

**Tourists and vagabonds in 21<sup>st</sup> century cities.  
On senses of socio-spatial belonging of international migrants**

- outline of current research project as of August 2017 -

In my current research project, *Tourists and vagabonds in 21<sup>st</sup> century cities: On senses of socio-spatial belonging of international migrants*, I work at the intersection of migration studies, urban studies and material culture studies. My empirical research asks for the ways in which international migrants establish senses of belonging to (urban) places despite frequently changing locations. Especially in focus are highly skilled as well as low skilled migrants, that is those who – presumably – migrate voluntarily and those who migrate for the sake of survival.

For these two groups, I use the terms coined by Zygmunt Bauman (1996): to analytically capture their role in the world society: tourists and vagabonds. Representing two sides of the same development, both tourists and vagabonds participate in the global society, but in different ways and with different practices and identities. Tourists are those who voluntarily decide to cross spatial distances in order to live a temporal life. Independent of certain localities and temporalities, they are part of a global knowledge elite that accounts for major parts of what is called globalization. They are key figures in political, economic, and institutional processes and participate in respective networks. Paradigmatic examples of these tourists are the members of the creative class (Florida 2004), currently a prominent target group of different political and economic actors both on a local and a global level. Vagabonds, on the contrary, are forced to live a mobile life; they follow the tourists' stream in order to survive. They live a life independent of space, because their local homes do not offer any life chances to them. They assure the tourists' participation in a spatially independent global life and share a temporarily localized life in global metropolises with them. If the creative class constitutes the paradigmatic figure of the tourists, the lower end of the service class does correspondingly for the vagabonds.

Though both groups of migrants are part of the spatially independent flow of international migration, there are localized at (often urban) places that dispose of own local logics and where, I argue, a characteristic (again: often metropolitan) culture and sociality takes shape. To these places, international migrants establish certain forms of place attachment, ensuring their “locatedness during mobility” (Brickell and Datta 2011), and develop specific senses of belonging. In this sense, the interdependency of local and global processes with its certain spatial, temporal, and social peculiarities is in the center of my research.

As a first analysis of my empirical data shows, objects play a significant role for these processes of attachment and belonging. These objects either travel with the migrants or are stationary, thus being left being when the move to a new place is pending. The (emotional) importance of certain objects may vary in the course of their owners' migratory lives (see Bardhi, Eckhardt, and Arnould 2012), but there are also objects whose value remains rather stable over time. The data thus direct me towards integrating material culture studies, making it possible to understand and explain the interdependencies of attachments to places against the backdrop of migratory lifestyles.

The general aim of this research project, supposed to serve as basis for my habilitation treatise, is twofold: On the one hand, its objective is the advancement of a social theory, in particular considering phenomena of migration in specific urban-spatial contexts, that is based on empirically sound research and data. Here, special attention shall be on the role of (material)

objects for the creation of senses of belonging and attachment to places, thus developing a social theory of objects further. On the other hand, the project aims at developing a new/modified research methodology that can be used to adequately analyze urban migration processes like those described above.

### **Bibliography**

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