THE SOCIAL LIFE OF MOBILITY ENVIRONMENTS

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Abstract

This is a position paper regarding the social dynamics of mobility environments associated with inner-city high-speed rail stations (HSR). This paper aims to complement the place dimensions in previous related studies that consider the stations as node and place, through spatial explorations of their social life. To this end I present briefly two analytical methods regarding people's use of the place and the everyday life rhythms, and propose to collect this type of information in a distributed, collaborative manner, which may include planning experimental courses. Including the provision for social life in decision-making processes for railway stations development is a measurable parameter of spatial quality that can indicate city's potential success in the global marketplace.

1. Introduction

The inner-city railway stations and their immediate proximity represent strategic locations, which typically concentrate development efforts on their attributes as transportation nodes, and as landmarks within the urban fabric. Historically the stations have been important urban "gates" opening to the broader region and leading toward foreign destinations. Recent redevelopment strategies of the areas at the railway station often address the aspirations of globally connected local economies and real estate markets. However, the railway stations need to receive more attention as socially constructed spaces, and because they mobilize large public budgets, among tangible public benefits should be also the improvement of their potential to accommodate public life. The necessity of social exploration becomes more critical for important locations like the surrounding areas of high-speed rail (HSR) stations, due to their national importance, increased accessibility, a particular space-time dimension including Castells' (2005, 2010) space of flows - space of places relation within the globalization process.

In this paper I propose to include the provision for social life in decision-making processes for railway stations development, as a parameter of spatial quality. The paper is part of a European research project (PORTA) that explores the social dynamics associated with inner-city railway stations in three cities along one of Europe's west-east axis stretching from the Atlantic to the Black Sea. Through this project I aim to formulate a synthetic view of the social life in the public spaces of

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trains, and in and around the stations, which are called “mobility environments” (Bertolini and Dijst, 2003). The stations chosen for spatial exploration through field participant observation are the three Parisian stations that are currently destinations of international HSR (i.e. Gare du nord, Gare de l’est and Gare de Lyon), and the central station in Zurich (i.e. Hauptbahnhof) that receives HSR from France (TGV) and Germany (ICE). From the expertise with HSR networks development and stations urban integration in Paris and Zurich I derive lessons for future development of the central station, Gara de nord, in Bucharest.

At urban scale there is documentation of various planning initiatives to integrate railway transport and land use development at station area, either in urban regeneration and redevelopment projects in Europe (Bertolini and Spit 1998, Joseph 1999, Pol 2002, Bruinsma 2008), or in transit oriented developments (TODs) in the USA (Calthorpe 1993, Cervero 1998). In context Bertolini’s node-place model (1999) put forward an analytical framework that may be applied to urban regions, and also at specific stations’ location, in order to provide some insight in the urban dynamics between rail transport and adjacent urban activities and land uses. Along with the facilitation of the redevelopment process, an initial purpose of applying in practice the node-place model is “the realisation of the potential for human interaction at and around public transportation nodes” (Bertolini 1999, p.201).

Why is the spatial quality of rail station areas important? Or even why shall we consider rail stations as urban places at all? First, nowadays the vitality of the inner city is seen as a measure of the city’s potential success in the global marketplace (Castells 2005), and that can be influenced through the location and development of dynamic inter-modal transportation nodes. Second, such nodes like HSR stations are capable to represent the city as an interface between the global and the local scale. This is especially so, if one takes into account the transformations that fast train connections bring into the travel patterns, and into the present conception and future use of HSR stations and their surrounding areas, which is similar to that of the airport districts (e.g. *Gares et connexions*: Rol-Tanguy 2011, Duthilleul 2010, Amar 2010). In this case, the rail station and its adjacent developments may be the only local destination of foreign travelers. So having the potential to represent the city’s image projected to the world, the place qualities of these developments play an important role in shaping the city’s identity. Moreover, if the location is closer to the city core, often the space of the railway station becomes a city’s extension that creates unique opportunities for social exchanges, a place where locals can connect face-to-face with the larger regional and global context brought about by the commuting others (e.g. Zurich Hauptbahnhof).

Due to these symbolic transformations within the urban fabric, and in light of the stations’ importance also as transport nodes within the rail network, in this paper I propose to introduce in the analyses of railway stations as nodes and places, some urban design perspectives that complement their place dimension. In the following sections I present briefly a few possible methods toward such spatial explorations that require, rather than removed observation and analyses, direct engagement in travel situations. The research findings may complement the node-place model, for instance, by means of participant observations of the spatial practice and associated temporalities. While the knowledge acquired from such analyses has the potential to inform in detail the development process, and also particularize it according to these findings, the main research challenges reside in the scientific formulation of the ambiguities, vulnerabilities, and the ephemera associated with such spatial explorations. Eventually, the PORTA project outcomes may add an important missing link between the spatial quality of railway stations, and infrastructure networks development and spatial planning.

This paper is organized in four parts. First I exemplify a spatial analysis method that helps to identify design choices for shaping "good places", which is based on people's use of space (Whyte 1980). Second, after structuring a place-based perspective, I make a concise overview of the nature of space and place, to advance a temporal perspective on the dynamic places like HSR railway stations. I present the concept of place in parallel with the node-place model (Bertolini 1999), in order to suggest some possible complementarities that stress on an urban design perspective of places. Third, I mention briefly a few characteristics of rhythm-analyses, as the method to be used in deciphering the temporalities of mobility environments. Fourth, I conclude with the perspectives of grass-roots deployment of these types of spatial explorations to generate collective images of the place, which may be further employed in the development processes.

2. The social life of mobility environments

Understanding thoroughly how people use and also would like to use the space of the mobility environments requires empirical research of human behavior in these urban settings. There are a few examples of such comprehensive and cross-disciplinary studies, for instance in the French language, the various related studies of authors in the edited volumes by Isaac Joseph (1996 and 1999). This body of work implied analytical frameworks from anthropology, sociology, political science, or geography, in addition to planning and urban design methods. In the planning processes grounded in the people's use of space, field research should be the starting point of future design and development, as advocated by scholars like Kevin Lynch and William Whyte.

In the classic work on the people's behavior in small urban places Whyte (1980) emphasized also the possibilities for action. Accordingly the social life observed by field participation became the basis for re-thinking the New York City zoning ordinance. By way of analogy, this study may be relevant to the case of mobility environments through evaluations of the main spatial elements observed in the field: 1) access and linkages, 2) uses and activities, 3) comfort and image, and 4) sociability, in the manner that the New York based *Project for Public Spaces* developed Whyte's initial categories. The first two categories of variables are relatively similar to those considered in Bertolini's node-place model that aims to understand the nature of change between the mobility flows and urban activities. However, the last two categories of variables, which imply more affective, emotional and phenomenological aspects, are strongly related to the social construction of places. From this perspective the framework provided by Whyte's study brings to light some additional aspects that may explain the spatial quality of railway stations.

Besides its interest within the rail networks and at the urban scale, the railway station is for the community also a focal point in the neighborhood. So the place qualities of the station can be analyzed inside its premises as well as in its urban proximity. As a "place in the city" Bertolini and Spit (1998) defined the station as "All the built and open spaces, together with the activities they host, contained within the perimeter designed by a 'walkable radius' centred on the railway station building, as amended to take account of case-specific physical-psychological, functional-historical and development features" (p.13). In this study the authors take into consideration a 'walkable radius' of 700 meters from the main pedestrian entrance of the railway station. They propose four conventional manners to delimit the area around the station (i.e. the walkable radius, functional-historical elements, topographic, a development perimeter), but because none of them seems sufficiently flexible, Bertolini and Spit suggest as best solution the interplay between these four dimensions.

In a more bottom-up fashion and drawing on the experience of space, one may identify the limits of the railway station surrounding area as Lynch defines districts (1960) through the edges, landmarks and paths that have the potential to give hints regarding the spatial organization, and the structural framework that people refer to while navigating the space. After delimitation of the study area, let us return presently to the application of Whyte's analyses to railway stations, by means of four key qualities that make places successful.

2.1 Access and linkages

During this step the information may be gathered through empirical research, and completed from the related literature. Concerning the station accessibility I propose to structure the analyses according to two categories of variables. One category refers to the railway station premises and concerns elements like a) opening hours (e.g. the stations in Paris in Zurich close during the night between 1.00am/1.30am and 3.30am/4am, while the main station in Bucharest is open 24 hours/day), b) street entrances, c) fences (e.g. the opening of Zurich Hauptbahnhof toward the city versus the more enclosed spaces in Paris and Bucharest), d) inclusive access (functioning for everybody including people with special needs), e) signage and paths for navigating the station and f) inter-modality. The analysis of inter-modality in this case is similar to the node-content (or the accessibility of a node) in Bertolini's node-place model (1999, pp.201-203), which takes into account the intensity and diversity of transport supply, and combines accessibility by various transport modes (i.e. train, bus, tram, underground, car, and bicycle). A special note regarding the Parisian pair stations Gare d'Austerlitz - Gare de Lyon is that the first inter-modal transport node materialized at Gare d'Austerlitz by building a stop of the metro line inside the station main hall (1906, see APUR 2006), and that at Gare de Lyon in December 2011 was inaugurated a station of the shared electric cars (autolib').

The second category of accessibility variables refers to the city and neighborhood linkages, as included in the area of study. Many inner-city historic railway stations benefit from the proximity of a planned neighborhood, which was conceived around the station as the main landmark (e.g. Zurich Hauptbahnhof, Gare de l'est and de Lyon in Paris). As a consequence nowadays the station premises receive a public function for the local community, whose access can be stimulated through other uses than those related to travel (see below the paragraphs on uses and activities). The construction of the railway station brought also the opportunity for opening a representative boulevard, allowing for convenient pedestrian access, in order to link the transportation gate with the inner-city (e.g. Bahnhofstrasse in Zurich, Boulevard de Strasbourg in Paris). But this is not always the case, and a famous example of lacking a representative connection with the city core is Gare du nord in Paris, due to the impossibility to execute the required land expropriations for a boulevard development during the Haussmannian reconstruction of Paris (refer to Bowie 1999, Sauget 2009).

2.2 Uses and activities

The uses and activities of the mobility environments may be recorded through participant observation, from the point of view of the occurring users of the place, and of the type of activities existing in the area of study. Regarding the users presence in the current phase of railway stations evolution, it may be, or not, related to rail travel. Hence a first question to be asked while observing the place is whether people use this public space besides passing through either a transportation node as travelers, or through this node within the urban fabric as passers-by. If there are additional uses to the mobility environments, it is interesting to look for signs of diversity (e.g. range of ages, individuals or group clusters, variety of purposes like walking, eating, relaxing, people watching, reading, playing etc), to identify the parts of the space used, and if there are some noticeable patterns. Note as a difference in comparison with traditional places, there is seldom outset design of stations as "nodes" in Lynch's term (1960) that means a gathering spot, rather the intention being to produce fast pace and optimally fluidized circulations. Hence the pace or tempo relative to people's use of the space is to be analyzed for each case also from a design point of view (i.e. entrances, paths, signage, announcements, noise, lighting, public space furniture etc). As an extreme efficiency example, the number of the train platform is published in the French stations only ten minutes before the train departure, which produces a "controlled" node in front of the traffic displays due to constraints on traveling crowds' use of space.

The type of activities inside and in the station's proximity are to be listed and evaluated according to their use at different times of the day and week, if they are permanent or temporary events, their accessibility, scheduling, management presence, and the like. In addition to public transportation, currently commercial activities at the station are most common, including weekly or seasonal markets like farmer's or Christmas' markets. However, operators of contemporary railway stations made choices also for non-travel related activities. For example, the main hall of Zurich Hauptbahnhof is used as a city square for all sorts of events and activities that vary in scope and scale (e.g. celebrations, manifestations of political actions, sport events etc), and the forthcoming reconstruction of Gare d'Austerlitz in Paris will provide additional space for neighborhood activities such daycare etc. Moreover, there are unaccounted for activities at the station like people watching, which through the researcher's participant observation may reveal other dimensions of the spatial qualities, shaping the character of the place.

2.3 Comfort and image

To decipher the following two groups of place characteristics, the study may be divided between a) the place's conception by professionals, b) the one-time spatial experience (i.e. first-time visitors), and the lived experience of the place (i.e. the regular user of the railway station). During the observation of mobility environments, surveys and questionnaires need to be employed, as well as interviews with the actors involved in the process of spatial production. To the information gathered from field observation, archival research can add important information regarding the institutional setting: the planning culture, the initial policies, the conflicts and constraints within the development projects, and the like. The recorded findings may be evaluated in comparison, and presented in narrative form.

As for the place's comfort and image, the field survey may be structured according to qualities such as a) visibility / obstruction of the interior-exterior space and of the navigating details, b) ease of movement and legibility (e.g. do I always know where I am and where my destination is?), c) signage and spatial borders as leading or misleading (see Joseph 1996), d) use of lighting, materials, planting and green areas, retail frontage, seating and also if there is a choice of places to sit (e.g. Gare du nord versus Gare de Lyon in Paris) e) continuity and enclosure in terms of safety, and f) stimulated emotions like feeling of arrival, and impressions such as the first impression, observing if people are taking pictures of the place, or if there are people presenting the place to others etc.

2.4 Sociability

To what extent it is interesting to strengthen the place qualities of railway stations in terms of sociability? Shall a high-speed place be conceived more as a passing-by transitory place, or shall it stimulate conviviality? Does a terminus station have higher potential for sociability than a through station? Is this a place where you would choose to meet your friends or where strangers make eye contact with each other? Are people smiling, and talking with each other?

Of course the answers to these questions about the interactivity, diversity and friendliness of a high-speed place depend on a multitude of factors. Yet the institutional aspects of planning and development processes, and the planning culture in general, play an important role in the achievement of the mobility environments as successful places in the city. As I mentioned in the introductory section of this paper, the railway station is a place of confluence between the others and the local community, and is capable to generally reflect the community at large. Within the railway station conception, there are design elements that can facilitate face-to-face interactions, and ad-hoc social networking, what Whyte called “triangulators”. A simple example are the electric heaters placed in the main concourse of the Gare du nord or Gare de l’est in Paris, which create focal points that gather people around them, and also give the opportunity of strangers to face each other. A quality of place’s sociability is to make users feel comfortable to interact with strangers.

The design elements related to rail travel like traffic displays, information points or retail kiosks are potential locations for Lynch’s nodes, which are “the strategic spots into which the observer can enter, intensive foci, typically either junctions of paths, moments of shift from one structure to another, or concentrations of some characteristic” (1960, p.72). The place’s sociability may be improved by developing such nodes and their corresponding amenities that can work toward triangulation.

The events and activities organized on the premises and in the proximity of the railway station create as well a multitude of opportunities for social interactions. Additionally, nowadays the French rail company SNCF develops various possibilities to create opportunities for social exchanges also in the high-speed trains, through designated spaces (IDTGV) and the use of information and communication technology (e.g. SNCF apps) that can transform the quality of the spaces associated with rail travel.

3. Place qualities of railway stations

From this brief overview of the qualitative aspects that participants can observe in the mobility environments, I return to theoretical studies, in order to build a thorough understanding of their spatial nature and as particular places. On the nature of space David Harvey (2006) proposes three views namely absolute, relative and relational space, which coexist and are not mutually exclusive. In his words, the absolute space is space being a “thing in itself” independent of the matter, where time does not play an explicit role in spatial formation (e.g. the spatial view of Descartes or of Newton). The relative space arises from relationships between objects, where the temporal dimension is being fixed like in the case of the modern time of clocks and watches.

While the relational space cannot be conceived in separation from time, it is "regarded in the manner of Leibniz, as being contained in objects in the sense that an object can be said to exist only insofar as it contains and represents within itself relationships to other objects" (Harvey 1973, cited in 2006, p.271). How does the concept of place fit within this spatial framework?

In a comprehensive study for the pedagogy of place, Arefi & Triantafillou (2005) propose as teaching models four ontological constructs of the place concept, which is "less coherent [than space], maybe borderless, and can come into existence for a short period of time by dressing the urban space with a new set of visual attributes (e.g., the new Times Square)" (p.77), and "is at times unpredictable and can be understood through engagement, not through detached observation" (p.76). These four place constructs embody a comprehensive understanding of the term, 1) as a set of visual attributes, which may be identified by exploring the complexity within spatial images and syntax (absolute space), 2) as product decoded from the analyses of spatial morphology, policy making and problem-solving (absolute and relative space), 3) as process, which requires a thorough understanding of the transformative forces over time (relative space), and 4) as meaning (relative and relational space). For deciphering the construct of place as meaning the analyses should imply phenomenological, intuitive, self-reflective takes, due to the ambiguity and complexity associated with the study of values, symbols, or human experiences such as perception, emotion, desire, volition, imagination etc. Note that in shaping the image of a place, these four constructs are kept in dialectical tension while thinking through the interplay among them.

Hence what places' characteristics are we talking about with respect to inner-city railway stations? Previous studies (e.g. Bertolini and Spit 1998, Pol 2002) take into consideration the first three components of the place concept (i.e. image, product and process), and the elements defining the place-content of its area are mainly the intensity and diversity of activities associated with the railway station being. For instance, in the node-place model, Bertolini accounts as variables of the place-index, besides the degree of functional mix, the number of residents in the area, and the number of workers per each of four economic clusters namely retail/hotel and catering, education/health/culture, administration and services, industry and distribution (1999, pp.202-203). Pol chooses spatial quality as a separate element of analysis, but defines it mostly as a physical space quality "of outdoor and indoor public spaces and their integration in the environment" (2002, p.111). While these views pertain to the understanding of place that could be approached from the perspective of absolute space, the inclusion in the analyses of the process (Bertolini and Spit 1998) or only of the actors involved in the redevelopment process (Pol 2002) pertain to the city shaped of space understood in a relative manner. According to a recent analysis (Peek and colleagues 2006), a next step toward improving the node-place model is the inclusion of the synergy between the actors engaged in the (re)development process into the set of variables: "In the end, synergy between node and place features at a station area is created by interactions between the land use and transportation systems through different spatial markets, for instance the labour market, housing market and the market for mobility" (p. 457).

In understanding places, however, the absolute and relative understandings of space do not bring sufficient explanatory qualitative features in terms of its lived experience. As places are predominantly social constructions (e.g. Lefebvre 1991), inquiries may be pursued also from the perspective of the relational space, where it is "impossible to disentangle space from time" (Harvey 2006, p.273), and where processes define their own spatial frame. In a critique of functional theories Lynch (1981) mentioned the absence of time within, as it does not "deal successfully with continuous change, with incremental actions that lead in some progressive direction" (p.39). In the 1972 study on the evidence of time embodied in the physical world, Lynch suggested the possibility of "learning to enjoy the process of change in itself; the constant reformulation of action and aim, the delight of new revelations and new possibilities" (p.211).

Moreover, in the evolution of the railway stations French sociologist Isaac Joseph proposes three phases (1999), which interestingly could be a parallel to Harvey's classification of the spatial nature (2006). There is an initial view of the station as an artifact, referring to its functional role and characteristics as absolute space (e.g. the 19th century rail stations, for which the term in French is "gare"). In the 20th century, after the development of regional and urban rail networks in conjunction with the long distance and high-speed rail (e.g. during 1970s-1980s, APUR 2007), the railway station becomes an inter-modal node-place that in French is called "pole d'échange". As nowadays these exchange poles host also other city activities, their development corresponds mainly to a relative spatial point of view. As a third phase, Joseph introduces the term "place-movement", in French "lieux - mouvements dans la ville" (1999, p.5) that is investigated from the perspective of the relational nature of space. In these latter instances derived from relative and relational spatial understandings, social space is predominant, and time becomes relevant for the changes and exchanges within social networking.

To reflect these particular qualities of space, I will use henceforth the term "high-speed place" to refer to the spatial instantiation of the railway station that Joseph (1999) calls "place-movement". On the one hand this term describes the dynamic and transitory qualities of the current development of railway stations. The railway station and its surrounding area is a prospective lived place, through its capability to inspire meaning and eventually generate attachment through frequent reiterations and formation of emotional ties, but in a different manner than "slower" places such as a "place of birth" or a "place of residence". It is rather a more hasty place of passage, mobility, and relatively rapid change, hence the name "high-speed place". On the other hand, this denomination makes a parallel with the advanced technology of the HSR, reflecting also a fast pace of change, and the overlay of multiple life rhythms. Like I mentioned in the analysis of sociability, more than a transportation mode, HSRs become mobile work-and-play spaces with high potential for socialization and ad-hoc networking. These emergent spatial uses shape a particular lifestyle with specific rhythms that get inserted in the local spatial practice of the destination place.

What are the similarities and differences in the quality evaluation between "slower" places and the "high-speed" places? In the case of classic places Lynch put into words: "A good place is one which, in some way appropriate to the person and her culture, makes her aware of her community, her past, the web of life, and the universe of time and space in which those are contained […] sensible, identifiable places are convenient pegs on which to hang personal memories, feelings, and values. Place identity is closely linked to personal identity. "I am here" supports "I am". Intense familiarity will create a sense of place" (1981, p.142 & 132).

Indeed the railway stations' qualities in terms of visual attributes --even only for a limited period of time through the use of public displays-- together with their meaning (Arefi & Triantafillou 2005) establish them as recognizable, memorable, and even prominent locations in the city. This is the case of all the central stations studied in the PORTA project. Then in the stations studied in Paris and in Zurich, more than half of the travelers are frequent commuters. The recurrent use of rail transport turns these environments into habitual locations, where attachment may be formed through actions' reiteration and representations of the everyday life. Hence my interest in a social and temporal perspective in the inquiry of place qualities translates into advancing a relational understanding of the spatial use of inner-city railway stations and their surrounding areas as high-speed places. In the next section I make a first step toward an analytical framework based on rhythm-analyses (Lefebvre 2004) of the everyday life in the mobility environments.

4. Railway stations as vehicles of time: the high-speed places

The temporal dimension is the most important potential and constraint of the people's use of high-speed places. Why would we analyze temporalities? Maybe because of the "struggle around time and the use of time. … There is no time to do everything but every 'doing' has its time". But also because time as a social product "divides and splits itself into use and use-value on the one hand, and exchange and exchange-value on the other. On the one hand it is sold and on the other it is lived" (Lefebvre 2004, p.74). Furthermore, analyses of the temporalities associated with the mobility environments show how the location, design and operation of railway stations are capable to impact the inner city vitality.

Hence comparative analyses should take into account railway stations' changes over time within historic overviews, as well as in ethnographic accounts of the everyday spatial experience of mobility environments. The constraints of practice may not allow the direct use of these narratives, as Bertolini notes in Bruinsma (2008), "The information should be sophisticated enough to be true to the complex reality, but plain enough to be understood by those involved in the strategy development process" (p.37). So while the knowledge derived from these methods of analysis may not always be sufficiently plain to be used within the process of spatial production, I believe it is theoretically helpful, due to its potential to shape representational spaces that appeal the intuitive and poetic imagination, and through exemplifications may turn useful also in practice (e.g. Bates et al. 1998).

In a more and more globalized world, the railway stations especially the international HSR destinations embody spatial concentrations of the omnipresent overlapping flows: capital, information, technology, vehicles, people, goods etc. In the PORTA project I look at these flows historically in cities like Paris that appear to be focal nodes (Castells 2010), and then follow their distribution and their effects in more distant locations from these centers, for example in Bucharest. There is not a simple way to include the global flows in the analyses, although it is critical to capture their impact on the high-speed places.

As a starting point, because metaphors are a powerful way to represent the complexities of modernity, for mobility environments I suggest here the combination of two metaphorical comparisons inspired from the natural world. One metaphor comes from the ocean waves and tidal rhythms (e.g. Jones 2010), with the potential to describe the fluctuations in the spatial concentrations of flows embodied in a railway station. From this perspective, a station concourse, accesses and proximity may be paralleled with recent representative waterfront developments, as a "travel front" facing the incoming and outgoing variations of embodied flows. (Note that due to the modern rhythms of clocks, this happens mostly at the edge of conscious, as opposite to the ocean symbol of the unconscious). Then the juxtaposition of another metaphor --the heart-- is necessary to imagine the integration of this place within the urban systems. While acting as "urban hearts", currently some of the main stations "pump" daily the equivalent of the city's population. For instance, the same number of travelers as city core residents passes daily through Zurich HB (~380,000), and half of the number of Paris' inhabitants travels every day through the three stations Nord, Est, de Lyon (~1,000,000), and out of these travelers, half are frequent commuters that arrive at and depart daily from the station.

Moreover, due to its dual attributes as transport node and urban place, I note the overlapping qualities of the dynamics within a central railway station and its surrounding area (i.e. transport network, people traffic for various purposes). In other words, there is a certain rhythmic vibration associated with the high-speed places that seems to be part of their dual nature, and that cannot be reproduced in other places only by design. "The everyday is simultaneously the site of, and the theatre for, and what is at stake in a conflict between great indestructible rhythms and the processes imposed by the socio-economic organization of production, consumption, circulation and habitat" (Lefebvre 2004, p.73).

Within this framework, the rhythm-analyses translate spatial theory into design practice through their capability to restore the role of the human body in the spatial production, by reinstating the sensible in modern consciousness (refer to Apostol

2007). But what do we call the sensible? In Lefebvre's words, "It is neither the apparent, nor the phenomenal, but the present. The rhythmanalyst calls on all his senses. … without privileging any one of these sensations … he does not neglect smell, scents, the impressions that are strong in the child and other living beings, which society atrophies, neutralizes in order to arrive at the colorless, the odorless and the insensible" (Lefebvre 2004, p.21).

Rhythm-analyses refers to the understanding of spatial rhythms and their practical consequences, as rhythms could be defined as forms of repetition, or movements and differences within repetition, temporal measures that bring with them "a differentiated time, a qualified duration" (Lefebvre 2004, p.78). In the study of rhythms the relation between repetition and difference is critical. Difference is something new and unforeseen that introduces itself into the repetitive, which is usually what we perceive, for instance, from an announcement through the station speakers, to the renaming of the station public spaces (e.g Gare de Lyon in December 2011), from the construction of the suburban station building at Gare du nord (1990s), to the demolition of the Seine courtyard wing at Gare d'Austerlitz (February 2012), from the murmur of a water fountain, to the noises of the traffic flow interfering with the strolling flow. There are linear rhythms defined by the repetition of the same phenomena that mostly belong to the public realm such as routines, successions, predetermined encounters, a social and civil time (e.g. morning commuting, timetables, time at the café, work time, playtime, opening hours, scheduling, evening commuting). There are cyclical rhythms that have a determined frequency and new beginnings similarly to the cosmic rhythms (e.g. seasonal changes, seasonal markets in and at the station, the succession of day and night, rituals, alternating manifestations of social organization).

Rhythmanalysis was coined first by Gaston Bachelard in *The Psychoanalysis of Fire*, (1964 [1949]) although he borrowed the term from the Brazilian writer Lucio Alberto Pinheiro dos Santos (Lefebvre 2004, p.9), who wrote in Portuguese a work on rhythmanalysis published in 1931 that was lost subsequently. Bachelard used the term as "rhythmo-analysis" in *The Poetics of Space* (1994, p. xxxiv) and developed a chapter on "Rhythmanalysis" in *Dialectic of Duration* (2000 [1950]). Toward the end of his life, Henri Lefebvre made an attempt to develop a theory of rhythms that he exposed in *Writings on Cities* (1996) and *Rhythmanalysis* (2004), in which he aimed at expanding the theory of the spatial production into an applied method. Recent studies tried to advance the rhythm-analyses from the various perspectives of practice (e.g. Edensor 2010). However, research difficulties come from the fact that the rhythmanalyst "must simultaneously catch a rhythm and perceive it within the whole, in the same way as non-analysts, people, perceive it. He must arrive at the 'concrete' through experience" (Lefebvre 2004, p.21), because only the experience of rhythms could give the measure of what is concrete/present. Hence one perceives, analyses and records moods rather than images, picturing an atmosphere rather than reporting on the particular events.

5. Perspectives

Over the last one hundred and fifty years one may observe the transformation of the inner-city railway stations, from the 19th century monumental gates toward exotic worlds or connecting the city with the countryside, into strategic urban locations, concentrating within relatively small scales some of the city's identifiable features. The recent HSR railway stations embody qualities of transportation nodes and complex urban places, which I call here high-speed places.

To build the competency of drawing implications for steering future developments, planning research needs to comprehend the multidimensional spatial practice of these particular places. Empirical research is the only way to evaluate the spatial practice, which is revealed in the association of daily reality (everyday life) and urban reality (urban discourses and practices) within the social life of the mobility environments. The comparative analyses should take into account a "thick description" approach (Geertz 1973), which places the research data in context, and at the same time contextualizes the research findings in order to explain both discourse and practices.

To this end, in this paper I make brief overviews of two methods of analysis. One is Whyte's study of small urban places to evaluate the station's potential as a successful place (1980). The other is the relatively novel method of rhythm-analyses to build an understanding of the everyday life rhythms within the mobility environments. Usually in practice there are not available budgets (i.e. time, money) to perform these comprehensive studies through engagement in observing the people's use of space and its associated rhythms. Therefore, I suggest that only participatory and distributed collaborative processes can provide this data, pointing also at experiential planning course that draw wisdom from social sciences and use the mobility environments as the spatial laboratories.

6. References

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