

CONFERENCE OF THE COMMISSION MOBILITIES_REGIMES IN THE GERMAN SOCIETY FOR EUROPEAN ETHNOLOGY (DGV)

Time and Place: University Graz, Institute for Cultural Anthropology & European Ethnology, 15. - 17.11.2018

Procedure: Conference with keynotes, section lectures, workshops; Arjun Appadurai, initiator, guest of honor and key-note speaker, will participate in the conference in Graz.

Organizers: Johanna Rolshoven, Regina Römhild, Marija Martinovic

Mobilized Futures – the role of the imagination and aspiration in transformations of the present

A conference with Arjun Appadurai (New York, Berlin)

Globalization, individualization, commodification and postcolonial claims to recognition and participation are central moments of development on the path to late modernity. By now not only the economically successful West is the producer of mediatized narratives that empower individuals, "separate oneself from increasingly alienating social environments, collective identities, and normal biographies, in favor of building individual life-schemes.¹ Globally, various possibilities of a "life of their own" (Ulrich Beck) with connectivity to new collectives are circulating. Within these the liabilities of stationary, traditionally modern social institutions have lost their power. Playing a central role here is the longing for the good life in prosperity, security and reliability as well as for its opposite: change, the unknown and new, which serve the search for meaning in life. The 'Western' scenarios of longing in the field of tourist mobility were directed towards the "other" beyond industrial modernity and migration have traditionally focused on the prospering 'North'/'West.' However, these parameters of a classically colonial world division have long since shifted in favor of multicentric, turbulent mobility scenarios and new demarcations in which 'Europe' and 'the West' have forfeited their centrality.

As one of the most prominent globalization theorists in the world, Arjun Appadurai ascribes a society-changing power to the imagination. He defines it as a social practice that has become a key component of a new global order: "The image, the imagined, the imaginary – these are all terms that direct us to something critical and new in global cultural processes: the imagination [...] has become an organized field of social practices, a form of work (in the sense of both labor and culturally organized practice), and a form of negotiation between sites of agency (individuals) and globally defined fields of possibility. This unleashing of the imagination links the play of pastiche (in some settings) to the terror and coercion of states and their competitors. The imagination is now central to all forms of agency, is itself a social fact, and is the key component of the new global order."²

¹ Peter Niedermüller: Stadt, Kulturen und Macht. Zu einigen Aspekten "spätmoderner" Stadtethnologie. In: ÖZfVk LII/101, 1998, 279-301; 283

² Arjun Appadurai: Modernity at Large. Cultural Dimensions of Globalization. Minneapolis, London 1996, 31.

Digital media, films, news, newspapers, books, etc. convey images of possible life plans and point the ways to their realization.³ This process concerns migration and tourism in a special way as initially seemingly incompatible dimensions of world affairs and nourishes the imaginations of its actors at the starting points and destinations. The social spaces linked to this mobility process are based on real geographies, they coincide with topographical spaces whose contours are formed by the movement and networking taking place within them and which therefore often run beyond or across seemingly fixed geopolitical units and their borders. Furthermore, these "processual geographies" (Appadurai) are also interwoven with virtual spaces that are constituted from the perspectives and desires of their imagined or really mobile actors. Such spaces of mobility manifest themselves in social close-up and experiential spaces, when narratives and trends, narrations about other countries, cities and ways of life reach "by word of mouth", as well as in social developments and mobility phenomena: in tourism and migration, visual media, consumer worlds and political spheres of interest. Such narratives and developments produce longings that belong to the basic dispositions of the inhabitants of the multiple centers and peripheries of the globalized world. Everywhere they influence the mobility decisions of the most diverse forms of mobility. Their recognition as legitimate motivations however affects the mobilized actors of the world society in a very unequal way: borders and limitations confront them in different, shaped by longstanding colonial power relations and by today's conditions.

The conference topic is focused on concrete ideas and imaginations, their contexts of action, actors and actants as well as their society-changing consequences. The central question is how multi-perspective imagination contributes to the creation of the future in the presence, thus to the permanent transformation and change of the present. We welcome oral contributions from international professional contexts that discuss empirical and theoretical tropes to the genesis, forms and functions of imaginaries for the mobility and mobilization of individuals and society. The following thematic frameworks will be at the center:

Social production of the imaginary/imaginaries

- Economic and governmental fields of interest
- (De)centering ideas of Europe („The west and the rest!?“ (Stuart Hall))
- The contradictory scenarios of escape
- Intersections of tourist and migrant perspectives

Imaginaries as engines of cultural dynamics and social change

- Mobility as social and gender-relative emancipation: historical and current perspectives
- Social movement and departure
- Religious movements and *agencies*
- Migration impact in rural areas
- New urban constellations
- Political, institutional and cultural effects: hegemony, populism, identity

Actors and actants of the mobility regimes

³ Cf. i.a. <http://www.internationalcommunicationsummit.com/en/ics-newszone/ics-interview/europe-and-migrations-arjun-appadurai-and-power-imagination>

- Governmental structures and dispositives
- 'Traffickers' and travel guides: between criminalization and self-organization
- Moving Visualities/Visual Cultures [Media, Agencies, Transporters: Films, Literature, ...]
- Digitalization as a qualification structure