell's work regarding practiced mobilities we can find connections to humanistic geography focused on experience and human agency inspired mainly by existentialism and phenomenological inquiry (Cloke et al. 1991) as well as to the forms of post-structuralist nonrepresentational theory with the emphasis on practices as enacted and performed while valorizing processes that operate before conscious thought (McCormack 2005).

One of the most reflective accounts of this discourse has been offered by Claus Lassen in his studies of international work mobility where he states that often the "long-distance work-related journeys are carried out by aeroplane" and in his articles "this practice is termed aeromobility" (2006: 302). For Lassen, aeromobility consists of the *physical journeys* of people that are *mediated* by the airplane. His choice of words is particularly interesting at this point. The aircraft and the airspaces recede into the background as mediators that facilitate the embodied practice of long-distance airborne work travel that is his main concern. Yet, he does not narrow down aeromobility solely to the physical act of movement. Rather, he enriches this movement with a social meaning, which leads to the social performance of a journey. Moreover, Lassen claims to use the term aeromobility to refer to "both the factual air travel of individuals and their capacity to carry out air-based mobility" (2009: 190). Here he adopts the concept of social motility by Vincent Kaufmann (2002) to take into account people's potential to be mobile in a certain way and to put this potential into use. In this respect, his conceptualization of aeromobility corresponds with the understanding of mobility as movement induced with meaning, which has been developed by the leading scholars of the mobility turn (Cresswell 2006, Canzler et al. 2008, Adey 2010).

Similar images of aeromobility as an embodied practice are to be found in the studies of many other authors, yet mostly implicitly and often in coexistence with other discourses. For instance, in their article on crying babies on planes, Jennie Small and Candice Harris (2014) describe aeromobility as a social and cultural performance. Cidell often refers to aeromobility in terms of an experience throughout her paper on aero-automobility and concludes with a suggestion that "aeromobility and automobility should be considered jointly when examining travelers' journeys taken as a whole" (2017: 703). David Bissell, Maria Hynes, and Scott Sharpe (2012) also address the 'aeromobile experience' of airline passengers within the 'spaces of aeromobility' where aeromobility is understood as an embodied practice. Burrell (2011) writes about the 'corporeal aeromobilities' of the UK's Polish migrants on the low-cost airlines while Budd (2011) pictures the 'being aeromobile' as a corporeal and affective human experience of airline passengers from a historical perspective.

Explicit references to aeromobility as an embodied practice, an experience or a more ambiguous performance are few, yet very often, aeromobility is simply used as a

substitute for 'flying' or 'air travel' in reference to passengers and their journeys while oscillating between scripted and inventive meaning. Especially the plural form of aeromobilities often seems to represent all sorts of lived and practiced variations on the aeromobility theme (see, for instance, Adey 2008, Budd 2013, Lin 2014, Huchler and Dietrich 2016). Notably, there have been numerous studies that apply the perspective of embodied practice while researching aeromobilities, yet their understanding of the notion of aeromobility differs or they do not use this term altogether (see, for instance, Barry and Suliman 2020 or Bissell 2015).

This discourse evidently has a lot to offer to aeromobilities research mainly on the empirical level, and its contributions keep being recognized by the scholars (although not always acknowledged directly). Nevertheless, the lack of attention to the actual meanings of the references to aeromobility that are being used at times results in reproducing known conceptions while neglecting the emerging ones. Therefore, in developing this discourse, the scholars should equally focus on new empirical evidence of aeromobile practices as on their importance for the conceptualization of aeromobility and the establishment of aeromobile terminology.

Aeromobility as a lifestyle

The last relatively coherent and at least partially influential discourse of aeromobility that has been recognized in the aeromobilities literature evolved on the edge of the discourse of norms. Developing the claims of social selectivity of aeromobility, some mobility scholars began to address the privileged social groups and professions as those who often see aeromobility as normal and every day while stressing their active role (and responsibility) in choosing an *aeromobile lifestyle*. For these scholars, the individual decision, although undoubtedly influenced by the social norms and habits, to favor flying over other forms of transportation, together with the hypermobility in both professional and private life, and positive attitudes toward air travel, represents a specific way of living and working they refer to as 'aeromobile'.

In this vein, Stefan Gössling and John Henrik Nilsson examine the growth in individual aeromobility by focusing on the frequent flyer programs "as an institutionalized framework for high mobility, and its role in shaping aeromobile lifestyles" (2010: 241). 'Being aeromobile' is narrowed down by them to the level of individual travel behavior and lifestyle that they directly connect to a person's flying *frequency*. However, the frequency of flying does not solely define an aeromobile lifestyle in their approach. Equally important to that is the self-perception of being above average, being a part of the global elite that moves in high-speed through the airport corridors and enjoys the luxury of privileged spaces such as lounges, business class check-in, and fast-tracks. Indeed, Crispin Thurlow and Adam Jaworski (2006) argue that the stylization of elites, together with the rather symbolic and assumed rights of their members, stands behind the attractiveness of the frequent flyer schemes.

In a similar context, Budd and Hubbard (2010) speak about the kinetic aeromobile elites using private business aviation (same in Budd 2013) while Gössling (2019) comments on the question of status being connected to the aeromobile lifestyles of some celebrities. For Scott Higham, James Cohen, and Christina Cavaliere, aeromobility is also personal, and by exploring the environmental concerns of highly aeromobile tourists, they seek "to reduce levels of personal aeromobility" (2013: 464). Again, a few more studies have been found that coincide with the lifestyle discourse in their approach, yet they do not refer directly to aeromobility in this respect.[29]

There are three main aspects distinguishing the lifestyle discourse from the previous ones that we can draw from the examples presented above. First, aeromobility is understood primarily on an individual scale, and, although the social structures of norms and habitual behavior are being acknowledged, the individuals and their active decision making play an important role. Therefore, it is mostly individuals and their lifestyles that are given the adjective 'aeromobile'. Second, aeromobility is directly connected to hypermobility, and it is the high frequency of flight journeys that defines the aeromobile individuals. And lastly, intensive air travel produces a sense of (often elite) aeromobile identity that encompasses specific values and attitudes.

The interconnection between mobility and lifestyle that dominates in this discourse has been theoretically addressed by Scott Cohen, Tara Duncan, and Maria Thulemark (2013), who proposed a 'lifestyle mobilities' perspective to round up this kind of research. Building on the ideas of many theorists of lifestyle and identity, mainly on that of Anthony Giddens, they claim that physical mobility plays a crucial role in the performance of particular lifestyle choices and provides a source of meaning and sense of personal identity to its adherents. As such, the discourse of aeromobility as a lifestyle seems to follow the path outlined by the emerging lifestyle mobilities on the crossroads of travel, leisure, and migration to blur some of the traditional research boundaries.

Conclusions

Academic debates in humanities materialized in the written form of research articles, books, and conference proceedings constitute a vivid platform to share, produce, and reproduce our knowledge of social reality. Scholars from different parts of the world, educated in various scholarly traditions and working with diverse datasets, develop new concepts and enrich the existing ones, which often naturally leads to inconsistencies in the ways they understand particular terms. In this article, the elements of discourse analysis have been used to map the evolution of the still relatively new concept of 'aeromobility' and its related terms in the past two decades,

[29] See, for instance, Sysiö (2019) or Higham and Font (2013).

and we identified the main discourses in the mobility literature that co-constitute its meaning by now.

The extensive literature review revealed that although there are significant differences in how scholars understand aeromobility, there are few important unifying elements, too. As Saolo Cwerner, Sven Kesselring, and John Urry (2009) proposed, aeromobilities start to be recognized as a separate interdisciplinary field of study inspired by the mobility turn, even established as an independent field of research at some institutions (such as Aalborg University as mentioned in Lassen 2019). Therefore, the principal understanding of aeromobility as an analytical concept based on the mobilities paradigm remains taken-for-granted across all studied texts. Of how scholars define, describe, or otherwise use the notion of aeromobility, the article presented four main discourses in the mobility literature—the mobility-system, the norm, the embodied practice, and the lifestyle—all grounded in direct quotations from academic writings and set into the context of scholarly traditions in social sciences. The analysis focused solely on explicit references to aeromobility and due to this limitation, it does not aspire to be representative of all discourses that nowadays contribute to the conceptualization of aeromobility, rather it aims to clarify and support further (re)thinking of aeromobile terminology.

The typology offered in this article might not come as a surprise considering the co-existence of similar clusters of meaning in other mobilities as well. The intention of this article was, however, not to find new understandings of aeromobility but rather to draw attention to the important, meaningful nuances of existing accounts of aeromobility. After the successful manifesto for establishing aeromobilities in the 2009 essential book, it seems that the willingness to (re)define aeromobility has faded. As a result, the existing definitions are sometimes being reproduced while the actual meaning of the aeromobile terminology differs and remains unexplained. What this analysis aimed to contribute to the further conceptualization of aeromobility can be summarized into the following points: (1) to demonstrate the semantic richness of the notion of aeromobility; (2) to urge mobility scholars to use the aeromobile terminology reflexively and avoid falling into the trap of a "great word" with assumed common-sense meaning; (3) to inspire scholars to keep rethinking and theorizing aeromobility in a forward-looking way toward further recognition of aeromobilities as an important research field; and (4) to surpass the overreliance on the dominant Western and Anglophonic aeromobile experiences or representations and incorporate much more of the non-Western or otherwise marginalized perspectives as well as to better integrate the term of aeromobility to languages other than English.[30]

[30] During the analysis a few examples of adaptation of the term aeromobility mainly to German or French have been found (see, e.g., Jean-Baptiste Frétigny 2012, Denise Solle-Haertl 2013, Kerstin Schaefer (2017), yet they are rather an exception with limited impact on the conceptualisation of aeromobility.

Thinking of the terminological nuances of aeromobility as presented above, it is hard to resist a tendency to discuss which meaning is the 'right' one, one we can consider defines aeromobility. The discourses of aeromobility are, however, not meant to compete, rather they should all be acknowledged as valuable contributions that altogether help define and theoretically grasp aeromobility as a multilayered concept, universal yet diverse in its forms and shapes, global yet selective, stable yet dynamic in time, in other words, as complex as mobile society itself.

5 'WHERE ARE YOU?' (AUTO)ETHNOGRAPHY OF ELITE PASSAGE AND (NON)-PLACENESS AT LONDON HEATHROW AIRPORT (ARTICLE 2)

VERONIKA ZUSKÁČOVÁ

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Abstract: Led by the question of where an international airport is *placed* within the *aeromobile* experience of kinetic elites, the author took on the role of a Business Class passenger to empirically reflect on the issues of placeness and non-placeness while routinely passing through one of the world's busiest airports. The author gradually reveals the unique sense of place individual terminals hold, the familiar at-homeness of frequently used passages, the dwelling-in-motion within virtual infrastructures of habit, the ostensible segregation of 'upper class' passengers, the multiple placemaking efforts and the importance of specific aeromobile practices in the place-related perception of airports. Applying the concepts of place and mobility jointly in their mutual interconnectedness, this (auto)ethnography points to the hybridity of airport perception within the elite passenger experience, which goes beyond the usual binary of a traditional place and a detached non-place.

Keywords: aeromobility, autoethnography, kinetic elites, London Heathrow Airport, non-place, passenger, place

Introduction

The arrival hall at Heathrow Terminal 3 is busy this early afternoon. At the arrival board, I read the departure places of aeroplanes that have just landed: LAX, HKG, AMM, ISB, VIE, HND, DXB. The three-letter airport codes are regularly replaced by the names of faraway cities they claim to represent. The automatic door opens and closes at high frequency, releasing groups of freshly deboarded passengers to the open space of the arrival hall. A young woman in casual business attire with a light suitcase rolling smoothly at her side suddenly stops near me to pick up a ringing phone in her purse. 'Where are you?' she says in a high-pitched and slightly irritated voice. 'I'm at Terminal 3' she continues, the rising level of her irritation becoming obvious. After a while of discussing a meeting point with the person on the other side of the call, she slowly moves towards the exit sign, occasionally sighing and shaking her head as if something hardly believable had just happened to her—she was expected at a different place, a different terminal.

In the following days spent at London Heathrow Airport (LHR), I realised that, indeed the question *'Where are you?'* seems to be of significant importance to

passengers. When asked to locate themselves, passenger replies ranged from the small-scale, 'by the Costa cafe', to geopolitical macroregions, such as Great Britain or Europe, and they oscillated between 'being in London already' and the rather unsettled 'still at the airport', still travelling. The designers and other entities involved in the production of the physical structure of Heathrow seemed equally preoccupied with the placeness of its various passenger welcoming sites at, respectively, Pret A Manger, at Heathrow, in London, at American Airlines and in the Skyteam Lounge. The simple but essential geographical question of the perceived self-location of (elite) passengers at airports resonated with my long-term interest in the geographies of frequent flying and led my research through the elite spaces of Heathrow to ask the very same question: *Where am I when I pass through this international airport?*

As many airport ethnographies demonstrate, different types of passengers and airport users can develop very specific place-related meanings as regards certain airports (e.g., Abranches 2013, Cresswell 2006, Gefou-Madianou 2010, Khoshneviss 2017, Hernandez Bueno 2021.) While there is an observable trend (undoubtedly legitimate) to depict marginalised and unprivileged experiences, not much is actually known about the perception of airports by kinetic elites, and even less comes from empirical studies. As a result, scholarly claims often either romanticise or negatively judge the (aero)mobile practices and lifeworlds of the privileged few (Birtchnell and Caletrío 2014), or they seek to apply the well-established conceptions of place(less)ness where a much deeper, nuanced understanding is needed. In this paper, I step into the shoes of the fictional Pierre Dupont (in a female variation), the experienced Business Class passenger from Marc Augé's prologue to *Non-places* (Augé 1995), to question any easy notions of place-related perception that elite[31] passengers develop through interaction with the material and social environment of routinely visited airports (Augé 2001, Crang 2002, Lassen 2009, Kesselring 2009, Sysiö 2019).

The figure of the elite passenger encapsulates the kind of mobile experience presented in this paper, but my main focus here leans on the elite airport passage itself. The 'being in passage', as Peter Merriman reminds, rests significantly upon the attributes of places "where there is a way through"; thus, the means through which the geographical position of passengers within transport corridors shapes their experiences of passengering and travel should not be ignored (Adey et al. 2012: 180). Recent social research provides growing evidence of affective atmospheres that are being engineered at many airports to create a distinct sense of place, a destination in their own right (Cwer 2016, Nikolaeva 2006), to oppose the still very influential thesis of airports as non-places (Augé 1995) and as exhibiting placelessness (Relph 1976),

[31] In this paper, I use the adjective 'elite', in line with the usual semiotics of airline advertisements and their frequent flyer programmes (Thurlow and Jaworski 2006), to refer to high-status airline passengers, the users of the privileged corridors, spaces and services at many international airports. The elite status of these passengers in any true meaning of the word (Birtchnell and Caletrío 2014) outside of this particular context is not being questioned here.

that is, new generic spaces of globalised sameness. Yet it remains largely under-researched how these placemaking efforts are being perceived (or ignored) by elite passengers as well as what unintentional elements in airport environments co-constitute the place-related meanings these passengers ascribe to airports within their aeromobile practice. This paper aims to fill in that gap and enrich the ongoing debates on both airports and elite aeromobilities[32] with a more balanced, empirically informed perspective on the constellations of meanings that airports can be given in the lived experience of a routine, privileged passage through their material and social environments.

In the following sections, I first outline the connections between the two essential concepts— place and mobility—that I work with throughout my paper in a non-binary and non-competitive way. Afterwards, I discuss my mobile methods and continue on to describe my journeys through Heathrow's elite spaces and corridors. Wrapped up thematically under subheadings that stem from actual visual or aural in situ moments, my (auto)ethnography gradually reveals the uniqueness of all the Heathrow terminals as well as emotional attachment commensurable to familiarity, the dwelling in motion through embodied virtual infrastructures of habit, the stylisation of gated communities of an 'upper class' identity, the multiple placemaking effects of airport facilities and VIP airline lounges, and the apparent detachment of the corridor-like practices of extended business travel. Finally, I will point to the hybridity of airport perception within the elite passenger experience in the conclusion.

Approaching the airport as a place?

Driven by the interest in where an international airport is being *placed* within the aero*mobile* experience of frequent elite travellers, I draw my theoretical inspiration from two key humanities concepts—place and mobility—and particularly in their fusion within practice theories, as developed by Tim Cresswell (2002). For long decades, the duality between place and mobility shaped discussions and social theories of human engagement with their surroundings. In the context of airports, it mainly revolved around the place/placelessness distinction as offered by Edward Relph (1976) or the influential anthropological place/non-place binary of Marc Augé (1995).

The humanistic concept of place rested upon philosophies of phenomenology and existentialism and claimed a central role for the human being-in-the-world. In the work of geographers such as Yi-Fu Tuan (1977) and Edward Relph (1976), places were experienced; they incited a sense of attachment and belonging; they were centres of value, care and meaning for people; they were authentic, stable, rooted and bounded.

[32] The terms aeromobilities and aeromobile refer in this paper to the practiced and embodied experiences of physical journeying within the airspaces (see Zuskáčová 2020) for more on aeromobile discourses).

Mobility and movement, on the other hand, have been typically viewed as antithetical to the moral character of place (Cresswell 2006). For Tuan, only a "pause in movement makes it possible for location to be transformed into place" as mobility lacks commitment, attachment and involvement. Thus, the mobile modern man "has not the time to establish roots; his experience and appreciation of place is superficial" (1977: 183). Relph considered increased mass mobility to be destructive of places, and hypermobile sites, such as roads, railways and airports, "cutting across or imposed on the landscape rather than developing with it", he described as meaningless and inauthentic, and thus placeless (1976: 90).

The ideas of Marc Augé evolved within a different stream of postmodern thought, where dynamic changes and hypermobility in postmodern (or supermodern, as he calls it) society have been looked at with fascination rather than judgement. Nevertheless, he reproduced the same binary of an anthropological place invested with meaning for people who live in it—the source of identity, traditionally rooted and seemingly permanent—and an oppositional non-place "which cannot be defined as relational, or historical, or concerned with identity" (Augé 1995: 77). His non-places such as motorways, airports or supermarkets were essentially spaces for travellers, cold and lonely sites of liminal character designed solely to be passed through, where transitions are wordless, and signs replace real history (Triebel 2015).

Such binary thinking, according to Cresswell, stems from the two opposing metaphysical positions of sedentarism and nomadism. Whereas 'sedentary metaphysics' seeks to divide the world into clearly bounded, rooted and static territorial units like nations, states and places and actively territorialises identity in place, 'nomadic thought' celebrates mobility, flow and dynamism while despising any attachment to place or a singular place-based identity (Cresswell 2006). In Cresswell's view, the way to overcome such binaries is signposted by theories of practice that help to portray the place as lived, mundanely practised and always in process (Cresswell 2002). Building on the work of Edward Soja (1996), Pierre Bourdieu (1990), Michel de Certeau (1984) and Doreen Massey (1997), he conceptualises place as practice and practice as placed, which relies "on the symbiosis of locatedness and motion rather than the valorization of one over the other" (Cresswell 2002: 26). He develops a similar point further in his 'constellations of mobility', in which he puts forward three aspects of mobility (and we may say place as well), namely, material (conceived) movement, mental (perceived) representation and experienced and embodied practice, all of which are closely bound up with one another (Cresswell 2010).

It is this fusion of thinking that I found inspiring, and it represents a starting point for further reading. Focusing on the elite airport passage at Heathrow, I, therefore, explore the conceived materialities and socialites of the passage, in other words, the 'airport atmospherics' that come pre-structured (Urry et al. 2016), the shared and individual representations and meanings that arose from my own mental perception of my *where*abouts at Heathrow and my gradually habitualised mobile practices of

walking through the elite spaces at Heathrow as they were experienced through my body. In so doing, I hint towards similar constellations, combining in a hybrid way elements of traditional place and dynamic mobilities within the specific embodied experience of the elite airport passage.

(Auto)ethnography in the hypermobile environment

My methods for this paper unsurprisingly stem from the same position I tried to sketch above. I examined the mobile phenomena of elite airport passage within the hypermobile environment of one of the world's busiest airport hubs. This inevitably mobilised my fieldwork in terms of both my own physical participation in the movement and my constant theoretical and analytical focus on mobility (Sheller and Urry 2006). At the same time, my focus on the lived experience, on place-related meanings, on the sensual and embodied perception of airports, brings my research close to phenomenology, traditionally connected to humanistic interpretations.

Inspired by mobile (auto)ethnographic methods of physical in situ immersion in the flows and rhythms of people and places one attempts to study (Larsen 2013, Gottschalk and Salvaggio 2015, Spinney 2006) while simultaneously acknowledging the practical difficulties of researching elite mobilities in high surveillance environments (Birtchnell and Caletrío 2014, Pütz 2011), I reached for a novel method of analytic (auto)ethnography while being myself an elite passenger. I purchased five fully flexible Business Class tickets from London Heathrow to various Schengen destinations, each from a different terminal and with a different airline, and I used these tickets repeatedly according to their terms and conditions to be able to repeatedly undergo the same passage through elite airport spaces as most the Business Class passengers do.

Analytic autoethnography, as proposed by Anderson (2006), aims to produce accounts that are more compatible with traditional ethnographic practices than the emotional evocative autoethnographies that have long dominated qualitative research (Adams, Jones, and Ellis 2016). In fulfilling this aim, Anderson suggests having informal conversations with and observing other participants in the field as well as drawing upon and developing theoretical understandings of broader social phenomena. At the same time, he refers to ethnographic work where the researcher is a full member of the research setting and is visible as such in the published text. Let me stop for a moment at this last point. While I entered the flows of elite passengers at Heathrow and gradually became a full member of this particular setting, I deliberately set myself apart from other flows that also significantly co-constitute the place-related meanings of airports. I was not actually travelling anywhere. I did not plan my journey ahead and had no expectations or thoughts about my destination; thus, I had no experience of an *actual* departure, arrival or transit within the frame of a journey and within the context of an elite or hypermobile lifestyle.

This methodological decision necessarily limits the possible generalisation of my findings, as I further elaborate in the last empirical section and in the conclusion. Yet, as the aim of my paper is to zoom in on the experience of a routine, elite *passage* through the airport, I find it beneficial to step out of certain flows to dive deeper into others. The more tasks, processes and thoughts that occupy the traveller's (and researcher's) attention, the less it is possible to (self-)reflect on the nuances of each one. As Larsen (2013) noted, even the 'most experienced legs' struggle to reflect in interviews upon the subtle, bodily and sensuous dimensions of their movement practices and their fleeting interactions with their mobile environment, certainly in part because they focus more on the goals of their journeys than on the routine of the passage. Moreover, the placelessness and non-placeness of airports are typically pictured as attributes of airports, the (lack of) inherent qualities of their material and social environment that their users simply react to (Augé 1995, Relph 1976); thus, in this regard, my focus solely on the airport passage seems highly relevant.

Nevertheless, the experience of passage inevitably enfolds dependent on the person who moves. For me, as a White, able-bodied woman in her thirties, decently dressed, holding an EU passport with an electronic chip, speaking fluent English, and experienced in air travel, there were absolutely no obstacles to the smoothness of my passage within the Schengen Area. There was no tension about the border for me. I was a welcomed and trusted guest, stereotypically unproblematic and voluntarily transparent (Hall 2015). Although I have travelled Business Class only once before, I had detailed knowledge of elite airport processes and its specific jargon from years of working in the air travel industry managing VIP passenger inquiries. Taking into account any other even slightly different situations, such as travelling outside of the European Union; fitting another category of passenger profile with negative sociocultural or political baggage (Salter 2007); having different bodily dispositions, poor knowledge of English or the local language or no previous experience with (elite) air travel; or being located at a different kinetic airport like Dubai, for instance, my otherwise still elite experience would have been entirely different. I chose this particular setting, including the choice of Heathrow airport, to capture the most profound experience connected to the claims of placelessness and non-placeness of international airports, which is, undoubtedly, the experience of kinetic elites (Crang 2002, Augé 1995, Lassen 2009).

My airport passage at Heathrow followed a prescribed path, from quick check-in machines or Business Class check-in counters to fast-track security lines and then onto Business Class lounges, where I spent time and changed my ticket to another day. I then continued to my gate to observe the boarding process. Instead of boarding the plane, however, I would exit the transit zone to join the stream of deboarding passengers, continuing with them through immigration and, finally, to the arrival hall. The passenger flows at airports are strictly one-way (Urry et al. 2016). Yet as Rachel Hall (2015) reminds us, before a plane leaves, a traveller can, for whatever reason, always

decide not to fly. In practice, when I expressed my intention of not travelling to airside airport personnel, I was simply diverted to another one-way flow of incoming passengers leading me to the border. Similarly, in the few instances I went through the immigration booth instead of electronic passport gates (E-gates), if asked at all, I only informed the border control that I was navigated here as I decided not to fly today.

I conducted this elite passage once a day during a 30-day-period between May and June 2015, both in the mornings and late afternoons. The division of my visits between terminals, however, was rather disproportional and in accordance with the ease of various procedures and personal preference[33]. The very intense rate of my research was inevitably inscribed into my experience, and, very possibly, some elements of place-perception were artificially highlighted and overrated, whereas, in reality, their presence is much subtler. On the other hand, it is also due to this intensity that the otherwise rather overlooked elements of elite airport passage became pressingly recognisable, and I could capture and describe them more easily.

In order to preserve the ethical responsibility of my fieldwork, I followed the three principles suggested by Pospěch (2012): the *principle of anonymity* towards sensitive locations, airlines and other companies as well as individuals; the *principle of staying unfocused* in terms of not taking initiative towards gaining information more than any other Business Class passenger can normally encounter; and the *principle of no harm* to any enterprise or individual, whether directly or indirectly, by revealing sensitive information about them. In abiding by the legal terms and conditions of my Business Class tickets and surely also due to their extreme flexibility and privileged status, as well as thanks to my EU electronic passport granting me (at that time) unlimited free entry to the United Kingdom, there were never any problematic negotiations with airport or immigration personnel. The only instance I was called upon by airport security was to prove that I was the holder of the credit card I had used for a ticket.

Goodbye Terminal 1, hello new Heathrow

At the beginning of May 2015, London Heathrow Airport held a stable position among the top 5 busiest airports worldwide, with an impressive traffic volume of more than 73 million passengers in 2014 (ACI 2015 World Airport Traffic Record). Its size seemed similarly overwhelming, with its five terminal buildings, two runways and vast support infrastructure. Yet, when I stepped out of the elevator on my first day of fieldwork and found myself in the arrival hall of Terminal 1, the surroundings suggested a rather provincial airport as opposed to one of the world's busiest hubs. A small space with modest architecture, Terminal 1 had a lazy atmosphere, with only a few occupants filling the seats around Costa Coffee and newly arriving passengers from Palma de

[33] In total, I passed through Terminal 1 and Terminal 5 each once, three times through Terminal 3, nine times through Terminal 4, whereas I conducted 16 of these individual passages at Terminal 2.

Mallorca warmly waving goodbye to their fellow vacationers. I found a similar picture in the departure hall later on. And it was only there, next to deserted check-in counters, that I noticed billboards announcing the permanent closure of Terminal 1 by 30 June.

The history of an airport terminal rarely reveals itself to passengers in such dramatic fashion; nonetheless, contradicting Augé's picture of ahistorical non-places, airports, too, have their own (often quite rich and turbulent) history, their own sets of connections, their unique situatedness distinguishing one from another (Cresswell 2006). And the distinction goes further, to the level of individual terminals, where different airlines and different place connections shape unique atmospheres through the 'place-ballet' (Seamon 1980) of travellers and the languages and cultures that accompany them. At Heathrow, there was the ghost-like Terminal 1 with the last few remaining flights, lazy atmosphere and nostalgic old photos hanging from its empty walls. There was the neat, modern and airy Queen's Terminal or Terminal 2, the only one with a proper name and the port for almost all Star Alliance members, where, in its peak hours, German was heard more than English and whose straightforward layout of fenced corridors maximally supported the surprisingly organised movement of its visitors. There was the somewhat chaotic Terminal 3, accommodating most of the Oneworld airlines with its vibrant outdoor plaza and arrival hall, often overfilled with multicultural extended families. Its stable population of homeless people resisted the typical sterile officiality of airport environments to altogether produce a sense of place similar, in a way, to European city centres. Then there was the cosy Terminal 4, which was mainly for the SkyTeam airlines. The warmest of all terminals in both indoor temperature and its relaxed atmosphere, its old wooden benches, old-fashioned design, and backpackers usually occupying its floors contrasted with the rest of the terminals. And, at last, there was the spectacular Terminal 5, the proud and representative home base of the national carrier British Airways, a remarkable display of technological beauty, where even lavatories featured fine classical music to amplify the presumed high-class manners of its visitors.

The uniqueness of each terminal at Heathrow struck me on my first visit. All of them appeared to me as completely different places connected through a few unifying elements in design and management and a common symbolic meaning, as all of them equally represented London Heathrow Airport. Otherwise, they seemed to operate largely on their own, and they undoubtedly produced a different sense of place. A part of that sense was shaped by different pre-engineered airport atmospherics, as argued by Urry et al. (2016). Yet the main creators were the people who gathered and diverged in different dynamic configurations and thus uniquely embodied the outside world within particular terminal buildings. They were those who constantly reproduced the highly particular "spatio-temporal event" called place (Massey 2005: 131). Airports, as Fuller and Harley write, are "stable in their constant instability" (2004: 114). They are always in process, always becoming (Cresswell 2006), and this becoming happens

through practice. As such, every individual airport terminal is both a distinct context for practice and a product of unique practices (Cresswell 2002).

Over time, the feelings of familiarity with each terminal increased to the level where I could experience my passage in a relatively non-stressful way. Soon I started to build up emotional preferences towards terminals, particular paths and airline lounges that made me visit them more often than others. Terminal 4 became my favourite and, as there was only one massive lounge for all partner airlines, my passage always followed the same path. I passed by the same boutiques every time, saw the same familiar faces at the lounge reception. They started to greet me by name after some time, and we used to exchange a few informal words when arriving to and leaving the lounge—even the security officer recognised and welcomed me once. Augé (2001) was right in his later work where he admitted that certain airport users, such as frequent flyers, could, over time, develop an emotional attachment to particular airports such that they become meaningful places. Frequent pleasant visits certainly have the potential to transform unknown airport spaces into meaningful places of familiarity, at-homeness and emotional attachment.

Still, the experiences of passengers are necessarily incomplete, partial, and subjective, and they need to be approached and valued as such. The performance of the passage can rarely allow for a thoughtful analysis of an airport's history and its complex relations, nor for acknowledgement of its heterotopic complexities. Despite the overall tendency of passengers to speak of certain airports as a whole while only experiencing their parts, I need to stress that I did develop an intense emotional connection to one particular elite passage at Terminal 4. Switching to a different terminal always involved a certain level of shock, strangeness, and alertness of my senses. I had simply found myself at *a different place* even though I was still at the very same airport.

You are approaching the end of the conveyor belt

> "A friend of mine asked me recently what I do here all day long, and her question keeps resonating with me. If I had to pick one activity over the others, one main activity that I do here most of the time, almost constantly and automatically, would definitely be that I WALK. I walk here so much that my feet hurt enormously at the end of each day."
> (extract from my personal diary, 14 June 2015)

If an airport presents a pause in the context of long-distance movement, a place where, after hundreds of kilometres of high-speed movement, passengers make a stop, a break before they continue on to quickly consume another great portion of distance, in the context of bodily activity, the opposite is true. After being strapped to an aeroplane seat for a long time, passengers now move on their own again. The joy of being able to activate their body I found inscribed in many people's faces shortly after they deboarded the plane, stretching their arms and legs with sighs of relief and pleasure before they walked on cheerfully. Others appeared to be rather annoyed at not being

transported anymore, maybe woken up from their sleep and forced to move their bodies on their own. And still others let adrenaline mobilise their bodies to their maximum in order to catch their connecting flight. In one way or another, an essential feature of the (elite) passenger experience at the airport is inherently the fact that this experience happens *in bodily motion.*

Passengers at the airport are, however, rarely just bodies. They move around in different body-object configurations, or as Shilon and Shamir (2016) write, passengers *are* mutable assemblages of body, luggage, and documents. In this regard, I too packed a carry-on suitcase and a handbag to accompany me together with my travel documents while on my path. As Bissell (2009) noted, through repetition, passengers naturally develop a particular bodyknowledge and a set of strategies to lower the degree of encumbrance in moving with their 'mobile prosthesis' in certain environments. Places are then produced through embodied practices as 'taskscapes' (Ingold 2000) that are made significant precisely through the bodily effort of movement within them. In the role of an elite passenger, I also gradually developed this practical knowledge of moving smoothly, quickly and effectively through the (elite) airport spaces. I changed the form of my carry-on luggage several times to achieve sufficient lightness (Barry and Suliman 2020). I mastered the art of pulling out my belongings to the scanner tray in less than a minute (and earned many annoyed 'aahs' and 'oohs' by my fellow fast-track security users until I managed to do so). I learnt to recognise the speediest line at various checkpoints and the most efficient level of talk with security officials, all of that solely through my repeated interaction and the process of movement-making itself.

Towards the end of my fieldwork, after many days of completing the same routine walk from check-in to gate and back through immigration, my attempts to reconstruct my airport passage at the end of the day became harder and harder. I was no longer able to recall the same details as before, sometimes even the path itself. My passage through the frequently visited terminals started to be routine and habitual. My body incorporated the tasks of walking with a suitcase and following the usual path, presenting the boarding pass at checkpoints or organising my belongings quickly to fit into a scanner tray so much that I did them automatically, without any thinking. I was on autopilot, as Middleton (2011) described in the context of daily work commuting. Only unusual, outstanding or unexpected encounters caught my conscious attention. I remembered those clearly, whereas the rest blurred into some sort of a routine aggregate activity, such as 'walking to the lounge' or 'returning to the arrival hall'.

Habit is considered a powerful force in the generation of meaningful places in humanistic geography. And while habits certainly produce practical, embodied competencies for moving around, emerging research suggests that habit may in fact be less individual and much more distributed across bodies and environments as a key part of mobility infrastructure (Bissell 2015). In this perspective, the speed and ease by which kinetic elites move through airport spaces does not rely solely on privileged

access protocols but, simultaneously, on habit as a virtual infrastructure that *carries* their mobile bodies through the environment in a similar way to physical infrastructures (just like conveyor belts). The paths and passages carved out by repeated journeying are 'as much habitual as they are architectural'. Thus, frequent travellers glide through the airport with ease and grace, "sheltered and cocooned by the virtual infrastructure of habit" (Bissell 2015: 133). Yet, there is a sense of slowness in the speedy elite passage, particularly at the fast-track lines. A part of this comes from the privilege of 'taking your time', of being waited for (at least by authorities), whereas non-privileged passengers are being rushed.

The speed, pace and regularity of daily walks produce what Edensor has called a 'mobile sense of place', a linear perception of place formed by the footpath where "the rhythms of walking allow for a particular experiential flow of successive moments of detachment and attachment, physical immersion and mental wandering, memory, recognition and strangeness" (2010: 70). The dwelling that co-constructs sedentary meaningful places here happens in and through motion (Sheller and Urry 2006), and a place is experienced as "the predictable passing of familiar fixtures", producing a comforting sense of reliability and mobile homeliness (Edensor 2010: 70). Indeed, over time I started to feel comfortable and secure enough at certain terminals to switch off the decision-making part of my brain when I walked, allowing myself to freely contemplate what I had read or experienced before. Although this might evoke a sense of placelessness, of being trapped in no place and no time in particular—and if someone were to ask me *where I was* at that point, I would probably be confused—these were precisely the moments of dwelling-in-motion, in a place intimately familiar to me both particularly and conceptually.

Welcome to the Upper Class Wing

On Thursday morning, 16 June, after quickly passing through fast-track security, I turned right to my favourite lounge. I recognised one of the receptionists, a smiling Polish girl who similarly recognised me and greeted me warmly, asking how I was today and if I had not been their guest just two days prior. I nodded and, while handing her my boarding pass, I noted with a hint of powerlessness that she would likely see me often here in the next two weeks. She smiled with compassion, likely thinking I must be in the middle of a busy project that was forcing me to travel there and back. Then she wondered why I was there so early, noticing that my boarding pass indicated an early afternoon flight. I explained that I had brought some work I needed to finish, and, in any case, I could try my luck at the boarding gate if I decided to catch an earlier flight. My obvious competence made the right impression. She promptly offered to store my suitcase at the reception and asked if I wished to be signed up for a complimentary facial treatment in their massage room since I had so much time before the departure of my flight. Welcome to the 'upper class' at London Heathrow Airport.

With the purchase of an extremely expensive Business Class ticket, I now *belonged* among them legally, ensuring me of my right to access and make use of certain privileged spaces and to be treated like a 'very important person'. This legal belonging had to be renewed and reclaimed every day by rebooking my ticket or purchasing another. The (elite) passenger presence at the airport is always fleeting and temporary and so was my belonging. The possession of a valid entry document, however, did not automatically induce the feeling of being truly and comfortably in-place. Only after I started to routinely participate in elite passenger activities, such as obtaining my boarding pass at the Business Class check-in counter in the morning, walking through fast-track security, chatting with lounge receptionists, waiting at the boarding gate or in the E-gate line in a specific time-space pattern, when my body built up the confidence to move around as a frequent flyer, knowing where to go and what to do or say, only at this point did I no longer feel like an outsider and truly *became* a passenger (Hernandez Bueno 2021), an elite passenger.

For humanistic geographers, the question of belonging and existential insideness defines meaningful places (Tuan 1977, Relph 1976, Seamon 1980). The same question accompanied me during my journeys through Heathrow's terminals, and on many occasions, it demonstrated itself with a remarkable emotional intensity. Besides my legal right to access elite spaces, I gradually developed a synergic insideness of belonging to the rhythm of life, to the flows and the 'place-ballets' (Seamon 1980) of regularly visited terminals. I felt in-place within them. Simultaneously, there was yet another level of belonging that was being offered to me as a Business Class passenger—the belonging to an exclusive community.

Airspaces and, most significantly, airports are all highly segregated sites with a clear separation of kinetic elites enjoying access to privileged spaces and kinetic underclasses not entitled to enter them (Adey, Budd, and Hubbard 2007). Being now part of the elite flow, a great portion of my airport passage led through these segregated privileged spaces. Some shared the same materiality as their non-privileged counterparts and were being made exclusive solely by their access rules, procedural smoothness, extended hospitality and a handful of symbolic elements. Others were true oases of luxury, hidden away from the sight of the masses. Yet, all of them served the same purpose—to induce and pamper the elite identity of their users by visibly contrasting them to the discomfort of the surrounding crowds.

By distinguishing us from them in such a reactionary manner, the privileged spaces at Heathrow reminded me of the gated communities once described by David Harvey (1996) in relation to the idea of place. They, too, presented secure and bounded communities with their own names, distinctive social and physical qualities and, most importantly, visible and highly protected boundaries in the form of ropes, barriers, walls, signs, discreet lounge doors, all guarded by dedicated airport personnel to verify the entry right of each and every newcomer. The visible policing of boundaries in the airspaces is claimed to be, in fact, a part of the performance of the elite status that

"offers the experience of being protected or of being kept out, depending on whether you are 'in' or 'out', which in turn increases the pleasure and the desire, respectively" (Thurlow and Jaworski 2006: 116). Elite passengers do not merely enter a space of solitary individuality and non-human mediation when they travel through the airport, as Augé (1995) has argued, they simultaneously enter a space where they are being continuously reassured of their importance, distinctiveness, elite social status and, once again, their *belonging* to the recognised and protected community of VIP travellers. The airport, thus, easily becomes a place where class identity can be formed and performed, an important resource in self-stylisation and elite identity, however transient this might be.

Take a little piece of Britain home with you

Near the arrival gates, I joined a scattered flow of passengers that had just deboarded the mighty Boeing 747-400 from overseas. I walked with them through empty corridors until my attention was caught by a distinct blue overhead sign announcing that I was soon to approach the UK border. As usual, I went straight to the E-gates, where I simply scanned my biometric passport and waited for the satisfying sound of the beep after the software matched my face to the passport chip. Green light, door open, and I was free to (re-)enter the territory of the United Kingdom. It felt more like beeping my staff card at the entrance door of my workplace than crossing a state border. Indeed, by possessing the "right sort of passport" (Burrell 2011: 358), both politically and technologically, the airport microborder barely existed to me. Only the long queues of less-favoured passengers at the staffed immigration booths gave me a hint of an impression that we all stand at the frontiers of a sovereign state that has the power to admit or exclude us (Salter 2007), even the privileged ones, as Kitchin and Dodge (2009) ethnographically describe.

After bypassing the baggage reclaim area, customs, and a very modest duty-free shop, I reached a door whose opening struck me every time I passed through them—the automatic door leading from airside to the semi-public areas of the arrival hall. Maybe it was the stark contrast between mundane corridors and sterile officiality on one side and the colourful and vibrant atmosphere on the other, perhaps it was the stares of waiting crowds lining the barriers to welcome their arrivers, or maybe it was the symbolic act of crossing the threshold to the kingdom as Mark Wallinger (2000) artistically captured in his slow motion video of the same name at the Terminal 1 arrival hall. The essence of arrival to somewhere very particular was, for me, best seen and felt here at this door. The idea of the airport as an abstract waypoint, disconnected from the outside world, whose geographical location becomes irrelevant (Chambers 1990, Fuller 2003, Laing 2008) seemed peculiarly odd in these intense moments of arrival.

Nonetheless, there is a transit experience that stands in contrast to border crossing and arrival. Passengers changing planes at Heathrow remain for a few hours in the transit zone of the airport and find themselves legally outside any nation-state territory (Laing 2008). Many of them, as Rowley and Slack (1999) argue, might have lost their sense of place and time as a result of long-distance air travel across multiple time zones. Could this induce the 'no place in particular' (Chambers 1990) experience given that LHR could easily be exchanged for any other three-letter code representing a similarly irrelevant airport en route to the final destination? Or, as Laing writes, is the passenger only waiting "to arrive to reconnect to geography" (Laing 2008: 96)?

Research on airport choice, specifically in relation to frequent flyer programmes, provides some evidence that en-route transit airports are, in fact, carefully selected by passengers with multi-option choice (which elite passengers typically are) based on their previous experiences and personal preferences, loyalty to specific airlines and their hubs, available benefits and other factors (e.g., de Luca 2012, Seelhorst and Liu 2015). Passengers in the transit zone of airports also do not find themselves in some sort of an absolutely universal global environment. They, too, must interact with numerous country-specific elements that are naturally present at the airports, such as local language and manners, currency, indications of local climate, even little things like the flushing system of toilets that vary across the world. Moreover, as airports compete for the loyalty of passengers, there is growing evidence of intentional placemaking efforts by airport authorities to create a unique sense of place, distinct airport atmospherics in terminal interiors (Urry et al. 2016, Wattanacharoensil, Pipatpong, and Graham 2022, Nghiêm-Phú and Suter 2018, Fuller and Harley 2004), even to create a destination in itself (Nikolaeva 2006).

A significant portion of these efforts consists in the promotion of the national, regional or local identity of the surrounding area, mainly to the closest city, in order to shape the image of the airport as a gateway, the first and last point of contact with the destination (Wattanacharoensil, Pipatpong, and Graham 2022). In this way, Heathrow Terminal 2 features a black cab installation in the centre of its airside plaza, passengers can taste local cuisine and beer at a traditional-esque English pub in Terminal 3, buy all sorts of souvenirs connected to London or the United Kingdom at the Glorious Britain shop in Terminal 5, send a postcard via a classic Royal Mail postbox at Terminal 4 or take a picture with a double-decker bus driver, royal guard, police officer or street artist in front of the numerous billboards welcoming passengers at Heathrow.

Elite passengers are often exposed to more than one such place making strategy while transiting at international airports. Visiting a total of seven Business Class lounges on the airside of Heathrow terminals, I experienced both confirming as well as contradictory place making attempts, from offering porridge or a full English breakfast to the very specific design, facilities and cuisine that matched the traditions of the airline's home country. As such, I found myself once in a bamboo-designed lounge with strictly Asian-origin personnel and ramen soup and rice dishes were served. Another

time, the lounge was wallpapered with posters from Manhattan, where bartenders mixed all sorts of Martinis and visitors could have lunch at a build-your-own-burger station. Once I found myself among mainly German-speaking businessmen in an elegant no-frills lounge, and another time in front of a lounge door decorated with Indian flower garlands. Thus, and in relation to an actual travel itinerary and its progress, the perception of an airport as a geographically and culturally situated place can, in fact, be far more hybrid for an elite traveller than for unprivileged passengers.

Just 15 minutes. Every 15 minutes. Heathrow Express

Let me return again to the place from where I started—to the barriers that lead arriving passengers into the semi-public part of arrival halls. I stood there regularly to observe passengers who embodied any sign of privilege associated with elite travel. One type of elite traveler was truly not hard to spot: men in business attire pulling a small black suitcase, a frequent flyer card visibly attached to its handle, who moved around swiftly with a confidence and elegance that markedly matched the stereotypical picture of forty-something healthy male business executives (Crang 2002) seen on Business Class advertisements of many airliners (Thurlow and Jaworski 2006). Most headed straight towards the escalators and corridors that connected the airport terminal to the ground transportation infrastructure, that is, numerous parking lots and Heathrow Express platforms (itself just another form of elite transportation for city-bound travellers). No walking around or stopping to check information in their travel documents, no phone calls or ATM queuing, they barely even looked around as they followed their habitual trajectories, having apparently completed the same trip many times before. Some had a company driver waiting to greet them with a handshake while slowing down their speedy progress for a moment, but often without actually stopping—the driver was expected to join their path rather than the other way around.

Lassen describes this type of business travel experience as a 'life in corridors' that evolves in high-speed spaces where employees are constantly "on the way to the next meeting, next hotel, next bar and next country" (Lassen et al. 2009: 179). For them, he argues, the corridors are like non-places where it is often difficult to distinguish between different locations within them. The airports, too, are experienced as mere nodes in the network of non-place-like corridors. A similar point has been made by Kesselring regarding the mobility praxis of knowledge workers, that a "life in transit makes actual geographical location irrelevant" as the social or physical features of the environment are not factored into such mobility (Kesselring et al. 2009: 43). This deserves special attention as they both suggest it is the *practice* of extended aeromobile business travel that produces specific perceptions of airports which seem to be very close to non-places, as described by Marc Augé. Yet, their conclusions, besides being based on a simple binary between fully anthropological places and oppositional non-places, with nothing in-between, fail to acknowledge a wide spectrum of emotions that

can, in fact, produce many more hybrid forms of place-related meanings and conceptions at different airports within the frame of usual journeys and beyond.

While frequently travelling knowledge workers undoubtedly represent a significant portion of the elite passenger flow at international airports, the group of airline passengers commonly labelled as 'kinetic elites' is far more diverse (Birtchnell and Caletrío 2014, Zuskáčová and Seidenglanz 2019). The aeromobile experiences and place-related perceptions of kinetic elites can also be (re)shaped by their different bodily mutabilities, such as fatigue, jet lag, old age, or illness (Bissell 2015), as well as by their personal values, lifestyle and attitudes towards air travel (Lassen 2009). How do, then, different elite aeromobile practices impact the perception of particular airports as places? How do different levels of the stylised elite identity influence this perception? Can the same frequently visited airport terminal gain different place-related meanings in the context of departure, transit, and arrival? Is the same transit airport perceived differently on the outbound journey as when returning home? How do memories, emotions or phantasies connected to a city influence the perception of its airport (even during mere transit times)? Can the cultural stylisation of lounges somehow mix this all up in different contexts? Can fatigue be responsible for anything like a non-place experience in the airspaces? Or can it be that the detached experience described by Augé (1995), Crang (2002), Lassen (2009) and others is, in fact, based on a secure, comfortable, and intimate at-homeness felt at familiar airports?

When I was leaving Heathrow after thirty days of (auto)ethnographic endeavor, I had more questions than answers more openings than closings appeared in front of me. These questions were, however, empirically informed, at least to some extent original and highly relevant to the ongoing debates on the place(less)ness of international airports. In order to get closer to a full understanding, these questions must now be addressed to those who truly lead an aeromobile lifestyle and possess authentic experiences of frequent elite travelling within airspaces such as airports.

Conclusions

Elite mobilities, as Birtchnell and Caletrío (2014) claim, are hegemonic in their impact on other forms of movement. What is now deemed normal owes its form to pioneering elites and their power agendas. The fictitious Pierre Dupont, who introduces the widely influential book on nonplaces (Augé 1995), is similarly an elite figure. And it was mainly for this reason that Augé's ideas have also been heavily criticised. The over-generalising, Western-based privileged nature of his non-places fail to acknowledge the myriads of diverse ways in which different sites are experienced by different individuals in them—in the case of airports, the pilots, taxi drivers, holidaymakers, excited children, immigrants, refugees, homeless or members of neighbouring communities (Merriman 2009, Cresswell 2006, Gefou-Madianou 2010, Abranches 2013, Triebel 2015). Another stream of critique highlights the unique atmospheres

that many contemporary airports intentionally create to attract passengers (Urry et al. 2016, Wattanacharoensil, Pipatpong, and Graham 2022, Nikolaeva 2006). The only context where the non-placeness of airports remains still very powerful is that of frequent elite travel (Crang 2002, Lassen 2009, Kesselring 2009). In this paper, I therefore focus specifically on this kind of aeromobile experience to examine how materialities and socialites as well as the mobile performance of the *passage* through the elite spaces and corridors of one of the world's busiest airports might shape its perception as a place.

Armed with the provocative question *'where am I?'* at each step of my own elite passage through Heathrow terminals, I gradually uncovered many more nuances of the place-related perception of international airports that go beyond the usual binary of a traditional place and a detached nonplace. In my (auto)ethnographic vignettes, I depicted the unique event-like dynamics of each one of Heathrow's terminals and contrasted the at-homeness of frequently used passages with the strangeness, alertness and discomfort of walking through unfamiliar environments. I revisited the well-discussed impact of habits on the production of places so as to portray the automatic movement of frequent elite passengers as dwelling-in-motion, enabled through the mastery of place-specific bodily practices within intimately familiar mobile surroundings. I reflected upon the stylisation of preferred passengers as 'upper class', visibly segregated in various privileged spaces, where their elite identity can be formed and performed around the sense of belonging to an exclusive community. I described how natural elements in a local airport identity together with intentional place making strategies create specific place-related settings for (elite) passengers in the two very different contexts of arrival and transit, which are, in any case, far from universal in their sameness. And lastly, I speculated as to how specific aeromobile practices of kinetic elites might result in unique hybrid constellations of place-related meanings for particular airports within the frame of their usual journeys and beyond.

While I aimed to capture important aspects of how airports impact the embodied and sensuous experiences of elite passengers, I deliberately bypassed other, similarly relevant questions that stretch beyond the spatially bounded actuality of the airport visit. The (elite) passenger experience does not start and end at the airport. Further elaboration is thus needed of how the progress of particular journeys, previous travel experiences and lifestyle choices as well as bodily sensations from the flight, the jetlag or extended aeromobility influence the place-related perception of particular airports by kinetic elites. With this (auto)ethnography, I help to flesh out the largely distant claims about elite aeromobilities as they are performed at airports while also opposing the general tendency of mobilities scholars to focus solely on one aspect of the (elite) passenger experience, such as embodiment and affect, habitual structures or place making strategies, to draw attention to their mutual interconnectedness, coexistence and coactivity.

Showing just how divided we move (Adey 2006) at the airport, I have joined here the vivid stream of airport ethnographies that provide growing evidence of actual practices and disparities that occur in the airspaces as well as intentionally created places for some that exclude others. Furthermore, in times of increasing concern about the global climate, when the still ongoing glamorisation of extensive air travel (Cohen and Gössling 2015) is being challenged by rising voices of 'flight shaming' (Higham, Cohen, and Cavaliere 2013), social science needs to pay close attention to the lifeworlds of this small but highly aeromobile privileged part of postmodern society. If we hope for any effective structural changes in this carbon-intensive industry, we first need to gain a deep and non-judgmental understanding of what is at stake for those whose mobile behavior we are targeting so as to propose and communicate acceptable solutions for the future.

6 ELITE DIVERSITIES IN PRACTICE: THE CASE OF FREQUENT FLYERS IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC AND SLOVAKIA (ARTICLE 3)

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Abstract: Due to deregulation of air traffic flying has become increasingly accessible to masses of travellers on the growing low-cost market. Yet, a significant group of passengers seems to remain on the other side – the kinetic elites whose hypermobile lifestyles are performed in privileged spaces. The aim of this paper is to critically address the binary of elite and non-elite passengering and to demonstrate the evidence of a much wider spectrum of individual aeromobile experiences. We use the case study of frequent flyers in the Czech Republic and Slovakia to present the highly diverse practices of passengers usually labelled as elites.

Keywords: aeromobile practices, accessibility, frequent flyer, frequent flyer programmes, mobile elite, Czech Republic, Slovakia

Introduction

Mobility, whether in spatial or social terms, always represented a crucial stratifying capital in the society dividing people into those who move and those who must wait (Birtchnell and Caletrío 2014). Although the continual liberalisation of much of the traffic has now brought masses to travel every day, the stratification of today's society according to individual access to different types of mobility did not disappear. Focusing on air transportation we can witness this inequality to exist on various levels. As Cwerner (2009a) writes, the popular 'everyone can fly' attitude is still true only for privileged social classes. Similarly, Thurlow and Jaworski (2006) point out, there is no other transport mode that will make the passengers aware of their social status, their class, as much as the airlines do. Standing in the long check-in queue while just next to you the privileged others walk down the red carpet towards a smiling airline representative, waiting for ages for a security check and seeing some others running through the fast lanes and electronic gates, having to walk all the way through the luxurious Business Class section until you end up at your cramped Economy seat, almost every part of the flying experience is accompanied by the reminder of one's position in the social hierarchy of airline passengers. And for most of the airline

passengers this experience includes knowledge that above them are these others, the privileged, the elites.[34]

Despite the stereotypes that are extensively (re)produced by the airliners (Thurlow and Jaworski 2006), there is, however, not one and uniform world of flying elites, the reality, we believe, may be far more diversified. In our paper, we want to further address the need to recognize and acknowledge the diversity of aeromobile practices and go beyond the simple binary of the elite and non-elite. We thus draw our attention to the group of highly mobile airline passengers, the frequent flyers, that are easily identifiable as they are determined institutionally through their elite membership in various frequent flyer programmes. This decision was inspired by the approach of Gössling and Nilsson (2009), who similarly used the membership in frequent flyer programmes as an indicator of aeromobile lifestyle of passengers at Copenhagen Airport. Unlike them we, however, further use the term frequent flyer to refer solely to the status members of frequent flyer programmes and we excluded entry level members from our analysis intentionally. It means we further pay attention solely to the members who have reached at least the second rank of the membership, often labelled *silver* or *bronze*, and naturally all the higher ranks labelled frequently *gold*, *diamond* or *platinum.* Some evidence suggests that the majority of elite frequent flyers are business travellers (Thurlow and Jaworski 2006, Gössling and Nilsson 2009, Lassen 2009, Kellerman 2012). Although in our paper we do not purposely limit our focus to business travel, the empirical results that are presented here correspond with the thesis of strong connectedness between frequent flying and business travel.

The aim of this paper is to collect and analyse multisource data that will help us uncover the heterogeneity of mobile practices of frequent flyer business passengers and in so doing to enrich the understanding of highly mobile lifestyles that contribute greatly to the endless intensification of air transportation in Europe. We set our analysis outside the typical Western European regions with the generally high levels of aeromobility [35] by focusing on the frequent flyers in the Central European, still transforming post-socialist countries of the Czech Republic and Slovakia. This decision was deliberate and reflects many inherent attributes of the area of former Czechoslovakia in connection with air transportation. Despite the fast growth of the air travel industry, the general level of aeromobility is still lower here in comparison with Western Europe (Seidenglanz 2009, Taylor 2016). This is mainly a consequence of the lower supply of air transportation noticeable clearly by the presence of only smaller hubs and rather regional airlines on one side (Burghouwt 2007, Dobruszkes et al. 2011) and the lower demand of passengers for flying on the other.

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[34] Lucy Budd (2013) and Saulo Cwerner (2009b), however, very accurately demonstrate the existence of the true global aeromobile elites that are far beyond the public sight using private or corporate jets and helicopters to travel between private airports and helipads.

[35] Kellerman (2012) even uses a term *frequently flying business persons*.

The lower demand can be seen as an evident manifestation of persisting lower regional economic power in absolute and also in relative terms. The lower demand for air transport stems also from the modern history of the studied region, it is related namely to the experience of isolation and the absence of possibility to travel freely abroad during the socialist era before 1989. Flying was rather a rare experience for the average inhabitant of Czechoslovakia at that time (Erdösi 2010, Grenčíková 2011, Grenčíková et al. 2011) and is still being seen as an unavailable or even unnecessary mode of transport at least for some socials groups of local population. The current fast development of aeromobility in such environment seems to us, therefore, analytically interesting. With this paper we thus also want to contribute to the understanding of aeromobilities by at least partly specific, Central European perspective, which could enrich the western concepts and thoughts prevailing in this field (Schwanen 2018).

The paper is conducted as a case study which is divided into three mutually interrelated empirical sections[36]. Methodologically, this paper combines quantitative methods in the first two sections with the qualitative approach used in the third section, as we believe it is the mixed methods research design that enables us to study complex issues in the most complex way. In the first section we discuss the long-term development of air transport accessibility in the Czech Republic and Slovakia and drawing from the current flight supply data we analyse the connectivity of airports available to frequent flyers in the targeted area (firstly hub airports in Prague, Vienna and Warsaw[37] and secondly smaller airports in Brno, Ostrava, Košice, Bratislava and Poprad/Tatry). The flight supply in Prague, Vienna and Warsaw is compared to selected primary hubs in Western Europe (Frankfurt and Amsterdam) as we try to demonstrate the existence of regional barrier in the air transport availability which modifies the aeromobile practices and strategies of the Czech and Slovak frequent flyers. The data used in this part originates from the OAG Aviation and the Flightstats datasets.

The second section is devoted to the analysis of main frequent flyer programmes offered by three principal airline alliances to all its passengers, within them, of course, to Czech and Slovak frequent flyers. The programmes analysed empirically in this section are *Miles and More* of Star Alliance available to Czech and Slovak travellers primarily via hubs in Vienna (Austrian Airlines), Warsaw (LOT) and Frankfurt and Munich (Lufthansa), *Flying Blue* of SkyTeam alliance available via Amsterdam (KLM)

[36] The communication partners and largely the spatiality of their aeromobile practices is the aspect which interconnects all empirical sections into one interrelated unit and, moreover, this is the key to the spatial focus of the whole paper. Selection of analysed Central and Western European airports as well as of frequent flyer loyalty programmes including their entry points in respective sections of this paper is given by the fact they are used by the interviewees from the last, qualitative section of the paper.

[37] Clearly, Vienna and Warsaw are located outside the geographic area of the Czech Republic and Slovakia, however, they are commonly used by residents of some parts of these two countries as their 'home hub' airports or as home airports of their favourite network airlines respectively.

and Prague (Czech Airlines) and *Executive Club* of Oneworld alliance accessible in a most comfortable way via London (British Airways). We are looking closer mainly at the internal hierarchy of its members and the benefits they offer, and we interpret these differences as an important source of the distinctions in the practices of Czech and Slovak airline passengers. Frequent flyer programmes are thus considered in our view as a source of passengers sorting that often creates segregated sub-groups of frequent flyers.

Lastly, we focus on the lived aeromobile practices of frequent flyers to examine their internal diversity in a more detail. For this purpose, we have analysed five semi-structured interviews with frequent flyers from the Czech Republic and Slovakia, that served as pilot interviews for another project of one of the authors. The interviewees were approached by the authors using references from mutual acquaintances taking three main criteria into account – the minimum of 40 individual flights taken in the past 12 months, at least a 2nd rank frequent flyer programme membership and a usual residence in the Czech Republic or Slovakia. All interviews have been collected from March till July of 2016. During the interviews, all frequent flyers were asked to describe the network of places they have visited by air in the past year and to reconstruct their last journey in the free narrative form. We have than approached the collected data set using the Atlas.ti software with the two research questions in mind, namely asking: *What practices do local frequent flyers employ to cope with the airport accessibility in their region*, *and if their frequent flyer status affects the spatiality of their journeys and how?* We need to stress at this point that the qualitative analysis of interviews is meant to draw on the issues of airport accessibility and spatial strategies of frequent flyers in a vivid form of the first-hand experiences rather than to generalize its conclusions to the wide group of all Czech and Slovak frequent flyers.

Air transport accessibility and the patterns of the aeromobile strategies

The development of air transport supply and demand and simultaneously of its spatial and social accessibility has been very dynamic in the last few decades. The gradual deregulation of the industry, continuing globalization of economy, lifestyle changes and increasing wealth which enhanced the possibility to spend growing parts of income on traveling and tourism are some of the examples of highly influential factors beyond that advance (Bowen 2010, Rodrigue et al. 2017). If we compare the total amount of offered flights in Europe and their spatial distribution in 1980s or 1990s and now, we can undoubtedly conclude the sheer increase of scheduled flights on one side and their spatial de-concentration on the other. During the given period, many smaller airports were successively integrated into the regular airline networks. The progress

of this phenomenon is illustrated in Figure 2 showing principal air routes[38] starting in the area of four post-socialist countries in Central Europe including the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Poland and Hungary. While 200 of these regular routes started only in four airports in the targeted area (in Prague, Warsaw, Budapest and Bratislava) and terminated in limited number of destinations in 1990, there were almost 500 routes from 15 airports approximately 20 years later. Daily flights were gradually introduced also to the secondary cities in the given region such as to Kraków, Gdańsk, Wrocław, Brno, Ostrava and Košice. Moreover, the total seat capacity on all scheduled flights has more than quadrupled within the period of 20 years.

Although the evidence of continuing spatial expansion of air services seems to support the assumption of general or universal air transport accessibility in the contemporary Europe in the sense of its accessibility to (almost) all people (almost) everywhere (Cwerner 2009a, Urry 2009) and on flying as a standard, normal, or even unavoidable means of passenger transport (Adey et al. 2007), the truth is much more complex. In the more focused view, we argue, the air transport accessibility, despite its continuing improvement, is by all means not uniform or homogeneous in space. This claim is valid also in the European space where the air transport accessibility is rather strongly diversified based on the position of individual airports within the airline networks and the airport hierarchy.

Accordingly, the Czech Republic and Slovakia are, unlike the Western European countries, served primarily via smaller and less prominent hubs in Prague, Warsaw and Vienna (Grenčíková et al. 2011, Kraft and Havlíková 2016, Taylor 2016). Table 1 shows significant differences in the number of departing flights from these three. For illustration, there are only 9 flights weekly from Prague to North America in comparison with 353 flights from Frankfurt. Latin America and the Caribbean are even completely inaccessible from Prague, Warsaw or Vienna by direct flights. The evidence of this uneven provision of air transport accessibility has been recently commented by several studies in transport geography using traffic and network data of various types (carried passengers, operated flights, seat capacities, direct and indirect connectivity, networkability etc., see Burghouwt 2007, Dobruszkes et al. 2011, Derudder et al. 2010, Lee 2009 and many others), however, unlike them we connect this fact newly with travelling behaviour of frequent flyers.

[38] Principal air routes are routes where the offered seat capacity exceeds the level of 5,000 seats per one month for the purposes of this analysis. It means that this type of route is served at least daily with a plane with 160 or 170 seats on board in average.

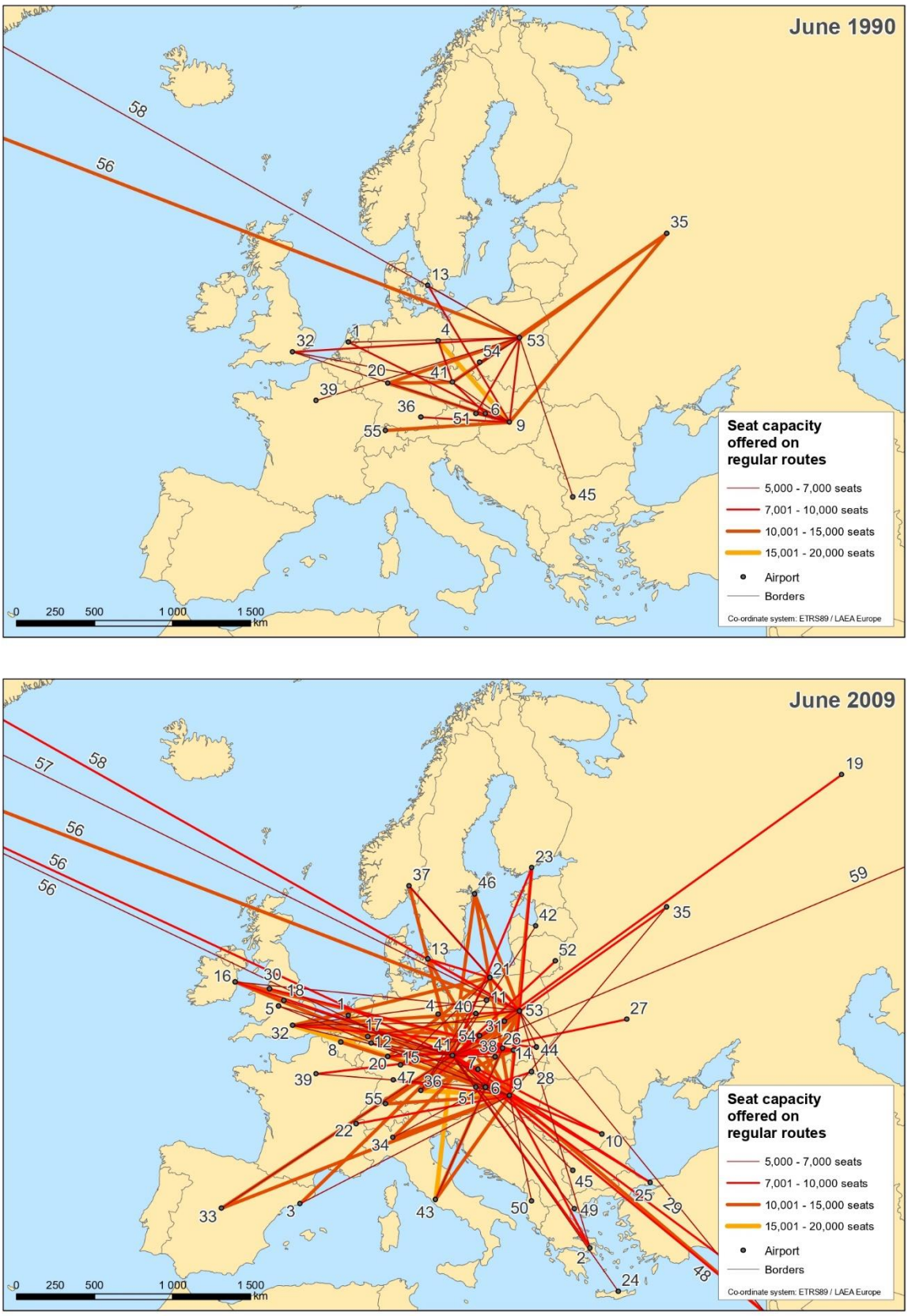

Figure 2: The development of principal air routes starting in the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Poland and Hungary between June 1990 and June 2009.

Notes: Principal air routes are routes where the offered seat capacity exceeds the level of 5 000 seats per one month at least in one direction
Cities are indicated by following numbers in the Figure:

1 Amsterdam	21 Gdansk	41 Prague
2 Athens	22 Geneva	42 Riga
3 Barcelona	23 Helsinki	43 Rome
4 Berlin	24 Iraklion	44 Rzeszow
5 Birmingham	25 Istanbul	45 Sofia
6 Bratislava	26 Katowice	46 Stockholm
7 Brno	27 Kiev	47 Stuttgart
8 Brussels	28 Kosice	48 Tel Aviv
9 Budapest	29 Larnaca	49 Thessaloniki
10 Bucharest	30 Liverpool	50 Tirana
11 Bydgoszcz	31 Lodz	51 Vienna
12 Cologne / Bonn	32 London	52 Vilnius
13 Copenhagen	33 Madrid	53 Warsaw
14 Cracow	34 Milan	54 Wroclaw
15 Dortmund	35 Moscow	55 Zurich
16 Dublin	36 Munich	56 New York
17 Dusseldorf	37 Oslo	57 Toronto
18 East Midlands	38 Ostrava	58 Chicago
19 Ekaterinburg	39 Paris	59 Seoul
20 Frankfurt	40 Poznan	

Source: OAG Aviation database

We suppose these differences significantly affect their aeromobile practices, strategies, habits, and routines because requirements of the world travellers can be hardly fulfilled smoothly by smaller hubs. The lower supply in the hubs that serve the Czech Republic and Slovakia of both flights in total and intercontinental flights in particular can, therefore, be a complication for frequent flyers residing in their vicinity as they inevitably have to undergo more indirect flights, fly longer, use more detour routes, or even travel further by surface transport modes to reach larger hub or modify their mobile behaviour in a different way. As a consequence, less prominent airports create a sort of a spatial and temporal barrier contributing to the lengthening of the journeys of Czech and Slovak frequent flyers in comparison with their western counterparts. Access to the air transport supporting infrastructures of various hierarchical or traffic levels, therefore, enrich the internal differentiation of the group of frequent flyers significantly (Cresswell 2006).

Table 1: Hubs/main airports: flights during a week in October 2017 (2nd – 8th October)

	Hubs/main airports serving Czech and Slovak interview partners:			Selected European hubs/ main airports:	
	Vienna (VIE)	Prague (PRG)	Warsaw (WAW)	Frankfurt (FRA)	Amsterdam (AMS)
Total number of flights	**2 290**	**1 287**	**1 581**	**4 714**	**4 799**
Flights to Europe	**2 018**	**1 137**	**1 438**	**3 548**	**3 938**
- London (LHR, LGW, LCY, LTN, STN)	86	78	58	173	374
- Paris (CDG, ORY)	57	62	48	96	95
- Frankfurt (FRA)	89	47	49	.	83
Flights to North America	**37**	**9**	**38**	**353**	**288**
- New York (JFK, LGA, EWR)	11	5	14	45	41
- Chicago (ORD)	6	0	11	28	14
- Atlanta (ATL)	0	0	0	14	28
Flights to Asia	**211**	**113**	**96**	**585**	**363**
- Beijing (PEK)	9	3	7	21	14
- Dubai (DXB)	14	16	7	28	23
- Tokyo (NRT, HND)	0	0	4	28	7
Flights to Africa	**25**	**28**	**9**	**157**	**112**
Flights to Latin America and the Caribbean	**0**	**0**	**0**	**71**	**100**

Source: flightstats.com

Beside the national hub in Prague, in the Czech Republic and Slovakia there are now several smaller airports in Brno, Košice, Bratislava, Ostrava and Poprad/Tatry with regular direct flight services, see Table 2 for more details. They are, however, integrated into the air transport system less intensively, only as spokes or end points in the airline networks. They are served either by feeder flights of network airlines from and to their respective hubs (e.g., flights from Košice to Vienna, Prague and Warsaw or from Ostrava to Prague) or by flights of low-cost carriers (e.g., flights from all airports to London Luton or London Stansted). The introduction of regular air services into selected secondary or even tertiary Czech and Slovak cities improved air transport accessibility in space, nevertheless, in a rather particular way because the total supply of flights in these airports is generally low. The busiest from these regional point airports, the Bratislava airport, handles only 100 scheduled flights a week, which is more than 12 times less than the national hub in Prague.

Moreover, in the overview of destinations in Table 2 we can often find cities that are primarily business destinations of knowledge industries (London, Cologne, Munich, Brussels, Milan, Dubai). The long-term existence of regular flights to regional business centres indicates a vivid corporate mobility mostly within the IT sector. As a consequence, next to the group of true world travellers noted above another type of frequent flyers is to be expected to occur on these regional routes – the commuters. This specific sort of frequent flyers, on contrary, highly profits from the extended network of regional airports as they travel frequently between the place of their residence and their offices abroad (Salt 2010, Wickham and Vecchi 2010). With the newly introduced flights the regular commuting in a week, bi-week or month regime is

suddenly available and easily affordable even in remote regions of the Czech Republic and Slovakia. The emergence of regular plane commuters also in smaller Czech and Slovak cities heterogenies the elite highly mobile groups by the local presence of passengers with specific flying and spatial practices that are examined in section 3 of this paper in a more detail.

Table 2: Regional point airports: flights during a week in October 2017 (2nd – 8th October)

	Regional point airports in the Czech Republic and Slovakia:				
	serving interview partners		**other:**		
	Brno (BRQ)	**Košice (KSC)**	**Bratislava (BTS)**	**Poprad/Tatry (TAT)**	**Ostrava (OSR)**
Total number of flights	**27**	**56**	**100**	**3**	**12**
Flights to Europe	**27**	**54**	**95**	**3**	**11**
European destinations	10x London (7x Stansted + 3x Luton), 12x Munich, 2x Eindhoven	11x Vienna, 13x Prague, 8x Warsaw, 7x London Luton, 6x Bratislava, 4x Istanbul, 3x Doncaster, 2x Munich	11x London Stansted, 7x Dublin, 6x Prague, 6x Košice, 4x Warsaw, 4x Kyiv, 4x Berlin, 4x Brussels Charleroi, 4x Milan Bergamo, 4x Moscow Vnukovo, 4x Skopje, 3x Manchester, 3x Rome Ciampino, 3x Sofia, 3x Birmingham, 2x Athens, 2x Barcelona Girona, 2x Edinburgh, 2x Cluj-Napoca, 2x Leeds Bradford, 2x Madrid, 2x Nis, 2x Alghero, 2x Malaga, 2x Paris Beauvais, 2x Trapani, 2x Tuzla, 1x Heraklion	3x London Luton	6x Prague, 3x London Stansted, 2x Milan Bergamo
Flights outside Europe	**0**	**2**	**5**	**0**	**1**
Non-European destinations	.	2x Tel Aviv	3x Dubai, 2x Tel Aviv	.	1x Dubai

Source: flightstats.com

Frequent flyer loyalty programmes

The frequent flyer loyalty programmes are schemes that aim to bind the customers to a particular carrier or an alliance of airlines and thus to encourage their loyal behaviour. There are around 110 different frequent flyer programmes worldwide with some 160 million people around the world collecting bonus points (Gössling and Nilsson 2009). When the customers reach a certain amount of tier points, they are

assigned an elite status granting them access to additional services, treats and privileges such as access to airport lounges and fast tracks, free upgrades to business class, additional baggage allowance, priority boarding and many more. The programmes often further hierarchize its members to several elite ranks according to the number of collected tier points that correspond with the amount of time and money they spend on their flights. Thurlow and Jaworski (2006) interestingly point out that behind the success of frequent flyer programmes are not the material benefits of the high-rank membership but the ostentatious declaration of the elite social status.

Table 3: Miles & More: selected principles of FFP as a way to diversify travel experience.

		Frequent flyer levels		
		FREQUENT TRAVELLER	**SENATOR**	**HON CIRCLE MEMBER**
How to qualify		**35 000 status miles or 30 flights**	**100 000 status miles**	**600 000 HON Circle miles** in 2 calendar years
		status miles are earned on scheduled flights, HON Circle miles are earned on scheduled flights when flying first or business class (e.g., flight Prague – Vienna in Economy lowest class earns 125 status miles, flight Vienna – Tokyo in Economy lowest class earns 1 421 status miles, in Business lowest class 5 685 status miles)		
Key benefits	**Fly one class higher**	No	2 eVouchers	6 eVouchers
	Preferential check-in	Business Class check-in	First Class check-in; Premium check-in	First Class check-in; check-in at the First Class Terminal in Frankfurt; Premium check-in
	Free baggage allowance	1 additional bag in Economy Class, 2 bags in total in Premium Economy Class and Business Class and 3 bags in First Class	an extra 20 kg; 2 bags or 3 bags on certain routes in Economy Class, 3 bags in Premium Economy Class and Business Class, 4 bags in First Class	an extra 20 kg; 2 bags or 3 bags on certain routes in Economy Class, 3 bags in Premium Economy Class and Business Class, 4 bags in First Class
	Priority baggage handling	No	Yes	Yes
	Lounge access	Business Lounge	Senator and Star Gold Lounges	Lufthansa First Class, SWISS First and Austrian HON Circle Lounge, First Class Terminal in Frankfurt
	Limousine and transfer service	No	No	Yes
	Exclusive service hotline	Yes	Yes	available worldwide 24/7

Note: Table contains information on elite membership levels only, entry level *Miles & More Member* is excluded for methodological reasons.
Source: austrian.com

In this section we examine various procedures of passengers sorting on the example of three distinct frequent flyer programmes commonly used by passengers from the Czech Republic and Slovakia – the *Miles and More* (Tab. 3), *Flying Blue* (Tab. 4) and *Executive Club* programmes (Tab. 5). Moreover, we consider these programmes to be the stimuli for different spatial strategies and mobile practices of Czech and Slovak passengers as they illustrate, and even support, the uneven spatial accessibility of

airline services. To be more precise, we mean that the hubs of network airlines which enable the entry to the world of frequent flyers are accessible in unlike quality and quantity from the metropolises, such as Prague and Vienna, as compared to other cities in the studied area.

Primarily, the programmes simply separate more mobile customers from the less mobile ones and ostentatiously acknowledge the former as mobile elites. The qualifying conditions which have to be fulfilled to reach a certain elite status in particular loyalty programmes are, however, based on very diverse mobile performances. To reach the second rank of membership, for instance, the airline customers have to undertake only 20 medium long flights to be assigned Silver status in *Flying Blue* programme yet, conversely, they need to perform a considerably higher mobility of 30 flights in *Miles and More* scheme to become Frequent Travellers. *Executive Club* occurs exactly in the middle as the passengers need to conduct 25 flights to be rewarded with the Bronze status. Comparable differences are also to be found between other elite ranks in all examined programmes, nevertheless, we can conclude with certain level of generalisation that the difficulty needed to step up the hierarchy of elite passengers is much more pronounced in *Miles and More* scheme than in the *Flying Blue* and *Executive Club* programmes. The passenger gains the most prominent Platinum status in *Flying Blue* or Gold status in *Executive Club* programme after performing a similar number of business class flights between its European hubs and Tokyo (8.3 or 9.4 flights) but in the *Miles and More* counterpart this number of business class flights on the same route will still be sufficient to qualify only for the lowest elite level, the unadorned Frequent Traveller. To qualify for the HON Circle Member, the highest status in *Miles and More*, a traveller needs to undertake more than 50 business class flights between Frankfurt or Munich and Tokyo at least in two following calendar years. The demands placed on the regular passengers of Lufthansa, Austrian Airlines or LOT are thus significantly higher than on the KLM or British Airways passengers.

The different qualifying conditions of selected frequent flyer programmes interestingly indicate the strategies of respective carriers to influence the social hierarchy of its elite passengers. Whereas the KLM's *Flying Blue* makes all its elite ranks accessible on the number of flights taken, the British Airlines' *Executive Club* excludes its Gold status solely for the members with sufficient amount of tier points, and the *Miles and More* program of Lufthansa Group only allows to qualify for the lowest Frequent Traveller status based on the flown flight segments, its most exclusive HON Circle is even only accessible for Business and First class passengers. To be labelled a frequent flyer, therefore, means something very different in terms and conditions of specific airlines. In order to maintain the exclusivity and elitism of its highest ranks, the airlines seem to carefully adapt the conditions of their loyalty programmes to geographic conditions of their major markets as they seek to cope with the travel behaviour of population in the regions they mainly serve.

Table 4: Flying Blue: selected principles of FFP as a way to diversify travel experience.

		Frequent flyer levels					
		SILVER		**GOLD**		**PLATINUM**	
How to qualify		**100 Experience Points**		**180 Experience Points**		**300 Experience Points** **after 10 consecutive years of Platinum membership conversion to Platinum for Life**	
		The amount of Experience Points (XP) gained is based on the types of the flight and the cabin:					
			domestic flight	medium flight (under 2 K miles)	long flight 1 (2 – 3,5 K miles)	long flight 2 (3,5 – 5 K miles)	long flight 3 (over 5 K miles)
		economy cabin	2 XP	5 XP	8 XP	10 XP	12 XP
		premium economy cabin	4 XP	10 XP	16 XP	20 XP	24 XP
		business cabin	6 XP	15 XP	24 XP	30 XP	36 XP
		first cabin	10 XP	25 XP	40 XP	50 XP	60 XP
Key benefits	**Extra baggage allowance**	1 extra checked baggage item		1 extra checked baggage item		1 extra checked baggage item	
	Seats in Economy Comfort	25% discount		50% discount		Free	
	Seats with extra leg room	25% discount		50% discount		Free	
	Priority services:	SkyTeam Elite status		SkyTeam Elite Plus status		SkyTeam Elite Plus status	
		Priority check-in		SkyPriority check-in		SkyPriority check-in	
		Priority baggage drop-off		SkyPriority baggage drop off		SkyPriority baggage drop off	
		Priority boarding		**SkyPriority boarding**		SkyPriority boarding	
		Exclusive booking service		exclusive booking service		exclusive booking service	
		.		SkyPriority at immigration and security		SkyPriority at immigration and security	
		.		SkyPriority service at ticket offices and transfer desks		SkyPriority service at ticket offices and transfer desks	
		.		SkyPriority baggage delivery		SkyPriority baggage delivery	
		.		Guaranteed seat in Economy		Guaranteed seat in Economy	
		.		Free transfer between Paris CDG and Orly with Le Bus Direct		Free transfer between Paris CDG and Orly with Le Bus Direct	
		.		.		Platinum service line	
	Lounge access	Access to some lounges for a fee on international flights operated by a SkyTeam partner		Free access to lounges for member + 1 guest on international flights, additional guest for a fee		Free access to lounges for member + 1 guest on international flights, additional guest for a fee	

Notes: Table contains information on elite membership levels only, entry level *Explorer* is excluded for methodological reasons.
Source: klm.com

Table 5: Executive Club: selected principles of FFP as a way to diversify travel experience.

			Frequent flyer levels		
			BRONZE	**SILVER**	**GOLD**
How to qualify			**2 flights at least and 300 Tier Points or 25 flights**	**4 flights at least and 600 Tier Points or 50 flights**	**4 flights at least and 1500 Tier Points**
					after 35 000 Lifetime Tier Points conversion to GOLD FOR LIFE
			Tier Points (TP) are earned on scheduled flights (e.g., flight Prague – London in Economy lowest class earns 5 TP, flight London – Tokyo in Economy lowest class earns 20 TP, in Business lowest class 160 TP, in First flexible class 240 TP)		
Key benefits	**Priority check-in**		yes, Business class check-in	yes, Business class check-in	yes, First class check-in
	Fast-track security		No	Yes	Yes
	Priority boarding		yes, Business class boarding	yes, Business class boarding	yes, First class boarding
	Free seat selection		7 days before departure	at time of booking	at time of booking
	Additional baggage allowance		No	yes, 2 pieces of checked baggage, 32 kg per checked bag	yes, an additional free checked bag, 32 kg per checked bag
	Lounge access	**Business lounges**	No	Yes	Yes
		First lounges	No	only when travel in First Class	Yes
		Concorde Room	No	only when travel in First Class	only when travel in First Class
	Use of First Cass check-in desks		No	No	Yes

Note: Table contains information on elite membership levels only, entry level *Blue* is excluded for methodological reasons.
Source: britishairways.com

Lufthansa as the main contributor and originator of the *Miles and More* programme transports much higher share of passengers on shorter domestic and European routes than KLM and British Airways which are used here as representatives of the *Flying Blue* and *Executive Club* schemes. The share of revenue-seat kilometres performed on domestic and European flights together amounts for 27.1% in the case of Lufthansa and only 18.2% in the case of KLM. The real difference between these figures is even bigger if we become aware of the fact that KLM combines revenue seat-kilometres from European and North African market into one broader geographic group (Lufthansa Group Annual Report 2017, KLM 2017 Annual Report). The geographic segmentation of total seat capacity offered on Lufthansa, KLM and British Airways flights is presented in Table 6 and these figures also clearly confirm that the share of domestic and European flights is significantly higher for Lufthansa. The exact number is 72.0% in the case of Lufthansa, 67.3% for KLM and only 63.0% for British Airways. The higher is the share of passengers on shorter flights of specific airlines, the more complicated is their access to higher ranks in respective frequent flyer programmes. As such, Lufthansa appears to have stronger impetus to prevent the access of regular and low profit passengers on shorter routes to the elite circles of loyalty schemes than KLM and British Airways. Interestingly then the majority of frequent flyer loyalty programmes

evidently prefer passengers travelling *less frequently* to more distant destinations in higher cabin classes (thus in more expensive ways) than passengers who fly *more frequently* but on the shorter and less prominent commuter routes.

Table 6: Available seats (in %) on flights to geographic market segments of principal European air carriers representing specific airline alliances: Lufthansa (Star Alliance), KLM (Sky Team) and British Airways (Oneworld)

Flights	Lufthansa	KLM	British Airways
Domestic	21,1	0,0	15,7
Europe	50,9	67,3	47,3
Domestic + European flights	***72,0***	***67,3***	***63,0***
North Africa and Middle East	4,7	2,8	6,0
North America (US and Canada)	8,1	7,6	14,8
Asia	7,7	8,3	7,4
Rest of the world	7,5	14,0	8,8
Total	**100,0**	**100,0**	**100,0**

Source: austrian.com, lufthansa.com, klm.com, britishairways.com, flightstats.com

The diversity of Czech and Slovak frequent flyers is further enriched by the uneven accessibility of the hubs of network airlines and, respectively, of their frequent flyer programmes. The Czech Republic and Slovakia are spatially surrounded from north, west and south by the realms and hubs of airlines belonging to the very demanding *Miles and More* programme – LOT with its hub in Warsaw (Poland), Lufthansa with its hubs in Frankfurt and Munich (Germany) and Austrian Airlines with its hub in Vienna (Austria), all of them members of Star Alliance. All these hubs are geographically much closer to the Czech Republic and Slovakia, and, more importantly, they are much better connected to both countries by direct feeder flights than hubs in Amsterdam (*Flying Blue*) and London (*Executive Club*). Not only there are numerous direct flights from Vienna and Prague but there are direct flights also from secondary airports, for instance there are 12 Lufthansa flights from Brno to Munich, 11 Austrian Airlines flights from Košice to Vienna or 8 LOT flights from Košice to Warsaw (see more details in Tab. 7). The accessibility of the *Flying Blue* and *Executive Club* is considerably lower with direct flight services to Amsterdam and London available only from Vienna and Prague (see again Tab. 7). Of course, the *Flying Blue* scheme is accessible also through the Czech Airlines as the member of SkyTeam alliance, however, the supply of connecting flights of this carrier in Prague is very limited even within the scope of Europe. Therefore, for frequent flyers residing in the Czech Republic and Slovakia the geographic accessibility of *Miles and More* loyalty scheme is much better compared to *Flying Blue* and *Executive Club*, yet the very limited possibility to qualify for its elite membership further diminish the already disadvantaged regular air transport users in the studied area.

Table 7: Geographic accessibility of FF programmes for FFs from the Czech Republic and Slovakia: flights during a week in October 2017 (2nd – 8th October)

Flights by hubbing airline to its hub:		FFP	Flights from:								
airline	hub		PGR	BRQ	OSR	VIE	WAW	BTS	KSC	TAT	total
OS	VIE	Miles and More	32	0	0	.	18	0	11	0	**61**
LO	WAW		32	0	0	14	.	0	8	0	**54**
LH	FRA		34	0	0	42	28	0	0	0	**104**
	MUC		27	12	0	27	21	0	2	0	**89**
KL	AMS	Flying Blue	28	0	0	21	21	0	0	0	**70**
OK	PRG		.	0	6	0	12	6	13	0	**37**
BA	LON	Executive Club	40	0	0	39	13	0	0	0	**92**
	LHR		*33*	*0*	*0*	*34*	*13*	*0*	*0*	*0*	***80***
	LGW		*0*	*0*	*0*	*5*	*0*	*0*	*0*	*0*	***5***
	LCY		*7*	*0*	*0*	*0*	*0*	*0*	*0*	*0*	***7***

Notes: OS – Austrian Airlines, LO – LOT, LH – Lufthansa, KL – KLM, OK – Czech Airlines, BA – British Airways

VIE – Vienna, WAW – Warsaw, FRA – Frankfurt, MUC – Munich, AMS – Amsterdam, PRG – Prague, LON – London (total), LHR – London Heathrow, LGW – London Gatwick, LCY – London City, BRQ – Brno, OSR – Ostrava, BTS – Bratislava, KSC – Košice, TAT – Poprad/Tatry

Sources: austrian.com, lufthansa.com, klm.com, britishairways.com

Naturally, different ranks of frequent flyers also enjoy a different level of elite treatment, and their hierarchy is often spatially observable. Although there are some exclusive airport spaces they all have access to, such as priority check-in, priority boarding and some types of lounges, in a lot of other spaces they are obviously segregated. There are different lounges or specific lounge sections for different types of frequent flyers, they have uneven possibilities to upgrade to a higher cabin class and their seats on board of the airplanes often similarly correspond with their frequent flyer status moving the highest ranks further to the front and to the seats with more leg room. The micro-geography of passengers ranked differently in frequent flyer programmes varies significantly, they experience the spaces of airports and airplanes in differing ways as they move within aeromobile system in different speeds. Some of them move much smoother compared to the lower tiered passengers who have to overcome more spatial and temporal obstacles (e.g., less luxurious lounges or longer queues before check-in and boarding). In no aspect are the frequent flyers a homogenous group of elite passengers, on contrary, they embody an extraordinary internal diversity that is greatly produced and reproduced by the airlines themselves.

Practices of frequent flyers

To support the claim that elite aeromobilities might be far more diverse than traditionally assumed, we now present particular practices and existent spatial patterns of some of the frequent flyers from the Czech Republic and Slovakia. Our interviewees were all male and active professionals, two of the were based in Brno

(Czech Republic) while the other three lived in Košice, Prešov and Bratislava (Slovakia) respectively. Their age ranged from 30 to almost 70 years with professions ranging from IT specialists to senior managerial and academic positions. They reported the membership ranks from the lowest silver Frequent Traveller card with the *Miles and More* Star Alliance programme to the highest Platinum rank For Life with *Flying Blue* of the SkyTeam. Among our interviewees, notable differences became evident already on the schematic drawings of their aeromobile networks. While two of our interviewees travelled to various, often distant, destinations with only a few repeating routes and their aeromobile network spread out more-or-less globally, the other three were regular passengers on one or two fixed routes, mostly within one region, only occasionally flavoured by private flights to holiday destinations. In accordance with the expectations resulting from the flight data supply in section 1 of this paper, on one hand we have the frequent flyers with global networks (left scheme on Fig. 3), who recalled slightly more than 40 individual flights in the past year with worldwide destinations as well as many European cities. They described two or three more frequented routes related to their primary professional interests, the remaining destinations were places where they attended conferences or other meetings as well as holiday places whereas their location tend to be changing rather than repeating. On the other hand, we can recognize a different type of frequent flyers in our group, the commuters with regional networks. They greatly overrun the global frequent flyers in the sheer frequency of flights, yet their routes remain fixed within one region and rather limited to the connections between the place of their residence and their office abroad. On the right scheme on Figure 3 we see the aeromobile network of a weekly commuter from Košice (Slovakia) to Dusseldorf (Germany) who reported more than 160 individual flights in the past year, the other two commuters reported similar but less frequent flying on routes Košice – Vienna – London Heathrow and Vienna – London Heathrow.

As we suggested in the first section, an interesting disparity between both types of frequent flyers is to be noted on the air- port types they use for their aeromobility. The global frequent flyers tend to drive to more distant but busier national hubs (Vienna and Prague), which are still, however, rather small in European comparison. They connect from these hubs to their final destinations mostly via higher ranked European hubs such as Frankfurt, Amsterdam or London. The frequency of regular flight services together with the good organisation of surface traffic around the airport have been mentioned as the key factors for choosing their departure airport. Therefore, Vienna Airport seems to be of strong strategic importance at least for the frequent flyers outside the Prague metropolitan region.

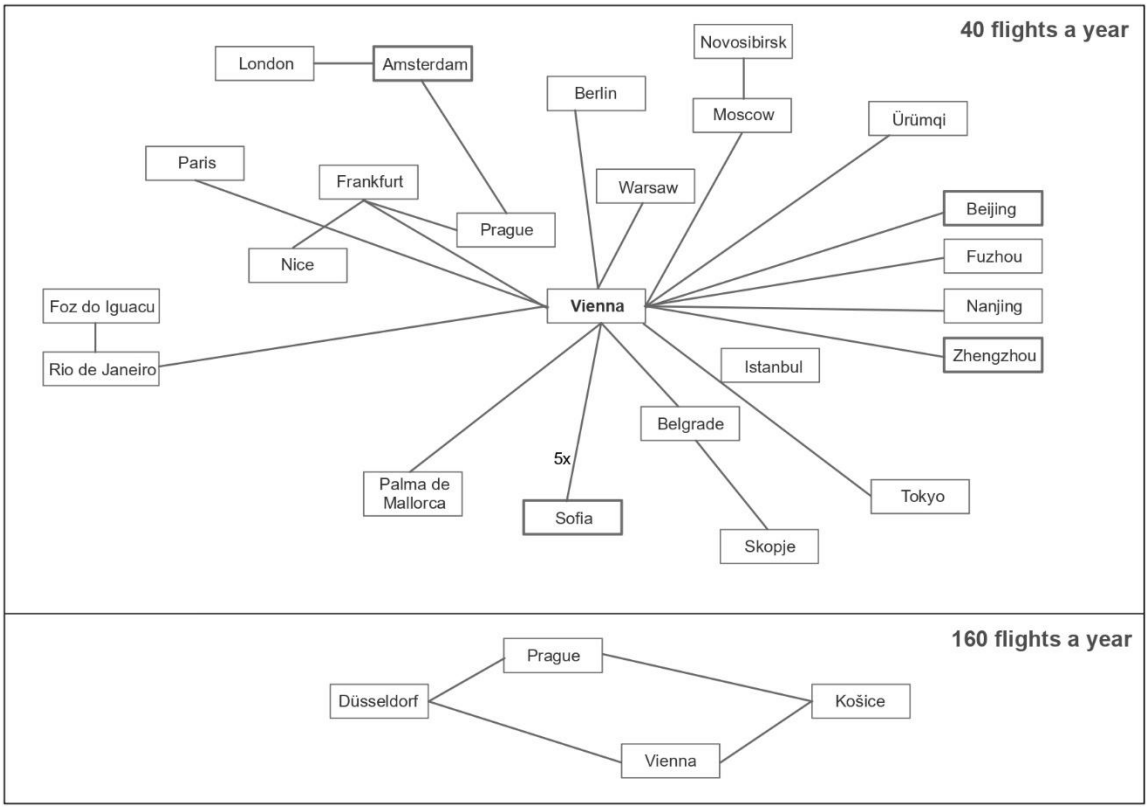

Figure 3: Aeromobile network of a global frequent flyer with around 40 flights a year and a commuter with more than 160 flights a year.

Note: All of the interviewees rejected to sketch their aeromobile networks themselves, therefore the schemes were drawn by the authors following the spatial information provided by the interviewees during the interviewing process and under their direct supervision. All depicted accentuation was expressed by interviewees themselves and only reproduced by the authors in the drawings.

* The depicted accentuation of Vienna airport represents the strong preference expressed by the interviewee who frequently referred to the Vienna airport as his home-base.

> *"Nowadays my basis is in Vienna. And why Vienna? Because I drive to Vienna mostly via Bratislava, which is longer but faster, I leave my car at Park and Drive Edberg. The third floor is the best because there is also the subway station. I buy a return ticket and I go 4 stops on subway to the airport. I usually fly alone and come back to the same place so I can even use that return journey, it's perfect."*
>
> *(68-years old university professor, Brno (CZ), SkyTeam Platinum for Life)*

Whereas the excellent supporting infrastructure at Vienna Airport attracts the Czech and Slovak frequent flyers, the accessibility of Prague Airport has been rated far from ideal. In all our interviews it was articulated very clearly that the only option for frequent flyers to travel to an airport was by car as they value effectiveness and comfort of their travels above all. In this context, both interviewees based in Brno neglected Prague Airport mainly due to the problematic D1 highway connection with frequent maintenance disrupting their journeys. Another push factor seems to be the expensive

parking directly at the airport in Prague with no suitable alternatives. Compared to Vienna, also the flight supply in Prague has been assessed as significantly lower (see Tab. 1). Therefore, if a suitable flight connection to their destination exists but operates only twice or three times a week, they cannot afford to wait for it and thus often opt for a departure from Vienna.

The commuters, however, strongly benefit from the extended network of regional airports, such as Košice and potentially Bratislava, Ostrava, or Brno, from where they can easily and quickly fly with connecting flights of network airlines via smaller hubs (Vienna, Prague, Warsaw) to their end destination which is often another regional airport (see Tab. 2). One interesting exception seems to be the Bratislava region where the close vicinity of Vienna Airport attracts the commuters to travel slightly further to enjoy more frequent flight services to more prestigious airports such as London Heathrow as compared to London Stansted. These commuting frequent flyers admitted that without these regional flight services they will not be able to fulfil their job duties without being forced to change their residence. They do not require extended supporting infrastructure as they mainly reported to use company paid taxi services to travel to and from the airport and even the infrequency of flight services on their routes has not been viewed as problematic. As Salt (2009) noted, for the commuters, the journey itself is a part of their daily work regime, it is often a part of their contract, too. Therefore, the consequences of irregularities which they may experience have been commented on as inconvenient more for the company than for them as employees.

> *"It happened to me that I missed the flight to Košice. I wasn't thrilled, but I always try to see it as a positive thing. I missed a flight, so what? They gave me a hotel, they gave me dinner, they gave me luxurious breakfast, I didn't have to work next day (...). I only wrote to Germany that I am sorry, but I only fly now. I arrived home at 2 p.m. next day and I was smiling. And the airline even gave me 250 euro as a compensation."*
>
> 30-years-old data analyst,
> Prešov (SK), Miles and More Frequent Traveller

The spatial patterns and strategies of all interviewed frequent flyers, in terms of their preferred routes, airports and carriers, to some extent always involved conscious planning to maximise the benefits of their elite status. Entering *the "world of frequent flyers"* and experiencing the benefits that the programmes offer to its elite members often meant a milestone in their air travel planning. Three of these benefits were described as particularly important – the lounge access, the enhanced speed of airport procedures such as check-in or security check and the extra baggage allowance. To make sure they will be able to use them on their journeys they all admitted active negotiations with the providers of their flight tickets being it their employer, a sponsor, or a travel agency. As a result, whenever possible, they rather selected transfer flight of associated airline with a stop at the airport where they can use the lounge than a direct flight with an airline outside their programme. In this context, a very interesting disparity emerged from our interviews – the strong preference of Vienna Airport for

both types of frequent flyers and at the same time the negative attitudes towards the *Miles and More* frequent flyer programme of Lufthansa Group. Both global frequent flyers among our interviewees were elite members of SkyTeam programmes (with KLM, Aeroflot and Czech Airlines as the most used carriers) and simultaneously accorded unsuccessful millage collection with *Miles and More* where they were not able to reach even the second silver rank of the frequent flyer membership. On the other hand, all commuters reported a Frequent Traveller status with *Miles and More* programme due to flying with Austrian Airlines, yet their rank was granted to them thanks to the high number of flight segments whereas the millage level remained rather low (see the qualifying criteria in Table 3). Only one interviewee, a senior contract auditor for an international ICT company, reached the Senator status with *Miles and More* which he admitted to have worked on intentionally by purchasing just enough business class tickets to qualify and thus ensure the privileged, fast and smooth transit in Vienna as well as quick de-boarding at London Heathrow. Without the pricy business class travel, the qualifying conditions were seen as unjust and extremely difficult to reach.

The uneasy access to the *Miles and More* elite membership, which was reflected by our interviewees may, we believe, very well correspond with the argument we made in section 2 of this paper. The hierarchy of its frequent flyer ranks seems to be carefully adapted to the air travel patterns in their main area of interest. As such, the dividing line between the Frequent Traveller and the Senator status seems to represent also a qualitative shift from the regular customer towards the member of an elite circle. According to Thurlow and Jaworski (2006), the terminology of frequent flyer programmes aims to support the perception of upward social mobility thus the labels of their membership ranks gradually escalate the sense of exclusivity, luxury and elitism. In case of the *Miles and More* programme, this point applies by all means to the Senator and HON Circle labels, yet the second rank received a very simple name – the Frequent Traveller. Interestingly, our interviews illustrate that this labelling seems to be very accurate in case of Czech and Slovak frequent flyers. Focusing on the small-scale spatiality of our interviewees within the airports and planes, it is strikingly evident how differently the two types of frequent flyers move, behave, and express their perceived position within the hierarchy of airline passengers.

> *"Sometimes it infuriates me when I see that there are businessmen, people who evidently fly a lot and they are not able to prepare (for the security check). You know, they start to slowly put out their things into the trays to be X-rayed, they are checking their pockets, remembering what they have and where and so on. You need to wait for them because they are chatting, or they are on the phone and then they hurry up. Well, I can do this in 20 seconds, even less, I don't need to show off."*
>
> 30-years old data analyst,
> Prešov (SK), Miles and More Frequent Traveller

The speed and efficiency of the airport procedures and of the journey itself seem to be of a great value to the commuters whereas the global frequent flyers truly enjoy the cosmopolitism of airports and lounges, the recognition of their elite status and the extra comfort, time and treatment that comes with it. Except from lounges where there are spatially segregated sections for different ranks of frequent flyers, they also share many identical spaces at the airports and in the planes, yet they use them differently. In the quotation above a commuter comments on the smoothness of his passage thought the business class security check being often disrupted by the disorganised travellers. The very same process has been described from an opposite point of view by one of the global frequent flyers. He takes his time, enjoys the small talks with the airport staff as he feels entitled for the privilege of being approached individually and respectfully without being rushed. Similarly, all interviewees acknowledged the comfort of lounges in terms of being separated from the masses and hidden from the usual airport hustle. Yet, the global frequent flyers emphasised the variety of food and drinks, the perfect working conditions and, not at least, the possibility of being among the other high-class people that they can exchange ideas with, whereas the commuters valued comfortable chairs to relax, refresh and charge their phones and reported to talk to no-one but other commuters. Perhaps the most obvious moments of mutual otherness have been demonstrated at the business class check-in counters and lounge receptions. Again, the global frequent flyers expressed the need to feel recognized and privileged, to have time for a little chit-chat with *"the girls at the desk"* and they admitted to be very demanding as customers. On the other hand, the commuters rarely demanded to be recognized as privileged as they seem not to feel to be a part of an elite, they simply desired to be recognized as regular customers who, for instance, do not wish to be constantly reminded of the way to their departure gate.

Conclusion

The idea of our paper is to draw attention to the considerable diversity of aeromobile practices among frequent flyers that are often wrongly and stereotypically perceived as a homogenous group of elite passengers. Although there are studies that examine the practices of coping with the frequent business travel (Lassen 2009), the different strategies of collecting bonus points to maintain the frequent flyer status (Gössling and Nilsson 2009) or the stylisation of elites in the frequent flyer programmes (Thurlow and Jaworski 2006), the internal hierarchy of its members related, moreover, with the spatiality of their practices, has been usually marginalized. We, therefore, aim to address this gap and to empirically contribute to the discussion on elite and non-elite mobilities from the Central European point of view.

In our case study we analysed three datasets that provide evidence of an existence of different types of frequent flyers in the Czech Republic and Slovakia and reveal their interesting mobile patterns. Firstly, we focused on the accessibility of flight

connections that have deciding impact on the aeromobile strategies of frequent flyers living apart from the prominent European hubs. The extended network of regional airports cannot meet the needs of the globally active frequent flyers as the connectivity of global destinations remains still very limited. These global frequent flyers therefore use the local airports very rarely and instead work on their own strategies to effectively and comfortably reach the less prominent hubs in the region (Vienna and Prague) via ground transport. The supply of flight routes available for them in the less prominent hubs is namely much broader, yet still far behind the prominent European hubs (Amsterdam, Frankfurt, London), which also affects their spatial behaviour in terms of the higher rate of connection flights they must undertake. Nonetheless, another type of frequent flyers with entirely different spatial aeromobile patterns raises their numbers in the Czech Republic and Slovakia. As explained by Wickham and Vecchi (2010) and Salt (2010), these are mostly junior employees of international corporations that on contrary strongly benefit from the supply of regular flight services between small regional airports, which they use to commute frequently from the place of their residence to their offices abroad.

Secondly, we compared three most common frequent flyer programmes in the given area focusing on the internal hierarchy of their members, namely schemes *Miles and More* (Star Alliance), *Flying Blue* (SkyTeam) and *Executive Club* (Oneworld). Frequent flyer programmes are remarkable instruments of social distinction, stylisation, and elitism among airline passengers (Thurlow and Jaworski 2006). With a closer look, the popular unifying figure of a frequent flyer suddenly becomes a complicated category with numerous possible ranks, names and privileges differed by the airline and the geography of its flight services. The most common hierarchy of frequent flyers into three distinctive ranks interestingly determines their access to several secluded VIP spaces whereas some of them they share (priority check-in, fast track) but in others they are strictly spatially differentiated (various lounges or distinctive sections of lounges, airplane seats). Moreover, setting the criteria to reach a certain status in frequent flyer programmes the airlines can actively influence the hierarchy of its frequent passengers and potentially exclude certain types of travellers from the highest ranks as evidenced by the exclusion of commuters from Senator and HON Circle statuses in *Miles and More* scheme in this article. Finally, and importantly, membership in a specific frequent flyer programme has a power to substantially influence the spatial strategies of individual passenger resulting in his choice of particular airline, departure and transit airport, flight, route etc. The Czech Republic and Slovakia are surrounded by the realm of Star Alliance airlines and thus, from a geographic point of view, their *Miles and More* programme is better accessible for local passengers than the other two schemes.

And lastly, we analysed the transcriptions of five semi-structured pilot interviews with frequent flyers from the Czech Republic and Slovakia to capture the first-hand descriptions of their aeromobile practices and spatial strategies. Here we encountered

the global frequent flyers of the highest ranks that travel to various worldwide destinations, highly demanding of the privileges they feel to be entitled for as VIP passengers, especially on the plenitude of time, comfort, individuality, and recognition of them as elite. On contrary, a very specific type of regional frequent flyers occurred in our interviews – the commuters that greatly overrun the global frequent flyers in the sheer frequency of flights, but their routes remain fixed and are usually limited to the place of residence and the place of work often within one region. Despite the extraordinary frequency of their air travel, the regional frequent flyers commonly occupy the lowest ranks in the frequent flyer programmes and their self-identity rarely reflects any sights of elitism; instead of an elite treatment they prefer efficiency and speed and expect to be remembered as regulars that are familiar with the airport procedures. This case study thus demonstrates that the passengers' spatialities are too complex to be unequivocally summed up in terms of 'miles' and loyalty programs and that speaking of more or less mobile passengers is often far from the colourful diversity of the world we live in and move within.

8 CONCLUSIONS

This dissertation is the result of my ten-year-long engagement with geographies of (Czech and Slovak) elite frequent flying during the course of my doctoral studies. I began this project with the deductive intention of 'proving' the existence of a highly aeromobile part of society in the Czech Republic and Slovakia (since many discussions with my first supervisor at the time revolved around the question of whether we could even speak of aeromobility in our region, since he understood aeromobility in terms of a social norm) and 'proving' that there was no such thing as a non-place in relation to airports in the context of elite frequent flying. Over the years, it has developed into a predominantly inductive attempt to find out what shapes the relationships of (Czech and Slovak) elite frequent flyers to airports and what forms these relationships can take, with a rather open-ended result. Qualitative research, by its very nature, can never be truly finished. There is always more to discover, there is always deeper to go in understanding a given phenomenon and its particular facets. This dissertation, therefore, is not the end of my work on this topic, nor is it the end in the sense of a definitive 'solution' to a given research problem. Rather, it can be seen as a report that summarises the current state of my understanding and thinking about these complex postmodern relationships between people and places.

There is, nonetheless, one answer that I feel comfortable giving. There is an enormous variety and variability, the 'immanent potentiality' (Whatmore 2002: 161) of the complicated entanglements involved in the making of these variously hybridised relationships. Trivial as it may sound, failure to acknowledge this hybridity can (and often does) lead to the production and reproduction of one-sided universal claims that rarely do justice to the multiple realities of human experience of the world and its places. Some of these entanglements and their particular elements have been explored in this thesis, while many others have been omitted. My focus has been on lines of enquiry that were analytically (and theoretically) interesting to me, but very likely another researcher on the same topic would have produced very different accounts. For example, I have focused on people, on how elite frequent flyers produce their geographical worlds in interaction with their environment, whereas other researchers might focus more on the materialities, socialities or politics of place, or they might seek to maintain the uncompromising equilibrium between both sides of this relationship, looking at it from above. Similarly, I focused on the discovery of what has already been created, the 'made' (Philo 2005), whereas others might have focused more on the process of 'making'; I was more interested in the multiplicity of possible outcomes, the patterns, whereas others might have delved more deeply into particular hybrids. My choice of individual methods could also have been replaced by other sets of qualitative or quantitative tools and might have yielded different insights. And the list goes on. As Whatmore writes, "hybrid geographies ... are inescapably partial, provisional and incomplete" (2002: 7), but that does not make them any less relevant.

In my dissertation project, I have made a number of such discoveries that I consider relevant to geographical research on highly aeromobile lifestyles, airports and postmodern people-place relations. By focusing on aeromobility as a lifestyle, on the crucial role that frequent flying plays in the performance of lifestyles that provide a source of meaning and a sense of personal identity for their adherents, I have shown how misleading it can be to base assumptions of lifestyle aeromobility solely on the sheer frequency of individual flying or on the institutionally framed (assumed) elite identity. Among the research participants, regional commuters tended to score very highly in terms of individual flights, but the hypermobility of their professional lives did not extend to the private sphere, nor did it translate into positive attitudes towards flying or an aeromobile elite identity. Ironically, the most frequent flyers in this research were often the least aeromobile in terms of lifestyle choices and the least elite in relation to flying. The privileged airport spaces to which they had access through their elite membership in frequent flyer programmes were perceived by them as a job benefit rather than a source of elite identity. Indeed, they often distanced themselves from such aeromobile elitism.

Conversely, other respondents who saw themselves as the cosmopolitan aeromobile elite often complained that frequent flyer lounges were overcrowded with too many ordinary people who disturbed their sense of exclusivity. Some airlines operating in markets with intensive regional business travel have responded to these tensions by reorganising the structure of their loyalty schemes (as in the case of the Lufthansa Group and its Miles and More programme) to exclude commuters and other less profitable but similarly active passengers from the higher tiers. Nonetheless, their lowest rank, 'Frequent Traveller', which by its very name implies a non-elite identity of its members (compared to the more honourable Senators or the HON Circle), cannot be associated solely with non-elite regulars either, as there were also examples in this research that showed a strong elite identity within this rank, based mainly on less frequent Business Class flights. Thus, neither the sheer number of flights nor elite membership in frequent flyer programmes can be taken as a measure or guarantee of a highly aeromobile lifestyle.

Who we call aeromobile may seem like a harmless bit of terminology, but the impact of such decisions can be very real. If we propose strategies, measures, or solutions to the aeromobile elites, for example to improve the accessibility of regional airports to better meet their needs, or to reduce the practice of frequent flying in our region, without being aware of these significant differences, we are much more likely to fail in our objectives and end up in mutual frustration. But if we know that we can (and must) distinguish between very different practices and very different needs, we can better target our proposals and achieve better results. Taking the example of environmental objectives such as the reduction of frequent flying, we could very effectively target the practice of aeromobile commuting from peripheral regions first, even in a form of our call for top-down regulation, as these travellers are very likely to

reduce or stop flying if they are offered an alternative way of doing their work. In this respect, a follow-up study to this research would be interesting to assess the impact of pandemic bans and look for possible indications of future solutions.

The contrasting practices and lifestyles of elite frequent flyers, and by elite, I mean now all travellers who traverse privileged airspaces accessible through their high-level membership in frequent flyer programmes, without questioning the other meanings of the word, inevitably translate into their very different relationships to airports in general and specific airports in particular. The main line of critique of both the humanistic place(less)ness and Augé's supermodern non-places highlights precisely the over-generalising tendencies of these ideas, which fail to acknowledge very diverse ways in which different sites can be experienced by different people, be they, in the case of airports, the pilots, taxi drivers, holidaymakers, excited children, immigrants, refugees, homeless people or members of neighbouring communities (Merriman 2009, Cresswell 2006, Gefou-Madianou 2010, Abranches 2013, Triebel 2015). In this dissertation, I build on these critiques and extend them to the context of elite aeromobilities where the internal diversity of experiences remains still largely unquestioned.

Moreover, I challenge the tendency to think of placelessness and non-placeness as merely a lack of inherent qualities of the material and social environment of airports to which their users simply react (Augé 1995, Relph 1976). I paid particular attention to this during my (auto)ethnographic fieldwork at London Heathrow Airport and later confronted my observations in interviews. In many cases, contemporary airports deliberately disrupt the universal sameness of their terminals and attempt to create a unique sense of place, their own 'airport atmospherics' (Urry et al. 2016), by materialising their history or geographical specificity, and these efforts sometimes achieve their aims, if the traveller has time to notice and appreciate them, as many interviewees confirmed. Yet, especially in the context of very intensive routine travel, they are often completely ignored. Similarly, while the airport environment implies ephemerality, solitude and automatic wordless interactions through the signs and machines, as Augé (1995) so famously described, in the context of frequent elite passage this is often replaced by the stability of repeated similar experiences, belonging within the closed circuits of loyalty schemes or togetherness and social exchange within a co-mobile community. So, it is the people, their embodied dynamic interactions with the airport environment and the meanings they ascribe to its particular locations that have the decisive impact.

To my surprise, when I asked the research participants in interviews if they had ever experienced the feeling of not knowing where they were at the airport, of being in no place in particular (Chambers 1990), in a kind of universal, indistinct, placeless place, I got far more positive answers than I had expected. And when I did get a negative response, it was often commented on in terms of having a good sense of orientation. A significant link emerged between the positive responses and commuting practices,

confirming my observations at Heathrow, which I had initially interpreted in terms of the predominantly sedentary orientation of commuters, for whom the business trip was an unpleasant routine activity to be survived with a resting place, their home, in mind. Why should they care about airports? There seemed to be nothing significant about airports for them. Yet, there were similar responses from variously active globetrotters who enjoyed flying and generally enjoyed being in airports, so I looked for what connected them. Although their descriptions of such situations were brief, they all referred to micro-moments that occurred after they had travelled very intensively, after several fast-paced transfers between different locations, different airports, different hotels, different time-zones, leading to their physical and mental exhaustion. They often experienced these moments of placelessness immediately after waking up from their nap in the lounge or in their hotel room.

This has already been described by Lassen (2009), who used almost identical empirical examples of waking up in a hotel room and wondering where the hell I am to illustrate how the corridors through which aeromobile knowledge workers routinely travel, including airports, are like non-places - impersonal, indistinguishable, identical. But what if this has more to do with the physical and mental state of exhaustion from fast-paced travelling than with the materialities of these spaces? Anderson (2015) or Cohen and Gössling (2015) argue that long-distance high-speed (aero)mobility disrupts the humans and their competence in understanding and dealing with the world around them, and they suggest replacing jet lag with a more holistic sense of temporary 'travel disorientation'. Further research is, therefore, needed to explore such possible links between what is commonly described as non-placeness of airports (Lassen 2009, Kesselring 2009) and the exhaustion of highly aeromobile travellers, in order to avoid reproducing popular metaphors in situations where a much more nuanced understanding (and perhaps also a more appropriate metaphor) is needed. Moreover, this echoes Bissell's (2015) arguments that the mutability of bodies on the move, such as exhaustion, illness, or jet lag, alters bodily capacities to move, sense, perceive and attend, which can dynamically transform even the strongest 'virtual infrastructures of habit' and thus the lived experience of place. In this dissertation I have focused on hybrid entanglements of influences that have been rather stable over the horizon of several years - be it lifestyle, individual aeromobile patterns and embodied mobile practices, the regional context of airport accessibility and connectivity, the internal hierarchy of frequent flyer programmes, and the segregation of elites from unprivileged masses, habitual structures and familiarity of frequently used passages, uniqueness of particular airport terminals and multiple intentional placemaking efforts, the context of departure, transit and arrival, cultural stylisation of airlines and airspaces, emotional attachment to the cultural region or city where the airport is located, etc. - producing rather (provisionally) stable constellations of meaning. However, momentary physical discomfort and other ephemeral influences

can overturn these stable meanings and produce similarly ephemeral, differently hybridised constellations of meaning that would also merit further investigation.

On the other hand, there may be extremely stable, even predetermining influences at play in the way that individual people view the world and ascribe meaning to places, which I personally find most appealing, as it may nail on the head at least one binary (and its transgression) elaborated in this thesis. As Cloke and Johnston (2005) argue, binary thinking, as the most extreme form of categorisation, is an inherent, even inevitable, way in which humans simplify the world in order to survive in it. But the ways in which we categorise and make sense of the world can be very different, not just because of our different experiences, not just because of the different cultural environments in which we live and move (although that certainly plays a big part). Our minds do not work in the same way either. Types of different personalities have been described as far back as the 1920s by Carl Gustav Jung and developed by many other psychologists to explain why some people naturally perceive, think and work in a systematic way, while others resist rigid structures and try to transcend them, looking for new patterns in apparent chaos, or why some people's basic needs revolve around stability, predictability and the boundedness of clear (unquestioned) categories, while others strive for change, progress and transformation. In my interviews with elite frequent flyers, I often sensed this underlying diversity of worldviews, of values created and cherished to satisfy these basic needs of our different brains rather than our different experiences (although one inevitably translates into the other). While all regional commuters, despite their hypermobility, maintained varyingly intense but still predominant sedentary focus, some globally active research participants' expressions suggested that their tropophilic needs preceded (and caused) their frequent flying. When we are not constrained by external circumstances, we tend to choose a lifestyle that best suits our needs and values, be it stability or change, or a mixture of both.

The main message I took away from this flirtation with psychology was the same one that advocates of engaged pluralism in geographical research, of 'hybrid geographies' (Kwan 2004, Sui and DeLyser 2012), try to get across. Contrasts are inevitable and necessary; contrasts can be productive. The problem with binary thinking, as Cloke and Johnston (2005) put it, is that it usually involves 'us' thinking we are superior to 'them' and the difference, the contrast, becomes the potential basis for conflict, humiliation and oppression. We do not all have to seek pluralistic research agendas, as Sui and DeLyser (2014) argue, but we can all contribute to building the "overlapping cultures of respect" within geography (Barnes and Sheppard 2010: 206) and "avoid dismissing out of hands works grounded in traditions not our own" (Sui and DeLyser 2014: 303). When I first started looking at humanist interpretations of place, I often got the reaction from other geographers that this was 'outdated', that it had been 'overcome'. And I always wondered how it is that we dismiss such perfectly accurate descriptions of sedentary worlds, when these worlds are (still) very real for a significant part of the world's population. Far too many people see the world as

organised in terms of bounded places (no matter that this is usually an illusion, for them it is real), while looking suspiciously at the mobile forces of globalisation and the mobile 'others' of the kind described by the humanists, to dismiss their accounts as 'outdated'. While we rightly reject the totalising idealism of their claims to one universal truth, why are we so keen to throw out the baby with the bathwater, as Cresswell (2006) has put it? People often think and act in binary ways, as Cloke and Johnston (2005) argue, and these same people can also think and act across these binaries without realising or admitting it. Recognising all accounts that focus on both extremes of social reality, as well as their hybridisation, as equally valuable and equally important may be, as many argue, the best way to tackle the complex problems of our time.

This dissertation is therefore a beginning rather than an end. I have found great inspiration in the 'geographies of hope', as Braun (2005) so succinctly captures my main impression from reading Sarah Whatmore's work. As he writes, among the many contributions Whatmore's work makes to geographical thought, the most important might be that "it teaches us to once again believe in the world and its possibilities, to once again imagine and give birth to new modes of existence" (Braun 2005: 840-841). In her 'hybrid geographies' she marvels at the ongoing fabrication of the world and she marvels in the world's potential and futures that are not already given by the past. I found similar hints of hope for a respectful future within geography that might not be so difficult to achieve in later accounts of hybrid geographies as engaged pluralism (Kwan 2004, Sui and DeLyser 2012). Both, in fact, place great emphasis on micro-practices, on patiently working out real-world practices (Whatmore 2002), and on enacting respectful research practices (Kwan and Schwanen 2016), which can end up being surprisingly useful agents of change. In this sense, my dissertation can be seen as one such micro-practices. Contrasting (not opposing!) contemporary tendencies to loudly voice our concerns about a sustainable future, pointing our fingers at the 'enemies' and demanding that they quickly change their high-carbon lifestyles, while mainly receiving nothing but their fingers pointing back at us, in this dissertation I have offered such a patient elaboration of the practices of Czech and Slovak elite frequent flyers in the hope of deepening our understanding of their lifeworlds and their geographies. After all, as one of the main principles of the psychology of problem solving states: "First seek to understand, then to be understood".

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LIST OF APPENDICES

Appendix 1

Contribution of all authors to the presented articles

Article 1 (Chapter 4)

ZUSKÁČOVÁ, V. (2020): How we understand aeromobility: Mapping the evolution of a new term in mobility studies. Transfers, 10, 2/3, 4–23. (indexed in WOS in the year of publication, without IF)

Veronika Zuskáčová conceived the idea, carried out the analysis and wrote the maniscript.

Article 2 (Chapter 5)

ZUSKÁČOVÁ, V. (2023): 'Where are you?':(Auto) ethnography of elite passage and (non)-placeness at London Heathrow Airport. Mobilities. https://doi.org/10.1080/17450101.2023.2171805. (IF_{2022} = 2,8).

Veronika Zuskáčová conceived the idea, carried out the analysis and wrote the maniscript.

Article 3 (Chapter 6)

ZUSKÁČOVÁ, V., SEIDENGLANZ, D. (2019): Elite diversities in practice: The case of frequent flyers in the Czech Republic and Slovakia. Geographia Polonica, 92, 3, 309–329. (indexed in WOS in the year of publication, without IF)

Veronika Zuskáčová conceived the idea, carried out the qualitative analysis of interviews and wrote respective (third) subchapter. Daniel Seidenglanz carried out quantitative analysis, both authors shaped its interpretations, both authors conributed also to the theoretical framework. Veronika Zuskáčová summarised the findings and wrote the conclusions.

Article 4 (Chapter 7)

ZUSKÁČOVÁ, V. (2023): Hybrid geographies of frequent flying. Airports as meaningful places in the elite aeromobile experience of Czech and Slovak frequent flyers. Manuscript under review in Social and Cultural Geography (IF_{2022}= 2,888).

Veronika Zuskáčová conceived the idea, carried out the analysis and wrote the manuscript.

Appendix 2 - Anonymised table of respondents

Identificator	Age	Gender (M/F)	FF status (airline)	Flights per year	Usual residence	Nationality	Date of interview	Location of interview	Duration of interview
Interviewee A	68	male	Platinum For Life (Skyteam)	40	Brno	CZ	25.07.2016	in person	1:15:36
Interviewee B	30	male	FTL Miles and More (OS)	160	Prešov	SK	19.06.2016	in person	1:28:09
Interviewee C	33	male	FTL Miles and More (LH)	68	Brno	CZ	18.11.2019	in person	1:15:31
Interviewee D	31	male	Privilege Club Silver (QR)	46	Brno	CZ	25.3.2020	Skype	0:43:30
Interviewee E	30	male	Elite Plus Miles and Smiles (TK)	42	Bratislava	SK	8.12.2019	Skype	1:28:32
Interviewee F	44	male	OK Plus Gold (OK) / Elite Miles and Smiles (TK) / Emirates Skywards Gold (EK) / Privilege Club Gold (QR) / Executive Club Silver (BA)	120	Košice	SK	21.4.2020	Messenger Call	1:57:24
Interviewee G	39	male	Gold MilesAndSmiles (TK)	100	Bratislava	SK	23.4.2020	Messenger Call	0:54:48
Interviewee H	23	male	KLM Platinum (Sky Team Elite Plus) / BA Silver (One World Sapphire) / Latam Black Signature (One World Emerald) / Aegean Gold (Star Alliance Gold)	201	Brno	CZ	29.4.2020	Skype	0:55:40
Interviewee I	46	male	Delta Platinum	50	Praha	CZ	30.4.2020	Skype	1:03:22
Interviewee J	39	male	Platinum KLM / Gold TK / Platinum Finnair	74	Praha	CZ	1.5.2020	Skype	1:48:43
Interviewee K	50	male	Delta Silver	32	Praha	CZ	5.5.2020	Skype	1:21:05
Interviewee L	52	female	FTL Miles and More (OS)	72	Nitra	SK	8.5.2020	phone	0:48:06
Interviewee N	30	male	Flying Blue Gold (KLM/AF) / FTL Miles and More (LH)	50	Košice	SK	14.5.2020	Skype	1:42:07
Interviewee O	33	male	Miles+Bonus Gold (Aegean) / FLT Miles and More (OS)	46	Bratislava	SK	15.5.2020	Messenger Call	1:42:26
Interviewee P	41	male	Senator Miles and More (LH) / Flying Blue Platinum (AF)	72	Praha	CZ	18.5.2020	Skype	0:46:53
Interviewee R	47	male	Senator Miles and More (LH)	33	Bratislava	SK	19.5.2020	Skype	1:59:48
Interviewee S	53	male	Executive Club Silver (BA)	44	Bratislava	SK	20.5.2020	Skype	1:15:25
Interviewee T	36	female	FTL Miles and More (LH)	70	Košice	SK	25.5.2020	phone	0:53:58
Interviewee U	30	male	Miles+Bonus Gold (Aegean) / FLT Miles and More (LH)	86	Praha	CZ	29.5.2020	Messenger Call	1:24:15
Interviewee V	27	male	FTL Miles and More (OS)	56	Košice	SK	1.6.2020	Google Meet	1:06:37
Interviewee X	33	male	FTL Miles and More (OS)	100	Košice	SK	5.6.2020	phone	0:53:21

Appendix 3

Pilot Interviews 2016 - Structure

Frequent flyer programmes

What is the story from your first flight to becoming a frequent flyer?

Which airline(s) do you have a status frequent flyer card with? How many status cards do you have with different airlines? What is your current status with each of them?

How did it feel to get your first (and every other) status card? Have you noticed any change in the quality of your travels?

Air travel and lifestyle

Is flying your preferred mode of transport? How often do you typically travel outside your home city by any means of transport (where, purpose, mode of travel)?

Is flying related to your work? Do you fly in your leisure time?

How do you spend your time on the plane? Do you enjoy flying?

Do you have a favourite airport, airline, or lounge? Do you like the airport environment? Do you enjoy the company of other frequent flyers? Do you socialise with them? Do you recognise faces or names of airline or airport staff? Do airline or airport staff recognise and greet you?

Recent travel history, places of interest

Please try to draw a schematic network of your air travel over the past year.

Tell me about your last flight (round trip).

- Did you know the airports through which you were travelling? How did you move through the airport(s)? Do you remember what you were thinking as you were departing (changing planes, arriving)? Did you notice anything interesting along the way?
- Do you like the place of your destination (the city)? Do you know the city and its surroundings? What is the city like? Do you have friends, family, or other important people there? Do you have any favourite places in the city?

- Would you recognise the airport(s) you have travelled through in the photo? Would you be able to show its location on a map of the city and surrounding area? Do you like the airport(s)? What is each airport like? Do you have favourite places in each airport? Do you recognise people there?
- When you travelled through this particular airport, where would you say you were? Was it already in the city or were you still travelling or something else?
- How did you arrive (at your destination, at home)? Was anyone waiting for you at the airport? How did you get from the airport? What route did you take? Did you notice anything interesting on the way?
- Have you ever experienced a sense of placelessness (or timelessness)?

Personal details:

Age, gender, usual residence (city), profession

Appendix 3

Interviews 2019/2020 - Structure

1. Spoke travellers

   In which FFPs are you registered, and in which do you have elite status? Can you remember how long you have been a frequent flyer? In your opinion, has achieving elite status made a difference to the quality of your travel, comfort, staff attitude, etc.? In what ways has elite status made a difference to you?

   Try to recall all airports visited in the last 12 months, including transfers (if not provided prior to interview). Are any of these trips regular/frequent? What was the purpose of your travel (work, holiday, visiting relatives, etc.)? How many individual flights did you take last year?

   How do you plan your itinerary (departure and arrival airports, transfers)? What factors most influence your choice of route and airline? To what extent is your FF status involved in this planning? Is any other authority (employer, sponsor, etc.) involved in your planning?

   Which airports in our region do you use most often for departures and arrivals? What influences your choice of departure (and arrival) location in our region? Do you have any preferences in this regard (length of flight or transfer, departure/arrival time, price, lounge, ground transport options - distance, motorway, parking, etc.)?

   How do you get to and from the airport in our region? Do you consider the need for and risks of ground transportation in your travel plans? Have there been any problems with transport to the airport in the last year?

   How would you rate the accessibility of the airports in our region? How would you rate their overall facilities and flight connections? Do you feel disadvantaged compared to frequent flyers/colleagues from other regions because our region does not have a major hub (or anything else)?

2. Airport as a place

   Can you think of any airport(s) that you would say you have an emotional attachment to? Do you have a favourite airport(s) and/or a disliked airport(s)? Would you recognise this airport in a picture (outside, inside)? If so, by what?

   We will choose one or more specific routes (favourite or most used):

Try to describe where you feel geographically present when you are at the departure, transit, and arrival airports? Is this feeling more influenced by the geographical location of the airport or by the sequence of your journey (a place along the way)? Do you feel present in a country, a continent, or a city? Or, conversely, have you experienced a sense of being completely detached from geographical space and time at the airport (the so-called sense of placelessness and timelessness)? Does this sense of where you are change in any way on the way there and back?

When you depart from our region, where would you say your journey begins (starting from home, airport, other)? Where do you feel like you are leaving?

When you arrive at the airport, do you feel that you are in a certain place or that you are still travelling? When do you feel you have finished your journey/arrived at your destination? Is there usually someone waiting for you at the airport?

When you are at the airport, do you perceive borders/crossings in any context?

Do you ever notice local, national, or other specific features in airports (representation of a city or country, temperature, humidity, smell, language and signs, composition of people, their appearance and behaviour...)? Do you notice any specific features in the lounges you visit? Are these features the same or different from those of the airport as a whole? Have you ever felt that you were in a different country (e.g., the home country of the airline whose lounge you used) from the country in which the airport is located?

3. <u>Personal details</u>

   Gender, age, occupation, nationality, usual residence (city)

(Do you know someone who meets our criteria for research participation?

Are you interested in the results of this research?)