ARTICLES

Steve LITTLE[*], Len HOLMES[**], Frank GO[***]

THE SKILL OF TRAVEL: NETWORKS INTO NEIGHBOURHOODS

Abstract: This paper explores the social potential of the complementary flows of people and resources between central and peripheral locations. Tourism generates travel from central to peripheral locations while the search for employment creates travel to centres. The latter generates critical reverse flows of remittance, the former communicates the experience of travel through increasingly convergent digital technologies of video camera, picture-phone and the travel-blogs of 'gap year' backpackers. The skill and reward of travel is partly in communicating back to your base.

The paper will argue that the coordination of these movements and flows in both directions creates new skills and networking capabilities across groups of friends and relatives. These in turn deliver new networked relationships which bind distant locations into virtual neighbourhoods.

Such exchanges have also created a new sense of connection between Western tourists and the communities they have visited in the tsunami-affected regions of Asia. The response to the disaster contradicts assumptions about 'compassion fatigue', and the paper suggests that the forms of adjacency created by such exchanges have transformed 'strangers' intro 'people like us'.

The paper explores the distributed and collective nature of the skill set generated by the creation and maintenance of remittance and tourist infrastructures and how these can be harnessed for other uses in both recovery and development.

[*] Steve LITTLE, Centre for Innovation, Knowledge and Enterprise, Open University Business School, Walton Hall, Milton Keynes MK7 6AA, United Kingdom, e-mail: S.E.Little@open.ac.uk
[**] Len HOLMES, Management Research Centre, London Metropolitan University, London North Campus, Holloway Road, London, N7 8DB, United Kingdom, e-mail: len.holmes@luton.ac.uk
[***] Frank GO, The Centre for Tourism Management, Erasmus University, Burg Oudlaan 50, Room T10-08, 3062 PA Rotterdam, the Netherlands, e-mail: fgo@rsm.nl

1. PONDICHERRY SPRINGBOARD

On 26th December 2004 the son of a Tamil Nadu fisherman working in Singapore saw TV news coverage of the tsunami and telephoned a warning to his sister which was relayed from the village Knowledge Centre, allowing all the villagers to escape to safety.[1]

This brief account, in the mode of a springboard story[2] (Denning, 2000), reveals unintended synergies in the information infrastructure of the global economy, it demonstrates the skilful use of an existing set of resources to create an *ad hoc* warning system that was both timely and effective, albeit for a tragically small number of those affected by the disaster.

The fishing boats destroyed along the Tamil Nadu coast were funded by the remittances of family members working abroad, mainly in the Gulf States. The communication technologies that allow these remittances to be monitored across a dispersed community also conveyed the critical warnings to several communities.

The communication technologies that support outward migration from the affected regions also supported the shorter-term inward movements of tourism. The sense of connection between Western tourists and the communities they have visited and the wider public response to the disaster contradicted assumptions about 'compassion fatigue'. A virtual sense of community and identification was created for outsiders by the powerful images and accounts brought to the rest of the world by the tourist technologies of digital video cameras and cell phones. Despite the partial nature of coverage and connectivity across the many locations affected by the disaster, the collective logging of events and monitoring of relief and recovery efforts continues and includes coverage of the less connected areas.

Hägerstrand (1967, 1970) established the notion of space-time geography. However, much of the application has been on intensive and relatively fine-scale activity (Ellegard et al., 1977). This paper compares the current electronic mode

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[1] A more detailed account of the incident below was published at http://www.digital-review.org on 1st January 2005.

[2] Stephen Denning, who was the World Bank's Programme Director for Knowledge Management has published his experiences of the power of stories in leveraging tacit understanding though concrete example: 'A springboard story has an impact not so much through transferring large amounts of information, as through catalysing understanding. It can enable listeners to visualize from a story in one context what is involved in a large-scale transformation in an analogous context. It can enable them to grasp the idea as a whole not only very simply and quickly, but also in a non-threatening way. In effect it invites them to see analogies from their own backgrounds, their own context, their own fields of expertise' (Denning, 2000, pp. xviii–xix; see also http://www.stevedenning.com).

of extensive communication and the consequent support of community over distance with earlier patterns of movement and maintenance of community. It shows that Hägerstrand's contribution can inform the analysis of broader patterns of physical movement and pinpoints how a continuous flow of ideas, values and tastes mediated through mobile individuals and electronic simulations construct social spaces. These spaces make possible 'imagined communities' (Anderson, 1983) that are increasingly detached from fixed locations or territories.

2. MIGRATION AND GLOBALISATION

The processes underlying 'globalisation' are, individually, neither novel nor irresistible. They are delivering at best partial and selective inclusion in both local and distant relationships. The key driver of current globalisation has been the reduction of transaction costs achieved through information and communication technologies (ICTs) leading to the replacement of a production or supply 'chain' with much more densely networked patterns.

The Western mercantile tradition developed around a specific set of technologies, such as reliable navigation aids, developed by Portuguese mariners (Law, 1986). Hirst and Thompson (1996) argue that reached by the conclusion of the nineteenth century a functional plateau had been with the steamship and the electric telegraph. The regularity and reliability of communication achieved by these technologies represented a step change from earlier situations of long-distance coordination blighted by the tyranny of distance (see e.g. Blainey's description of European settlement in Australia: Blainey, 1966). ICTs are essential to the delivery of appropriate levels of control over critical resources which are spatially distributed across national boundaries (Little and Clegg, 2005).

The traces left by the mass population movements of the nineteenth and early twentieth century, as well as long distance contacts in much earlier historical periods, left lasting effects on cities and regions across the globe. For example, the geographical position of the UK as a set of islands off the mainland of Europe allowed the capture of outward traffic, particularly human migration. During this period Glasgow captured through-traffic from the Baltic for North America, predominantly Canada, while Liverpool captured traffic *via* Hamburg and Rotterdam, predominantly for the NE United States. This transfer of migrants from the Baltic and northern Europe *via* east and west coast ports to North America left a residue in the form of a minority of permanent settlers who maintain the connection between origins and destinations.

In the present context of an expanding European Union, Hull and other east coast ports now transfer goods in route to the Irish Republic, creating two major development and communication corridors. One runs from the East Anglia ports, especially Felixstowe, using the A14–M6 highway corridor to Holyhead and Liverpool. The other route is the basis for the current proposal for a linear 'super city' along the M62 motorway corridor between Hull and Liverpool (Alsop, 2005).

The physical movement required by the present global economy is leading to equivalent infrastructure development. The rapid modernisation of mainland China is creating twenty-first century equivalent tracks, particularly in the Pearl River delta, and in Fujian province, across the Taiwan Straits from Taipei, both initiated by returning overseas capital fed into family-based business networks (cf. Redding, 1996). However, where such tracks lead from the interior of a nation to the wider world, they also raise issues of balance in national development.

By the end of the twentieth century the vertically-integrated multinational corporation, under unified ownership, had been replaced by networks of externalised relationships between associated but often autonomous firms. The information and communication technologies which facilitate such arrangements also shift attention from flows of material to flows of information and knowledge. Production and consumption of goods and services take place in an increasingly complex web, in which both sophisticated and commoditised products may be produced and consumed at either its centre or periphery.

The modal shift in traffic from sea to air for higher value goods meant that, measured by value rather than volume, London Heathrow airport replaced the Port of London as Britain's biggest port three decades ago. The shift in the balance and nature of physically traded goods has also caused big changes in the seaport cities. In a networked economy inbound and outbound manufactured or processed goods may be identical, while bulk goods are handled in dedicated facilities, often in new locations. Much high value intellectual property is transported over high capacity data links, as with the creative industries that sponsored Sohonet in London (http://www.sohonet.co.uk/).

This change in the organisation of production was accompanied by processes of decolononisation which led to new flows of migration, from periphery to core. Increasing prosperity in the key developed economies has increased the demand for externally sourced low wage and relatively unskilled labour, while this affluence coupled with the development of civil aviation led to the establishment of counterflows in the form of mass tourist travel patterns. This redistribution of the components of transnational value chains has resulted in a shift in the scale of the space-time geographies of individual and communities.

3. NETWORK AND COMMUNITY

Global economic integration accelerated at the end of the Cold War. Ohmae (1995) refers to the removal of the 'bi-polar discipline' of the Cold War which had obscured differences within and between members of the Eastern and Western blocs and consigned the remainder of humanity to the disparagingly-termed 'Third World'. Disparate national and regional cultures are increasingly interacting within globalised economic systems and organisations. However, the interpenetration of the developed centre and the periphery reveals an unevenness in development which is reflected in both of the coordination of dispersed activities through the new communication technologies and the physical co-location of high and low value activities.

The previous form of physical connectivity, based on an infrastructure of seaports, railways and underwater cables, has left cultural and economic tracks and traces reflected in the diversity of port cities around the world. However, as noted, the node of the new global network has been defined by Castells (1989) as a 'city of flows' requiring an infrastructure dependent upon on air transport and wired or wireless connectivity.

The notion of 'networked enterprise' promoted by Castells (1996) as a means of geographically and temporally constrained collaboration in order to enter and shape specific market has, however, already been superseded by more durable modes of operation. Companies such as ARM Holdings (http://www.arm.com/) produce high value intellectual property utilised by global corporations that rely, in turn, upon third party manufacturing facilities such as those provided by Flextronics (http://www.flextronics.com/). The actors located at each node of these networks enjoy an electronic proximity to a range of geographical locations across which to distribute intellectual property and physical processes.

This electronic coordination of distributed resources is not new. Locational strategies employing state-of-the-art ICTs allowed white-collar work from the US mainland to be relocated off-shore to the Caribbean as far back as the 1980s. Even earlier local distribution separated face-to-face 'front office' tasks in prestigious locations from asynchronous 'back office' tasks which were relegated to the local periphery of outer suburbia (Nelson, 1988). With the new freedom of location facilitated by electronic coordination, however, high and low value activities occupy a more complex spatial relationship. Research and development, raw materials sources and routine manufacturing, final assembly, markets and after-market support may involve physically adjacent activities supporting different value chains in different industries. Similarly the producers and consumers of goods and services are intermixed and, through travel for work and leisure, relationships are established and conducted at many points across the network.

The social dynamic between new information technologies, globalisation and development has been under examination for some time (Castells, 2001; Giddens, 1999; Ohmae, 1995). Most discussions take the shape of the technology and its social organisation as unproblematic although concern is expressed about the distributive spread of the technology and the level of access of low income groups and areas. Ohmae talks of a triad of core economies – North America, East Asia and North West Europe. Beyond this core is a 'borderless world' in which direct foreign investment seeks areas of highest GNP regardless of political boundaries.

Delamaide (1994) explores the synergies flowing from the re-assertion of historical cultural and economic linkages made possible by the removal of Cold War boundaries. Ohmae (1995) argues that governments should play to the relative strength of the most developed components of national economies in order to create regional synergies. Delamaide offers an alternative understanding to Ohmae's 'zebra strategies', arguing that the emergent super-regions of Europe represent the reactivation of much older pre-existing geopolitical relationships. The mass migrations triggered by the emergence of the modern nation state, industrialisation and empire-building in the nineteenth century have created a set of durable connections over greater distance than the Hanseatic League or the Danube basin identified by Delamaide as major areas of re-alignment and recovery of lost connections.

Despite the increased use of ICTs much employment, particularly in the growing service sector, including health and tourism, requires the physical presence of the 'in-person service provider' (Reich, 1991). Relatively low wages and increasing mobility have led to the development of diasporas and overseas communities of longer and shorter duration. The opening story shows how the condition necessary to the maintenance of wide-scale relationships in the global economy allow space for the social organisation of the least advantaged within the system. The dominant economies dictate the direction of development in the key technologies. However, through the new connectivities and adjacencies delivered by the same technologies, specific groups are developing collective and distributed solutions to the problem of maintaining identity and giving voice to that identity from outside any formal hierarchy.

Electronic adjacency permits instantaneous interaction between distant individuals: new forms of knowledge are generated in this new interactive practice though social and political theory has been slow to document and analyse this new social state (Carter and Grieco, 2000). The speed and ease of new communication over distance enables the collecting together of views and opinions which were historically fragmented and disparate.

Nevertheless, the electronic movement of capital, real and intellectual, is matched by significant flows of labour between low cost and high cost

environments. These are emerging in response to a complex process of layering of labour markets, both internal and external to the developed economies driving this process.

The future scenarios investigated by Ellegard *et al.* (1977) foreshadow current debates over mobility and exclusion, but do so in relation to daily movement over relatively short distances. The widening scale of movement to employment in a globalising economy led Attali (1991) to predict the emergence of a nomadic international elite, in line with the examples provided by Webber (1964) but most movement does not involve the elite employees of transnational corporations. Since regions with higher costs seek to retain higher value work there is often a corresponding shortage of labour resources for the remaining lower grade, low wage activities. The outsourcing strategies that have redistributed white-collar work on a global basis are of no use for low value physical work in assembly, personal services and agriculture within specific developed world national spaces. As a result, the majority of workers moving long distances are skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled workers, legal and illegal, moving into and between both rural and urban areas of the more developed economies in growing numbers, a situation foreshadowed by Castles and Miller (1993).

It can be argued that, in the pursuit of workforce availability and cost control, illegal movement has become institutionalised to a degree in developed economies. According to Kling *et al.* (1991) areas of Orange County, California, the quintessential Reaganite environment, are in effect no-go areas to the INS (Immigration and Naturalisation Service) due to the non-cooperation of the local authorities. This is a reflection of the formal political organisation of the legal component of these diasporic communities in gaining control of these local authorities.

4. TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY TRACKS AND TRACES: THE *BRACEROS*

Migration patterns and improved physical and electronic communications have produced transcontinental extended families in all types of society. However, there is anxiety and confusion between categories such as asylum and illegal immigration and between economic migration and the involuntary movement of displaced peoples. These tensions are produced by the growing scale of physical movement within the globalising system. Remittances from these workers to their relatives and dependants in the home country have become a significant component of global financial flows and they represent a very different form of

global workforce from that posited in the mid-twentieth century by writers such as Webber (1964).

The support of Internet technologies allows the maintenance of community and identity described by Miller and Slater (2000) in the case of Trinidadians. An example of crucial significance is the remittance of essential funds through an efficient micro-banking system, such as the Grameen system in Bangladesh (Yunus, 1999). This ensures that resources are returned to the home location for development purposes (Little *et al.* 2000). The Grameen Bank has extended its activities to the support of communication technologies for poor village women as part of their empowerment. This gives the women an ability to check on market prices and to better organise their finances and production. Elsewhere, fishermen use the technology to check market prices before landing their catches.

One area of longstanding workforce movement is agriculture and many countries operate specific temporary migration schemes. For example, the UK operates a Seasonal Agricultural Workers Scheme which allows foreign students to enter the UK to fill seasonal farm jobs as legal workers. New information communication technology enables the ready assembly of detailed on line materials around any specific migration scheme. The next section describes the creation of an index of such materials relating to one particular group of migrant workers – the *Braceros.*

In the United States, around 350,000 contract workers (called *Braceros*, Spanish for 'strong arms') were brought into the country from Mexico beginning in 1942 to replace a US workforce which had been diverted to war production. Many individuals stayed after the war. It is estimated that there are approximately one million US residents who are descended from these workers or their families.

An on-line index was constructed as a shadow exercise during the 10th APROS international colloquium held in Oaxaca, Mexico in December 2003 (cf. http://www.aeo-uami.org/apros/oaxaca/). The aim was to generate a set of resources in support of the face-to-face interactions and observations taking place among the delegates in Mexico. Materials created at the colloquium were also placed on the website, linked to existing resources (cf. http://www.geocities.com/archiving_practice/outsidein.html).

The aim of the Oaxaca Index was to capture existing materials using a simple word search function on the world wide web, in order to create a matrix of materials surrounding *los braceros*, http://www.geocities.com /archiving_practice/losbraceros.html.

A similar search discovered material and narratives based around the international boundary between Mexico and the United States at http://www.geocities.com/archiving_practice/boundariesandborders.html which

emphasise the disruption and discontinuity of the border which links in turn to a portal for resources documenting the nature and implications of this international divide (cf. http://www.albany.edu/jmmh/vol2no1/borderlands.html). In contrast, other searches uncovered material, from family archives (cf. http://www.cmp.ucr.edu/students/glasshouses/) and personal histories (at http://www.labornotes.org/archives/2002/04/f.html) which emphasises connection and continuity of identity across the divide.

There are also contemporary records created and collated by US academics (http://digitalcollections.library.oregonstate.edu/bracero/).

An attempt at the construction of a comprehensive archive from the perspective of organised labour can be found in Spanish at http://www.farmworkers.org/bespanol.html and in English at http://www.farmworkers.org/benglish.html.

The on-line materials which archive the experience of the *braceros* reveal a combination of both pre-existing cultural forms – *retablos*, traditional religious art executed on small tiles, their graphic narrative content physically carrying a cultural identity to the new territory – and more widely familiar forms of on-line record. The Index functions as a portal to a set of resources relevant to the experience and aspirations of the *Braceros* and their families: it also demonstrates the variety of uses, conflicting and complementary, which have been made of the materials by different on-line narrators. A portal is a homepage which provides a set of structured links to on-line resources. These resources can be repositioned and represented according to the priorities and objectives of the portal's creators. It was therefore possible to recover and reassemble the existing materials around the *braceros* into a form appropriate to the objectives of the APROS meeting to which they formed a backdrop.

5. CONCLUSION: TRAVELLING AND SKILLING

The emerging global system is far from complete and far from determined, but it is having a profound impact on social and working life, directly and indirectly. Information and communication technologies are driving the distributed processes of globalisation. ICTs provide new forms of cultural and political indexicality. They also provide new forms of counter-coordination for excluded constituencies. In turn these are the means for the potentially excluded to absorb, in addition to interpersonal ties and the flow of 'home-destined goods', and develop their experience and knowledge most relevant to the new relationships.

A large-scale example of this can be found in the Chinese diaspora, at up to 45 million depending on definitions, it is represented by a range of websites

assessed by Wong (2003), who points out the contradictions between an external view which judges China by Western liberal criteria alongside appeals to an essential 'Chinese-ness'.

The Chinese in Southeast Asia constitute almost 80% of the overseas Chinese (defined as those living outside China, including Hong Kong, and Taiwan). Sites cater to the entire population of Chinese origin by birth, descent and heritage inside and outside China (e.g. http://www.huayinet.org /culture/culture_chinese_diaspora.htm, http://www.huaren.org/), and to specific groups within that population, such as the Hakka (see http://www.asiawind.com /hakka/index.htm).

The spatial and cultural dynamics of flows of capital and labour change continually and the speed of change in markets, competition and technology means that there is a socio-institutional lag as any new techno-economic paradigm emerges (Perez, 1985). The lag presents an opportunity to develop and demonstrate alternative forms of proximity and identity from within and between the affected communities themselves.

For example, e-commerce is already mutating into m-commerce: mobile delivery of services. Despite the relative inadequacy of current WAP (Wireless Application Protocol) mobile telephony, the combination cellular phones systems with Global Positioning Systems (GPS) will allow location-sensitive services to be delivered to individuals and groups on the move (see e.g. Taplin, 2000).

E-government had already emerged as a tool for more efficient service delivery and for the support of civil and economic activity with which to reduce social exclusion within both developed and developing societies. However, e-government is usually conceived in a top-down form which seeks efficiency. The emergent, distributed, bottom-up responses to disaster are one manifestation of an emerging form of 'metagovernance' which is driven by a concern for effectiveness.

In the Indian subcontinent e-governance is being approached from national and regional government as well as local community levels. The protagonist of the opening story was a former volunteer at the knowledge centre in Nallavadu, a coastal village with a knowledge-centre provided by an NGO. The initiative is based on a hub-and-spoke model of data and communication established for six villages. The villages can communicate with each other as well as over the Internet. Dial-up Internet connections are accessed by a variety of wired and wireless paths, utilising solar power. A major objective is ownership at the village level, with support available from the hub. Villagers used the databases stored in the knowledge centre computers to organise relief measures and the distribution of aid and material received from government and other sources.

Elsewhere in India the issue of robust and affordable technical platforms suitable for such environments has been tackled through the development of the Simputer, a robust low-cost handheld solar powered device suitable for non-literate users. Even this low cost device must be shared around a village community, and commercial smart card technology has been used to provide a cheap and robust means of securely storing individual data away from the device.

Early applications for the Simputer (see http://www.simputer.org/) include the field collection of information on crops under cultivation for the government of Karnataka and the support of mobile applications for micro-finance institutions. Critics argue that a technically-focused solution is still likely to exclude, either through cost or through lack of the specific skills required.

In the past developing new skills, practices and knowledge has required proximity or adjacency to others who hold a relevant set of skills and interests. The Open Software Development paradigm (Raymond, 2001) has demonstrated that this adjacency can increasingly be delivered electronically, and sufficient skills for effective use of the Internet in support of advocacy and communication can be acquired relatively simply. The process of skilling can draw on extensive experience with electronically supported distance education and the 'e-mentoring' techniques enumerated by Salmon (2000).

With the mass migration of the nineteenth century the printing press supplied the community language newspapers which allowed the new location to function as an extension of home. The on-line equivalent can re-unite the diaspora with the home-based population. In addition ICTs introduce new social practices and social patterns allowing the collective development of skills and their transmission across the support network. The individual and community use of ICTs in support of relocation and the maintenance of links to the home community means that the voice of the small social and political unit can now gain volume. (Little *et el.* 2000).

The portal metaphor and the ability to reframe and re-organise access to web-based resources allows the margins to communicate with the centres: for instance, a country such as Estonia provides public access in its own Finno-Ugric language (Abbate, 2000). Freely available 'front-end' translation software, such as that as incorporated in the Oaxaca Index, can now overcome the language barrier. Miller and Slater (2000, p. 7) describe a distinctive set of social activities undertaken on the Internet by the Trinidadian diaspora:

Indeed the significance of studying the Internet is the degree to which it transcends dualisms such as local against global. It forces us to acknowledge a more complex dialectic through which specificity is a product of generality and *vice versa*.

Globalisation has repositioned the combination of the personal and political, celebrated in nineteen seventies slogans, in terms of their reciprocal impact on domestic as well as public spaces through networking (Little, 2000, 2004). Hägerstrand (1967, 1970) presented us with the basis for the consideration of the new scale and distance components of space-time geographies. The analytical approach to the daily patterns of allocation of resources in time and space can be applied equally well to longer-term relocation over greater distances. The understanding of micro-spatial decision-making around urban spaces (e.g. Nelson, 1988) now applies to the global selection and location of resources (Castells, 1996; Dicken, 1998).

The incorporation of personal, cultural and political identity into this new mode is a necessary response to the penetration of public and private space by the logic of globalisation However, forms of ethnic, cultural, linguistic and other identity-based politics have created a viable presence in cyberspace by the infiltration of the key technologies which underpin these processes. Electronic adjacencies leave electronic tracks and traces which can be shaped into new forms of scholarly reflection and accessibility: the index on the *braceros* provides a highly visible demonstration of this new capability. These grassroots responses to top down prescriptions provide an opportunity to close the loop of e-governance and to provide quality real-time feedback on the consequences of policy decisions made by governments. The new sense of connection between Western tourists and host communities reinforced by powerful images and accounts brought to the rest of the world by the tourist technologies of digital video cameras and cell phones offers a disintermediated and bottom-up route to mutual understanding.

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