

Mobility and Social Spatiality

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Historically, work activities have been bound to physical places, such as farms, factories or offices. Hence, the physical environment, organized into meaningful patterns, has played a crucial role in the shaping of the social. Due to the changing technological and social prerequisites people have become more accessible for interaction independent of time and location. The mobility and the geographical detachment, (i.e. you can receive phone calls without being at your office-desk) challenge the traditional notion of the workplace.

There have been several attempts, in application oriented IT-research, to explain and model this change by focusing on the characteristics of mobility. We argue a weakness in these attempts since distinctive factors from a stationary work setting have been converted into a "semi-mobile" context. It is our opinion that the concept of mobility depends on the understanding of the spatiality of social space, rather than the distinctive features of physical movement. We argue that mobility acts as a central activity to maintain a sense of shared social similarity (belonging) if we use alternative descriptions to understand social spatiality. Mol and Law provide an understanding of the spatiality of "the social" by their description of a fluid topology. "The social" is thus detached from geographical manifestations. Enabling the researcher to identify the activities where people shape and respond to meanings invested in the physical environment. Activities that otherwise are taken for granted. We introduce two empirical cases, where the objects of our studies conduct ongoing mobile work in a road setting. It is not a fact of movement between different physical places, seeing that the continuous movement could be understood as the main activity itself. Still the participants actively attend to collaborative activities and relate to each other as members of a social space, a workplace. It is the movement of the participants that illustrates these social similarities and differences, i.e. relations to; colleges, roadsides, road-users, and people far remote, instead of pre-defined physical and social places. While conducting this ongoing movement, participants continuously relate themselves and others to the physical environment.