

# **Workshop Report: Social Networks and Telecommunications**

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chair

# Workshop Papers

- **Resource paper:** ICT and social networks: Towards a situational perspective on the interaction between corporeal and connected presence, by *Martin Dijst*
- **Synthesis paper:** Connected anytime: Telecommunications and activity-travel behavior from Asian perspectives, by *Nobuaki Ohmori*
- **Contributed papers:**
  - Review: The state of tele-activities, by *Pavel Andreev, Ilan Salomon, and Nava Pliskin*
  - A closer look at the interrelations among information and communication technologies, travel and space-time constraints, by *Tim Schwanen and Mei-Po Kwan*
  - Spatial and social networks: The case of travel for social activities, by *Juan Antonio Carrasco, Eric J. Miller, and Barry Wellman*

# Report Structure

- Observations on the current state of knowledge
- What do we need/want to know?
  - Conceptualizations
  - Specific research questions/issues
  - Methodologies & data

# Observations on the Current State of Knowledge

- Technology is moving faster than research can keep up
- Need to **avoid both extreme mindsets**: on the one hand that “there is nothing new under the sun”, and on the other hand that the new technologies are revolutionizing everything.
- Travelers are **socially networked actors rather than individual rational actors**, and **trips don't relate just to places, but to place-people bundles**. When the “people” component is substantial, travel decisions cannot be captured by any conventional measure of place attractiveness, but require an understanding of the individual's social connections.

# Observations on the Current State of Knowledge (cont'd)

- Paradoxes:
  - We can have virtual presence in many far-flung places simultaneously, yet corporeality still matters. Distance in some ways is irrelevant, while in others is still paramount.
  - ICTs relax some constraints while imposing others
  - While enabling dematerialization of many formerly physical objects (audio CDs, paper), they still require a material infrastructure. We are still constrained by the availability and functionality of this physical infrastructure
  - ICT seen as liberator for women etc., but it can actually perpetuate gendered roles. Technology itself is neutral – it is how humans apply it that can be positive or negative

# What Do We Need/Want to Know?

- Conceptualizations:
  - Need a fundamental understanding of **how to characterize communications** in terms of dimensions relevant to transportation (e.g. synchronous/asynchronous); need a systematic **typology**
  - In some contexts, specific physical geography may be less important than dynamic human flows

# Specific Research Questions/Issues

- Which broad **patterns are different, and which are similar**, to those we have seen with earlier communication technologies?
- How **important** are the differences we are seeing now?
- How has the influence of ICTs on social networks affected **quality of life**, and satisfaction with life? To what extent and under what circumstances are ICTs a **burden**? When do their costs outweigh their benefits? What are their implications for **privacy**?
- How do the adoption of ICTs, and their impacts on social networks, differ between **developed and developing countries**? How do they differ between **large metropolitan areas, smaller towns, and rural areas** of a given country?
- What are some of the second- and third-order, **longer-term and more indirect, impacts of ICT** on social networks?
- We need to better understand the nature of the **digital divide and potential social exclusion impacts**.

# Methodologies & Data

- Importance of understanding **multitasking** – how such decisions are made, & impacts on other behavior (notably travel). How can we **collect the needed data** without imposing too great a burden on the respondent – direct observation? ICT-enabled automatic data collection? Self-reports?
- To what extent is the ability to multitask while traveling affecting the **value of travel time savings**? If it is having a significant impact, what are the implications for the valuation of transportation infrastructure improvement investments?
- Need for more **cohort-specific studies** of the adoption of ICT in a social networking context, esp. among children, teens, and young adults.