

## BOOK REVIEW/ KÖNYVSZEMLE

### ***Reed-Danahay, D. (2020): Bourdieu and Social Space. Mobilities, Trajectories, Emplacements***

**(Worlds in Motion 6., Berghahn Books, New York, 161 pp)**

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The word ‘mobility’ can be applied to a wide range of spatial movements, and giving a universal definition is hardly possible. One can think of mobility of students, mobility of labour, mobility as a result of a free choice of the individual, or mobility as a result of a situation of distress, forcing us to leave our familiar physical (or social) space. Mobility is not necessarily only about people, one can also talk about the mobility of capital or goods, but it is certainly about the fact of changing spatial position. As with mobility, the concept of habitus, which is primarily associated with Bourdieu (1977), can be interpreted from a number of perspectives. The definition of habitus and the relevant sub-concepts of the Theory of Practice could be considered even more uncertain than mobility. From Reed-Danahay’s point of view, the interpretations that attempt to define habitus downplay significant elements of the concept, for example, the relationship of habitus to space. Deborah Reed-Danahay’s work, published in 2020, seeks to reveal the relationship between mobility and space, focusing primarily on social space. Spatiality is not limited by the author to the social space closely linked to the concept of habitus; the physical space is also a key aspect of her work.

The author is a professor of sociocultural anthropology, her research focuses on migration, mobility, and the work of Pierre Bourdieu, which has inspired the choice of the book’s subject. Reed-Danahay aims, as stated in the Preface, to highlight the importance of social space in Bourdieu's practice theory. Bourdieu’s concept opens the door to many different interpretations, and the author's work is one of them. The book introduces valuable perspectives into the analysis of Bourdieu’s oeuvre. Although Reed-Danahay aims to emphasize the role of social space, other important elements of Bourdieu’s theory, such as



the different types of capital or the field, the role of physical space and habitus are also examined.

As the title (*Bourdieu and Social Space – Mobilities, Trajectories, Emplacements*) suggests, the author aims to illustrate the importance of social space in the concept of practice theory through examples of mobility. “How is social mobility related to geographic mobility?”, she asks, and then, chapter by chapter, elaborates on the question by analyzing the concepts of Bourdieu. The author believes that the use of this conceptual framework encourages us to consider geographical mobility in relation to social position and mobility in social space. The main driving force of mobility – spatial inequality – is, in Bourdieu’s terms, the result of the unequal distribution of capital due to different positions in social space, and one’s habitus can only be understood in relation to it. Reed-Danahay’s main argument is that spatiality and habitus are inseparable aspects, social space being linked to physical space through embodied habitus. She supports her claim through the analysis of different situations of mobility, for example the case of the impact of voluntary mobility on the individual’s habitus and its position in social space, where an individual decides to move in the hope of better opportunities. In most cases, this repositions the individual and its habitus in the system of social relations, which can cause several problems in the habitus (e.g. split habitus). The author discusses the consequences of forced mobility (e.g. refugees) and the types of capital that facilitate mobility or non-mobility. Reed-Danahay also describes a particular type of displacement where the individual does not engage in mobility but the changing world around them results in exclusion.

The central spatial category in the book is the home. Bourdieu assumed that the happiness associated with a sense of home was an important factor in mobility, and he himself addressed the habitus distortions caused by displacement. If one accepts the claim that the development of a primary habitus is determined not only by family, education, etc., but also by the spatial environment, then mobility can give the individual a secondary habitus. Those who are affected by migration find themselves in a particular situation; they feel at home in the social space of their place of origin and alienated in the social space of the new geographical space. This situation is further complicated if not only the habitus is incompatible with the destination of migration, but also the capital possessed by the individual does not correspond to the capital system of the new environment. In sum, although there are cases where migration opens up the world, unlike Bourdieu, the author essentially characterizes it as a painful process. In Bourdieu’s assumption mobility is driven by the desire to feel at home, Reed-Danahay’s interpretation is that it is precisely the changed habitus that makes a sense of home impossible.

The greatest contribution of Reed-Danahay’s work, in my opinion, is that she takes her argument about the significance of space in Bourdieu’s practice

theory to an expanding scale. She characterizes social space as a system of relations, and makes habitus dependent on the position occupied in this system. She starts from the scale of the individuals and their home, and then gradually expands the space towards a system of relations between urban and rural, center and periphery. She then moves on to the scale of the nation-state (chapter 4), what Bourdieu calls the central bank of symbolic capital. The state not only determines the distribution of economic capital, but also the distribution of cultural and symbolic capital, primarily through education. Reed-Danahay reveals embodied habitual elements that are in fact the result of nation-state world-making, for example the central coordination of long weekends and school holidays, which determines the embodied seasonal mobility of the nation.

Finally, in chapter 5, she writes about the supranational level of the nation state, using the example of the European Union. She describes the social space of the EU (if there is one) as a highly structured system, where regions exist in a hierarchical system of relations. There are, for example, more European and less European regions, places and people who play a dominant role in defining the concept of Europeanness. The existence of a habitus associated with the European social space is also questionable in this context, since it is largely a certain class (the aspiring middle class with the necessary capital, according to the author) that is involved in European mobility, whose habitus is not representative of the European social relations system. People with similar social origins (in terms of national and regional affiliations) have affinities of habitus, but for some, the European Union remains a closed geographical and social entity, despite the political unity.

Overall, the book poses relevant questions on the interpretation of Bourdieu's oeuvre, mobility itself and the development of the European Union. It does not 'clarify' the conceptual scheme of Bourdieu's oeuvre, a life's work that has been interpreted in many different ways, but that was not its purpose either. While many of Bourdieu's concepts have long been present in Hungarian sociology, spatial research is only now beginning to find its way into these ideas, especially in recognition of the importance of the habitus of the city/village/place (e.g. Németh 2020; Máté, Pirisi, Trócsányi 2022). As Reed-Danahay's work shows, the study of the relationship between physical space and habitus can provide useful new perspectives also for the spatial sciences. Reading this work can help to understand Bourdieu's approach, making the book's statements worthy of further reflections. As a geographer, I find Reed-Danahay's views on the importance of space in Bourdieu's practice theory particularly useful.

## References

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