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“Public Transport as Public Space”



Call for Papers

PUTSPACE CONFERENCE

Location: Halles Saint Géry, Brussels, Belgium

Dates: 20.4.2022 – 22.4.2022



The Event

The conference *Public Transport as Public Space* is organised within PUTSPACE (www.putspace.eu), a research project led by academics in Tallinn, Leipzig, Turku and Brussels. Both the conference and project explore **what makes public transport a type of public space, and for whom.**

As public transport continues to be explored primarily by engineers and economists, its publicness remains understudied. Yet, public transport embraces intense and intimate sites for encountering cultural diversity, facilitating social integration and negotiating public space. It reflects political ideologies, social relations and conflicts, allowing for the reproduction or resistance to configurations of power. Put simply, public transport is at the frontline of contesting what is, can be, or should be public in the city.

The conference aims to gather diverse contributions that **humanise and politicise** knowledge about public transport by exploring narratives, experiences and contestations of public transport.

Call for Contributions

The conference is more than a typical academic event. Alongside academic researchers, it will gather public officials, policy experts, activists and artists. It embraces roundtables, panel discussions, workshops, art interventions and academic presentations. We welcome contributors from diverse fields related to the humanities and social sciences, including (but not limited to) history, anthropology, cultural studies, literary studies, political sciences, geography and spatial/urban planning. In all the sessions the use of visual materials and presentations is strongly encouraged over "classic" PowerPoint slides.

We are currently looking for **contributions to seven open sessions** organised at the conference. Please find the list of sessions below.

If interested, please submit a short description of your contribution (250-300 words), specifying its format (e.g. paper, presentation, video, audio), and including a short bio (max. 150 words) **by 10th December 2021**. Please mention the short title of the session to which you are submitting in the subject of your email.

Your proposal should be sent to the session organisers as well as putspace.conference@gmail.com.

For more information about the event, see the conference website (www.putspace.eu/brussels-2022).

Acknowledgments

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Sessions

It is now possible to submit paper proposals to the following seven sessions. More detailed description of each session can be found below.

1. The Bus as Space of Encounters
2. Gender Issues in Transport
3. Postcolonial Representations of Public Transport
4. Public Transport Meets Autonomous, Connected, Cooperative Mobilities
5. Surveillance, Public Transport and Public Space
6. The Chosen Few: Picturing Passengers
7. Representations of Tram Closures

Remember that your proposal should be sent to the session organisers **as well as putspace.conference@gmail.com**.

1. The Bus as a Space of Encounters

Short Title: Bus Encounters

In a qualitative research project relating to the mobility practices of families located in socially vulnerable neighborhoods in Sweden, the bus has surfaced as pivotal in and for the families' daily life. Interviews have been carried out with families (adults and children) in neighborhoods in three Swedish middle-sized municipalities. For many families living in socially vulnerable areas, the bus is vital as an everyday mode of transport. Many are employed in in societally vital functions (care, transport and education) in the public sector. Further, many families choose schools outside their neighborhoods, which entail travel by bus to school. The residents are dependent on public transport for commuting to work or to upper secondary schooling. In this presentation we will analyse their experiences of the bus as a stigmatized space, but also a space that enables new spheres.

During the pandemic, the bus quickly became a stigmatized space in public debates and have been the subject for various restriction. Young people in general were accused of free-riding and riding the bus "for fun and amusement", thus contributing to crowding and infection. Simultaneously, the informants live in areas perceived as violent and unsafe. We seek to investigate how the research participants negotiate the double stigmatization of their neighborhood and their primary mode of transport. Which mobility strategies are employed? What are the discursive and practical implications for how public transport is perceived and used?

During this thematic session/workshop we wish to discuss and engage with theories of equality and mobility justice and transport poverty by exploring what a bus is for the users. By using visual and textual material, the aim of the workshop is to creatively assemble the material into e.g. a short film, personas, a map, a collage or mind map, etc. This "product" can then be used to display the multitude of different everyday experiences of what a bus is in the bus riders' perspective, and thus counter hegemonic discourses on public transport and its users. It can also be used to bring forward the everydayness and relationality of mobility, hence confronting technocratic, fragmented and idealized/top down versions of reality.

Session organisers: Dag Balkmar, Associate Professor, Örebro University, dag.balkmar@oru.se; Malin Henriksson, Senior Researcher, Swedish National Road and Transport Research Institute, malin.henriksson@vti.se; Tanja Joelsson, Associate Professor, Stockholm University, tanja.joelsson@buv.su.se

2. Gender Issues in Public Transport. Is Public Transport a Women-friendly Place?

Short Title: Gender Issues

Globally, women make up the majority of public transport passengers. Due to a frequent lack of choice some research calls them PT captive users. In households with one car available women do not usually have priority in using it and therefore, they need to look for alternatives. On the other hand, several studies reveal that women do not share a general masculine transport preference oriented to a car and argue women's higher willingness to travel in public transportation, even despite having access to private vehicle.

Women also engage in more daily trips and the proportion of personal mobility exceeds occupational travel. Care duties fall more often on women and therefore require more trips. In particular, those consisting in accompanying children or seniors, as well as those related to household errands. It means that women spend long times a day on board and waiting at the stops.

On the other hand, in particular contexts women are a clear minority of PT users, e.g. they are only one-third of passengers in Delhi (India). The genesis of this state of affairs certainly lies in the traditional gendered division of power, tasks and spaces in a patriarchal society. Women may have limited mobility and consequently reduced access to opportunities. It should be considered whether the low attendance of women in public transport makes some women feel that they belong to this place, so they avoid it. The result is a vicious circle.

In one case or another, we are looking for answers to the following questions: How do women experience these particular public spaces and mode of transport? Can they rely on this service to meet their mobility needs? Do they feel safe at every stage of the trip?

We would like to gather researchers from different fieldworks (anthropologists, ethnographers, geographers, historians, sociologists, urbanists, etc.), activists and artists from different geographical contexts to hear their part of the story. Presentations or artistic interventions can relate to a wide range of concepts eg. travel behavior, safety, perceptions, satisfaction, accessibility, social inclusion-exclusion viewed in context of gender power relations in public transport as a public space.

We propose several topics to be addressed in individual interventions or to be discussed in a debate. However, we are open to suggestions from participants.

- ***Ethnographical perspective*** – women as collective transport users. Past experiences and perceptions on shared and contested spaces
- ***Historical perspective*** – Has the way women experience public transport changed over time?
- ***Gendered transit etiquette, civility and civic values*** – own behavior and perception of the attitude of others
- ***Transit and childbearing, spaces of freedom and captivity***
- ***Women-only passenger cars*** – are they a stop-groping game changer or an expression of the strengthening of sexual segregation?
- ***She rides for free*** – can a zeroing cost policy be a lifeline for women from specific contexts or particular social segments?
- ***Queer transit mobilities*** – LGTBQ experiences of collective transit spaces

Session organisers: Monika Maciejewska, Vrije Universiteit Brussel, monika.maciejewska@vub.be; Oriol Marquet, Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, oriol.marquet@uab.cat

3. Postcolonial Representations of Public Transport

Short Title: Poco PT

A central aspect in the concept of the public space is the idea of “mixing with others” (Bodnar 2015, 2093). Likewise, as a *mobile* public space, public transport is a site for ephemeral encounters between strangers (Wilson 2011; Koefoed et al. 2017). The understanding of the public transport as a setting for transcultural encounters resonates with postcolonial critical discussions and makes public transport a relevant topic for postcolonial inquiry. By enabling “interactions between different segments of society”, public transport produces social differences (Paget-Seekins & Tironi 2016, 177), segregation (Rokem & Vaughan 2017), and experiences of racial hostility (Purifoye 2015, 286), but it can also be a site where the “workings of multicultural intimacies” (Wilson 2011, 634) end up generating a “cosmopolitan canopy” (Anderson 2004, 15).

The meanings of public transport – just as any mode of mobility – are generated not only in ‘real-life’ contexts and through embodied experiences but also involve the realm of *representation* (see Cresswell 2006, 3). Consequently, to understand public transport in its complexity, it is important to explore how different cultural products produce its meanings. As Lynne Pearce (2020) argues in her discussion concerning the value of literary texts in understanding mobility, “written texts are often the only means of accessing the full complexity of our experience of mobility” because of their high degree of “reflexivity and honesty” (81). Cultural products can also bring to the fore perspectives and experiences that might otherwise remain neglected.

Travel by public transport is a form of everyday mobility *par excellence* (Jensen 2009). Because of its banality, public transport *per se* is not necessarily the main theme of that many cultural products. Yet even seemingly marginal portrayals of travel by public transport can be full of meaning and make the postcolonial aspects of the travel experience very tangible (Toivanen 2021, 3). Representations may distance the reader/viewer/listener from or resonate with their own (trivial) experiences of travel by public transport. In effect, cultural texts help us understand the differential dimensions of mobility and can have “a mobilising, or moving effect” on the reader/viewer/listener (Bond 2018, 7).

The aim of this session is to explore representations of public transport as a mobile public space from a postcolonial perspective in different cultural products (e.g., literature, film, music). We invite papers addressing both Global South/North contexts and their manifestations of postcoloniality from scholars working in diverse fields in the humanities and social sciences such as literary studies, cultural studies, art studies, film studies, sociology, geography, and urban planning. We are particularly – although not exclusively – interested in papers that explore postcolonial (readings of) representations of public transport in the light of the following questions:

- What sorts of encounters in public transport are represented in postcolonial cultural products? How is the production of differences or transgressive encounters described?
- How do postcolonial representations of public transport engage with the figure of the ‘stranger’?
- What narrative/representational strategies inform portrayals of public transport in postcolonial cultural products? What is the relation of politics *and* aesthetics in representations of public transport?
- How do postcolonial cultural products challenge the ‘triviality’ of everyday mobilities? How do they ‘move’ their readers/viewers/listeners?

Session organisers: Anna-Leena Toivanen, anna-leena.toivanen@uef.fi; Sandra García-Corte, sandragco@educastur.org

4. Public Transport Meets Autonomous, Connected, Cooperative Mobilities: Displacement, Co-existence, Entanglement

Short Title: PT Meets AV

Our session addresses the following question. How the arrival of the new transport technologies will change the place of public transport (PT) in the cities and the very definition of public space and urban "publicness"? By new transport technologies we mean a heterogeneous array of high-tech initiatives variously designated as self-driving cars, autonomous or automated vehicles (AV), connected, cooperative and automated mobilities (CCAM), or more generally intelligent transportation systems (ITS). We want to discuss patterns of actual encounters and possible futures of the meeting between PT and AV, CCAM, ITS. Without limiting the scope of contributions to the session we would like to suggest some focal points of discussion.

Where do PT and AV meet? In what public spaces? In the streets, discourses, simulation models, public trials and controversies? What spaces, what 'hybrid forums' (Callon, Lascoumes, Barthe, 2009) do we need to bring old and new technologies and discourses on (public) transport in a dialogue or productive clash?

What are the sociotechnical and political imageries of automated and algorithmically powered public transport? Though the promoters of new transport technologies stress their social and ecological benefits the discourses on AVs are strongly car-centric. How do imageries and technicalities of projects on autonomous public transport differ from those by Tesla, Waymo, or Yandex? Do they perform their users, mobility ecologies, and urban futures differently?

How will the new regime of AV public trials change the ecologies of urban mobilities? How will this new paradigm of testing technologies in society (Marres, 2020; Laurent, Tironi, 2015) change the definition of public urban space and the understanding of PT as a certain kind of public space (Tuvikene, Kębłowski, et al. 2021)? Do these tests constitute true public experiments or they are just a sort of advertising intended to convince the general public to accept the new technologies (Stilgoe, 2017)? How will the AVs change the relations between public transport, pedestrians, cars, cyclists, and other mobile actors on the street and outside it? How can we use the controversies around these tests to answer the general questions in social sciences and humanities about the transformation of the public sphere, the publics and their politics, the public relations between society and technologies?

What are the future relations between AVs and PT? Technocentric literature on AVs routinely presupposes future displacement of the 'old' and 'inefficient' PT with 'new' and 'intelligent' AVs (Lipson, Kurman, 2016). How can we counter this simplistic and disturbing complacency? What conceptual, inscription, and visualizing devices do we need to imagine and perform other types of relations between old and new transport technologies in general and AV and PT in particular? What about co-existence, ecological tension, co-evolvement, and entanglement? How can we nurture and curate differences in urban mobilities in the search for sustainable futures instead of eliminating them?

Picturing new urban (public) transport disorder. On the one hand, conventional renders of intelligent urban transport futures picture neat, ordered, and highly regulated spaces. They point to the fact that the introduction of AVs will bring order, convenience, and efficiency into the complicated ecology of mobilities of today. On the other hand, the discourse of AVs is imbued with the rhetoric of disruption, radical changes in mobilities, land use, logistics, social inclusion and equity, etc. Can we balance the images of the ITS futures? What if we add disruption, entanglement, messiness, and disorder to the image of partial order that would bring in new transport technologies? How can we imagine, picture, and talk about this redistribution of order and disorder in the public transport futures?

We invite empirical and theoretical contributions from researchers, practitioners, and artists interested in mobilities, science and technology studies, urban and transport histories, and other relevant fields.

Session organisers: Andrei Kuznetsov, European University at Saint-Petersburg, ITMO University, andrey.kuznetsov.29@gmail.com; Nikolay Rudenko, European University at Saint-Petersburg, diogenstyx@gmail.com

5. Surveillance, Public Transport and Public Space

Short Title: PT Surveillance

Surveillance techniques and technologies have not stopped growing, both in terms of quantity and diffusion, and in terms of specialization and technological development. Growingly, public transport spaces are equipped with CCTV [Koskela, 2000], if not other sensors, and this has not been hindered by discourses on smart city, enticing cities to collect more and more data, nor by the development of AI and machine-learning. This raises several questions regarding the use of the massive quantity of data collected that way and the PT users' privacy [Lyon, 2002].

Surveillance also directly relies on humans, either the ones behind screens creating algorithms and processing the collected data, or those in the spaces of PT, watching, policing and controlling them [Castagnino, 2016]. How is public transport watched and controlled? Who defines the standard against which behaviour will be considered deviant when automated tools are used to monitor these spaces?

More fundamentally, this session also asks the question of the governance and the economy of surveillance in PT [Zuboff, 2019]. Several types of actors can be mobilized (public and private police [Loader, 2000], or even passengers [Molz, 2006]), for different types of objectives: flows management [Klauser, 2020], safety policies, prevention and repression of fare evasion, incivilities, crime, etc. How do those actors interact? The question of the cost of surveillance remains unclear, and its results much debated.

Eventually, we are interested in the impacts of these policies, technologies and practices on PT seen as public space. Surveillance can impact and transform the public spaces of PT, and their public character, by restricting their access, by forcing users to make compromises about their individual liberties, and by excluding users seen as “undesirables” from these spaces.

This session aims at gathering contributions that reflect on those issues, enabling to foster a debate around surveillance and its effects on public transport, its spaces, its users, their privacy and the power relations they might affect.

We invite contributions (in English or in French) that address themes such as, but are not limited to:

- Surveillance & policing in public transport
- Technologies of surveillance in PT
- Conflict and crime prevention in PT
- Access control to PT, fares, Covid-19
- Smart city and public transport
- Privacy, technology and public transport, smart mobility, mobility as a service
- Controlling public transport and its impacts on the public character of PT
- Resistances to surveillance and control in PT
- Gap between PT monitoring aspiration and policy implementation
- Intersectional approaches to safety and surveillance
- Interpersonal surveillance, vigilantes in PT

Session organisers: M. Gillard, LISER/VUB, merlin.gillard@liser.lu; C. Debailleul, ULB; N. Bocquet, UCLouvain/UNIGE

6. The Chosen Few: Picturing Passengers

Short Title: The Chosen Few

Photographing in close-up (unsuspecting) passengers during their everyday journeys on public transportation systems, especially those ensconced inside metropolitan subway carriages, has a long tradition. The commuters on the New York subway featured in pioneering and now classic collections by Walker Evans (*Many are Called*, 1938-41, first published in 1966) and Bruce Davidson (*Subway*, 1986), while those seated in the Parisian metro system have been portrayed controversially by French photographer Luc Delahaye (*L'autre*, 1999) and by the film-maker Chris Marker (*Passengers*, 2011).

And such passenger portraits are by no means confined to the confines of underground networks: Nick Turpin (*On the Night Bus*, 2017) photographs bus passengers from the outside through steamed-up windows to create extraordinary painterly effects and tones.

In this session we invite interdisciplinary scholars, thinkers, writers, artists, photographers and others to share their analyses, reflections, texts and images on the theme of depicting public transport passengers.

Issues and questions might include but are not limited to:

Socio-political:

What kind of photographic portraiture is this? What is it to become an unposed object of an unseen camera, to serve as the unwitting sitter for a secret artwork?

How does the stranger as 'other' encountered fleetingly and by chance become an object of fascination? How are we to read and reflect upon these countenances, faces redeemed from the oblivion of the 'optical unconscious', and captured in the very act itself of looking without seeing.

What might such images reveal about otherness, difference, heterogeneity, about intersectional and identity politics in public space?

Phenomenological:

What kind of practices are revealed in these images, forms of (in)activity that define public transport spaces?: 'doing nothing'; impatient waiting; the endurance of boredom; sleeping; staring blankly into space; displaying disinterest and civil inattention; listening to music; absent-mindedness; being distracted and open to distraction; reading; mobile media usage; musing and daydreaming; surreptitiously observing others.

In capturing the appearances of such micro-gestures and gazes, these photographs lend themselves to physiognomic and phenomenological analyses drawing on, for example, Critical Theory (Walter Benjamin on the 'optical unconscious'; Siegfried Kracauer on thresholds / in-between spaces of waiting); contemporary cultural theory (Jean Baudrillard on banality, otherness and the degree zero of interest); urban ethnography (Marc Augé on 'non places' and solitude); and ethnographies of media use (Michael Bull on the 'cocooning' of the self).

Spatial/technological:

How are the spaces of public transportation systems themselves transformed by and represented in these images?

Indeed, it is not just the photographer's camera that turns the subway train carriage into a mediaspace, an intimate studio in motion. Rather, these images reveal how changing media technologies themselves have long been essential in negotiating the transient but enforced intimacy experienced by strangers *en passant* in the modern city.

Aesthetic:

And how and to what effect have recent photographers (Matt Crabtree [2016] for example) playfully and parodically reworked and retouched their phone camera snapshots, transforming them into simulated 'works of art', portraits imitating centuries-old paintings?

Our roundtable welcomes ten-minute contributions and interventions exploring the picturing of passengers.

Session organisers: Dr Erkan Ali, Department of English, Guangdong University of Foreign Studies, Guangdong, China, erkanali_4@hotmail.com; Professor Graeme Gilloch, Department of Sociology, Lancaster University, Lancaster, UK, g.gilloch@lancaster.ac.uk

7. Representations of Tram Closures: Nostalgia, Modernity and Obsolescence

Short Title: Trams Closures

The first main era of electric tramways in many European and North American cities ended in the mid-twentieth century. The cultural impacts of this closure phase call for more attention. Among possible routes for doing so, Kevin D. Tennent (2020) has discussed the closure of tramways in Britain as an example of how solidity of infrastructure does not ensure permanence in transport networks and experiences. Alternatively, tram closures are explicable through the frame of literary urban studies, which connects actual cities and the narratives of them that emerge in different genres (Finch 2022; Finch, forthcoming).

Often, the closure of a tram network was commemorated in some way as marking a break with now-obsolete phases of modernity, heralding a new kind of urban transport future. Cinema newsreels, newspaper reports and photojournalism were among the modes in which tramway closures were represented, for example in London (1952), Glasgow (1962), Turku and Copenhagen (both 1972). The final closure of a city's electric tram network often seemed to have a symbolic value worth recording. This contrasts with, for example, the earlier disappearance of horse-drawn public transport from London just before World War One, which received no such commemoration. After the event, sometimes decades later, the disappearance of trams from the streets of cities such as these has inspired diverse literary and visual reflection.

This session will focus on representations of tram closure events, both representations that were contemporary with the closures and those produced afterwards. We also welcome presentations dealing with the ways the closures have been remembered and invite the presenters to think of the various ways, from souvenirs to political decisions concerning future transport, in which memories of the past are present in today's urban culture. The focus could be on European cities or on cities elsewhere in the world. Cultural forms and media covered could include imaginative literature (poetry, fiction, memoir), journalism, documentary film, enthusiast and activist writing, or interviews with those who still recall the disappearance of tramways from their cities in this period.

The session's format will adhere to the conference organizers' preference for creative, innovative presentations. The specific format will emerge in collaboration with the presenters once these have all been identified.

Session organisers: Adam Borch, Jason Finch, Silja Laine, Åbo Akademi University, adam.borch@abo.fi