

Locative Media Summer Conference
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1) Title
Situating Encounters

2) Keywords
situations, interaction, city, social, territory, community, encounter, space, experience

3) 500-word abstract

Our everyday lives are characterised by encounters, some are fleeting and ephemeral and others are more enduring and meaningful exchanges. Shared encounters are the glue of social networks and have a socializing effect in terms of mutual understanding, empathy, respect and thus tolerance towards others. The quality and characteristics of such encounters are affected by the setting, or situation in which they occur. Social interactions usually bear a strong relationship with physical setting or situation (Goffmann 1963, p. 21), yet these settings are increasingly less defined only by physical spaces with their corresponding meanings, and can now occur in diverse and often physically remote sites. Electronic media have changed the significance of space, time and physical barriers as communication variables (Meyrowitz 1985, p. 13). Consequently, physical distance no longer prevents the types of interaction that used to be confined to face-to-face contact. But interaction is still defined by situations or settings; we act differently in different contexts, whether online or offline, in public or private or among friends of strangers. Open public space with its streets, parks and squares plays an important role in providing space for shared encounters among and between these coexisting networks. Mobile and ubiquitous technologies enable social encounters located in public space, albeit not confined to fixed settings, whilst also offering sharing of experiences from non-place based networks. These settings are in the process of continuous construction and are made of both a rich background of experience, as well as diverse real-world social and physical contexts.

Locative media, far from being anyone, anytime, anyplace is about the right time and the right place with the right person. But in a world where merged digital and real everyday experience is so complete that we no longer are able to distinguish the two, how do we start to define and understand the settings for our encounters and interactions? The interactions between those in urban settings are the key to an understanding of the importance of social interaction on physical spaces. We will consider the nature of the creation of social settings and 'places' through sharing behaviour, the sociality of information creation, the types of exchanges as well as the content, its location, evaluation and use. In particular it seeks to explore how technologies can be appropriated for shared interactions that can occur spontaneously and playfully and in doing so re-inhabit and connect place-based social networks. In particular we will explore the relevance of concepts of neighbourhood and territory, and of the frameworks for interaction in spatial settings in times when cities become essentially transitory social spaces for many of those who experience them. In particular we investigate how we can rethink the concept of 'interactional territories'; geographical locales in which situated interaction occurs among a group of people (Lyman and Scott 1967) and how this comes to be transformed through locative media. What are the site for interaction in the city; do unencrypted WiFi Access Points provide the same opportunity to bump into a stranger as that offered by street corners in physical public space? And if so what is the quality of these encounters?

We will also present the work of students from the 'Sensing Place' course, run in the Interaction design Department at the University of Weimar where a number of innovative locative media projects have been developed. This work was undertaken as part of the MEDIACITY project, an interdisciplinary research project, shared between the faculties of Media, Architecture and Global Sociology, and with researchers from Architecture, Software Engineering and Urban Planning.

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5) 200 word cv of presenter.

Katharine S. Willis is an artist and researcher whose focus on exploring ways in which we interact with our spatial environment. In particular she has been researching and creating installations which adopt new approaches to understanding how we can create legible environments. These projects investigate navigation, wayfinding and identity and the transformative possibilities of mobile and locative technologies.

She is currently a research fellow on the MEDIACITY project, Bauhaus University of Weimar. Her work has been published widely and she recently co-organised a workshop at CHI2007 entitled 'Shared Encounters', the outcomes of which will be published by Springer in 2007. Katharine's background and training is in architecture and she is a qualified architect.