MANOEUVERING THROUGH PHYSICAL AND VIRTUAL SPACES:
MOBILITY AND NEW MEDIA IN ASIAN CITIES

DATE: **4-5 August 2014**
VENUE: **AS7 06-42, Research Division Seminar Room**
               Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, National University of Singapore

This workshop is jointly organised by the Migration Research Cluster, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences; the Asian Migration Research Cluster, Asia Research Institute; Department of Communications and New Media, National University of Singapore.

New virtual spaces offer a great array of new opportunities and connectivities that increasingly influence and reconfigure the cultural, social, political, and economic environment we live in. The scale and speed of change triggered by new information and communication technologies (ICT) are unprecedented, and involve not only new possibilities, but demand fresh capacities and flexibilities for adapting to a constantly evolving environment. For mobile subjects, i.e. internal or international, translocal or transnational, short- or long-term or circular migrants, new media have a special relevance. Through new media platforms' multifarious affordances, migrants can sustain multiple networks, access news on their home countries and adopted domiciles, and empower themselves with potentially life-changing information, in a manner not hitherto witnessed.

This workshop explores how migrants' lives, practices, communication, networks, movements, and economic ventures are influenced by new media. It considers how migrants actively participate in and shape various virtual spaces, further questioning how their online interactions alter the contours of their everyday activities, societal integration, individual identities, and emotional bonds to the cities they migrate to or pass through. The papers of the workshop will shed light on the role of ICT use by migrants from various cultural, educational, professional, and socio-economic backgrounds, with differential levels of ICT access, and varying migration motivations and intentions, aspirations, and expectations.

At the same time, this workshop will bring together scholars who have analyzed the interlinkages between ICTs and migration in fast-growing cities. Marketing a city as a "connected city", as "virtual", "smart", or "digital" has become part of the globalisation mantra, and the holy grail of "worlding" cities that many urban governments pursue. Through their diverse perspectives, background, needs, and experiences, migrants contribute to new debates on the city and to the construction of notions and images of the city. This workshop considers the influence that ICTs and their virtual spheres have on this physical space. It also interrogates whether there is a difference in terms of the relevancy and use of ICTs by migrant groups based on their origins or the cities that they move to, and through.

This workshop offers a multi-disciplinary perspective on the topic by showcasing research by communication and media scholars, geographers, sociologists, and anthropologists, all working in the field of mobility, media, and the city. More specifically, this workshop seeks to address the following questions:

1.   How do new media (the internet and mobile communications) influence the inclination and decision to migrate, as well as the expectations, aspirations, imaginations, and constructions of the arrival/ transit city by mobile subjects?
2.   What is the match/mismatch between the imaginative constructions of the arrival/ transit cities and the subjective "realities" that mobile subjects experience?

3. How are notions and images of the arrival/ transit city constructed in various virtual spaces that mobile subjects participate in, such as chat forums, blogs and microblogs, social networks etc.?
4. How do ICTs influence their bonding to, identification with, integration, adaptation, and identity building in the various cities they move from, through, and to?
5. How do ICTs influence the everyday practices of mobile subjects in the arrival/transit city and the creation of new translocal or transnational spaces?
6. How do new ICT devices and technological developments influence the above-mentioned issues?

ORGANISING COMMITTEE

Conveners

Dr Tabea BORK-HÜFFER
Asia Research Institute, National University of Singapore
aritbh@nus.edu.sg

Assoc Prof Sun Sun LIM
Department of Communications and New Media, National University of Singapore
sunlim@nus.edu.sg

Prof Brenda YEOH
Department of Geography, National University of Singapore
geoysa@nus.edu.sg

Secretariat

Ms Amy TAN
Research Division, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, National University of Singapore
The Shaw Foundation Building, Block AS7, Level 6, 5 Arts Link, Singapore 117570
Phone: 65-6516 7710(DID)
Email: fastxr@nus.edu.sg

FINAL PROGRAM

Monday 4 August

11:00-11:15   **REGISTRATION**
11:15-11:30   **Opening Remarks and Welcome**

                    Brenda YEOH
                    Sun Sun LIM
                    Tabea BORK-HÜFFER

11:30-12:30   **Session 1: Mediated Social Change**

Chairperson: Richard LING
11:30-12:00   Heather HORST and Sandra KAILAHI: The Value of Sacrifice: Mobilising Money among Tongans in Auckland
12:00-12:10   Connor Clive GRAHAM: Responses
12:10-12:30   Discussion

12:30-14:00   **Lunch**

14:00-15:45   **Session 2: Empowerment and Recognition through Mediated Communication**

Chairperson: Rita PADAWANGI
14:00-14:30   Cara WALLIS: The Labor of Empowerment: Domestic Workers and Mediated Communication in Beijing
14:30-15:00   Jozon A. LORENZANA: From Representation to Mutual Recognition: The Case of Filipino Transnationals in Hospitable Indian Media Spaces
15:00-15:15   Michiel BAAS: Responses
15:15-15:45   Discussion

15:45-16:15   **Coffee/Tea Break**

16:15-18:00   **Session 3: Communicating Affect through Mediated Platforms**

Chairperson: Patrick SAKDAPOLRAK
16:15-16:45   Kakit CHEONG and Alex MITCHELL: Helping the Helpers: Understanding Family Storytelling for Domestic Helpers in Singapore
16:45-17:15   Annisa BETA: Hijabers Community, Instagram and Visuality
17:15-17:30   Jagdish THAKER: Responses
17:30-18:00   Discussion

18:00   **END OF DAY 1**

18:30-20:00   Buffet Dinner (for speakers, chairs and discussants)
                Nasi Padang Galore at *Café on the Ridge* – Kent Ridge Guild House Level 2

10:15-12:00   Session 4: Student Migration and Mediated Translocal Networks

Chairperson: Stefan ROTHER
10:15-10:45   Yinni PENG: Student Migration and Telecommunication: Mainland Chinese Students and their ICT Usage in Hong Kong
10:45-11:15   Sun Sun LIM and Becky PHAM: *"Although I socialize fairly well here, I always tell myself that I am a foreigner"*: Ambivalences in the Migrant Student Experience and the Role of Digital Communication
11:15-11:30   Asha Rathina PANDI: Responses
11:30-12:00   Discussion

12:00-13:00   Lunch snacks

13:00-14:45   Session 5: Mediated Place Making and Perception

Chairperson: Shirlena HUANG
13:00-13:30   Maria PLATT, Brenda S.A. YEOH, Choon Yen KHOO, Grace BAEY and Theodora LAM: Indonesian Domestic Workers in Singapore: ICT Use, Place Making and Identity Formation
13:30-14:00   Tabea BORK-HÜFFER: Mediated Sense of Place: New Media and Changes in Place Perception during the Migration Process of Highly Skilled Transnationals to Singapore
14:00-14:15   Kamalini RAMDAS: Responses
14:15-14:45   Discussion

14:45-15:00   Summary and Closing Remarks

15:00-15:30   New Media & Society Special Issue and Way Forward (Speakers Only)

15:30   END OF WORKSHOP

The Value of Sacrifice: Mobilising Money among Tongans in Auckland

Heather HORST & Sandra KAILAHI
RMIT University
heather.horst@rmit.edu.au

The increase in mobile phone penetration rates around the world has transformed the ways in which transnational migrants connect with their families, friends and communities across national borders. The mobile phone has become a device through which transnational families and communities communicate, coordinate and convey care on a routine basis. Yet, the mobile is no longer merely a device for voice communications; it has also become a device through which airtime, money and a variety of other mobile media can be circulated. Among Tongans, for example, the mobile now possesses the capacity to send, store and spend money. Pacific Mobile Money is a service that facilitates remittances and other financial transactions within Tonga and between Tonga, New Zealand and Australia. The service is also integrated with 'Beep & Go' in Tonga that uses the phone as a Near Field Communications-based (NFC-based) card to pay for goods and services. The mobile phone's entry into a broader financial ecology - including banks, Western Union, exchange of tapas (mats) at ceremonial events and a range of other family and community-specific remittance services - have inspired a range of debates among Tongans about the currency of sending money and other forms of value. This paper draws upon ethnographic research in Auckland, New Zealand between 2013 and 2014 to examine transformations in value among the Tongan community. It traces the frequency, amounts and forms of value accorded to the categories of money, goods, services and consumer items circulated between Auckland and Tonga, with particular attention to the generational and gendered dimensions of these activities. We conclude by reflecting upon the ways in which the changing locations of Tongan culture and sociality in Auckland and Tonga are shaping notions of trust, control and sacrifice between the first generation Tongan migrants in Auckland and their extended families.

Heather HORST is Vice-Chancellor's Senior Research Fellow, Associate Professor and Director of the Digital Ethnography Research Centre in the School of Media and Communication at RMIT University. An anthropologist by training, Heather's research focuses upon understanding how digital media, technology and other forms of material culture mediate relationships, communication, learning, mobility and our sense of being human. Her books examining these themes include The Cell Phone: An Anthropology of Communication (Horst and Miller, Berg, 2006), Hanging Out, Messing Around and Geeking Out: Kids Living and Learning with Digital Media (Ito, et al. 2010, MIT Press) and, most recently, Digital Anthropology (Horst and Miller, Eds., 2012, Berg). Her current research, supported by an ARC Discovery Grant, two ARC Linkage grants and the Smart Services CRC, explores transformations in the telecommunications industry and the emergence of new mobile media practices such as mobile money and locative media across the Asia-Pacific region.

Sandra KAILAHI is a researcher at RMIT University involved in the PACMAS State of Media and Communication 2013 Report and The Gender of Money Project. Sandra has worked in mainstream and Pacific Radio and television for over 23 years as a reporter, presenter and producer. She has worked for Radio New Zealand, Tagata Pasifika, TVNZ 7 and was a presenter for one of New Zealand's longest running programmes, Fair Go. She also established Radio 531 PI, is a founding member of the Pacific Islands Media Association (PIMA) and a board member of the National Pacific Radio Trust. She is the author of Pasifika Women: Our Stories in New Zealand (Reed Publishing, 2007).

The Labor of Empowerment:
Domestic Workers and Mediated Communication in Beijing

Cara WALLIS
Texas A&M University
cwallis@tamu.edu

In most regions in China it is now common for rural residents and rural-to-urban migrants – both extremely marginalized populations due to cultural and structural factors – to engage with new/social media primarily via mobile phones. However, while scholarship has focused on the use of new media technologies by those in the countryside and by young adult labor migrants in China's cities, very little research has examined older migrant workers' media use. This paper presents an ethnographic exploration of a group of middle-aged female domestic workers in Beijing who live and work in their urban employers' homes. Based on six months of fieldwork, this research explored these women's involvement in a community theater program sponsored by an NGO as well as their personal use of social networking sites and mobile applications, in particular Tencent's Qzone. Viewing the grassroots theater and the women's social media use as potential forms of communicative empowerment, this paper examines the intersections as well as contradictions between the organized forms of communicative empowerment and the women's individual use of social media. Drawing on Hochschild's (2012) concepts of emotional labor and emotion work, I argue that through participating in the community theater, the women gain a sense of voice and empowerment yet at the cost of great emotion work. Moreover, the focus in the theater on the women's hardships contrasts greatly with their expressions online, where they share both joys and struggles. Through their profiles, personal status updates, and forwarded posts, the women use social media as a limited yet important means of voice and personal empowerment. However, their limited economic, cultural, and social capital mean that their voices are rarely heard beyond their small personal networks. The paper thus seeks to add to our understanding of the challenges of using various forms of media to amplify the voices of marginalized groups in the public sphere.

Cara WALLIS is an interdisciplinary scholar whose work spans the fields of media studies, mobile communication, cultural studies, critical studies of technology, and feminist theory. Her research examines the mutually constitutive nature of new media technologies, modes of power, and the intersections of multiple axes of identity, including gender, class, and place (urban/rural). She is the author of Technomobility in China: Young Migrant Women and Mobile Phones (NYU Press, 2013), which is an ethnographic exploration of the use of mobile phones by young rural-to-urban migrant women working in the low-level service sector in Beijing. Wallis' current book project examines the use of social media by different groups of people in China – white collar workers, college students, migrant workers, and rural entrepreneurs – and how such usage is articulated to issues of voice and empowerment, trust and risk, and lifestyle and aspirations. Wallis is currently an assistant professor in the Department of Communication at Texas A&M University.

From Representation to Mutual Recognition:
The Case of Filipino Transnationals in Hospitable Indian Media Spaces

Jozon A. LORENZANA
Ateneo de Manila University
jlorenzana@ateneo.edu

What possibilities do media spaces of globalising Asian cities present us? This paper looks at the intersection between local Indian media and social media practices of transnationals, particularly Filipino workers in Indian cities. Contrary to the rise of xenophobic media spaces (e.g. Horsti and Nikunen 2013), the representations of Filipino transnationals in Indian media indicate hospitality. Hospitable media spaces embrace diversity and dissent unconditionally (Silverstone 2007). Building on Silverstone's notion of hospitality, this ethnographic study reveals the potential of media to become not only spaces of representation but also of mutual recognition between locals and strangers, insiders and outsiders. I examine the practice of sharing local media coverage of Filipino transnationals on their social media network to identify the enabling conditions and qualities of a mediated space of recognition. A plural and entrepreneurial mediascape, a history of accommodating strangers and a demand for foreign talent in globalising cities constitute India's hospitable media environment. In the case of Filipino transnationals in India, the 'interplay and continuity between social and mainstream media' (Horsti and Nikunen 2013) demonstrate mutual recognition wherein locals acknowledge the personhood (Laitinen 2002) and work of migrants; and, conversely, transnationals recognise shared values with members of the host society. At the same time, both strangers and locals can voice out cultural differences, further suggesting that a hospitable space allows critical exchanges that may lead to understanding or sociality. Finally, the transnational character of social media shows how recognition also takes place among audiences in the homeland and elsewhere, where perceptions of both migrant and host society are transformed. The emergence of a mediated space of mutual recognition points to the role of media in enabling sociality in the context of globalising Asian cities.

Jozon A. LORENZANA (PhD candidate, University of Western Australia) is instructor in the Department of Communication, School of Social Sciences at the Ateneo de Manila University. Since 2002, he has been researching on the cultural and social consequences of new media, media and migration, and the Global South-South migration route, specifically between India and the Philippines. His works have appeared as chapters in book publications of the Asian Media Information and Communication Centre and Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, and as articles in the Loyola Schools Review and Philippine Sociological Review.
Note: Jozon has since passed his PhD thesis and final paper work for his PhD transcript is underway.

Helping the Helpers: Understanding Family Storytelling for Domestic Helpers in Singapore

Kakit CHEONG & Alex MITCHELL
National University of Singapore
c_kakit@hotmail.com | alexm@nus.edu.sg

This paper explores ICT use for family storytelling by Filipino female domestic helpers in Singapore. Family storytelling remains an important way for families, especially families living apart, to maintain close bonds and share personal experiences that they hope will be remembered or retold. While there has been prior research into investigating ICT use by migrant workers, such studies often focus on how such workers use ICTs for social support or empowerment. As such, there is a gap in understanding the **types** of family stories that are currently being shared by such workers with their families, and in particular, their children. Also, there is a lack of understanding as to how these workers make use of ICTs to share family stories.

To address these gaps, in-depth interviews were conducted with 14 domestic helpers. In addition, the study also employed *'cultural probes'* where participants were provided with writing materials and a disposable camera to capture personal experiences they wanted to share with their families. These photos were used during the follow-up interview to better understand the specific types of stories such workers would like to share.

Our findings suggest that while such women communicate with their families via a variety of ICTs on a regular basis, such conversations typically centers on inquiring about the family's well-being, leaving little or no time for such workers to share about their own lives in Singapore. To compensate, these helpers make use of technologies such as social networking sites and services to share stories with their families. At the same time, given their limited access to technology and working environments, they still rely on traditional ways of recording their experiences, for example, via diaries or scrapbooks. We also observed that such workers typically choose not to share negative experiences with their families for various reasons. As a result, these women express a desire to be **better remembered by their families**. The paper concludes by proposing how technologies such as computer-mediated storytelling systems may be designed to support the needs of such workers.

Keywords
ICTs, mobile phone, family storytelling, domestic helpers, migrant workers, cultural probes

Kakit CHEONG is currently pursuing his M.A in the Department of Communications and New Media. His thesis research is focused on understanding and supporting mediated storytelling for migrant workers. He is also interested in game and interactive media design. His creative work has been shown at the student exhibition, RandomBlends. His augmented reality mobile application proposal was also awarded 'Best Student Project' by the Singapore Tourism Board.

Alex MITCHELL teaches interactive media design in the Department of Communications and New Media at the National University of Singapore. Alex's current research investigates various aspects of computer-based art and entertainment, focusing in particular on interactive stories. This work involves creating digital and non-digital interactive storytelling systems, using these systems to develop creative works, and observing how people respond to the resulting pieces. It also involves theoretical work to understand what is happening in and around this process. Current funded projects include HypeDyn and *Travel Teller*.

Hijabers Community, Instagram and Visuality

Annisa BETA
National University of Singapore
annisa.beta@gmail.com

Consumption and piety are more often considered representative of vain Muslim women, rather than as efforts to replenish gaps created by urban, fast-changing life in the metropolis. Jones (2010) have analyzed that Muslim women enjoy fashionable attires as means of pious expression, although they are often critiqued as highly consumptive and conceited. The problematic can arguably be represented by the Hijabers Community. It started as an informal gathering of young, creative Muslim women in Jakarta, which due to its popularity has by now spread to many Indonesian cities. The community holds Qur'an reciting gatherings and sermons as often as it holds make-up and hijab tutorial classes. This contemporary form of Muslim women gatherings and expressions is often reduced as 'non-syar'i' or 'not Islamic', curtailing and hampering the Muslim women's chances for expression. Hence, this paper investigates the threads of popular Islamic discourse of "apt performance" (Asad 1986 in Jones, 2010) in urban Indonesia. This paper argues that the visual, circulated via digital media, particularly Instagram and blogs, becomes the vehicle in which the Muslim women express their ideas. By investigating the hijabers' digital activities, the visual becomes the arena where these women gain self-authority without having to give heed to dissent.

Annisa R. BETA is a PhD student in Cultural Studies in Asia, FASS, NUS. Her research focuses on media studies, piety and modernity in Indonesia. Her current project discusses Hijabers Community, public piety, and visuality.

Student Migration and Telecommunication: Mainland Chinese Students and their ICT Usage in Hong Kong

Yinni PENG
Hong Kong Baptist University
ynpeng@hkbu.edu.hk

Student migration has been a global phenomenon and an increasingly significant topic in international migration and transnationalism. However, empirical investigation and theorization of this phenomenon is seriously underdeveloped. To fill this gap, my study examines the intersection of student migration, telecommunication and transnational/trans-localism through investigating the ICT usage of mainland Chinese student migrant in Hong Kong and exploring the following three questions: 1) how mainland Chinese students in Hong Kong, as student migrants, use Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), such as the smart phone and the Internet, to maintain their cross-border connections with their family members and friends in mainland China; 2) how they use these technologies to create new connections or expand their local networks in Hong Kong; 3) how their communication practices shape and are shaped by their migrant lives in Hong Kong. Drawing on the data obtained through qualitative interviewing with over 20 mainland Chinese student migrants in Hong Kong, I argue that two telecommunication networks have been observed among mainland Chinese students in Hong Kong: one is the network which is constituted by mainland Chinese, including their family members and friends in mainland China and other mainland Chinese college mates and friends in Hong Kong, provides valuable information and great emotional support to them in their process of migration and adaption to their lives in Hong Kong; the other is the network which is constituted by Hong Kong students and works as a source of limited, instrumental information and a platform where mainland Chinese student migrants experience cultural shock and conflicts.

Yinni PENG is assistant professor of sociology at Hong Kong Baptist University. Her research interests include migration, gender, information and communication technology (ICT), labor politics, and qualitative research methods in social sciences. Her previous research concentrated on labor politics and ICT usage of migrant workers in South China. Since 2010, she has been examining transnational mothering of Filipina domestic workers in Hong Kong, with a particular interest on their telecommunication and mother. Currently, she is working on two research projects: Mainland Chinese student migrants and their ICT use in Hong Kong; and internal migrant workers in Mainland China and their parenting practices. Her recent publications appear in The China Quarterly and Gender & Society.

"Although I socialize fairly well here, I always tell myself that I am a foreigner": Ambivalences in the Migrant Student Experience and the Role of Digital Communication

Sun Sun LIM & Becky PHAM
National University of Singapore
sunlim@nus.edu.sg | beckypham2108@gmail.com

In universities around the world, migrant students have become an expected and unremarkable part of the campus population. Yet the experience of the individual migrant student is anything but predictable or ordinary. For every young person who takes the bold step of venturing into a foreign land in pursuit of education and overseas exposure, the migrant student experience is one that is rich with opportunity, but fraught with difficulty. As challenging as their journey is however, the migrant student of today can be intimately connected with friends and family back home via Internet and mobile communication. This study seeks to understand the ambivalences of the migrant student's experience, and the roles that such digital communication plays in helping them cope with their situation.

We conducted a media deprivation exercise where in the first week, participants communicated with their left-behind families using the digital communications that they typically access. Their media use was recorded in a daily media diary, and participant reflections on their communication practices were probed in an in-depth interview at the end of the week. In the second week, the media deprivation condition was imposed where participants ceased all forms of communication with their left-behind families. Again, their reflections on how they coped with this deprivation condition, and its influence on their behaviour, as well as their experience of their home and host countries, were then interrogated through an in-depth interview. Twenty migrant students from Vietnam who are studying in universities in Singapore participated in the study.

We found that the students used digital communications intensely for connecting with family and friends back home, seeking emotional support, affirmation, social capital, and even reinforcement of their cultural identities. These migrant students tend to inhabit a liminal space, neither completely accepting of their home countries, nor embracing their host countries. From the burdens of coping with an entirely different education system, to the trials of fitting into a new culture with its idiosyncratic traits, migrant students' journeys are often marked by conflicting feelings of inclusion and isolation, self-actualisation and self-doubt, excitement and trepidation, courage and fear. Digital communications were thus indispensable in helping them adjust not only to alien surroundings, but also to the unfamiliar terrain of emotional dissonance.

Sun Sun LIM holds a PhD in Media and Communications from the London School of Economics. She is Associate Professor at the Department of Communications and New Media, and Assistant Dean (Research) at the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, National University of Singapore. She studies the social implications of technology domestication by young people and families, charting the ethnographies of their Internet and mobile phone use, publishing more than 40 journal articles and book chapters. Her recent research has focused attention on understudied and marginalised populations including juvenile delinquents, youths-at-risk and migrant workers. She serves on the editorial boards of the *Journal of Computer Mediated Communication, Journal of Children and Media, Communication, Culture & Critique*, and *Mobile Media & Communication*.

Becky PHAM is a final year student at the Department of Communications and New Media at the National University of Singapore. Becky has a keen research interest in studying how young people appropriate new media and technology and how their technology engagement shapes their worldview.

Indonesian Domestic Workers in Singapore: ICT Use, Place Making and Identity Formation

Maria PLATT*, Brenda S.A. YEOH, Choon Yen KHOO, Grace BAEY & Theodora LAM
National University of Singapore
arimwp@nus.edu.sg

Transnational migration not only affords people the opportunity to forge livelihoods, but also allows them the opportunity to construct their own sense of place in a new location. Due to the nature of employment within the home, live-in domestic workers face an added challenge of making social connections and carving out a sense of place in their new community. In this context, new forms of communication, including social media, have changed the landscape upon which place making occurs for domestic workers.

This paper explores domestic workers' place making strategies with regards to communication technologies in the context of Singapore. It draws upon a survey (n=200) with domestic workers and follow up in-depth interviews (n=39). This depicts the various types of social relationships domestic workers both seek to develop and sustain during their migration stints in Singapore. It underscores the mediating role communication technologies plays in both helping women establish a sense of place in the city as well as negotiate labour issues in the work place/home. The paper also considers how domestic workers' use of communication technologies shapes their migrant female subjectivities.

Maria PLATT is an anthropologist with research interests in the area of gender and migration in the Southeast Asian context. She currently works as a Research Fellow at the Asia Research Institute at the National University of Singapore where she contributes to the Migrating out of Poverty Research Partner Consortium. Prior to this she completed her PhD in anthropology at La Trobe University. In 2007-2008, as an Endeavour Research Fellow, she undertook field work on gender relations and unofficial marriage on the Indonesian island of Lombok. The results of this fieldwork will are being developed into a monograph entitled Marriage, Gender and Islam in Indonesia: Women Negotiating Unofficial Marriage, Divorce and Desire which is under contract with Routledge. Her work has also appeared in a number of journals including Ethnos and The Asia Pacific Journal of Anthropology.

*Corresponding and Presenting Author

Mediated Sense of Place: New Media and Changes in Place Perception during the Migration Process of Highly Skilled Transnationals to Singapore

Tabea BORK-HÜFFER
National University of Singapore
aritbh@nus.edu.sg

An increasing variety and complexity of new media (internet and mobile communications) are changing the ways in which people are confronted with, perceive and communicate about places. This paper looks into the difference that new media make in people's perception of place. It analyses practices of new media choice by transnational migrants during the migration process and after settlement in the migration destination and its effect on their sense of place. Relocating to a new place makes conscious reflection on the nature of the future place of living necessary and opens an ideal entry point for research on the role of mediation in place perception. The analysis is based on in-depth interviews with 30 migrant professionals in Singapore and compares new media utilisation patterns and their effects between migrants who newly arrived with those who have lived in the city-state for several years. The findings of my study suggest that neither increases in new media use nor in mobility lead to "placelessness", but that both have an effect on the way that places are experienced. The simultaneity of differential mediated experiences conveyed through a potpourri of multilayered digital media produce their very own diversified sensation of place. New media create notions of place that differ from "conventional" offline impressions. Virtual apprehension of space is never fully isolated from experiences in the physical world. Virtual combine with offline notions of place and increase the multiplicity and complexity of sense of place. Migrants' choice and use of specific new media types changed throughout the migration process, which had reciprocative effects on place perception. Eventually, however, the strength and stability of the local social network became the decisive factor for place attachment, feelings of belonging, the complexity of migrants' sense of place and the development of a field of care sense of place. Nevertheless, social media often played an important role in establishing and maintaining such ties.

Tabea BORK-HÜFFER is Alexander-von-Humboldt Foundation Fellow at the Migration Cluster, Asia Research Institute, National University of Singapore (NUS). She has studied geography, sociology and social anthropology at the Universities of Bonn, Belfast and Cologne and received the national award of the Association of Geographers at German Universities (VGdH) for her PhD thesis ("Migrants' Health Seeking Actions in Guangzhou China", Steiner Publishers 2012). Her research interests and publications center around the changing geographies of internal and international migration, migrant health and health governance, and the role of new media in migrants' place perception with a regional focus on China, Southeast Asia (Singapore and Malaysia) and Germany. Among others her work has been accepted for publication in journals such as *Erdkunde*, *Tijdschrift voor economische en sociale geografie*, *Geographische Zeitschrift*, *International Journal of China Studies*, and *Population, Space and Place* (forthcoming 2015). Before coming to NUS she was Scientific Coordinator of the German Research Foundations' Priority Program "Megacities – Megachallenge: Informal Dynamics of Global Change", which comprises 10 projects and 70 researchers in China, Bangladesh, and Germany.