

The sociabilities of travel

**John URRY: Prof of Sociology
and Director of Centre for
Mobilities Research,
Lancaster University, UK
j.urry@lancaster.ac.uk**

The mobilities paradigm

1. All social relationships involve diverse 'connections'
2. These connections stem from five interdependent 'mobilities'
3. On occasions and for specific periods, face-to-face connections are made. There is contingent meetingness
4. Social life is constituted by environments, technologies and machines with which human actions are contingently assembled
5. There are various 'mobility-systems' that distribute people, activities and objects
6. Modern states 'govern' mobile populations moving in, across and beyond 'territories'
7. Such mobility-systems can endure through path-dependency
8. Such systems are based on increasingly expert forms of knowledge.
9. Some such systems are self-organising, co-evolving and interdependent
10. Mobilities do not just to enable other activities but are in part meaningful activities in their own right

MEETINGS

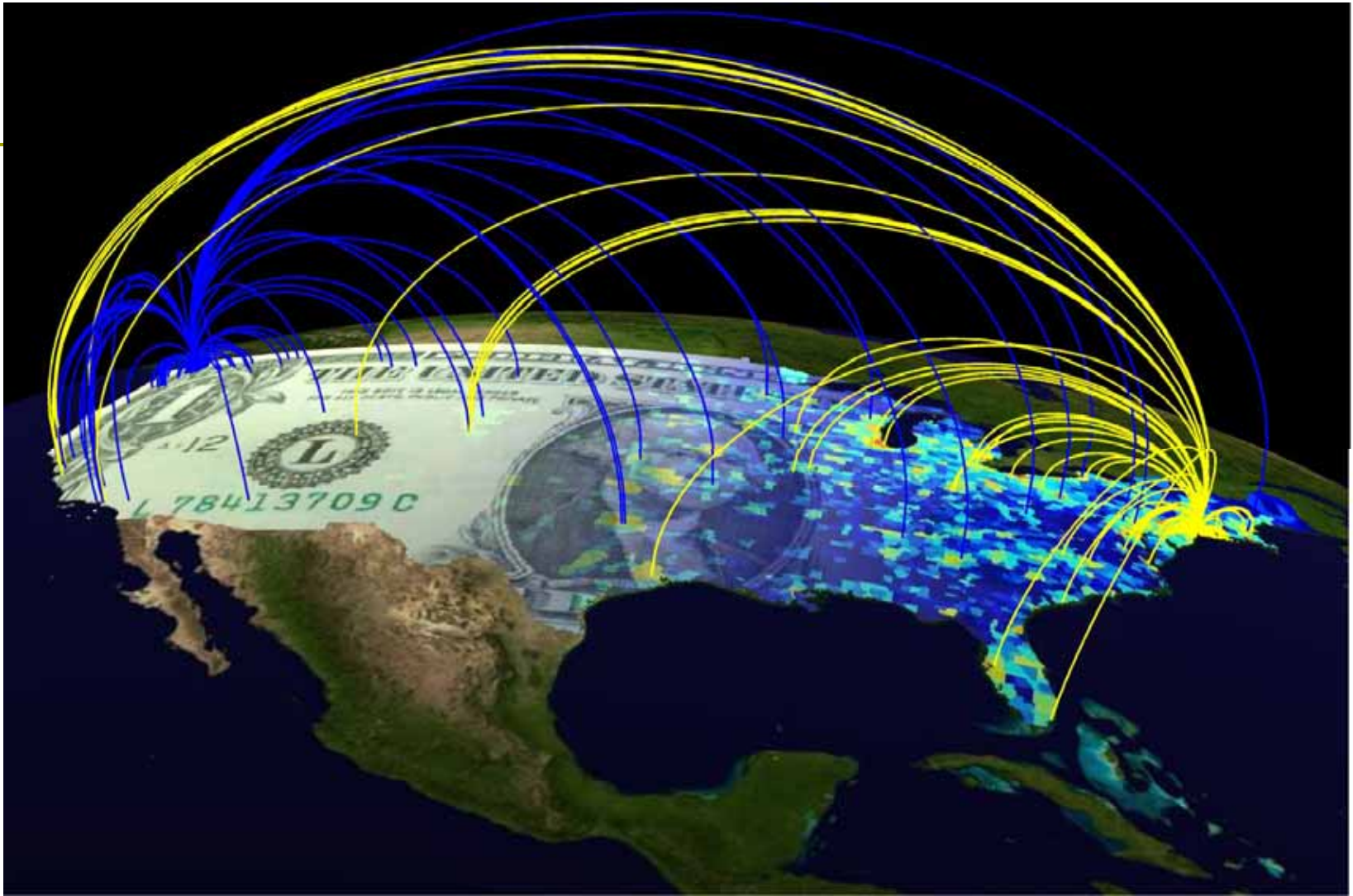
- ❑ The Henley Centre summarises how we increasingly live in a ‘connecting economy’; since ‘few of us actually make anything...our work is based on the influence we have over our networks’
- ❑ Even in 1988, the USA’s major 500 companies are said to have held between 11 and 15m formal meetings each day and 3-4 billion meetings each year.
- ❑ Managers spend up to half of their time in such face-to-face meetings
- ❑ Strassmann summarises: ‘there are meetings, and meetings about meetings, and meetings to plan reports, and meetings to review the status of reports. And what these meetings are about is people just trying to figure out what they are doing’.
- ❑ Moreover, the ubiquitous meeting tool, ‘the personal diary’, makes sure that a new meeting is arranged

MEETINGNESS

- ❑ The drums beat and from far and near the chosen foregather, face-to-face across the shiny table'...Meetings are complex encounters... When in doubt call a meeting. When one meeting isn't enough, schedule another' (Boden)
- ❑ Turn-taking 'worked like a revolving gate, demanding and facilitating deft entry and exist, and effectively managing the flow of talk by spacing speakers and pacing topics' (Boden).
- ❑ David Lodge describes conferences : 'you journey to new and interesting places, meet new and interesting people, and form new and interesting relationships with them; exchange gossip and confidences ...; eat, drink and make merry in their company every evening; and yet ... return home with an enhanced seriousness of mind'
- ❑ Future workplaces: 'will be highly interactive, not just with technology, but with people. The pacing and sequencing of work tasks will continue to be talk-based' (Boden)
- ❑ Since more information can now be exchanged via technology, there is a greater need to build relationships when getting together for face-to-face meetings. Consequently, meetings in the future will focus more on social aspects rather than on business, which may be conducted mainly via technology (Weber and Chon).

NETWORKS AND MEETINGS IN WORK, FAMILY, FRIENDSHIP

- ❑ ‘Eventually, as friends move and form, or join, other networks with more like-minded individuals in the next host country, and because previous contacts are maintained, yet more friends are added to the revolving circuits of transnational social life’ (Kennedy 2004: 176).
- ❑ ROWNTREE report states: ‘There are social customs, obligations and activities that substantial majorities of the population ... identify as among the top necessities of life’; among these necessary events are: ‘celebrations on special occasions such as Christmas’ (83%) and ‘attending weddings, funerals’ (80%), ‘visits to friends or family’ (84%), especially those in hospital (92%) (Gordon et al 2000).
- ❑ Thus ‘it is important to be present, if it is possible, because the meal symbolises a socially significant, temporally specific occasion. To have eaten the same meal the day before or the day after would not be a satisfactory substitute, even if many of the same people were present’ (Warde and Martens 2000: 217).



NETWORK CAPITAL

- 1. movement competences***
- 2. location free information and contact points***
- 3. communication devices***
- 4. appropriate, safe and secure meeting places***
- 5. physical and financial access***
- 6. time/money/resources to manage and coordinate 1-5***

MOBILITIES, NETWORKS, GEOGRAPHIES

(Larsen, Urry, Axhausen 2006)

- ❑ **as societies are more spread out scheduled visits and meetings are more significant**
- ❑ **social networks are something accomplished, in process, weaving together the material and the social**
- ❑ **when people meet face-to-face this very often involves long distance travel**
- ❑ **the relational commitments that people have to their social networks of work, friendship and family life, both domestically and especially overseas, are crucial to travel patterns**
- ❑ **people both visit *and* receive the hospitality of close friends, workmates and family members living elsewhere**

MOBILITIES, NETWORKS, GEOGRAPHIES

(Larsen, Urry, Axhausen 2006)

- People are enmeshed in social dramas wherein travel depends upon negotiation, approval and guilt - 'guilt trips' set in motion physical trips:
 - *... I don't like going [to the family in Italy] I must admit. I'm not a massive fan of going. But I did....my mum wanted me to go ... Yeah, because I get the old guilt trip and then I feel like I have to go (No. 22, male doorman, early twenties).*
- 'Moral' work is often required to remind people of their obligations.
 - *I think my father probably put a lot of pressure on his brothers and sisters, my aunties and uncles, to come over from Ireland, because they were all there (No. 6, male architect, early thirties).*
- Indeed if people are absent at a compulsory family get together their social face is likely to be damaged:
 - *... [my partner's] family are very rigid in the fact that there are certain days of the year like Easter, Boxing Day where it's a kind of compulsory family get together, so you have to make that effort to go down there. Your absence would be noted if you weren't there (No. 3, male architect, early thirties).*

MOBILITIES, NETWORKS, GEOGRAPHIES

(Larsen, Urry, Axhausen 2006)

For many people, being in a relationship means travelling a lot:

- *... we've got different groups of friends, her friends and my friends who live in London. And I actually hate going to London because we've got so many friends that are down there, so when you go down there you feel you have to try and see everyone, and at the end you come back on the Sunday and you wish you had another couple of days off. It just never feels like a weekend when you go down there. And there will always be arguments because someone will find out that you've been down to London but you purposely haven't told them because you know you can't fit them in (No. 5, male architect, late-twenties).*

Also:

- *A problem I have ... I find a lot of my holidays have been taken up with going to weddings and going to stag dos. This year I've got 7 weddings to go to ... I'm going to have to take out a mortgage (Male architect, late twenties).*

MOBILITIES, NETWORKS, GEOGRAPHIES

(Larsen, Urry, Axhausen 2006)

- ❑ **Tourist-type travel can often be as much about sociability and meetings as it is a search for the 'exotic'**
- ❑ **Tourist-type travel thus enters many lives including otherwise immobile people with friends and families in distant places.**
- ❑ **Tourism is less the privilege of the rich few, but more something involving and affecting very many people**
- ❑ **Tourists are thus to be found in inner city flats, suburban homes, local supermarkets and other everyday places**
- ❑ **The obligations of such tourist-type travel can be as persuasive and demanding as any other kind of travel**

MOBILITIES, NETWORKS, GEOGRAPHIES

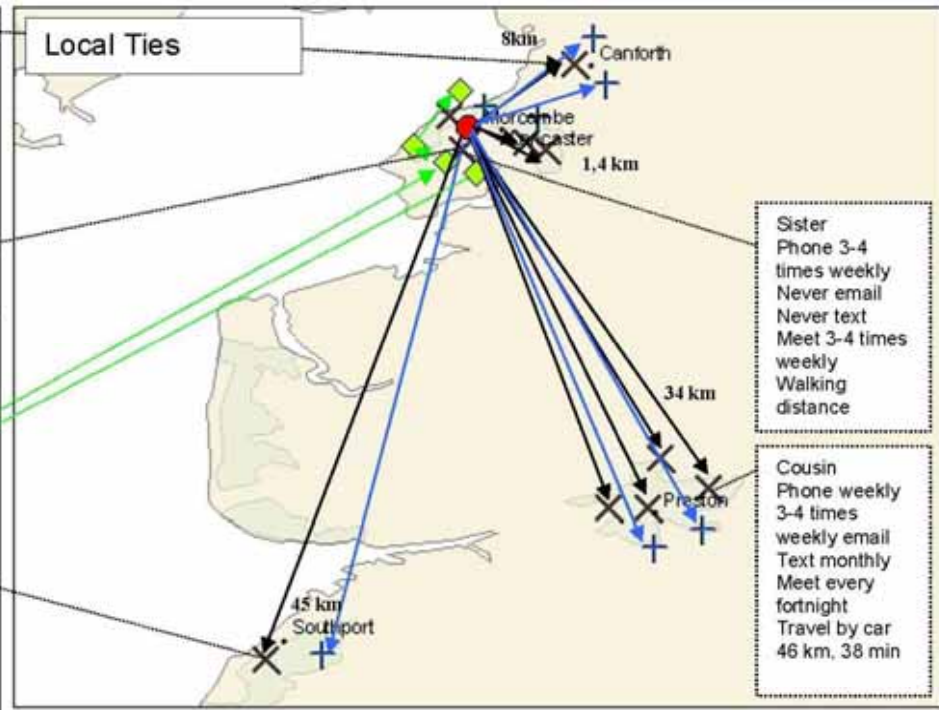
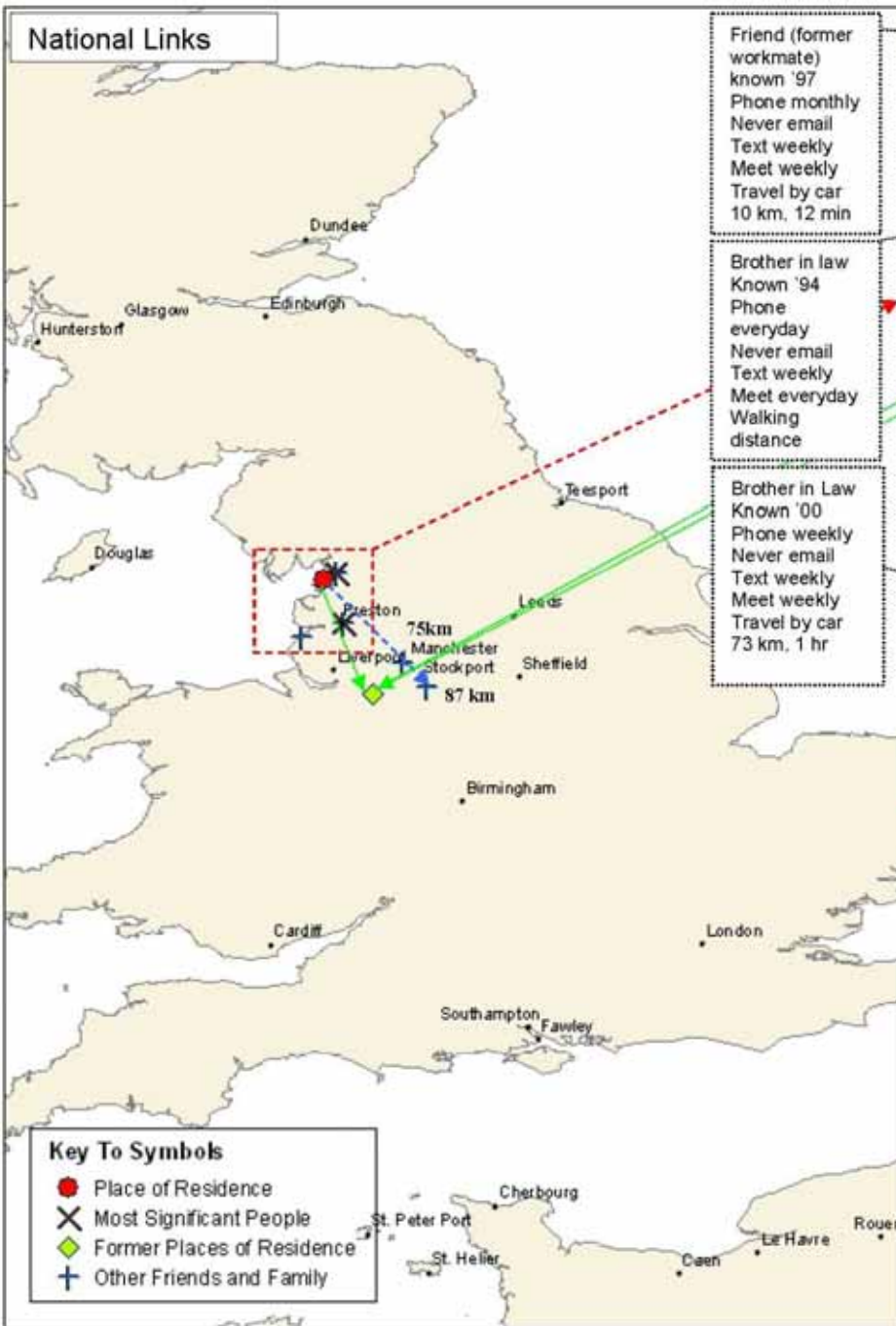
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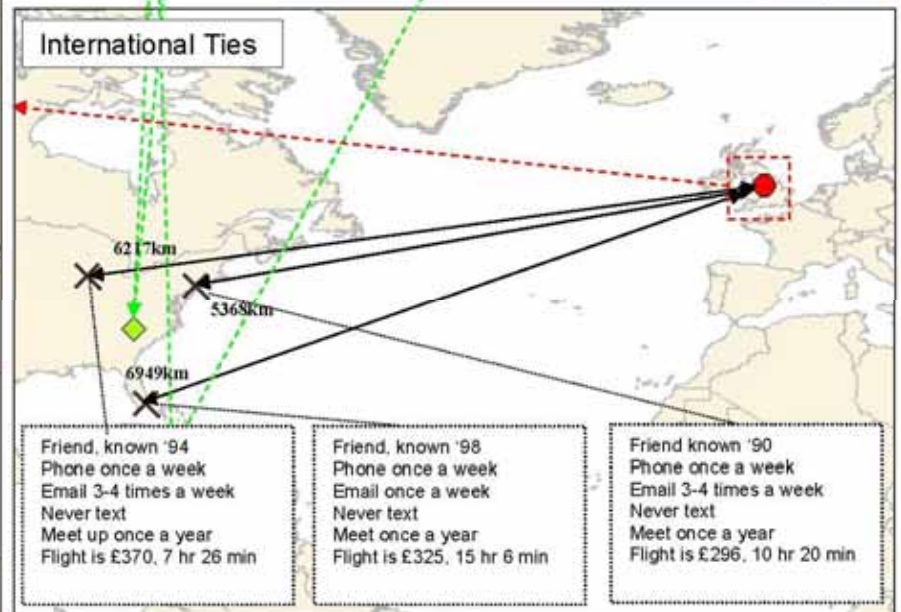
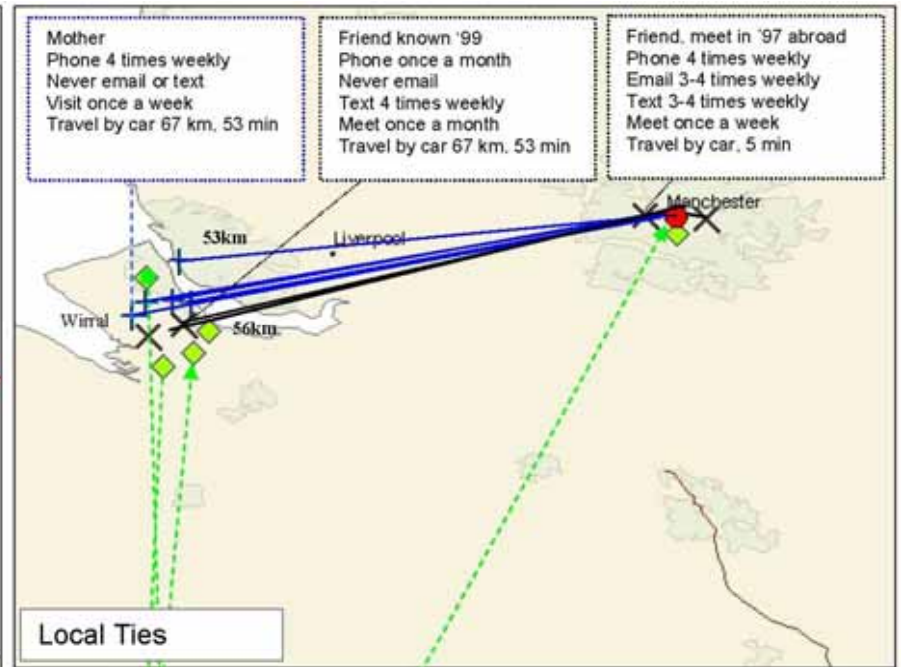
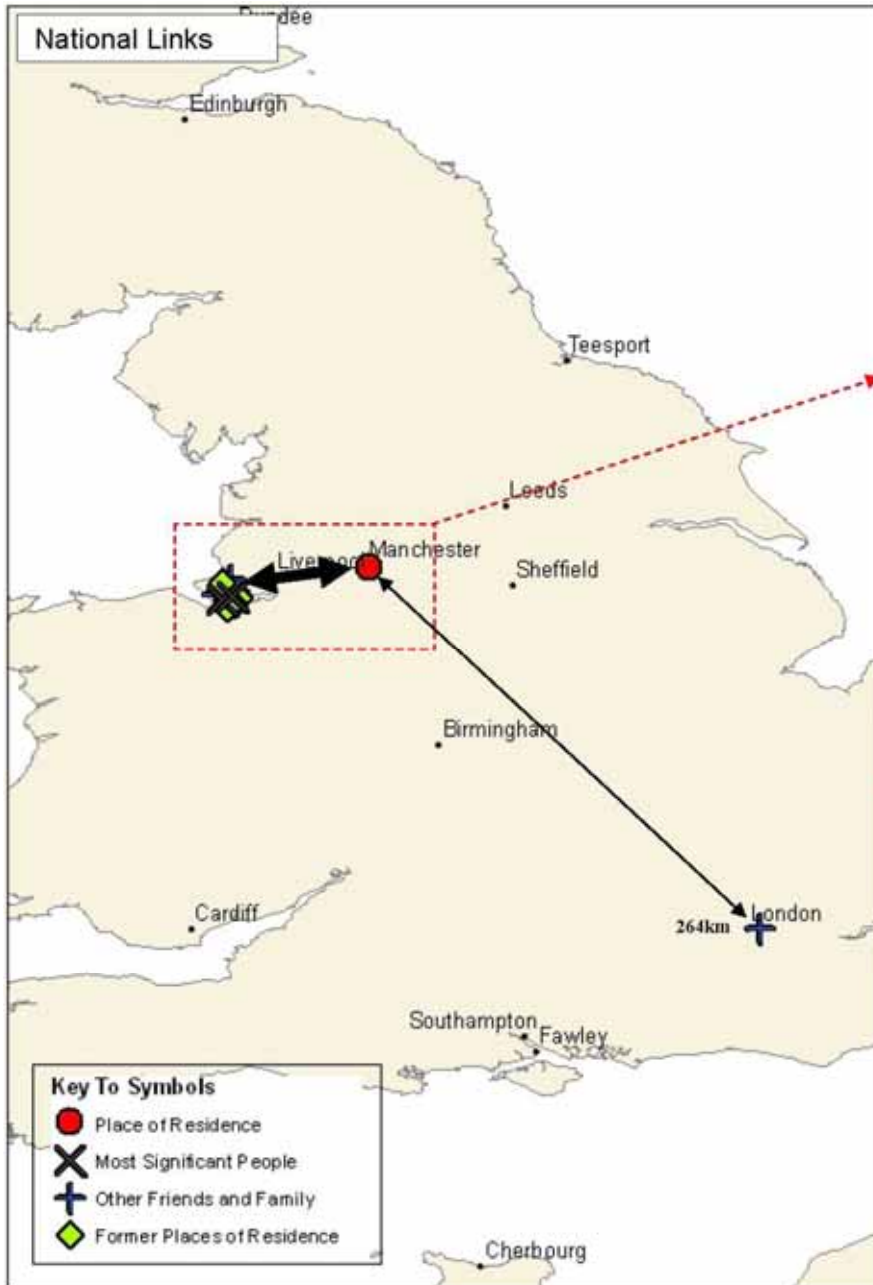
- *It's usually a combination. Obviously with the cost of traveling and the cost of staying somewhere, if we can make the best out of the trip, the better. So if we can get in doing the tourist thing, doing the relaxation thing and doing the family thing all in one go, then that's convenient bonus. If my friend's in Berlin, then that's great because I've never been to Berlin before so I'm killing two birds with one stone. I'm looking forward to Berlin (Male sales adviser in fitness and health club, late twenties).*
- *I'm organizing a trip to Mexico because I know he's [friend] only there for another year, so there's no point on missing out on free accommodation ... You know, say it was somewhere like Azerbaijan, I don't think I would be that keen on going, but you know Mexico, I'd quite like to go there (Male architect, late twenties).*

MOBILITIES, NETWORKS, GEOGRAPHIES (Larsen, Urry, Axhausen 2006)

- Travel and meetings require systems of coordination and mobile communication technologies.
- 'Going out' involves continuous coordination, negotiation and movement with others:

Yeah. It's usually a loose arrangement, say meet up roughly 8 o'clock in this bar, but most of the time that changes. Because you've got mobiles, you can do that...I'm running late or we've decided to go to a different bar, meet us in this bar or whatever (No. 12, female receptionist, early twenties).
- Texting and especially face-to-face meetings become less regular with increasing distance, while regular contact increases with emails. This suggests that email best 'substitutes' for face-to-face sociality when distance makes frequent travel too time-consuming and expensive





CONCLUSIONS

1. The understanding of travel should shift from the individualistic *homo oeconomicus* to a *network actor* engaging in sets of social practices often involving extensive far flung networks
2. Such social networks within work, family and friendship are a key feature of the contemporary world; and much work is undertaken to establish and sustain such networks across work, family and friendship
3. People's travelling and communications practices extend and strengthen such networks; more or less all these networks depend upon intermittent meetings involving travel and communications
4. Such travel and communications generates network capital that is a major source of social stratification in contemporary societies
5. There is a shift from specific movement-spaces to interspaces; and from time as punctuality to a more informal, fluid and instantaneous 'meeting up'
6. Sociabilities before, during and after travel are central to understanding contemporary patterns of a networked life in part conducted on the move