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# 5 **Hypermobile Business and Leisure Lifestyles: Will wellbeing concerns stimulate environmental co-benefits?**

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## **Introduction**

Travelling far, fast and frequently is increasingly common in contemporary lifestyles. Hypermobile lifestyles are normally associated with affluence, which affords the power to move, and materialises in corporeal movements such as frequent business travel and leisure trips, lifestyle migration or visits to spatially dispersed friends and relatives. These mobilities often fold into each other as complex hybrids. A unifying feature of such mobilities however is that they are often carbon intensive, requiring spatial mobility that in many cases relies on transport via air travel.

A wide body of scientific literature has in recent years examined if and how mobilities can be made more environmentally sustainable, with concern heavily centred on the climate impacts of varying forms of mobility (Banister, 2008; Higham, Cohen, Peeters & Gössling, 2013). Research has shown that a disproportionate amount of mobility emissions are generated from a small proportion of individuals, that is, the hypermobile elite (Frändberg & Vilhelmson, 2003; Gössling *et al.*, 2009). An array of studies have also demonstrated that those who travel frequently are largely unwilling to change their travel patterns because of environmental concern (e.g. McKercher *et al.*, 2010).

Against this background, this chapter focuses on two types of corporeal mobility, leisure-motivated lifestyle mobility and frequent business travel, with the aim of appraising if and how these forms of movement might undergo low carbon mobility transitions as a result of evidence indicating they have negative impacts on wellbeing. Lifestyle mobility refers to sustained mobility practices where travel,

leisure, migration and work blur together, such as in the cases of many seasonal ski resort workers, long-term backpackers or ocean cruisers (Duncan, Cohen & Thulemark, 2013). Corporeal mobility is central to the performance of these lifestyles (Cohen, Duncan & Thulemark, 2015). But rather than focus on the environmental impacts of lifestyle mobility and frequent business travel, which to varying degrees are carbon intensive mobility practices, this chapter takes a new direction in probing whether attention to the negative personal and social consequences for individuals who undertake these hypermobile lifestyles, that is, concern over well-being aspects, could provide a basis for leveraging behavioural change.

## The dark side of hypermobile lifestyles

The impetus for this chapter stems from a recent study examining the ‘darker sides’ of hypermobility (Cohen & Gössling, 2015). This work drew upon a range of interdisciplinary secondary literature to argue that frequent travel entails a number of physiological, psychological and social consequences that tend to be overshadowed in society by the popular representation of travel as glamorous. Travel is glamorised by a range of social mechanisms, such as visualisations on social media that encourage mobility competition, frequent flyer programme status levels and the mass media and travel industry which depict tourism and business travel as desirable (ibid).

This glamorisation comes at the expense of attention to frequent travel’s negative impacts on personal wellbeing. The darker sides of travel are to a degree contingent on the type of travel. As the focus in this chapter is on two broad types, leisure-motivated lifestyle mobility and business travel, it is helpful to compare and contrast some of the negative personal and social consequences that adherents to these hypermobile lifestyles may experience. It is important however to note that the level of choice between these two types of travel may differ greatly: while lifestyle mobilities would typically be perceived as voluntary, business travel is often viewed as an obligation, although a nuanced reading of these two types of travel would suggest a dichotomous view of choice versus obligation would be an oversimplification. It is also important to recognise that darker elements of hypermobility may be perceived brightly by some individuals, vice versa and all shades in between (Cohen & Gössling, 2015).

## Darker sides of lifestyle mobilities

Given that lifestyle mobilities are closely related to forms of lifestyle migration, with the latter associated with the search for a ‘better’ way of life (Benson & O’Reilly, 2009), it is unsurprising that few studies of either lifestyle mobilities or lifestyle migration have given significant voice to their negative sides. There is abundant evidence however on the ills of migration more generally (e.g. Nowok *et al.*, 2013), and emerging evidence that lifestyle mobilities may also be experienced as ‘discordant’ (Botterill, 2016). The negative personal consequences of lifestyle

mobilities can be viewed as largely social-psychological, centring on the disruption of social relationships and personal identities. While there are myriad forms of lifestyle mobility (see Duncan *et al.*, 2013), 'lifestyle travellers' are drawn upon here as an insightful case. Lifestyle travellers are backpackers who, by travelling for years, often mixed with working in order to fund travel, sustain backpacking as an ongoing way of life (Cohen, 2011).

Lifestyle travel has been associated with a building sense of isolation as a lack of co-presence with friends and family who remain home can lead to divergent interests and worldviews. This sense of isolation has been shown to engender depression among returnees, often driving them to travel or 'escape' again (Pocock & McIntosh, 2011). It pushes young, western travellers back into searching for social cohesion through mobile lifestyles (Cohen, 2011), and ironically cages them within the very same corporeal mobilities through which they sought ideals of freedom. Despite the opportunities taking a trip can open for making fresh social connections (Bergström, 2010), both Adler and Adler's (1999) study of transient resort workers and Cohen's (2011) work on lifestyle travellers illustrate how new friendships and romantic relationships forged through mobility have a tendency to be situational and short-lived. Mobile lifestyles left many of the participants in these studies looking for more enduring relationships.

Lifestyle mobilities not only provoke psychological and emotional strains in social cohesion, but also in how one perceives personal identity and how one relates to place (Cohen *et al.*, 2015). Although lifestyle travellers are well connected to global networks, this is often at the expense of local place-bounded identities (Frändberg & Vilhelmson, 2003), that is, a weakening of ties at local and community scales. The counter side of this physical absence at those scales is more presence 'away', often in varied socio-spatial environments. Sustained and repeated exposure to different cultural practices, whilst associated with the development of cosmopolitan sensibilities and global citizenry (Hannerz, 2002), may also lead to a sense of identity confusion: indeed, studies of lifestyle travellers show evidence of participants who had developed a sense of being metaphorically 'lost' (Cohen, 2010). In more extreme cases, sustained mobility can even engender psychological disorders and mental illness. Studies from consular psychiatry have examined how 'pathological tourism' fosters 'mad travellers' who have severely disrupted conceptions of personal identity (Hacking, 1998). Maoz's (2007) study of Israeli backpackers in India observes that an institute in Israel has emerged to provide residential care for 'mentally damaged' backpackers upon their return from long-term travel, although this is closely tied to the use of drugs while travelling. Whilst such a clinical perspective has not been taken towards the study of lifestyle travellers, significant social psychological costs are evident, with these darker sides also manifesting in the case of frequent business travel, but in different ways.