

National, Transnational and International Communication and Movement

The principal object of the following volume is to render the traveler as independent as possible of landlords, coachmen, and guides, and thus enable him to the more thoroughly to enjoy and appreciate the objects of interest he meets with on his tour.

Karl Baedeker¹

The spatial infrastructures implemented from above and the cartographic iconography representing it provided the German people with endless possibilities of practical and imagined spatial connections, but the final choice to utilize them was up to the free will of individuals in their everyday activities. Part III analyzes the actual connections between people formed through various modes of mobilities. It does not study static institutions, as Part I, or given visual texts, as Part II, but ongoing movement. The reconstruction of social networks from contemporary statistics of mobility complements the viewpoints of the previous chapters. State territories are seen as ‘lived spaces,’ in which people move and act, many times regardless of the predefined borders of the territory or the planning of a dominant elite.

Mobility has many forms and types, and their analysis reveals socially defined boundaries, which limit the directions and range of movement in space. Tim Creswell notes that mobility is at least as significant in the formation of space as fixity and place, if not more. ‘What is not “geographical” (both in real world and disciplinary terms) about things and people on the move? Why is geography equated with fixity and stasis?’

Mobility is just as spatial—as geographical—and just as central to the human experience of the world, as place.²

Accordingly, the last three chapters explore the three most significant forms of transnational public mobility in the nineteenth century: migration, railway travel, and postal communications. Chapter 8 discusses two distinct types of migration in the German world, German mass emigration and the temporary migration of students to foreign universities. Chapter 9 examines railway journeys in order to interpret the boundaries of travel. Chapter 10 describes patterns of postal communication and identifies communication centers and peripheries.

All three chapters rely on statistical data and as such depend on categorization (mostly state oriented), designed by interested agencies, such as statistical bureaus, commercial institutions, and social scientists.³ Categorization is a primary condition for collecting the data, but the categories are always a result of a predesigned perception and as such cannot be seen as neutral. Consequently, we must always consider who collected the data and for what cause.⁴

Furthermore, statistical categories affect the surveyed society and the way in which we understand it.⁵ They create a language, with which the members of the society subsequently describe their reality. Consequently, it is hard to identify when the categories accurately describe social divisions, and when they help construct those divisions.⁶ In terms of historical research, this can easily lead to circular argumentation which naturalizes social divisions with pre-decided statistical categories.⁷ In addition, the aggregation of point-based measures, such as individual migration, train travel, and postal interactions, into arbitrary cities, districts, or states, is a source of statistical bias coined the ‘modifiable areal unit problem.’⁸ The resulting summary values (e.g., totals, rates, proportions, and densities) are influenced by both the shape and scale of the aggregation unit, which makes it increasingly difficult to determine whether any patterns found are simply due to the arrangements of the administrative units used to report the data, rather than underlying patterns within the data. Accordingly, Walter Isard states that ‘the choice of a particular interregional framework depends upon the stock of existing data and the manner in which existing data collecting and processing agencies are organized.’⁹ As a result, more delicate and nuanced divisions are not always possible when the data is given in larger scales.¹⁰ Despite

this limitation, the following chapters attempt to break out of the given categories and question the cohesiveness of state territories.

NOTES

1. This quote is taken from Baedeker 1864b, p. v; an English edition of a Baedeker guidebook. German editions are very similar in style, see Baedeker 1864a, p. III.
2. Creswell 2006, p. 3.
3. Desrosières 1998, p. 9.
4. Schneider 2007, p. 28.
5. See: Anderson 1991, pp. 163–186.
6. Desrosières 1998, p. 333.
7. For example, the conflicting sides in the debate about Macedonian ethnicity relied on different statistical categories (language, religion, etc.). Wilkinson 1951.
8. Openshaw 1984.
9. Isard 1962, pp. 324–325.
10. Burton 1972, p. 42.

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