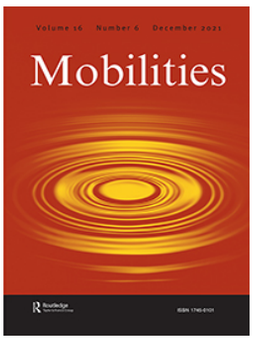

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Disentangling Following: Implications and Practicalities of Mobile Methods

Markus Roos Breines [a], Joanna Menet [b] and Joris Schapendonk [c]

[a]Sociology, London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine, London, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland; [b]Laboratory for the Study of Social Processes, Universite De Neuchâtel, Neuchatel, Switzerland; [c]Geography Planning & Environment, Radboud Universiteit Nijmegen, Nijmegen, Netherlands

ABSTRACT

The increasing interest in mobilities among social scientists over the past two decades has generated new research approaches to deepen the understanding of people's diverse movements. These methods have focused on capturing research participants' mobilities, but also led to new ways of thinking about researchers' mobilities as a strategy to collect data. In this paper, we explore the relationship between researchers and research participants' mobilities through the idea of 'following'. Drawing on insights from the Moving Marketplaces research project on eight markets in the Netherlands, Spain, Switzerland and the UK, we highlight the lack of beginnings and endings of following. This leads us to a reflection on what to actually follow as well as an analysis of the doings of following. This paper examines some of the unexplored terrains in the conceptual and methodological debate around following and argues that it is essential to reflexively engage with the implications and practicalities of this approach. We argue that it is more productive to regard following not only as the physical process of following people, objects, knowledge, etc., but also as a theoretical and methodological openness that embraces and articulates the dynamic and non-linear character of ethnographic research practices.

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Mobile methods; following; mobilities; marketplaces; reflexive ethnography

1. Introduction

Building on what has been called the 'mobilities turn' or 'mobilities paradigm' (Urry 2007; Sheller 2021), over the past two decades social scientists have moved their focus on the increasing importance of mobilities. They are challenging sedentarist social theory (Sheller and Urry 2006) and nation-state centred epistemologies (Dahinden 2017). Concomitant mobile methods (Büscher and Urry 2009; Hein, Evans, and Jones 2008; Elliot, Norum, and Salazar 2017) have emerged as a central method for studying the mobilities of goods and people. In particular, there has been a focus on the use of following as a method that can help to comprehend the complex mobilities of people (Salazar, Elliot, and Norum 2017), but also of 'things in motion' (Appadurai 1986; see also Hui 2012). The idea of researchers following their object of study has been discussed explicitly in anthropology since Mintz' (1985) work on sugar, and has become a central issue in broader epistemological and methodological debates in anthropology, geography, migration studies and mobility studies. With the emergence of notions such as 'multi-sited ethnography', Marcus' (1995) review of existing research pointed to new modes of data collection that include following the people, thing,

CONTACT Markus Roos Breines markus.breines@lshtm.ac.uk Department of Infectious Disease Epidemiology, London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine, London, United Kingdom

metaphor, plot, biography and conflict. This influential work has inspired a large number of studies that have used the movements of researchers between locations to generate important insights into the complex chains, networks, industries and legal frameworks that enable or hinder the mobilities of people and objects.

Over the past few decades, the forms of following have changed as the emphasis on migration and mobilities experiences and the production of power relations behind mobile and immobile subjects (Spinney 2011; Schapendonk 2020) has increased. Following is applied in a wide range of studies from a focus on cycling (Spinney 2011), car driving (Harada and Waitt 2013) and students' everyday mobilities (Holton and Finn 2018) to a focus on circulation as an alternative to sedentary migration (Schmoll 2005; Tarrius 1993), pastoralist mobilities (Pas Schrijver 2019), itinerant mining (Bolay 2017), salsa dancers' entangled mobilities (Menet 2020), transnational mobilities (Choplin and Lombard 2010; Schapendonk 2020) and refugee trajectories (Janssens 2019; Wissink 2019). These and other studies have provided important insights as they engage with research participants in different contexts and develop deep understandings of their mobility practices.

Following is most commonly used to describe research conducted in more than one location, suggesting that the mobilities dimension is incorporated into the relationship between the researcher and the researched (people or objects). This arguably generates more composite understandings of people as they traverse different social landscapes. For example, walking with informants qualitatively transforms the conversations and interviews (Evans and Jones 2011). Following, thus, can enable a recognition not only of participants' movements but also of how their practices vary across different socio-political spaces. Hui (2012) demonstrates that following of things inevitably shifts between mobility and immobility and that these temporal flows interact with each other. Following affords opportunities to engage *with* mobilities. In the literature that draws on following as a research practice, there is, however, a significant variation in the description of what following actually is (Spinney 2011; Janssens 2019). In line with this, new methodological questions have been raised about the position and imperatives of mobile methods (see also Merriman 2014).

Because the methodological sections in academic articles provide limited space for discussion, the description of the practices of mobile methods are often restricted to general outlines of principles and approaches. Consequently, the practicalities and *doings* of these methods remain underexplored. Hence, we use this paper to reflexively engage with some questions that emerged through our research practice of following mobilities. We do not only intend to make visible what mostly remains hidden in academic writings, such as the underlying uncertainties, the discussions and disagreements between research group members, the analytical challenges involved (see also Aparna, Schapendonk, and Merlin Escorza 2020), but we actually use our reflections on the practicalities of following to address the analytical implications of this research practice. These explorations and reflections emerged from the Moving Marketplaces project. This is a collaborative effort to study the role of traders in producing public spaces (see also Watson 2009) and the following of their mobilities started from eight rural and urban markets in the Netherlands, Spain, Switzerland, and the UK. It is important to stress that markets bring together a wide range of mobilities, including those of customers, money, digital connections, vehicles, information and products from and going to different parts of the world. This research, however, was from the start primarily interested in the role of market traders in this complex system of mobilities. In so doing, we focused on human mobilities as 'active corporeal engagements' with the sensed world (Sheller 2021, p. 30) and asked how traders navigate, and simultaneously coproduce, marketplaces through their mobilities.

Through an exploration of how researchers' and traders' mobilities converge and diverge, and how research participants' mobilities are constitutive of researchers' mobilities (and the other way around), this paper unpacks some of the struggles we faced during our research project. Below, we discuss how the following of people led us to re-consider the unit of analysis and how we attuned our research practices to the mobilities we observed. In engaging with the challenges that we faced during fieldwork, we outline how we modified our strategy and approach over time. These reflections, in the end, help us to scrutinize the ontological underpinnings of the relationship between

place and mobilities as well as to critically discuss the presumed divide between 'mobile methods' and 'conventional methods' (Merriman 2014). We use mobilities as a lens to the 'world' while also seeing mobilities as an empirical phenomenon to be studied. We rely in particular on the anthropological work of Tim Ingold (2007, 2011) to articulate the continuity of our research practices *across* places and to disentangle following. Our exploration of following in this paper demonstrates its importance as a tool for collecting empirical insights, but also that it can help us reflect on related issues such as multi-sited research, the entanglement of mobilities-immobilities and the co-construction of knowledge between researchers and research participants.

2. Situating following

The discussions about following people and things are closely interconnected to debates about 'the field'. Anthropologists have fundamentally re-thought the notion of the field in a deterritorialized world (Appadurai, 1990; Gupta and Ferguson 1997), which has moved away from the notion of bounded fields by deconstructing ideas of 'local cultures' and 'fixed communities' and shifted the emphasis from *roots* to *routes* (Clifford 1997). Marcus' notion of following the research object is strongly related to ethnographic research moving 'out from the single sites and local situations of conventional ethnographic research designs' (1995, 96) in order to better understand the circulation of cultural meanings within the context of the 'world system of capitalist political economy' (Marcus 1995, 96). There are many similarities between Marcus' multi-sited strategies' strategies and contemporary debates about mobile methods (Büscher and Urry 2009). However, one fundamental difference is that mobile methods do not necessarily share Marcus' aim of capturing the impacts of the world system, but rather seek to understand people's connections between places. One anthropological theorist that has moved away from multi-sitedness, but still focuses on mobilities is Tim Ingold (2007, 2011). He frames human beings as wayfarers that do not so much live their lives *in* places, but through, around, to and from them (Ingold 2011, 148) or in other words; humans live their lives as paths (Mazzullo and Ingold 2008).

Alongside the anthropological discussion of the field, the relational turn in Geography (Massey 1991, 2005) and the transnational turn in migration studies (Glick Schiller, Basch and Szanton Blanc 1995) have provided important insights into the spatialities of research. In similar ways as the notion of the unbound field in anthropology, the former breaks with a traditional geographical divide of the local as the intimate/near/the embodied versus the global as the abstract/far-away/virtual (Amin 2004). As a result, spatio-temporal trajectories (coming from afar) are believed to produce and shape places (Massey 2005). In these terms, places, as put forward by Ingold (2007, 2011), only exist along paths of movements. With this ontological shift to relational geography – and further fueled by a wider debate on globalization – geographers started to follow, among others, social movements (Hendrikx 2014) and recycling processes (Lepawsky and Mather 2011). Concurrently, the transnational turn in migration studies has sensitized the field for the multi-local engagements of migrants. This led to a mushrooming of multi-sited research projects through which financial transactions (Smith 2007), transnational care systems (Serra Mingot and Mazzucato 2018), and other practices, are traced. Still, the transnational dynamics are often captured from only two places; the country of origin and the country of destination. Such approaches leave much of the mobilities to, from and across places out of the picture (Schapendonk and Steel 2014).

The mobilities turn builds strongly on these anthropological and geographical shifts and has urged researchers to move beyond bounded notions of society (Urry 2000; Sheller and Urry 2006). With the focus on mobility processes, there has been more attention to the practices as mobilities are unfolding (Büscher and Urry 2009; Hein, Evans, and Jones 2008). In this sense, mobile methods are 'on the move': First, researchers are indeed travelling with their research objects, and second; this facilitates being 'tuned into the social organization of move' (Büscher and Urry 2009, 103). The emphasis on movement, Büscher and Urry (2009, 104) argue, 'makes it less interesting to find and define underlying grammars, orders, rules or structures' and requires instead fieldwork that is more

mobile and fluid (Schmoll and Semi 2013). While these conceptual arguments and methodological refinements have contributed to push the agenda of 'following' forward, the use of 'mobile methods' and related terms introduces a 'mobility bias', as it seems to suggest that other methods are not mobile. However, mobile methods are 'practically and epistemologically linked with mobility' (Novoa 2015, 100). A position that uses mobility as an analytical perspective means that there is a certain degree of mobility involved in many method.

The agendas of multi-sited approaches and mobile methods share a common ground when it comes to following but are at the same time different. A 'Marcusian' (Marcus, 1995) multi-sited approach is in its essence a study to understand how Location/People A relates to Location/People B and C (and possibly more) as if they form a world system, where the researcher travels (physically and/or analytically) between a number of sites that are part of that system. The notion of following in mobile methods can lead to the conceptualization of underlying or overlying structures such as a transnational community but following things and people does not necessarily mean a focus on circulation between specific sites. The focus can also be on travelling with people to known and unknown places, highlighting that following is not *multi*-local, but rather *trans*local as mobility (of people and objects) is followed to, from, and across places (Schapendonk 2011).

However, studies that use following as a method also discuss its limits, not least in practical terms (Hage 2005; Hannerz 2003). Criticizing the use of the notion of multi-sited field, Hage (2005, 465) reminds us of the physical limits when flying to several different places: 'The body of the anthropologist, even a post-modern one, simply cannot cope with such fast and intensive travelling for a very lengthy period of time'. Beside the financial costs of it, mobile methods necessitate a large amount of coordination and flexibility on the side of the researcher (Lipphardt 2015). There are also social dimensions of conducting mobile methods that need to be taken into consideration. In her study with Somali migrants, Moret (2015) abandoned the initial idea of using mobile methods because of her personal situation which made it impossible to follow her respondents' unpredictable movements and irregular activities while on the move. Instead, she conducted interviews in four stages, during which she met research participants several times, thus allowing her to come back and discuss changes that had occurred at different points of their journeys and in their lives (Moret 2015).

To address a further challenge of multi-sited research, its assumed lack of depth of contextual information about each site, Mazzucato (2009) suggests a simultaneous research design where researchers simultaneously follow migrants' transnational networks from the main locations of the network. Another approach is Janssens' (2019) study of mobility in Central Africa where she frames the 'doings' of following the mobility of her informants less in terms of common ethnographic and participatory approaches. She embraced a 'nomadic mind' in which contingency and serendipity are not feared and omitted, but rather embraced and valued (Janssens 2019, 105–6), but argues that it is the *analytical* approach to the methods that makes it mobility-minded. This example indicates that methods of following are accompanied with a sense of stillness and this is in line with our discussion below, in which we outline how the following of mobilities and in-place observations clearly blended into each other. While there is extensive theorisation of mobile methods, there is still a lack of in-depth description and reflection on the practicalities of following. To emphasize the value and limitations of following, we now turn to the social, practical and conceptual challenges that derived from the practice of following traders in our research project.

3. Searching for the unit of analysis

Based on the insight that markets are inherently local and translocal spaces (Low 2014), a key interest of the Moving Marketplaces project was to better understand traders' mobility practices. These mobilities turned out to vary significantly between the countries under study as well as within countries. Some traders move between markets on a daily basis, whereas others trade only on one market several days a week. Each country team started by choosing two markets to focus on, and then gradually consider other locations by following traders to other locations. Once focusing on the

mobilities of the traders, we became aware of the multitude of mobilities involved. Cresswell (2010, 17) breaks mobility into six related parts of 'motive force, velocity, rhythm, route, experience, and friction', and we observed similar rhythms, paces, temporalities and spatialities of traders' mobilities. Their mobilities were not restricted to movements between different markets, but also included mobilities for other market-related purposes such as buying products to sell and meeting other market traders in cafés.

It was clearly impossible to follow all of the diverse forms of mobilities involved in market trading. The diversity of mobilities made us regularly return to the question of *what* we actually follow in attempts to articulate the boundaries of our unit of analysis. This has proven to be a particularly valuable collective exercise since the following is applied to all kinds of unit of analysis – from world systems (Marcus 1995), mobile subjects like 'the expat' (Cranston 2017), economic production processes (Lepawsky and Mather 2011) and individual mobility trajectories (Schapendonk 2020). Moreover, following is stressed in both research with actor-centred approaches (following the actor) as well as research that start from practice approaches that include materiality, competences and meanings (Shove, Pantzar, and Watson 2012).

In this research, we started from a human-centred interpretation of mobilities and followed the mobilities of traders. Yet, this seemingly specific focus still left us with two fundamental issues. First, the following of people gave us very limited indication of what we actually follow. We could potentially follow the traders' mobilities from their homes to the market or their scattered mobilities across different markets to get a sense of their weekly rhythms. However, it would also be possible to follow their mobilities to the wholesale markets as well as their mobilities within markets, to social places such as pubs and sports events, and to second jobs in some cases. It would even be possible to follow traders who travel to other countries to buy goods. In this struggle of demarcation, some of the researchers involved in our project stressed that we were focusing on translocal mobilities between markets and within countries. Others argued that there is no ontological justification for separating translocal mobilities from transnational mobilities. All these concerns relate to the question of when and where to stop following – analytically *and* empirically.

The second fundamental issue related to the distinction between following people and following practices. A shared feeling among the researchers was that the following of traders had its downsides as it would create limited insights into the project's broader focus on markets as public spaces. To explore the production of public space fully, it would be interesting to widen our scope and follow also the materiality (products, stands, etc.) competences and meanings involved, as Shove, Pantzar, and Watson (2012) suggest. Yet, this would create even more practical barriers of what to follow and where to. It is important to note that these dilemmas did not emerge in the stage of the formulation of research questions or as a theoretical choice based on a literature review. After all, the entire project started from a rather clear-cut definition of human-centred mobilities, that was outlined and justified in the original proposal. These dilemmas actually emerged *during* the process of following of traders. To put it differently, the idea of following as part of our methodology implicated that we had to re-consider how we approached and defined our unit of analysis during fieldwork (for a similar case see Boas *et al.* 2020).

Through following traders' mobilities we thus observed the skills and competences involved, the rules, regulations and habits attached to their mobility practices and the importance of materiality in the form of vehicles, carriers, stands, signposts, boxes, cash, notebooks, and so on. By following the mobilities of actors, we noticed how their mobilities were enmeshed in, and relied on, other non-human mobilities (Adey 2010). We approached trader's mobilities as unbound in terms of its national or transnational outreach – preventing us from falling into methodological nationalism (Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2002). However, this did not resolve the challenge of where to go and when to stop when conducting following. In the end, following came with a lot of pragmatism and was often the outcome of a negotiation between the researcher and the trader:

> I first met the jewellery sellers on a cold autumn morning while they were putting up their stall. There were only a few customers around and as I was standing on the side of their stall, we soon engaged in a long chat. They told me that they visited different markets every day, several days of the week and drove around the whole country [Switzerland] to sell the jewellery they had designed and made of silver and gemstones from Nepal. Whenever a potential customer approached, I stepped aside and walked around the market before coming back again later. At the end of the day, they gave me their business card and we agreed that I would meet them at another market soon. Over the following weeks we exchanged several emails, but when I suggested to go to one of the monthly-held markets on their list, they invited me to rather come to another market. They insisted that this was "a good market for your research" because they would have a larger space and offer not only jewellery but also singing bowls, and that this would allow me to see different kinds of customers. Furthermore, the larger stall would allow for the three of us to stand behind the counter, which was not possible in the smaller one. Accepting their suggestion, I went to the market on the day and time they had suggested. When I arrived, there was only one of them present, while the other was dealing with some difficulties with their car. Before the second trader came back, I helped out for several hours as my presence made it easier for the trader. During this time, I gradually got to know about their annual travels to India and Nepal necessary to buy the products and the different international and national legal frameworks that regulate traders' mobility practices. They had already been busy since the early morning and would have to be in the market for another five hours before they were allowed to bring their car into the street and start removing their goods and their stall.[1]

Beyond travelling together, following involved meeting specific traders in other markets. In such cases, following people became a rather immobile practice as we were most of the time standing in front of, next to or behind the stalls to chat, observe or participate in selling products or constructing and deconstructing stalls. In other words, while following seems to be about capturing mobilities in its continuous conduct, it would be misleading to relate following to a practice that is only dynamic and on the move. As most mobility scholars would agree, there is a lot of stillness in mobility, and these moments are central in creating insights into the mobilities that have taken place in the past, are occurring elsewhere as a result of traders' practices or other forms of mobilities that may not be visible.

In addition to the im/mobility dynamics, the above example raises the question of what we follow in the spatial-temporal sense. Some forms of traders' mobilities involve longer distances and may take more time than others, which illustrates the variety of traders' mobilities. The researcher's mobilities that is central to the following approach is co-constructed with the research participants. While the researcher in this case initiated the movement by suggesting moving with the traders, the rhythm and direction of her mobilities were shaped by the traders, which led her to the place that they thought was most representative of their work. Thus, what we followed was not people or objects, but the entanglement of multiple forms of mobilities that were co-constructed by the research participants as well as the researchers.

The interspersed mobilities meant that following was not only related to physically being with traders. Between meetings with traders in person, we kept contact through email and phone, a way of following that has been highlighted in other studies (Janssens 2019; Wissink 2019; Schapendonk 2020). The shift between being in the same location as traders and following them in other ways illustrates that following has a spatial and a temporal dimension, but also that identifying the unit of analysis requires a careful reflection upon the processes surrounding following. However, the character of following as well as the spatio-temporal stretches of what we are following appeared to be a negotiated and co-constructed outcome as well. We now turn to a further exploration of the practical side of following.

4. The doings of following

The notion of 'following' is often used broadly and with little clarification of the practicalities and wider implications of such an approach. Sheller and Urry (2006, 217) have pointed out that there

[1]These field notes were taken during our fieldwork, but have been developed further during the writing of this paper to clarify how they relate to our understanding of following

have been calls by proponents of the 'mobilities paradigm' for novel research methods that are concomitantly 'on the move' and 'simulate intermittent mobility'. More recently, Merriman (2014, 183) has made a plea for scholars to avoid using mobile methods to represent elusive practices of over-animated mobile subjects and objects, but rather use them as 'a means to experiment and move with' without assuming that 'traditional' methods are insufficient. While methodologies always need to be adapted to research contexts, the lack of clarity of *what* following actually entails was exacerbated in the Moving Marketplaces project as the 'doings' of following appeared to be difficult to align between different researchers across the four countries. This difficulty points to the importance of specifying what following means in terms of its objects and limitations (see previous section), but also to reflect on *how* it can be used.

The researchers adopted a strategy of learning parts of the traders' daily activities through embodied involvement. While this allowed us to access-specific skills and practical knowledge (an argument dance ethnographers have put forward, see e.g. Sklar (2000), we also made use of ethnographical observations and interviews to access traders' representations of their own experiences and mobility practices. It became evident to us that following seldom comes alone but that it needs to be accompanied with other methods. In practical terms, following thus not only meant moving along or staying put behind the stall with traders but also mobilising other and equally important research methods such as participant observation and informal interviews.

Following beyond marketplaces

By following traders beyond the markets where they were selling their products, we came to see different aspects of the processes through which traders' mobilities shaped the markets. In the UK, the researcher went with one of the traders to a wholesale market where the trader gets his fruit and vegetables every morning:

> I had agreed with Tom to arrive at 2.30am at the entrance to the wholesale market. By chance, he pulled up at the exact same moment as I arrived and waved at me from his red little truck and pointed for me to follow him. He pulled over and told me to get in and took us to his usual spot by one of the entrances to the building. Inside, there was a lot of activity despite it being in the middle of the night. We walked over to the company where he always goes first as he explained to me that he has worked with this company for 40 years. Tom introduced me to several of the staff, but also told them that he had been to see a common friend has in a care home who gets woken up early in the morning, taken to the bathroom and then to physio before he spends the rest of the day in a wheelchair. While he was sharing the news about their friend's deteriorating health, he was checking out their products and placing orders. We smelled the asparagus and put our nails into the bottom of them to assess the freshness and how long it will last. Tom looked at the broccoli and pointed out that it was a good sign that there was still ice because it means that is has been transported quickly from Spain to the UK. He also had a quick look at the bottom of the broccolis to make sure they were not brown. In another part of the same store, he took a bite of two pomegranates, but said that they were not good because they were a bit bruised and did not have the right flavour. We moved on to other stores to look for other products, and Tom combined his purchase with conversations with the many traders he had worked with for many years. Having visited about 20 stores across the hall and checked out various fruits and vegetables, John, a man working for Tom, showed up. He transports the goods to the market and Tom suggested I could go with John. Getting into the truck around 5am was welcome relief from the biting December cold. In three trips we transported the goods from the wholesale market to the market where other employees were setting up the stall, and around 6.30am we joined Tom and five of his friends for breakfast in a café. Tom had been having breakfast with some of them daily for decades, and they talked about their businesses, the bad weather and good quality pineapple, and joked and laughed, as they had their tea and bacon sandwiches. After this little break, we drove back to the market and joined the people working for Tom in setting up his stall and get the products ready for customers. While still preparing for the day, the first customers started arriving around 8am.

In this case, there was about five and a half hours of work taking place before the first customer could buy something at the market, and most of this work had taken place in a different location. This work behind the scenes could not have been understood without following the trader beyond the market. Following traders into contexts outside of the market provided us with new insights into the

mobilities, intense labour and product chains that lie behind the façade of their stalls. Additionally, it enabled us to value mobility as a social space through which knowledge is shared and social bonds are created (De Bruijn and Van Dijk 2012). Interestingly, Tom's daily interactions with the wholesalers over many years had made his place much more meaningful in terms of social relations compared to the market where he was selling his products.

While following is an ethnographic approach, and ethnographic approaches inevitably involve some form of following to make sense of people's lifeworlds (see for an insightful example Steel's (2008) study of street vendors in Peru), the case above illustrates the importance of rendering following as a research approach more explicit because it can shed new light on the processes that make markets happen. Without creating a false narrative of how ethnography has traditionally been conducted (see above), ethnographic research of markets often stick to the sociological tendency to be ethnographies *of places* (Desmond 2014) as they concentrate on what happens on the market (see e.g. Marovelli 2014; Rhys-Taylor 2013). Our understanding of the processes behind the markets could only emerge through the practice of following traders to the source of their goods. These local chains of goods are tied up in social relations. The doings of following, then, involve an openness to different practices, locations and unexpected events. One of the questions that arose, however, was how this following was really different from our activities 'at' marketplaces.

Following across marketplaces

Our research practices of following also took place at markets. Here the zigzagging of movements continued, even though the traders' practices were characterized by relative immobility. Market traders may be very mobile at certain times or days of the week, but when they are trading in a specific market many of them are very immobile in the sense that they are 'stuck' behind their market stalls for most of the day. Simultaneously, there are a range of surrounding mobilities taking place; of customers, suppliers and other traders stopping by for small chitchats and, at times, handing over cash. The market traders' immobilities relates to their selling activity, which constricts their movements to within and around their own stall, but also the regulatory regimes that require them to stay on the market for a certain number of hours. Another factor is that many traders work alone, which means that they cannot leave their stalls for much of the day.

For researchers to follow traders across markets, the embodiment of these spatial routines requires a careful balance between mobility and immobility:

> Walking through the market, some of the traders that I have spoken to before greet me, whereas others are busy with customers and do not notice me. It is in this space that I have to find moments to establish contact with traders, without interfering in their engagement with customers. This navigation is largely reliant on a reading of the market and the individual traders to use my mobility and immobility to situate myself in spaces where we can have a chat for a while.

> Upon reaching the stalls of two traders who I have gradually built a relationship through frequent conversations, I see that they are busy with customers and so I wait next to their stalls until they have a free moment. One trader is selling cheese and the other selling light bulbs, hoover bags and charging cords. Customers come and go, and as soon as the man selling cheese is free, I start the conversation, standing next to his stall to avoid blocking the view of his products. In this gap between stalls, there is a regular flow of people moving and I often have to move out of the way to let them pass. The conversation flows easily but breaks up every now and then as people stop to taste, ask questions about his cheese or buy some of his products. He has, like many of the traders, developed the capacity to recognize potential customers from afar and keep an eye out for them while engaging in conversation with me. When he becomes starts speaking to a customer for some time, I move to the other stall to talk to the other trader. Here, there is no space to stand next to the stall, and I rather have to move into a narrow space between the two stalls that is not where customers would normally enter. It took several months of weekly contact before they suggested that I could cross this invisible boundary. When standing in this space, I can easily talk to the two of them, shifting between them depending on who has time to chat. As such, it is a place that enables a degree of immobility where I can spend extend periods of time focusing on my conversation with them. Occasionally, I have to move out of the way if the traders have to walk to the front of their stalls.

> Despite their openness to interacting with them within their spaces, after spending an hour or so, I often get the feeling that I should leave them to work and find other traders to interact with.
>
> Apart from the spaces that open up for immobility through established relations with traders, there are limited places to hang out. The market is characterised by continuous movement of people, with the exception of the traders, and anyone not moving will be noticed as they deviate from the prevailing flows. Consequently, I continuously move around the market until I find room for immobility that resembles the spatial practices of the traders.

While researchers' immobilities resemble the traders' 'confinement' to their stall at times, they also diverge from traders prolonged relative immobilities. Researchers' immobilities are relatively short and reliant upon the attention and interest of traders. When finding that they were less willing to talk, this was understood as a signal to keep moving and move towards other traders. Following people in this case, then, is not merely about moving within the market, but also finding the right balance between when and where to move, and where to stop for a while, until engaging in mobility again.

By trying to follow, we still shift between people and places, or we move around the people, not with them. In some places, following traders' practices required us to synchronise the following with the traders' lack of movements (see also Hannerz 2003 for a discussion on the temporal aspects of fieldwork). Following across the market is reliant on temporal mobilities and immobilities that are shaped by the rhythms and codes of the market. While we agree that the purpose of the methodological practices of following are to capture 'complex mobilities' (Salazar, Elliot, and Norum 2017, 8), we also emphasize that following included rather immobile and localised practices. In line with our search for the unit of analysis, the vignettes substantiate our argument that the framing of following as merely an innovative and mobile approach does not reflect the actual doings of following. More fundamentally, the presumed dichotomy of following versus in-place methods do injustice to one of the main points of mobility studies – that mobility and immobility are mutually constitutive (Adey 2006; Breines, Raghuram, and Gunter 2019).

Following lines

If places are a throwntogetherness of trajectories, as many geographers (Massey 2005) and mobility scholars (Sheller 2021; Urry 2007) suggest, we could best perceive markets as 'knots' where the mobility of people, things, goods, ideas, come together. Mobilities, thus, produce places. This is illustrated in a simple drawing by Ingold (2007, 98). Figure 1 is based on his original drawing but has been modified to a market context. The version on the left represents markets as bounded entities

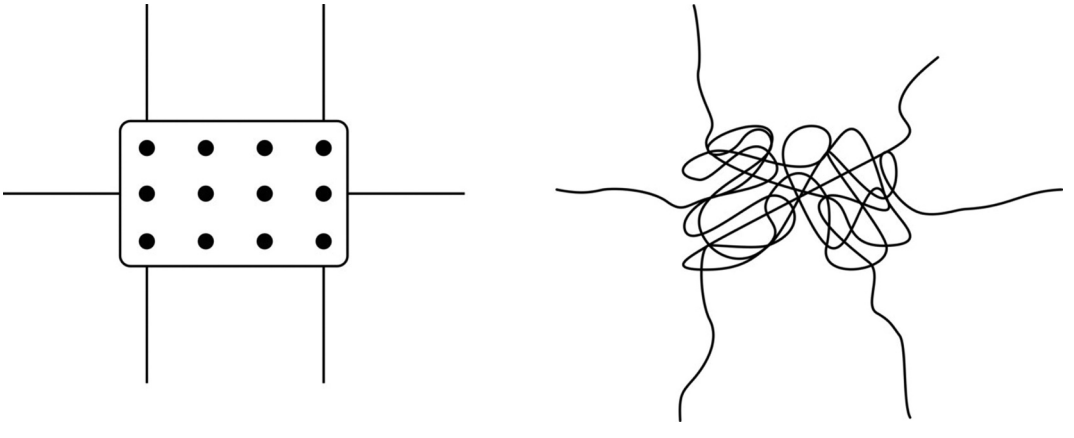

Figure 1. Two versions of a marketplace.

with interactions 'within' the square that represents a marketplace. The dots can be seen as traders, or any other material, knowledge, products that come together for a while, whereas the straight lines indicate their routes to the market. The lines represent static movements (Cresswell 2006), and do not shape and transform the places but leave them untouched. This would correspond with the geographies of fixed boundaries, scales and states that consider mobility as residual time and relatively meaningless connectors (Cresswell 2006). From this mobilities of place, movement *to a place* is disconnected from *moving in a place*.

The drawing on the right represents a different version of place where the lines of traders, money, customers and digital data come together as a knot in the market. Their movements highlight that markets only exist through mobilities and this relational dimension became even more visible during the COVID-19 lockdowns. Without the usual mobilities of traders, customers, goods and stalls, there was in many cases no such thing as a market. In some contexts, markets were reduced to sanitized were ordered spaces that lacked the usual sociality because mobility dynamics were significantly reduced (Van Eck, Van Melik, and Schapendonk 2020). This shift directed us to the notion that – in ontological terms – we cannot disconnect the so-called in-place mobilities from the mobilities in-between places. These lines that we followed move to, from *and* across places (Ingold 2011), but also stay put at markets (symbolized by the 'knot') for considerable periods of time as different mobilities entangle – before they disentangle again.

How we follow depends on the context and the ways in which the mobilities in focus enable prolonged, intermittent or shortened forms of following. The navigation of the temporalities of following across markets illustrates that this approach must include both mobility and immobility, as it unveils their relations and entanglements. Also, following does not have to be limited to one person or a group of people moving in the same direction, but that the space of a market involves a range of mobilities that go in diverse directions – even if the traders converge on regular intervals in this specific space. Considering how these *lines* (Ingold 2007) are brought together, following can only focus on certain aspects of them, thus capturing only fragments of the mobilities. This means that following works best when it is combined with other methods such as interviews (see e.g. Van Melik and Van de Schraaf 2020; Meeus 2012; Spinney 2011). Despite the 'incompleteness' of following, it complements other methods by bringing forward fragments of social lives that cannot be understood without the physical presence of the researcher in multiple locations.

5. Conclusion: following as co-production

Through an exploration of following, we have unpacked some of its practicalities to be able to address important theoretical implications. By using following as part of our methodology, the divide of 'moving with' approaches versus traditional approaches located in places increasingly stood out as a false and unproductive dichotomy (Janssens 2019). Following mobilities and in-place observations blended into each other. The reflection on our struggles to pin down the unit of analysis made it clear that following cannot be limited to one person or an object, but rather needs to encompass different aspects of their entangled mobilities. The fieldwork illustrations above have shown that following is a tool that can help explore how mobilities of different temporal-spatial stretches are entangled. The convergence and divergence of researchers' and research participants' mobilities provide insights into how trajectories are bundled and intertwined at different points, and how they disentangle later. In addition to showing how markets are formed, these relations suggest that the tendency in social sciences to separate different forms of mobility (international migration vs. internal migration; everyday mobilities vs. life event movements; transnational vs. local) does not sufficiently recognise the ways they are empirically intertwined.

As the discussion of our field note extracts has shown, following produces unique knowledge. It provides insights that would otherwise be overlooked. The knowledge production is closely related to the decisions that are made about the unit of analysis and the practice of following as the choice of what kind of mobilities that are worth following determines the findings that will emerge.

Research participants' mobilities are constitutive of researchers' mobilities (and to some extent researchers' mobilities shape participants' mobilities). We invite researchers who employ qualitative methods to further reflect on the practical implications and lived aspects of their own mobilities, as they are inherent elements of mobility-driven knowledge production. In other words, methods do not only describe the world, they *enact* the world (Law and Urry 2004, Aparna 2020). These reflections, as we argue, can generate new knowledge about the co-production of space as well as the conceptual underpinning of our methods. It may not always be pertinent to engage in such reflexive practices on the intersections of and differences in mobilities, but the relational dimensions of mobilities and following in this case have generated empirical insights suggesting that the stationary and the mobile aspects of research cannot be separated.

In this paper, we have considered the importance of a more explicit engagement with following for data collection. Rather than distinguishing following from conventional ethnographic methods, we consider it as a research practice that is part of the family of methods that is subsumed under the term ethnography. However, our study of market traders has highlighted that mobilities cannot easily be followed and that fixed plans and inflexible research designs might be counterproductive as it is the unexpected mobilities and immobilities that generate new insights. Following is often part of ethnographic research, but we have demonstrated that following does involve more than the physical process of following people, objects, knowledge, and so on. Instead, following requires a theoretical openness to be guided by what happens in the field and take up the leads that may take the researcher in new directions. In other words, following is a practice that demands analytical awareness for researchers to take the opportunities that arise. With reference to the already cited 'nomadic mind' (Janssens 2019), we suggest that researchers need to be following-minded which necessitates that they embrace serendipity and accept the non-linearity of ethnographic research practices.

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ORCID

Markus Roos Breines http://orcid.org/0000-0001-7570-9354
Joanna Menet http://orcid.org/0000-0002-3778-3024
Joris Schapendonk http://orcid.org/0000-0001-6099-0841

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