

## Social networking: mobile communities and spaces

*“Everything touches everything”*  
Jorge Luis Borges

A social network is a set of people, including organizations, connected by a set of social relationships (Khariff, 2006). A community usually refers to a group of people who interact and share certain things or interests as a group (Wikipedia, 2006). A social network can be defined as the structure of a given community. Within these communities specific social behaviors occur to each of its members. In mobile communities, the feeling of always being in touch at least in theory creates security. You may be alone, but you do not feel lonely. Third parties function as a kind of audience, although they do not actually set out to be one. If those telephoning have other people around them, conversations are significantly shorter than when they are out and about alone (Höfllich, 2006).

This psychological mobility makes ‘Where are you?’ far more than a practical question. Where are you? Is an attempt to locate and contextualize what would otherwise be a displaced voice, and also a recognition of the fact that mobile users operate in a dislocated, slightly schizophrenic world. The behavior of many mobile users is affected by the tacit, understated details of the environment. I’m not alone; I’m with my mobile phone (Plant, 2000).

We might define public spaces as true “places for sociability”; places where individual and collective identities assert themselves through the exchange of both explicit and unspoken tacit information. After young people have converged in physical space, mobile communication does not necessarily end. In contrast to work meetings in which mobile communications are largely excluded, among gatherings of young people, the mobile phone is a social accessory (Ito, 2003). Being in a space doesn’t mean that the user is no longer in need for knowledge or information; the space can play a role as a filter in order to narrow down the search for similar members in the community. These individuals don’t have to be inside the space, the user can use other media like mobile email: Mobile email augments the properties of a particular place, enabling contact and communication that would not otherwise be available.

Urban space has become highly personalized, no longer a site of anonymity. Mobile phones become devices for customizing, personalizing and augmenting even the most generic of urban places. Today there are two main trends on communities based in space and mobility: Portable and Location-based communities. Inside portable communities there are two classifications: the portable communities that are enduring and ignore place (such as Dodgeball and Imity) and proximity communities which are transient and based on the people in your general vicinity (Enpresence).

On the other hand, Location-based communities exist within zones (usually delimited by mobile phone cells or WiFi access points), each is unique and mobile platforms enter and exit these communities (Placesite). From a point of view of mobility and social networking a space besides being a physical location or landmark can also be defined by its identity: an identity of a space is that of the users or communities inhabiting it.