Fluid mobilities for cities in transformation: the marshrutka as an unusual place of encounter regarding work and migration in the everyday life of Obninsk, Russia

The object of investigation of my doctoral project is marshrutka as a meeting place with regards to work and migration. From a sociological point of view, 'Work' as a social norm and practice, is a societal constant through which states and their people communicate as well as define and stabilise themselves (Voß, 2010). This can be particularly observed in the abrupt and rather chaotic transformation in the post-socialist Russian Federation (Niedermüller, 2004). The marshrutka entrepreneur as an actor and product of the 90s responds to the asynchrony of these transformation processes and brings together the divergent demands of the newly emerging market and economic cycles with the old systems of values and traditional expectations of behaviour. He successfully close some gaps of the post-socialist infrastructure, thus establishing themselves as important actors of the urban mobility offers in the Russian Federation. The marshrutka users on the other hand, demand reliable arrangements for mobility and expect a specific behaviour from the driver. While using the marshrutka, the passengers evaluate existing symbols and unexpected changes by sanctioning or approving them through the articulation of their opinion or changing their behaviour. The social arena marshrutka is a promising field of research because it is a space where new forms of self-employment and informal entrepreneurship can be encountered. It is a space where the entrepreneur has to accommodate the uncertain market conditions with the specific infrastructure of the city, the sometimes loudly complaining clientele and the political requirements in order to continue to exist.

Migration, in turn, is a crucial field of research for the analysis of collective identities because the understanding of oneself is strengthened and (re-)formulated through the definition of a significant other (Brettel, 2000; Bausinger, 1986). Labour migration, in its current form, is a characteristic feature of post-socialism and it presents a political challenge which needs to be addressed from all levels of society (Pilkington, 1998). Therefore, an important aspect of this study is to closely examine the marshrutka entrepreneur in his/her transnational dimension by looking at the transnational networks operating around the marshrutka market and conducting empirical research on the constructions of concepts of belonging and otherness. An analysis of concrete objects such as the interior and exterior design of the minibus will reveal the economic and social living environments of transnational migration movements. Thus, the multiperspectivity of the actors involved constitutes the focal point of the research. The hypothetically dichotomous evaluation of the marshrutka by the owners and users would give new insights into issues of migration at a community level.

The examination of the daily urban mobility reveals an implicitly and explicitly encoded complex venue of interactions which needs to be deconstructed. The space of encounter marshrutka, brings the abovementioned topics of work and migration together and makes the investigation from an inductive research perspective worthwhile.

Connection to the Research Project

The central Russian city of Obninsk is important for the research design because it offers a unique and promising opportunity to add a crucial dimension to the research, namely the construction of transnational of identities. This study will focus on the observation of the processual reconfigurations vehicle and entrepreneurs. Here the use of marshrutka is understood as an encounter with migration, in which the involved actors have to relate to each other. The seeming fluidity of the transport medium is reflected on the seeming fluid and potentially temporary encounter with migrants both practically and metaphorically. The analysis of the marshrutka entrepreneur should enable a differentiated and more accurate understanding of the conditions of the space of encounter. To what extent do the conditions of the marshrutka market influence the behaviour of the entrepreneurs and the composition of the transport medium? How does it affect the user's opinion on migration and migrants?

Methodology

Methodologically, the multi-sighted-ethnography (Marcus, 1995) with its modes of construction 'follow the people,' 'follow the thing,' 'follow the plot,' 'follow the metaphor' and 'follow the conflict' enables the use of various analysis techniques. The production of situational maps and analyses (Clarkes, 2003) would allow for a closer examination and a better visualisation of the symbolic interactions of the actors involved in the social arena marshrutka (Strauss, 1987). The study of mobility by focusing on the technological means requires a theoretical and methodological discussion of subject-object relations and their impact on the communication and action spaces. Here, the research focus would be expanded by using Latours' Actor-Network Theory which places particular emphasis on the determining effects of the material entities (Callon, 2006; Latour, 2005). Furthermore, the empirical data will be systematically collected and processed in accordance with the research design and through the analysis of documents, field research and qualitative interviews.

The Theoretical Embedding of the Research

This research project will be based on the findings of spatial theoretical perspectives. The relation between space and power in the enactment of mobility (Jensen, 2011) clarifies that our constructed perceptions of space are never value-free. Despite the potential of the interpretations of space and mobility offers (Cresswell, 2006), the access to mobility is not equally distributed and it reinforces social injustice through the provision of selective infrastructure (Urry 2007). The application of Foucault's concept of governmentality, would help to demonstrate the relation between power and space. According to Foucault mobility can be defined as „a political technology […] through which we come to control the social body in its finest instruments" (Foucault, 2007 p.159). It becomes quickly evident, that spaces determine the way we perceive our reality and draw the limits of what is possible through the provision of mobility offers. Thus spaces and mobility offers are perceived as quasi-natural entities, which are integrated in the inter-individual negotiating and positioning process. (Latour, 1996).

This study would use the actor-network theory (ANT) to analyse the relation between technology and the social. Arguably, materially solidified mobility practices are socially constructed and follow a common perception of space of a commonly negotiated world and legitimise the established daily conventions. However, a crisis would suffice to put the 'seemingly secure world' into question (Latour, 2009). By looking at the processes of negotiation one can identify the involved actors in their specific network. Hence, every actor that has the necessary legitimacy, has the potential to pressure the collective for new negotiations. Whether it is the origin of the marshrutka or the marshrutka driver, defective entry doors, city laws abolishing or limiting the informal transport, under- or over-frequented minibus routes, competition or clientelism, the rise or fall of commodity and ticket prices; all this could lead to negotiations and changes of behaviour of the actor groups involved. Through the interlocking of theory and methodology, the ANT enables a meaningful delimitation of the research field and makes its description and understanding easier.

The research project draws insights from the migration studies and sociological labour studies. Transnationalism - as an explanatory approach and a descriptive model for social interactions in global networks - enables the examination of migration in the work context (Darieva, 2006). This approach analyses the social and cultural networks within and across municipal and national borders. The deconstruction of economic and communicative entanglements would contribute to better analyse the 'interconnectedness' (Hannerz, 1996) of transnational identities. The transformation processes of the 90s in the post-socialist states with regards to work (Roth, 2004; Niedermüller, 2004) will be examined by using a historical perspective. The recent studies on market life (Bittner, 2004) will contribute to the discussion on the realities of the current marshrutka market as compared to other forms of self-employment in the post-socialist countries of the former Soviet Union.

Literature

Bausinger, Hermann (1986): *Ausländer – Inländer: Arbeitsmigration und kulturelle Identität*. Tübingen.

Bittner, Regina (2009): *Postsozialistisches Markttreiben. Überlebensökonomien im transnationalen Raum*. In: Götz, I.; Lemberger, B. (Hg.): Prekär arbeiten, prekär leben. Kulturwissenschaftliche Perspektiven auf ein gesellschaftliches Phänomen. Frankfurt.

Bretell, Caroline (2000): *Theorizing Migration in Anthropology. The Social Construction of Networks, Identities, Communities and Globalscapes*. In: Dies.(Hg.):Migration Theory. Talking across Disciplines. New York.

Callon, Michel (2006): *Einige Elemente einer Soziologie der Übersetzung*. In: Belliger,A.; Krieger, D. (Hg.): ANThology. Bielefeld.

Clarke, Adele (2003): Situational Analyses: Grounded Theory. Mapping after the Postmodern Turn. San Francisco.

Cresswell, Timothy (2006): *On the Move. Mobility in the Modern Western World*. London.

Darieva, Tsypylma (2007): *Migrationsforschung in der Ethnologie.* In: Brigitte Schmidt-Lauber (Hg.): Ethnizität und Migration. Berlin.

Foucault, Michel (2007): *The meshes of Power.* In: Crampton, J.W.; Elden, S.(Hg.): Space, Knowledge and Power. Foucault and Geography. Ashgate.

Hannerz, Ulf (1996): *Transnational Connections. Culture, People, Places.* London.

Jensen, Anne (2011): *Mobility, Space and Power: On the Multiplicities of Seeing Mobility*. In: Mobilities Vol.6, No 2. Aarhus.

Latour, Bruno (1996): *Der Berliner Schlüssel. Erkundungen eines Liebhabers der Wissenschaften*. Berlin 1996.

Latour, Bruno (2005): *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory*. Oxford.

Latour, Bruno (2009): *Das Parlament der Dinge - Für eine politische Ökologie*. Frankfurt.

Marcus, George E. (1995): *Ethnography in/of the World System: The Emergence of Multi-Sited Ethnography*. Texas.

Niedermüller, Peter (2004): *Arbeit, Identität, Klasse. Der Sozialismus als Lebensentwurf*. In: Roth, K. (Hg.) Arbeit im Sozialismus – Arbeit im Postsozialismus. Münster.

Pilkington, Hilary (1998): *Migration, Displacement and Identity in Post-Soviet Russia*. London.

Roth, Klaus (2004): *Arbeit im Sozialismus – Arbeit im Postsozialismus. Erkundungen zum Arbeitsleben im östlichen Europa.* Münster: LIT 2004 (=Freiburger Sozialanthropologische Studien, Bd.1).

Strauss, Anselm (1990): *The Basics of Qualitative Analyses. Grounded Theory, Procedures and Techniques*. Thousand Oaks,CA.

Urry, John (2007): *Mobilities*. Cambridge.

Voß, Günter (2010): *Was ist Arbeit? Zum Problem eines allgemeinen Arbeitsbegriffs*. In: Böhle, F.; Voß, G.; Wchtler, G.(Hg.) Handbuch Arbeitssoziologie. Wiesbaden.