

**Call for Applications**  
**The Marshrutka Project's final conference:**  
**Spatial dynamics of informal and shared mobilities**

**Dates:** 8-10 November 2018; **Location:** TU Berlin main campus

**Organisers:** Leibniz Institute for Regional Geography, Leipzig, Germany

Technical University of Berlin, Berlin, Germany



## **Conference theme:**

The ride-sharing/ride-sourcing companies of the Global North have claimed to revolutionize urban transport as we know it. Meanwhile, low-tech and informal counterparts such as shared taxis, have served the Global South for decades. Despite obvious similarities and opportunities for cross-learning, academic research so far has done very little to compare low- and high-tech mobilities. A comparative discussion about ride-sharing/ride-sourcing experiences in Global North and Global South is not only important for mutual learning about transportation modalities, but also for understanding how the past and the future of urban transportation is perceived across different localities. Such a discussion would involve thinking of not only what kinds of transport, but also more broadly, which social-economic orders, what kinds of spaces have been constructed and are being imagined.

Discourses around novel mobility services have revolved around wide-ranging societal and spatial transformations. The sharing economy aroused imageries of creating communities and connecting people in contrast to individual consumption; it conveyed ideas of access in contrast to owning resources, and ideas of environmental sustainability in contrast to unsustainable economic growth modes. Ride-sharing, and other sharing economy practices, are seen by proponents and sometimes even critics, as the future of transport, but also as the future of social-economic organisation of society. The informal paratransit of the Global South mobilises entirely different discourses. These modes of transportation, even if acknowledged as a key mobility enabler for poor and marginalised communities, is rather associated with traffic congestion, health and safety risks and environmental degradation. Citizens, governments, academics and transnational organisations alike, tend to point out the need for modernising public transport, either by offering alternatives to paratransit (such as BRT systems), formalising and regulating paratransit, or a combination of both. Hence, in contrast to shared taxis of the Global North, shared taxis and paratransit choices of the Global South are rather portrayed as the past of urban transport – as well as an effigy of outdated social-economic orders in general.

Why do such contrasting pictures of the past and future of urban transport arise almost simultaneously? Is this because both phenomena are fundamentally different and hence promise divergent versions of the future? Or, are there lessons to be learned from past experiences of sharing transport for designing the transport of the future? Vice versa, do sharing economy practices offer something that could alter and improve informal paratransit in the Global South? Can the digitalisation of sharing practices, as a central innovation offered by Uber and its corporate rivals, alter existing ride-sharing practices worldwide? And what are the effects on space, society and culture?

This conference aims to critically reflect on shared and informal mobilities and their implication for spatial and social dynamics. It questions existing discourses on sharing by paying attention to corporate strategies, labour conditions and implications on public transport systems. Likewise, it challenges existing visions of informal transport as the past of urban transportation by examining its ongoing presence in different global regions. We thus invite contributions for following and related themes:

- Socio-spatial comparisons between informal and shared mobilities
- Social, economic and environmental ambitions of ride-sharing
- Impact of digitalisation on informal transport
- Labour conditions of informal and shared mobility workers
- Informal and shared mobilities complementing or competing with public transport
- Informal and shared mobilities and class, race and gender inequalities
- Mobility justice and spatial justice perspectives on informal and shared mobilities

### **About the Marshrutka project:**

Minibuses locally known as marshrutkas are a common sight in urban and rural landscapes of Central Asia and the Caucasus. The Marshrutka project deals with the role of the marshrutka mobility phenomenon in the production of post-Soviet urban spaces, in and beyond Central Asia and the Caucasus. It provides an empirically founded contribution to the larger discussion on post-Soviet transformation, and fosters a still under-represented view on post-Soviet transformation, highlighting – through the lens of the marshrutka phenomenon – the bottom-up and everyday emergence of new orders in the fields of economy, morale, urban development and migration. The project is carried out by means of five complementary PhD projects under supervision of academic project partners; in addition, a post-doc based at the IfL in Leipzig is charged with a cross-cutting research project and ensures the conceptual coherence of the project. The project sees its outcomes in terms of a solid and sustainable transfer of knowledge and methods, from German partners towards the academic institutions in the target regions, and vice versa, strengthened local research capacities and infrastructures, and long-lasting research cooperation. The project has started in late 2015, and will be entering into its final phase in 2018. The summer school is therefore designed in order to build upon the research progress done so far, and transform it into high-profile publications, and, furthermore, to strengthen and expand the marshrutka research networks with follow-up projects in mind.

### **Submission guidelines:**

The conference is planned to last two and half days, and will include high-profile keynote speakers, dialogue sessions with practitioners and activists, and a public panel table discussion on the conference subject. Limited number of travel grants is available. Please indicate in your application if you would like to make use of this possibility. For non-funded participants, a catering contribution of 20€ will be due upon registration. We expect your abstracts by the 20<sup>th</sup> of June 2018, with final decision of acceptance to be sent out by the 15<sup>th</sup> of July 2018. For submitting your abstract, and any organisational queries concerning the conference, please contact [H.Schauer@ifl-leipzig.de](mailto:H.Schauer@ifl-leipzig.de).