

Zeitschrift: Schweizerische Zeitschrift für Soziologie = Revue suisse de sociologie
= Swiss journal of sociology

Herausgeber: Schweizerische Gesellschaft für Soziologie

Band: 33 (2007)

Heft: 1

Artikel: Mobility, motility and freedom : the structural story as analytical tool for understanding the interconnection

Autor: Freudendal-Pedersen, Malene

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-814218>

Nutzungsbedingungen

Die ETH-Bibliothek ist die Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften auf E-Periodica. Sie besitzt keine Urheberrechte an den Zeitschriften und ist nicht verantwortlich für deren Inhalte. Die Rechte liegen in der Regel bei den Herausgebern beziehungsweise den externen Rechteinhabern. Das Veröffentlichen von Bildern in Print- und Online-Publikationen sowie auf Social Media-Kanälen oder Webseiten ist nur mit vorheriger Genehmigung der Rechteinhaber erlaubt. [Mehr erfahren](#)

Conditions d'utilisation

L'ETH Library est le fournisseur des revues numérisées. Elle ne détient aucun droit d'auteur sur les revues et n'est pas responsable de leur contenu. En règle générale, les droits sont détenus par les éditeurs ou les détenteurs de droits externes. La reproduction d'images dans des publications imprimées ou en ligne ainsi que sur des canaux de médias sociaux ou des sites web n'est autorisée qu'avec l'accord préalable des détenteurs des droits. [En savoir plus](#)

Terms of use

The ETH Library is the provider of the digitised journals. It does not own any copyrights to the journals and is not responsible for their content. The rights usually lie with the publishers or the external rights holders. Publishing images in print and online publications, as well as on social media channels or websites, is only permitted with the prior consent of the rights holders. [Find out more](#)

Download PDF: 21.08.2025

ETH-Bibliothek Zürich, E-Periodica, <https://www.e-periodica.ch>

Mobility, Motility and Freedom: The Structural Story as Analytical Tool for Understanding the Interconnection

Malene Freudendal-Pedersen*

Preface

Research into mobility has grown in importance during the last decade. It is a transdisciplinary research field which covers a large range of different theoretical and empirical areas (Hannam et al., 2006) such as ICT systems (Dodge and Kitchin, 2004; Vogel, 2007), politics and governance (Jensen and Richardson, 2004; Jensen, 2006), freight transport (Hansen, 2005; Jespersen and Nielsen, 2005), air traffic (Lassen, 2005; Kaplan, 2006), tourism (Sheller and Urry, 2004; Bærenholdt, 2004), work and everyday life (Oldrup, 2005; Kesselring, 2006) etc. within both local and global systems¹. This article is placed in the field of everyday mobility which lies within the broader category of critical, sociological mobility research in which the cultural and social implications and possibilities in mobilities are important issues. The research focuses on everyday life, how we perceive and understand everyday mobility and how this affects the mobility choices we make. This article is a contribution to the empirical research on everyday mobility where the construction of meaning examined through qualitative research methods plays a central role. In this paper, I will not examine the actual routines or mobility patterns, and will not provide a detailed empirical description of how a mobile everyday life might look. Instead, I show, through the lenses of mobility, how, every day, we create and recreate the setting for creating 'the good life' for ourselves and our families. I attempt to develop analytical tools to condense meaning and action behind everyday mobility. In understanding the meaning and consequences of mobility, it is important to pay attention to the voices of everyday life which reveal the cracks through which we can develop and change the mobility patterns (Nielsen, 2005). This article shows how the analytical concept 'the structural story' can be used to understand the seeming rationalities of how and why we use mobility in our everyday lives. The structural story has the ability to highlight concepts and dichotomies which are important focal points in understanding the dynamics of mobility. Structural stories are mapped out and analysed on the basis of extensive qualitative work relating to families who were

* Malene Freudendal-Pedersen, PhD Scholar, Research group; Space, Place and Mobility, Department of Environmental, Social and Spatial Change, Roskilde University, Denmark.

1 The references listed after each area do not in any way do justice to all the interesting work being done within mobility research, the references should only be seen as examples.

interviewed both separately and in focus groups. The material has been analysed in relation to concepts and dichotomies such as time, risks, freedom and motility. In this article, I will present the structural story in relation to freedom and motility. The dichotomies of mobility represented by freedom/unfreedom are central in critical mobility research when they help us to understand both sides of the coin, when mobility is a burden and when it is a resource.

1 The structural story

My starting point for research into transport and mobility related questions has been with a focus on everyday life. Why do we choose the kinds of transport we do, and how are our choices related to our everyday life? The collection of data has centred on qualitative methods, in depth interviews and focus groups. The focus has been on all elements in everyday life and on revealing the role and significance of mobility in this everyday life. The term “structural stories” emerged from the material. The “structural story” is a concept which has grown out of empirical and theoretical work centred on mobility (Freudendal-Pedersen et al., 1999, 2000, 2002; Freudendal-Pedersen, 2005) and was originally developed with two colleagues on the basis of in-depth interviews and focus group interviews. During my current project, I have refined and developed the concept through additional in-depth interviews followed by focus group interviews and additional theoretical work. I have redefined some of the driving forces behind this concept and highlighted some concepts which we can use to gain a better understanding of mobility in everyday life. The quotations that appear in this article all originate from empirical work done in the fall of 2005 and spring 2006. I take a soft social constructivist approach to my research; I start from the belief that the material world has an influence on how we as individuals construct the social (Berger and Luckmann, 1996; Burr, 1995; Sayer, 2000; Fairclough et al., 2001). Ontologically, this means that knowledge is constructed in an interaction between the individual and society, between actors and structures, and it is in this process that the structural stories are formed. Giddens (1984,1991) defines structures as embedded in the consciousness of the individual, the individual acts on the basis of already existing structures and, at the same time, the structures are reproduced when the individual acts. According to Giddens’ concept of structuration, structures do not exist as an outer frame but only in praxis and in human memory. The structural aspect of the structural story should be understood in relation to Giddens’ theory of structuration.

If you compare the age group, social status and geographical placement of the individuals whose stories are the basis for the concept of structural stories, there is a big variation. For instance, conceptions of risks, attitudes towards the environment, the relation to the expert systems vary among different social groups. This

will also be visible in how the features of modernity such as individualization and time pressure influence different lives. However, it is my belief that you can find these structural stories in all layers of society. Some of the most universal structural stories are “when one has children one needs a car” or “one cannot rely on the public transport system, there are always delays” or “the car gives me the potential to do whatever I want”. Most people will recognise these kinds of stories from their own lives, using them often, in different settings. It is most likely that a structural story is, sometimes, a precise description of a momentary situation. The problem sets in when we start talking about what “one” can and should do. Kids and cars are not “by nature” connected and a lot of trains do arrive on time. When we use these structural stories relating to mobility, we contribute to maintain certain types of mobility as an indisputable “objective truth” and by that to sustain certain mobility behaviours. A structural story is defined as follows:

A structural story contains the arguments people commonly use to explain their actions and decisions. A structural story is used to explain the rationalities behind the way we act and the choices we make when exercising our daily routines and is a guide to certain actions. The structural stories form the basis that determines how the individual views certain problems and their solutions. The social practice of the individual produces and reproduces these structural stories.

One of the strongest structural stories I have come across in my work is about the interconnection between children and cars. *“As I at the present time do not have a transport need that requires a car I can’t see why I should buy one, but you know when one gets a child we will probably get one”*. Or *“It is mostly about when one gets kids, how can one get anywhere with three kids?”* The interesting thing about this structural story is that it’s also very commonly used by individuals who have no kids and they often use it to explain why they bought the car prior to having children. They did not buy the car on the basis of an experienced need, it seems, but because of an anticipated need that the structural story tells them they are going to feel. A woman I interviewed was car sharing with some friends, the car broke down, and the others wanted to buy a new shared car, but she didn’t because, *“The ones we shared it with had twins last week, they want a new shared car, but I do not want to share a car with them because I know they need a car all the time now.”* When we as individuals act according to the seeming rationality the structural story presents, we confirm others of in the importance of having a car when you have kids. This woman is maintaining and reproducing a structural story based on experiences that she has not had but recognized from others around her.

The structural story about the delays in public transport is also often used. Some have a very critical attitude, *“Well public transport, it is expensive, it never fits with your plans and you have to walk to the bus stop ... that’s terrible ... it is always delayed, there are too many people and some of them smell”*. Users of the public trans-

port system are in general more positive, but in the focus group they will accept and validate this structural story to a certain extent if they are outnumbered.

The key to comprehending how and why structural stories exist lies in understanding the conditions under which late modern societies mould their foundations and the mechanisms of control that maintain the generally accepted validity of the structural stories. Everyday life is filled with a series of competing discourses, all of which have great significance for the increasing need for mobility (Hagman, 2004; Thomsen, 2005; Pooley, 2005; Oldrup, 2005; Freudendal-Pedersen et al., 1999, 2000, 2002; Freudendal-Pedersen, 2005). The structural stories discussed here are the outcome of these diverse discourses. In this way, structural stories can serve as a logical, short explanation for one's choices, which most people accept without further ado. It is essential to understand the way the structural stories are interwoven with the cultural notion of mobility and late modernity, the essential characteristics of which are reflexivity and individualization.

2 Structural Stories' Foundation in Late Modernity

The interconnection between mobility and modernity arises from the idea that late modernity is closely connected to and dependent on mobility in that they encourage each other in a reciprocal process (Harvey, 1989; Giddens, 1994; Urry, 2000; Beckmann, 2000; Kaufman, 2002; Kesselring and Vogel, 2004), because modernity both demands and facilitates mobility. The generation of structural stories about mobility is closely connected to the characteristic of late modern everyday life. Individualization, separation of time and space, the notion of risks and the ambivalences that follow are some of the important ingredients in the formation of the structural stories about mobility. The characterization of late modern life as described in the following does not necessarily describe how every individual lives his or her everyday life, many people do not live an individualized life where they pack a large number of activities into their everyday life while at the same time they worry about the risks they take and feel ambivalent about what they do not do. But most people live a life where some of these characteristics of late modern life play an important role and in some parts of their lives they use the structural stories to comply with the pressure of handling everyday life in an adequate matter.

3 Everyday Life and Individualization

Today, mobility is an essential part of nearly all lifestyles (Giddens, 1991; Thrift, 1996; Baumann, 2000; Urry, 2000). As today's lifestyles include elements scattered over large geographical areas, mobility provides the means for achieving a modern lifestyle.

The nature of a certain lifestyle is reflected upon to a much higher degree though than the use of mobility to achieve these lifestyles. This is due to the late-modern individual's preoccupation with choosing a lifestyle to create an identity (Giddens, 1991). Choosing a lifestyle is also important to prevent everyday life becoming too incalculable, because when you choose a particular lifestyle where some choices are already given, it emancipates you from a number of choices (Giddens, 1991). A lifestyle involves a cluster of habits and orientations and thereby defines a number of the routine actions the individuals undertake in their everyday lives. Choosing a lifestyle gives the individual a continuing sense of ontological security, while containing a certain unity that connects the large number of options that appear in our everyday life (Giddens, 1991). Every day, the late modern individual is a part of a large number of lifestyles. The workplace can demand one kind of lifestyle, which is perhaps very different from the attitude signalled among friends. It is important to be ready to seek new opportunities, as increasing opportunities are an important part of everyday life (Giddens, 1991; Beckmann, 2001). A necessary requirement is mobility; the more mobile the individual is, the more possibilities are available. Important in this context is that mobility is becoming the vital link between these elements of a lifestyle, making it impossible to exclude some and include others, and to bridge the distance between lifestyles (Urry, 2000).

Closely related to the choice of lifestyles is the organization of everyday life. Here, the family assumes a central role, in that it is largely the nature of the family's everyday life that determines each of the member's transportation habits. Many factors, including the home, workplace, day-care and school location, not to mention recreational and social activities, have an influence on the families' need for mobility. Unique for late modern individuals is that fitting in all of the above elements and activities into one's life is, in fact, possible (Giddens, 1991; Beck, 1992). Today, it seems as though we are able to do all the things we want, it becomes more important than actually doing them. Hylland Eriksen (2001) argues that we increasingly measure life quantitatively rather than qualitatively: how many activities can we fill into an average day? The qualitative components of everyday life such as raising kids, having close friends, having a partner, are all elements that need time and these elements which create security and to a large degree define "the good life" are at risk (Hylland Eriksen, 2001). The sports club chosen for the family's activities is not the local sports club but the "best sports club" even though it is an hour away by car. In late modern life, there is a tendency to seek out new groups and activities to participate in; this is partly a consequence of the fading importance of tradition. The individual is no longer restrained by tradition, place, social relationships and activities; the modern individual has developed a need to seek out new and different social interactions. Late modern life is thereby marked by provisionality (Bauman, 2000), to be mobile becomes important; to be on your way to something else. When mobility is of such great significance in everyday life,

and in constructing the “good life”, there is no room for reflexivity. Therefore, we construct the structural story when it offers a seeming rationality by which to act and at the same time decreases the ambivalences that follow when choosing certain actions rather than others. When we no longer have traditions to guide us in what we do, the structural story steps in and gives us guidelines in facilitating the workings of everyday life. The structural story works as a constructed expression of the way to handle everyday life in different situations. This of course means that structural stories exist in all areas of life. My focus is on the structural stories concerning mobility, but navigating in everyday life often makes me reflect on the way, I myself, and others, use them in different situations.

In that manner, structural stories relating to mobility are also about the construction of “the good life”, what it contains, how to get it, and at what cost. In the same way, one could say that everyday life is so planned and compressed that there is no spare time to use on mobility, which is why an important characteristic of mobility is to overcome space as quickly as possible. As one man put it, *“It’s the time one uses on transport that should disappear, that’s why I should have a helicopter, then it would be fun to transport oneself”*. However, mobility is not always about overcoming. Sometimes mobility becomes the only “free space” which is left in our time pressured everyday life. The time we use on mobilities is not dead time (Hannam, 2006) mobility can also have the important feature of dwelling-in-motion (Featherstone et al., 2004). Mobility becomes a cocoon in the in-betweens which is the only place left for the mind to wander, to read a book, listen to music or philosophize on the life we lead or simply fall asleep. As the man who wants a helicopter, later in the interview, described the situation, *“I need my own time, I have my work and I have my family and if I want to do something with other people I will join a club. Sometimes you just want to sit in your own space, use that half hour each way to mentally disconnect”*. Hylland Eriksen (2001) describes how the in-betweens disappear from our everyday life, how fragmentations replace continuity. We live in a fragmented world where acceleration and exponential growth lead to what he calls vertical stacking (Hylland Eriksen 2001). This is expressed in the following comment on why we become stressed in our everyday life, *“In my case it is because I want to have time for everything, I am not good at saying no”*. Hylland Eriksen describes how fast time (instantaneous time) always wins over slow time (glacial time) and this means that time has become a scarce resource in late modern everyday life (Urry, 2000; Hylland Eriksen, 2001). He suggest that we install “in-betweens” in everyday life, and these in-betweens are supposed to function as breaks on fast time so that we can fluctuate between slow and fast time (Hylland Eriksen, 2001, 154–159). It seems that mobility gives us these in-betweens in everyday life, *“When you get into your car, train, bus or metro you really need the time to disconnect and be yourself, disconnect mentally and concentrate on oneself”*. This gives mobility

the ambiguity since it creates instantaneous time but at the same time it can be our means against it. Thereby mobility is, in itself, ambivalent.

4 Risks and Ambivalences

The risks and the coherent ambivalences we live with in our everyday lives are of great significance in developing the structural stories. In our reflexive, time pressured, everyday life, we need to make a lot of choices. How much sugar should cereals contain? Which kind of washing powder should we choose? And should we worry about the Antarctic melting? We make these choices based on expert knowledge and make our opinions based on the experts we sympathise with and whom we feel have a trustworthy attitude. As Beck (1992) states, the social effect of the definitions of risks is not dependent upon their scientific durability but more about whether or not the expert seems trustworthy (Beck 1992). Consequently, we are aware of the provisional in the knowledge we choose to believe in and this constant reassessment and negotiation builds an increased sense of risks (Beck et al., 1994; Beck, 1992). The media is often the basis on which the re-evaluation of knowledge is communicated to individuals, where the presentation often matters more than the news itself. Furthermore, stories and subjects, which in reality have nothing in common except that they are newsworthy, often get juxtaposed in their presentation (Giddens, 1991). In a dramatic way tragic events often become, in a dramatic way, a part of the everyday consciousness. All this causes basic insecurity about the truth of new knowledge. The individual cannot know for sure that new knowledge will not be revised. This insecurity means that ambivalence becomes an invertible consequence of modern life “Ambivalence, both analytical and existential, is an understandable consequence of not knowing, and knowing that one cannot know for sure precisely what will emerge from the various complex processes of restructuring through which modernity is continually (re)constituted” (Smart, 1999, 11). Ambivalences exemplify the dichotomy between attitudes and actions. We know what we should do more than what (might or most likely) would be the best for ourselves and the environment. But the complex and time pressured everyday life needs other exits than the “right one”. This is precisely why we use the structural stories, because they offer a seemingly rational and matter of course way of thinking that we need when we have to make some of these everyday choices. Having ambivalences is an inevitable part of late modern life (Bauman, 1991), and they are also an explanation as to why the structural stories are mostly not questioned. In some ways, the structural stories are a way to legitimize the ambivalences, and the individual learns to live with the ambivalences by the structural stories.

There has recently been a big discussion about whether or not there should be a toll charge in Copenhagen’s city centre. The discussion has arisen again fol-

lowing the successes in London and Stockholm. In the debate, a Danish right wing politician stated that she did not care if all the experts thought it was a good idea, because she did not want to place restraints on people's freedom. She dismissed expert knowledge on the basis of one of the strongest structural stories, namely "more mobility means more freedom". Jensen (2006) shows how the structural story lives in the political system. Jensen (2006) calls it "taken for granted knowledge" which she analyses by using a discourse analysis of European transport policies. Here she shows how taken for granted knowledge, what I would call structural stories, underlie the whole idea about how mobility should be governed. One of the strongest structural stories flowing through the policy system is the idea of mobility as a provider of freedom (Jensen, 2006, 223–229). When individuals make a decision, they choose something instead of something else, in that choice the individual is very much aware of the risks a certain decision implies (Beck, 1992). To be able to handle everyday life and the risks it implies, one has to ignore some of those risks (Beck, 1992) and the media, the advertising industry, and the politicians help us by building the structural story. This strengthens the structural story, there is a clear connection between the most used structural story found in my empirical material and the ones floating around in public. The structural stories about "kids and cars, 'the delayed train' and the possibilities" have a great deal of support in all areas of society. This does not mean that alternative structural stories cannot exist, they do, they do not have the same strength, but they exist and are only waiting for the right moment to reappear on stage. One of these structural stories could be "*Money is not a provider of freedom, community is*". This structural story is not as strong, but it appears in the material. When matters relating to mobility are presented in public and in everyday life they contain in most cases a structural story about what kind of mobility is necessary, and how it should be performed.

5 Freedom and unfreedom

The idea of mobility as a facilitator of freedom is consistently found in both the theoretical and empirical literature on the late modern society (Bauman, 1998; Sheller, 2006). The description of the car as a creator of freedom quickly becomes present when you talk to individuals about the reason why they have a car. "*I love the feeling of freedom*" or "*It is simply the freedom – and the time you save*" or "*It gives me so much extra freedom to have that car*" or "*When you are 18 you almost live in the car. You could do stuff – it was freedom*". Kaufman (2002) describes this in relation to both virtual and physical mobility. These mobilities entail that the whole spectrum of possibilities is open for the individual, so we develop forms of movement that allow us to avoid having to choose between alternatives, we are able to do it all (Kaufmann, 2002, 42). Automobility as a technology is being launched on the

concept of freedom and one is tempted to claim that no other technology has meant so much unfreedom for others. This technology occupies a huge amount of space in relation to how many people are being transported. The spaces in our cities are to a large degree occupied by roads, parking lots and other kinds of materialities facilitating the car. Kids and people who do not drive are restricted in their use of spaces, also due to an increased perception of risks that increased automobility has induced (Thomsen, 2005, 11–28). In Bauman's (1988) book on freedom he illuminates the flip sides of freedom: *"To be free means to be able and to be allowed to keep others unfree."* This is one of the quotations that sticks to you after you've read it when it hits the core of ambivalences and opposites that mobility, especially automobility, as a principal part of everyday life contains. It is important to state from the beginning that this is not a zero sum game, there are softer landings than Bauman's sentence indicates but precisely because it touches on the ambivalences in everyday mobility, it can open up the possibility for the reconciliations that these ambivalences also contain. This dichotomy makes you wonder why it is that certain kinds of mobility (automobility) are seen as freedom providers and others (public transportation), which could have different aspects of freedoms are seen as unfree? This is very clear in the way freedom is used in the structural stories, *"You have more freedom when you drive a car"* is an often heard and reproduced structural story.

Maybe unfreedom is an unintended consequence in the attempt to gain more freedom. A colleague of mine told a story about how the purchase of new timesaving technologies also create unfreedom and less time. She and her husband moved to the countryside and therefore they bought a car. This car quickly created a high dependence on the cell phone for them. The cell phone is primarily used to coordinate their automobility. On top of that they had to get a dishwasher because their guests (because of the remote location) stayed longer and often over night. Thereby the motivation for moving, getting more freedom, created unfreedom and a dependence on technologies which they did not need before, when the flexibility and motility have to be unchanged. *"It was just because we wanted to move to the countryside and be organic – so the bubble popped"*.

The unintended consequences of automobility are also described by Shove (1998) who calls it a paradoxical situation where more freedom means less choice because the "car simultaneously creates precisely the sorts of problems which they also promise to overcome" (Shove 1998, 7). In our wish to create the best opportunities for ourselves and our families, to achieve "the good life" we place our activities scattered over larger distances because we can do it with the car. Being able to live a life with a complex juggling of everyday life activities and wishes through time and space are both allowed but also necessitated by the car (Urry, 2000, 59). We can constantly ask ourselves why we should settle for a less football club, school, shopping possibilities or cultural event just because it is close by, when the car gives us other possibilities, another motility. The car gives us possibilities and at

the same time it forces us to design the lifestyle that in a more precise way shows who we are or want to be (Thomsen, 2001). It provides the flexibility to seek the types of communities that support our life politics. At the same time, it demands a large number of spaces and materiality which only have these functions and takes up spaces that could be used for other purposes, it constructs non-places (Urry, 2000; Augé, 1995). Though the unfreedom the car gives us is not often put into words in the public sphere, it comes out in the interviews, *"If you have got a car it would be stupid not to drive it. A new car puts limits on you because you are forced to use it and then you would have to be stuck in horrible traffic jams all the time, which is extremely boring"*.

As the car creates unfreedom, it also creates inequalities, if you can afford it, you have the possibilities of making your own choices, or at least that is one of the structural stories that goes.

"In cars you can go wherever you want when you want, one can suddenly make a new decision, drive two miles and stop at a deserted beach where you are all alone, you feel power when you drive a car, that is why people love it, power and freedom." This is one of the big differences between the way the individuals perceive the car and the public transport system – being in control. The driver controls and the passengers are being controlled, this is especially expressed by car drivers; they are in control because they decide when to do what. The public transit passenger on the other hand has to fit in to an already fixed pattern together with a number of other passengers. But on the other hand, today's car driver is not in control and free of traffic systems controlled by others as is often perceived. Beckmann (2001) points out that the car-drivers have to plan their trips just as much as the public transport passenger to perform the daily activities (Beckmann, 2001, 36). But it seems to car drivers that this is still seen as a greater freedom than using the public transport system. *"If you take your car you can be totally sure about one thing, you are in the queue and you are there every morning, it is something that I accept, but you still feel that you are in control, you don't feel in control in the train."*

Some of my interviewees express that they get more upset by waiting five minutes on a delayed train than spending five minutes in a queue on the highway, they feel they have more control in the car. When the train is delayed there is someone to blame, a state run authority, who can one blame for the queue, well they demand more roads, but that is filling a need not running a bad business. In that sense it seems that the public transport system has a much worse image than it deserves, and when you give people time, the majority and especially the users are satisfied. But the structural stories about mobility are keeping this "worst case" scenario on public transport, and "best case" scenario on automobility alive. It is argued by some that the late modern, individualized, society produces individualized transportation needs which only the car can satisfy, but Beck (1997) supplements this by saying that the individualization of the risk society liberates the individuals from structures which

earlier framed their social being. In this light, living in a modern individualized society means that the traveller cannot just use one specific transport mode like the car, but is obliged to ask himself which specific mode of transport he chooses for a specific situation. And this is actually what many do, *"I can see that the car can give you a sense of freedom, but I think other kinds of transport can do the same. When the public transport is working well, then you can get freedom from that too, because everything just works, there is a god connection and it is fast – and you can leave your brains at home"*. And some also see the negative consequences of spending a lot of time cocooned in a car every day. *"Freedom is for instance that I do not have to sit on the highway each day for an hour."* This is in line with what Beckmann (2001) states when he says that the car has liberated us from some structures, but it has, at the same time, imposed some new ones on us when the "mobile individual is re-embedded into a new structure, reintegrated into standardised automotive ways of living. This standardisation is nowhere else more visible than in the periodically recurring traffic jam" (Beckmann, 2001, 49).

One could argue that the public transport user is freer and more individualized than the car driver. The public transport user is, like the car driver, pressed into certain systems of transportation, but in the process of moving from A to B, the collective user has time on his hands that he can use in a way he finds most suitable or pleasant, while moving he/she is not forced to be alerted to different structures and systems which automobility demands. *"Trains are good because you can relax and de-stress. You can read or you can prepare some work, that's why it is my favourite form of transport."* Some also say that they want to use the car but it takes too much time because of all the traffic, so they take the train instead.

The symbols and the possibilities the car contains are more visible in opposition to something else, such as the public transport system. A commercial for the car Daewoo Nubira plays down that road. A brand new silver lined car is parked across some old railroad tracks overgrown with grass. The message is: *a new barrier for the public transport system has arrived*. The public transport system is handicapped when the company that runs this system (the state) does not have the same budget. Selling the public transport system as an important symbol of the right lifestyle will never have the same budget as the car industry. Baumann (1988) expresses this in connecting the power of symbol to the power of freedom and the interconnection between freedom and capital.

"Goods and services which are not mediated by the free market (so-called 'public services', ... like ... public transport ... which are unlikely to be sold at a profit, or by their very nature are unfit for selling to individual costumers) tend to fall in quality and lose in attractiveness in both relative and absolute terms. Unlike the goods and services merchandised by the market, they tend to discourage their prospective consumers; to their utility values

negative symbolic values are attached (stigma falling upon those who are obliged to consume them), so that they appear as a liability in the symbolic rivalry serviced by consumption. The overall shoddiness of public goods and their low grading in the hierarchy of positional symbols tend to encourage everybody who can afford it to 'buy themselves out' of the dependence of public services, and into the consumer market."

(Bauman 1988, 69–70)

Based on the structural stories that go around and how the public transport system is presented in the media, I argue that the public transport system has a far more negative reputation than it deserves. This is closely linked to the symbolic value of these transport systems which are being produced and reproduced through the structural stories. The public transport system is given the label of second-class mobility, as a political spokesman from a very car friendly Danish party said at a conference on public transport. *"In the Conservative People's Party we like public transport. It means that those who drive in their own car have enough space on the roads."* The symbolic and institutional characteristics of the public transport system and the automobile are an important part of why the individual constructs and accepts the structural stories on mobility. Accepting and constructing structural stories is linked to leading a life with a bearable number of ambivalences by choosing lifestyles and these lifestyle choices are to a large degree guided by the symbolic power of different products. And when the car is affiliated with freedom, who wouldn't choose that as their everyday mobility?

6 Mobility and Motility

Living a late modern life demands a certain level of mobility, the individual has to be able to get from one place to another fast, to be flexible and ready to move in a second, and most importantly have the possibility of mobility so that the idea of all the potentials embedded in everyday life does not get clouded. Possibilities related to mobility are characterized by being able to do whatever you want, whenever you want, as often as you want. These kinds of possibilities are often related to possessing a car, *"The car gives you the freedom to change plans at the last minute, you probably won't do it, but it is important, you can change your plans in a second"*. It is not about making use of the possibilities but more important the sense that they exist. *"I would not have a car if I did not have a summer cottage, there it is necessary and it is also nice to have the possibilities to get out of the city in the summer ... it just works as a potential for transport whenever you need it."* Essential in understanding mobility is therefore not alone the definite distance covered, but even more the

potentials for movement. Kaufmann (2002) has in his book “Re-thinking mobility” started a process of redefining the concept of mobility so that the potential for mobility has its own voice. Starting from sociological theories about the fluid society, he defines the concept of motility (the potential to be mobile) along side with the concept of mobility. The aim is to make sociological categories which can be used in a closer analysis of the empirical field. He defines motility “as the way in which an individual appropriates what is possible in the domain of mobility and puts this potential to use for his or her activities” (Kaufmann, 2002, 37). Despite the fact that motility is identified on the individual level, it is shaped by social life and not by the individual. Motility is formatted by financial, social and cultural capital of those involved, these aspects together define the possible opportunities and projects (Kaufmann, 2002, 40). The outline of everyday life and the life policy the individual wishes to follow have a great influence on the motility. Very different life situations with large variants in economic possibilities and local connections can have an equal amount of motility, but the outcome of mobility can be very different (Kaufmann, 2002, 46).

As always in relation to new concepts, there has been some negative voices on the need for creating the term of motility when for some it is included in the term mobility. This is particularly true for traditions, which I am a part of, which a few years back made a shift from transport research to mobility research. The big change at that time consisted in the understanding that mobility research in contrast to transport research also contained the potentials for moving. Beckman (2001) shows the difference by relating traffic to mobility and says that “traffic, in opposition to mobility, is ‘realised movement in concrete geographical space’; traffic is ‘materialised’ mobility” (Beckmann, 2001, 31). This means that with a starting point in transport research, the difference is between transport and mobility, where for other scholars it lies between mobility and motility. What convinced me to accept the concept of motility was working with everyday life and the structural stories in relation to the ideas of freedom. Motility is closely connected to the idea of freedom which is a ruling utopia navigating our everyday life. The idea of “the good life” is primarily controlled or navigated by the utopias of freedom and happiness. And the concept of motility has potentials for containing and framing these agenda setting utopias, it provides a focus on the utopias, the vision and the potential. These are all aspects which are extremely important in analysing the growing mobility. Motility has a huge influence on how we construct our everyday lives and having a narrower and precise analytical frame to analyse these important aspect of mobility is very constructive.

Kaufman (2002) describes different types of individuals with different starting points in their way of being mobile in everyday life. His wish has been to examine if individuals are freer when they are more mobile and if there is a greater connection between mobility and motility with the most mobile individuals. He concludes that

there are no signs that the most spatially mobile individuals have more freedom in their everyday lives and that the vast number of possibilities we have for mobility are used to “reconcile more constraints rather than to obtain more freedom” (Kaufmann, 2002, 58). The following example shows the ambivalences and dichotomies that are coherent in mobility and motility. In interviewing families, the partners were interviewed separately. The wife in this family explains why it is important for them to have a car, *“Lately I have been thinking it would be nice with a shared car, one could just go get it when you needed it. But right now my husband is looking for a job and it is nice to have extra possibilities”*. While the husband at the same time has a different picture of what it would mean if the motility was to be materialised into mobility, *“A heavy tie to put on me would be if I had to go to x city and spend two hours on transport every day. That would be to take away my freedom, it would be spending time on nothing. Transport to and from work is a waste of time”*. He addresses the mobility dichotomy freedom and unfreedom and you can ask the question, if it is not the case that motility is close to the utopia of freedom, the freedom that has no negative consequences, where the unfreedom and insecurity do not exist. Consequently motility, the utopia or the ideas concerning the possibilities we have, become what frames the ideas on, and the need for mobility in everyday life produces and reproduces the structural story “more mobility gives more freedom”.

7 Conclusions

Individuals’ mobility patterns are based on a number of conscious and unconscious choices. The mobility patterns are dependent on the choices of lifestyles and the fragmentation of everyday life activities in time and space. With all the possibility of late modern everyday life, mobility becomes of great significance in constructing the “good life”. To overcome and control this life we need not to reflect on all the decisions we make. Therefore, we construct the structural story, when it offers an apparent rationality to act by and at the same time decreases the ambivalences that follow from choosing certain actions rather than others. The structural story offers an apparent rationality and a matter of course we need when we make some of these everyday choices. While the structural stories on mobility help us in our time pressured everyday life, they also contribute to maintain certain types of mobility as an indisputable “objective truth” and sustain certain mobility behaviours. Having ambivalences is an inevitable part of late modern life, by means of the structural stories we can live with these ambivalences and this is why the structural stories are mostly not questioned.

The idea of “the good life” is primarily controlled or navigated by the utopia of freedom and happiness. And the concept of motility has potentials for containing and framing these agenda setting utopias, which has a huge influence on the

growing mobility especially automobility. Motility is close to the utopia of freedom, a freedom that has no negative consequences, where unfreedom and insecurity do not exist. The structural story offers an important analytical angle because it gives voices to the lived everyday life and reveals the cracks where alternative structural stories on mobility can be installed. The big challenge for the future is to find ways through mobility to balance the inequalities that mobility provides and the structural story maintains. One can say that there is a flip side to automobility, it gives us possibilities but on the other hand it places tight restraints on our mobility and today everyday life is moulded into a structure that forces people to keep moving. Through understanding and recognising the structural story it is possible to question and deconstruct the common knowledge the structural stories consist of and make new mobility rationalities.

8 Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my good friends and colleagues Katrine Hartmann-Petersen and Kenneth Roslind with whom I worked in an inspiring and constructive atmosphere for more than three years. In this teamwork the concept of structural stories emerged and became an important player in understanding mobility. I would also like to thank Lise Drewes Nielsen, Anders Lund Hansen and Kurt Aagaard Nielsen for valuable critique on earlier drafts. The generous financial support of the Danish State Railways S-Trains is gratefully acknowledged.

9 References

- Augé, M. (1995), *Non-Places*, London: Verso.
- Bauman, Z. (1988), *Freedom*, Stratford: Open University Press.
- Bauman, Z. (1991), *Modernity and Ambivalence*, Cornell University Press, New York: Ithaca.
- Bauman, Z. (1998), *Globalization: the Human Consequence*, Cambridge: Polity Press
- Bauman, Z. (2000), *Liquid Modernity*, Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Beck, U. (1992), *Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity*, London: Sage.
- Beck, U.; A. Giddens and S. Lash (1994), *Reflexive Modernization – Politics, Tradition and Aesthetics in the Modern Social Order*, Polity Press, Cambridge.
- Beck, U. (1997), *Reinvention of Politics – Rethinking Modernity in the Global Social Order*, Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Beckmann, J. (2000), 'Automobilisering som mobilitetsparadigme – refleksioner over biler, bilister og deres spatiotemporaliteter [Auto Mobilization as Mobility Paradigm – Reflections on Car Drivers and their Spatial Temporalities]', *Dansk Sociologi* [Danish Sociology], 1, 11, Årg. København.
- Beckmann, J. (2001), *Risky Mobility – the Filtering of Automobility's Unintended Consequences*, Sociologisk Institut, Københavns Universitet, København.

- Berger, P. and T. Luckmann et al. (1966), *Den samfundsskabte virkelighed – en videnssociologisk Afhandling* [The social construction of reality: a treatise in the sociology of knowledge], København: Lindhardt og Ringhof.
- Burr, V. (1995), *An Introduction to Social Constructionism*, London: Routledge.
- Bærenholdt, J.O.; M.H. Pedersen, J. Larsen and J. Urry (2004), *Performing Tourist Places*, Aldershot: Ashgate.
- Dodge, M. and R. Kitchin (2004), Flying through code/space: the real virtuality of air travel, *Environment and Planning A*, 36, 195–211.
- Drewes Nielsen, L. (2005), Reflexive Mobility – A Critical and Action Oriented Perspective on Transport Research, in: Thomsen et.al (2005), *Social Perspectives on Mobility*, Aldershot: Ashgate.
- Fairclough, N.; B. Jessop and A. Sayer (2001), *Critical Realism and Semiosis*, Paper presented to International Association for Critical Realism Annual Conference, Roskilde, Denmark, 17–19 August 2001.
- Featherstone, M.; N. Thrift and J. Urry (Eds) (2004), Cultures of Automobility, special issue of *Theory Culture and Society*, 21, 1–284.
- Freudendal-Pedersen, M.; K. Hartmann-Petersen and K. Roslind (1999), *Virksomhedens Trafikale Ansvar* [The traffic responsibility of the company], Roskilde University.
- Freudendal-Pedersen, M.; K. Hartmann-Petersen and K. Roslind (2000), *Mobilitet i hverdagen – taler vi nok om det?* [Mobility in everyday life – do we talk enough about it], Roskilde University.
- Freudendal-Pedersen, M.; K. Hartmann-Petersen and K. Roslind (2002), *Strukturelle fortællinger om mobilitet* [Structural stories on mobility], Roskilde University.
- Freudendal-Pedersen, M. (2005), Structural Stories, Mobility and (Un)Freedom, in: Thomsen et.al (2005), *Social Perspectives on Mobility*, Aldershot: Ashgate.
- Giddens, A. (1984), *The Constitution of Society*, California: The University of California Press.
- Giddens, A. (1991), *Modernity and Self-Identity*, Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Giddens, A. (1994), *Modernitetens konsekvenser*, [The Consequences of Modernity], København: Hans Reitzels Forlag.
- Hagman, O. (2004), *Alternative Mobilities in the Networking of Everyday Life*, Paper presented at the Alternative Mobilities Futures conference, 9–11 January 2004, Lancaster University, UK.
- Hannam, K.; M. Sheller and J. Urry (2006), Mobilities, Immobilities and Moorings. *Mobilities*, 1, 1, March 2006, 1–22.
- Hansen, L.G. (2005), Impacts of Infrastructure investment on Logistics and Transport – Examples from the Fixed Links of the Great Belt and Oresund in Denmark, in: Thomsen et al. (2005), *Social Perspectives on Mobility*, Aldershot: Ashgate.
- Harvey, D. (1989), *The Condition of Postmodernity*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
- Hylland Eriksen, Thomas (2001), *Tyranny of the Moment – Fast and Slow Time in the Information Age*, London: Pluto Press.
- Jensen, A. (2006), *Governing with Rationalities of Mobility – A Study of Institution Building and Governmentality in European Transport Policy*, Department for Environment, Technology and Social Studies, Roskilde University, Roskilde
- Jensen, O.B. and T. Richardson (2004), *Making European Space: Mobility, Power and Territorial Identity*, London: Routledge.
- Jespersen, P.H. and L. Drewes Nielsen (2005), Involving Freight Transport Actors in Production of Knowledge – Experience with Future Workshop Methodology, in: Thomsen et.al (2005), *Social Perspectives on Mobility*, Aldershot: Ashgate.
- Kaplan, C. (2006) Mobility and War: the “Cosmic View” of US Air Power, *Environment and Planning A*, 38, 2, 395–407.

- Kaufmann, V. (2002), *Re-thinking Mobility. Contemporary Sociology*, Aldershot: Ashgate.
- Kesselring, S. and G. Vogel (2004), *Mobility Pioneers – Networks, Scapes and Flows between First and Second Modernity*, Discussion paper for the Alternative Mobilities Futures conference, 9–11 January 2004, Lancaster University, UK.
- Kesselring, S. (2006), Pioneering Mobilities: New Patterns of Movement and Motility in a Mobile World, *Environment and Planning A*, 38, 2, 269–279.
- Lassen, C. (2005), *Den Mobiliserede Vidensarbejder – en analyse af internationale arbejdsrejsers sociologi* [The mobilized knowledgedeworker – an analysis of the sociology of international worktravel] Department of Development and Planning, Aalborg University, Aalborg.
- Oldrup, H.J. (2005), *Mellem hastighed og tilhør – erfaringer og fortællinger om hverdagsmobilitet* [Between speed and belonging – experiences and narratives on everyday mobility], Department of Sociology, Copenhagen University, Copenhagen.
- Pooley, C.G.; J. Turnbull and M. Adams (2005), *A Mobile Century? – Changes in Everyday Mobility in Britain in the Twentieth Century*, Aldershot: Ashgate.
- Sayer, A. (2000), *Realism and Social Science*, London: Sage.
- Smart, B. (1999), *Facing Modernity – Ambivalence, Reflexivity and Morality*, London: Sage.
- Sheller, M. and J. Urry (Eds) (2004), *Tourism Mobilities: Places to Play, Places in Play*, London: Routledge.
- Sheller, M. (2006), *Mobility, Freedom and Public Space*, Paper presented at the Mobilities Symposium, Trondheim, Norway, June 2006.
- Shove, E. (1998), *Consuming Automobility*, Discussion paper, Project SceneSusTech, Department of Sociology, Trinity College Dublin, Dublin 2, Ireland.
- Thomsen, T.U. (2005), Parents' Construction of Traffic Safety: Children's Independent Mobility at Risk? In: Thomsen et al. (2005), *Social Perspectives on Mobility*, Aldershot: Ashgate.
- Thomsen, T.U. (2001), *Persontransportens betydning for individet I et identitetsperspektiv – med fokus på transportmiddelvalg* [What does mobility mean to the traveller? – An identity perspective on mode choices], The Aarhus School of Business, Department of Marketing, Denmark.
- Thrift, N. (1996), *Spatial Formations*, London: Sage.
- Urry, J. (2000), *Sociology beyond Societies – Mobilities for the Twenty-first Century*, London: Routledge.
- Vogel, G. (2007), *Selbstständige Medienschaffende in der Netzwerkgesellschaft. Zwischen innovativer Beweglichkeit und flexibler Anpassung* [Mobilizing the net. Virtual mobility, self-employment and the network society], Promotion an der Technischen Universität München, München.

