

*Doing Methodological Cosmopolitanism in a Mobile World*

David Tyfield\*‡ and Anders Blok†

\* Centre for Mobilities Research (CeMoRe), Lancaster Environment Centre, Lancaster University, Lancaster, UK

‡ International Research & Innovation Centre for the Environment (I-RICE), Guangzhou, PR China

† Department of Sociology, University of Copenhagen, Copenhagen, Denmark

Keywords: Mobilities, methodological cosmopolitanism, phronesis, methods, data, East Asia

Abstract:

A decade of mobilities research has responded to the key question of how a ‘world on the move’ can and should be studied, including in terms of futures thereby brought into view and possibly shaped into being. What happens, however, if we shift our focus from the ‘world *on the move*’ to the ‘*world* on the move’, with all the cosmopolitical diversity this highlights? This paper explores this question regarding the parallel research programme of methodological cosmopolitanism, inspired and instigated by the work of Ulrich Beck. We examine how mobilities research and methodological cosmopolitanism illuminate, support and contrast with each other as paradigms of social science for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. We argue for two major changes in this regard: moving from ‘methods’ as tools for objective knowledge-gathering to partial but directed and knowledge-enabling *dialogical interventions*; and from ‘data’ as given ‘facts’ to the construction of new, promising *boundary-crossing connections*. These reorientations resonate strongly also with methodological directions from mobilities research, but in complementary ways. In particular, both relate to a shift of methodological imperatives, specifically regarding dynamic, interactive and power-attentive forms of social knowledge-making or *phronesis*, a situated practical wisdom. We illustrate these points in brief with insights from our own methodologically cosmopolitan research on key contemporary cosmopolitized issues, undertaken as part of Beck’s ‘cosmopolitan climate change’ (CosmoClimate) project.

## Introduction: methodological cosmopolitanism in a mobile world?

Over the past decade, mobilities research has emerged as a diverse and insightful programme, studying the thorough-going transformation of social life through changing mobilities and differential motilities. As socially-constitutive flows pass and get stuck they produce novel hybridity and varied mobile lives (Elliott & Urry 2010). This demands a shift in social ontology that does not privilege (descriptively or normatively) mobility and fluidity but one that acknowledges and can examine their empirical instantiations, intercalated with blocked movements and stillness. Hence, mobilities research shifts perspective to socio-technical *systems* of diverse (im)mobilities.

This ‘world on the move’ raises a key question: how it can and should be studied, including in terms of futures thereby brought into view and possibly shaped into being (see Introduction)? In mobile methods (Fincham et al. 2009; Büscher et al. 2010; Blok 2010), mobilities research has developed a panoply of interesting responses. What happens, however, if we shift our focus from the ‘world *on the move*’ to the ‘*world* on the move’ – where these very movements constitute the specific, concrete ‘world’ *as* globally interconnected? We explore this guiding question here.

Our question stems from and points to a parallel and complementary, yet distinctive, agenda-setting programme within social science, namely the ‘methodological cosmopolitanism’ instigated by Ulrich Beck.<sup>1</sup> Friendly exchanges between Beck and John Urry witness (e.g. Urry 2004; Beck 2008) the clear similarities and affinities (and some differences and

---

<sup>1</sup> This paper was originally to have been co-authored with Ulrich Beck within his ERC-funded project on ‘CosmoClimate’. His untimely death means we have not had the privilege of developing this argument further with him. Nonetheless, we gratefully acknowledge his many discussions with us that have contributed to the argument of this paper. The subsequent, and equally untimely, death of John Urry later during the process of revising this paper adds to the poignancy and significance of this discussion. The inspiration of both Beck and Urry is greatly missed by both authors..

misunderstandings) between these two ambitious programmes. These affinities serve as our starting point. Both Beck and Urry argued – and at roughly similar times – how inadequate, especially under post-national conditions of cultural connectivity (cf. Sheller 2011), is a dominant ‘methodological nationalism’ that takes for granted the boundaries of society as the container nation-state. For both authors, the new world of flows, networks and global interconnections necessitates a wholesale reorientation of the social sciences, from ontological and epistemological commitments to its methods and normative engagements.

For Urry (2000) this argument is cast in terms of the growing social significance of multiform mobilities, which demand that sociology moves ‘beyond societies’, reinventing its methods bottom-up. For Beck (2006), by contrast, the ‘cosmopolitization’ of social life – a realist sociological understanding of growing global interconnectedness and attendant cultural-political ambivalences – demands a new ‘methodological cosmopolitanism’. *Methodological cosmopolitanism* (Beck and Sznaider 2006) first and foremost entails an open-ended search for new units of analysis, beyond the nation-state, thus making possible empirical investigation of trans-local phenomena of cultural-political encounter across difference and distance. Moreover, this methodological search must be self-reflexive, since social-scientific methods themselves participate in processes of ‘connecting’ and/or ‘bounding’ whereby new epistemic and political territories emerge.

Beyond the explicit target of redirecting social theorizing (e.g. Beck & Grande 2010), however, how to do empirical research informed by methodological cosmopolitanism, following the lead presented by mobilities, remains an acknowledged challenge (e.g. Beck et al. 2013). We explore this question here, examining how mobilities research and methodological cosmopolitanism illuminate, support and contrast with each other as

paradigms of social science for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. How does this transform the social sciences and their methods, possibly in their very form and purpose, and including in terms of the kinds of (specifically *cosmopolitized*) futures thereby being imagined, practiced and furthered? What, in turn, might this tell us about the future of mobilities research and (the research of) possible mobilities futures?

The transformations we distil (and advocate) can be summarized regarding two major changes: from ‘methods’ as tools for objective knowledge-gathering to methods as partial but directed and knowledge-enabling *dialogical interventions* in the co-produced evolution of trans-local, mobile, dynamic systems; and from the product of such research being ‘data’ as given ‘facts’ to the construction of new, promising *boundary-crossing connections*. We argue that these changes resonate strongly also with methodological directions from mobilities research, but in complementary and (productively) different ways.<sup>2</sup> In particular, both relate to a shift of methodological imperatives, specifically regarding dynamic, interactive and power-attentive forms of social knowledge-making – or what has elsewhere been described as *phronesis* – mobilized here in service of engaging a ‘world on the move’. We illustrate these points in brief with insights from our own methodologically cosmopolitan research on key contemporary cosmopolitized issues, undertaken as part of Beck’s ‘cosmopolitan climate change’ (CosmoClimate) project.

### Mobilities, methodology, phronesis

In mobilities research, focusing on social and physical mobility – and attendant *immobilities* and motility (Kaufmann 2010) – directs attention to the inherent dynamism of objects of

---

<sup>2</sup> We are also well aware that our discussion partakes to wider debates on the reconfiguration of methods in the social sciences, where scholars in e.g. science & technology studies (STS) (Law 2009; Suchman 2012; Nowotny et al. 2001), feminist theory (Barad 2007) and design research (Simonsen et al. 2010) have made important and cognate observations on ‘lively’ methods.

social study. The socio-technical world is conceptualized as emerging through the interplay of processes, faster and slower, never reaching any kind of ‘completion’. This ontology of change and movement, in turn, poses radical epistemological and methodological challenges; to which diverse mobile and ‘inventive’ methods have informatively responded (Fincham et al. 2009; Büscher et al. 2010; Lury & Wakeford 2012). Crucially, knowledge itself also loses its ability to reach a determinate conclusiveness, whether of a positive or critical kind – thereby questioning established notions of linear processes from the *acquisition* to *application* of knowledge. Finding herself situated within the changing system under study, the researcher no longer has any single, fixed and objectively definable future to uncover, but instead an ambivalent and shifting set of ethical-political horizons and futures in-the-making.

Under these circumstances, mobilities research finds itself in a difficult predicament: now tasked with greater responsibility of its own making, regarding the (co-)management of systems of diverse forms of mobilities that substantially constitute ‘society’; but simultaneously robbed of any way of conclusively ‘knowing’, and so assisting direction of, these systems. Moreover, government – in the Foucauldian sense – of systems of mobility is obviously a charged normative and political issue; not just the value-neutral management to maximize transparently rational ends but a contested, strategic terrain of mobilities systems with differential effects. How, then, can social science be reshaped to respond productively to this revised social ontology and attendant ethical-political challenges?

As argued previously, in the context of low-carbon mobility transition (Tyfield 2014) , following Foucault’s later work on power/knowledge and the ‘conduct of conduct’ – of states, institutions, groups and selves – social science can be seen here as situated *within* ongoing, inchoate and diverse programmes of strategic manoeuvring that are continually

(re)constructing systems of power/knowledge relations and hence ‘society’. Across multiple power-laden settings, social scientists are called upon to help ‘perform’ particular socio-environmental changes into being (Marres & Asdal 2014), within shifting epistemic and political terrains of volatile alliances and tensions. Such a reading complexifies social issues and research in ways resonating strongly with the mobilities turn.

In particular, against the seeming paradox of greater ethical-political responsibility alongside less-definitive epistemic capacities, social knowledge production itself might need a tactical reorientation, allowing for a renewed engagement in the trajectories of social issues.<sup>3</sup> As has been formulated elsewhere (e.g. Flyvbjerg et al. 2013), one promising route in this direction is the practice of *phronesis*, understood in the Aristotelian sense of an epistemic virtue of situated practical wisdom. When paired with a post-Foucauldian sensitivity, this virtue implies, *inter alia*, systematic attentiveness to the irreducible power-relational nature of all knowledge claims – both the claims researched and those made in the research itself.

Moreover, *phronesis* suggests a rethinking of the very target of knowledge production, set within specific and shifting parameters of those issues under study. If social research is to retain a claim to be ‘more’ than merely and explicitly based on *ex ante* political or normative standpoints, it can only be so, it suggests, in terms of a commitment to *mapping the relational power/knowledge landscape* itself *for* and *with* diverse stakeholders and publics. Here, then, research is *phronetic* when it serves and aims to clarify, for *all* parties involved, how values, concerns and interests intersect within situated power/knowledge relations, their dynamism and openings – and, importantly, when it acknowledges this as an *ongoing concern* in and for

---

<sup>3</sup> We use the term ‘tactical’ advisedly here, and in implicit distinction to the ‘strategic’, following de Certeau’s (1984) famous rendering of these concepts. To us, the tactical nature of (phronetic) research conveys its being situated in limited and opportunistic ways within wider and, indeed, highly strategically imbued power/knowledge spaces.

the praxis of involved agents, thereby in *this very process* of research cultivating a broad-based move towards the exercise of informed public judgment.

This shift towards phronetic engagements obviously carries profound implications for any ‘orthodox’ formulation of social research as a matter of choosing methods appropriate to gather objective evidence. Indeed, much of this challenge is already made explicit within mobilities work: e.g. how can the dynamic but also exceptionally locked-in systems of (auto-)mobility be researched in ways that both pay due heed to their lock-in performing dynamism and facilitate their transformation (cf. Dennis & Urry 2009)? Yet, compared to existing discussions and/or ‘performative’ social-scientific methods, the phronetic approach arguably entails a more power-sensitive vocabulary of ethical-political manoeuvring – thereby also enabling, for our purposes, a new rapprochement with kindred but distinct challenges opened up via methodological cosmopolitanism.

#### Methodological cosmopolitanism: tracing communities of global risks?

In sum, for mobilities research, an ontological vision across levels of abstraction raises epistemological questions that then lead to and yield political and normative implications, not least for conduct of that knowledge-making. By opening sociology ‘beyond societies’ (Urry 2000), mobilities research entails not only searching for those aspects of mobility *constitutive* of new and/or emergent socio-technical forms, but also concomitantly a heightened ethical-political (self-)reflection – in the shape of what we call phronesis – on *which* socio-technical forms to (co-)shape into being.

By contrast, methodological cosmopolitanism focuses attention on movements, flows and interconnections *across* established socio-geographical, cultural and political boundaries;

encounters that set in motion processes of mixing and blurring that Beck (2006) collated as ‘cosmopolitization’. This contrast, however, is smaller than it might at first appear (cf. Sheller’s (2011) excellent comparison of Beck and Urry on cosmopolitanism). For Beck too (Beck & Sznaider 2006; Beck & Grande 2010), cosmopolitization entails a destabilization of those very socio-political and cultural ‘units’ – the scales, structures and forms of national ‘society’ – to which much social (and natural, e.g. environmental (Otto et al. 2015)) research and (institutions of) data collection remain committed. This destabilization initiates an open-ended search for new units and forms of social analysis, below and beyond (but not necessarily substituting for) the nation, and attentive to the new mixtures and interdependencies of a cosmopolitized world where ‘the other’ is always-already in our midst: ‘methodological cosmopolitanism’.

While Beck’s cosmopolitan oeuvre certainly lends itself to misunderstandings, it was always paramount that cosmopolitization entails more than inter- or trans-nationalization; nor is it merely another word for a supposedly *a priori* ‘global’ (Beck 2006; Beck & Grande 2010). Rather, methodological cosmopolitanism examines a diverse empirical landscape that may be characterised by a qualitatively novel and intensified impact of various trans-boundary phenomena, exemplified by the ‘global risks’ of climate change. Cosmopolitization implies globalization *from within*; a set of intertwined processes of movement and encounter, it restructures localities and everyday lives as much as (transnational) markets, science and politics. Methodological cosmopolitanism is about devising ways of capturing and intervening in these processes.

If mobilities research deconstructs ‘society’ into multiple systems of (im)mobility there is no ontological basis to privilege or assume given boundaries between social formations (though

boundaries can come to be *shown* to matter). Rather, one must ‘follow the actors’ (as the actor-network slogan says) wherever they may go (cf. Blok 2010). In empirical terms, methodological cosmopolitanism draws on similar approaches, always focused on specific cosmopolitized case studies of local-global interconnection (Beck et al. 2013; Blok 2015). After all, cosmopolitization implies that ‘social’ (socio-technical, socio-natural) phenomena can be understood only in terms of concrete relations and movements in the world, including the infrastructures and institutions facilitating or disabling such trans-local travel of people, money, (technological) things and imaginations. In this sense, methodological cosmopolitanism is less an argument about ‘the global’ as such, and more about how the very ‘ground’ on which social researchers stand is being fundamentally remade.

Just as mobilities research is as much about blockages and stillness as movement, therefore, methodological cosmopolitanism is as much about situated forms of bounding and excluding as it is about global synthesis and shared values.<sup>4</sup> The question remains, however, of how to translate such insights into concrete empirical research strategies? *How* to do methodologically cosmopolitan research, in ways that reinvent the units of social-scientific analysis in analytically and politically productive ways? Exploring this question has been the key goal of the CosmoClimate research project.

One important guiding vision – at once sociological and ethical-political – for this shared endeavour is that, within contemporary transformations of trans-local geographies, we are currently witnessing emergence of new ‘cosmopolitan communities of global climate risks’ (Beck et al. 2013). Such communities arise in collective processes of climate-risk staging, mediated via trans-local spread and travel of scientific knowledges, media representations,

---

<sup>4</sup> We thank the editors of this special issue for this concise rendering.

activist framings, new market valuations and everyday political engagements. In an attempt to remain epistemically adequate and sensitive to situated realities of climate-risk cosmopolitization, while also striving to trace and follow cross-border cosmopolitized practices and ‘risky’ worlds *in-formation* in real time, the CosmoClimate project takes ‘Europe’ and ‘East Asia’ as initial settings of intra- and interregional comparative study.

These two sites are chosen for various reasons: both substantive, regarding the clear global importance (e.g. trade volumes, GHG emissions, shifting geopolitical balance etc...) of these two regions and their relations; and pragmatic, given the project team assembled and the strength of Beckian cosmopolitan sociology in both regions. But the choice was also pragmatic in terms of being self-consciously limited: a mere starting-point affording development of methodological cosmopolitanism as a programme and not aiming to be a definitive statement, supposedly encapsulating the world as a whole. Moreover, while crucial tensions are in play in relations across and within Europe and East Asia and how these play out will likely have global-historical significance, they pose a significantly less challenging prospect for research on emerging ways of living together well than, say, those amongst Europe and the Middle East. As an initial experiment in methodological cosmopolitanism, therefore, the CosmoClimate project worked with a key contemporary case, but not necessarily the hardest or most pressing one.

Within these shifting regional territories, various case studies – including our own (see below) – carve out their own specific geographies and units of study, including by practising mobile methods. But, importantly, in hypothesizing the emergence of new trans-boundary risk-communities, no premature assumptions of growing normative integration are implied. To the contrary, the ethical-political imaginary of risk cosmopolitization remains open-ended,

equally attuned to possibilities of trans-boundary solidarities as to *intra*-boundary communities and novel and intensified local-global conflicts (Beck et al. 2013).

In methodological terms, however, being attentive to cosmopolitized global risk realities does entail a kind of ‘cosmopolitically’-engaged phronetic imagination; that actively and dialogically engages with and seeks to intervene in diverse and shifting settings, values, interests and publics. Such an epistemic-cum-ethical imagination must remain highly power-sensitive, working tactically to broaden its own scope of engagement beyond narrow circles of transnational mobile elites. Moreover, it must be both reflective and reflexive in its willingness to swap ‘self’ and ‘other’ perspectives, and to cultivate its capacity to stimulate this in research participants; and hence engage in inclusive, locally-appropriate forms of dialogue. Finally, being cosmopolitically engaged, in our view, also entails a certain guiding commitment to the intellectual *and* (urgently) practical task of learning to live together across differences, in ways that would eventually translate into more local *and* transnational solidarity, democratic engagement, and collective search for less ecologically damaging futures (cf. Beck 2010). Yet, again, there is *not* any *a priori* mechanism for deepening global cosmopolitical synthesis, let alone teleological convergence on a shared universalism; nor even presumption regarding the *normative* superiority of these goals on any given substantive understanding. Hence, just as accelerating mobility enforces or conditions certain types of immobility, so too cosmopolitization may well find expression in heightened support for (diverse, and possibly more or less ‘progressive’) cosmopolitized nationalisms (Beck & Levy 2014) and neo-traditionalist fundamentalisms.

Processes of (risk) cosmopolitization, like accelerating (‘intra-societal’) mobility, are always of a *specific* quality, hence demanding empirical analysis alongside the conceptual and

methodological guidance to be able to do this (Blok 2015). As such, a methodologically cosmopolitan approach assumes and expects a more-or-less irreducible diversity of cosmopolitics; conceives this as an enduring strategic landscape of power/knowledge relations and technologies; *and* yet remains committed to actively *exploring* ways – and hence futures characterised by novel ways – to *live together well*, including in the crucial work of formulating viable concepts of ‘cosmopolitan’ co-existence.

In short, by putting the horse of actual-historical cosmopolitization (as process of power-relational change) before the cart of normative cosmopolitanism, a phronetic methodological cosmopolitanism aims both: to illuminate the current *ignorance* about what living together well on a planetary scale looks like, such that ‘cosmopolitanism’ is recast as a *question*, or even *the* question in a moment of global *urgency* and emergence; and thence to open up as broadly and effectively as possible the irreducibly strategic and knowledge-mediated process of working out (diverse) manifest answers to that question, without *ex ante* commitment to any specific vision beyond the requirement that we are indeed learning to live together better.

As such, we also expect mobilities and cosmopolitan studies to retain significant but potentially productive differences in purview and insights, since each continues to investigate different ‘units’ and ‘moments’ in cosmopolitized mobile societies, rather than converging on one supposedly hyper-mobile diagnostic gaze. In particular, for methodological cosmopolitanism the key socio-political challenge today is not the government of mobility *per se*, but rather the patent and irreducible diversity of cosmopolitical visions and lived perspectives *from which* attempted cosmopolitan risk communities must be forged, amidst multiple global crises. Regarding social theory and methodology, this translates into how to describe and understand a cosmopolitized reality that systematically exceeds the Eurocentric

conceptual vocabulary of the currently pre-eminent (and manifestly inadequate) ‘globalized’ social sciences (Beck 2015). In this context, the CosmoClimate project aimed to set up an experimental and dialogical research space in-between Europe and East Asia to explore this transformation.

#### CosmoClimate: cosmopolitanizing social-science research in practice?

A key part of methodologically shifting to cosmopolitized phronesis involves an attempt to rethink standard assumptions about what counts as ‘methods’ and ‘data’ in (social) science. Here, we again find multiple possibilities for tracing complementarities *and* tensions between mobilities and cosmopolitan studies that both may be mutually productive.

New forms of ‘cosmopolitan data’ are certainly required for this cosmopolitized world (Otto et al. 2015). So, too, are specific ‘cosmopolitized’ methods of data production, for instance regarding the challenges of language barriers, including online; the focus of the prematurely final CosmoClimate workshop in December 2014. But these do not *per se* constitute the methodological cosmopolitan shift. Rather, a transformation of ‘methods’ into forms of phronetic and dialogical *intervention* is needed. Intervention here signals a shift in emphasis, not abandonment of the discourse of methods as pertaining to a specialized expertise. Like mobilities scholars, methodological cosmopolitanism asserts that methods may carry their own specific epistemic-cum-ethical efficacy – even as this may need to be shared more evenly and/or dialogically across social-scientific and other forms of expertise.

As Beck was well aware, however, retaining and revitalizing a space of relative epistemic and ethical authority must be done in ways accommodating the constructive critiques of expertise associated with STS – and, in particular, with (e.g. postcolonial) critique of the supposed

superiority of a Eurocentric scholarly register (Sheller 2011; Beck 2015). For this to work, cosmopolitan studies must adopt an inherently *dialogical* self-understanding, one oriented to *mutual* capacities for and practices of knowledge production in which all parties involved in the research field, not least the researcher herself, learns a great deal from sustained interactions.

Such learning concerns two key issues that together cultivate ‘strategic’ (or rather ‘tactical’) ‘wisdom’ (where *both* terms are necessary) through practising it in just the ways one would expect of phronetic research: first, learning (by diverse stakeholders) to (re-)map the cosmopolitized strategic landscape under discussion, not least one’s own position within it and the openings and hindrances to future action. Second, and inseparably, it involves reflexive forms of ethical and political questioning, including an on-going self-questioning by the researcher, as to the shared aspirations and/or constitutive conflicts embedded in and shaping the research field.

This realignment is arguably already strongly evidenced within the methodological cosmopolitan legacy bequeathed by Beck himself, albeit of a specific kind. As the CosmoClimate project exemplified, Beck’s practice of methodological cosmopolitanism was emerging as a programme of intervention as public intellectual encounters between ‘West’ (European) and East Asian social analysts, all committed to debates and empirical explorations into societal self-perceptions and varieties of ‘second modernity’ (Beck & Grande 2010; Beck 2015). Moreover, participants to this dialogical endeavour together sought to invent and experiment specifically with new ‘cosmopolitan’ (and mobile) conceptual resources, including of definitions of ‘cosmopolitanism’ itself (e.g. Han & Park 2014), tested out and reworked within the very space of encounter (Blok 2015). This

engagement thus gave priority, as starting points, to the transformation of concepts of ‘world risk society’ *within* and towards a ‘post-Eurocentric’ social science. Yet, even as very much a work-in-progress, such discussions were also always essentially framed around the enabling of (and being informed by) new methodologically cosmopolitan forms of *empirical* analysis. What we add in this article, then, is that the primal but inchoate epistemic-cum-ethical urge motivating these endeavours can be expressed *as* phronesis, in ways that remain substantively open to precisely the kind of productive inquiry and constitution of new conceptual understandings (including about the very concept of ‘cosmopolitan’) that a genuinely cosmopolitan encounter of differences would require.

A related argument pertains to ‘data’. Instead of cosmopolitan data as objective facts concerning a ‘higher’ (e.g. ‘global’) level of social reality, a cosmopolitically sensitive practice of phronesis would focus on dialogical interventions that maximize the production of novel and promising *border-crossing connections*, in the intervention itself and/or as a capacity for further interactions thereafter. We emphasise ‘border-crossing’ connections as those bringing into (possibly new) dialogue parties already mutually implicated in the dynamic shaping of cosmopolitized phenomena; and where their encounter may prove stimulating to *them* regarding both reflection on their existing cultural attachments and their self-understanding of their strategic positioning. Such interventions aim to further the project of ‘learning to live together well’, and thus to nurture phronesis by doing it. As stressed above, therefore, this approach thus instantiates no *a priori* commitment to the normative superiority of a presumptively ‘global’ culture – one that is *de facto* likely to be elite –; and, indeed, border-crossing connections may well engender stronger attachments to familiar and ‘traditional’ cultures and practices. Moreover, it remains necessarily a limited and fallible

intervention, built upon and effective upon the specific capacities and situated positionalities of all involved, including the research team.

Similarly, what is ‘promising’ here ultimately entails and foreshadows an experienced and embodied *personal* judgement, albeit always an uncertain one, vis-à-vis the tactical project of ‘learning to live together well’ in a world on the move, i.e. a deepening tactical wisdom of actual living human beings. More specifically, this includes judgments regarding the facilitation of new connections between *ideas*, via the construction of new bodies of information, measurements, theories and arguments – not unlike the way ‘objective’ data works as a power/knowledge technology for positive or critical social science today. At the same time, however, methodological cosmopolitanism must *also* acknowledge itself as an explicit intervention in knowledge politics, but one that seeks to (co-)construct knowledges of a specific phronetic and dialogical sort.

In heeding its own situatedness in contemporary power/knowledge landscapes, and opening up to (self-)critical questioning, methodological cosmopolitanism *also* and of necessity partakes in the construction of novel social connections and relations across diversity and distance. This brings with it a weighty responsibility, but one in a cosmopolitized world that is there whether or not it is first acknowledged. Such connections pertain, for instance, amongst the research’s stakeholders, with other people, with socio-technologies, with institutions and concerned publics and with non-humans, depending on the aims and chosen process of the research. They pertain also, as just noted, to the building of new connections within the social sciences, across borders, such as those between and within Europe and East Asia, potentially transforming the very infrastructures of knowledge and ‘data’ production. In all these respects, therefore, the ‘data’ and epistemic products of cosmopolitan studies

become a direct tactical contribution to – and limited, initial and fallible intervention in – the evolution of the complex systems, processes and transformations in question.

Nonetheless, the specific emphasis here is on an insistence that contemporary ‘societies’ and ‘systems’ must themselves be conceived in *cosmopolitized* terms, and as therefore involving attention to local-global interconnectedness, switches of perspectives across borders and life-worlds, and an active decentring of nation-state- and (Euro-)centric units and assumptions. Hence our suggestions that research interventions must from now on be thought as inherently dialogical, and that the connectivity of research must traverse a space of distance and diversity.

#### Low-carbon innovation in East Asia (and Europe): two brief illustrations

We illustrate these two points briefly drawing on two elements of the CosmoClimate project. First, as regards dialogical interventions, a further example of this work concerns cosmopolitan low-carbon innovation networks centred on China. This problem field is a crucial test-case of the real-existing cosmopolitization of climate change and responses thereto. China is now the world’s largest absolute emitter of greenhouse gasses, but also a pivotal site of attempts to upgrade innovation capacities and to take advantage of significant opportunities, given rapid ongoing development at unrivalled scale, to fashion a new model of ‘sustainable development’. Yet investigating these low-carbon innovation networks – especially as a Western researcher – immediately reveals a landscape of socio-technical relations that are starkly strategic even as it is often accompanied by warm words regarding ‘international collaboration’ and ‘win-win’, in at least two key respects.

First, under the banner of *zizhu chuangxin* (indigenous innovation), any specific programme of low-carbon innovation in (a ‘rising’) China is transparently a focus of an intensely pursued top-down project of techno-nationalist catch-up, perhaps on the verge of its ‘historical’ realization. Such dynamics are easier to miss in more familiar, ‘advanced’ socio-economic contexts, even as they are also there. Secondly, the specific political constitution of power relations, state and everyday government in China – i.e. one-party state progressively liberalizing its economy amidst a troubled financialized globalization – conditions a common-sense that is strikingly pragmatic, tactical and built upon personal connections; one that in many ways already (if possibly un-self-consciously) manifests Foucauldian points regarding the political nature of knowledges that are key insights still to a ‘Westerner’.

In these circumstances, then, not only do familiar ‘Western’ processes of social science, asking accessible individuals direct questions about the public and/or private matters of relevance to the study, not work; but a cosmopolitan phronetic approach – seeking to engage in dialogical interventions that are explicitly framed on an ‘equal footing’ and as illuminating for all involved – is a simple pragmatic choice for evidence-gathering. Where the goal is a (deepening) meaningful encounter between EU-based (and encultured) researchers and Chinese researchers and research subjects in ways that may then, in turn, have some impact on future trajectories of that issue and Euro-Chinese ‘living together well’, including perhaps stimulating politically *awkward* but candid and productive discussion and reflection, this approach becomes inescapable.

A familiar (and Euro-centric) critical perspective may see this approach in terms of capitulation to the existing power relations, failing to speak truth to power and/or to demand the truth from power. But such analysis overlooks two key points, one of European and one

of Chinese lineage. On the one hand, its epistemic-cum-political radicalism neglects the Foucauldian insight that structures of power relations are never monolithic but always capillary and punctuated with holes. Hence working tactically *with* the conditions presented by existing power/knowledge relations nonetheless affords ample – and indeed more numerous and more strategically effective – opportunities for working *on* those conditions, presenting (and eliciting) uncomfortable truths, than does a radical full-frontal assault. This is thus a ‘cosmopolitically’-engaged phronetic point, since the goal and approach here is to stimulate ongoing (indeed never-ending) and demotic reflection (then conditioning change) on incumbent socio-political systems, rather than a radical rejection and overthrow of the latter guided by self-confident literal truths.

On the other, this line of criticism also imperiously neglects cultural differences regarding processes of productive critical encounter: a self-defeating move, pragmatically and normatively, for any self-declared ‘cosmopolitan’ social analysis. For instance, while different to Western approaches, the overlaying of the current power relations and regime (including the complex relations in China to the recent history of Western cultural dominance) on a Confucian culture, in which frank criticism is undoubtedly permitted but when built upon relations of personal connection and trust (e.g. Bell 2008), yields a situation in which candid discussion and productive dialogue – and about issues as potentially sensitive, culturally and politically, as plans, hopes and fears of future socio-technical global leadership and with which *intra*-national winners – are unquestionably possible, but will only happen following some considerable work in framing such an event or intervention.

With this in mind, workshop discussions are currently being organized to bring together Chinese, other East Asian and European researchers and stakeholders to flesh out jointly the

new high-level concept of the Chinese approach to low-carbon innovation, namely ‘ecological civilization’; a term that could be richly resonant with both the ‘cosmopolitan turn’ envisioned by Beck and a phronetic turn to a new ‘civilization’ as ‘wise society’, but also may well prove in concrete not to be. These discussions will be informed by, and in turn inform, empirical work across a range of low-carbon domains, including urbanization, mobility, agri-food and environmental management. As such, they are experiments in developing a post-Eurocentric social science and ‘safe’ spaces of encounter for candid dialogue about the *challenges* of cosmopolitanism today. But where these discussions are unusually also acknowledged as *important (phronetic) research happenings in their own right*, not just ‘output’ events.

Our second illustration pertains to the domain of so-called ‘urban sustainability transition’, as this is fast becoming a ubiquitous strategic target of urban planning and policy-making across the globe, in tandem with growing academic interest manifest mainly in urban studies (Bulkeley et al. 2010). Within the CosmoClimate project, researching this highly cosmopolitized and uneven domain of urban power/knowledge interventions across Europe and East Asia has meant confronting the challenge of how to position this work in ways that enable new and promising boundary-crossing connections on several levels. Most immediately, this involves the challenge of how to define a novel ‘cosmopolitan’ unit of research that will allow us to map out emerging transnational urban sustainability alliances and policy mobilities – but to do so in ways that challenge, intellectually and practically, the lingering Eurocentrism of such mobilities. Closer to the urban ground, in turn, it implies attending closely to various power-enforced boundaries, notably the way urban climate interventions tend to shape up within confined arenas of urban elites, with limited accountability towards either local or transnational publics.

In terms of rethinking political geographies, our main tool for establishing a new space of inter-urban connections has been conceptually to cast major ‘world port cities’ – including, for instance, Hong Kong, Yokohama, Singapore, Rotterdam, Copenhagen and Hamburg – as an emerging cosmopolitan community of climate risks (Blok & Tschötschel 2015). These world port cities, we document empirically, are increasingly positioned within transnational urban alliances as sharing both the risks (of sea-level rise etc.) and the opportunities (of best-practice solutions etc.) for driving sustainability transitions, thus exerting new normative pressures of ‘green’ cooperation and competition on other, more peripheral cities. As such, we suggest, these world cities form important ingredients in a shared but uneven urban-cosmopolitan ‘real-politics’ – a suggestion which opens up new dialogical spaces across regions, disciplines and urban practices, potentially challenging standard assumptions in the process. For instance, during the inaugural meeting of the Megacity Think Tank Alliance in Seoul in 2014, Beck and his research team put the idea of urban-cosmopolitan risk communities into conversation with analysts attuned to the specific challenges faced by Asian ‘megacities’ such as Shanghai and Ho Chi Minh City, in the process decentring usual (Europe-based) assumptions as to what ‘sustainability transition’ implies.

Cross-boundary connections are also at stake, however, at more situated levels, regarding the extent to which elite-driven climate interventions in specific urban contexts are rendered accountable to local and transnational public concerns. Exploring this question in CosmoClimate has meant engaging in forms of mobile and collaborative urban ethnographies, in attempts to explore and enable the potentials for wider social learning and cross-cutting solidarities possibly opened up in the peripheries of urban strategies. At this level, working with local experts and stakeholders across East Asian urban settings helps bring into

comparative view, and dynamize new connections across, a varied regional landscape: hence, whereas climate-related interventions in the quasi-democratic setting of Hong Kong remains highly socio-technically circumscribed, recent initiatives in Seoul manifest a broadening of civic participation and attendant sustainability aspirations (Blok 2016). By thus rethinking comparison as the active establishment of urban connections, such collaborative research helps open new spaces also for civic learning across contexts.

### Conclusions: lessons, interchanges, futures

This ongoing methodologically cosmopolitan and phronetic work tells us much about specific, substantive sites and problem-fields that could be potentially pivotal vis-à-vis emerging futures but that remain largely unintelligible to conventional, ‘methodologically nationalist’ and Eurocentric perspectives. In the wider CosmoClimate project, scholars explore emerging cosmopolitized futures of changing post-Western political-economic regimes (Tyfield forthcoming), trans-local public spheres (Volkmer 2014), international security politics (Selchow 2014) and trans-local civic bonds of shared memory and solidarity (Levy & Sznajder 2013). All of this within the overarching vision, emerging from Beck’s broader theoretical and methodological works, of a world undergoing fundamental ‘metamorphosis’ confronting global climate risks (Beck 2016).

Our focus in this article, however, has been on the questions – at once eminently practical and abstractly (meta-)methodological – of what this work tells us about the wider epistemic reorientations by methodological cosmopolitanism of the social sciences, including of ‘methods’ and ‘data’ . When conceptualized through the lens of a phronetic and situated research engagement, methodological cosmopolitanism amounts to self-conscious and power-sensitive practices of dialogical intervention in strategic cosmopolitized realities,

oriented to the establishment of novel and productive connections across borders, distances and differences even as these need not privilege, and indeed may oppose, a tendential movement towards global hyper-fluidity and cultural synthesis or (likely corporate-commercial) mishmash.

Inseparably interwoven into these discussions and claims are onto-political questions as to what kinds of futures our own travelling research contributes to bringing about, in ways that resonate strongly with conversations on mobilities and mobile methods. What methodological cosmopolitanism adds to this discussion is a specific cosmopolitical sensitivity, at once epistemic and ethical-political, to its own situatedness within fields and processes of local-global interconnectedness. The key complementary conclusion and challenge that emerges from this work thus may itself be stated as an open-ended question: *how can we practice social-scientific research through a form of cosmopolitized phronesis, ultimately oriented to emerging possibilities for exploring, opening up, dialogically questioning and thereby possibly (co-)constructing more con-vivial local-global practices, communities and (world-spanning) societies?*

Important for our argument, however, is how this very question and the process of its emergence and formulation demand that there is no possibility of one single, overarching and abstractly specifiable answer. Rather, the question serves as a permanent challenge for multiple experiments in cosmopolitically-sensitive phronetic research; a new horizon orienting multiple engaged research endeavours, all of which thereby will incrementally contribute to the construction of partly overlapping assemblages of tactical knowledges. From these assemblages, in turn, may emerge not only a new, broader, more encompassing and perspectival understanding of the complex, mobile and cosmopolitized (socio-natural, socio-

technical) systems we inhabit; but also possibly more inclusive and ‘cosmopolitan’ (the term itself taking on substance yet to be defined), more convivial and solidary, more democratic and sustainable, and more diversity-aware practices, systems and societies themselves.

Of course, there is no guarantee at all that this work will produce better worlds, let alone this grander vision. Yet such a grander prospect not only serves to offer embryonic form to a positive vision fit for the new challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century – a development for sense-making creatures such as ourselves of uncertain but likely significant importance – but it would also at least enable a broad-based contestation of what ‘better’ might be; which, in turn, is an inescapable element and moment of any (ongoing) process of such a complex power/knowledge system of coming to realization of that brighter outcome and of deepening practices and capacities of strategic wisdom.

On the other hand, comparing and contrasting mobilities and cosmopolitan studies, as two kindred forms of phronetic research engagement with and within a mobile world, highlights subtle but productive differences. Whereas mobilities research tends to emphasize questions of the ethical-political (re-)constitution of *systems* of (im)mobilities and power/knowledge relations in more equal and empowering ways, cosmopolitan studies arguably entails a stronger focus on issues of (re-)constructing *communities* in settings of irreducibly diverse local-global interdependencies. In turn, if mobilities research has preoccupied itself strongly with the invention of new and sophisticated *methods* for intervening into (im)mobility systems, for cosmopolitan studies phronetic intervention has so far entailed a stronger commitment to *conceptual* invention, in the shape of common and travelling intellectual resources that may enable dialogical (self-)reflection on more cosmopolitan forms of living together well. The former thus conditions a strategic ‘political epistemology’ that helps

illuminate the latter (as in this article); while conversely, the latter counsels a sensitivity to diverse cosmopolitics that is equally in evidence in leading mobilities work today (e.g. see contributions to this Special Issue from Nicholson, Parent; and Sheller (2016)).

As we have argued throughout this article, however, these differences should be seen more as matters of emphasis and priority, and thus as productive differences, rather than as signalling any underlying incompatibilities. Methodological cosmopolitanism, no less than mobilities research, entails a commitment to *the empirical* and *the situated*; mobilities research, in turn, is already attuned (if perhaps implicitly so) to a cosmopolitized world of *local-global interdependencies* and *trans-boundary risks*. Indeed, both mobilities and cosmopolitan studies should be seen as dynamic, iterative and principally ‘endless’ programmes of situated research practice – in temporal, spatial and normative senses – equally committed to phronetic ideals of elucidating and intervening in key public issues and common power/knowledge spaces for the production of more just, ‘cosmopolitan’ and post-Eurocentric (and post-other-, e.g. Sino-, centric) futures. Here, then, they both grapple with the *shared* and practical challenges of doing meaningful and valuable research in a mobile world.

### References

- Barad, Karen. 2007. *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Beck, Ulrich. 2006. *The Cosmopolitan Vision*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Beck, Ulrich. 2008. “Mobility and the Cosmopolitan Perspective”. In Canzler, W., Kaufmann, V. and Kesselring, S. (eds.) *Tracing Mobilities: Towards a Cosmopolitan Perspective*, pp. 25-36. Surrey: Ashgate.
- Beck, Ulrich. 2015. “Emancipatory Catastrophism: What Does it Mean to Climate Change and Risk Society?” *Current Sociology* 63 (1): 75-88.

- Beck, Ulrich. 2016. *The Metamorphosis of the World: How Climate Change is Transforming Our Concept of the World*. Oxford: Polity.
- Beck, Ulrich, and Edgar Grande. "Varieties of Second Modernity: The Cosmopolitan Turn in Social and Political Theory and research." *British Journal of Sociology* 61 (3): 409-443.
- Beck, Ulrich, and Daniel Levy. 2013. "Cosmopolitanized Nations: Re-imagining Collectivity in World Risk Society." *Theory, Culture & Society* 30 (2): 3-31.
- Beck, Ulrich and Natan Sznaider. 2006. "Unpacking Cosmopolitanism for the Social Sciences: a Research Agenda." *British Journal of Sociology* 57 (1): 1-25.
- Beck, Ulrich, Anders Blok, David Tyfield and Joy Yueyue Zhang (2013) "Cosmopolitan Communities of Climate Risk: Conceptual & Empirical Suggestions for a New Research Agenda." *Global Networks* 13 (1):1-21.
- Bell, Daniel. 2008. *China's New Confucianism*, Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Blok, Anders. 2010. "Mapping the Super-Whale: Towards a Mobile Ethnography of Situated Globalities." *Mobilities* 5 (4): 507-528.
- Blok, Anders. 2015. "Towards cosmopolitan middle-range theorizing: A metamorphosis in the practice of social theory?" *Current Sociology* 63 (1): 110-114.
- Blok, Anders. 2016. "Urban climate risk communities: East Asian world cities as cosmopolitan spaces of collective action?" Forthcoming in *Theory, Culture & Society* (special section on "Cosmopolitanism in (East) Asia")
- Blok, Anders and Robin Tschötschel. 2015. "World port cities as cosmopolitan risk community: mapping climate policy experiments in Europe and East Asia." Forthcoming in *Environment & Planning C*.
- Bulkeley, Harriet, Broto, Vanesa C., Hodson, Mike and Simon Marvin (eds). 2010. *Cities and Low Carbon Transitions*. London: Routledge.
- Büscher, Monika, John Urry and Katian Witchger (eds). 2010. *Mobile Methods*. London: Routledge.
- de Certeau, Michel. 1984. *The Practice of Everyday Life*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Dennis, Kingsley and John Urry. 2009. *After the Car*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Elliott, Anthony and John Urry. 2010. *Mobile Lives*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Fincham, D. Ben, M. McGuinness and Leslie Murray. 2009. *Mobile Methodologies*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Flyvbjerg, Bent, Todd Landmann and Sanford Schramm (eds). 2013. *Real Social Science*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- Han, Sang-Jing and Young-Do Park 2014. "Another Cosmopolitanism: A Critical Reconstruction of Neo-Confucian Conception of Tianxiaweigong (天下爲公) in the Age of Global Risks." *Development and Society* 43(2): 185-206.
- Kaufmann, Vincent. 2010. *Rethinking the City*. London: Routledge.
- Law, John. 2009. "Seeing Like a Survey." *Cultural Sociology* 3 (2): 239-256.
- Levy, Daniel and Nathan Sznajder. 2013. "Cosmopolitan Memory and Human Rights". In Lury, Celia and [N.] Wakeford (eds). 2012. *Inventive Methods: The Happening of the Social*. London: Routledge.
- Marres, Noortje and Kristin Asdal. 2014. "Performing environmental change: the politics of social science methods." *Environment & Planning A* 46 (9): 2055-2064.
- Nowotny, Helga, Peter Scott and Michael Gibbons. 2001. *Rethinking Science: Knowledge and the Public*. London: Polity Press.
- Otto, Ilona, Anne Biewald, Dim Coumou, Georg Feulner, Claudia Köhler, Thomas Nocke, Anders Blok, Albert Gröber, Sabine Selchow, David Tyfield, Ingrid Volkmer, Hans-Joachim Schellnhuber and Ulrich Beck. 2015. "Socio-economic Data for Global Environmental Change Research." *Nature Climate Change* 5: 503-506.
- Selchow, Sabine. 2014. "Security Policy and (Global) Risk(s)". In Kaldor, M., & Rangelov, I. (eds.) *The Handbook of Global Security Policy*, pp. 68-84 London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Sheller, Mimi. 2011. "Cosmopolitanism and Mobilities", in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Cosmopolitanism*, M. Nowicka and M. Rovisco (eds), Aldershot: Ashgate, pp. 349-365.
- Sheller, Mimi. 2016. "Uneven Mobility Futures: A Foucauldian Approach." *Mobilities* 11 (1): 15-31. Available at doi:10.1080/17450101.2015.1097038.
- Simonsen, Jesper, Jorgen Ole Bærenholdt, Monika Büscher and John Damm Scheuer (eds) 2010. *Design Research. Synergies from Interdisciplinary Perspectives*. London: Routledge.
- Suchman, Lucy. 2012. "Configuration". In Lury, C., & Wakeford, N. (eds). *Inventive Methods: The Happening of the Social*. London: Routledge.
- Tyfield, David. 2014. "Putting the Power in 'Socio-Technical Regimes' – e-Mobility Transition in China as Political Process." *Mobilities* 9 (4): 585-603.
- Tyfield, David. Forthcoming. *Liberalism 2.0 and the New Nineteenth Century: Innovation, China and the Crises of Neoliberalism*. London: Routledge.
- Urry, John. 2000. *Sociology Beyond Societies*. Cambridge: Polity.

- Urry, John. 2004. "Introduction: Thinking Society Anew". In Beck, U. and Willms, J. (eds) *Conversations with Ulrich Beck*, pp. 1-10. Oxford: Polity.
- Volkmer, Ingrid. 2014. *The Global Public Sphere: Public Communication in the Age of Reflective Interdependence*. Cambridge: Polity.