

# Imaginaries Related to Transport: Insights from Northern Bulgaria

## RESEARCH TOPIC:

This dissertation investigates entanglements of humans and road infrastructure. Questioning the presumption of 'being gifted' access to the European transport corridors network, the aim is to show how infrastructure is inhabited by the local community. How does infrastructure development inform the negotiation of social norms and imaginaries?

More precisely, research focuses on how people working in the service sector for road transport relate to a recently upgraded transport corridor in the EU and which topics this brings about. Based on an approach that emphasizes malfunction and discontinuity of road mobility, this research will provide a detailed understanding of the interplay of imaginaries and concepts of time that coexist in the same infrastructure.

## VIDIN IN THE CONTEXT OF TRANS-EUROPEAN NETWORKS

Located at one of the many intersections of the Orient/East-Med Corridor and the Rhine-Danube Corridor, the city of Vidin inaugurated the second bridge between Bulgaria and Romania in 2013. First envisioned in 1909, it took almost a century and the integration of road E-79 into the Trans-European network corridors for transport (TEN-T) to convince Bucharest and Sofia to provide necessary funds for the bridge.

The construction of the bridge was and still is one of the great hopes for the region. Roads and railway lines on both sides of the Danube have been connected, and further upgrades are expected. A multimodal shipping terminal near the bridge interconnects the two corridors and three transport systems (road, rail and water).



SUNNY OIL gas station on the Vidin bypass road; section of E-79. Photo by M. Anranter © 2020.

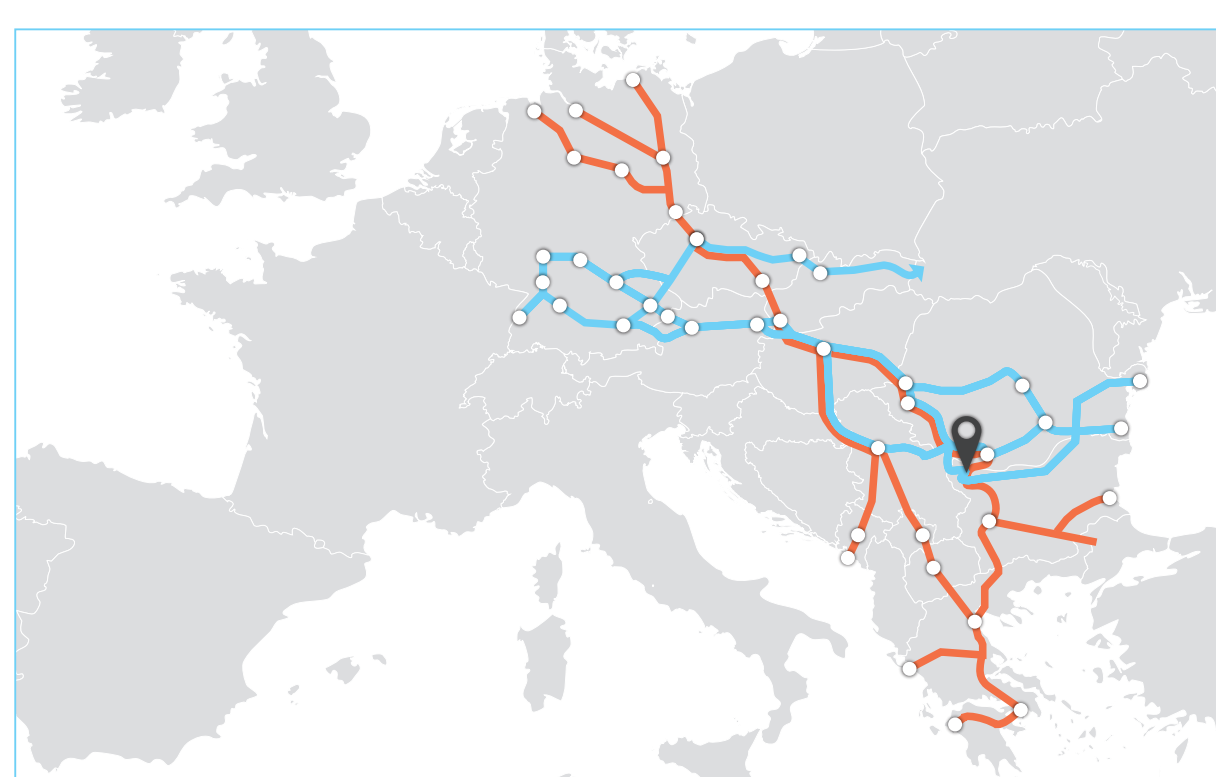
## RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The aims of this research are

- to unveil the ambiguity of the roles, concepts of time and imaginaries of people negotiating the (mal-)function of infrastructure
- to understand the dynamics and sense-making that arise from temporal indeterminacy inherent to transport infrastructure
- to learn about how transport-related rules and norms contribute to the construction of imaginaries
- to show why and how regulations applied in the context of road infrastructure have been adopted by a broader majority but are neglected by others



Lorries crossing the Danube Bridge Vidin-Calafat after having received the corresponding road signal. Photo by M. Anranter © 2020.



Orient/East-Med Corridor and Rhine-Danube Corridor meeting in Vidin. Map elaboration by J. Fetka © 2020.

## METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

This research approaches infrastructure as a process structured through situations that intersect the everyday routine of a transport network. This research builds on

- 8 months of ethnographic field research at two sites in Vidin, Bulgaria (SUNNY OIL gas station and central market) and one in Calafat, Romania (Border control station)
- 20-40 in-depth interviews including the discussion of visual material and statistics available

## PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

This research is still ongoing. Preliminary findings show

- how not only congestion but emptiness or temporary abandoning mark malfunction of infrastructure
- that agents within the transport network develop independent concepts of time that are more relevant to the creation of imaginaries and social norms than those set by the road
- that road network development furthers exclusion based on new standards but also because it provides actors on the road with a better 'stage' for power demonstration
- how political and social belonging is linked to road classification systems that allow for self-ascription in cross-regional comparison

**MICHAEL ANRANTER**

**SUPERVISION: PETER SCHWEITZER**  
**RESEARCH FIELD: SOCIAL & CULTURAL ANTHROPOLOGY**

 universität wien  
Department of Social and Cultural Anthropology

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