

## Carried by migrants - frictions of migration and mobility patterns in the conflicting assemblage of the Russian private transport sector

Weicker, Tonio

Postprint / Postprint

Zeitschriftenartikel / journal article

### Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:

Weicker, T. (2019). Carried by migrants - frictions of migration and mobility patterns in the conflicting assemblage of the Russian private transport sector. *Central Asian Affairs*, 6(4), 304-326. <https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:ssoar-71715-8>

### Nutzungsbedingungen:

Dieser Text wird unter einer Deposit-Lizenz (Keine Weiterverbreitung - keine Bearbeitung) zur Verfügung gestellt. Gewährt wird ein nicht exklusives, nicht übertragbares, persönliches und beschränktes Recht auf Nutzung dieses Dokuments. Dieses Dokument ist ausschließlich für den persönlichen, nicht-kommerziellen Gebrauch bestimmt. Auf sämtlichen Kopien dieses Dokuments müssen alle Urheberrechtshinweise und sonstigen Hinweise auf gesetzlichen Schutz beibehalten werden. Sie dürfen dieses Dokument nicht in irgendeiner Weise abändern, noch dürfen Sie dieses Dokument für öffentliche oder kommerzielle Zwecke vervielfältigen, öffentlich ausstellen, aufführen, vertreiben oder anderweitig nutzen.

Mit der Verwendung dieses Dokuments erkennen Sie die Nutzungsbedingungen an.

### Terms of use:

This document is made available under Deposit Licence (No Redistribution - no modifications). We grant a non-exclusive, non-transferable, individual and limited right to using this document. This document is solely intended for your personal, non-commercial use. All of the copies of this documents must retain all copyright information and other information regarding legal protection. You are not allowed to alter this document in any way, to copy it for public or commercial purposes, to exhibit the document in public, to perform, distribute or otherwise use the document in public.

By using this particular document, you accept the above-stated conditions of use.

Tonio Weicker  
Leibniz Institute for Regional Geography  
Schongauerstraße 9, 04328 Leipzig  
Mail: [t\\_weicker@leibniz-ifl.de](mailto:t_weicker@leibniz-ifl.de)  
Phone Number: +49 341 600 55-172

## Carried by Migrants– Frictions of Migration and Mobility Patterns in the Conflicting Assemblage of the Russian Private Transport Sector

### Abstract

It is well known that labour migrants from different countries all over the Eurasian Union build the backbone of crucial economy sectors in the Russian Federation as inter alia construction, agriculture or trade. This article deals with another less mentioned but similarly significant labour market, which changed its assemblage during the last couple of years substantially, namely commercial urban transport services. In the last two decades, the marshrutka sector underwent major reforms and formalisation processes, which on the one hand brought operators back into the tax net and ensured a certain extend of control to the local transport departments but on the other hand worsened the labour conditions of the transport workers. Drawing from empirical evidence of my fieldwork in southern Russia, I describe currently problematized mobility assemblages and embed the actor's articulations in broader conflicts within the marshrutka business and transport regulation policy. I further analyse how labour migrants have been forced to accept unfavourable working conditions in the enterprises, as a direct result of politically triggered reforms in the marshrutka business. The paper provides insights into the social arena "marshrutka" which serves as a societal encounter of urban conflicts and transformation mirroring (un-)intended effects of the local transport planning reformation attempts.

**Keywords:** labour migration, marshrutka, Russian Federation, translocality, transnational identity, public transport policy, urban mobility

## Introduction

The journalist Sergej Prudnikov starts one of his articles about current marshrutka reforms with the following quote: “Migrant drivers are bugging everyone. They do not know the city, they drive like crazy, and they do not even speak Russian”<sup>1</sup>. If only marshrutkas were driven by Russian citizens, there wouldn’t be major problems, the argument continues. Other journalists argue that it is exactly the grey business structure of a still informalised mobility service, which attracts migrants without legitimate education and working permits<sup>2</sup>. If the city could supply a decent public transport infrastructure, the problem would be solved. Starting from this observation, this article explores an identified discursive interrelation between a pejoratively perceived urban transport mode and the instrumentalised origin of their drivers, while going beyond rather superficial and often heavily populist rhetoric in local newspapers.

The paper draws on extensive fieldwork periods mostly conducted in the two southern Russian cities Volgograd and Rostov on Don between 2015-18<sup>3</sup>. Therefore, the study relies on a broad range of more than 40 qualitative interviews, detailed newspaper analysis as well as on ethnographic sources derived out of go along interviews in the buses, participative observations and extensive research diaries. While the main focus of the research project was an in-depth analysis of diverse marshrutka enterprise structures and respective transport policies applied in the last two decades on different administrative and operational levels, the great significance of labour migrants in the sector both as a self-describing ascription strategy and as a pejoratively instrumentalised external attribution became obvious during the fieldwork and give reason to this separated article.

Arguably, labour migrants literally keep contemporary Russian cities moving as the urban transport networks would collapse without their daily services inspite of the widespread derogatory remarks in public newspapers. In private marshrutka enterprises, migrant workers fill in the gap former drivers left behind due to a significant and ongoing decrease of the working conditions and income perspectives in the sector, directly caused by the formalization policy of the government during the last two decades.

Therefore, turning attention towards the everyday societal negotiation on currently supplied commercial marshrutka services, as well as towards long term established labour migration living worlds, it becomes quickly evident that although both phenomena are negotiated rather distinctively, they provide a number of remarkable similarities in the argumentation lines of the public discourse as well as an empirical point of contact in the subordinated discussion about marshrutka modes served by migrant carriers and drivers. This means, both representative actor-groups, e.g. everyday semi-formal urban minibus services and transport workers with migration background are increasingly tackled and criticized by a public majority discourse as well as by concrete policy attempts. Moreover, both phenomena fulfil key functions in preserving the everyday societal life, on the one hand as the backbone of a slowly transitioning economy sector relying on extremely exploitative working conditions and on the other hand as the only reliable engine of everyday urban mobility, which keeps urban life and

---

<sup>1</sup> Sergej Prudnikov, “Na marshrutke bez Aziza. Ostanetsja li Peterburg bez inostrannykh voditelej?,” *Argumenty i Fakty*, July 5, 2017, № 27, accessed December 14, 2017,

[http://www.spb.aif.ru/society/na\\_marshrutke\\_bez\\_aziza\\_ostanetsya\\_li\\_peterburg\\_bez\\_inostrannykh\\_voditelej](http://www.spb.aif.ru/society/na_marshrutke_bez_aziza_ostanetsya_li_peterburg_bez_inostrannykh_voditelej)

<sup>2</sup> Aleksandr Tzipko, “Migrantov zovut na ekzamen!,” *Aktual'nye Kommentarii*, January 26, 2012, accessed May 23, 2018, [http://actualcomment.ru/migrantov\\_zovut\\_na\\_ekzamen.html](http://actualcomment.ru/migrantov_zovut_na_ekzamen.html)

<sup>3</sup> Tonio Weicker, “Russian Cities in Motion. The Marshrutka as a Multifaceted Issue of Post-Soviet Urban Life” (Dissertation), TU Berlin 2019.

mobile circulation for granted. However, despite their system-immanent function, they remain highly marginalized and are recipients of critique mainly from two sides: a wider public discourse shaped by the Russian majority as well as by official administrations and political programs on different levels.

Therefore, the marshrutka living world empirically links challenges in the field of migration and mobility policy, when discursively reinforcing the pejorative image of each other: the 'informal minibuses' and the 'non-regulated labour migration flow'. The article aims to criticise this very common interlink of informal transport with informal labour migrants' conditions and gives more fundamental insights about the development of marshrutka enterprises during the last two decades. In this regard, I argue that the actively reproduced pejorative image of both is directly related to the consequences of a failed reform policy led by the local transport departments. To underline this argument, I will show how the marshrutka market reforms and following changes in the enterprise framework destroyed the social bonds of the drivers and alienated the transport workers from each other. Conclusively, the loss of social capital among the drivers led to a significant restructuring of money flows, which advantage the operators and transport politicians alike at the cost of the driver's livelihood. This may help to explain the decrease of service quality in the past years as well as the disappearance of Russian drivers from the labour sector and their replacement through labour migrants.

From a theoretical perspective, the article contributes to the further entanglement of mobility and migration studies, opening up questions of social inequality through the linkages of fluid (in this case) migrant identity patterns and urban mobility infrastructures. Thinking together patterns of mobility and migration appears promising as both phenomena are semantically linked through processuality and movement. Moreover, there is a constantly growing body of literature in both academic fields, which increasingly refer to each other and search mutually for a fruitful application of the respective field of interest<sup>4</sup>. Nevertheless, many scholars tend to subordinate either migration movements under the lens of a 'mobilities' perspective<sup>5</sup> on society or describe, in turn, notions of mobility as one secondary signifier of migration patterns<sup>6</sup>. The marshrutka assemblage<sup>7</sup> as a place of encounter and a political issue of concern derives here as a promising starting point to theorize further on the complexity of transport related informality and labour as well as on the interrelation of migrant living worlds and urban rhythmicity.

I will begin this article by shortly describing the environmental setting of labour migrants as well as the basic organization structure of commercial minibuses in contemporary Russian cities. Recognising the discursive interrelation of migrants and marshrutka mobility, I theorize in a second and third section on the empirical observed categories of mobile migrants and migrant mobility as highly consequential concepts of daily operation. The article concludes with a short discussion of the empirical insights and their theoretical implications.

### **Translocal patterns of Migration in fluid settings of Mobility**

---

<sup>4</sup> Alison Blunt, "Cultural geographies of migration: mobility, transnationality and diaspora," *Progress in Human Geography*, 2007.

<sup>5</sup> John Urry, *Sociology beyond societies: Mobilities for the twenty-first century* (Routledge, 2012).

<sup>6</sup> Thomas Faist, "The mobility turn: a new paradigm for the social sciences?," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 36, no. 11 (2013).

<sup>7</sup> Ben Anderson and Colin McFarlane. *Assemblage and geography*. In *Area* 43 no.2 (2011), pp. 124–127.

According to the Federal Migration Service of the Russian Federation, 8.842.239 people from the CIS-states resided in Russian territory in October 2016<sup>8</sup>. Although a large majority moved to Russia to find work in order to be able to send remittances home, only a fraction receives official work and residence permits<sup>9</sup>. For instance, in 2014 only 1,5 million citizens from the CIS-states residing in Russia, had a work permit.<sup>10</sup> The official policy of the Federal government concerning this issue remains ambivalent and volatile. For instance, the current legal texts on labour migration, which were originally issued in 2002 under the title 'On the legal status of Foreign Citizens' have since then gone through 82 partially extensive amendments<sup>11</sup>. The many revisions stand metaphorically for a self-created dilemma of the Russian policy makers unsolved already for many years: On the one hand, the government as well as local governors recognize the high demand for relatively cheap labour in certain sectors of the economy and therefore support status quo practices that force labour migrants to accept uncertain residence conditions. On the other hand, several politicians simultaneously argue in favour of the introduction of strict quotas "that do not meet labour demand [but serve as] a populist response to xenophobia, creating the perception that the government is clamping down on immigration"<sup>12</sup>. The depicted ambivalence can also be observed since the last major reform of the Federal migration policy in 2015, when the anyways inadequate and insufficient migration census was abolished and replaced by a patent-system that promised for a better steering effect concerning the distribution of labour migration in the country<sup>13</sup>. In reality, however, the major reforms have been sabotaged by an ever increasing bureaucracy that is preventing many persons affected from initiating permanent working permits<sup>14</sup>. This has led to a situation, where many affected people live and work in a sphere of grey transition, without social welfare and lacking an official legal status. Therefore, most non-registered labour migrants continue to work in specific semi-public economic sectors, the most common being "construction, primarily in house and road building, followed by small-scale wholesale trade and public transport."<sup>15</sup>

In contrast to a widespread anti-immigrant rhetoric among local officials and opinion leaders<sup>16</sup>, a closer consideration of migration living worlds reveals a more complex picture of motion and belonging in transnational and translocal contexts. Obviously the attribution as 'CIS-migrant' tells little about the everyday experiences of individuals. People, arriving from very different countries such as Uzbekistan, Armenia, Ukraine, Tadjikistan or Georgia in

---

<sup>8</sup> MVD Rossii (Ministry of Internal Affairs), «Отдельные показатели миграционной ситуации в Российской Федерации за январь - июнь 2019 года с распределением по странам и регионам» (2018), assessed August 18, 2019, <https://мвд.рф/Deljatelnost/statistics/migracionnaya/item/17595161>

<sup>9</sup> J. Florinskaja and N. Mkrtchjan, "Migracija v Rossii v 2016 godu," №19 (37) (МЭС, 2016), 40.

<sup>10</sup> Irina Semenenko, "Ethnicities, Nationalism and the Politics of Identity: Shaping the Nation in Russia," *Europe-Asia Studies* 67, no. 2 (2015), 313.

<sup>11</sup> Vladimir S. Malakhov and Mark E. Simon, "Labour Migration Policy in Russia: Considerations on Governmentality", *International Migration* 56, no. 3 (2018), 63.

<sup>12</sup> Caress Schenk, "Controlling Immigration Manually: Lessons from Moscow (Russia)," *Europe-Asia Studies* 65, no. 7 (2013), 1445.

<sup>13</sup> Caress Schenk, "Anti-migrant, but not nationalist: Pursuit of statist legitimacy through immigration discourse and policy", in Pal Kolsto and Helge Blakkisrud (eds.), *Russia Before and After Crimea: Nationalism and Identity, 2010-17* (2018), 243-244.

<sup>14</sup> Vladimir S. Malakhov and Mark E. Simon, "Labour Migration Policy in Russia: Considerations on Governmentality", *International Migration* 56, no. 3 (2018), 65.

<sup>15</sup> Vladimir S. Malakhov, "Russia as a New Immigration Country: Policy Response and Public Debate," *Europe-Asia Studies* 66, no. 7 (2014), 1064.

<sup>16</sup> Bhavna Dave, "Becoming "Legal" through "Illegal" Procedures: The Precarious Status of Migrant Workers in Russia", *Russian Analytical Digest* 159, no. 159 (2014), 2.

order to find work in the Russian transport sector, are confronted with different challenges and bureaucratic obstacles, not least depending on the respective destination city or district. Besides, the life biographies, defiance and integration potential may significantly vary among variables as ascribed ethnicity, the access to personal and relative networks, the working environments and many more determinants.

However, one main commonality about CIS- migrants surely results from shared experiences in a common historical heritage of the former Soviet Union. Hence, even though some citizens of the CIS-countries are officially registered as foreigners, may have a temporary work permit or might miss some registration documents, many of them have been living and working in today's Russia rather than their newly established home states for most of their lives. The categorial subordination of labor migrants with different status according to their residence permit is exposed here as a widely artificial ascription system with little meaning. In this sense, Cordula Gdaniec depicts the metropolises in Russia as examples of post-colonial or rather "post-imperial cities"<sup>17</sup>. She reflects on an encounter with labour migrants during one of her fieldwork trips on a main marketplace in Moscow concerning the attitude towards Central Asians:

"I noticed a feeling of normality rather than marginality, reminiscent of the Soviet situation when people from Central Asia were, just like Russians, Soviet citizens [...] Since the break-up of the USSR citizens of the other republics become de facto foreigners in Russia, even if they feel completely at home there, and are framed as migrants, thus becoming marginal not only discursively."<sup>18</sup>

Although, as Jeff Sahadeo has argued, the Soviet ideology of a 'friendship of the peoples' functioned only as a superficial frame, covering underlying practices of marginalization and ethnic violence, conducted under the rule of the superior Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic, it is all the more interesting to note that the collective identification pattern of a Homo Sovieticus continues to be widely reproduced by various affected individuals inspite of very different understandings of belonging.<sup>19</sup> Many of my interview respondents identifying themselves as people of non-Russian origin, referred repeatedly to a common past that has been eased the living and working conditions in the Russian Federation. Samat, a sixty-seven-years old marshrutka driver in Moscow, worked for many years in the commercial transport sector of the city. He explains the relation to his country of residence by referring to his own Soviet biography:

"I have basically two professions: I am actually a railway worker! I worked 39 years in the railway sector. But as it happens in life! We are people of Soviet manufacture, we lived together in the Soviet Union."<sup>20</sup>

Especially experienced drivers combine the personal experience of a Soviet identity with the better working conditions during that time, stating:

"To tell the truth, previously the profession as a driver was highly reputed [...]. For instance, the income was exclusive and drivers enjoyed certain privileges, orderly working hours for example and paid recreational leave. [...] However, today it is not prestigious anymore to work as a marshrutka driver. You can hardly make a living from it. This profession doesn't have any future"<sup>21</sup>.

---

<sup>17</sup> Cordula Gdaniec, *Cultural diversity in Russian cities: the urban landscape in the post-Soviet era 2* (Berghahn Books, 2010), 10.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>19</sup> Jeff Sahadeo, "Druzhba Narodov or second-class citizenship? Soviet Asian migrants in a post-colonial world," *Central Asian Survey* 26, no. 4 (2007).

<sup>20</sup> Samat, 67 years old, marshrutka driver, interview by Tonio Weicker, May 24, 2016, Moscow.

<sup>21</sup> Igor, 63 years old, marshrutka driver (non-Russian origin), interview by Tonio Weicker, October 15, 2017, Rostov on Don.

Samat's lifework to build a united railway system for a formerly united country and Igor's experience of decay underline the multidimensional nature of origin and affiliation at this point. Their stories exemplify the multi-layered intricacy of origin and mobility patterns, representing an ambivalent status quo in the contemporary Russian society, where on the one hand narratives of multiculturalism are forced to assure reciprocal recognition in the everyday urban life, while on the other hand historically grown racial prejudices are applied as a public demarcation and discrimination strategy as well as a more or less successful populist instrument in political discourses. Indeed, Samat's work experience is far from romantic, when he describes his everyday work schedule for a large-scale commercial company in Moscow:

"Well, at four o'clock you get up, at five o'clock you should already be at the depot to get the car, to go through different check-ups. And at 05:30-6:00 o'clock, you should already be at the final stop. Well, depending on your schedule. [...] you end at 12 am. [...] You sleep three hours and go back to work. And we worked five [days in a row]. Sometimes it happened that you had to work on the sixth day, when they did not have enough people, they asked for volunteers. In these weeks, I had only one day off. It was real slave labour<sup>22</sup>" (Samat, 67 years, marshrutka driver 5/24/2016).

In this sense, mobility and migration patterns appear more complex than descriptively expectable, being conglomerated in frictional biographies, multiple layers of urban life; collective identity constructions as well as in everyday performed practices and institutions.

### **Central Asian Minibus Drivers as crucial actors in the urban transport of Russian Cities**

Like Samat or Igor, tens of thousands of people with supposedly non-Russian origin work momentarily in the commercial public transport sector in several Russian cities. Especially the marshrutka, operated as a private minibuss transport service, is a widespread phenomenon in nearly all successor states of the Soviet Union. Marshrutkas provide in most post-soviet cities the largest public transport supply, often offering the only reliable transport option for citizens, due to a chronic undersupply of state-led public transport offers as tramway, trolley- or big-size buses.<sup>23</sup> Although marshrutkas existed as a fringe phenomenon already in the Soviet Union, the widespread emergence of urban minibuss mobility is closely connected to the breakdown of the Soviet Union and the early years of transition.<sup>24</sup> The disastrous financial situation of most of the local municipalities, which shortly after the fall of the former centralized state received the responsibility for local transport supplies, led to a continuously wear of the existing state owned vehicle parks and therefore to an ongoing decrease of public transport mobility.<sup>25</sup> Privately organized and commercialized marshrutka mobility appeared in this situation as a promising gap filler, non-reliant on rarely existent subsidies from the

---

<sup>22</sup> «Ну в четыре часа встаешь, в пять часов уже должен быть на автобазе, пока машину примешь, пока туда-сюда. И пять тридцать-шесть ты уже должен быть на конечной остановке. Ну, в зависимости от твоего графика. До двенадцати. Ну, где-то в час, во втором часу мы попадали домой. Иногда, бывало, мы по три часа в день спали. Три часа спишь, и обратно выходишь на работу. [...] И работал пять – два. Пять дней, каждый день, ну три-четыре часа я спал. Пять дней. Иногда бывало и шестой день работал, когда у них людей не хватало, они просили. Один день у меня был выходной. Это был настоящий рабский труд».

<sup>23</sup>Wladimir Sgibnev and Andrey Vozyanov, "Assemblages of mobility: the marshrutkas of Central Asia," *Central Asian Survey*, 2016, 277.

<sup>24</sup> Anna Sanina, "The marshrutka as a socio-cultural phenomenon of a Russian megacity," *City, Culture and Society* 2, no. 4 (2011), 212.

<sup>25</sup> Anton Vorobyev, Julia Shulika, and Varvara Vasileva, "Formal and Informal Institutions for Urban Transport Management," in *Transport Systems of Russian Cities*, ed. Mikhail Blinkin and Elena Koncheva (Springer, 2016), 180.

state.<sup>26</sup> This said, it is an important, although widely forgotten layer of marshrutka history that they emerged as a fairly elitist and expensive minibus service for the better off, who could afford to skip the long queues for rare and overcrowded municipal buses or trams<sup>27</sup>. In this sense, marshrutka mobility was highly regarded in the early nineties and far from their present assessment.

However, since the establishment of marshrutka mobility in Russian cities as a mass phenomenon and as a middle- or even long-term transport solution, there are constant public voices to state, which oppose minibus transport solutions as being low in quality and prone to criminal business structures.<sup>28,29</sup> And indeed several cases in the private transport sector of Russian cities, especially in the late nineties and the early years after the Millennium, proof corruption offences, money-laundering and illegal employment within the marshrutka business<sup>30,31</sup>. In this sense, the development of marshrutka mobility in Russian cities can inter alia be interpreted as a juxtaposition of formalisation attempts by the local municipalities trying more or less successful to conduct marshrutka mobility patterns in their cities. For instance, Lyudmila Shajtanova and Andrej Kuznetsov have shown how the local government forced marshrutka operators and drivers to register officially by applying obligatory route licenses in Volgograd.<sup>32</sup> This, however, affected negatively the working conditions of so far widely independent acting transport workers. By trying to “regain at least part of their ability to finance bus capital and operations, and to restore at least part of their operating capacity”<sup>33</sup> the consolidation of the marshrutka market subsequently led to the deterioration of the marshrutka-driver’s conditions. Without losing the daily risk of their work, drivers lost their entrepreneurial ability to act because of the establishment of a subcontracting franchise model in officially registered private transport enterprises. Consequently, the profession’s attractiveness started to fade away and the transport conditions for passengers decreased. Jurij Belousov, the chairman of the “association for passenger automobility transport” summarises:

“When marshrutka mobility emerged, drivers were able to generate a respectable income. Back then, many wanted to work in this area, so there was a certain selection at stake. Today, this situation has radically changed. There is a wide lack of staff, so [operators] take almost everyone. It is of course difficult to combat rule violation, but it is still possible. Therefore, we have to act as a united front: the

---

<sup>26</sup> Andrey Kuznetsov and Lyudmila Shaitanova, “Marshrutkas: Spinoffs of Post-Soviet Urban Mobilities,” 2014, 3.

<sup>27</sup> Sanina, Anna. “The marshrutka as a socio-cultural phenomenon of a Russian megacity.” *City, Culture and Society* 2, no. 4 (2011): 211–18.

<sup>28</sup> Vasilij Koltashov, “Marshrutki, territorija bez zakona,” *Эхо Москвы* (Moskau), accessed December 18, 2015, <http://echo.msk.ru/blog/koltashov/1559826-echo/>.

<sup>29</sup> V. Volgin, “Marshrutochnyj korol’,” *Shuberskoe. Voronezh*, July 24, 2016, accessed November 28, 2017, <http://shuberka.ru/home/oblastnye/1347-marshrutochnyj-korol>.

<sup>30</sup> Albina Zolotuchina, “Chlenam Cheljabinskoj OPG, razvernuvshej "marshrutnye vojne", vynesli prigovor,” *ura.ru*, December 20, 2016, accessed November 23, 2017, <https://ura.news/news/1052271685>.

<sup>31</sup> Stas Zacharkin, “Маршрутные войны: Страх и ненависть в пассажирских перевозках Новосибирска,” *sib.fm*, May 5, 2016, accessed November 23, 2017, <https://sib.fm/articles/2016/05/05/marshrutnye-voyny>.

<sup>32</sup> Lyudmila Shajtanova and Andrej Kuznetsov, “Social'naja Istorija Marshrutnykh Taksi g. Volgograda: Preemstvennost' Slova i Razryvy Praktiki.” *Vestnik Volgogradskogo gosudarstvennogo universiteta. Serija 9: Issledovanija molodykh uchenykh*, no. 12 (2014).

<sup>33</sup> Brendan Finn, “Market role and regulation of extensive urban minibus services as large bus service capacity is restored – Case studies from Ghana, Georgia and Kazakhstan,” *Research in Transportation Economics* 22, no. 1 (2008), 119.



consumer, the carrier control agencies, the administration and so on. It is important to raise the prestige of the profession. After all, this is a dangerous, but socially important and very responsible work.”<sup>34</sup>

Simultaneously, this caused the effect that since the beginning of a continuing transformation of private transport enterprises due to several regulation changes and the transformation of local markets, for some time past the enterprises increasingly employed labour migrants in many places. Olga Parschina comments the aftermath of the marshrutka reforms in Krasnoyarsk as follows:

“In the transport sector of Krasnoyarsk, the private companies try to minimize the expenditure and maximize the gains which follows a downgrade in quality. This applies particular to commercial transport companies. They use inappropriate, obsolete vehicle fleets and hire unqualified cheap labour forces mostly from Central Asia, which partially cannot communicate with the passengers.”<sup>35</sup>

At this point, it is important to note that the share of labour migrants differs widely from city to city and seems generally to correlate with the average degree of income in a certain city. In this sense, relatively rich cities like Saint Petersburg show a much higher supply of labour migrants working in the public transport sector than cities like Volgograd, for instance, with a significant lower income level.<sup>36</sup> Furthermore, there are further causes as geographical determinants or the varying number of operators in a city<sup>37</sup>, which condition different degrees of competition in the transport sector from city to city and therefore affect the local employment rate of labour migrants. Moreover, the general supply of traffic participants (including private car mobility or the existence of a metro system) influences the market position of marshrutka providers and within the working conditions of the drivers.

Conclusively, it should be noted that the ongoing attempts of local authorities to domesticate publicly criticized marshrutka practices in their cities have in most cases not led to an image increase of marshrutka mobility as such. In contrary, more and more municipalities try to reduce or fully shutdown marshrutka transport offers. Some showcase projects, for example in Kazan<sup>38</sup> or Moscow<sup>39</sup>, have already abolished marshrutka modes from the public transport supply. Other attempts were less successful due to the lacking ability to provide alternative public transport offers, which provoked illegal or grey modes of minibus providers to appear and fill the leftover gap of urban transport needs. In this period of uncertainty, marshrutka drivers face additionally to the very exploitative everyday working conditions further job

---

<sup>34</sup> J. N. Belousov, “Рабочая группа ищет проблемы там, где их нет,” *V1.ru*, January 22, 2014, accessed February 26, 2018, <http://v1.ru/text/gorod/748887.html>

<sup>35</sup> Olga I. Parschina, “Issledovanie Problem Gorodskogo Obshhestvennogo Passazhirsogo Transporta” (UDK 656, Sibirskij Federal'nyj Universitet, Krasnoyarsk, 2012).

<sup>36</sup> Anastasija Gavriolova, “Deficit voditelej v Peterburge: russkie ne khotjat, migrantov ne khotim,” *Moj Rajon*, December 27, 2012, accessed December 13, 2017, <http://mr7.ru/articles/64291/>.

<sup>37</sup> As a rule of thumb, big transport enterprises tend to offer lower terms of employment and independencies, while smaller operators often consist out of personal network relations, which opens up a certain negotiation scope. Furthermore, small operators rely on drivers who bring their own vehicle and dispose therefore over more resources, while bigger operators often enter into leasing contracts with vehicle owners, which further strain the driver’s income charges.

<sup>38</sup> Nikita Ischmuratov, “Ajdar Abdulchakov o transportnyh problemah i sposobah ich reshenija v Kazani,” *newsnn.ru*, November 16, 2016, accessed May 25, 2018, <https://newsnn.ru/interview/16-11-2016/aydar-abdulchakov-o-transportnyh-problemah-i-sposobah-ih-resheniya-v-kazani>

<sup>39</sup> Inna Degot’kova, “Moskva bez marshrutok: bezobrazie ili zabota o passazhirach,” *Novye Izvestija*, September 21, 2016, accessed December 8, 2016, <http://www.newizv.ru/society/2016-09-21/247106-moskva-bez-marshrutok-bezobrazie-ili-zabota-o-passazhirah.html>

insecurity, while others are already pushed into semi-legal spheres in order to sustain their monthly income.

### ***Mobile Migrants – Mobility constrains based on origin and citizenship***

A closer look on the life conditions of marshrutka drivers and the structure of their mobility demands is equally complex and diverse. Some of the marshrutka drivers with migration background do not provide a valid working permit in Russia, which means they risk receiving fines in case of police controls. Other drivers are forced to regular commuting between the working destination and the country of origin. Back in their home countries, the migrants have to apply for a new residential or work permit which also causes high expenses and mobility capital. In this sense, the administrative structure of Russian migration policy creates by itself a permanent circulation flow of labour migrants.

Despite that, the attribution of ethnicity and citizenship also plays a role in the everyday mobility networks of the drivers. In Saint Petersburg, for example, many marshrutka lines tend to be served either by teams consisting of solely Russian drivers or of labour-migrants of different origin. Mirobid, a fifty-five-year-old marshrutka driver, explains:

“We have fourteen drivers in our brigade. They come from Uzbekistan, Tadjikistan or Kirgizstan. Previously, we also had two Russians, but they disappeared: one was always drunken and the other one had health problems. However, with the arrivals it’s easier: they take the work serious because they do not have any alternatives.”<sup>40</sup>

Babur, born in 1959 in Dushanbe, who has been driving marshrutkas in Saint Petersburg for seven years, argues similarly, claiming that there is also a hierarchy between the different lines which reflect the origin of the drivers. According to him, “Russian drivers work on the better lines with more passengers”<sup>41</sup>, which also means a higher income for the drivers.

A further mobility constrain for a majority of the migrant-drivers was created by the revision of the federal law ‘about traffic safety’ in May 2013 which was implemented only in June 2017, stating in article one, paragraph thirteen that:

“It is not allowed to drive vehicles on the basis of foreign national or international driving permits when carrying out entrepreneurial or labour activities directly related to the transport sector.”<sup>42</sup>

This has huge consequences for the private transport in Russian cities. In Saint Petersburg, for instance, only 8 percent of the approximately 3600 marshrutka drivers with migration background actually possess a Russian driver’s license. The Russian newspaper “argumenty i fakty” suggested that, if the new regulation is put into practice, 100000 drivers should expect to lose the right to proceed with their everyday work.<sup>43</sup> Due to the high costs and long waiting lists to register for a Russian driver’s license exam in category D, the operators expected a significant shortage of already rare drivers, especially in the big cities. And indeed, when the law was finally implemented in Rostov on Don in June 2017, the number of vehicles decreased significantly over night, which immediately raised strong complains from passengers and

---

<sup>40</sup> Mirobid Oblokulov, 55 years old, marshrutka driver, interview by Anastasija Gavriellova, December 27, 2012.

<sup>41</sup> Gavriellova, “Deficit voditelej v Peterburge: russkie ne khotjat, migrantov ne khotim”, 2.

<sup>42</sup> O vnesenii izmenenij v Federal'nyj zakon: "O bezopasnosti dorozhnogo dvizhenija" i kodeks Rossijskoj Federacii ob administrativnykh pravonarushenijakh, Federal Law of the Russian Federation, N 92-Ф3 (07.05.2013).

<sup>43</sup> Valentina Grebenkova, “Voditeli-migranti, na ehksamen! Pochemu v Rostove stali rezhe khodit' marshrutki,” *Argumenty i Fakty*, June 21, 2017.

operators alike.<sup>44</sup> The public discussion before and after the implementation of the revised law of traffic safety reveals again the already detected synchronized perception of insufficient mobility performances and the origin of drivers. In this sense, a transport provider in Saint Petersburg argued against the 'societal myth' that migrant-drivers are badly educated and have rude driving manners:

"There is a misconception in society that all migrants are uneducated. But in Uzbekistan and in Tajikistan, the rules for driver licenses are as strict as in Russia, and the drivers themselves are not inferior as far as their skills are concerned in comparison to their local colleagues. Another misconception is connected to the fact that migrants often are involved in accidents. In the last seventeen years in Russia, 500 000 people were killed by road accidents. Of these, only 5000 were caused by migrants."<sup>45</sup>

Indeed, the discussed law tells much about predominant stereotypes in large parts of the current society. By analysing only superficially the circumstances of the private transport sector in Russia, it becomes easily obvious that the harsh labour conditions such as long unofficial working hours of the drivers required to be able to earn enough to survive, the low quality of the car parks and the congestion of the existing urban road infrastructures are largely responsible for the insufficiency of the mobility mode. The sense of purpose concerning this law, besides populist activism, remains questionable at this point.

However, the remarks prove that attributions of origin and citizenship significantly determine the shape of mobility capital of migrant drivers. Migrant transport workers have to react simultaneously to very different structural restrictions like law texts, operational guidelines and discursive attribution. In turn, local marshrutka mobility networks are determined by restrictions of the Federal migration policy. As a matter of fact, local drivers are also discursively confronted with the insufficiency of the mobility operation they conduct. In this merger, migrant drivers additionally have to react to internal and external hierarchies and ascriptions linked to their origin, which all include supplementary mobility expectations of the actors affected.

Therefore, they often have to utilize equally fluid practices as applied in the operational mode of marshrutka mobility in order to continue to exist. Here again, one can detect a somewhat mutual co-existence of the mobility mode and the marginalized position of migrants in urban space. The publicly applied argumentation structure appears surprisingly similar, with both labour-migrants and marshrutka mobility being considered as system relevant because of a current lack of proper alternatives<sup>46</sup> but at the same time remain limited as a temporary, transitional phenomenon, which will somehow disappear in the future. Furthermore, there is a common reference in both the policy towards urban mobility and migration which takes the limited temporality as an argument for inactivity in this sphere.

Consequently, the common pejorative description of marshrutka modes and their migrant drivers leads to a reinforcing process of discursive marginalization. In response, migrant-drivers have to accumulate huge sources of flexibility in order to be accommodated in the

---

<sup>44</sup> Nikita Kitov, "V Rostove propali marsrutki: Sygralo rol prinjatnie novych zakonov, zatrudnivchich trud migrantov," *Panorama*, June 15, 2017, accessed July 20, 2018, <http://panram.ru/news/transport/v-rostove-propali-marshrutki/>

<sup>45</sup> Prudnikov, "Na marshrutke bez Aziza. Ostanetsja li Peterburg bez inostrannykh voditelej?"

<sup>46</sup> The cynical argument concerning labour migration goes that proper labour is too expensive for a still developing economy and will slow down the structural development of the state. Equally, local municipalities do not see alternatives to the current public transport supply because of missing financial capital.

often contradictory, pre-conditioned situational contexts and to respond to very different structural determinants, expectations and rules in a systemically precarious environment.

### ***Migrant Mobility - Everyday intangibility as a constant representation of migration and mobility fluidity***

By entering the microcosm of marshrutka performances in a random Russian city, it becomes quickly evident that marshrutkas are simultaneously omnipresent in the urban space and at the same time non-locatable. This is because, although cities have huge supplies of minibus vehicles to respond to the everyday mobility demands, many commercial transport providers do not actually have their own garages or depots. In general, the structure of private urban transport companies is rather fluidly embedded in the urban infrastructure.<sup>47</sup> Therefore, the official offices of operators are often separated from certain gathering points of the employees. Although drivers and cars have to go through certain health and technical control checks every morning, the garages where those inspections take place are often not related to the line or vehicle owners. The main meeting points of marshrutka drivers in the cities are the last stops of the lines, mostly vacant 'non-places'<sup>48</sup> in the peripheries of a city, which are spontaneously and temporarily used as car parks for resting marshrutka drivers. Here, the drivers spend their breaks under the direction of so called dispatchers, who control the sequence and order of a specified line. Remarkable is at this point the contrast to large and representative transport vehicles' depots of municipal transport devices in the setting of post-soviet cities<sup>49</sup><sup>50</sup><sup>51</sup>. Although marshrutka mobility has been the superior transport device in the Russian Federation for more than two decades now, no marshrutka operator known to me resides in a representative headquarter, instead they hide their residency in remote neighbourhoods<sup>52</sup>. Besides, there is usually no contact point or official address to engage with minibus providers and companies. The marshrutka phenomenon – omnipresent for each and every one – remains invisible as well as its underlying structures, interdependencies, employment forms, and individual interventions in order to maintain the urban mobility mode.

Like the marshrutka enterprises literally hide from the public sphere, so do the transport workers in urban space<sup>53</sup>. Indeed, this is a common phenomenon for migrant workers

---

<sup>47</sup> Sgibnev and Vozyanov, "Assemblages of mobility: the marshrutkas of Central Asia"

<sup>48</sup> Marc Augé, "Non-Places: An Introduction to Supermodernity, trans. John Howe," *London and New York: Verso*, 2008

<sup>49</sup> N. V. Pruglo, *Народный транспорт Царицына – Сталинграда – Волгограда:: из прошлогов будущее: К 100-летию трамвая, 50-летию троллейбуса* (Volgograd: Panorama, 2013)

<sup>50</sup> MET Volgograd, "Музей," news release, accessed July 24, 2017, <http://www.gortransvolga.ru/about/museum/>

<sup>51</sup> State-led public transport infrastructure remains a *lieu de memoire* in the Russian society and reflects the quick urban modernisation and industrial development during the Soviet Union. In this sense, many contemporary Russian cities host museums of public transport development in representative depots of the former Soviet transport provider.

<sup>52</sup> One must add that the degree of operator's formalization varies from city to city. Some cities allow hundreds of very small operators to provide their services, while other municipalities favored a limitation of operators. In a few cities, for example in Saint Petersburg, there are only two or three operators with huge amounts of lines and vehicle parks. Those companies, of course, also provide headquarters and public relations services. Nevertheless, the typical

<sup>53</sup> The most obvious example for this are informal dispatchers, who conduct the minibus flow in dense areas. Although they are a common sight in many cities, they never appear officially and literally hide as waiting passengers. See Olga Gopalo, "В Ростове «свистки» обложили данью водителей общественного

confronted with racial discrimination and xenophobic attacks using fluid and contemporary appearances in the urban space as a conflict-avoidance-strategy in many places.<sup>54</sup> In Russian cities, this is particularly observable in the construction sector, where entire brigades live in the respective construction site, fully isolated from the remaining urban sphere.<sup>55</sup> Similar practices are observed in the Russian trade sector, where the marketplace serves as accommodation for marginalized groups, which, for different discriminating reasons, are not able to access proper housing.<sup>56</sup> However, concerning the marshrutka market it is interesting to note that the hidden enterprise structures as well as the remote resting areas were established long before labour migrants entered into the business. Nevertheless, it was obviously of advantage that semi-formal enterprise structures could deal with unsolved question of residence and work permits beyond an attentive public.

Due to the fluid appearance of both mobility institutions as well as employed transport workers, there may be a likelihood of confusion that marshrutka practices generally appear to have a low degree of institutionalisation, as it is very unlikely to get in touch with underlying practices and structures as a passenger. However, a deeper consideration unveils well established institutions and hierarchies in the enterprises and among the workers, which shape and organise the working day of marshrutka drivers significantly.<sup>57</sup>

In this sense, not only the conditions and the institutions behind marshrutka mobility provision remain unnoticed but also the high variety of employment status, payment flows and power struggles determining the everyday appearance of the mobility mode and its drivers. Few have considered, for instance, the financial pressure especially sub-renting drivers have to face<sup>58</sup>. Narek, a fifty-years-old marshrutka driver in Rostov on Don complains:

“The system of public transport supply in Rostov on Don is really stupid. If you want to work, you first have to pay money [...] I have to pay like 20.000 - 25000 roubles<sup>59</sup> per month to the garage only for the fact that I may work on this car”<sup>60</sup>.

---

транспорта,” *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, January 30, 2015, accessed May 28, 2018, <https://www.rostov.kp.ru/daily/26335/3218726/>

<sup>54</sup> Boris E. Winer and Aleksandr V. Tavrovskij, “Migranty na rynkakh truda v Sankt-Peterburge,” *Zhurnal sociologii i social'noj antropologii* 12, no. 4 (2009)

<sup>55</sup> John Round and Irina Kuznetsova, “Necropolitics and the migrant as a political subject of disgust: The precarious everyday of Russia’s labour migrants,” *Critical Sociology* 42, 7-8 (2016)

<sup>56</sup> Sergej V. Rjazantzev, “Ehtnicheskoe predprinimatel'stvo kak forma adaptacii migrantov,” *Obshchestvennye nauki i sovremennost'*, no. 5 (2000)

<sup>57</sup> Natalja V. Sorokina, ““Десять Минут Страха и Вы Дома!”: Повседневность Водителей Городских Маршруток,” *Этнографическое обозрение*, no. 5 (2008)

<sup>58</sup> The hierarchies, status and income level of drivers are highly diverse depending on financial resources but also on personal networks, and work experience. For instance, a car-owning marshrutka driver disposes more independence in negotiation with the carrier than a car-renting driver who depends on the conditions of the transport enterprise.

<sup>59</sup> The value of the Russian currency has been subject to wide fluctuations during the last years since the inflation crisis in 2014. Currently the exchange rate is relatively stable about 75 RUB/1 EUR. However, the statistical value of a currency says little about the value concepts within a country, working segment or social class (Christoph Deutschmann, “Geld als soziales Konstrukt. Zur Aktualität von Marx und Simmel,” *Leviathan* 23, no. 3 (1995), p.377). That is why I do not convert certain price information in this text into international comparison currencies, unless my informants switch by themselves between certain currencies. Therefore, I will take over the amounts of money my interview respondents refer to, trying to comprehend the socially constructed and produced values of money in a certain situational setting.

<sup>60</sup> Narek, 50 years, driver, interview by Tonio Weicker, October 22, 2017, Rostov on Don.

Despite that marshrutka practices also include hidden representations of collectivism as a strategy of demarcation as well as affiliation. For instance, although solidarity among drivers is highly decreasing<sup>61</sup>, the last stops of the line may become important places of gathering and community especially for migrant-drivers. Occasionally, one can observe how smaller operators provide fondly furnished little sheds, where the located dispatcher switch into the hybrid role of a caring patron, serving tea and cake to the drivers while chatting in the mother tongue about daily incidents on the road. One young Armenian driver, who just arrived in Rostov on Don a couple weeks ago, told me in an interview:

“Of course, we have to work many hours in order to save some money. But I am new here in town. I don’t know anyone in the city. That’s why I appreciate spending time with my fellows in my work place.”<sup>62</sup>

However, this interlocutor works for a very small transport enterprise in Rostov on Don, which serves only three peripheral routes on the outskirts of the city and hires almost entirely Armenian drivers on their buses. Their case proves that solidarity among drivers may occur as a significant resource, but switched the relating point. Solidarity is no longer based on common interests as an employment group, e.g. as disadvantaged and highly exploited marshrutka drivers but may survive in trust networks based on origin.

Furthermore, the enterprise size plays a major role to enforce or contradict solidarity among drivers. In this sense, transport workers are less determined by the origin or migrant living worlds, but mainly by the profound structure of the transport enterprise, transport labourers work for. Especially in the big private transport enterprises, most drivers state that they actually have no personal relation to their colleagues. Although they cooperate during work, most of the drivers do not express any loyalty to the company or solidarity with their fellow drivers. This is a relatively new development as Kuznetsov and Shajtanova show in one of their articles. One of their interview respondents explains:

“Previously, when we started marshrutka-driving, in the first two or three years, we supported each other any time also outside of the working hours. If a minibus was broken, we phoned each other: “My minibus is broken. I need to be towed to the garage!” We dropped everything and went to help. We repaired the vehicle and got back to work (58 years old self-dependent Marshrutka driver in Volgograd in the 90ies).”<sup>63</sup>

## **Discussion:**

At first sight, it appears counterintuitive that bigger private transport enterprises, which provide a greater dependence on reliable workflows, which potentially could be used by drivers as labour dispute capital moreover as drivers are very rare in the local settings, may be characterised as less solidly united and more competitive on the workers’ level. In this sense, one could argue that trade unions are more likely to be successfully implemented in bigger transport enterprises than in the kinship based smaller operator structures, which rely on mutual negotiation, personal dependencies and trust networks. However, the empirical evidence indicates that marshrutka drivers have been shown the ability to organise major

---

<sup>61</sup> Shajtanova and Kuznetsov, “Social'naja Istorija Marshrutnykh Taksi g. Volgograda: Preemstvennost' Slov i Razryvy Praktik.”

<sup>62</sup> Unknown, young Armenian marshrutka driver, interview by Tonio Weicker, October 13, 2017, Rostov on Don.

<sup>63</sup> Shajtanova and Kuznetsov, “Social'naja Istorija Marshrutnykh Taksi g. Volgograda: Preemstvennost' Slov i Razryvy Praktik.”, 57.

strikes and public attention in settings where smaller operators dominate the city market<sup>64</sup>, while bigger commercial transport providers successfully prevent major demonstrations for labour rights among their employees.

To explain this superficial paradox, one has to consider the different employee states among drivers in bigger transport enterprises, which is characterised by complex financial dependency layers of the individual workers. Most importantly, the ownership structure of the vehicles varies significantly between smaller and bigger transport operators to the detriment of the drivers. As the figure below illustrates one major change in the enterprise structure after the reforms is that drivers do not possess their own vehicles anymore. Instead most of the drivers have to rent out their vehicles, which is an additional financial burden but more importantly a loss in capital to negotiate with the operator. As many operators do not support the model of self-owned drivers anymore, transport workers also lost the otherwise unlikely opportunity to climb up in the imaginative ranking order and to become, for instance, a mini-operator in the enterprise who provides a couple of cars and drivers to the daily operation, which ensures a maximum of self-dependency<sup>66</sup>.

	Variety of drivers	Description	Payment mode
	Sub-subcontractors	Substitute drivers jump in on different buses on a daily basis.	Employed by other car-owning drivers
Dominating ownership structure in big transport enterprises	Ordinary Drivers	Work for an operator and rent out the vehicle from them.	Monthly fees to the operator for the route license and the car rent
	Fictional-Self-Dependent-Drivers	Drivers are registered as Individual Entrepreneurs, but rent a vehicle from a third person	Monthly fees to the operator & monthly fees to the car owner
Dominating ownership structure in small transport enterprises	Shareholder Drivers	Drivers who share the credit for a self-owned car	Monthly fees to the operator & loan instalments
	Self-dependent Drivers	Drivers who own their own car	Monthly fees to the operator; Savings to invest in a new car & maintenance
	Mini-Operators without licenses	Drivers who own a little vehicle fleet (2-10 vehicles) and hire drivers to work for them	Monthly fees to the licensed operator

<sup>64</sup> Sergej Viktorov, "Перевозчики Волгограда пригрозили революцией," *V1.ru*, September 14, 2016, accessed February 26, 2018, <http://v1.ru/text/gorod/210972006658048.html?full=3>

<sup>65</sup> Regnum, "Забастовка водителей маршруток в столице Киргизии завершилась," *Regnum*, April 3, 2018, accessed May 14, 2018, <https://regnum.ru/news/2399626.html>

<sup>66</sup> Nonetheless, the figure also deconstructs the neoliberal myth of drivers as self-dependent micro-entrepreneurs. A deeper consideration of the driver's action scopes shows clearly that most of them do not have any opportunities to manage any kind of self-dependent investment but solely sell their labor force plus bearing the risk of daily outage costs. Indeed, the rare group of mini-operators could be called an exception from this, however, they have little in common, with the daily challenges of ordinary drivers. Again, this is especially true for drivers, working in big-size transport enterprises rather than for self-owning drivers, who can at least have the illusion to increase capital and influence over time.

However, as marshrutka drivers increasingly do not own their cars anymore and do not know their colleagues, they also lose the reason and the ability to achieve solidarity among their working collective. In a broader sense, the increasing formalization and neoliberalisation of marshrutka services made those “survival strategies”<sup>67</sup> superfluous in many cases. Today one can observe how certain marshrutka drivers, operators or line owners do not show any effort to build up trust networks or community patterns around the working place. In contrast, many drivers see themselves in direct competition especially with the closest colleagues, which can even lead to physical struggles among drivers occasionally.<sup>68</sup> It was indeed the process of building up enterprise hierarchies and different employment forms with various monetary obligations followed by a detachment between transport workers and operators, a division that did not exist in the 90ies<sup>69</sup>, which led to an individualisation and an increase of competition among the drivers within one company<sup>70</sup>. Although the degree of atomisation among transport workers differs from operator to operator, the general trend seems irreversible as the still existing small operators struggle a lot with the financial requirements for modern vehicle fleets. Therefore, their operations are gradually dying out, following the description of a marshrutka operator from Volgograd stating:

„From formerly 30 buses, there are today only 20 buses left [in my company]. Some of the drivers disappeared. This happens because the competition is very strong. There are so many minibuses on the street and some of the independent drivers just go bankrupt, especially because the requirements are getting higher and higher. Every year you have to prove that your car still complies with the requirements. That means you have to invest continuously. So, some drivers just fade out [...] actually, it is very difficult to maintain the business because no one is willing to drive marshrutkas anymore. I mean, who is willing to work for 15.000/16.000 roubles<sup>71</sup> per month?”<sup>72</sup>

In consequence, the turn in transport enterprises enabled migrant drivers to enter into the business for several reasons. At first, marshrutka operators increasingly draw on cheap labour forces provided by migrant workers because no one else is willing to accept the low conditions and income. At second, migrant marshrutka drivers rarely enter the enterprise as self-investing micro-entrepreneurs but rather as drivers who additionally rent out third person’s minibuses. Both developments increase the pressure on the drivers to accumulate a certain degree of income, which further alienates them from their colleagues. Concurrently, this changes the structure of local transport enterprises as small operators slowly fade out and are replaced by bigger carriers, which, in turn, decreases the resources of solidarity in a continuous downward circle.

---

<sup>67</sup> Another consequence of this is that drivers have no incentive to maintain the vehicles anymore. While they still look after the work ability, many passengers complain about the ongoing decrease of marshrutka interior inside the cabin. This is a sharp difference to former marshrutka settings, where most drivers were tempted to carefully decorate their own cars and looked after the cleanliness in the cabin.

<sup>68</sup> During my fieldwork, I was once witness of a physical fight between drivers, who worked on the same route. The conflict was sparked by the driver who was driving behind, who accused the driver in front of him of intentionally driving slowly to ‘steal’ his own passengers.

<sup>69</sup> Kuznetsov and Shaitanova, “Marshrutkas: Spinoffs of Post-Soviet Urban Mobilities”

<sup>70</sup> Lela Rekhviashvili and Wladimir Sgibnev, “Uber, Marshrutkas and socially (dis-) embedded mobilities,” *The Journal of Transport History*, 2018

<sup>71</sup> 15000 roubles is the average loan of the lowest employment relationships in Russia as salesman/women or ticket inspectors for instance. Workers concerned, normally, require a second income source to make a living.

<sup>72</sup> Timofej, interview by Tonio Weicker, June 16, 2016, Volgograd.



## Conclusion:

Urban studies literature often describes how social inequality and processes of marginalization are mirrored and cemented in urban space, infrastructure and dwelling.<sup>73</sup><sup>74</sup> However, the marshrutka example shows that marginalization and discrimination attempts of a majority society can similarly be read out through the conduction of mobility performances in urban space. One described conflict-coping strategy of the persons affected is to become 'invisible' in urban space, pushed to peripheral parts of the urban agglomeration or even quartered in contemporary accommodations near their working place. It is therefore an interesting observation, that the above described aloofness and intangibility of marshrutka mobility appears as metaphorically reflected in the perception of migrant workers in the urban sphere. The everyday encounter, in this sense, stabilizes the intangibility of the urban wide established black box 'marshrutka-mobility' from passengers' point of view, which opens scope for populist marginalisation and discrimination discourses. Indeed, it seems to be this very fluid interplay of appearance and vanish, which strengthens a continuously publicly reproduced pejorative picture of both the insufficient mobility mode and the migration-worker as something transient, a phenomenon, transitional passing by.

From a theoretical perspective the article shows how a 'mobilities' perspective is applicable in the analysis of everyday migration living worlds as well as translocal understanding of urban mobility assemblages may contribute to a better description of current social struggles in the organisation of urban mobility services<sup>75</sup>. Nevertheless, it must be critically admitted that "any analysis of spatial and social mobilities needs to go beyond descriptions and start accounting for the mechanisms underlying the production of social inequalities"<sup>76</sup>. In this sense, the increasing competition and the ongoing loss of solidarity among drivers needs further argumentation beyond the horizon of mobility theories. Because the underlying enforcement of inequality, decrease in services and working conditions is neither the demand for fluid or structured mobility devices nor the reaction of increasing or decreasing migration flows, but a direct consequence of exploitation driven profit-maximisation in a non-regulated capitalist frame of an untamed commercial transport market. Therefore, in order to answer the question how a certain movement is legitimised or delegitimised, it needs a step beyond a solely 'mobilities' perspective.

With this in mind, this article points out the productive potential of merging perspectives of mobility and migration patterns on empirical observations but analyses the observed phenomena through structural deficits in the local transport policy and enterprise organisations. In this sense, the utilized empirical data proves that everyday mobility and migration patterns are not sufficiently explained by their processual performance but need an integrative perspective on the unequal enterprise structure beyond which produces system-immanently both extremely exploitative working conditions for the transport workers and

---

<sup>73</sup> Douglas S. Massey, "American apartheid: Segregation and the making of the underclass," *American journal of sociology* 96, no. 2 (1990).

<sup>74</sup> Ruth D. Peterson and Lauren J. Krivo, *Divergent social worlds: Neighborhood crime and the racial-spatial divide* (Russell Sage Foundation, 2010).

<sup>75</sup> Dragos Simandan, "Competition, contingency, and destabilization in urban assemblages and actor-networks", *Urban Geography* (2017).

<sup>76</sup> Thomas Faist, "The mobility turn: a new paradigm for the social sciences?," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 36, no. 11 (2013)

simultaneously the backdrop for a societal mediated devaluation discourse of marshrutka performances.

This is particularly obvious when considering how the fluid mobility mode of marshrutkas mirrors the uncertain situation of its drivers and vice versa. Migrant transport workers do indeed rely on the fluid structures in the commercial transport business, although this means that they have to accept to the worst labour conditions. While marshrutka operators and vehicle fleet owners seem at first glance to profit from these developments, in the long run the decrease in services leads to stronger political efforts to abolish the transport offer all together. This decision, however, is made without considering the crucial need for an affordable and well-functioning transport service for citizens, who rely on cheap and relatively fast carrier services, not to mention long term consequences in the urban development of an entirely collapsed public transport network on manifold social levels.

## Bibliography

- Anderson, Ben, and Colin McFarlane. "Assemblage and geography". *Area* 43 no.2, (2011): 124–127.
- Augé, Marc. "Non-Places: An Introduction to Supermodernity, trans. John Howe." *London and New York: Verso*, 2008.
- Belousov, J. N. "Рабочая группа ищет проблемы там, где их нет." *V1.ru*, January 22, 2014. Accessed February 26, 2018. <http://v1.ru/text/gorod/748887.html>.
- Blunt, Alison "Cultural geographies of migration: mobility, transnationality and diaspora," *Progress in Human Geography*, 2007.
- Dave, Bhavna. "Becoming "Legal" through "Illegal" Procedures: The Precarious Status of Migrant Workers in Russia", *Russian Analytical Digest* 159, no. 159 (2014), 2-8.
- Degot'kova, Inna. "Moskva bez marshrutok: bezobrazie ili zabota o passazhirach." *Novye Izvestija*, September 21, 2016. Accessed December 8, 2016. <http://www.newizv.ru/society/2016-09-21/247106-moskva-bez-marshrutok-bezobrazie-ili-zabota-o-passazhirah.html>.
- Deutschmann, Christoph. "Geld als soziales Konstrukt. Zur Aktualität von Marx und Simmel." *Leviathan* 23, no. 3 (1995): 376–93.
- Faist, Thomas. "The mobility turn: a new paradigm for the social sciences?" *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 36, no. 11 (2013): 1637–46.
- O vnesenii izmenenij v Federal'nyj zakon: "O bezopasnosti dorozhnogo dvizhenija" i kodeks Rossijskoj Federacii ob administrativnykh pravonarushenijakh. Federal Law of the Russian Federation. N 92-ФЗ. May 7, 2013.
- Finn, Brendan. "Market role and regulation of extensive urban minibus services as large bus service capacity is restored – Case studies from Ghana, Georgia and Kazakhstan." *Research in Transportation Economics* 22, no. 1 (2008): 118–25.
- Florinskaja, J., and N. Mkrтчjan. "Migracija v Rossii v 2016 godu." №19 (37), МЭС, 12/2016.
- Gavriellova, Anastasija. "Deficit voditelej v Peterburge: russkie ne khotjat, migrantov ne khotim." *Moj Rajon*, December 27, 2012. Accessed December 13, 2017. <http://mr7.ru/articles/64291/>.
- Gdaniec, Cordula. *Cultural diversity in Russian cities: the urban landscape in the post-Soviet era 2*. Berghahn Books, 2010.
- Gopalo, Olga. "В Ростове «свистки» обложили данью водителей общественного транспорта." *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, January 30, 2015. Accessed May 28, 2018. <https://www.rostov.kp.ru/daily/26335/3218726/>.
- Grebenkova, Valentina. "Voditeli-migranti, na ehksamen! Pochemu v Rostove stali rezhe khodit' marshrutki." *Argumenty i Fakty*, June 21, 2017.
- Igor, 63 years old, marshrutka driver (non-Russian origin), interview by Tonio Weicker, October 15, 2017, Rostov on Don.
- Ischmuratov, Nikita. "Ajdar Abdulchakov o transportnyh problemach i sposobach ich reschenija v Kazani." *newsnn.ru*, November 16, 2016. Accessed May 25, 2018. <https://newsnn.ru/interview/16-11-2016/aydar-abdulhakov-o-transportnyh-problemah-i-sposobah-ih-resheniya-v-kazani>.
- Kitov, Nikita. "V Rostove propali marsrutki: Sygralo rol prinjatnie novych zakonov, zatrudnivchich trud migrantov." *Panorama*, June 15, 2017. Accessed July 20, 2018. <http://panram.ru/news/transport/v-rostove-propali-marshrutki/>.
- Koltashov, Vasilij. "Marshrutki, territorija bez zakona." Accessed December 18, 2015. <http://echo.msk.ru/blog/koltashov/1559826-echo/>.
- Kuznetsov, Andrey, and Lyudmila Shaitanova. "Marshrutkas: Spinoffs of Post-Soviet Urban Mobilities." 2014.
- Malakhov, Vladimir S. "Russia as a New Immigration Country: Policy Response and Public Debate." *Europe-Asia Studies* 66, no. 7 (2014): 1062–79.

- Malakhov, Vladimir S., and Mark E. Simon, "Labour Migration Policy in Russia: Considerations on Governmentality", *International Migration* 56, no. 3 (2018), 61-72.
- Massey, Douglas S. "American apartheid: Segregation and the making of the underclass." *American journal of sociology* 96, no. 2 (1990): 329–57.
- MET Volgograd. "Музей." News release. Accessed July 24, 2017.  
<http://www.gortransvolga.ru/about/museum/>.
- Mirobid Oblokulov, 55 years old, marshrutka driver. Interview by Anastasija Gavriellova. December 27, 2012.
- MVD Rossii (Ministry of Internal Affairs). «Отдельные показатели миграционной ситуации в Российской Федерации за январь - июнь 2019 года с распределением по странам и регионам» (2019), assessed August 18, 2019,  
<https://мвд.рф/Deljatelnost/statistics/migracionnaya/item/17595161>.
- Narek, 50 years, driver. Interview by Tonio Weicker. October 22, 2017. Rostov on Don.
- Parschina, Olga I. "Issledovanie Problem Gorodskogo Obshhestvennogo Passazhirskogo Transporta." UDK 656, Sibirskij Federal'nyj Universitet, Krasnoyarsk, 2012.
- Peterson, Ruth D., and Lauren J. Krivo. *Divergent social worlds: Neighborhood crime and the racial-spatial divide*. Russell Sage Foundation, 2010.
- Prudnikov, Sergej. "Na marshrutke bez Aziza. Ostanetsja li Peterburg bez inostrannykh voditelej?" *Argumenty i Fakty*, July 5, 2017. № 27. Accessed December 14, 2017.  
[http://www.spb.aif.ru/society/na\\_marshrutke\\_bez\\_aziza\\_ostanetsya\\_li\\_peterburg\\_bez\\_inostrannykh\\_voditeley](http://www.spb.aif.ru/society/na_marshrutke_bez_aziza_ostanetsya_li_peterburg_bez_inostrannykh_voditeley).
- Pruglo, N. V. *Народный транспорт Царицына – Сталинграда – Волгограда: из прошлого в будущее: К 100-летию трамвая, 50-летию троллейбуса*. Volgograd: Панорама, 2013.
- Regnum. "Забастовка водителей маршруток в столице Киргизии завершилась." *Regnum*, April 3, 2018. Accessed May 14, 2018. <https://regnum.ru/news/2399626.html>.
- Rekhviashvili, Lela, and Wladimir Sgibnev. "Uber, Marshrutkas and socially (dis-) embedded mobilities." *The Journal of Transport History*, 2018, 0022526618757203.
- Rjazantzev, Sergej Vacil'evich. "Ehtnicheskoe predprinimatel'stvo kak forma adaptacii migrantov." *Obshhestvennye nauki i sovremennost'*, no. 5 (2000): 73–86.
- Round, John, and Irina Kuznetsova. "Necropolitics and the migrant as a political subject of disgust: The precarious everyday of Russia's labour migrants." *Critical Sociology* 42, 7-8 (2016): 1017–34.
- Sahadeo, Jeff. "Druzhiba Narodov or second-class citizenship? Soviet Asian migrants in a post-colonial world." *Central Asian Survey* 26, no. 4 (2007): 559–79.
- Samat, 67 years old, marshrutka driver. Interview by Tonio Weicker. May 24, 2016. Moscow.
- Sanina, Anna. "The marshrutka as a socio-cultural phenomenon of a Russian megacity." *City, Culture and Society* 2, no. 4 (2011): 211–18.
- Schenk, Caress. "Controlling Immigration Manually: Lessons from Moscow (Russia)." *Europe-Asia Studies* 65, no. 7 (2013): 1444–65.
- Schenk, Caress. "Anti-migrant, but not nationalist: Pursuit statist legitimacy thgough immigration discourse and policy", in Pal Kolsto and Helge Blakkisrud (eds.), *Russia Before and After Crimea: Nationalism and Identity*, 2010-17 (2018), 236-257.
- Semenenko, Irina. "Ethnicities, Nationalism and the Politics of Identity: Shaping the Nation in Russia." *Europe-Asia Studies* 67, no. 2 (2015): 306–26.
- Sgibnev, Wladimir, and Andrey Vozyanov. "Assemblages of mobility: the marshrutkas of Central Asia." *Central Asian Survey*, 2016, 1–16.
- Shajtanova, Lyudmila, and Andrej Kuznetsov. "Social'naja Istorija Marshrutnykh Taksi g. Volgograda: Preemstvennost' Slova i Razryvy Praktika." *Vestnik Volgogradskogo gosudarstvennogo universiteta. Serija 9: Issledovanija molodykh uchenykh*, no. 12 (2014).

- Simandan, Dragos. "Competition, contingency, and destabilization in urban assemblages and actor-networks", *Urban Geography* (2017).
- Sorokina, Natalja V. ""Десять Минут Страха и Вы Дома!": Повседневность Водителей Городских Маршруток." *Этнографическое обозрение*, no. 5 (2008): 61–74.
- Timofej. Interview by Tonio Weicker. June 16, 2016. Volgograd.
- Tzipko, Aleksandr. "Migrantov zovut na ekzamen!" *Aktual'nye Kommentarii*, January 26, 2012. Accessed May 23, 2018. [http://actualcomment.ru/migrantov\\_zovut\\_na\\_ekzamen.html](http://actualcomment.ru/migrantov_zovut_na_ekzamen.html).
- Unknown, young Armenian marshrutka driver. Interview by Tonio Weicker. October 13, 2017. Rostov on Don.
- Urry, John. "Sociology beyond societies: Mobilities for the twenty-first century", Routledge, 2012.
- Viktorov, Sergej. "Перевозчики Волгограда пригрозили революцией." *V1.ru*, September 14, 2016. Accessed February 26, 2018. <http://v1.ru/text/gorod/210972006658048.html?full=3>.
- Volgin, V. "Marshrutochnyj korol'." *Shuberskoe. Voronezh*, July 24, 2016. Accessed November 28, 2017. <http://shuberka.ru/home/oblastnye/1347-marshrutochnyj-korol>.
- Vorobyev, Anton, Julia Shulika, and Varvara Vasileva. "Formal and Informal Institutions for Urban Transport Management." In *Transport Systems of Russian Cities*. Edited by Mikhail Blinkin and Elena Koncheva, 167–206. Springer, 2016.
- Weicker, Tonio. "Russian Cities in Motion. The Marshrutka as a Multifaceted Issue of Post-Soviet Urban Life" (*Dissertation*), TU Berlin 2019.
- Winer, Boris E., and Aleksandr V. Tavrovskij. "Migranty na rynkakh truda v Sankt-Peterburge." *Zhurnal sociologii i social'noj antropologii* 12, no. 4 (2009): 97–121.
- Zacharkin, Stas. "Маршрутные войны: Страх и ненависть в пассажирских перевозках Новосибирска." *sib.fm*, May 5, 2016. Accessed November 23, 2017. <https://sib.fm/articles/2016/05/05/marshrutnye-vojny>.
- Zolotuchina, Albina. "Chlenam Cheljabinskoj OPG, razvernushej "marshrutnye vojne", vynesli prigovor." *ura.ru*, December 20, 2016. Accessed November 23, 2017. <https://ura.news/news/1052271685>.