

Air-travel mobilities: Summary Sheet

Lecture summary

In the lecture we divided up our time into 4 areas.

First we considered what are air-travel mobilities, and why different terms like ‘mobility’ or ‘mobilities’ are important and add to our understanding of air-travel.

By mobilities we mean movement but also what movement means and how it is experienced.

We mean mobility in the plural sense, when we move we move with others and affect others as we move. We may also have quite different experiences of mobility. We mean other things that move too: like goods and commodities, money, viruses, etc.

And ‘mobilities’ also turns our attention to particular places and infrastructures of travel – like the airport.

Second, we thought about where air-travel mobilities have come from. Certainly air-travel was a response to move speedily and long distances, but it was also strategic. Air-travel grew up around imperial demands, to tie empires together. The aeroplane was also closely linked to air power and military uses, and has almost always been bound up in nationalism and national identity, no matter how ordinary the aeroplane might seem today. Air-travel has also come a long way in terms of the first airports, to the airport cities of today which function as key locations of economic activity.

Third, we considered the airport as a key infrastructure for air-travel, but also as a global place. Airports express many of the symptoms of globalization, places brought closer together, homogeneity of culture, but some airports work hard to express their differences, especially as they want to encourage passengers to transit through them, like Singapore’s Changi airport.

Finally, we considered how air-travel mobilities are challenged. We thought about, in the context of the 20th anniversary of 9/11, how air-travel has changed so much from the threat of international terrorism *and* security practices. Of course the aviation has been an important conduit or network through which the global COVID-19 pandemic has spread. It has also been heavily effected by it too, as with other disruptions like volcanic ash clouds. The **connections** and **interdependencies** that air-travel makes possible, also make societies vulnerable in certain ways. And as countries pledge targets to reduce their carbon emissions, air-travel sticks out like a sore thumb. Even if it has become much more efficient, it is a highly polluting form of travel but we must look to develop fairer or more ‘just’ alternatives to moving internationally if we are to move away from air-travel.

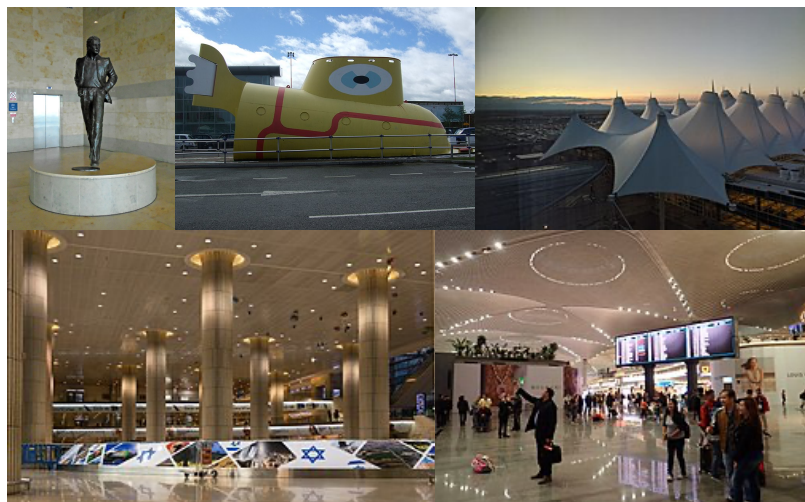
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Activities summary

The two activities pick up first, on the 'what kind of place is an airport' question raised in relation to the airport as a kind of symbol of globalization, and through those connections how air-travel mobilities are being challenged - so the ways certain vulnerabilities threaten air-travel and wider society in the form of multiple disruptions.

In Activity 1. What kind of place is an airport? Students are asked to consider several images of an airport or indeed if they can recall their own experiences of one. It is suggested that they peruse the images, and their memories, for any elements they can identify as global and local. They might remember the flight information display screens and city names, perhaps they can see some of the global brands advertised. Perhaps some of the signage. But perhaps they can also identify the John Lennon statue and Yellow Submarine from Liverpool Airport – or look them up. The image next to that, is of Denver airport where the tent-like design of the roof is meant to echo the mountains of Colorado. Below Ben Gurion Airport, Tel Aviv is designed almost as a temple, and the Star of David indicates religious iconography. While Istanbul Airport on the right has all the qualities of a luxury shopping centre, while tourists take photos. It is suggested that the students look up and discuss these qualities.



Top: left to right, Liverpool John Lennon Airport, Denver airport
Bottom: left to right, Ben Gurion Airport, Istanbul Airport

In Activity 2. Connections and Interdependencies the activity asks students to think about disruption, just as we did at the end of the lecture. There is a figure that tries to show where passengers were assumed to be travelling from in January 2020, from Wuhan to sites in the US, Europe and the UK, as well as within China, S. Korea and South Asia. The activity is intended to get them thinking about these linkages. Research has shown how much global supply chains depended upon manufacturing and distribution from Wuhan for global automotive sectors, as well as electronics, steel and pharmaceuticals. This meant Wuhan and Hubei province was very well connected globally into other cities and manufacturing regions around the world. If air-travel networks between cities like Wuhan were what helped the spread of disease, how might they prove vulnerable to disruptions from it, or other emergencies? And how does society depend upon air-travel?

The exercise asks the students to consider the social and economic consequences of not being able to fly, to have air-travel mobilities suspended, just as they have been during the pandemic and earlier disruptions.

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