

**Ninth International Spaces & Flows Conference on
"Mobilities in the Global North and South –
Critical Urban and Global Visions"
24-26 October, 2018, Heidelberg**

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With the urgencies of global warming and inequality as backdrops, the Spaces and Flows conference kicked-off with a thought-provoking keynote by Geographer Tim Cresswell about the politics of low carbon mobility transitions. Cresswell's talk emphasized how neo-liberal logics of individual action and personal responsibility act to deflect culpability from structural forces and the political power of corporations, and that this dynamic between individual and societal/political power change is one of the fundamental conundrums of the new mobility agenda. During the next two days this conundrum was revisited throughout the conference and made for very lively intellectual conversation and constructive debate, both formally inside the venue, and informally over coffee, meals, or outings around Heidelberg.

Building on Cresswell's critique of neo-liberal logics, on the first full day of presentations several lively discussions about the contradictions of the car culture and identity took place. For example we learned from Melissa Butcher that while the car is destroying Delhi, for upper class women the car also liberates from deeply misogynistic street spaces – adding crosscurrents to previously-raised questions about individual responsibility versus political power. The ample time for questions and the garden talks allowed these conundrums to be vetted further and the international representation and participation of emerging scholars added even more insights often missed in standard transport or planning-themed discourses.



Heidelberg was itself a fascinating setting since this year's Spaces and Flow's conference was an investigation of critical perspectives on mobility. Many of us were especially curious about how the city presents a proud image of sustainability and indeed, Heidelberg does have an excellent public transport system and a healthy cycling culture. But as we explored the city by foot, trams, and even by boat, the conference themes of political power, contradictions, and identity resonated.

Many of us (myself especially) were struck at how many cars come into Heidelberg from the region. The world famous Altstadt is indeed beautiful and worth a stroll. Yet literally beneath the mile-long pedestrian precinct are massive underground car-parking garages, and parts of the Heidelberg's Neuenheimer Feld campus, location of the conference venue resembled car-oriented office parks in Silicon Valley or Texas rather than how I'd imagined Germany! A conference boat tour with a glass of local wine provided a voyeuristic gaze at the lovely city, while on a morning guided walking tour of new large-scale housing developments, the more gritty 'street fights' in Heidelberg over parking or housing affordability bought some of us back to earth.

Back inside the Spaces and Flows conference, there was a well-balanced set of critical and practical approaches towards grappling with the mobility conundrums outside in the streets. We learned of car, transit, and cycling politics in cities from nearby Frankfurt to global cities like Cape Town, Detroit, Jakarta and Tehran. We got talks with methods and approaches that consider car dependency as not just a spatial technicality, but an assemblage of ideology and values, which shape politics and power. As I look with anxiety at the great upheaval global warming might bring if we do not act, I am inspired that there are gatherings like this, and hopeful that what we learned in Heidelberg can be transferred to cities, regions and nations.



Team Heidelberg "Nordamerika/Stadtgeographie"