Social networks and future mobilities
Report to the UK department for transport

Author(s):
Larsen, Jonas; Urry, John; Axhausen, Kay W.

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REPORT TO THE UK DEPARTMENT FOR TRANSPORT

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Jonas Larsen
John Urry
Kay Axhausen

March 2006
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Social networks and future mobilities

J Larsen  
Sociology Department  
Lancaster University  
UK – Lancaster, LA14YL  
Phone: +44-1524-594179  
Fax: +44 1524 594256  
j.larsen@lancaster.ac.uk

J Urry  
Sociology Department  
Lancaster University  
UK – Lancaster, LA14YL  
Phone: +44-1524-594179  
Fax: 44 1524 594256  
j.urry@lancaster.ac.uk

KW Axhausen  
IVT  
ETH  
CH – 8093 Zürich  
Phone: +41-1-633 3943  
Fax: +41-1-633 1057  
axhausen@ivt.baug.ethz.ch

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Abstract

This research is concerned with the impacts that changing spatial patterns of people’s social networks will have upon future forms and the extent of travel. It seems probable that over the next couple of decades there will be significant increases in the spatial scale of many social networks. This is because of low prices for long-distance travel and communications, as well as the historically high levels of migration and interaction between different countries. It may also be expected that such networks will feel the need to meet up from time to time to cement their network, as people seek to enjoy each other’s company face-to-face and to carry out tasks. This report documents this exploratory project funded by DfT to develop a method for researching the spatial structure of such networks, the nature of meetings that take place from time to time and the implications for travel.

Keywords

Social network, network geographies, mobilities, meetings, Northwest Britain

Preferred citation style

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Summary

The following are the main results of the desk and survey research undertaken in this project.

1. travel that would have once been classified as ‘leisure’ and by implication a matter of ‘choice’, seems to have become central to the lives and social cohesion of families, friendship groups, professions and firms. Travel is essential for work, friendship and family life.

2. this importance of travel results from how ‘meetingness’ is crucial to the nature of people’s networks. Although people may know many people, this will produce less affect than if they intermittently meet, face-to-face

3. tourist-type travel can often be as much about sociability and meetings as it is a search for the ‘exotic’. Long distance leisurely travel (albeit often very hectic) can be especially important for its social and emotional significance

4. as societies are more spread out with connections at-a-distance and people are less likely to bump into their contacts, so scheduled visits and meetings are more significant

5. when people meet face-to-face this involves longer distance travel, especially as there is less likelihood of quick, casual meetings which occurred when work, family or friendship networks overlapped

6. the relational commitments that people have to the social networks they are enmeshed in are crucial to travel choices; individual utility maximization is an inappropriate model here

7. people visit and receive the hospitality of close friends, workmates and family members living elsewhere, and there is extensive travel to fulfil social obligations by attending Christmas parties, birthdays, weddings, funerals and so on

8. ceteris paribus the greater the distance between people who meet up, the longer the time that meetings will last. People may compensate for the intermittent nature and cost of visits (time, money and weariness) by spending longer in each other’s company
9. social networks as something accomplished, in process, weaving together the material and the social as well as pleasures, obligations and burdens. Travel is embodied, involving others and often objects that also have to travel

10. family life is becoming plugged into an ever-expanding array of communication technologies that connect families to one another and to the outside world often at great distance. Lives are rarely if ever ‘local’

11. methods can be developed to measure and map networks. We determine how far-flung the respondents’ networks are by measuring how far away they live from their ‘non-local friends’, ‘close family members’ and ‘most important people’. All reported locations can be geocoded and mapped

12. travel and meetings require systems of coordination and mobile communication technologies to enable dispersed network members to be present. In the era of landline phones, rigid planning and punctuality were essential. With new communications people can arrange and rearrange their meetings on the move, there is an informal, fluid and instantaneous ‘meeting up’ where venue, time, group and agenda can all change

13. crucial to modern life and to one’s social position is the amount and forms of ‘network capital’ that each person possesses

14. phone calls, texting and especially face-to-face meetings become less regular with increasing distance, while it increases with emails. This suggests that email substitute for face-to-face sociality when distance makes it too time-consuming and expensive

15. the distinctions between ‘mobile’ and ‘immobile’ people, ‘local’ and ‘non-local’ networks are too simple and non-relational. One person’s networks are affected by the mobility of others in complex and contingent ways. Network geographies are not only of one’s own making and indeed less mobile people can in theory have far-flung networks

16. ‘going out’ involves continuous coordination, negotiation and movement with people present as well as (temporally) absent others. This provides opportunities to meet new people and come across new places for meetings
17. The results change our understanding of the average traveller from the quasi-
*homo oeconomicus*, myopic and individualistic, to a *network actor*, who tries to
achieve his or her goals as part of a network of interacting and negotiating actors.

18. The following are some of the immediate next questions which should be
addressed before one can integrate social network information into transport
policy thinking, modelling and evaluation:

• Is it possible to obtain valid information on social network geographies
  reliably from large representative samples?

• What is the social content of the activities undertaken?

• How strongly does the social content of an activity explain the form of the
  associated journey (timing, mode, location)?

• Is there a link between the social network geographies of residents and the
  level of local anomie, if any?

• Is it possible to model these effects efficiently and reliably in
  microsimulation models of travel demand?
1. Researching networks and travel: An introduction

1.1 Context

This research project is concerned with the impacts that changing spatial patterns of people’s social networks will have upon future forms and extent of travel. It seems probable that over the next couple of decades there will be significant increases in the geographical scale of many social networks. This is both because of low prices for long-distance travel and communication, as well as the historically high levels of migration and the economic, social and political interaction between different countries. It may also be expected that such networks will still feel the need to meet up from time to time to cement their network, as people seek to enjoy each other’s company face-to-face and to carry out joint tasks. So in order to anticipate future travel patterns it is essential to research first, the likely geographical scale of people’s social networks; second, the degree to which it will continue to be necessary for such networks to meet up; and third, the implications that these networks and meetings may have on future forms of travel and levels of demand.

These processes have major implications both for the amount of travel to be undertaken and therefore having to be provided, but also in the changed understanding of the very nature of much travel. Where in the past travel would have been classified as ‘leisure’ and by implication a matter of choice, today it often seems to have become central to the lives and social cohesion of families, friendship groups, professions and firms. Travel is viewed as ‘essential’ for work, friendship and family life.

This report documents this important exploratory project funded by DfT to develop a method for researching the spatial structure of such networks, of the nature of meetings that take place from time to time, and the apparent need for travel. We report in Chapters 2, 3, 4 upon a large range of existing theoretical and empirical literature concerned with social networks, meetings, and travel, and this enables us to develop new theoretical insights and connections. Chapter 5 is a methodological chapter where we discuss new methods of establishing the spatial structures of social networks. We detail how, and with whom, we carried out the research in practice. The empirical part of this research explores how youngish people’s social networks in the North West of England are stretched out geographically and what the consequences are of this spread for their social life and their likely future travel patterns. We focus upon three expanding occupations/industries that differ with regard to required education, salary/status and, we hypothesise, mobility patterns (architects, employees in
fitness centres and security staff). The empirical chapters (Chapters 6, 7, 8) are based on qualitative, quantitative and spatial analyses. In Chapter 9 we draw out some implications for transport policy, as well as suggestions as to how future research might be developed.

This first chapter sets the scene for subsequent chapters. In it we seek to explain why these are crucially important issues and why we have undertaken the work we have done. We explain the academic and policy context for this project.

1.2 Mobile societies

We can begin by noting how the last decade or so has seen striking increases in long distance travel and in communications at-a-distance through mobile phone calls, text messaging, emailing, videoconferencing and so on. People in prosperous industrialised societies are both increasingly on the move and communicating more to reach and connect with absent others. Thus developments in transport and communication technologies not merely service or connect people but reconfigure social networks by disconnecting and reconnecting them in complex ways. Thus as easy availability of cars, trains, planes and communication technologies spread social networks beyond cities, regions and nations, so they reconnect them by helping to afford intermittent visits, meetings and communication at-a-distance. People can travel, relocate and migrate and yet still be connected with friends and family members ‘back home’ and elsewhere. So increasingly, people that are near emotionally may be geographically very far away; yet they are only a journey, email or a phone call away.

This report will show how contemporary technologies and practices of transport and communication seem to be reconfiguring how people connect with places and each other, how they socialise with and relate to friends, workmates and family members, and how they make new contacts. We will consider just why do people travel as social networks appear to be more mobile and dispersed. Given the significance of much more extensive communications within contemporary societies why are there still increasing amounts of physical travel? Why bother with the risks, uncertainties and frustrations of movement? What is it about face-to-face meetings that people spend considerable money and time on the road and in the air to be physically co-present with other people? We consider how people stay connected when physically separated and on the move. Is networked social life at-a-distance going to be more important in the future? If so, what are the implications for transport? What kind of transport we ask will be relevant in 10-15 years time.
1.2.1 Social science approaches

It is difficult to find satisfactory answers to such questions either within social science or transport research. Much social science research ignores the movement of people for work, friendship and family, leisure and pleasure. Despite the fact that: ‘natives, people confined to and by the places to which they belong, unsullied by contact with a larger world, have probably never existed’, the social sciences mostly fail to examine how social life presupposes both the actual and the imagined movement of people from place to place, person to person, event to event (Appadurai 1988: 39). And yet migration, pilgrimages, war, trade, expeditions and colonization have linked most countries in complex travel connections. From early times servants, settlers, missionaries, soldiers, sailors, traders, scientists and many others traveled and formed extensive links across the world (Clifford 1997; Fennell 1997; Urry 2000).

Some social scientists regard mobility as producing a lack of connections, commitment, trust and emotional nearness (Albrow 1997; Cresswell 2002). Mobility undermines communities and ‘social capital’, as argued recently by American political scientist Putnam (2000). Human geographers have argued that mobility destroys authentic senses of place by turning them into ‘placeless’ sites of speed and superficial consumption. As Tuan says: ‘modern man might be so mobile that he can never establish roots and his experience of place may be all too superficial’ (1977: 183). Relph argues in a similar fashion by saying that: ‘Roads, railways, airports, cutting across or imposed on the landscape rather than developing with it, are not only features of placelessness in their own right, but, by making the possible the mass movement of people with all their fashions and habits, have encouraged the spread of placelessness well beyond their immediate impacts’ (cited in Cresswell 2002: 34).

The methods of the social sciences tend to emphasise everyday face-to-face proximities and interactions. For example, Sheldon’s classical study from 1948 of elderly people in Wolverhampton: ‘defined a close relative as someone who lived within five minutes walking distance, being a measure of the distance a hot meal could be carried from one dwelling to another without reheating’ (cited in Fennell 1997: 90). Successive studies of families, communities and social capital ‘have followed this steer in taking ‘close’ to mean ‘near’ or ‘interacting frequently face-to-face; and, by extension, significant, important, meaningful’ (Fennell 1997: 90). Social science thus tends to focus upon ongoing and direct social interactions between peoples and social groups that constitute a proximate social structure. And travel is mostly seen as a neutral set of technologies and processes predominantly permitting forms of economic, social and political life explicable in terms of other, more causally powerful processes. Research on social networks normally fails to analyse travel.
Moreover, social science portrays communication as sequences of face-to-face-encounters in specific fixed physical spaces. We can say that social science in its analyses of communities, places and social life prefers to study roots rather than routes (Clifford 1997).

1.2.2 Transport approaches

By contrast, transport planning and modelling mostly ignore the social dimension of travel and broader issues of how travel and transport help to produce modern societies. Transport researchers take the demand for transport as largely given, as a black box not needing much further investigation, or as derived from the level of a society’s income. Also transport researchers tend to examine simple categories of travel, such as commuting, leisure, or business, and presume that journeys have one purpose. Moreover, most transport research and modelling sees travel as individually shaped and chosen, and they therefore have little understanding of how travel patterns are socially embedded and depend upon complex networks of family life, work and friendship.

Most travel demand forecasts and the resulting transport strategies are based on the assumption that travelers demonstrate highly routinised and predictable travel behaviour. Transport researchers tend to focus upon everyday commuting and peak hour traffic, partly because this causes the most problems for transport system managers. They focus upon the representative day with the representative rush hour. This overlooks the high level of day-to-day variability in travel patterns (Schlich et al. 2004), especially because leisure travel is at the individual level less consistent over time compared with commuting. Leisure travel is an important component of this intrapersonal variability and indeed more generally of changing travel patterns. Transport research does not adequately explain why so-called leisure travel is fundamental to many travel practices and forms of social life.

1.3 Research objectives

This research seeks to remedy social science and transport planning approaches through helping to develop, along with other contributions, a social science of travel as it tries to insert analyses of the ‘social’ within transport research. And it seeks to do this through developing one of the first social science analyses within the UK of social networks, travel, communication and meetings.

It should be noted that this report understands friendships, families and communities, as well as businesses and professions, as social networks. Travel is used here to refer to the physical movement of people. By communication we refer to various forms of face-to-interface-to-face
communications such as the movement of images, texts, sounds and words through faxing, emailing, text messaging, messaging, videoconferencing, speaking on the phone or the net (‘skyping’, see www.skype.com). We use the term meeting to refer to the planned or unplanned physical co-presence of two or more people who in some sense orient their actions to each other (and not just to business or professional type meetings). Some meetings involve meeting up with particular classes of people, members of a particular organisation, profession, family and so on. We use the term virtual meeting to refer to various forms of mediated and virtual co-presence effected through one or more means of communications, either one-to-many or one-to-one.

This report shows how there are five interdependent mobilities that form and reform geographies of networks and travel in the contemporary world. These are:

- **Physical travel** of people for work, leisure, family life, pleasure, migration, and escape.
- **Physical movement** of objects delivered to producers, consumers, and retailers.
- **Imaginative travel** elsewhere through images and memories seen on texts, TV, computer screens and film
- **Virtual travel** on the Internet.
- **Communicative travel** through person-to-person messages via letters, postcards, birthday and Christmas cards, telegrams, telephones, faxes, emails, instant messages, email, videoconferences and ‘skyping’.

We explore how meetings are spatially and temporally coordinated, how people use websites, emails, text messages, mobile calls to synchronise complex preferences, diaries, travel routes and time schedules before and during meetings. Travel and meetings require systems of coordination and mobile communication technologies that enable dispersed network members to coordinate co-presence in-between meetings. Further, we consider how communication technologies may on occasions substitute for physical face-to-face meetings and hence travel. We briefly explore the significance of new and future ways of meeting up that do not involve physical travel and co-presence but rather virtual co-presence and communicative travel.

By contrast with virtual and communicative travel, physical travel is embodied - the corporeal pains of crossing the Atlantic in an Economy flight seat. People bring their bodies, their ‘handbag office’, their luggage and perhaps their children with them when they travel. Two friends emailing between the UK and US are in a small world way only a cheap email away but the distances separating them materialise bodily when they move in and out of bus stations, train platforms, airport lounges and confined to narrow seats for many hours. Even though travel time and travel cost (especially in relation to European air travel) has reduced
within the last decade, friction of distance and the cost of travel do matter in relation to physical travel. Rather than the ‘death of distance’ (see Cairncross 2000), it seems the world has become simultaneously smaller and therefore by comparison larger; sometimes people can make connections at-a-distance in a few seconds while at other times they spend hours in cars, trains and planes just to see their close friends and relatives for brief moments. There is therefore the need to research the nature and significance of travel time and especially the embodied travel experience (Lyons and Urry 2005).

We explore changes in travel and communication through examining the changing patterns of people’s social networks. We examine to what degree social networks are spatially distributed and how they are produced through networking practices of travel, communications and meetings in apparently mobile societies.

Swiss research suggest that people’s residences and activities are now more widely distributed spatially; and when people meet face-to-face this involves longer distance travel, especially as there is less likelihood of quick, casual meetings which occurred when work, family or friendship networks overlapped (Axhausen 2004b, 2006; Schlich et al. 2003). North American research indicates that the US and Canada have shifted from being based upon ‘little boxes’ where there was strong, overlapping membership of different social groups, to a system of networks where connections are spatially dispersed and membership of one network does not necessarily overlap with that of others (Wellman 2002). This research investigates whether similar patterns are to be found within the UK.

Thus we examine to what extent a small but carefully chosen sample of youngish people in the North West of England have far-flung network geographies. Are people’s links predominately nearby or faraway? How far do they live from the people that are most important to them? Are networks mobile in terms of residential mobility and leisurely mobility?

Social networks involve technologies and work, there is networking through travel, communication and interaction. We will examine how, and where, they do networking and make networks come to life through emailing friends and lists, text messaging mates about parties, gossiping on the phone, cruising at receptions, chatting over a coffee, going for a drink and spending hours on the road and or the air between recurrent meetings (similar to Conradson and Latham 2005a). And we explore the geographies of these networking technologies and practices: how much physical, virtual or imaginative travel do they entail, and over how long distances? How are network geographies and networking practices
influenced by income and education? Is there something we can call ‘network capital’. To what extend are some networks local because of a lack of ‘network capital’?

We examine how networks have to meet up intermittently in order to cement their connections, to enjoy each other’s company and to carry out certain obligations. We hypothesise that in more distributed societies with connections at-a-distance and people being less likely to bump into their contacts, scheduled visits and meetings are highly significant. Transport and meetings at-a-distance are increasingly necessary and obligatory to social life, not only as commuting to work, but as leisure activities or through attendance at birthdays, weddings, funerals, or visits to friends and family members. Much travel demand seems to stem from a powerful ‘compulsion to proximity’, to feel the need to be physically co-present and to fulfil social obligations with significant others (sometimes against one’s will: Boden and Molotch 1994; Urry 2003). So this project is very important in the way that we explore the social obligations that result in various kinds of demand for physical travel.

1.4 ‘Mobile’ methods for researching social networks

This research project employs and develops ‘mobile’ methods, by contrast with the methods of social science that are normally ‘a-mobile’ as they tend to emphasise everyday face-to-face interactions and short distance mobility (Sheller and Urry 2006). So until recently there has been a neglect of long distance travel, occasional sociality and mediated communication. However, if friends and family members no longer live near each other, the regular dropping-in type of visits becomes difficult. And when friends and family members do meet up each visit is likely to last longer (and involve staying over). We hypothesise that ceteris paribus the greater the distance between people who meet up, the longer the time that meetings will last. People may thus compensate for the intermittent nature and generalized transport cost of visits (time, money and weariness) by spending a whole day or weekend or week(s) together in each other’s company, often staying in each other’s homes (this may have implications for household and furniture size and design). While McGlone et al. document that friends and families socialise less often at each other’s houses, this is not the same as reporting a general fall in friendship and family visits (1999: 146).

Mobile methods mean two things. Firstly, they are methods where the researcher also moves along with the people, images or objects that are moving and are being studied (see Bærenholdt, Haldrup, Larsen, Urry 2004). Secondly, the methods can be mobile by capturing through observation, questionnaires, interviews, mapping and traces, the complex mobilities of the people, images and objects under study (see Sheller and Urry 2006). This project mainly uses mobile methods in the second sense.
We noted that transport studies with their conventional one-day travel data privileges repetitive everyday mobility and by implication relative short distance travel. If we only observe everyday mobility (within a short period of time) we will conclude that most people live relative localised lives. Thus a recent study concludes that Swedish families live localised lives because their everyday transport patterns are local and revolve around private homes (Ellegaard and Welhemson 2004). Yet if the researchers had also had examined occasional long distance travel and weekend touring, to visit friends or family members or tourist sites, we can ask if their conclusions would have been the same. Indeed two transport studies have used six-week travel diaries to show that travel practices of households incorporate not only routines but also ‘detours’ and new destinations, especially over the weekend (if these studies had taken place over the summer holiday months, the significance of variety seeking and long distance journeys would have been even more marked) (Schönfelder and Axhausen 2004; Schlich et al. 2004). The social life of most people during the week is bound up with a specific locality and short trips while many embark on longer journeys such as leisure activities, sightseeing and visiting friends and family, at weekends, festival holidays and other holidays.

Mobile methods highlight how research should analyse those processes by which co-presence and intimacy are on occasions brought about, and the socialities involved when people are not involved in daily interactions with others but with whom a sense of connection is sensed and sustained. If social networks are becoming more far-flung and people are less able to visit one another on a daily or even weekly basis, then we cannot equate closeness and communion with geographical nearness and daily or weekly co-present visits. Long distance leisurely travel (albeit often very hectic) is important to research for its social and emotional significance. Despite being less frequent, long distance travel is as significant to mobile methods as everyday short distance trips.

In the past much leisure travel could have been classified as touristic and by implication unnecessary; now it seems that affordable, reliable and well-connected transport is central to the nature of friendship and family life, social inclusion and social capital. We term this travel for life (see Cass, Shove, Urry 2003, 2005, stemming from previous DfT funded research). We examine to what degree leisure travel is bound up with reconnecting with friends and family members living elsewhere, rather than only the seeing of new and interesting places. We label this tourism proximity and suggest that what is unsatisfactorily classified as VFR tourism (visiting friends and relatives) is an important contemporary element of travel that will increase in importance in the future.
Mobile methods are distinct from transport research by highlighting that studies of physical movement of people and objects must be supplemented with studies of imaginative, virtual and communication travel. We are also concerned with the methods used to research the ‘socialities’ involved in communications, by letter, phone, email and text message, that take place in-between physical meetings. Even people living in localized fashion may be in frequent conversation with distant connections through letters, telephone calls, emails and text messages. It is necessary to examine caring at-a-distance as well as socialising at-a-distance to decouple further conventional notions of what it is to be close. As described about a time before the mobile phone:

Take 73-year old Grace Angel, who was born in Wandsworth and has lived in her house in Tooting [London] for over fifty years … She engages in all the traditional activities of a settled life; visiting family, knitting and enjoying crafts. She rarely leaves Wandsworth; she enjoys the sense of community … At the same time her life is not confined by the locality. She tells how she writes letters to France and the United States (Fennell 1997: 45).

And similarly, people and groups who may seem isolated can be in frequent face-to-interface-to-face contact with significant others living elsewhere. Thus the apparent decline in the frequency of physically visiting people may be compensated for by an increase in the frequency of communicating by phone and through text messages and emails. Thus it seems many people simultaneously lead local lives and possess distant ties, they are face-to-face and face-to-interface-face.

1.5 Outlook

Drawing upon much existing research, mobile methods and the data analysed, this report develops methods, general hypotheses and theories that subsequently can be used upon a large sample. So the stage will be set for substantive future research that would entail a large-scale survey of social networks and future mobilities. This current project establishes a framework for future research concerned with networks, mobilities and social life.

To provide a context for the empirical work, we now provide an extensive literature review in three parts. Chapter 2 reviews the main analyses of social networks and we then argue for a mobility approach that understands social networks as mobile and performed, having to be practiced to be meaningful as well as durable. Chapter 3 reviews literature that is concerned with why face-to-face meetings are fundamental to social networks, and we make the argument that tourist-type travel is really as much about sociability as about the search for
exotic places. In Chapter 4 we set out the five main forms of mobility and then specifically examine the physical movement of people showing some of the connections with these other mobilities. We show that communication technologies seem very important in coordinating meetings and travel.

Since this is an explorative study intended to inspire and guide further research, Chapter 5 discusses in some detail the methodological set-up of the empirical work, and how it can be improved in the future.

Our empirical work is reported in three parts too. In Chapter 6 we experiment with methods that help us to analyse the spatial patterns of people’s social networks. We develop and employ methods that can measure and map networks. In the following chapter we examine the roles that the increasing amount of tourist-type travel plays in societies where social life is often conducted at-a-distance. We analysis how people visit and receive the hospitality of close friends, workmates and family members living elsewhere. This can help us to analysis the spatial patterns of people’s social networks. In this chapter we examine the social obligations involved in attending Christmas parties, birthdays, weddings, funerals and so on. Chapter 8 examines how physical travel and communicative travel fold into each other, and how emails and mobile phones often enhance the nature of travel. We examine how the respondents coordinate travel and co-presence through the Internet, emails and mobile phones with network members living close by and faraway.
2. Social networks

This chapter reviews the main analyses of social networks in the modern world: community studies and the social capital approach, social network analysis; and the small worlds approach. We then argue for a mobility approach that understands social networks as mobile and performed, having to be practiced to be meaningful as well as durable. Networks we argue should be viewed as an accomplishment, involving and made possible through various network tools such as cars, buses, trains, planes, laptops, networked computers, personal organisers, mobile phones, text messages and so on. Subsequently we briefly review various empirical studies of network practices of mobile professionals, long-distance relationships, fragmented families and diasporic families. Here we argue that much social scientific mobility research implicitly works with the notion of autonomous, free-floating individuals and thereby overlooks the relational economies of commitments and obligations to family members, partners and friends that both connect people and their networks.

2.1 Community studies and social capital

We begin with a classic study by Richard Hoggart who in writing about a 1930s urban setting argues: ‘The core of working class attitudes … is a sense of the personal, the concrete, the local … first the family and second the neighbourhood’. Later he argues that within ‘the massed proletarian areas’ there are ‘small worlds, each as homogenous and well-defined as a village where one knows practically everybody, an extremely local life, in which everything is remarkably near’ (both cited in Albrow 1997: 40). Although not all community studies have portrayed communities as so tight-knit, Hoggart illustrates that community studies have looked for social networks and their structures of support, friendship, kinship, place attachment and intimacy as located within particular physically confined localities, such as a neighbourhood. Much of this literature employs the concept of the pre-modern rural community.

To develop a more suitable analytical framework, Bell and Newby distinguish three notions of community (1976). First, there is community based upon close geographical propinquity, but where there is no implication of the quality or even presence of the social relationships found in such settlements of co-presence. Second, there is the sense of community as the local social system in which there is a relatively bounded set of systemic interrelationships of social groups and local institutions. Third, there is communion, human association characterised by
close personal ties, belongingness, and a strong sense of duty and obligation between its members. Bell and Newby show that no particular settlement type necessarily produces communion. It can occur where those involved do not dwell in close physical proximity. Geographical propinquity also does not necessitate a local social system, nor does localness necessarily generate communion. It follows that we can have communities without close-knit and interacting social networks and social networks of communion that move across specific places. Yet the social sciences have overly focused upon geographically propinquitous communities based on more or less face-to-face social interactions with those present.

This last orientation can be seen in Putnam’s influential US research reported in *Bowling Alone* (2000). Putnam argues that good communities depend upon rich and multi-layered forms of social capital; this ‘refers to connections among individuals – social networks and norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them’ (Putnam 2000: 19). Communities in the US with substantial social capital are characterised by dense networks of reciprocal social relations, well-developed sets of mutual obligations, generalised reciprocity, high levels of trust in one’s neighbours, overlapping conversational groupings, and bonds that bridge across conventional social divides. Putnam also believes that civic-minded and well-integrated communities are essential for economic prosperity and growth. Social bonds and especially involvement in civic work within neighbourhoods are considered crucial to social capital, and it is precisely local face-to-face socialising, church going, political rallying, volunteer work, philanthropy, general trust and reciprocity that have been in decline over the last third of the twentieth century. It is the strong ties of local communities that are fading. American people are less connected, they are likely to be strangers to their neighbours, they have less co-present face-to-face talk and they show little local civic engagement.

In addition to generational changes, Putnam argues that the widespread growth of TV, urban sprawl and travel are major causes of these changes. TV ‘privatizes leisure time…TV watching comes at the expense of nearly every social activity outside the home, especially social gatherings and informal conversations’ (Putnam 2000: 236-7). 1950s and 1960s slum clearance programmes destroyed those close-knit community ties that involved intensive short-range corporeal mobility (Putnam 2000: 281). American’s liking for residential mobility is also detrimental to social capital:

> Just as frequent movers have weaker community ties, so too communities with higher rates of residential turnover are less well integrated. Mobile communities seem less friendly to their inhabitants than do their more stable communities. Crime rates are higher, and school performances are lower, in high-mobility communities. In such communities, even longtime residents have fewer ties with their

Putnam notes how two-thirds of car trips involve driving alone and this is growing; the time and distance of solitary work commutes is increasing; each additional minute in daily commuting time reduces involvement in community affairs by both commuters and non-commuters; and spatial fragmentation between home and workplace is especially bad for community groups that historically straddled class, ethnic and gender divides (2000: 212-4).

Putnam outlines how to reverse declining local social capital. One suggestion is that: ‘Let us act to ensure that by 2010 Americans will spend less time traveling and more time connecting with our neighbors than we do today, that we will live in more integrated and pedestrian-friendly areas, and that the design of our communities and the availability of public space will encourage more casual socializing with friends and neighbors’ (Putnam 2000: 407-8).

Putnam’s approach to community building and social capital has influenced the UK Government’s Innovation and Performance Unit where one working paper states:

Geographic mobility can have a detrimental impact upon social capital. Residential mobility breaks up social networks and lessens social contact between friends and family. Relationships that depend on face to face contact - such as informal eldercare and childcare – may suffer from increased mobility (Donnovan, Pilch, Rubenstein 2002: 3).

Putnam is not though without critics. Some accuse him of being nostalgic in his concentration upon organised leisure such as bowling, Scout Troops and church going. While participation in some such traditional institutions has fallen, newer groups such as pub-based soccer clubs and environmental NGOs are flourishing. This can also be seen in the UK where the unique Kendal study showed declining Church and Chapel attendance at the same time as the growth of participation in a range of new age and ‘spiritual’ associations and movements (Heelas, Woodhead et al. 2005).

Overall Costa and Hahnthere indicate that there is only a small decline in joining groups and no fall in socialising with friends and family members in the evening (reported in Florida 2002: 269-270). Journalist Ethan Watters challenges Putnam’s derogatory view on friendships and his heroic view of civic organizations. According to Putnam, friends (‘schmoozers’) are only concerned with inwardly focused bonding while civic work is concerned with noble outwardly focused bridging. So schmoozers are causing a decline in civic engagement and therefore a fall in social capital. But Watters reminds us that meetings in Lions Clubs are not only concerned with altruistic, civic matters but also with plain old schmoozing and business
networking, and that tight-knit communities often are static, conservative and exclusive. That is, they bond rather than bridge (Watters 2004; see also Florida 2002: 269-270).

Richard Florida indeed shows how social networks of friends among youngish (unmarried) city-dwellers can generate much social capital, now that people enter family life at a later stage and are less likely to do traditional civic work. Indeed amongst ‘the creative class’, youngish well-educated people prefer tolerant and diverse communities of weak ties and wish to escape Putnam’s tight-knit small-town communities (Florida 2002: 269). Florida further argues that ‘creative capital’ rather than social capital is emerging as crucial for prosperity in contemporary informational economies.

The final point to note is that Putnam’s notion of social capital is at odds with more recent community research that travels beyond local cultures to deconstruct ideas of local cultures, static social networks and fixed places (Albrow 1997, Albrow, Eade, Durschmidt, Washbourne 1997; Durschmidt 1997; Urry 2000, 2003b). On this account places are seen as constructed through, as Clifford (1997) would say, routes as well as roots. Or as Massey puts it: ‘what gives a place its specificity is not some long internalized history but the fact that it is constructed out of particular constellation of relations articulated together at a particular locus’ (1994: 217). Communities are impure and porous. Travel is central to communities, even those characterised by relatively high levels of apparent propinquity and communion.

2.2 Social network analysis (SNA)

In this section we examine SNA through the outstanding research programme of Wellman and collaborators at Toronto. SNA is concerned with mapping the links between people, organisations, interest groups, places, and so on. It takes as its starting point the assumption that social life, beneath all its apparent messiness, randomness and chaos, is networked, a larger structured web of social connections strung between people and technologies, near and far. In this sense, SNA is concerned with uncovering, rendering visible, already existing networks, their links and properties. It often involves a mathematical analysis of relationships often stretching across distance, and is grounded in systematic analysis of mainly quantitative empirical data (see Scott 2000, for a UK focussed review).

Wellman notes that communities always have and will pervade social existence. In fact, wherever SNA has looked, communities are flourishing (Boase and Wellman 2004; Hampton and Wellman 2001; Wellman 2001, 2002; Wellman and Haythornthwaite 2002). The reason
why commentators like Putnam have found a death of communities is that they have looked for them in the wrong places, in neighbourhoods and localities, the traditional sites\(^2\). Indeed when Wellman talks of communities there are few traces of civic connections and normative expectations. He does not lament the demise of communities because North Americans no longer bowl in leagues, participate in mainstream political campaigns, join neighbourhood associations and regularly attend chapel or church (although Americans do attend those more than most in the developed world).

SNA explore the structural properties that connect people in webs of friendship, mutual support and sociality through face-to-face talk, phone conversations and emailing. SNA illustrates how communities and social capital are tied into and dependent upon technological cultures and virtual spaces:

Rather than being exclusively online or in-line, many community ties are complex dances of face-to-face encounters, scheduled meetings, two-person telephone calls, emails to one person or several, and broader online discussion among those sharing interests (Wellman 2001: 237).

Network ties exist in and across both physical space and various virtual or cyberspaces (Wellman 2001, Wellman and Haythornthwaite 2002). Thus communities are in flux, transforming and even developing on the move within networks:

We find community in networks, not groups... In networked societies: boundaries are permeable, interactions are with diverse others, connections switch between multiple networks, and hierarchies can be flatter and recursive ... Communities are far-flung, loosely-bounded, sparsely-knit and fragmentary. Most people operate in multiple, thinly-connected, partial communities as they deal with networks of kin, neighbours, friends, workmates and organizational ties. Rather than fitting into the same group as those around them, each person his/her own personal community (2001: 227).

So communities are found in networks, and such networked communities are not confined to a particular place but stretched out geographically and socially. Moreover, in ‘networked societies’ people are tied into multiple networks. Each person is uniquely connected to diverse networks, so we all have a ‘personal community’. Communities, these interpersonal ties of sociality, support, information and identity, are far-flung and individualised (Wellman 2001: 228).

\(^2\) However it should be noted here that Putnam and Wellman strangely only sporadically refer to each other.
Wellman captures this shift as a transformation from *door-to-door* to *place-to-place* to *person-to-person* communities. First, people walking to visit each other typify door-to-door communities that were spatially compact and densely knit; ‘little boxes’ based upon geographical propinquity (Wellman 2002). This is the kind of community that Putnam yearns for. Family life in at least parts of Europe and North America in the first half of the twentieth century was predominantly lived within such a ‘little box’ with family members regularly encountering each other within their immediate neighbourhood. There was an informal co-presence of family members. Classic studies that documented this up to the 1950s were conducted in the East End of London and various Italian-American ‘urban villages’ (Young and Willmott 1962; Gans 1962). Significant others were encountered through walking about such neighbourhoods, through what Wellman terms door-to-door connectivity (2001: 231). People walked or cycled to visit one another and there was much overlap of family life, work and friendships. According to Wellman, door-to-door communities expired with increased speed in transportation and especially communication: ‘huge increase[s] in speed [have] made door-to-door communications residual, and made most communications place-to-place or person-to-person’ (2001: 233).

Second, with ‘place-to-place’ communities, interactions move inside the private home; it is here that entertaining, phone-calls and emails take place: ‘the household is what is visited, telephoned or emailed’ (Wellman 2001: 234). Yet this is not seen as destroying networks and social capital, because phone calls and emails connect homes in disparate geographical locations and produce communion with those not living close by. The house is not only a site of TV consumption and inwardly bonding, but also of communicating with near and distant acquaintances. Against the thesis that the Internet makes social networks disembodied and virtual, Wellman’s studies suggest that ‘computer mediated communication supplements arranges and amplifies in-person and telephone communication rather than replacing them’ (2001: 242; Hampton and Wellman 2001). Those who are on-line are those who are most active in voluntary and political work within their immediate neighbourhood (Wellman 2001: 10). The Internet increases local as well as long-distance involvement (Wellman 2001: 236). While the Internet offers global access and connectivity, most emails are local and concerned with local arrangements, sustaining contact with familiar faces and arranging and rescheduling face-to-face meetings (Wellman 2001: 236; Boase and Wellman 2004). ‘Frequent contact on the Internet is a complement to frequent face-to-face contact, not a substitute for it’ (Wellman, cited in Putnam 2000: 179). A study of American college students showed that 64% of them used face-to-face, telephone and the Internet to conduct their social life. Only 1 out of 51 solely relied upon face-to-face (Byam, Zhang, Lin 2004: 306).
Third, the notion of person-to-person community highlights how it is the person rather than place that increasingly matters. ‘The person has become the portal’ (Wellman 2001: 238). The turn to person-to-person results from innovations in communications, according to Wellman: ‘The technological development of computer-communication and the societal flourish of social networks are now affording the rise of networked individualism (2002: 2). Whereas the emblematic technology of place-to-place connectivity was the fixed landline telephone, the mobile phone is the technology of person-to-person communities. ‘Mobile phones afford a fundamental liberation from place, and they soon will be joined by wireless computers and personalized software’ (Wellman 2001: 238). While landlines eliminated the prerequisite of physical proximity, they reinforced the need to stay at specific places. Personalised, wireless worlds afford networked individualism, each person is, so to say, the engineer of his/her own ties and networks, and always connected, no matter where she/he is going and staying. Person-to-person brings about what Wellman calls ‘mobile-ization’ that ‘suits and reinforces mobile lifestyles and physically dispersed relationships’ (2001: 239). Or as French researcher Licoppe reports: ‘the mobile phone is portable, to the extent of seeming to be an extension of its owner, a personal object constantly there, at hand … Wherever they go, individuals seem to carry their network of connections which could be activated telephonically at any moment’ (2004: 139). The mobile phone frees people from spatial fixity (Geser 2004: 4).

Central to this notion of networked individualism is that friendships and networks are chosen and specific. People know and socialise with an increasing number of friends, workmates and ‘networks’ but these relationships are specialised in the sense that they revolve around particular roles, skills, leisure pursuits, places and sites; they dissolve if they cease to satisfy these functions (Wellman 2002: 6). Networked individualism can produce many weak rather than strong ties. As Granovetter (1983) has taught us, bonds and ties come both as weak and strong; most people have strong ties with a few people (partner, parents, best friend and so on) and weak(er) links with a larger group of people. Weak links are crucial for linking different networks, and Granovetter speaks of them as bridges: weak links bridge once separated networks in the same fashion as bridges connect once separated pieces of land and people. Such weak ties connect people to the outside world, providing a bridge other than that provided by close friends and family. Without bridges communities would degrade into isolated small worlds of cliques.

Networks are said to become individualised, part of a wider individualisation of ‘reflexive modern societies’. Wellman’s notion of ‘networked individualism’ has much in common with the individualisation thesis of sociologists Anthony Giddens (1994) and Ulrich Beck. To cite the latter:
We live in an age in which the social order of the national state, class, ethnicity and the traditional family is in decline. The ethic of individual self-fulfilment and achievement is the most powerful current in modern societies. The choosing, deciding, shaping human being who aspires to be the author of his or her own life, the creator of an individual identity, is the central character of our time (2001: 165).

‘The individual as actor’ is the ‘designer, juggler and stage director of his own biography, identity, social networks, commitments and convictions’ (Beck 2001: 166).

From our viewpoint the main deficiency of Wellman’s work is that he focuses overmuch on communications through the Internet and mobile telephony while neglecting travel (this is true of SNA more generally). This neglect is striking given his attention to how communication technologies connect people in order to arrange future offline-meetings. There is no attention paid to how people attend such meetings, where they are located and how much travel they entail. There is an absent analysis of how trains, buses, cars and airplanes fit into the transition from ‘door-to-door’ to ‘place-to-place’ to ‘person-to-person’ communities. How does travel produce far-flung networks? There is a neglect of travel in Wellman’s research, and this we will see is also true of the next body of literature to examine, the very influential analysis of small worlds.

### 2.3 Small world analysis

A different approach to social network is the recent small world analysis, which, among other things, attempts to explain mathematically the so-called ‘small world phenomenon’ (see Urry 2004c, on the following). James Watts developed an explanation of the empirical finding demonstrated by various researchers that all people on the planet, whatever their social location, are separated by only six degrees of separation. It is common for people who believe that they are strangers to each other to find that they are in fact connected along a quite short chain of acquaintanceship. Watts argues that: ‘even when two people do not have a friend in common they are separated by only a short chain of intermediaries’ (1999: 4; Barabási 2002: 27-30). A small world experience refers to these intermittent occasions where one bumps into an apparently stranger that turns out to ‘know’ one’s partner’s parents’ best friend or workmate. Small world meetings are particularly powerful when away – the farther away – from home. It is this apparently strange small world phenomenon that various authors seek to explain by modelling networks on the edge of order and randomness. They share with SNA the ontological assumption that social life is fundamentally networked.
Small world analysis is also inspired by Granovetter’s analysis of the strength of weak ties (1983). He shows that extensive weak ties of acquaintance and informational flow are central to successful job searches and by implication to many other social processes such as the spreading of jokes and rumours. Granovetter’s findings suggest that strong links do not exist in isolation but form triangles. If somehow a strong link should disappear from the network, two steps would still be enough to go from one end to the other. In ordered isolated networks where each person is connected to, say, his or her 50 nearest neighbours, then there would be 60 million degrees of separation in order to go even halfway around the world (Buchanan 2002: 114).

However, if there are just a few long-range random ties or weak links connecting each of these ‘clumps’ of 50 neighbours, then the degree of separation dramatically drops, from 60 million to five (Barabási 2002). So it is weak ties – these long-distance bridges – that are responsible for creating the small worlds, for bringing geographically dispersed people into contact with each other. Watts then shows that a wide array of phenomena, from the networks of film stars to electric power interconnections, demonstrates a similar patterning, or a combination of tight clumps with a few random long-term connections. People live in clusters of close ties and weak ties, and not in random networks.

However, while Watts’ and other writings are full of anecdotes about random meetings in foreign places, they discuss small worlds without taking account of the mechanisms of travel and communications (but see Dodds, Muhamed and Watts 2003). Small worlds, it appears, are universal phenomenon of social relationships; they exist in pre-modern and modern worlds with equal force. Wherever people happen to live they are only a short chain of intermediaries away from anyone else (Buchanan 2002: 35). They explain small worlds through mathematical abstraction; they prove that in any society (whatever scale) with just a few weak social ties or bridges (so basically all societies) no person is more than six degrees from any other person.

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3 To cite Buchanan:

As for myself, I moved a few years ago from the United States to London ... A few weeks after arriving, I went to a party with some new friends. At the party, most people were British, but quite by chance I sat next to a man who had come from the United States. From where, I asked? Oddly enough, Virginia, the very same state where I had been living. From where in Virginia? Remarkably, Charlottesville, the not-very-large town from which I too had just come. Where had he lived in Charlottesville? Well, as it turned out, on the same street as myself, just a few doors down, even though I had never met him before (2002: 24).
However, while the six degrees of separation thesis is intriguing, it is those links direct and indirect within one or two steps of separation that is in fact crucial for most peoples’ patterns of everyday life (Watters 2004: 105). Small world analysis never really examines how it is that links are organised and reinforced through specific meetings and travel with particular weak and strong ties. So Buchanan reports that each ‘social network has not been designed by anyone. It has evolved through countless historical accidents – people meeting people by chance’ (Buchanan 2002: 41). But such meetings are often not by chance but by design, as the fourth approach here tries to examine in depth.

2.4 Mobility approach

Departing from and elaborating upon the three approaches just reviewed, this project develops a fourth approach to social networks based upon the systematic examination of physical, imaginative, virtual travel and of their interdependencies (Sheller and Urry 2006). This ‘mobility approach’ argues that extensive regional, national and transitional flows and meetings of objects, technologies, representations and people (may) produce small worlds. Bridges are crucial, but so are the traffic and the meeting places and greetings along these bridges. It examines how this traffic can take place through cars, buses, trains and airplanes, through letters, emails, telephone calls, photographs, websites and videoconferences. These ‘network tools’ (Axhausen 2003) make the world smaller by affording widespread bridges and fast connections between geographically dispersed people, and people and places. Social networks involve diverse connections, which are more or less at a distance, more or less intense, and more or less mobile. There are thus material worlds that organise and orchestrate networks, especially those ties that lie beyond the daily or weekly face-to-face relations. Human practices are intricately networked with extensive material worlds, with various technologies, machines, software, texts, objects, databases and so on that organise the very nature of social life.

The mobility approach suggests that what is important is not the absolute number of links that people possess; this is a rather abstract issue. Rather ‘meetingness’ – talking, writing, emailing, travelling and visiting – is crucial to the nature of networks. Although people may know others in a short chain of acquaintanceship, this will produce less affect than if they intermittently meet, face-to-face, as well as encountering each other on the phone, texting, emailing and in chat rooms. Central to networks are the forms and character of the meetings and hence of travel in order both to establish and to nourish links or at least temporarily cement them. Instead of focusing upon the formal structures of the networks themselves, this mobility approach analyses the embodied making of networks, performances and practices of
networking. Social networks come to life and are sustained through various practices of networking through email, forwarding messages, texting, sharing gossip, performing meetings, making two-minutes bumping-into-people-conversations, attending conferences, cruising at receptions, chatting over a coffee, meeting up for a drink and spending many hours on trains or on the road or in the air to meet up, with business partners, clients, and displaced friends, family members, workmates and partner.

For example, Watters discusses how one-to-one and one-to-many emails particularly helped to bond his network:

We constantly keep track of each other in a never-ending e-mail thread. One an average week, among my group of friends, there were hundreds of one-to-one e-mails, a dozen group e-mails, and perhaps fifty phone calls exchanged. I couldn’t vouch for any deeper meaning in any of these communications or activities, but I could tell you that the subtext of almost all of them was a clear message of solidarity. That repeated message, from the group to the individual, was “We’re on your side” (2004: 38).

Networking is effectively work, sometimes tedious and tiring, sometimes enjoyable and stimulating. The mobility approach understands social networks as something accomplished, in process, weaving together the material and the social as well as pleasures, obligations and burdens. Travel, meetings, writing and talk make networks come intermittently to life. Physical travel is especially important in facilitating those co-present conversations, to the making of links and social connections, albeit unequal, that endure over time. Such connections derived from co-presence can generate relations of trust that enhance both social and economic inclusion. However, to be lacking in various networking tools (low in what we will call network capital) reduces the range and practices of travel. Interventions that reduce, channel or limit such mobilities weaken social capital and generate social exclusion (see Cass, Shove, Urry 2005).

We now briefly discuss some ethnographic research concerned with networking as an accomplishment and practice, of building and maintaining social ties in mobile ‘network societies’. We start by analysing studies of transnational information work and continue by discussing research on family life on the move and at-a-distance. We call this ‘networking for a living’ and ‘networking for life’. It will become evident that these two network practices often overlap.
2.5 Mobile workers and global workplaces

In his best-selling *The Rise of the Network Society* the sociologist Manuel Castells outlines a global analysis of the ‘Information Age’ (1996). This informational economy is global as it works on a planetary scale in real time, and it is networked in that the connectivity of this global economy is sustained through the organisational idea of the network enterprise.

And Wittel in his study of new media workers in London explores what kind of sociality flourishes amongst the ‘avant-garde’ of the Information Age. He uses the notion of ‘network sociality’. By contrast with traditional closed societies based around mutual experiences and shared histories, network sociality is an open, individualised and mobile sociality of integration, disintegration and quick exchanges of information (Wittel 2001: 51). Thus:

> Network sociality is a technological sociality insofar as it is deeply embedded in communication technology, transport technology and technologies to manage relationships. It is a sociality that is based on the use of cars, trains, buses and the underground, of airplanes, taxis and hotels, and it is based on phones, faxes, answering machines, voicemail, videoconferencing, mobiles, email, chat rooms, discussion forums, mailing lists and web sites. Transportation and communication technologies provide the infrastructure for people and societies on the move (Wittel 2001: 69-70).

Sociality among the sampled mobile urban media workers is fleeting and transient, intense and energetic. Wittel argues:

> Mobility and speed seem to be the primary reasons for this shift from a narrative- or experience-based sociality to an informational sociality. Mobility is important because more and more people are on the move and thus somewhere else. In order to re-establish social contacts, ‘catching up’ becomes an indispensable condition of social situations. Catching up is essentially informational. And the acceleration of speed in social encounters is additionally feeding the development towards an informational sociality (2001: 52).

These media workers ‘see’ and ‘know’ a lot of people and new people speedily travel in and out of their private and professional lives. In this network sociality there are few strangers, only potential members of people’s ever-expanding networks. This quick exchange of contacts commodifies personal relationships. Network practices of managing relationships are performed through communication and transport technologies, as well as through face-to-face networking events where work and play are blurred: ‘working practices become increasingly networking practices’ (Wittel 2001: 53). London has a broad range of networking places where new media people meet up to show their face, catch up and exchange information,
business cards, rumours, deals, greetings and glances. This takes place at specific networking events, receptions and informally in pubs, wine bars, cafes, clubs and restaurants. Wittel’s analysis suggests that there is a proliferation of urban places of cool, playful meetings where members of social milieux bump into each other, do business and have fun.

The mobile and networked character of networked sociality in the information economy is also examined in Kennedy’s study of transnational architects and engineers (2004, 2005). This study examines how these highly mobile workers sustain and not least form social networks of both weak and strong ties while on the move, moving from short-term project to short-term project. Kennedy’s research suggests that such professional ‘global nomads’ produce and sustain different networks compared with migrants and members of diasporas. The latter depend upon support from family as they construct multi-stranded social relations linking together their new and old environments.

By contrast, global professionals normally go overseas alone on an economic contract and move into cosmopolitan environments less influenced by national cultures (Kennedy 2004: 162). Their social networks consist of like-minded cosmopolitan workmates. They do not think of themselves as company people since their primary loyalty is to their profession. Companies are partly chosen because they demonstrate a ‘cosmopolitan culture’. These people primarily participate in localized, small scale transnational networks constructed around occupational links while on an assignment. Their leisure time is spent with workmates and their friends (Kennedy 2004: 164). But in a somewhat similar way to immigrants and diasporic cultures, these mobile architects form enclavistic networks with other mobile architects, engineers and similar people with a cosmopolitan outlook. So these networks have a post-national character (2004: 176). As one architect in his study reported:

Our friends are mostly people from across the world. They are people who travel both physically and mentally … people who don’t find other cultures to be a problem (2004: 175).

Such networks are we can say ‘on the move’. As people move from project team to project team, from city to city, the links and bridges within these networks multiple and expand across time-space. Since these people are rich in networking tools and master the art of keeping in touch, more and more people are enrolled into a revolving circuit of transnational social life. Kennedy sums up: ‘Eventually, as friends move and form, or join, other networks with more likeminded individuals in the next host country, and because previous contacts are maintained, yet more friends are added to the revolving circuits of transnational social life’ (2004: 176).
Ó Rain also researched transnational team working among global professionals in his study ‘Net-working for a living’ (2000). This study shows how software developers from various countries rely upon intense face-to-face team working to meet tight project deadlines and search out new projects. These ad-hoc project teams have much autonomy in arranging and performing their work so long as they meet the deadline: ‘the politics of the contemporary workplace is increasingly the politics of time’ executed through tight project deadlines (Ó Rain 2000: 178). To meet these deadlines these groups work together in a shared physical space and forge solidarity and intense team spirit. However, once the project is finished, the group fragments and people use their networks to become part of a new project, locally or elsewhere.

Ó Rain’s and Kennedy’s studies show how the distinction between strong ties and weak ties is less marked for those with mobile lives. Weak ties can become strong when working in a project team and they become weak again when the project finishes, if that is they are not maintained at-a-distance.

These studies also illustrate the ‘liquid’ nature of networking and networked sociality. Leading social theorist Zygmunt Bauman stresses that the modern workplace has become a ‘camping site’ where no one stays for long before moving onto the next job (2000: 149). Networks within workplaces are loosely tied; they are constantly untied and retied; people keep their distance at the same time as they relate: their networks work through instantaneity and disposability. Bauman summaries the logic of such individualised networking:

> Unlike ‘relations’, ‘kinships’, ‘partnerships’, and similar notions that make the mutual engagement while excluding or passing over in silence its opposite, the disengagement, ‘network’ stands for a matrix for simultaneous connecting and disconnecting ... In a network, connecting and disconnecting are equally legitimate choices, enjoy the same status and carry the same importance (2003: xii).

As Florida’s research also suggests, such people do not desire the strong ties, long term commitments and spatial fixity characteristic of Putnam’s social capital; they wish for fluid, diverse and mobile communities where one can plug in-and-out with great ease and easily build a wide range of relationships (2002: 220; and see Sennett 1999 on the resulting ‘corrosion of character’).

Although this mobile, networked work is likely to become more significant it is not yet typical, and is anyway constrained by other aspects, especially relationships and family life. Much mobility research has focused upon professionals with many weak ties but apparently very few strong ones (for similar research see Beaverstock 2005; Kesselring 2006; Lassen...
In his on-going research of ‘knowledge industries’ as ‘transport-generating enterprises’, Lassen makes the sweeping statement that the work of ‘scientists, engineers, architects, educators, writers, artists, entertainers as we all as many traditional businessmen’ is characterised by a high level of international mobility as well as a high level of virtual communication (2006: 2). However, his study shows that the average Hewlett-Packard employee in Denmark actually only flies 3.8 times a year, while academics from Aalborg University, Denmark, fly only twice a year for academic purposes.

Mobility research thus somewhat overemphasises individualised networking and overlooked the relational commitments that people have to the social networks they are enmeshed in (Conradson and Latham 2005b). However, there are exceptions. Holmes’ (2004) study of academics in relationships with partners living elsewhere indicates that many mobile professionals are constrained by their relationship and therefore partly directed by their partner. It also shows that distant relationships can come at a high price: for many couples it is something they have to live with, for shorter or longer periods, if both of them work. An extensive survey in Germany suggests that for about one in three long distance relationships mobility is a forced choice (Limmer 2004). Green and Canny’s research shows that professionals are much more willing to relocate to pursue a career if they are single and do not have family responsibilities. If couples do relocate, there is a high probability that one person has to sacrifice his or (most likely) her own career (2003). We continue this discussion by reviewing some literature and research dealing with family life.

2.6 Networked family life

The modern family is said to be undergoing major transformations. First, family life is becoming plugged into an ever-expanding array of communication technologies that connect families to one another and to the outside world. The typical modern family with two teenagers is said to have several land line phones, 3-4 mobile phones, a couple of computers, a number of cameras (including a digital one) and video cameras, perhaps four email accounts, at least one car and some travel cards. In addition there are TV sets, DVDs and videos, stereos, magazines and a newspaper as well as various credit cards. The family has become a communications hub: ‘No longer a sanctuary where the family was relatively shielded from intrusions from the outside world, the home is now a communication hub, infused with messages of diverse and increasingly global origins’ (Bachen 2001: 1). Yet these ‘machines’ also enable local ordering as the coordination of seemingly endless journeys to work, school, recreational and domestic activities that would be practically impossible without emails, text messages, telephone calls and diaries. ‘Families and technologies in
households are inter-connected as elements of the same system’ (Bachen 2001: 2). So there is a widespread adoption of mobility tools by ordinary families that afford the mobilisation of social networks, with the making and sustaining of connections at-a-distance.

Second, there is a large increase in the sheer number of households, as each household shrinks in size. This is a global trend, with an annual growth rate in the number of households of 2.3% between 1985-2000, while the world’s population is growing by only 1.5% per annum (Liu, Daily, Ehrlich, Luck 2003). Families we might say are becoming more networked, becoming less nuclear so much as ‘unclear’ (Bauman 2003). It is claimed that the family is under siege, as signalled by growing divorce rates, single parenthood, joint custody, co-habitation, singles, stepfamilies and gay couples. In particular among couples without children, long distance relationships are common, especially because women pursue careers more or less like men (Holmes 2004: 190; Walby 1997). Many dual-career couples will at one point live apart. In Britain, in the late 1990s there were 157,000 divorces; if this trend continues, 40% of all marriages will end in divorce. There are now in the UK 1.6m lone parents. It is estimated that 7% of all children live with a stepmother or stepfather. Most extended families involve one or more stepfamilies (Allan and Crow 2001: 25, 26, 34). ‘Unclear’ families are fragmented not only socially but also spatially, with most families moving house after a divorce. Moving back and forth between one’s mother’s and father’s new place of residence involves considerable travel for children and parents, especially if one relocates to another city or region (Allan and Crow 2001:132).

Third, this high rate of household dissolution seems not to undermine people’s desire for family life. To live with another person on a stable basis and at some stage have children is still seen as natural; the nuclear family is a powerful myth within the collective imagination. What is new is that splitting up and remarrying is also normal. So the remedy for the so-called crisis of the family is the family! People live in a frenzy of love, in what is called the ‘normal chaos of love’ (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 1995). Social theorist Anthony Giddens argues that the family is being recovered as a pure relationship in a democracy of contingent love (1992). It is the romantic complex of ‘forever’ and ‘one-and-only’ qualities with which Giddens contrasts his notions of pure relationships and confluent love. ‘Pure’ love is lived out in impure families. Such relationships exist because of love, and if they do not deliver emotional satisfaction, they break up:

The general diagnosis is that people’s lives are becoming more mobile, more porous, and of course more fragile. In the place of pre-given and often compulsory types of relationship is appearing ‘until the next thing’ principle, as Bauman calls it, a kind of refusal of lifelong plans, permanent ties, immutable identities … Instead of fixed
forms, more individual choices, more beginnings and farewells (Beck-Gernsheim 2002: 123).

Thus it is said that the family is becoming individualised, part of a wider individualisation of ‘reflexive modern societies’. However, some researchers contest this individualised version of family life, partly because it is somewhat apocalyptic at times: ‘One can, it seems, begin to predict the growth of societies where kinship networks cease to exist, where few couples will commit to each other beyond a few years, where children who have experienced their parents’ divorce become deeply ambivalent about marriage, and where there is almost frenetic emotional mobility and only fleeting, serial relationships’ (Smart and Shipman 2004: 493). Mason argues that the ‘individual, reflexive author’ is the reality of only ‘a highly privileged minority of white middle class men, apparently unencumbered by kinship or other interpersonal commitments’ (2004b: 163). The ‘individualisation thesis’ is said to overlook how commitments and obligations continue within families and keep them ‘tied together’, not least when (small) children are involved. In her study of personal narratives about residential histories in the North West of England, Mason shows that social identity and agency are relational rather than individualised concepts:

> When the people in our study talked about where they had lived and why, they talked about relationships with other people, especially family and kin, but also friends, neighbours and sometimes colleagues and workmates. Indeed their discussions of context, contingency, constraint and opportunity were themselves highly relational in that they were grounded in and spoke of changing webs of relationship and connection rather than any kind of strategic individualism or motivation (2004a: 166-167).

Similar relational narratives are to be found in Hammerton’s study of how the post-war generation of British working class immigrants to Canada and Australia constructed their immigration and family stories (2004). The stories told by these people are partly recollections of the pain and guilt of leaving people behind, of separating families. Given that money was scarce, long distance travelling high-priced, and communication slow and costly, these migrants lost contact with family and friends back home. While they came to experience relative financial and professional success, their ‘homesickness’ almost ruined it (2004: 274).

Fourth, modern families in the UK are often comprised of migrants and mixed-race families. The number of international migrants worldwide doubled between 1960 and 2000 (UNDP 2004: 87). The migration literature shows that migration is rarely an isolated decision pursued by individual agents but rather a collective action involving families, kinships and other communal contacts. Migrants travel to join established groups of settlers who provide transnational arrangements for them in receiving countries, while simultaneously retaining
links with their country of origin and with chains of other immigrants (Goulborne 1999; Salaff, Fong, Siu-Lin 1999; Ryan 2004: 355).

So while migration disperses family members and friends across vast physical distances, intimate networks of care, support and affection – effectively ‘social capital’ – can be traced over large geographical distances (Chamberlain 1995). Scholars of kinship and migration have long known that presence and absence – or proximity and distance – do not necessarily conflict. Thus ‘geographical proximity or distance do not correlate straightforwardly with how emotionally close relatives feel to one another, nor indeed how far relatives will provide support or care for each other’ (Mason 1999, 2004a: 421). Indeed intimacy and caring can take place at-a-distance, through letters, packets, photographs, emails, money transactions, telephone calls and recurrent visits. So caring, obligations and indeed presence do not necessarily imply co-presence or face-to-face proximity: people can be near, in touch and together, even when great distances tear them physically apart. As Callon and Law maintain more generally, ‘presence is not reducible to co-presence … co-presence is both a location and a relation’ (2004: 6, 9).

These various studies show that most people’s biographies and mobilities are relational, connected and embedded rather than individualised. People are enmeshed in social dramas wherein actions depend upon negotiation, approval and feelings, and have social and emotional consequences. They indicate that we cannot understand social networks and mobility practices if individuals are taken as the unit of analysis. Individuals are always enmeshed in networks that both enable and constrain possible ‘individual’ actions. This is the case not only for people in relationships and families but also for ‘singles’ that increasingly form tight-knit groups of friends where care and support flourish, according to journalist Watters in Urban Tribes (2004; see also Weston 1991, as well as much of the research reported below).

### 2.7 Summary

In this chapter we examined various ways of analysing social networks in the modern world. We reviewed the social capital, social network and small worlds approaches. We then outlined a mobilities approach to such topics. We went on to examine some mainly UK studies that reveal the importance of social networks within work and family life. Such networks significantly vary, depending in part upon people’s travelling and communications practices that sustain the weak and strong ties within and across networks. We also saw that more or less all networks depend upon intermittent meetings involving travel and
communications by some or all participants. Meetings central to networks can be costly in terms of time, money and effort, as we explore in detail in the next chapter.
3. Meetings and networks

In this chapter we consider the social science literature on meetings, an undeveloped field but one essential for deciphering the nature of networks and travel. First, we demonstrate the wide array, scale and organisational importance of face-to-face meetings within many kinds of work environment. Second, we show how such meetings are significantly about establishing and maintaining networks. Third, we consider the possibilities of substituting various kinds of communicative and virtual encounters for physical meetings. We argue that there are some possibilities here but still many things are achieved within co-present meetings that mean that they are here to stay for a good time yet; and hence physical travel is also here to stay. Finally, we turn the issue around and consider how leisure travel and tourism seem to be increasingly about co-present meetings and less about only travelling to view the exotic. Thus we show the importance of meetings taking place within families, especially of migrants and diasporas, and that a significant amount of tourist-type travel is really as much about sociability as a search for exotic places. Overall, we show how tourist-type travel is of increasing importance within mobile, networked societies.

It should be noted that we mainly deal with the literature relating to business-type meetings although our research more concerns meetings within friends and families. We deal here with business-type meetings since that is where the useful literature currently lies.

3.1 ‘Business of talk’

The scale of business meetings is enormous. Even back in 1988, the USA’s major 500 companies are said to have held between 11 and 15m formal meetings each day and 3-4 billion meetings each year. Managers spend up to half of their time in such face-to-face meetings and much of their time involves working with and evaluating colleagues through long and intense periods of physical co-presence and talk. The typical day of top executives consists almost exclusively of planning meetings, attending meetings and executing the decisions made at meetings. Talk face-to-face and on the phone can occupy 75% of an executive’s time (Boden 1994: 51; Boden and Molotch 1994: 272; Romano and Nunamaker 2001: 4). Strassmann summarises: ‘there are meetings, and meetings about meetings, and meetings to plan reports, and meetings to review the status of reports. And what these meetings are about is people just trying to figure out what they are doing’ (cited in Romano
and Nunamaker 2001: 4). Moreover, the ubiquitous meeting tool, ‘the personal diary’, makes sure that a new meeting is arranged, as the present meeting is coming to an end:

One of the unstated protocols of modern work is that those attending meetings should bring their diaries and schedule into their future the circle of forthcoming meetings. Indeed, this forms part of the ritualistic end of meeting: the entry into the diary of the next meeting. Indeed, the notion ‘diarize’ has been coined to describe this ritual (Symes 1999: 373).

Schwartzman understands meetings as communicative events with specific norms of speaking and interacting, oratorical genres and styles, interest and participation (1989). The commonsense notion of what meetings are and do in organisations is mistaken since:

Instead of accepting task-focused assumptions that suggest that decisions, crises, conflicts, and the like are what meetings are about, the opposite is proposed here, that is, that meetings are what decisions, problems, and crisis are about. Meetings reproduce themselves by the volume of decisions, crises and the like that an organisation produces (Schwartzman 1989: 9-10).

In other words, decisions, problems, and crises occur because they produce meetings and meetings produce organizations, and not the other way round. So organisations are about meetings, organisations are made and remade through the performances of meetings (Schwartzman 1989: 40-41, 86). Schwartzman defines a meeting as:

A meeting is a gathering of three or more people who agree to assemble for a purpose ostensibly related to the functioning of an organisation or group. The event is characterised by multiparty talk that is episodic in nature, and participants either develop or use specific conventions for regulating this talk (1989: 63).

Important aspects here are the physical coordination and assembling of at least three people at the same place, their roles and their speech performances. Schwartzman distinguishes between two types of meetings according to ‘time, formality and representation’: scheduled and unscheduled meetings. Scheduled meetings are pre-arranged, scheduled for a specific time and place, having an explicit agenda, perhaps materialised as a paper document, with more or less formal turn-taking and minutes. By contrast, unplanned meeting talk is loosely regulated and informal in conversational style and there is seldom a need to report back. Unplanned meetings often involve bumping-into-each encounters and especially ‘knock-on-
the-door’ meetings when problems and enquiries have to be solved immediately and face-to-face.

Drawing in part upon Schwartzman, Boden sees organisations as a human accomplishment of face-to-face conversation: people in organisations do work by arranging meetings, attending them and talking at them. Meetings constitute organisations because ‘meetings are, by their very nature talk. Talk, talk, talk and more talk’ (Boden 1994: 8, 82). Meetings are ‘ritual affairs, tribal gatherings in which the faithful reaffirm solidarity and warring factions engage in verbal battles . . . When in doubt call a meeting. When one meeting isn’t enough, schedule another’ (Boden 1994: 81).

Talk comprises sets of utterances that carry out tasks or do things. Such performative utterances include making contacts, forming trust, doing deals, repairing connections, networking, agreeing contracts and celebrating achievements. A co-present meeting is often necessary to talk through problems and make major decisions. Conversations are produced, topics can come and go, misunderstandings can be quickly corrected and commitment and sincerity can be directly assessed. Trust between people is thus something that gets worked at involving a joint performance by those in such conversations. Conversations are made up of not only words, but expressions that indicate various meanings, facial gestures, body language, status, voice intonation, pregnant silences, past histories, anticipated conversations and actions, turn-taking practices and so on.

Turn taking is highly structured. The ebb and flow of talk is a simple but highly effective system. Turn-taking works ‘like a revolving gate, demanding and facilitating deft entry and exist, and effectively managing the flow of talk by spacing speakers and pacing topics’ (Boden 1994: 66). Turns are valued, distributed between participants and normally involving one speaker talking at any time. Turns are not allocated in advance, turn transition is quick and there are few gaps and overlaps in turn transition.

The embodied character of conversation is thus: ‘a managed physical action as well as ‘brain work’’ (Boden and Molotch 1994: 262). ‘It is this richness of information’, Boden argues, that make us feel that we need co-presence to know what is really going on, including the degree to which others are providing us with reliable, reasonable accounts (Boden and Molotch 1994: 259). Compared with co-present conversations, letters, memos, faxes and email seem less effective at establishing and sustaining such long-term trust relations (Boden and Molotch 1994: 263–7).

This thus means that even in virtual economies and organisations physical meeting-places are necessary for trustful relationships. Boden summarizes how in fast moving financial services:
Surrounded by complex technology and variable degrees of uncertainty, social actors seek each other out, to make the deals that, writ large across the global electronic boards of the exchanges, make the market. They come together in tight social worlds to use each other and their shared understanding of ‘what’s happening’ to reach out and move those levers that move the world (2000: 194).

So a powerful ‘compulsion to proximity’ ensures that face-to-face meetings flourish within the business context (and by implication within many other social domains). They are also said to be superior in sparking creative ideas:

All the technologies in the world do not – at least yet, and maybe never – replace face-to-face contact when it comes to brainstorming, inspiring passion, or enabling many kinds of serendipitous discovery... Fax is fine one-way communication, e-mail for two-way asynchronous and relatively emotionless communication; telephone and communications that require no visual aids; and video conferencing if no subtlety in body language is necessary. But face-to-face communication is the richest multi-channel medium because it enables use of all the senses, is interactive and immediate (Leonard and Swap cited in Thrift 2000: 684-685).

It is interesting that this romanticised view of face-to-face meetings is at odds with anecdotes within popular media and management books where meetings are portrayed as boring and wasteful. In one study ‘corporate vice presidents admitted to falling asleep or dozing away off during a meeting presentation and they reported that they found more than forty-three % of business meetings boring’ (Romano and Nunamaker 2001: 9). While some meetings take place in new and interesting places, it appears that many meetings are dull and repetitive, especially internal staff meetings. In her celebration of ‘good old’ face-to-face interaction and sociality, Boden rejects the significance of communicative and virtual co-presence. Schwartzman and Boden speak of meetings as formalised gatherings within organization and therefore do not examine more informal networking events or social meetings between family members and friends.

They also do not examine the travel aspects of meetings. With the exception of most internal staff meetings, almost always meetings entail travel by some or all of the participants, since many conferences, symposia, bonding events, camps and so on are located on ‘neutral territory’. In many cases travel to and from a meeting will be more time-consuming than the actual meeting. In Norway, job-related meetings account for about 60% of all (domestic and international) flights (Høyer and Ness 2001), while the figure is 40% in Denmark (Lassen 2006: 2). Meetings and related travel are the third largest discretionary expense after salaries and data processing for businesses (Collis 2000). Since travel is crucial for performing
business life, it cannot be easily avoided. Or as an American Express Consulting Manager says: ‘A business that needs people to travel so they can generate revenue can’t afford to cut out travel’ (cited in Davidson and Cope 2003: 34). Therefore, even in times of economic recession and perceived dangers of travelling, the scale of the conference industry is said to be fairly stable:

One of the positive characteristics of the conference industry is its resilience, even in times of economic downturn. While there may be a trading down, many events still go ahead: public companies are required to hold an Annual General meeting for their shareholder, senior managers need to engage in management retreats to explore ways of reviving their business, new products are launched, staff still have to be trained and motivated, sales forces need to be brought together for briefings, and many other types of conference take place, albeit with reduced budgets (Rogers cited in Davidson and Cope 2003: 13).

Davidson and Cope’s examination of conferences, conventions, incentive travel and corporate hospitality bring out how business trips often have touristic qualities, and therefore how business travel and tourism often overlap (2003; see also Weber and Chan 2003, and the final section of this chapter). ‘Indeed for some forms of business travel, the leisure and pleasure element is absolutely crucial to the reason for making the trip in the first place: incentive trips that are composed almost entirely of leisure, recreational and cultural pursuits, only achieve their objectives if participants thoroughly enjoy themselves’ (Davidson and Cope 2003: 256).

Even normal business trips occasionally become touristic when they expand into weekend breaks. This reward for working long hours (Doyle and Nathan 2001) with airlines’ ‘Saturday Night Rule’ encouraging weekend breaks as passengers that spend Saturday night pay less than those flying straight home (Davidson and Cope 2003: 257). According to Høyer and Næss, academic conferences are being organised in new and ever more exotic places and they suggest how conferencing functions as a form of conspicuous consumption through which power is displayed, networks are sustained and interesting places are toured (2001). For instance, the ‘delegates attending FIAFT 2000, the Helsinki-based conference of the International Association of Forensic Toxicologists, chose from a number of post-conference tours including a three-day Lapland Arctic Safari, a one-day cruise to Tallinn, Estonia, and a three-day trip to St Petersburg by train’ (Davidson and Cope 2003: 254). As Collis of Herald Tribunes argues, most (long distance) meetings have an incentive, or leisurely aspect (2000: 2). Davidson and Cope suggest that the touristic nature of conferences is what keeps them alive:
perhaps the strongest argument against conferences being in danger of being replaced by Internet or videoconferencing technology is the very simple one …: ‘Delegates enjoy them!’ – not only for the opportunities they provide to update knowledge and network with like-minded people, but also due to the fact that they are often located in cities of tourist interest, and offer other peripheral pleasures such as the social programme, the partners programme and the type of pre- and post-conference (2003: 139).

However, while many business trips have become touristic, a counter tendency is that today’s business traveller finds it more difficult to escape the office. No longer is the person in transit also incommunicado (Ling and Yttri 1999). Now that laptops and mobile phones are standard equipment among business people and as airports, hotels, cafés planes and trains are increasingly designed as workspaces with Internet and laptop connections, business travellers have fewer opportunities for a disconnected rest or a touristic stroll. Places-in-transit become ‘a high-tech command centre’ from which business people communicate with clients and colleagues. It is expected of business travellers that the office can reach them in real time and they respond to phone calls, text messages, emails, faxes and so on. ‘Taking off on a business trip used to mean getting away from it all. But corporate downsizing and new information technology (which both allow and require you to be totally wired at all times) have forced travellers to be more accountable and productive when they’re away’ (Collis 2000: 112).

Mobile communication systems and ‘personalised networking’ are doubled-edged swords that simultaneously allow contact with absent others as well as monitoring by absent others. They allow ‘for a sense of presence at a-distance that allows the traveller to be always available, and therefore always under surveillances’ (Molz 2006).

3.2 Meetings and networking

Some commentators argue that face-to-face meetings and conferences are being transformed since information can travel the world in seconds. Weber and Chon state that: ‘Since more information can now be exchanged via technology, there is a greater need to build relationships when getting together for face-to-face meetings. Consequently, meetings in the future will focus more on social aspects rather than on business, which may be conducted mainly via technology’ (2003: 206). Face-to-face interactions appear to be less concerned with traditional (one-way) presentations and passive listening and more with building and sustaining networks and exchanging social goods. Future business meetings, it is said, will be more active and participatory in style, involving networking, two-way communication, hands-on experiences and workgroups (Davidson and Cope 2003: 139).
David Lodge’s novel *Small World* reveals this complex, multi-layered and richly gossipy nature of conferences (and by implication many other ‘occasioned meetings’). He describes such conferences: ‘you journey to new and interesting places, meet new and interesting people, and form new and interesting relationships with them; exchange gossip and confidences . . .; eat, drink and make merry in their company every evening; and yet . . . return home with an enhanced seriousness of mind’ (1985: 1). *Small World* brings out that what gets exchanged in such conferences through intense and dynamic conversational interactions are rich social goods. These include friendship, power, projects, markets, information, rumours, job deals, sexual favours, gossip and trust. Conferences are full of small world experiences as apparent strangers discover they are connected through weak ties.

In a similar fashion, Collis proclaims that in real meetings:

> The social drink, the impromptu meeting, can be pure gold. It is nothing you can quantify; it’s intuitive; gut-feel; keeping faith with serendipity. Who, for example, goes to a conference to listen to the presentations? It’s networking that counts. Or the chance to bond with your boss or other colleagues for an extended time (2000: 64).

Mintzberg calls this the ritualistic phase of meetings:

> Gossip about peers in the industry is exchanged; comments are made on encounters the participants have recently had or on published material they have recently read; important political events are discussed and background information is traded. It seems reasonable to conclude that the manager collects much information in these discussions, and that this fact makes the formal, face-to-face meeting a powerful medium (cited in Schwartzman 1989: 75).

The social productiveness of meetings as networking and trust-generating is also clear in Nandhakumar’s ethnographic study of virtual teams operating on a global scale. As a manager of a virtual team says:

> We are having a global team meeting in two weeks time … the big joke is – ‘can’t you do this virtually?’… I say no we can’t do it virtually, we can get so far virtually but before we have a real good drink and a good meal and a good social chat at length we are not going to be a ‘real team’…We can then use technology to maintain it (cited Nandhakumar 1999: 53).

Echoing Boden, this study suggests that personalised trust relationships are essential for virtual team-working, and while personalised trust relationships can be to some degree sustained virtually, face-to-face interactions and socialisation are required to establish trust in the first place (Nandhakumar 1999: 55).
Another example of how virtual teams depend upon face-to-face meetings is seen in Brown’s and O’Hara’s research on mobile workers (2003). The main reason why these workers are on the move is to meet people face-to-face. However, their meetings are far from formal and scheduled – accidental encounters with colleagues ‘on the road’ and back at the office are important for workers that spend most of their day without face-to-face exchanges of information, gossip and sociality: ‘The motivation of the mobile workers is to put themselves in a position that would increase the likelihood of ‘bumping into’ their co-workers. This networking was seen as their ‘bread and butter’ in terms of their long-term development of knowledge, which they could bring to bear on both current and future work situations’ (Brown and O’Hara 2003: 1573-1574).

Networking and showing one’s face seem more important to business meetings especially to those working in the ‘knowledge industries’. The ideal spaces of such multifaceted networking are places with a cultural buzz. Workplaces move away from the formal office occupied for work 9–5 to a ‘club’ full of informal conversation, brainstorming and gossip (Cairncross 1997: 41). Indeed new office buildings are increasingly designed around ‘club space’ that is more for meeting up on those intermittent days of co-presence (Thrift 2000; Laurier and Buckner 2004). Such business is moving back into the café scene two hundred years after Lloyds Insurance of London began in a coffee house and only later acquired its own office buildings. Starbucks plays a major role in this development, being perhaps the most visible global high street brand with 4,500 cafés in America and 1,500 in Europe. Laurier and Buckner analyse how stylised cafés are ‘busy meeting grounds’ where business people meet up and hang out with workmates and conduct informal meetings with clients and business partners (2004).

Wittel’s research noted above discusses how cities such as London and New York have a broad range of networking events and places in which the new media field intermittently catch up, socially and professionally, through quick exchanges of information and sociality (2001). In such networking places the distinctions between social life and professional life, friends, workmates and clients are blurred. There is a proliferation of urban places of cool, creative sociality and community where social networks do business and have fun while consuming good coffee and drink. Crucially, such face-to-face sociality and meeting places make small worlds of expressive sociality in otherwise impersonal ‘big worlds’:

I mean the beautiful thing about New York is that a lot of people know each other, help each other, introduce each other, network ultimately. And you can’t, a lot of people when they don’t see each other at these kinds of events, forget you. New York is small but at the same time it’s very big as well. You live in the same area, you don’t
meet each other all the time, so you somehow lose contact. So these meetings and these conferences for me are about being seen and seeing other people again, saying hello being sort of on the back of their mind and it’s usually like a two-minute conversation like how are you doing, how is your business and that is all it needs (cited in Wittel 2001: 67).

Indeed research upon new media professionals and the ‘creative class’ suggest that a city’s economic power and ability to attract investment and creative (new media) professionals rest upon whether they have a vibrant, tolerant and inclusive cultural scene where people can network, easily meet new people and bump into like-minded people in small-world ways and yet live independent lives (Pratt 2002; Florida 2002). As cities are increasingly expected to have ‘buzz’, to be creative, and to generally bring forth powers of invention and intuition, so the active engineering of the affective register of cities is developed. Cities must exhibit intense expressivity to attract creative people that in turn attract innovative companies. Florida’s studies show that cities’ economic powers depend upon their level of ‘cultural capital’, that is, their tolerance, inclusiveness and cultural buzzness. Cities with a vibrant cultural scene, high mobility and dense concentrations of immigrants, gays and bohemian people are best at attracting the ‘creative class’ that in turn attracts capital; companies follow people and not the other way round (Florida 2002; Thrift 2004: 58).

3.3 Virtual meetings

In this section we consider whether and to what degree virtual ‘meetings’ can substitute for physical co-presence, still mainly using the business-oriented literature (this is also considered in the next chapter in a somewhat different way). We cannot ignore communication technologies and portray communication purely as a sequence of face-to-face-encounters within specific fixed physical spaces. ‘As many HP virtual team members work at home, or on the road, mobile technologies such as cell phones and wireless networks make it possible to conduct virtual meetings from (almost) anywhere, anytime’ (Jones, Oyung, Pace 2002).

Rather differently, Hiller and Tara discuss how diasporic websites are important ‘meeting places’ to gain ‘new ties’, sustain ‘old ties’ and recuperate ‘lost ties’:

The Newfoundland Kitchen has always been a meeting place for family and friends to exchange thoughts and news, the center of any social event, sing-a-long or party. We would like for you to use the kitchen to meet new friends and keep in touch with old friends, thank people for acts of kindness, wish them a happy birthday or anniversary … So come on in, help yourself to a cup of tea, pull up a chair and enjoy the company (2004: 742).
First then, with the unprecedented diffusion of mobile phones social scientists have begun to take telecommunications seriously (Katz and Aakhus 2002a, b; Licoppe 2004). Research shows that the longer the geographical distance between people the longer they talk (see Licoppe 2004). Immigrants, people with family members abroad and long-distance couples frequently engage in lengthy and recurrent telephone conversations; transnational connectivity through cheap telephone calls is at the heart of their lives (Holmes 2004; Pribilsky 2004; Vertovec 2004). Long distance calls seem to resemble physical meetings: they are lengthy turn-taking encounters through which gossip is shared, troubles are talked through, previous meetings are evaluated, solidarity is expressed, roles affirmed and future meetings arranged. They are the best substitute for physical meetings when these cannot take place.

Future landline telephone meetings are likely to be more meeting-like as ICT enables ‘audio conferences’ that can involve everything from 3 or 4 family members to hundreds of business people. Microsoft’s programme NetMeeting allow such ‘Internet telephony gatherings’ for free (if broadbanded) no matter where one’s friends or family members happen to be.

At BT teleconferencing is used by 92% of all staff and half of these participate five or more times per month. BT’s 108,000 staff made 350,000 audio-conference calls in 2003. The majority of these meetings last up to an hour and typically involve 6-7 participants. 52% relevant BT staffs are definite that their last teleconference replaced a face-to-face meeting, while only 5% said that it helped in scheduling a future face-to-face meeting. Thus BT conducted thousands of meetings without any associated journeys. In terms of petrol alone, the cost saved by BT is around £6m a year. More generally, most companies that promote teleconferencing report reductions of between 10-30% in overall travel expenses (Cairns et al. 2004: 293-295).

Indeed Boden’s romanticised view of face-to-face interaction and eye contact overlooks how the visual sense can reduce trust and engender superficial encounters relying up outward signs. This issue is interestingly addressed within an internal Hewlett-Packard article:

However, there are situations where virtual meetings are preferable (for reasons above and beyond limiting travel). For example, it’s more difficult to form first-impression stereotypes about someone in a virtual meeting. We recently received an e-mail from an HP [Hewlett Packard] employee confined to a wheelchair. The writer commented that meeting virtually is preferable for him because people can’t form an impression of him based on his disability (Jones, Oyung, Pace 2002).

The highlighting of bodily attraction and appearance in face-to-face meetings is replaced by textual and poetic adroitness in on-line meetings, and this can be an advantage for those
whose physical appearance is not their best ‘selling point’ or, more positively put, that are interested in knowing ‘whole people’ rather than ‘performances of appearance’. This may partly explain the apparent popularity of the Internet for dating and texting (sending SMS messages) among young people. While text messages, emails and cyberspaces can be seen as impoverished media for the presentation of the self because of their reduced communication cues, they afford new opportunities for self-disclosure, control or flirting:

Text messaging [and emails] may be one strategy for teenagers [and everybody else!] to present their more courageous selves. The corporeal presentation of the self has been filtered out, and the communicative device enables more control over the presentation of the self and message content. A less than successful attempt at this type of communication can easily be passed over referring to the playful quality of text messages, thus, to employ the Goffmanian term, elegantly withdrawing from the stage (Oksman and Turttiainen 2004: 326; see also Henderson and Gilding 2004).

However, this provides a one-sided account stressing the ‘positive’ elements of this sort of ‘courageous’ interaction where people more or less secretly can play with identities. There are problematic aspects to this virtual presentation of the self. There are for example widespread public concerns about grooming by Internet contact of young teenagers by mature (potentially paedophile) adults; bullying in schools by text messages; and offensive junk emails of especially sexual content and so on.

Another form of virtual meeting format is web-conferencing or data conferencing. Data conferencing is a way for students, colleagues, collaborators and clients to digitally exchange and work upon presentations, documents, texts, graphs and images in real time without rubbing shoulders. Data conferencing through NetMeeting is reported to be widely used at HP (Jones, Oyung, Pace 2002), while used by only 13% of BT’s staff (Cairns et al. 2004: 290).

The most complete form of virtual meeting, video conferencing, allows facial appearance and ‘facework’, and it is the form of virtual meeting most resembling face-to-face meetings. While video conferences do substitute some face-to-face meetings and physical travel, an Economist article concludes that while they ‘are often seen as a cheaper alternative to travel, they are better understood as … middle ground between a phone call and a face-to-face meeting … videoconferencing is a perfect second tool after the first handshake’ (Standage 2004). Along similar lines, Collis argues that ‘video-conferencing is less about saving money on travel and more about global team working. It enables people to be brought into meetings who might not normally attend if they had to travel’ (2000: 68).
So far however videoconferencing is a thinner version of physical meeting in terms of bodily idiom and sociality. One cannot sense much of the client’s office space, shake their hand, have sustained eye contact, observe all bodily expressions, taste their coffee, access their generosity, or finalise a deal over dinner overlooking the Manhattan skyline. It is in other words a weaker medium to get to know someone. So videoconferences are not yet like face-to-face meetings.

Thus while virtual conferences will substitute for some face-to-face business travel it seems more likely that virtual meetings will be used to supplement traditional meetings, lectures, plenary sessions and conferences (Cairns et al. 2004: 290). Moreover, face-to-face and virtual encounters are not separate worlds. Thus while participants meet in a disembodied virtual space, virtual meetings are real experiences taking place in physical locations; participants sip coffee, try to make themselves comfy in the chair, get nervous, excited and bored and so and so (on real experiences in cyberspace, see Miller and Slater 2000).

Further, mobile technology also affects the way that people interact when face-to-face. Face-to-face meetings transform into face-to-interface interactions when computer documents are worked upon, PowerPoint presentations begin, mobile phones ring and so on. Face-to-face meetings are mediated and always connected to other meetings; they are typified by ‘absent presence’ (Gergen 2002). As Wittel says: ‘it is impossible to separate face-to-face interactions from interactions over distance. In urban spaces the idea of an uninterrupted face-to-face sociality, disentangled from technological devices, is becoming a myth. More and more, we are experiencing an integration of long-distance communication in our realms of face-to-face interaction … It is hard to imagine a dinner of, let’s say, four businessmen without a mobile ringing’ (2001: 70). We are increasingly ‘face-to-face-to-mobile-phone’ as people bring their mobile phones even when meeting socially (Katz and Aakhus 2002a: 2). Plant indeed notes how:

Several Birmingham entrepreneurs say they use their mobiles as means of deliberately absenting themselves from their present environments and so keeping other people at bay: ‘If I arrive at a meeting where I don’t know anyone, I play for time and composure by doing things with my mobile’. This sends out other messages to the room as well: it says that one is busy and not to be disturbed, and temporarily extends one’s personal space (2000: 62).

We may say that face-to-face meetings are becoming partly virtual meetings.

Mobile phone cultures generate small worlds of perpetual catching up and small talk on the move, blurring distinctions between presence and absence. An extensive Cellnet-funded study
by Social Issues Research Centre suggest mobile phoning and texting are about networked gossiping, ‘anytime, anyplace, anywhere’, of living in ‘connected presence’ with one’s more or less dispersed social networks (Fox 2001). Perpetual gossip at-a-distance help people to come to terms with living in fast-paced and fragmented worlds where people less often physically bump into each other. Overall Fox argues that:

We no longer live in the kind of small, close-knit tribes or communities … where we would naturally be in daily contact with the members of our social network … Most of us no longer enjoy the cosiness of a gossip over the garden fence. We may not even know our neighbours’ names, and communication is often limited to a brief, slightly embarrassed nod, if that. Families and friends are scattered … We are constantly on the move, spending much of our time commuting to and from work either among strangers on trains and buses, or alone and isolated in our cars … [before the mobile phone] there was no telephonic equivalent of the regular brief and breezy encounters in a village or small community, where frequent passing exchanges – such as: ‘Hello, nice day isn’t it?’, ‘Yes, lovely – oh, how’s your Mum?’, ‘Much better, thanks’, ‘Oh good – see you later then’ – ensured that everyone felt connected to their social and support network … Mobile phones are re-creating the more natural, humane communication patterns of pre-industrial times: we are using space-age technology to return to stone-age gossip (2001).

So widespread mobile phone cultures enable individualised yet connected small worlds of communication, in the midst of vast complex worlds of absence, distance and disconnection. Even when people are absent they can remain in communicative propinquity with their social networks, of work, family and friendship.

3.4 De-exoticising travel

In the next chapter we see how in the last decade or so there have been striking increases in business travel, tourist travel and migration, and in communications at-a-distance. The rich societies of the West and North have experienced ‘time-space compression’ as people travel to and connect with absent others faster, more conveniently and more cheaply than before (Harvey 1989).

This section shows that studies of tourists are relevant here because travel, visits and hospitality have moved centre stage to many people’s lives. We demonstrate that practices and meanings of tourist travel multiply and move into other aspects of mobility and social life – through business travel, migration, family life and friendship. Much travel is increasingly concerned with (re)producing social relations – with giving and receiving the hospitality of
close friends, workmates and family members living elsewhere and fulfilling social obligations through attending Christmas parties, birthdays, weddings, funerals and so on.

Statistical data partly documents this changing significance of travel to visit friends and relatives. World Tourism Organisation statistics show that in 2001 there were 154m international arrivals for ‘VFR [visiting friends and relatives] health, religion, other’, compared with 74m in 1990. The average annual growth has been 8.5%. In the same period trips undertaken for ‘leisure, recreation and holidays’ only increased by 4.2% per year. In 1990 there were five times more ‘leisure, recreation and holidays’ travellers than ‘VFR, health, religion, other’ travellers; in 2001 this reduced to little more than twice as many. (http://www.world-tourism.org/facts/trends/purpose.htm).

The turn to what we can call ‘social’ travel is also seen in recent international tourist arrivals to the UK. While holiday visits to the UK fell 1.8m to 8m between 1999-2003, visits to friends or relatives increased by 1.3m to 7m. Thus when answering a pre-coded closed question, which allows only a single purpose, almost as many international visitors said they visited the UK to see their daughter or best friend as to view Big Ben or the Lake District (National Statistics 2004). Connections at-a-distance have become widespread and travel to meet with significant others is now more feasible as many places are quickly and cheaply within reach by car, train or budget airline.

Thus much leisure travel should not be seen as marginal, superfluous and by implication unnecessary. Rather travelling, visiting and hosting are necessary to much social life conducted at-a-distance. We take tourist travel to refer to all kind of non-work related physical travel that results in at least one overnight stay away from home, but for no more than a year. Tourist travel thus takes many cultural and organisational forms and it comprises both traditional journeys to extraordinary places and visits to significant others, hotels and private homes, and they will sometimes overlap in practice. Future travel surveys and tourist typologies need to be more sophisticated in their categories in order to capture how many journeys serve several purposes and combine various mode of travel, as when meetings or conferences are followed up by a weekend break, or migrants return home, or migrants receive guests from back home and so on. The term VFR tourism is also unsatisfactory because it underemphasizes the significances of visiting place, as if VFR tourism exclusively involves social travel.

Early tourism theory defined the nature of tourism through some rather fixed dualisms: leisure as opposed to work, away as opposed to home, authenticity as opposed to inauthenticity, the extraordinary as opposed to the ordinary, and guest as opposed to host (Cohen 1972;
MacCannell 1976; Smith 1978; Urry 1990/2002). These distinctions identified worthwhile places or moments of the ‘tourist gaze’ (Urry 1990/2002). The tourism escape was portrayed as special event (e.g. the annual summer holiday) taking place in contained places designed, regulated or preserved more or less specifically for tourism, such as resorts, sightseeing buses, hotels, attractions, paths, promenades and beaches. It was an escape from the ordinariness, commitments and alienation of home and a quest for more desirable and fulfilling places. Differences between tourists were explained in terms of the places they were attracted to and how they consumed them, visually or bodily, romantically or collectively, as high-cultural texts or liminal playgrounds or places were the active body comes to life (Urry 1995).

However, this concentration upon place neglects issues of sociality especially with significant others as well as obligatory social events (Kaplan 1996; Wearing and Wearing 1997). Thus there are very strong obligations to family and friends. 70% of people surveyed in the UK agree that ‘people should keep in contact with close family members even if they don’t have much in common’ (McGlone, Park and Roberts 1999: 152). There are social customs, obligations, and activities that substantial majorities identify as among the top necessities of life. These events include: celebrations on special occasions such as Christmas (83%) and attending weddings and funerals (80%), visits to friends or family (84%), especially to those in hospital (Gordon et al. 2000).

Fulfilling social obligations often requires physical co-presence, performing rituals and sustained quality time, often at a very particular moment. These obligations involve not only face-to-face talk but also sharing a well-prepared Christmas turkey, having an anniversary dinner, exchanging birthday gifts, sipping champagne on New Years Eve and so on. If these rituals do not take place at their right time, they cease to be meaningful. As Warde and Martens say about significant family meals: ‘it is important to be present, if it is possible, because the meal symbolises a socially significant, temporally specific occasion. To have eaten the same meal the day before or the day after would not be a satisfactory substitute, even if many of the same people would be present’ (2000: 217).

Telephone calls, text messages or courier-delivered flowers only substitute for a journey to, and physical presence at, a church, hospital or Christmas dinner, if people have a good excuse for not being able to attend. Communications will often be too one-dimensional to fulfil significant social obligations.

Fulfilling social obligations required relatively little long distance travel when walking and cycling were the major modes of travel and social networks were socially tightly knit and spatially dense. As discussed in Chapter 1, research shows that people now socialise less
frequently with each other on a weekly basis, seemingly indicating a decline in social capital (McGlone Park and Roberts 1999; Putnam 2000). Yet these studies overlook how travel may counteract this. And when distant friends or family members do meet up, each visit is likely to last longer. People compensate for the intermittence of meetings and the cost of transport (time, money and weariness) by spending a whole day or weekend or week(s) together, often staying in each other’s homes. In other words, frequent yet short visits may turn into intermittent yet longer periods of face-to-face co-presence, of hosting and visiting. Obligations of visiting and showing hospitality become central to tourist travel and indeed social life at-a-distance, as cheaper and faster travel compress stretched out networks. Given that mobility is integral to social life, then the social sciences can no longer equate closeness, ties and intensity of communion with geographical nearness and daily or weekly interactions. Tourist-type travel enters the lives of business people and global professionals, second homeowners and their friends and families, exchange students and gap-year workers abroad, migrants and (former) refugees, people with distant friends and kin, and even otherwise immobile people with friends and families in distant places. Tourism is less the privilege of the rich few, but more something involving and affecting many people, as otherwise immobile people might occasionally visit or host distant kin or be heartbroken when they remain at-a-distance. Tourists indeed we can note are no longer found only in hotels, sightseeing buses, museums, beaches and other places on the beaten track, but also within inner city flats, suburban homes, local supermarkets and everyday places (Franklin and Crang 2001).

Thus tourism visits are often essential to the lives of migrants, to diasporic cultures and generally to family life and friendship (Coles and Timothy 2004; Williams and Hall 2000). ‘Many forms of migration’, as Williams and Hall say, ‘generate tourism flows, in particular through the geographical extension of friendship and kinship networks. Migrants may become poles of tourist flows, while they themselves become tourists in returning to visit friends and relations in their areas of origin’ (2000: 7). O’Reilly shows how migration and tourism is complexly folded into each other in the case of British home owners on Spain’s Costa del Sol (2003; see also Caletrio 2004; Gustafson 2002). Retirement migration from northern Europe to tourist destinations in southern Europe generates much tourist travel. On average, retired immigrants receive 7 visits a year from the UK and 2 out of 3 of these migrants ‘return home’ at least once a year (Williams, King, Warnes, Patters 2000: 40-41). Such visits are clustered around Christmas, holiday periods and important family events (birthday, wedding, funerals and so on), indicating that they are tied into obligations of family life. And it has been documented how tourism is a major facilitator of subsequent migration (Oigenblick and Kirschenbaum 2002).
Migration is a far from one-way journey of leaving one’s homeland behind, but often a two-way journey between two sets of ‘homes’ (Ahmed, Castaneda, Fortier, Sheller 2003; Baldassar 2001). ‘The migration process appears to require a return, a journey back to the point of departure’ (Goulborne 1999: 193). This is particularly the case with many migrants that are members of distinct diasporas. Diaspora entails the notion that ‘the old country’ where one is no longer living, exerts some claim upon one’s identity and loyalty, and that there are desires and expectations to return there and to sustain networks. While diasporas traditionally involved a desire for permanent return, today’s migrants can connect with their homeland through frequent virtual and imaginative travel and especially through occasional visits.

In Trinidad, for example, it is said that one can really only be a proper ‘Trini’ by going abroad and returning home occasionally to visit friends and kin. About 60% of nuclear families are thought to have at least one family member living abroad (Miller and Slater 2000: 12, 36). 61% of the journeys undertaken by Korean-New Zealanders are to Korea, followed by journeys to Australia and Japan where many Korean-New Zealanders have kin members (Kang and Page 2000: 57). Sutton’s ethnography shows how cheaper, easier and faster travel have enabled large-scale family reunion parties amongst Afro-Caribbean migrants, assembling in one significant Caribbean place dispersed family members from most North Atlantic countries (2004). At many gatherings, family members living abroad will outnumber Caribbean-based members. The numbers of participants in these events range from fifty to 250, indicating the massive transnational tourist travel that such events generate. Mason demonstrates how English people with Pakistani ancestors regularly visit Pakistan to be co-present with their kin, to keep their family networks alive (2004a). Young people in the Caribbean and Pakistani communities are especially encouraged by mothers and grandmothers to travel back to their villages of origin (Stephenson 2002; 2004a).

The social obligations implicated within diasporic cultures are also often intricately intertwined with obligations to visit certain places, especially monuments, religious sites and places of cultural victory or loss. Each year more than 100,000 Israel and American Jews visit former Nazi concentration camps in Poland (Ioanides and Ioanides 2004). Duval’s research on return visits among Caribbean migrants, provide examples of how parents of Caribbean origin feel obliged to keep in touch with their homeland and to introduce it personally to their children (2004a, 2004b).

Bærenholdt, Haldrup, Larsen and Urry also highlight that most tourists do not only bring their bodies but also their loved ones with them when they are on holiday (2004). Tourists not only encounter other bodies and places but also travel with significant others. Tourist places are
valued for their ability to afford intimate proximities. Thus, ‘Tourists are not merely searching
for authenticity of the Other. They also search the authenticity of, and between, themselves’
(Wang 1999: 364). Holidays render the family members available and present to each other.
They are together, not separated by work, commuting trips, schools, homework, leisure
activities and so on. So it seems that families are most at home when away-from-home.
Tourists consume places and perform togetherness. Families on holiday invest much work in
staging and enacting a happy social life especially for the camera (as documented by Larsen
2005; see also Haldrup and Larsen 2003).

It also seems to be that much tourist travel even to typical tourist places is about visiting
friends and family members. Kyle and Chick’s ethnography of an American fair demonstrates
how families repeatedly return to the fair because it has turned into a meeting place where
people maintain precious relationships with family members and friends living elsewhere
(2004). In similar fashion, Caletrio’s study of Spanish tourists in Costa Blanca shows that
many are repeat visitors who have established strong relationships with other regular visitors.
For them, Costa Blanca is a ‘familiar place’ full of memories and meeting places where
dispersed social networks experience intense co-presence for some weeks or more each year
(Caletrio 2004; Pons 2003).

Much tourist travel thus involves a particular combination of places and significant people;
most tourists take a trip with significant others (unlike solitary business travellers) and they
might visit or meet up with friends or kin. Few tourists thus see the world as a solitary flâneur
without an intended destination. European people travel to see their parents in their old
hometown or their migrated parents in Spain or their best friend now living in Sydney or an
old university friend now lecturing in Berlin or their daughter studying in Toronto. So when
people travel to friends or kin they simultaneously travel to particular places that are
experienced through the host’s social networks and accumulated knowledge of the cultural
scene or of nature. Another way of expressing this is by saying that sociality matters in
sightseeing and places matter in visiting friends and family.

3.5 Conclusion

Thus we demonstrated here the sheer scale and organisational importance of co-present
meetings, and hence also of the travel that goes with them. Further we showed that such
meetings are significantly about establishing and maintaining networks, and indeed that
places are increasingly about providing opportunities for meeting and networking. We also
examined the possibilities of substituting various kinds of communications and virtual
encounters for physical meetings. Overall we concluded that there are some possibilities here but many things get done within co-present meetings that mean they are here to stay for a good time yet; and hence that physical travel is also here to stay. Finally, we considered how tourism seems to be increasingly about co-present meetings and less about travelling just to the exotic. We showed the importance of meetings taking place within families, especially of migrants and diasporas, and that tourist-type travel is really as much about sociability as it is a search for exotic places. Various critiques were provided of existing ways of collecting data related to travel and meetings.

Overall we set out various reasons why physical travel is necessarily intertwined with the very fabric of a rich, complex and occasionally mobile social life. This will be explored further in the next chapter on travel per se.
4. Mobilities

We start with a discussion of five ‘mobilities’ that support social networks and generate travel demand in the contemporary world. While most research focuses upon one of these it is crucial to examine the interconnections between these different mobilities. Following that we briefly set out a framework for establishing just why people physically travel given the array of alternatives now available. We then note some evident inequalities of access to travel and hence of the capacity to meet up. We also discuss the scale of travel, and how the distribution of travel is highly unequal. We finally consider the substitution and complementarity between communications and physical travel within the specific context of mobile workers, teleworkers and the coordination of everyday mobility and meetings.

4.1 Five interdependent mobilities

The five interdependent mobilities are (see for more detail, Urry 2000, 2003):

- Physical travel of people for work, leisure, family life, pleasure, migration, and escape. Travel is embodied as people need to be physically in the same space as various others, including work-mates, business colleagues, friends, partner or family, or they bodily encounter some particular landscape or townscape, or are physically present at a particular live event. Travel results in intermittent moments of physical proximity to particular peoples, places or events and that proximity is felt to be obligatory, appropriate, desirable or inevitable.

- Physical movement of objects to producers, consumers, and retailers. This transports faraway objects and goods to where people live and/or work. This especially results from how the world is placed on display and then consumed within local supermarkets, restaurants, shopping malls and so on.

- Imaginative travel elsewhere through memories, texts, images, TV and films (see Larsen 2004). This travel will often substitute for physical transport, as analysed in de Botton’s *The Art of Travel* (2002). There are one billion TV sets worldwide. TV enables people to attend live events without leaving the armchair or the local pub. Over the last two years there has been a decline in the numbers of football supporters that travel to see their team play away while there has been a noticeable increase in supporters that attend away games, at the local pub (http://www.footballeconomy.com/rep_oct_16.htm).

- Virtual travel often in real time on the Internet, so transcending geographical and social distance. By 2003, two-thirds of the UK adult population are Internet users. People are able to ‘plug into’ global networks of information through which they can ‘do’ things to at least certain objects (especially with increasing bandwidth),
without their bodies having to travel physically. If people bank electronically they are able to access their money in many parts of the world; if people want to work on texts with others they can do so from any networked computer; if people want to buy a book they can order it at Amazon and save the trip to the local bookstore or specialised bookstore a good drive away. Some commentators suggest that virtual travel may mean the end to traditional tourism: ‘Why fly to a Las Vegas casino-hotel when one can play the slots and other games of chance on line? Why go to the racetrack when one can bet on the races over the Internet?’ (Ritzer 2001: 147; see also Larsen 2004; Molz 2006; Rojek 1997).

Communicative travel through person-to-person messages via letters, postcards, birthday and Christmas cards, telegrams, telephones, faxes, emails, instant messages, email and videoconferences. Social network members with Internet-access are but an email away and members with mobile phones stay connected even when they are on the move. Communicative travel also allows the digital transport of paper, documents and photographs as attachments to email, thus substituting the postal service. Emails are particular powerful in travelling the world: they travel long distances as fast as short ones; they travel equally fast and equally cheap to multiple destinations (‘lists’) as single ones. Email addresses books, lists and practices of sending, replying and not least forwarding emails mean that news, gossip, jokes, job information, conference calls and scandals can travel the world in a small-worldly way with incredible speed (see Watters 2004: 114-145, for the swift travelling of a Nike scandal). Moreover, there are now more mobile phones than landlines and, in May 2003, according to National Statistics 4, 75% of adults in UK own or use a mobile phone, and in 2001 the total number of mobile phones worldwide for the first time surpassed the number of TVs (Katz and Aakhus 2002a; Geser 2004).

The overall volume of international telephone calls increased at least tenfold between the early 1982 and 2001 (Vertovec 2004: 223). ‘In December 2004, 2.4 billion text messages were sent in Britain as the traditional Christmas card was dumped in favour of a seasonal text message’ 5. Perhaps more than anything else, the last few years have seen a huge increase in a new kind of writing culture with the popularity of email and text messaging. The triumph of this new writing culture results from its fast and frictionless movement through social and geographical space; it seems designed for those on the move (Geser 2004).

Most social research focuses upon one of these separate mobilities, such as passenger transport or mobile telephony or the Internet, and generalises from that. This project by contrast seeks to examine the interconnections between these different mobilities that seem central to the making and maintaining of near and faraway connections and networks. Thus the mobile phone shows how these different mobilities intersect. It seems that few people

5 http://www.text.it/mediacentre/default.asp?idPageID=132
these days undertake physical travel without their mobile phone (probably manufactured in China or another low-cost production country) to fill those empty moments at bus stops, to kill time on long journeys by chatting away and to organise meeting places and times. So as an object the mobile phone itself travels, and it affords communicative mobility, as well as imaginative mobility and virtual mobility (through making and transporting photographs and video sequences).

In the rest of this chapter we discuss various dimensions of the physical travel of people bringing out connections with other mobilities adumbrated above.

4.2 Scale of travel

In 2004 there were a record 760m legal international passenger arrivals. This compares with 25m in 1950, 700m in 2002 with a predicted 1b by 2010 and more than 1.5b in 2020. Travel and tourism is the largest industry in the world accounting for 11.7% of world GDP, 8% of world exports and 8% of employment. Side-by-side with global tourists and travellers are 31m refugees and 100m international migrants worldwide. Such exiles are fleeing from famine, war, torture, persecution and genocide, as economic and social inequalities and consequential displacements of population have magnified in recent years and have forced travel upon many (Papastergiadis 1999: 10, 41, 54).

Such patterns of physical travel seem to be affecting almost everywhere. The World Tourism Organisation publishes tourism statistics for 200 countries, with almost nowhere not being either/both a significant sender and receiver of visitors, although the flows are extremely uneven. Whereas disposable incomes in Western Europe and the United States have substantially increased within recent decades, airfares in real terms have declined (Frånberg and Vilhemson 2003: 1755). The introduction of no-frills/low cost airlines has made air travelling much cheaper and more widespread. Thus ‘no-frills is the fastest-growing sector of the airline industry in Europe, which, analysts say, could triple in the next five years’ (Collis cited in Davidson and Cope 2003: 43). Airfares in UK fell by 30% in 2002 (Tarry 2003: 82). While the costs of cars have stagnated during the last decades, the quality adjusted purchase costs also continued to decline (Axhausen 2005: 3-4).

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7 www.world-tourism.org.facts/metho.html
People in Britain are travelling five times further per year than in the 1950s. This figure is expected to double again by 2025. This principally results so far from car travel which has set in train novel kinds of family life, community, leisure, the pleasures of movement and so on, principally involving new movement and not the replacement of other transport by the car (Adams 1999: 12; Vigar 2002; Urry 2004; Featherstone, Thrift, Urry 2005). UK citizens currently make around 1000 trips a year, a figure that seem fairly constant (Doyle and Nathan 2001). Most trips go to destinations which could not be reached when cycles and trains were the main forms of transport⁸. In the late 1890s the average commuting distance was 3.6 km and took 17.7 minutes. In 1930s and 1940s when public transport dominated the average commuting distance increased to around 7-8 km and took around 34 minutes to complete. By the 1990s when around one in two commuting trips are made by car the average one-way journey to work had increased to 14.6 km and took 34.5 minutes. Thus between the 1930s and the 1990s, while commuting distances more than doubled, commuting times increased by less than five minutes (Pooley and Turnbull 2000a: 366; Pooley and Turnbull 2000b).

Thus people are travelling further and faster but neither more often nor spending much more time actually on the road. On average, each person travelled 6.833 miles in 2003 compared with 4.476 miles in 1972/1973 (DfT 2004: Table 1). The average time spent travelling has remained at around one hour per person for the past three decades, as has the average trip time of around 22 minutes (DfT 2004; Lyons and Urry 2005; Schafer and Victor 2000: 271).

The UK Innovation and Performance Unit indicates that most everyday journeys take place within a radius of eight or nine miles, so day-to-day physical travel is relatively local (Donnovan, Pilch, Rubenstein 2002). However, 8-9 mile journeys or commuting 10-11 miles (the average commuting distance) are for most impossible by feet (by modern western standards). They both require fit and keen cyclists, or a well-serviced public transport system. So car cultures transform what we mean by ‘local’ and indeed what are the short distances to travel.

This same report also shows that people mostly drive to see friends and family members – almost 40 miles a week. So most travel we might say is ‘social’ travel. Similar German research indicates that leisure and holiday are the most significant trip with respect to miles traveled, and the meeting of friends and relatives is the most common reason for traveling (Schlich et all 2004a: 225). Thus many people will drive fairly long distances to see their non-local friends, a couple times each month. So while most people on a day-to-day basis make

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⁸ In the UK today only 2 per cent of journeys are by bike, compared with 20 percent in a bike-friendly country such as Denmark (Independent 06/02/05).
short trips they intermittently embark on longer leisure journeys to socialise with others at-a-distance. 47% of all long distance journeys in UK are to visit family and friends (for a couple of days) (Dateline 2003: 17, 57; see also Schilch, Simma, Axhausen 2003). And almost half the UK population travels several hundred miles or more when they go abroad for their foreign holidays. This again illustrates how we cannot determine the geographical mobility of people and their networks without examining intermittent tourist-type long distance travel.

4.3 Why travel?

How can we explain these increases in the scale of physical travel? It is evident that people undertake long distance travel for many reasons and under different circumstances: attending business meetings, conferences and job interviews; commuting to work; going abroad to study; migrating; escaping poverty; war and torture; visiting friends and family members; embarking on pilgrimages, going on holiday and so on. The developing and fulfilling of such activities and networks means that travel is necessary for social life, enabling complex connections to be made between workmates or leisure groups or crime networks or professional associations or voluntary associations or family or friends. There are various social obligations and burdens of apparently free mobility (Shove 2002). People’s patterns of travel are choreographed by circumstances not completely of their own making.

We can summarise these obligations and motivations of travel within the following five-fold schema:

First, travel occurs for legal, economic and familial obligations. These are either to specific persons (bride to groom) or to generic types of people (all who knew the late Mr Smith). These formal obligations include travel to go to work; to attend a family event such as a wedding, christening, or funeral, Christmas, Easter and so on; to meet a legal obligation by visiting a lawyer or court; to have to visit a school or hospital or university or public office; or to attend a job interview.

Second, there are less formally prescribed social obligations involving very strong normative expectations of presence and attention. This mutual presence enables each to read what the other seems to be really thinking, to observe their body language, to hear ‘first hand’ what they have to say, to sense directly their overall response, to undertake some emotional work. Such social obligations to friends or family are essential for developing those relations of trust that persist during often lengthy periods of distance and even solitude. These social obligations are associated with obligations to spend moments of ‘quality time’ often within very specific locations often involving lengthy travel away from normal patterns of work and
family life. There is often a quite distinct temporal feel to the moment, separate from and at
odds with the normal processes of work, leisure and family life.

Third, there are object obligations. Such obligations include the necessity to be co-present to
sign contracts or to work on or to see various objects, technologies or written texts. Such
obligations to be co-present with objects often necessitates being within a specific kind of
environment and this may necessitate particular kind of design, security, comfort and
ambience.

Fourth, there are obligations to place, to sense a place or a certain kind of place directly.
Many places need to be seen for oneself, to be experienced directly: to meet at a particular
house say of one's childhood or visit a particular restaurant or walk along a certain river
valley or energetically climb a particular hill or capture a good photograph or feel ones hands
touching a rock-face and so on. It is only then that we know what a place is really like.

Fifth, there are event obligations – to experience a particular live event programmed to
happen at a specific moment, including political rallies, concerts, plays, matches, celebrations,
film premieres, festivals and so on. Each of these generates intense moments of co-presence.
This is a kind of travel to place where timing is everything. These events cannot be missed
and they set up enormous demands for mobility at very specific moments (but they can
sometimes be substituted by watching TV).

4.4 Inequalities in travel

The opportunities for travel are highly unequal. Being on the move has radically different
implications for the businessman, the all-inclusive package tourist, the imported sex worker
and the backpacker. Access to (the right sort of) mobility has become a major stratifying
factor, as Bauman has described:

Alongside the emerging planetary dimensions of business, finance, trade and information flow, a ‘localising’, space-fixing process is set in motion …What appears as globalisation for some means localisation for others; signalling a new freedom for some, upon many others it descends as an uninvited and crucial fate. Mobility climbs to the rank of the uppermost among the coveted values – and the freedom to move, perpetually a scarce and unequally distributed commodity, fast become the main stratifying factor of our late-modern or postmodern times (1998: 2).
In the UK the richest quintile travels 3.5 times further than the poorest quintile. One half of UK adults took a flight during 2001, with one half travelling once, one quarter travelling twice and one quarter travelling three or more times a year (Lethbridge 2002). While if international mobility was equally distributed in Sweden each person would go abroad once a year (Frändberg and Wilhelmson 2003: 1762). In fact in Sweden a small group of hypermobile people, comprising a mere 3%, makes almost 25% of international journeys partly because they make 60% of international business trips. This group make more than five international journeys per year. Since ‘hypermobility’ is closely related to business travel, males, high-income earners and city-dwellers dominate this category. Almost half the population in Sweden do not fly at all each year, while 28% embark upon 1 non-domestic journey. So in terms of international mobility, 75% of Swedes are ‘nonmobile’ or only ‘slightly mobile’ (Frändberg and Wilhelmson 2003: 1762-1763).

Moreover around 45% of the UK population lives and works within 5 miles of where they were born (Doyle and Nathan 2001) (this does not necessarily mean that they have always lived there; see Chapter 6). These are mainly people with lower educational levels, whereas graduates are more likely to live elsewhere.

To summarise, people with higher level qualifications are also more mobile, especially graduates. ‘Only 12% of graduates live in the same local authority as they were born – compared with 44% of the general population. There may be two reasons for this. First the act of going to university may break the link with the person’s parental region. Second, the labour market for graduates is a national one – with jobs advertised in the national press and specialist publications. For those with lower skill levels, jobs tend to be advertised locally, and people tend to find out about jobs through informal networks of friends and family’ (Donnovan, Pilch, Rubenstein 2002).

Other research indicates ‘stranded mobility’ occurs for those living in poverty (Grieco and Raje 2004). Many low-income housing areas have experienced a cut back in transport services. At the same time, bus fares have increased considerably and made buses relatively more expensive than travelling by car. This is so despite the fact that ‘those without cars usually need more time, greater effort and pay a higher marginal cost to reach the same destination as people with cars’ (DETR Report, cited in Kenyon, Lyons, Rafferty 2002: 220). This has major consequences for these people and lone-mother households in particular, of which the majority live in poverty and without a car (Allan and Crow 2001: 136). Lack of reliable, frequent and well-connected transport reduces access and connectivity to social
networks and necessary social activities. For instance, ‘there is evidence that choice of job, or even the possibility of taking a job at all … can be constrained by mobility difficulties, in particular for part-time and shift work, low skilled and low paid jobs’ (Kenyon, Lyons, Rafferty 2002: 10). There is clear evidence of ‘mobility divides’ in Western societies (Cass, Shove, Urry 2003, 2005; Schönfelder and Axhausen 2003). These inequalities can also be reinforced by the ‘digital divide’, with only 7% of households in the lowest income decile having access to the Internet compared with 71% in the highest decile. People and households facing physical mobility-related exclusion are also likely to suffer from virtual mobility-related exclusion (Kenyon, Lyons, Raferty 2002: 221). However, the ownership of mobile phones is an exception here, as virtually every (at least youngish) person in the UK possesses one (Katz and Aakhus 2002a).

4.5 Travelling and communicating

In this section we discuss whether communication technologies substitute for physical travel, being cheaper and faster. Are communication technologies a tool to reduce traffic congestion, air pollution, and many problems related to the burning of fossil fuel? The literature here is considerable (and some was discussed in the previous chapter in the context of meetings: see Cairncross 1997; Graham 1998; Mokhtarian 1990, 2003; Golob and Regan 2001; Vilhelmson and Thulin 2001; Cairns et al. 2004; Gillespie and Richardson 2004; Plaut 2004).

The relationship involves either substitution or complementarity. Plaut argues that transport researchers and professionals generally predict major substitution of transportation by communication via the Internet or the phone (2004: 163). Transport researchers argue that:

As we become busier, we will increasingly rely on IT to avoid unnecessary travel … Also, as we spend new time engaged in telecommunications, there will simply be less time available for other activities, including travel. Small effects by a very large number of persons will aggregate up to large effects on a system wide basis (Golob and Regan 2001: 114).

According to the substitution thesis, telecommunicating, teleconferencing, telemeeting, teleeducation (distance learning), telebanking, teleshopping and other telesubstitutions will replace corporeal travel (Mokhtarian 2003: 45). So this thesis is closely related to the idea that ‘geography is dead’ - distance no longer much matters.

The complementarity hypothesis involves the idea of enhancement and increased efficiency. Rather than replacing physical transport of people and objects, communication technologies
make the planning and coordination of travel more efficient and smoother. So rather than substituting for physical travel it will enhance its volume. To cite Plaut:

News of the demise of location and transportation appears be premature. Those who believe that advanced telecommunications and information technologies have made geography and distance irrelevant appear to be mistaken. If anything, more communications appear to be producing more an expanded use of the transportation system, and vice versa (2004: 165).

Communication objects and technologies potentially make journeys more effective in another sense too; they afford the transformation of planes, trains and even cars into workplaces, and wasteful travel-time into productive work-time (Brown 2002; Brown and O’Hara 2003; Laurier and Philo 2003, Laurier 2004a,b; Letherby and Reynolds 2003; Lyons and Urry 2005). As Laurier points out:

On my laptop I can carry my diary, my address book, several hundred downloaded articles, all my previous publications, the majority of my correspondence, grant application forms, an offline version of my website, a thousand or more photos, some of my favourites records, a few episodes of a TV show... In other words in my shoulder bag I can carry a large proportion of my office and study which in paper form and as vinyl LPs and video-cassettes would have filled a small van. How odd, really, to imagine that if academics could carry their libraries with them in a shoulder bag that they would travel less? (2004b).

So here mobile ICT technologies are seen as enabling people to be more mobile in relationship to work and leisure, to become ‘digital nomads’. Various workplace studies examine the spatial practices and communication technologies that mobile workers – ‘hot-deskers’ – carry out and employ to make non-workplaces such as cars, trains and waiting rooms workable, rather like offices (Heath, Knoblauch, Luff 2000; O’Hara, Sellen, Brown 2002; Brown and O’Hara 2003; Laurier and Philo 2003; Laurier 2004a,b). Hot-deskers do not have a permanent office and it is expected of them that they work not only at home and in clients’ offices but also on the move. Such mobile workers manage their working-in-travelling in such way that they plan their activities and work tasks according to the varied physical environments where they will work: ‘So all the e-mailing might be done when in the office, or all the reading done when on the train. In this respect we can see how place is an important determinant in the ordering of work activities for the mobile worker’ (Brown and O’Hara 2003: 1571).
The flexible car, the network-connected laptop computer, the mobile telephone are crucial in making places workable (Laurier 2004a). The first of these enables flexible transportation, the second one affords access to documents, files, and e-mails, while the third allows connectivity to other colleagues and clients (Brown and O’Hara 2003: 1576). The car is transformed into an office through its combination with the mobile phone and mobile computing, enabling the ‘car-assemblage’ to become a much more effective mobile office. Work materials are synchronised and connected up to other company members while one is on the road. The mobile phone and car-based telematics function as ‘actants’\(^9\), taking messages as voice mail, screening calls, and providing information about traffic delays and alternative routings (especially with the increasing merging of various car-based mobile communications). The mobile is regularly used to rearrange the day as traffic can impede the planned series of meetings and encounters (see Ling and Yttri 2002). Team working is achieved by the skilful use of mobile telephony so as to maintain connections and synchronise timetables both with those back at the office (including making meeting arrangements, dictating letters and so on), as well as with those others who are elsewhere on the road and with whom meetings can be arranged. Thus an essential practical temporal concern for mobile workers is to achieve synchronicity in events across time and space. Meetings might occur at motorway service stations, roadside cafes, pubs, restaurants and so on.

Interestingly, paper documents (printed agendas, printed emails, faxes, printed illustrations and so on) are crucial for mobile working and meetings. Mobile workers often read and make comments on hard copies rather than on the screen. Whereas laptops can be cumbersome and rigid in meeting situations, paper documents afford ‘a high level of micro-mobility … around the meeting space that made it a useful conversational resource’ (O’Hara, Sellen, Brown 2002: 78). They allow scribbling in margins, can be passed around a room, photocopied and so on (Brown and O’Hara 2003: 1576). Likewise, paper documents are frequently used for ad hoc reading activities between meetings and travelling. The paperless office is thus a myth in relationship to the mobile office.

The substitution and complementarity theses have been discussed intensively in relation to teleworking. An early study by Gillespie and Richardson concluded that some teleworking might enhance rather than substitute work-related travel, even though such workers do not commute on a daily basis to a permanent office:

\[\text{Despite the sophisticated supporting electronic networks, face-to-face meetings are still required, both with clients and with other team}^{9}\text{This is a technical term in the 'actor-network theory' (Law and Hassard 1999).}\]
members, but now instead of popping next door to meet work colleagues, or travelling a few miles to meet clients, workers have to travel up and down the motorway on a regular basis. We would therefore anticipate that team teleworking, in expanding the geographical spread of participants in the virtual work activity space, is likely to lead to new demands for travel and to substantial increases in the distances over which business travel takes place (Gillespie and Richardson 2004: 215).

A recent report for the Department for Transport (Cairns et al. 2004) shows how teleworking can also reduce work-related transport, not least with regard to commuting to and from the workplace. Because these employees (for example working for BT) were little engaged in face-to-face meetings, the kilometres avoided by not commuting into the office complex were saved by spending more time on the road to meet up with other home-working or tele-working colleagues and clients, as predicted by Gillespie and Richardson. It seems that the transport reducing effects of teleworking is predominately related to the types of service and knowledge jobs that, for shorter or longer periods, can be performed with a broadband connection, access to a computer network at work, telephone calls and perhaps teleconferencing but with little need for co-present meetings and thick communications. So managers and executives are still likely to work in a sea of face-to-face interactions within office complexes. It is lower-rung workers with routinised IT tasks that are likely to be forced to work more or less permanently from their home, as companies free up expensive office spaces. Such workers who already have experienced a de-personalisation of their communication practices with clients and costumers (from face-to-face to interface) now work in ‘de-personalised’ environments without much collegial interaction and support. Home working and even mobile teleworking can contribute further to what has been called the ‘uneven access to ordinary talk’ (Boden and Molotch 1994: 275).

In the next section we explore more broadly how communication technologies are intricately tied up with coordinating networks and everyday mobility.

4.6 Coordinating networks and travel

Although travel has both a spatial and a temporal dimension, transport and mobility research pays most attention to the spatial aspects and therefore to trains, ships, cars and planes. But travel is not merely about getting there but also of coordinating travel and arriving at the right time, at that specific moment when the meeting, match, wedding, funeral or dinner commence. Travel and meetings require systems of coordination and mobile communications that enable dispersed network members to bring together agendas, destinations and arrival
before and during travel (Townsend 2004; Jarvis 2005; Fortunati 2005). Travel is not so much a question of movement but rather of spacing and timing (Shove 2002). Coordinating travel or meetings are thus both a spatial and temporal practice, and, thus, space and time cannot be analysed separately when investigating mobility or social life more generally (Bauman 2000b; May and Thrift 2000). More generally, in societies where social networks are stretched out and distant connections are common, it is difficult to meet up spontaneously and networks much depend upon systems of coordination.

One way to understand this issue of coordination is through classical sociologist Georg Simmel’s idea that early twenty-century Berlin would come to a chaotic standstill if all the pocket watches were to go wrong at the same time (1903, 1997). Simmel writes that the modern city involves the ‘unexpectedness of onrushing impressions … With each crossing of the street, with the tempo and multiplicity of economic, occupational and social life’, he says that the city sets up a ‘deep contrast with small town and rural life with reference to the sensory foundations of psychic life’ (Simmel 1997: 175). In the modern city, a new precision comes to be necessary in social life. Agreements and arrangements need to demonstrate unambiguousness in timing and location. Life in the mobile onrushing city presupposes punctuality and this is reflected according to Simmel by the ‘universal diffusion of pocket watches’ (1997: 177):

If all clocks and watches in Berlin would suddenly go wrong in different ways, even if only by one hour, all economic life and communication of the city would be disrupted for a long time. Thus, the technique of metropolitan life is unimaginable without the most punctual integration of all activities and mutual relations into a stable and impersonal time schedule.

Simmel thus argues that metropolitan relationships are so complex and differentiated that without strict timekeeping systems and watch-obeying citizens there would be inextricable chaos (1997: 177). So the forming of a complex system of relationships means that activities have to be punctual, timetabled, rational, a system or ‘structure of the highest impersonality’ often involving much distance-keeping politeness (Simmel 1997: 178). Because of the scale of such distance and mobility in the metropolis there is a ‘brevity and scarcity of inter-human contacts’ (Simmel 1997: 183). According to Simmel, ‘one nowhere feels as lonely and lost as in the metropolitan crowd’ and public transport:

The feeling of isolation is rarely as decisive and intense when one actually finds oneself physically alone, as when one is a stranger, without relations, among many physically close persons, at a ‘party’ on a train or in the traffic of a large city (cited in Wolff 1950: 119).
While the early modern metropolis produced people with a ‘highly personal subjectivity’, it also produced objective systems that isolated people in ‘distance-keeping politeness’. Simmel’s work thus highlights how ‘personalisation’ depends upon complex systems and inflexible time.

The pocket watch was just one of many early modern time systems. The invention of organised leisure travel and tourism in the mid-nineteen century relied upon the standardisation of time through Greenwich Mean Time and timetables (Lash and Urry 1994; see also Green 2002; Klein 2004). Strict choreographies of clock time ensured that public transport, so dominant at that time, was predictable and that dispersed city-dwellers could meet up. So the objective time of pocket watches, timetables and Greenwich Mean Time and public transport were part of the same early modern hegemonic system of fast and punctual transportation. The modern society on the move moved to the commanding beats of modern clock time. Central to early modernity was not only movement but also clock-time punctuality. Systems of motion and timing developed in tandem and reinforced each other (Thompson 1967).

A related technology of that period was the landline telephone that allowed communicative proximity with absent others. But the landline phone confined talk at-a distance to homes and offices. So people had to stay put when undertaken ‘communicative travel’. In the era of pocket watches, public transport and landlines, meetings had to be organised in painstaking detail and people had to know their route and arrive on time. The objective, unbending time of pocket watches determined whether people arrived successfully. Public transport, pocket watches and landline phones were equally inflexible and part of the same pre-mobile phone coordination system typified by punctuality.

In Chapter 3 we discussed how mobile phones and ‘networked individualism’ enable people to be in communicative propinquity with their social networks when they are absent and on the move. Research has yet to investigate how mobile phones cultures change how people arrange and attend meetings. In the era of landline phones, rigid planning was essential as people were unconnectable when away from home. The mobile phone eliminates this need for inflexible pre-coordination as people can arrange and rearrange their meetings on the move. Mobile ‘phonespaces’ afford informal, fluid and instantaneous ways of ‘meeting up’ where venue, time, group and agenda can change with the next text message:

The old schedule of minutes, hours, days, and weeks becomes shattered into a constant stream of negotiations, reconfigurations, and rescheduling. One can be interrupted or interrupt friends and colleagues at any time. Individuals live in this phonespace they can
never let it go, because it is their primary link to the temporally, spatially fragmented network of friends and colleagues they have constructed for themselves (Townsend 2004).

4.7 Conclusion

Thus in this chapter we set out the five main forms of ‘mobility’ and then specifically examined the physical movement of people showing some of the connections with these other mobilities. We then considered what it is that provokes such travel. We argued that there are five bases to travel, linking the debate back to the discussion in the previous chapter that deals with the importance of co-present meetings. We then noted some evident inequalities of access to travel and hence of the capacity to meet up. We then considered the substitution and complementarity theses with regard to communications and physical travel, and showed that so far there are good reasons to believe that physical travel will continue its growing significance in relationship not only to business and professional travel, but also in relationship to teleworking, family life and emerging forms of friendship. We might see this as a process of co-evolution, between new forms of social networking on the one hand, and extensive forms of physical travel now often enhanced by new communications, on the other. In particular, communication technologies seem very important in the temporal coordination of meetings and travel, which we exemplified indirectly through the classical sociological work of Simmel. These sets of processes reinforce and extend each other in ways that are highly difficult to reverse. This also means that crucial to the character of modern societies is something that we term ‘network capital’. Those groups high in network capital enjoy significant advantages within the systems of social inequality operating in the contemporary world.

Network capital comprises six elements:

1. *movement competences*: to walk distances within different environments, to board different means of mobility, to carry or move baggage, to read timetabled information, to access computerised information, to arrange and re-arrange connections and meetings, the ability to use mobile phones, text messaging, email, the Internet, skype etc

2. *location free information and contact points*: sites where information and communications can arrive, be stored and retrieved (includes real/electronic diaries, address books secretary, office, answering service, email, web sites, mobile)

3. *communication devices*: to make and remake arrangements especially on the move and in conjunction with others also on the move
4. *appropriate, safe and secure meeting places*: both en route and at the destination (s) (can include office, club space, hotel, public spaces, interspace)

5. *physical and financial access* to a car, roadspace, fuel, lifts, aircraft, trains, ships, taxis, buses, trams, minibuses and so on

6. *time/money/resources to manage and coordinate*: especially when there is system failure as will intermittently happen

In the empirical research reported below we investigate various social groups, some of which enjoy high levels of network capital – but not high levels of economic capital. We will see how their lives in part on the move come to be organised from day to day, week to week, year to year.
5. Research design

This research empirically explores to what degree youngish people’s social networks in the North West of England\(^{10}\) are stretched out geographically and what the consequences are of this spread for social life and likely future travel patterns. We discuss how we employ existing methods and develop new ones in order to measure and represent the spatial nature of networks and networking practices.

We begin with describing this sample in terms of sex, occupation, education, income, age and marital status. Then the recruitment and the places of interviews are discussed. We then discuss the design of the interview guide and questionnaires and how they worked out in practice. This is followed by a discussion of how the raw data was analysed and represented as quotations, tables, figures and maps. In the conclusion we suggest how the research design could be improved upon within future research.

5.1 Interviewees

The initial idea was to focus upon three expanding occupations or industries that differ with regard to education, salary/status and expected mobility patterns. This research explores, to use Conradson and Latham’s term, ‘middling’ forms of mobile life (2005: 229). Rather than searching for mobile respondents per se, the following chapters examine to what degree far-flung networks and mobile lives are characteristic of many people other than the transnational ‘elites’ and ‘underprivileged’ migrants. We focus upon architects, employees in fitness centres (managers, sales staff, qualified instructors and receptionists) and security staff (university porters and nightclub doormen). And rather than undertaking our research in cosmopolitan London, we interview people in the North West of England, respectively Manchester, Liverpool and Lancaster.

These particular occupations have rapidly expanded and are likely to continue to expand in the future. Thus the patterns found here indicate something about future trends. They are systematically selected for the light they can cast on future social networks and travel patterns. Thus architectural jobs and practices have proliferated and especially so in

\(^{10}\) North West England is one region within England. It covers 14,165 km\(^2\) and has a population of 6,729,800. The main cities are Liverpool and Manchester (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/North_West_of_England).
Manchester and Liverpool following the designation of the latter as European Capital of Culture for 2008. The fitness industry is booming and it has become common for people to be a member of a fitness club. This turn to the ‘aesthetics of health and bodies’ is likely to continue further as people, to paraphrase Putnam, do fitness alone rather than join teams (2000). The security industry is expanding because of (perceived) increases in 24 hour society requirements, terrorism, interpersonal violence, urban fears, the increased gating of housing estates, and the general privatizing of security.

Based upon the three preceding review chapters, our hypotheses are that:

- the architectural profession is highly mobile since architects move to study and work; they are rich in networking tools (car, email account, access to the Internet and so on) and they will undertake long journeys for social networking.
- managers and qualified instructors will demonstrate similar characteristics, they are mobile, moving residence to study and work, being rich in networking tools (car, email account, access to the Internet and so on) and hence will undertake long journeys to meet up.
- receptionists in the fitness industry and security staff are more likely to live relatively rooted lives with less residential, work-related and leisurely mobility. They will exhibit relatively tight-knit and immobile networks.\(^{11}\)

### 5.2 Recruitment

We sought to interview 24 people with an equal share from each occupation and industry, and of men and women. The invitation we distributed stated the purpose of the interview and the overall research. We deliberately mentioned that it was not a requirement to have moved around a lot or travel much to participate, but only a willingness to report upon one’s social networks of friends, family members and workmates for approximately two hours. The invitation also informed the recipient that the respondents will receive £50 for their time and contribution.

Invitations were first sent by email. Twenty architectural practices (with more 20 employees) and 15 (private and public) fitness centres/leisure centres and four security offices at universities\(^ {12} \) were asked to forward, or otherwise circulate them, to suitable candidates. This worked well with architects. However, recruiting by email was less successful with the two

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\(^{11}\) It should be noted that we do not trace networks as such, since we do not go on to interview the many ‘links’ that the interviewees identify. This would require substantial further interviews.

\(^{12}\) We were initially interested in interviewing security personnel in airports but with had no success with our invitations by email or letter.
other occupations/industries. We subsequently mailed the same places printed copies of the invitation so that they could more easily be put in pigeon holes, on notice boards and so on. In the end it was collegial recommendations and face-to-face invitations that proved most successful in recruiting interviewees. We mainly recruited doormen face-to-face while they were working outside night clubs.

There are some general lessons here. One is that invitation by email excludes manual and service workers that do not communicate through emails. Another is that the initial invitation was probably too long-winded and elitist in suggesting that networks are far-flung, emailing common and so on. Also qualitative interviews can be ‘damaging to the face’: people fear that their oral competence is inadequate, their life too mundane or they have to reveal ‘guilty’ secrets (quantitative research is much less damaging to the face in comparison). The idea of talking openly about one’s social network for two hours may appear daunting, despite the £50 incentive. However, a very important lesson is that face-to-face invitations, compared with written invitations, are much better to recruit people with such perceptions, because they are better at establishing trust and (potentially) changing attitudes.

Table 1 below illustrates the main characteristics of the sample of 24, a number sufficient for this exploratory study.

Nine architects work predominantly in Liverpool. Since the architectural profession is heavily male, we only managed to interview two women. Most of the architects are in their late twenties or early thirties and their average annual income is £28,000 (this excludes No. 9, an architectural student doing compulsory work placement). While seven out of nine have partners (six are married), none have children this despite all being heterosexual. They are all white. Two are born and bred in Ireland (No. 5) and Russia (Russian citizen) (No. 2) respectively. Nonetheless, these architects form a relative homogenous group.

There are nine interviewees working in the fitness industry in Manchester. Three of these are women. This group is far less homogenous: the ages vary from early twenties to late thirties; four work in sales; two are receptionists; and three work as fitness instructors; three have managerial positions; and the managers and the sales staff are earning substantially more than the receptionists (both receptionists regard this job as a stop-gap). Title and salary are not

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13 That the architects predominately work in Liverpool while all the fitness centre employees are in Manchester is purely coincidentally.

14 Interviewee 18 is now only working part-time as a self-employed fitness instructor. She used to work full on a cruise ship in Caribbean but her main job today is air cabin crew.
related to university degree here as two of the sales advisers and one of the receptionists have university degrees, while this is not the case with any of the managers. However, they also have common characteristics. All are white, except one woman with Indian origins (No. 13); every one is a British citizen; and none have children.

Finally, the sample is made up of six people working in the ‘security industry’ in Lancaster; we interviewed three porters and three night club doormen. Again there is an unequal distribution of the sexes, since there is only one security woman. The age difference ranges from 21 to 38. This group is typified by low salaries (just more £10,000 annually on average) and lack of university degrees. All are white with the exception of the female porter who is of Asian origin and married to man born and bred in Asia (No. 19). This woman and the doorman/gardener have children.

The average age of the whole sample is 28.5, while the mean salary is just more £20,000. There are 6 women and 18 men. There is a significant dominance of (hetero-sexual) couples with only four singles. To sum up, there is a bias in our study towards men, ‘white faces’, heterosexual couples and people without children. We now continue by discussing the design of the interview guide and questionnaires.
Table 1 Description of the interviewees and the location of the interview

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Profession</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Income</th>
<th>University degree</th>
<th>Relationship</th>
<th>Working in</th>
<th>Children</th>
<th>Interview conducted at</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Architect</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Early 30s</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Liverpool</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Work</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
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<td>F</td>
<td>Early 30s</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Partner</td>
<td>Liverpool</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Bar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
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<td>Married</td>
<td>Liverpool</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
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<td>Early 30s</td>
<td>32,000</td>
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<td>Single</td>
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<td>No</td>
<td>Bar</td>
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<td>Late 20s</td>
<td>25,000</td>
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<td>Married</td>
<td>Liverpool</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Work</td>
</tr>
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<td>6</td>
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<td>M</td>
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<td>27,000</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Manchester</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
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<td>M</td>
<td>Late 20s</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Liverpool</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
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<td>Mid 20s</td>
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<td>Married</td>
<td>Liverpool</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Architect (student)</td>
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<td>Early 20s</td>
<td>13,400</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>Liverpool</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Home</td>
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<td>Late 20s</td>
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<td>Yes</td>
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<td>Manchester</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Work</td>
</tr>
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<td>11</td>
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<td>Manchester</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Receptionist, fitness centre</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Mid 20s</td>
<td>13,000</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Partner</td>
<td>Manchester</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
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<td>M</td>
<td>Mid 20s</td>
<td>30,000</td>
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<td>Single</td>
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<td>Sex</td>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Income</td>
<td>University degree</td>
<td>Relationship</td>
<td>Working in</td>
<td>Children</td>
<td>Interview conducted at</td>
</tr>
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<td>16</td>
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<td>Mid 30s</td>
<td>18,000</td>
<td>No</td>
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<td>Manchester</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Cafe</td>
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<td>Lancaster</td>
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<td>20</td>
<td>Porter</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Mid 30s</td>
<td>9,500</td>
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<td>Partner</td>
<td>Lancaster</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Porter</td>
<td>M</td>
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<td>12,500</td>
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<td>Married</td>
<td>Lancaster</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Doorman/student</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Early 20s</td>
<td>11,000</td>
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<td>Bar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
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<td>M</td>
<td>Early 20s</td>
<td>15,000</td>
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<td>Lancaster</td>
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<td>Bar</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Lancaster</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Researcher</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5.3 Interview guide and questionnaires

This research combines qualitative and quantitative methods to measure and visualise networks and networking practices, on the one hand, and examine people’s multi-layered accounts of why and how they network and what their networking means to them, on the other. We combine qualitative interviews and quantitative questionnaires. All interviewees fill in two questionnaires and the qualitative interviews are designed to elaborate upon the answers. We designed a detailed interview guide to make the interviews systematic and comparable.

Each interview is designed to last for around two hours (our pre-tests indicated that longer interviews are too draining for both parties).

5.3.1 Pre-interview questionnaire (Appendix A)

Before the formal interview the interviewees fill in a 10-20 minute questionnaire that establishes their residential mobility – where (city and area) and with whom they lived during their school days and over the last 5-15 years (depending upon their age). It further establishes their access to networking tools (network capital), the number of business and personal journeys they made in 2004 in the UK and abroad and the location of their non-local friends.

5.3.2 Interview guide (Appendix B)

The interview guide elicitats respondent’s communication practices, travel and face-to-face visits for work, friendship and family life. The interview guide highlights the relational webs of individual biographies. It covers how, and how often, emails, text messages and phone calls connect people in intimate phone-to-phone conversation, text-to-text gossip, email-to-email-to-email co-ordination and circulation and so on. We ask people to describe their emails and text messages, how far they travel and to how many places. Respondents are asked to describe how emails, text messages and phone calls function as networking tools, how they use them to gossip, flirt, tease, argue, exchange information and jokes, organize travel and face-to-face meetings and to ‘get lost in conversation’.

Then the interview guide turns to geographies of travel. The interviewees are asked to describe the last long journeys they made within the UK and abroad. We ask not only where the respondents travel but also with whom they travel, who they visit and what social obligations they fulfil with this journey.
The interview guide also addresses geographies of old and new friends. Interviewees are asked where their friends live, how they first meet and keep in contact as well as how often they meet and where, and how much travel this entail; whether the majority of their friends are close by or elsewhere; how important it is for them to be close to their friends and whether they think long distance friendship works; what friendship obligations generate travel.

Then we ask the same questions in relationship to family life. Interviewees are asked where their parents, sisters, brothers and grandparents reside; why they live close or faraway for them; whether this was desirable or problematical, beneficial or inconvenient; whether they are likely to move closer or further away from their family in the future. Then we talk about how often the family meets up, at what occasions, and how much travel such visits involve, whether distance and cost of transport affect their rate of recurrent travel.

5.3.3 Post-interview questionnaire (Appendix C)

At the end of the interview, the interviewees are asked to complete another questionnaire, which again takes 10-20 minutes. Here interviewees are asked to identify the most important people in their social networks (up to ten) and specify their residential location; when and how they meet; and how often they stay in contact by mail, phone, text message and face-to-face meetings. This identifies the geographical distribution of respondents’ ‘strong ties’, something not done within much other research.

5.4 Conducting the interviews

A good interview guide is no guarantee of a good interview. An interviewer that slavishly follows the script is likely to obstruct the flows and the unexpected turns and conclusions of normal conversational talk, literally subduing the interviewee, and the interview end up reinforcing the research team’s preconceived ideas of what is of significance. The interviewer must be receptive to the respondent’s accounts and smoothly juggle the interview guide accordingly, skipping, re-phrasing, re-organising and re-thinking the questions. We used the interview guide as a flexible embodied (memorised) toolkit rather than a pre-formed instruction book. The toolkit metaphor highlights the now common position within the social sciences that the qualitative interview is ‘a construction site of knowledge’ and that the interviewer is part of this construction (Kvale 1996: 42). Occasionally we expressed ideas or told anecdotes (rather than just asking questions) that the respondents were asked to comment and elaborate upon. This was partly because many needed a little prompting to talk about their mundane everyday practices as these are habitual rather than reflexive. It is something that people are competent in doing but rarely reflect upon. Humans seldom ‘think-to-act’ (Thrift
1999: 297). Given that we were strangers to each other, it also made it easier for the interviewees to talk openly about personal issues such as friendship, family life and partners. A good interview – as any form of face-to-face interaction – necessitates trust, and this requires that both parties invest something of themselves during the interview.

This is also why the respondents decided upon the place of the interview. As we can see in Table 1, 15 took place in a quiet place at their work (office, meeting room, canteen), during the lunch hour or after work. We conducted six interviews in bars and cafés; two took place in the interviewee’s home and one at the interviewer’s home. The interviews were all conducted between January and May 2005 by the first author.

A couple of the days before the interview, we emailed the respondent and asked them to fill in the pre-interview questionnaire (see Appendix A) before coming to the interview (as well as confirming date and time), and everyone did so\(^\text{15}\). Those without email filled it out before the formal interview began. All 24 interviewees thus completed the pre-interview questionnaire. Each interview started with elaborating upon the answers in the questionnaire, which also had the positive effect that most remembered more, or corrected already given, information. The interviews lasted between 45 to 90 minutes (average 80). Most of the interviewees filled in the post-interview questionnaire (Table 7, see appendix) at the end of the interview, but some did it at home because they were in a rush. So with filling in the two questionnaires and introductory conversation, the whole procedure took around two hours.

5.5 Analysing and visualising the data

Material in the interviews and questionnaires have been turned into transcripts, a database, quotations, figures, tables and maps.

The interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed so that the analysis would be systematic and also transferable between researchers. Our qualitative examinations of the interviews are concerned with how networks are subjectively viewed, experienced and practiced by our interviewees, and how such individual accounts can be generalised and develop new theoretical insights. While this analysis is not concerned with quantitative questions we nonetheless try to identify what views are common, and when a quote is discussed, or used to exemplify a point in the following chapters, we roughly indicate how typical it is. And we also quantify parts of the interviews. All quantifiable data in the interviews were coded and

\(^{15}\) Moreover, we also suggested bringing a few photographs or other souvenirs from a recent ‘meeting’ with friends/partner/family that involved a longer journey. However, only a few brought any memorabilia.
analysed in a statistical database specifically designed for this project\textsuperscript{16} – alongside the information in the questionnaires – so we have been able to generate figures and tables out of otherwise qualitative interviews. This mix of qualitative and quantitative analysis is particularly salient in Chapter 6, while 7 and 8 are predominantly qualitative.

In Chapter 6 we experiment with mapping techniques so as to illustrate the spatial reach of respondent’s social networks (this approach was suggested by Schönfelder and Axhausen 2003). To our knowledge no social science research has systematically sought to measure and map distances between members of networks, now or in the past. We rectify this by applying and constructing methods that can measure and map the spatial structures of networks and the mobilities of travel, talk and text flowing between network members. The maps are particularly effective in visualising similarities and differences between networks.

We determine how far-flung the respondents’ networks are by measuring how far away they live from their non-local friends, close family members and most important people\textsuperscript{17}. All reported locations were associated with their longitude and latitude, that is, geocoded. Using these co-ordinates we calculated the great circle distance between them, which accounts for the spherical shape of Earth (Hubert 2003). As we had only place names available, such as Liverpool or London, we cannot calculate the distance between the homes of persons within a city. These were set to zero.

In terms of mapping, the geocoded data was then incorporated into a Geographic Information System (GIS), which is basically a geographically aware database. Since most networks are made up of both close by and faraway connections the maps constructed visualise ties on a local, national and global maps. While the printed size of the maps is the same, the depicted areas in the local ties and global ties maps will be different from respondent to respondent as we adjust the scale to the specific geographies of their ties (contrast Map 1 and Map 3).

As the legend explains, the maps contain information about the respondent’s current place of residence, most significant people, other friends and family and former places of residence. The home of the respondent and the place of her/his connections are linked by coloured lines, and these also indicate the distances between them. We use black lines to connect the

\textsuperscript{16} We thank Timo Ohnmacht, ETH for the technical realisation and support of this database. The data was captured with and stored with MS Access 2000. The tabulations were created with SPSS 13.

\textsuperscript{17} We only map present network geographies but this method can examine changing network geographies over time, if the data is available.
respondent to her/his most important people and blue lines to other friends and family. We trace the respondent’s residential mobility over time and space with numbers and green lines. These lines are particularly helpful in visualising distances, identifying ‘hubs’ and linking residential mobility with network geographies of friends and family members.

On each map there are 5-6 small boxes with details about one of the respondent’s ties: their relationship (family member, friend, etc.); how long time they have known each other; how often the phone, email, text and meet up; and the cost (money and time) of meeting up in terms of travel.

5.6 Conclusion

In this chapter we have exemplified how we designed this research. Based upon these experiences, we make the following recommendations for future research.

We suggest that network technologies (websites, email accounts, lap tops, mobile (camera-) phones, digital cameras, voice-over-IP telephony, such as www.skype.com, diaries, PDA, iPod, MP3-player, etc.) and documents (emails and text messages containing tickets, invitations, travel information, photographs and post-meeting gossip) should play a more integrated role within qualitative interviews. If such technologies and documents are (potentially) at-hand during the interview it will be easier to remember the journeys (destination, price, company, etc.) and meetings (with whom, how it was coordinated and through what means, etc.). This has the positive side-effect that the researcher becomes less dependent upon oral accounts and can include text messages, emails and email attachments (e.g. tickets, photographs) in the final report as well as ethnographic observations of how the respondents use communication technologies. This will be particular helpful in enhancing understanding of how communication technologies coordinate and occasionally substitute for travel.

18 It is difficult to determine travel costs especially because there are large discounts when tickets are bought in advance. Since our interviewees normally buy their train tickets two weeks in advance to obtain maximum discount, we report fares for such tickets (footnote18). Similarly, the reported flight tickets are booked three months in advance. Since our respondents fly budget airlines when possible, we began our search at Ryan Air and Easy Jet. If unsuccessful, we turned to the popular travel portal Expedia (www.expedia.co.uk) and searched for the cheapest deal booked three months in advanced. In relation to car journeys, we used ‘AA Route Map’18 to indicate time and actual travel distance (rather than great circle distance).
Retrospectively, it is clear that our interview guide at times focuses too much on individuals. For instance, in relation to family life we neglect families-in-law, and how respondent’s income partly depends upon what their partners earn. Related hereto, we overlooked that people do not only visit distant friends and family members but they also providing them with hospitality. Future research should be interested in the patterns of both visiting and hosting.
6. Geographies of strong ties

We have argued that mobilities of talk, writing and meetings sustain social networks, networks that potentially spread over great distances and connect distant people. In the preceding chapters we discussed research indicating that cheaper and more widespread physical, imaginative and communicative travel makes social networks less dense, more far-flung and mobile. While it is clearly plausible to claim that travel distances between members of networks have increased in the latter part of the twentieth century, neither transport research nor social science research have systematically measured or mapped distances between members of networks, now or in the past. In this explorative chapter we attempt to rectify this.

First, we examine the respondents’ residential mobility over the last 15 years. How often, how far and for what reasons have they moved? Second, we employ methods that can measure how far-flung their networks are. We measure how far they live from their significant others. Then we examine if and how distance influences the practices of phoning, texting, emailing and meeting up. Does distance matter? Third, we map and examine individual networks which possess characteristics that are typical or likely to be so in the future, and we use the qualitative interview material to add cultural landscapes to these maps.

6.1 Residential mobility

Each respondent has on average moved to a different town or city 2.3 times in the past 15 years. 43% lived outside the North West of England when commencing primary school; 70% once lived outside this region; 38% worked or studied abroad for a few months at the minimum. The majority have thus experiences of living in different places beyond the North West of England. Yet 38% now live in the same town or place where they started primary school. However, only one has never lived in another place, so the rest have returned to their hometown at some point. So rather than being immobilised by their hometown, people have returned home after years of living elsewhere. This is interestingly consistent with Doyle and Nathan’s finding (see Chapter 4) that around 45% of the UK population lives and works within five miles of where they were born (2001).

Much residential mobility is related to career moves and especially higher education, which also explain why the thirteen respondents who attended university (so mainly the architects) have moved most and over the longest distances. Architectural students are extraordinarily
mobile: only two of the architects in our sample studied at a university in their home town and the remaining moved some 208 km within UK when they began ‘Part 1’; some took ‘Part 2’ at another university and the obligatory ‘year out’ practice training somewhere else again (in some cases near their parents because of free accommodation) during the five years it takes to become a fully qualified architect. Four studied for some months abroad. The reasons for studying elsewhere were not only academic but had also to do with escaping parents and experiencing new places and people.

By contrast, respondents without university degrees have made fewer long distance moves. However, there are important exceptions. One male, now a well-paid sales manager, substituted provisional Warrington with metropolitan Manchester to fulfil his ambitions (29 km). Two fitness instructors worked on a Caribbean cruise ship (where they eventually fell in love with each other), to experience the world and take advantage of the fact that they had few obligations to others. As one of them says:

... I always regretted not getting an opportunity to travel. And when my relationship split up, the job that I was in didn’t have huge career prospects, it was basically a 9 to 5 job. So I then had an option...thought well I’ve not got a house, not got a relationship, [or] a career, if I’m ever going to do it, now is the time to do it. So I went off there with the plan of spending 3 or 4 years working for this agency. I ended up in the Caribbean (No. 16, male fitness manager, mid thirties).

Similar to Mason (2004b), when our interviewees talk about residential mobility they refer to relationships (or lack of), commitments to friends, parents and especially partners. They are reflexively aware that their mobility has affects upon their immediate network, and this sometimes delays and discourages them from moving. This is how the sales manager cited puts it:

....I’m very career focused .....Warrington is a town mentality. I originally moved to live with one of my friends in Manchester. ... That was quite difficult to make that move because my dad had passed away and my mum was becoming more reliant on my being there. So, although there was never a great time to do it, it was something that I had to do ... I mean I didn’t move out until I was 20, so it was 2 years after I was ready to move out, but I had to ... grievous time (No. 14, male sales manager, mid twenties).

This also means that some end up living in places more or less against their will. Some respondents live in the North West of England only because their partner strongly desires to
live here or refuses to move elsewhere. A receptionist and a sales adviser reflect upon why they happen to be in Manchester:

I came to live here with my boyfriend after he finished university. I finished the year before he did ... I'm from Devon and he's from Northampton but we met at university in Oxford and then we came up here because he's got friends in Manchester ... He met them at school, Northampton, but they were at university in Manchester and are still here (No. 12, female receptionist, early twenties).

Well when I moved to London, I said to my girlfriend: “let’s try and make a go of it in London, and we’d spend say a year here and see how it goes”. So we spent a year in London, unhappy, and I think the whole of the time she wasn’t completely happy. There was something there that wasn’t happy, and previously she’d lived in Manchester. And she has got a lot of friends in Manchester and she didn’t have many friends in London. So the main focus behind it was I promised her that we’d try it for a year in London, and then if it’s not happy enough, we’ll move to Manchester and try and live in Manchester... I moved up here for her. And she’s a lot happier. You know, I haven’t lived in Manchester before so it’s a complete new beginning for me. I haven’t got any friends in London, but obviously I go out with her friends, and obviously getting new social groups. From my point of view, because I haven’t got any friends, it has been hard (No. 10, male sales adviser, late twenties).

These people’s residential biographies are thus relational, shaped and negotiated with significant others. In a discussion about future plans, one architect highlights that this is a collective rather than an individual decision:

We are at the position....and I do say “we” because I’m married and we have been together a long time, we are a unit ... we’re in a good position where we don’t have any ties at the moment. We don’t have any children, we don’t even own a house. And our ambitions are to go somewhere else and experience more (No. 8, male architect, mid twenties).

In Chapter 2 we discussed Kennedy’s studies of cosmopolitan architects that move from city to city, from project to project, apparently unhindered by any relationships and obligations, other than those of work and personal ambitions (2004, 2005). In our study, architects talk about obligations to significant others and their ambitions for family life:

The older you get, the more commitments you have, the more difficult it is to do things like that. But if I was straight out of university, I could have gone anywhere, like London, Switzerland, France, Canada (No. 7, late twenties, male architect).
While they were highly mobile as students their careers have so far been less mobile; all of them have worked for the same practice for three to four years and only one has moved to a new town because of work. Rather than moving to new cosmopolitan places, several talk about settling down and moving back to their or their partner’s roots, sometimes because their partner desires this:

I will actually be very reluctant to leave [Liverpool] in particular because I suppose in a way I’ve formed my identity by being here away from my family, and because it’s such a great vibrant city. [But] I know that my wife in particular wants to move away and move close to our roots [Shrewsbury]. And I think if we do have a family, it will be a lot easier for us with the family close to hand (No. 3, male architect, early thirties).

This quote is typical as it highlights how most of interviewees believe that they will move closer or stay close to their parents or parents-in-law when they start a family, because especially physical support will be much more frequent ‘with the family close to hand’. While much emotional and economical caring can be carried out at-a-distance through phone calls, emails and post, there is no (regular) help with cleaning, shopping and not least babysitting from family members if they are too distant. A female architect, who studied in Manchester and moved straight back to Liverpool to her family network after graduation, explains how she as a child ‘suffered’ from her parent’s residential movement and stretched out social network. Her main ambition is to live in close proximity with her family and step family in Liverpool so that they can be fully involved with her future children:

… my parents both lived in Pudsey near Leeds. My mum went to London to university, my dad went to Lancaster and then to Liverpool for his masters. My mum moved to Liverpool and then got married, so we didn’t live in the same city as my grandparents. And I never really knew them. I did know them because I saw them but I didn’t know they didn’t pick me up from school or I didn’t go round for tea. We would go and visit them as a family, but ….I’d quite like [partner’s] parents and my parents to be involved in my children being brought up….John’s parents live in Liverpool and so do mine. I’d be very reluctant to leave [Liverpool] because of that … I’ve made the decision now that I want to stay in Liverpool near my family, near the clubs that I’m a member of. And I enjoy working here and they’re my priorities, not work (No. 1, female architect, early thirties).
6.2 Distances to significant others

We will now analyse how far the respondents live from significant others as reported in Table 7 and Table 8 in Appendix D. The distances are great circle distances, so the actual travel by car and train will be longer than these. The values reported there are summarized in Table 2 below:

Table 2 Great-circle distance in km to social contacts (by the form of contact)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sort of contact</th>
<th>Min.</th>
<th>25. Percentile</th>
<th>Median</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>75. Percentile</th>
<th>Max.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Non-local friends</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>249</td>
<td>1404</td>
<td>595</td>
<td>18625</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Close family members</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>640</td>
<td>203</td>
<td>9941</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most important people</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>403</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>16997</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

We start by examining the geographies of the respondents’ non-local friends. Respondents listed up to ten places (other than their own place of residence) where they have friends and we subsequently measured the distance between the respondent and each of these ‘non-local friends’.

The first point is that all respondents have non-local friends, the mean being 6.5 (some had more than one friend in each place). Three could have listed more than ten places. Their non-local friends are widely scattered; they only have one non-local friend in this region and the average distance between them and their non-local friends is a striking 1398 km. Only five do not have friends in the UK more than 100 kms away. They have friends in two foreign countries on average and 13 have friends in non-European countries. The three migrants have Russian (No. 2), South African (No. 24) and Irish (No. 5) friends back home as well as across the UK and Europe. Several of the university graduates made friendships while studying...

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19 The distribution of the distances gives a first impression of the spatial spread of the social networks. Still, the distances ignore the relative distribution in space. One can observe the same mean distance independently of the fact, whether the contacts are all clustered in one location or spread over many different locations in all compass directions. If one wants to account for this spread one needs to apply measures which capture the size of this social network geography. Schönfelder and Axhausen (2003) have solved the structurally identical problem of local activity spaces, i.e. the locations visited by same traveler over multiple weeks, by adapting and developing suitable measures. The simplest measure, the size of 95% confidence ellipse, has performed well and correlates highly with more sophisticated approaches (The confidence ellipse is the two-dimensional generalisation of the more familiar confidence interval) (Schönfelder and Axhausen 2004; Vaze, Schönfelder and Axhausen 2005).
abroad or with exchange students; some met English and foreign friends when working or travelling abroad (No. 16, 18); and some made English friends while touring the world (Nos. 14, 22, 23) or working abroad. Most of their friends in foreign countries are though from back home rather than being foreigners.

The architects are those with most non-local friends, both abroad and especially across the UK. Some non-architects have friends in Australia, America, New Zealand, Tanzania, Canada, Cape Town combined with few non-local friends in England, which make the mean distance very high. The five people without friends’ more than 100 km away have not studied at universities, while all university graduates (20 ) have such distant friends across the UK. With a few exceptions our architects report that they have close university friends despite moving to different places during or after the course. So amongst these people many of the non-local friends reported in Table 8 are old university friends.

Table 7 and Table 8 also show how close the respondents live to their parents, brothers and sisters, as well as other family members if the respondents state that they are of great significance to them.21 Again we see striking distances between network members, the mean here being 693 km. Even when excluding the longest distance, the distance is still a considerable 254 km. So the respondents live far away from there close family members. Indeed there are almost as many family ties abroad as in the respondents’ immediate neighbourhood. Ten of them have close family connections abroad, so it is not only the three immigrants that have close family ties living abroad. Only seven of the respondents have family networks that are exclusively located within the North West of England, and only two of these family networks are nearby. The respondents have to journey to another city or town when meeting up with three out of four of their family members. So these families do not live in Wellman’s ‘little boxes’ and extensive travel to meet up with their nearest family is unavoidable and almost always necessary.

We also asked the respondents to identify the locations of those people (up to 10) that they consider most important to their present life, and where they now live. These distances are also reported in Table 7 and Table 8. Here one would expect the mean distance to be lower than with non-local friends and family members as these people are strong ties. However, this

20 In addition to the architects, interviewee 10 (sales adviser), 11 (sales adviser) and 12 (receptionist) have university degrees.

21 The table only measures distances between cities/towns and not areas with cities/towns. All distances within cities/areas are therefore set 0 km, even though distances between places in Liverpool and Manchester can be considerable. The table is not giving ‘local’ distances and the averages underestimate the distances that separated people.
is only partly the case. The people that the respondents are closest to and most dependent upon are in fact on average distant: 496 km. A third have most important people abroad. 6% living more than 1000 km away; 7% live more than 500 km away; 31% live more than 100 km away; and 42% live more than 50km away. Figure 1 extends this by showing the distribution of these distances. The box plot show how far 25, 50, 75 and 100% of the closest contacts live to the respondents. In all cases the first 25% of the contacts live in the same town as the respondents. The median of this distances increases for the first 50% and there is a wider range of values. This trend continues and the final box shows the distribution of the means in the column ‘Distance to closest contacts’ in Table 7. This data supplements much of the literature reported in Chapter 2 highlighting how mobility produces weak ties by showing that strong ties of care, support and affection often are far-flung, and that mobility and distance do not necessarily destroy emotionally important ties between people.

Figure 1  Box plot of the distance to closest contacts and the cumulative % of the social contacts

22 Unfortunately, as discussed in Chapter 5, two of the respondents (No. 2 and 22) did not return this questionnaire. The reported figure would probably have been a little higher if we had the data for these two as their distances to ‘non-local friends’ and ‘close family members are above average.
However, these tables also indicate that not all ties are far-flung. Indeed it seems that most demonstrate a combination of far-flung and nearby ties. No respondent has only ‘distant’ ties. Table 7 shows that the average distance to their ‘3 most nearby’ most important people is 23 km and half of them live within a distance of 25 km. About half possess three such ties in the place where they live. So strong ties are not just far-flung.

We may indeed suggest that it is unsatisfactory to only have distant ties because it is difficult to meet such people impromptu for a coffee, beer, football match or film. Indeed the interviews highlight the significance of local networking events to make and develop friends. One architect with a strongly dispersed social network joined the civic organization Round Table (www.roundtable.co.uk):

… because we’re quite new to the city in terms of the circle of friends that we have within the city…. And we just want to increase the opportunity to meeting….getting new friends, because….we wouldn’t just go out to a pub on a Thursday night and start talking to people, we don’t really do that. So we need to be in an environment where we’re getting the opportunity to meet new folks, and this is kind of an organised way of doing that (No. 5, male architect, mid-twenties).

With a few exceptions these respondents do not have virtual friends. One exception is the Russian architect (No.2) who regularly meets up with migrated Russians in chat rooms, and she has developed close friendships with a few of them even though they have never met physically. Even though many of their friendships are stretched out and much communicative travel in-between meetings sustains them, few talked about friendships that occurred without intermittent co-presence. Most of the interviewees agree with this statement:

It is easier to keep in contact with people with text messages and emails. You can have a broader range of friends and it doesn’t matter where they are in theory. [Yet] I don’t think that good friendship is as good only via a message. That’s not a proper friendship really. … I

23 This illustrates Watters’ point that Putnam is wrong when he makes a clear-cut distinction between civic work and ‘schmoozing’ since so-called civic meetings are not only concerned with altruistic, civic matters but also with networking and forming friendships (2003; and see Chapter 3).

24 Indeed they spelled out how strong ties become weak if sporadic emailing and texting now is the only foundation:

I had a friend when I was at art school many years ago … and I’ve probably bumped into him once, and yet because he’s a Manchester United fan, as soon as we got beaten the other night against Burnley, I had an email from him straight away the following morning, and generally that is our only contact. It’s this kind of relationship….which is just over the internet or email rather than personal contact. And so he’ll be sending me some kind of wind up message about Liverpool being out of the FA cup and I’ll send him one back saying well maybe you’re not so good after all, you’ve got to play it tonight (No. 3, male architect, early thirties).
couldn’t really stay friends with somebody if I am just messaging them and never seeing them. I would have to see them now and again in the flesh and do things… (No. 7, male architect, late twenties).

So we might say that as a rule strong ties – at least amongst reasonably prosperous people in the western world – depends upon occasional co-presence, and too much distance can therefore be a problem.

But few strong ties exist without communications. Again, every single one of the identified most important people are people that the respondents have regular communications with, whether by email or phone or text (but not necessarily all three). The major reason that strong ties cannot continue without communicative travel is that their most important people actually only meet up once every fourth day on average. By comparison, the respondents’ talk every other day on the phone or text or email with their most important people (Figure 3).

This communication is partly about coordinating meetings (see Chapter 7) and partly about having communicative co-presence when physical meetings are impossible. Indeed all respondents agree that communications ease the ‘pains’ of being separated by distance:

It’s never really been a big problem. I know some people come to uni and they hate it because they’re not near their family, whereas I speak to my dad every other day, I speak to my mum every other day (No. 22, doorman, early twenties).

As the Russian architect, with her family still in Russia, says:

Well my parents in fact, although they are furthest away from everyone else, but they are kind of my immediate circle, although they are far away. So it’s my brother, my mum…. I phone them once a week at the weekend … If I don’t phone on Saturday, my dad starts to….oh she’s not phoning, what’s going on … I try to do it first thing on Saturday morning. I try to stick with routine. [We talk for] an hour easily. … We talk about personal things. …. She always thinks I’m ill because I’m sniffing (No. 2, female architect, early thirties).

6.3 Measuring meetings and communications

In Chapter 4 we discussed research suggesting that there is a ‘death of distance’ because of cheaper and faster corporeal, virtual and communicative travel. Figure 2 and Figure 3 show how the respondents’ meetings, phone calls, emailing and text messaging (SMS) are organised with their most significant people over distance. The distances were grouped into five classes with numbers of observations. For each of those quintiles the median was calculated to anchor the points on the graph.
Figure 2  Shares of the modes of interaction over distance (%) 

Figure 3  Frequency of interaction over distance by mode (%)
These figures demonstrate that increasing distance between network members means less frequent face-to-face contact. With increasing distance there is declining frequency of face-to-face meetings; but they might be spend more time together when they intermittently come together, as argued in Chapter 7. The respondents socialise with their ‘local’ ‘most significant people’ every other day or so; those living up to 30 km away every fourth day or so; those living 30-80 km away almost once a week. However, they meet with those living 400 km away as often as with those living 125 km away. So while distant ties are less likely to meet up they do intermittently meet up, no matter the cost. The figures show that strong ties can not sustain themselves without occasional physical co-presence. Indeed the respondents meet all their most important people at least once a year. Yet if people live too far from their most significant network members their social capital will diminish. This perhaps explains the significance of local networking events and why all respondents have most important people in their immediate environment, even if they have only moved there recently.

The figures also illustrate that phone calls (both landline and mobile) decline when distance increases. As discussed in Chapter 2, most phone calls are brief local calls concerned with coordination (Geser, 2004; and see Chapter 8). The respondents call their local most important people almost every other day, which is more or less as often as they meet up. Long distance calls are less frequent because they are more expensive per minute (especially international calls) and distant ties meet less frequently, so there is less need for coordination. While phone calls travel well, in practice they do not travel long (the timeless travel of telephony does yet come free for most, although Internet based ‘NetMeeting’ and especially voice-over-IP telephony is in the process of changing this). Nonetheless, among distant ties phone calls are pivotal and they often substitute for face-to-face meetings when these cannot take place. The respondents phone their most distant ties much more often that they meet up face-to-face, every second or third week compared with every second or third month. And they speak on the phone with those living 80-250 km away ten times as often as they meet up.

These figures indicate that phone calls to some extent overcome friction of distance and substitute for physical meetings.

The figures also show that respondents text those close-by most. Those in the nearby environment are likely to receive one or more texts every third day or so while those living more than 250 km away receive text messages once or twice a month. This decay with distance resembles the figures for face-to-face meetings and especially phone calls. In addition to gossiping, texting is intricately tied up with the complex micro-geographies of coordinating and assessing meetings (see Chapter 8).
But the rate of emails increases with distance. The emails travel further than phone calls and text messages. While emails are used least often used to communicate with ties around the corner, the respondents email those living more than 250 km away almost every week, and this is more often than with any of the others, except local ties (coordination emails). Around a half of all interactions with most distant ties are through email. So it is primarily emails that ensure that regular contact is sustained in-between long periods of little or no face-to-face interactions. Emails travel extremely fast and cheaply over great distances. Whereas distance matters in relation to face-to-face meetings (price and time) phone calls (price) and text messages (price), emails are indifferent to distances, both in terms of price and speed. Greetings, jokes, invitations, photographs and so on reach any distance within seconds when flying ‘timeless class’ with emails, and this first class service comes free (once broadbanded) on the Internet. These figures suggest that emails substitute for expensive long distance calls in periods where face-to-face meetings are impossible due to travel time and price. Thus without proper access to, or skills to use the Internet, people are less likely to have contact with distant ties.

Distance is also a matter in how long a contact has existed. Table 3 shows that the more recent contacts are closer to the current address of the respondents. In the lowest quartile of distances 55.6% of the contacts are less then seven years old, while in the highest quartile this share is only 32%.

Table 3 Duration of social contact and the distance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Distance to social contacts in km banded as quartiles</th>
<th>0</th>
<th>0.1 – 15.4</th>
<th>15.5 – 114.8</th>
<th>114.9 +</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Duration</td>
<td>0-7 years [%]</td>
<td>55.6</td>
<td>57.9</td>
<td>45.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8-33 years [%]</td>
<td>44.4</td>
<td>42.1</td>
<td>55.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Count</td>
<td>[-]</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In this chapter we documented how most of the respondents’ social networks can be said to far-flung. Yet even far-flung networks consist of nearby ties so the common distinction between far-flung and nearby ties is too simple. Then we documented how there are ‘frictions of distance’ in relation to face-to-face meetings but not so with email.

The analysis demonstrates that distance matters; too much distance to significant others will have detrimental effects upon one’s social capital. Network capital is a relational outcome that also depends upon other peoples’ location and mobility.
6.4 Mapping Individual networks

In the rest of this chapter we examine these general findings in relation to the individual networks by describing the networking practices of four typical respondents, illustrated by some novel map-making techniques developed for this project. We visualize in all cases the complex local, national and global linkages, obligations and interdependent mobilities that make and remake these four social networks. Each brings out how contemporary social networks possess complex geographies of nearby and faraway ties and how the friction of distance is lived with in practice. We first present the four ‘maps’.
Map 2  Respondent 18
Map 4  Respondent 4
6.4.1 Map 1 (No. 21, male university porter)

Map 1 shows how ‘little boxes’ are now getting more far-flung and less based upon geographical propinquity and walking distance. On the face of it this network resembles a ‘little box’ in that his national ties are exclusively located in a relatively small area of the North West of England, stretching from Carnforth to Morecambe (8 km), to Lancaster (1.4 km), to Preston (34 km) and to Southport (45 km). The two main hubs are his hometown Morecambe and Preston where the majority of his most significant people live, and, as the boxes reveal, these are predominantly family members. His wife is from Southport and her brother is one of his most significant people. So while his most significant people by today’s standard are fairly close by, they are not exclusively local. The average distance to them is 19 km and this is second shortest average among the respondents. So his ‘little box’ is beyond walking distance and depends upon much regional travel.

This pattern partly reflects this person’s limited residential mobility. As a child and young teenager he lived 10 years in Northwith with his parents (92 km from Morecambe) before jointly moving back to Morecambe. He has subsequently moved residence several times, but always within Morecambe, because this is where his family is, where he feels at home and housing is affordable compared with surrounding towns and cities. However, he almost moved to Southport when moving together with his partner who is equally attached to her hometown Southport:

> The general idea was … to get a house down there, and then it proved too expensive … so we ended up moving up here…. It was either always Southport or Morecambe, because … we’re very close with our families so we didn’t want to move too far away from either of them (No. 21, male porter, mid-twenties).

So it was a contest only between Southport and Morecambe. Yet the ‘little box’ nature of his network is thus not entirely of his own making, as Southport proved too expensive for their relatively low incomes.

The boxes on Map 1 reveal that respondent No. 21 engages in much face-to-face interaction with his significant others. The two people he sees most often – respectively everyday and every other day – live around the corner in Morecambe and within walking distance. Yet despite a 45 or 60 km car journey, he sees his brother-in-law weekly and his cousin fortnightly, either in Southport/Preston or Morecambe. This is possible since he has his own car that his father gave to him when purchasing a new one. This example illustrates how cars
are crucial in making ‘little worlds’ bigger and in enabling regular face-to-face meetings between people that live in other regional towns or cities.

The boxes also show that he has little communicative proximity, whether through phoning, texting or emailing. The people that he sees most are also the people that he phones and text most, which indicate that many of his calls are for brief coordination (Geser, 2004). Despite having access to the Internet at work (not a private work email), he does not email any of his most important people as none of them email regularly. This also illustrates how network capital is relational since email access is worthless if one’s network members lack or reject this access. He is forced to call or text with his ties.

However, the global map shows that he has friends and family members living abroad and emailing is crucial in connecting here, easily and cheaply:

I’ve got an uncle who lives in America so I email him a lot because it’s a lot cheaper than phone calls. [I have friends from] Preston, that now live in … Nice. So they send an email once a month. They send it to all their friends … say 30/50 people. That’s the only other email I get as well (No. 21, male porter, mid-twenties).

Emailing for him is a technology of long distance communication with people that have left home. This example illustrates how people with otherwise relative ‘little box’ networks often possess a few far-flung connections that they predominantly stay in contact with by email. Yet his relationship to his uncle in the US is also sustained through visits and physical travel as the uncle regularly visits England and occasionally offers a ticket to the US (see Chapter 7).

Most literature reviewed in Chapter 2 discusses mobile networks in relation to people who are themselves mobile, but this ignores how the less mobile can be much affected by the more mobile. This respondent’s international ties are not a product of his mobility; he is rather affected by the mobility of others. His networks would have been less far-flung if they had stayed put. As a general point this example helps us to grasp how far-flung networks do not need to be of one’s own making, because networks are relational. Most networks will consist of a combination of very mobile and less mobile people, and mobile, far-flung networks are thus not only common amongst the privileged few.

6.4.2 Map 2 (No. 18, female personal trainer)

Map 2 highlights how long distance communicative travel is habitually part of some people’s network practices and how email and phoning can sustain and develop ties formed through physical travel.
One striking feature of this map is that three of her identified most important people live in the US. Even more striking, as the boxes reveal, are the weekly emails and phone calls flowing between Manchester and the US. She makes expensive international calls at home and emails at the local library since she has no access to international calls or emailing at work or home. These strong ties, that have lasted up to 15 years, are almost exclusively sustained through communication at-a-distance, as they meet up only once a year at most (flight tickets alone cost around £400; her annual salary is £18,000).

Their weekly communication helps her and her friends to overcome the distance separating them:

I can call these guys any time and we just talk for hours and it’s like I saw them yesterday. It’s really strange, because I even said to Sarah yesterday you just sound like you’re in the next room. She just sounded like she was next door to me. Lou phoned first from Chicago and then Mia phoned in the afternoon from New York, and wished me happy birthday which was really really nice. We always send birthday cards, emails and speaking on the telephone … just to say hello, how are you, we’re doing really well, what they’ve been up to, what the boys are doing at school and just how things are going in life in general really. Because Sarah is having her kitchen refurbished, so that’s a topic of conversation (No. 18, female personal trainer, mid-thirties).

Hour long conversations and letter-type emails resemble face-to-face conversations in enabling people to catch up, fulfil social obligations (e.g. saying ‘happy birthday’), discuss personal problems, share gossip and so on. And occasionally they do meet up, once a year if money and time allow it, or at a special event that makes it more or less obligatory. In the next chapter we see how a wedding will next bring them all together.

So how did they meet? The international ties map shows that this person has lived in the US. In 1991, while working as an au pair for a year in Connecticut she met Sarah and at a subsequent tourist-type visit she introduces her to Lou. Between 1995 and 2000 she works as a personal trainer on a cruise ship in Caribbean and here she meets her third American friend. Her two most important people – best friend and co-residing partner – locally in Manchester are people she also met on this cruise ship. So, as she says: ‘most of my really good friends, I have either met whilst I have been travelling abroad or I’ve met them on the cruise ship’. In contrast to the respondent behind Map 1, her mobile, far-flung network is very much of her own making.
This map illustrates how periods of travelling, working or studying abroad normally have lasting network effects especially now that travel and long distance communications are widespread. In Chapter 2 we discussed how sociologists like Beck-Gernsheim argues that ‘individualisation’ and mobility mean that relationships are short lived, so our age is one of ‘more beginnings’ and ‘farewells’. However, this tends to overlook the increasing significance of reunions within relationships conducted at-a-distance (2002: 41; and see Chapter 2). In other words, more farewells are not the same as a refusal of permanent ties.

This map neatly illustrates how most social networks are made up of close by and far-flung ties, face-to-face sociability and mediated talk. Except for her American friends and a friend in London, all her ties are within North West England, in Manchester and her old hometown Chester, where her parents, sisters and other friends live. While they text or phone much, it these people that provide her with vital doses of physical co-presence. Respondent No. 18 has access to a car on a daily basis and travels the 56 km to Chester once every week. She would prefer to live in Chester but it is too expensive so she settled on Manchester. She is particular keen to move back in the near future as she hopes start a family, and her family’s physical support is believed to be crucial. Being on the move is no longer so desirable for this respondent, yet her social network is likely to remain far-flung because she keeps her distant ties alive mainly through communicative travel and very occasional tourist-type meeting.

Far-flung networks sustained primarily through communicative travel are likely to be even more significant in the future where broadbanded Internet and especially free telephony on the internet (as it is now with Skype) will make it cheaper and easier. However, this research suggests that rather than substituting meetings and travel, free communicative travel is likely to increase it, because with cost-free communication ties are less likely to weaken when they become dispersed and this create the need for intermittent physical travel.

6.4.3 Map 3 (No. 24, male doorman)

In Chapters 2 to 4 we briefly discussed how the number of international migrants has increased since 1960s, and that this potentially produces mobile, far-flung networks that depend upon much imaginative and corporeal travel (VFR tourism) to sustain ties to places and people back home.

Map 3 visualises one example of a migration network. In this example we can see that respondent No. 24 who now lives in Thornton having moved to South Africa as a young schoolboy with his family. Some ten years ago, he and his partner (born and raised in South Africa by English parents), decide to ‘return’, believing that Britain offers a better life than
post-apartheid South Africa. They moved to Bristol (and not any other place) because his sisters had recently moved there from South Africa:

My sister was living there at that particular time. I’ve only got one sister and she’d moved back to England about two years previous to us moving and she offered to help us with accommodation and setting us up and helping looking for work, etc. So that was my main reason because my sister was there. She was there purely for work. She had no family connections in Bristol either … we did want to come back to the UK, but the actual city of Bristol, the only reason was because my sister was there (No. 24, male porter, mid-thirties).

Additional motivation to make this difficult move was that his mother and some good friends had just made the same move; the mother moving back to her roots in North West England while the friends went to London on a two-year tourist visa. This couple lived in Bristol for four years, before moving back to his roots in the North West, triggered mainly by a job offer, but also of the idea of moving closer to his mother now back home. This case demonstrates how networks are implicated in both the timing and the routes and destinations that migrants follow.

This network illustrates how migration is not a linear journey from one home to another, but a more complex one involving regular communication and journeys to South Africa and South African friends across the UK and elsewhere. His far-flung ties in London, Bournemouth, Stockholm and Canada are all old friends or family members from his time in South Africa or to lesser extent are South Africans that he has been introduced to while living in the UK (the friends in Bournemouth). This illustrates how migration networks are often spread across multiple places and how migrants sustain close ties with people from back home, whether they are still at home or also on the move. Most of his strong ties are thus long lasting friendships, and he argues that such ‘deep-rooted’ friendships can stand the test of distance:

They are very deep-rooted friendship, which is long lasting, and I don’t think will ever go away. I think if you’ve made a friend just recently, that time you’ve been friends you will soon forget about them…if you’ve got experience of growing up with them and been through a lot of things, then I think that strengthens a friendship definitely (No. 24, male porter, mid-thirties).

Here he also refers to the fact that he has more or less lost contact with the friends that he briefly knew in Bristol.

The major reason that this far-flung transnational network can sustain itself is that it occasionally meets up, individually but also collectively, which is something that the
migration literature has largely overlooked until recently. That network geographies like his are more and more widespread and explain why VFR tourism also grows.

One important meeting place is his friend’s home in London where his friends from Bournemouth and Sweden are likely to show up too when travelling there every half-year or so:

The friend in Sweden is also a best friend from Cape Town who’s now living there. He also flies to London. Their brother is actually my best friend in London; he’s the brother of the one in Sweden. So if we go to London we may get to see him there as well as the Bournemouth crowd (No. 24, male porter, mid-thirties).

Respondent No. 24 normally travels the 381 km down to London by car because it is cheaper when travelling with his family and because he can make a detour to his sister’s home or to Bournemouth. Another meeting place is Cape Town where they try to meet up each summer. Here the flight tickets alone cost around £700 which represents a major obstacle and this prevents him and his family travelling every year (despite free accommodation). Possibilities for cheap, flexible long distance travel are thus essential for his network capital (as we will discuss in detail in Chapter 7), as VFR tourism is essential for his social life.

By contrast with respondent No. 18 and her American friends (Map 2), this network is sustained primarily through corporeal travel. This respondent phones and emails very little, approximately once a month on average with each tie. He thinks that it is very expensive to call South Africa (his father is the only one that he phones regularly with), and it is too expensive for his friends in South Africa to email him. This network’s emails are different from respondent No. 18. Rather than personal letter-type emails theirs are collectively distributed jokes. They are nonetheless meaningful as they distribute commonality and connectivity at the same time as fun:

[Some days] ago I received an email from South Africa from one of my close male friends … just a funny joke… Even though some of these are general and you’re just on the address list, you know it’s from a good friend, so even though the friend doesn’t particularly go to you: “how are you”, you still get a feeling that that friendship is there because of who’s it from, you know, and because they have obviously got the same sense of humour as you. The sender will obviously know that you will find it funny. So there’s that connection there (No. 24, male porter, mid-thirties).

While many of his most important ties are very dispersed indeed, Map 3 also reveals that the three most important people are local, his mother, a very recent workmate and a friend
without connection to South African. Clearly, especially given his thoughts on the different significances of old friends contra new friends, he cannot be as close to these new friends as to his old ‘South Africans’, but they are very important to his present everyday as they are a ‘bridge’ to his new home and people that it only takes a short walk or drive to socialise with. This example illustrates how strong ties in practice may often be what we would otherwise classify as weak ties. The distinction between weak ties and strong ties are often blurred as they depend upon people’s network geographies. For newcomers, weak ties can quickly turn into strong ties and they can equally quickly become weak again, if one of them moves on.

6.4.4 Map 4 (No. 4, male architect)

Map 4 illustrates how widespread residential mobility often will result in far-flung networks and much weekend travel, even if the person returns home. It also questions the idea that home is necessarily a place of attachment.

This respondent (No. 4) has also moved much and yet returned to his childhood city, to Southport. In between leaving in 1991 and returning in 2004, he lived in five places in the UK as well as spending shorter periods in Sydney and Vancouver. He very much expresses a mobile or cosmopolitan sensibility: ‘I don’t think it is healthy just to be in the one place all the time. I think it is healthy to get around and see what’s going on in the rest of the world’.

We saw that respondents who went to university have moved most often and over the longest distances; this architect was particular mobile as a student. He moved from Southport to Liverpool to go to technical college; to Huddersfield to take ‘Part 1’ of his architectural degree; back to his parents in Southport for his ‘year out’ to work for a Liverpool based practice; to Leicester for ‘Part 2’ and Birmingham for ‘Part 3’. Then he travelled with his girlfriend, spending one year in both Australia and Vancouver, working occasionally for an international architectural firm, mainly to cover his travel expenses: ‘it was really more homework experience than anything serious …just sort of subsistence living really’. It is well-known that gap-year travel, that is increasingly common amongst youngish well-educated people, combines lively city life and work experience (Latham and Conradson 2005b).25

From here this respondent moved to Manchester because of a good job offer, while his girlfriend went back to Glasgow to pursue a career there, so a desire to pursue career was one major reason that their relationship turned into a long-distance one (partly because of distance

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25 Latham and Conradson (2005) discuss how a vibrant cosmopolitan city like London attracts a very large numbers of such youngish people from New Zealand who normally stay for a couple of years before moving back to start family or a proper career.
the relationship eventually broke up). And after a few years he moved back to Southport. That this cosmopolitan architect ends up in his home town turns out to be an accidental homecoming that has little to do with place attachment and more with his career and getting on the ‘property ladder’:

Now I ultimately decided I’m going to work in Manchester and that’s where I’m going to settle down … When I reached that level where I was looking to buy a flat, I was looking round and there was nowhere in Manchester that was [affordable]…. So I kind of bought a flat back in Southport, which was still quite cheap, and I thought well I’ll rent that out. In the meantime I’ve got this job for […] and they were desperate looking for people in Liverpool. So I thought right fine… it seems like an opportunity, I’ve got this flat, I suppose I can [live there]….. I’m here [Liverpool] now is because it is one of the more exciting places to be as an architect. I think a lot of people might end up back where they lived because they’ve got nowhere else to go … I mean the only reason I do live here at the moment is because there’s a massive project here, and if this massive project wasn’t here, I wouldn’t be here (No. 4, male architect, early thirties).

While returning home, this respondent is likely to move elsewhere when this project ends or a new one comes up. He is one of the few respondents with little idea about where he will be living in five years time and he can easily see himself living abroad. This architect thus shows some resemblance to the ‘global architects’ researched by Kennedy (2004, 2005).

Widespread residential mobility as a student and as aspiring architect, coupled with well-educated, mobile friends, explain why this respondent’s network is widely dispersed across the UK and abroad (living on average 1484 km from his most important people) and he is a stranger in his old hometown, so he needs to rejuvenate or reform friendships there:

Because I’ve done a lot of moving around in the last couple of years, I’ve got a lot of friends, contacts all over the place …. even though I am here in the place where I started, I’ve gone full circle, I don’t actually know that many people here and people I do know I don’t want to know any more … all the friends I’ve … grown up with when I was in Southport, they are all spread out all over the country now and I’m still in touch with a lot of them… [However,] I can see myself being here [in Southport] for a few years at the moment, so I’ve kind of put down a few roots and stuff, but at the same time … (No. 4, male architect, early thirties).

His networking practices are thus a balance between meeting new people in Southport and Liverpool and sustaining old ties with friends living elsewhere through email and weekend travel.
He has already set roots as his three of his identified most important people are in Southport: his mother, an old friend and a very recent workmate. These are people that he meets regularly. But the other boxes on Map 4 reveal that he also has much interaction with his non-local friends. For example, he emails his old university friend in Mauritius daily and meets up with his sister monthly despite requiring a 4.5 hour train journey (involving 4 changes) costing at least £38. He receives and sends some 75 private emails weekly and undertook 27 longer weekend journeys to visit friends and family members in 2004. His network capital is high as he has access to private emailing at work and a substantial budget for leisure travel (this is discussed in Chapters 7 and 8).

6.5 Conclusion

In this chapter we developed ways to measure and map networks and their associated networking practices. We began with documenting the scale of the respondents’ residential mobility over the last 10-15 years. It was shown that most have experiences of living beyond the North West and this includes people that now live in their old home town. We went on to measure the respondents’ distances to their significant others and it was shown that many such ties are strikingly distant, and that long distance communication and travel in combination sustain them. Much of the literature reported in Chapter 2 highlights that weak ties are becoming far-flung, while this research shows that this is also often the case with strong ties. We also documented that phone calls, texting and especially face-to-face meetings become less regular with increasing distances, while the trend is reversed with emails. This indicates that emails in particular substitute for face-to-face sociality when distance makes it too time-consuming and expensive. However, while the frequency of face-to-face meetings falls dramatically with increasing distances, none of the respondents have strong ties that are only sustained through communicative travel.

We elaborated upon these quantitative findings by examining four instructive networks illustrated though novel maps showing the distribution of strong ties and mobility practices. These four illustrations showed that networks are distant for different reasons and sustained through various means. They also brought out how the common distinctions between mobile and immobile people, local and non-local networks are too simple and non-relational. The four respondents’ networks are affected by the mobility of others in complex and contingent ways. Network geographies are not purely of one’s own making as the individualization thesis argues. Less mobile people can in theory have very far-flung networks while this is not always the case here with those apparently more mobile.
In the following two chapters we further explore some of the findings of this chapter. In the next one we examine the social significance of long distance travel in societies where distant ties are common, while Chapter 8 further examines relationships between physical travel and communications through exploring how mobile communications can serve to co-ordinate a mobile social life.
7. Travel and meetings

In the last chapter we documented the geographical extent of the reported social networks and how virtual, communicative and corporeal travel connects disperse social relations. The review chapters documented how much leisure and tourist-type travel should not be seen as marginal, superfluous and by implication unnecessary. In this chapter we examine in detail the significance of corporeal travel to our sample. We explore to what degree and how travel is used to network, to connect networks and meet up with distant connections in face-to-face proximities. The chapter thus examines if mobility is not necessarily detrimental to social capital but can in fact produce this valuable social good.

We begin with documenting how many times in 2004 the sample travelled within the UK and abroad, and we test our hypotheses (formulated in Chapter 5) regarding the uneven distribution of travel. Then, elaborating upon the five-fold schema in Chapter 4, we examine why people travel, and document the scale of VFR tourism. The rest of the chapter then analyses how the respondents visit and receive the hospitality of close friends, workmates and family members living elsewhere, and travel to fulfil social obligations by attending Christmas parties, birthdays, weddings, funerals and so on.

7.1 Travel patterns

Table 4 shows that in 2004 the average respondent made 2.4 international leisure journeys and almost 10 UK leisure journeys of more than 100 miles. The average number of business trips made that year was 0.2 abroad and 2.4 within the UK. 19 out of 24 travelled abroad for leisure at least once, while two went on an international business trip. We may thus say that these people travel more for life than for a living.

In Chapter 4 we showed that travel is unevenly distributed. In our sample, the three people that made most long distance UK journeys undertook 27, 25 and 10 respectively, while six of the sample made only one or none. There are disparities between and within the three occupations. The 9 architects undertook 3.1 international journeys and 15.6 domestic journeys. The figures for those in the fitness industry are 1.8 and 4.6, and for the security staff 1.8 and 6.4. As hypothesised, the architects travel significantly more than the two other subgroups. This is in part because they have higher incomes (see Table 1) and more distant connections resulting from their mobile university biographies. Practically all of the architects have mobile travel biographies.
The picture is less clear cut with regard to the two other subgroups. For instance, the two receptionists (No. 12 and 13), who earn modest incomes (£15,000 and £13,000), make many long distance journeys within UK to visit friends and family members back home and university friends elsewhere, while the high-earning (£30,000) sales manager (No.14) did not undertake any long distance journeys within UK because his social network is located within North West England. But while the sales manager went abroad three times in 2004, the two receptionists only managed one such trip between them because of limited funds. The two persons (No. 19 and 24) that did not undertake any long distance travel in 2004 have relatively low incomes (£16,000 and £14,000). Income is an important element of network capital but it does not determine travel behaviour. Rather appropriate income and distant connections generate leisurely travel and mobile biographies.

Why, then, do these people travel so much? 45% of international journeys involve visiting other places. Visiting significant others and attending weddings, stag nights, funerals and reunions account for around one third of journeys abroad. This indicates that leisure travel is highly heterogeneous as it comprises both the desire for exotic places and of networking with familiar faces, and these desires often coexist within the same journey. The remaining quarter of journeys are hybrids of these two, and they should not be forced into either category (which is common with closed questions using pre-coded purpose categories). Thus overall visiting extraordinary places and meeting significant others often go hand in hand. As one respondent reported:

It’s usually a combination. Obviously with the cost of travelling and the cost of staying somewhere, if we can make the best out of the trip, the better. So if we can get in doing the tourist thing, doing the relaxation thing and doing the family thing all in one go, then that’s convenient bonus. If my friend is in Berlin, then that’s great because I’ve never been to Berlin before so I’m killing two birds with one stone. I’m looking forward to Berlin (No. 10, male sales adviser, late twenties).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Income</th>
<th>Long distance journeys in 2004</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>UK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Architect</td>
<td>32,000</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>N/A</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Architect</td>
<td>24,000</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Receptionist</td>
<td>13,000</td>
<td>24</td>
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<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Porter</td>
<td>9,500</td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Architect</td>
<td>25,000</td>
<td>20</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>Architect</td>
<td>25,000</td>
<td>17</td>
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<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Architect</td>
<td>13,400</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Doorman</td>
<td>11,000</td>
<td>10</td>
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<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Sales adviser</td>
<td>20,000</td>
<td>10</td>
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<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Architect</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Architect</td>
<td>27,000</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Fitness Instructor Manager</td>
<td>22,000</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Receptionist</td>
<td>15,000</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>Doorman</td>
<td>15,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Porter</td>
<td>12,455</td>
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<td>18,000</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>Doorman</td>
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<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Architect</td>
<td>N/A</td>
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<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Sales adviser</td>
<td>20,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Sales Manager</td>
<td>30,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Porter</td>
<td>14,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Sales Manager</td>
<td>19,000</td>
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<td>17</td>
<td>Sales Staff</td>
<td>16,000</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Average</td>
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<td>9.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This last quotation illustrates the point made in Chapter 3 that the term VFR tourism is unsatisfactory because it underemphasizes the significances of places when visiting friends. In that chapter we discussed how business travel often turn into leisure travel, and this is another
way of ‘killing two birds with one stone’ that some of the respondents also use. Thus one explained:

‘I’m canny basically on this. If I can, I’ll find a reason to be down in London and I can get a ticket off work. It’s an open ticket so I can use it whenever… So I can sort of like arrange a meeting on Friday, sorted’ (No. 4, male architect, early thirties).

Some explain that it is business travel that enables them to see their best friends. As this fitness instructor manager in Manchester says:

My oldest and closest friend, this guy down in Oxford … We were as thick as thieves at school… We … lost contact for about a year … And it actually ended up that he came up for business to Bolton about two years ago, and he rang me and said “I’m in Bolton do you fancy meeting up” … Now we probably meet up once every … every couple of months, that’s probably as often as we meet up, just because his work is very hectic and so is mine, and also he’s got a family and now I’ve got my fiancée. Most of the time it’s because work has taken us close to where we are (No. 16, male fitness instructor, mid-thirties).

This exemplifies how travel surveys and tourist typologies need to be more sophisticated in their categories in order to capture the ways in which many journeys serve several purposes and combine various mode of travel, as when meetings or conferences are followed up by a weekend break, or migrants return home, or migrants receive guests from back home and so on.

Travel theory and research have traditionally seen travellers as free-floating individuals seeking to maximise their hedonistic aspirations. They have failed to notice the obligations that choreograph ‘tourism escapes’. In Chapter 3 we discussed how there are various more or less binding and more or less pleasurable obligations that require meetings of co-presence. There are obligations to places, objects, events and especially people. As a male architect says:

The last [holiday]…. was my mum’s 60th birthday … we really couldn’t afford it but we were keen to make it a special birthday for her so we got cheap flights … So we went to Rome for 3 or 4 days … I mean family is very important to me, and the year before it was my dad’s 70th birthday so we went to Prague with him and we kind of felt we really had to do something for my mum as well for her 60th … my sister, who didn’t come, did contribute towards the price of the flights and things like that (No. 3, male architect, early thirties).
One woman explains how she and her partner invited her parents to Las Vegas to see the singer Celine Dion on their 35th wedding anniversary:

My mum and dad are big fans of Celine Dion … It was actually their 35th wedding anniversary and it was kind of a Christmas present, anniversary present and birthday present all rolled into one - just a very nice treat. Even when we went to see Celine Dion we got superb tickets. We were five rows from the front and we could see everything. And she could see us and we could see her and it was just amazing (No. 18, female personal trainer, early thirties).

These offspring show their love for their parents by giving them a special holiday. The obligatory nature of the holiday to Rome is shown by the fact that it takes place despite a lack of money and the need for the absent sister’s financial contribution. These gifts are more than tickets to see Rome, Celine Dion and Las Vegas; they represent a desire for being with the parents and having quality time, for experiencing the places and events together as a family. The concert in Las Vegas does not only offer proximity to a famous star, but also to each of the family members; it evaporates the forty or more miles (they live in Liverpool and Chester respectively) that separate their homes and prevent them from having as much co-presence at home as they would otherwise like.

So the interviews also bring out the significance of tourist travel as a way of being intimate with one’s close family. As we discussed in Chapter 3, tourists are not only encountering other bodies and places but also travel with significant others. This following quote illustrates how an extended family that all live close to each other nonetheless embark on tourist travel to bring the family ‘a little closer together’ after it suffered from ‘a couple of deaths’:

The second time it was like a big family holiday. There was like 19 of us who went. So it was kind of organised for everybody really … We’d had a couple of deaths in the family and it was in quite a short space of time, within a couple of weeks of each other. It kind of brought the family a little bit closer together. So everybody decided right let’s all…we’ve not had a holiday together before so let’s all go away now (No. 24, male sales adviser, mid-twenties).

7.2 Visiting and hosting

VFR tourism is distinct in that it requires more than just economic capital. It also needs far-flung friends or family members who may offer hospitality. Distant connections enable people with modest incomes to travel further than their income would otherwise allow. The male porter, mapped in the previous chapter, has a ‘rich’ uncle in San Francisco:
I have been to San Francisco twice [within the last couple of years] … he [uncle] said “oh you must come” … The company that my uncle was working for, he got all these air miles … I stayed at my uncle’s place … Yeah, he’s always got things planned, like we’ll go and watch a baseball or basketball game. He’s always got tickets there waiting for us, so it’s quite cheap when we get there (No. 21, male university porter, mid-twenties).

Here we again see how business travel and leisure travel overlap, since business travel generates air miles that generate leisure travel for others. Some respondents describe how they go abroad more often now that their parents have bought a villa in Spain or France:

Well we’ve just bought a house so we are planning on not putting all our money into that [tourist travel] this year. However, we will go to Majorca because it’s a family home so it just costs us the flights. So yeah we will do that (No. 14, sales manager, mid-twenties).

The lure of free accommodation means that people living in what are deemed to be ‘interesting’ places are especially likely to receive visitors:

I’m organising a trip to Mexico because I know he’s [friend] only there for another year, so there’s no point on missing out on free accommodation … You know, say it was somewhere like Azerbaijan, I don’t think I would be that keen on going, but you know Mexico, I’d quite like to go there (No. 5, male architect, late twenties).

Someone else states:

I’m going there because I want to go back to Africa and it’s a good excuse. If I know someone there already, he can like show us around and show us where the good spots are, where the dodgy spots are … Yeah, more to see Africa, but yeah we will see him too (No. 12, receptionist, early twenties).

This illustrates how free hospitality might be somewhat exploited to achieve cheap holidays rather than co-presence.

Much travel thus involves a particular combination of places and significant people; most tourists take a trip with significant others (unlike solitary business travellers) and they might visit or meet up with friends or kin. Very few tourists see the world through a solitary romantic gaze or travel the world as a lonely flâneur without an intended destination. They travel with their partner to visit parents in their hometown or their migrated parents in Spain or their best friend now living in Felixstowe or an old university friend now working in Berlin or head for a stag night in Amsterdam with a group of friends. So when people travel to
friends or kin they simultaneously travel to particular places, and these places will be especially experienced through the host’s social networks and accumulated knowledge of its cultural scene or of ‘nature’. Another way of expressing this is by saying that sociality matters in sightseeing and places matter in visiting other people.

### 7.3 Distant connections and travel

In Chapter 3 we discussed how new research spells out the significance of tourist travel to migrants and members of diasporic cultures. International tourist travel to see friends and relatives is particularly significant to the three migrants in this sample that were shown in the last chapter to possess stretched out networks.

The Irish male architect (No.5) returned to Ireland three times in 2004. On each occasion it was coordinated as a self-directed package holiday where he toured various places to see friends, family members and the national rugby team playing crucial games, thus combining obligations to significant people and live events. So timing was crucial on these trips.

For the doorman (No.24) and his family, who was mapped in the previous chapter, who lived 25 years in South Africa before returning to the UK, annual holidays to South Africa are essential even though they are expensive and prevent him from touring mainland Europe. It is very important to return home to stay in contact with, and introduce their daughter to their family as well as to the nature of South Africa. These visits also enable him to reunite with friends living in Cape Town, elsewhere in UK and Europe, as his transnational circle of friends and their families coordinate their holidays so that they visit Cape Town at the same time. He also explains how the last time that his family-in-law came to UK was straight after they had their first baby. They stayed for three months to help out with the baby and to provide general support.

Obligations and caring were also part of the reason why the woman architect from Russia (No.2) travelled to Russia three times in 2004:

I was there in December and at New Year, then I was there … at the beginning of summer to my best friend’s wedding and then my granddad passed away so I went only three weeks after that … My mum phoned me in the evening, I was in the office. I stayed in the office overnight just to finish off things, and booked flights first thing in the morning, called a taxi, called for passport and I was in Russia in about… I don’t know, less than a day after she phoned. He lived with us for 17 years. I really had to be there. I went for a week and then I
went in December again – for Christmas (No. 2, female architect, early thirties).

This illustrates how intimate networks of care, support and affection can be traced over geographical distance, as scholars of kinship and immigration have long known (see Chapter 2). This female architect speaks with her mother in Russia every Saturday morning for an hour or so and she is in more or less daily email contact with her brother living in Russia that needs her help with various issues. While caring at-a-distance works in most cases, the death of her granddad means that ‘she really has to be there’, to be in proximity with the rest of family. She has to care in a much more embodied and social way than is possible by just phone calls and emails.

Timing is everything; this woman has to be on time for the funeral and she is therefore in an acute rush to fulfil her work obligations and arrange the journey. This example illustrates how flexible and efficient coordination and travel depend upon access to, and skilful use of, phone, mobile, the Internet, email, Web pages as well as the financial means to buy last-minute tickets and to take a taxi. This is further developed in Chapter 8.

Another example of how obligations to significant others, caring and complex family biographies can generate tourist travel relates to UK born porter (No.19) with Indian parents and a husband born and bred in an Indian village. This couple and their four children can only afford\textsuperscript{26} to travel to his family in India once every five years or so. They once went because her father-in-law was seriously ill and he had never seen his oldest grandchild: being very ill the grandfather was very eager to see his grandchild and they were eager to support their parents and be there in case he passed away. The grandfather eventually recovered and is now living with them in England:

Well my eldest daughter was four, and my husband’s parents had never seen my children and they’d not seen their grandchildren basically. So I think because my father in law had become ill, he was ill and he wanted to see his son and wanted to see my children because

\textsuperscript{26} As she says: ‘If it was just me and my husband … it might not be too bad, but because it’s like me and my husband and the five children and his mum … Well I tried to calculate just for the summer…just flight only was going to be over £5000, that’s without…. Because obviously when we go there we do have like family even still, we can’t expect them to pay for us. Like my husband always makes sure that with the food and everything coming into the house, he was giving his sister the money, and she would buy the food. We’ve never relied, depended on them, because they don’t have that much money themselves. So my last journey, when I went with three children and my husband and his mother, ….in a matter of like six weeks, we spent about £13-£14,000’.
they’d never seen them … at that point it was important for him to be there because his father was ill and he wanted to go and he wanted the children to see his parents. So I suppose because the parents are here now it’s not been as important as it was at the time (No. 19, female porter, late thirties).

Now that her husband’s parents are living with them in the same house in the UK it less important for them to visit India.

### 7.4 Catching up

Trips abroad to catch up with busy friends living in the UK are also common (see Shove 2002). Long work hours, commitments to partners and dispersed social networks make it difficult for friends to meet up spontaneously at the same time, so meetings are coordinated in advance and tourist travel often brings networks together:

> My friends from back home in Chester, everyone does their own thing. It’s quite difficult to all meet up at the same time. We’ve all got like our partners and things like that, and our partners aren’t really from the same area so they don’t really know each other very well. Quite often, if we are going to meet up, we try and go away or something together (No. 11, male sales adviser, late twenties).

This is how another sales adviser explains a recent extended weekend trip to Amsterdam:

> It was more of a touristy holiday, a relaxing holiday. I went with four other friends as well. People I hadn’t seen for a while. It was a catching up holiday. They mainly came from London. It was people that I hadn’t seen whilst I was away in Barcelona. I had come back but they were living in opposite sides of London so it was still far enough. And then we decided to get together and go for a holiday (No. 10, male sales adviser, late twenties).

The male architect, mapped in the previous chapter, possessing many distant connections explains how a recent stag night to Prague might turn out to be an annual event:

> … basically it was a circle of friends who I’ve known since I was at sixth form, college and university … It’s very very rare that we’re all in the same spot at any one time, all of us together, so there’s been a lot of talk about arranging it as a yearly thing because it is so rare that everyone can meet up for personal reasons, some have got family, married or live far away or you know work commitments. It seems like a really good excuse just to sort of say this year we’re going to Berlin for three or four days … (No. 4, male architect, early thirties).
He also talks about how he goes snowboarding once or twice a year and how these trips are important social events where people catch up with old friends, friends of friends and meet new people as new faces constantly join this revolving snowboard network stretching across UK and Europe. On the last trip to Canada ‘there were 12 of us … people in Glasgow and Aberdeen … people in London … right down to people in East Grinstead and Surrey and stuff like that. I’m sort of in the middle’.

7.5 Weddings, stag/hen nights and cheap airlines

A problem I have … I find a lot of my holidays have been taken up with going to weddings and going to stag dos. This year I’ve got seven weddings to go to … I’m going to have to take out a mortgage (No. 5, male architect, late twenties).

Fulfilling these obligations through tourist travel will often be costly. This also means that mobile social networks may in effect exclude those who would otherwise meet up if less expensive travel was required. In the quotation above we see how a male architect expresses his financial concern over the many weddings and stag nights he has to attend. Reflecting that the average age of the interviewees is 28.5, weddings, stag nights, hen nights and honeymoons trigger much tourist travel, especially among architects. Stag nights in vibrant places like Berlin, Amsterdam and Prague are now common given how low-cost airlines can assembly dispersed social networks in such places at a cost little more than meeting up in the UK. As two respondents reflect:

It’s [the stag night] in Berlin because the flights are cheap. It’s a city where not everyone… has been to….if you look at it, it’s cheaper than going to London for a stag do in terms of travel costs which is excellent, to go to a foreign country cheaper than you can within your country (No. 5, male architect, mid-twenties).

Well it’s more interesting isn’t it? You can spend £60 going to Amsterdam and people are a lot more attracted to doing that than say meeting in Birmingham. And yet because it is so cheap there are a hell of a lot more places (No. 4, male architect, early thirties).

Within recent years, budget airlines have compressed Europe’s cities into a transnational network of cheap and accessible playgrounds:

Yes, definitely I wouldn’t be able to do it if it was more expensive because Liverpool Airport is only 10 minutes from this office and I can often work a half-day and fly at lunch time or I can fly immediately after work. And I can be in Spain and I can be in
Germany in less time than I would be in London (No. 8, male architect, mid-twenties).

Many of our sample regularly embark on (extended) weekend trips with budget airlines to places such as Dublin, Barcelona, Berlin, Paris and Rome to have quality time with partners, to catch up with friends or family members, and to ‘misbehave’ at hen nights or stag nights.

Most interviewees agree that it is more or less obligatory to attend stag nights and especially the weddings of important friends and family members, even if it requires substantial travel:

With weddings, it’s a big thing isn’t it? You only get married once, so if it’s a close friend you definitely feel obligated … I can’t think of one invite we’ve turned down. We’ve probably been to about three or four and we’ve got about five or six over the next two years to go to. All over the place … you would just have to go wherever they are really. Like I say if it’s in France or Greece or whatever (No. 7, male architect, late twenties).

Faraway weddings mobilise otherwise immobile people and bring together friends and family members that seldom meet up because distance separates them. In the last chapter we discussed how a female personal trainer phones and emails weakly with her American friends but hardly ever see them (Map 2). Yet the next time they meet is at her wedding, and she is touched that they will make her wedding, especially because one of them:

… has never been out of the United States. And to turn round and say I’m making the effort to your wedding, and she doesn’t like flying either … and it’s going to 9/10 hours … I think to myself WOW (No. 18, early thirties).

After the wedding, they are taking these Americans on a guided tour to London to show their appreciation that they made the journey, as her fiancé – a fitness manager – explains:

… we’re very fortunate in the fact that none of the people that we know have ever been to the UK so they’re desperate to come over anyway, and we’ve actually arranged it so that they will arrive a couple of days before the wedding, and we’ve also got a few days after the wedding before we go on our honeymoon so we can take these guys…almost like a group excursion to London … They are coming over here for our wedding to help us celebrate but they will also do their sight seeing as well (No. 16, fitness manager, mid-thirties).
The obligatory nature of weddings creates dilemmas if they clash with other obligations, especially if others do not acknowledge them. As one dedicated Liverpool football fan reflects:

I have a record of not missing a match for about 10 years at home … this year my partner’s cousin is getting married in April [on a Saturday] and [perhaps] it clashes with a home match … her auntie has invited everyone round to her house for a get together the day after the wedding … I’m not going to miss the wedding, I can’t miss the wedding … but if Liverpool are playing on Sunday then I will be tempted to come up on my own to watch the match because I don’t feel it’s quite as important, but again that will really be frowned upon, so…. (No. 3, male architect, early thirties).

Not fulfilling social obligations can have significant social consequences; in this example, this architect will ‘be really frowned upon’ if he fulfils his obligations to his football friends rather than the guests at the wedding.

Obligations are thus not fixed in time and space, but are negotiated, contested and enforced. ‘Moral’ work is often required to remind people of their obligations. As one person says about the surprisingly big turn out for his wedding in Spain:

I think my father probably put a lot of pressure on his brothers and sisters, my aunties and uncles, to come over from Ireland, because they were all there (No. 6, male architect, early thirties).

Perhaps this pressure was needed because no family members have connections with Spain. The couple got married in Spain because they wanted it to be special, and this was possible because they have wealthy friends that have retired to a well-known tourist spot that is connected to UK by budget airlines:

So I was talking to a couple of friends of ours who ….. they’re retirement age, 65, quite wealthy and they’d just bought a house over in Spain, a villa, a holiday home. And I was telling them my predicament. I said we just don’t know what to do … We just want to go and get married somewhere. So they said why don’t you get married near the villa in Spain? (No. 6, male architect, early thirties).

During the wedding preparations the architect and his fiancée travelled four times to Spain where they also enjoyed the hospitality of friends. This again illustrates how connections at-a-distance can afford possibilities for mobile lifestyles.
7.6 Weekend touring and significant others

Most of the reported long distance leisure journeys within the UK (more than 160 km) are (extended) weekend tours, and therefore involve at least one overnight stay (so qualify as tourist travel). Exceptions are one-day trips to football matches, mountain bike races in the countryside and so on. In Chapter 3 we discussed how most long distance travel is tied up with visiting significant others, and most of the long distance travel of these youngish peoples is to visit friends, kin and attend significant events; it is travel for social purposes. Very few of the journeys are simply excursions or holidays to particular sights within the UK.

Compared with one-day trips, tourist travel allows people to spend sustained, slow moving quality time together. When staying overnight there is no rush to catch the last train or worry about drinking too much to drive (the significance of meeting up in pubs and going for dinners are accentuated in many of the interviews!) or to catch up in a hurry. Rather than just having a meal for a few hours, they spend, say, 48 hours together.

Many of these meetings with friends and family take place at (extended) weekends. One respondent explained how: ‘Normally about 3 nights. We don’t normally go down for 2 nights. Longer than 3 nights you start getting in each other’s way’ (No. 24, male doorman, mid-thirties). Such tourist travel is of relatively short duration because it takes place in private homes (with perhaps too little space for extra people) and through non-commercialised hospitality; it requires substantial domestic work and guiding to host friends.

As hypothesised in Chapter 1, people compensate for the intermittence of meetings and the cost of transport (time, money and weariness) by spending a whole day or weekend or week(s) together, often staying in each other’s homes. In other words, frequent yet short visits turn into intermittent yet longer periods of face-to-face co-presence, of hosting and visiting. Their meetings are less frequent but more intense and multifaceted:

I often think that the people that are not local I only see two or three times a year, I have a stronger friendship with than the people I see every two or three weeks because it’s quality time (No. 24, male doorman, mid-thirties).

The last chapter documented that most people have a mix of close and distant connections. Their distant connections are typically very good friends known for a long time; they are deep-rooted friends that people are ready to travel for. The much travelled architect ‘mapped’ in the Chapter 6 says (Map 4):

I’ve got a lot of good friends in this office for example who I am establishing good relationships with, but you know you also have your
best friends, don’t you, the people you have grown up with over the years, there is quite a strong bond and you are prepared to make the effort to sort of go out and see them. And it’s always rewarded - you are never disappointed. You know maybe I’ll go to London and see some friends there and I know I’ll have a really good time, and I’ll come back and say I’m glad I went. It’s better than sitting round the house all day and … it actually only costs you like £20 on the train if you buy it in advance. It’s absolutely no effort at all for a much better quality of life sometimes … (No. 4, male architect, early thirties).

Best friendships can thus cope with distance, because they have stood the test of time. This architect illustrates how commitments and commitments to friends and family members have far from completely dissolved in ‘liquid modernity’, even among mobile people.

In comparison, friendships close by are often more fickle and less likely to endure if they become far-flung:

One have I lost contact with? A guy that I worked with on the cruise ship. Cracking bloke he came onto the ship about three or four weeks after me, five years younger, got on like a house on fire, really good bloke. With us both working in the same industry, big into fitness, we would work out all the time. We actually had a week when we were in dry dock so the ship was shut down for a week. So we had two weeks rather. So we spent a week in Miami, went up to Florida, did all that. We were close. When I finished my contract he was about another two months behind me. He lived in Ipswich, and we would speak on the phone quite regularly, saying “oh we’re going to have to meet up”, “we’re going to have to meet up”, and yet we never did. And then gradually it turned from telephone calls to emails, and from emails it was like “oh I got married last week”. And it was like ah, right, ok (No. 16, male fitness instructor manager, mid-thirties).

7.7 Guilt trips

Why do people travel? Tourist-type travel to see friends and relatives is particularly widespread among those who went to university. One Liverpool based architect, who grew up in Warwick and went to university in Plymouth and Liverpool, reflects upon why he spends many hours on the road every second week:

I think it’s because I now live in Liverpool and my family and my school friends are still back in Warwick, and I went to university in Plymouth so I’ve got friends from Plymouth, and then I’ve got friends in London … Some people I know in London were school friends, some people were at university in Liverpool, some people were at
university in Plymouth, and they’ve gone to London (No. 8, male architect, mid-twenties).

This explanation is in fact incomplete, as many of his journeys result from his partner’s equally stretched out social network. As he says: ‘Well last weekend I drove down to High Wycombe near London. My wife’s grandmother is ill, we think she will die soon so we went to visit her’.

Indeed the interviews reveal how tourist travel is rarely an isolated decision pursued by individual agents but a collective action involving friends, family members, partners and their friends and family members. When these people talk about where they travel and why, they make references to complex relationships with (two sets of) family and friends. Their travel accounts are highly relational, just as their residential accounts (as shown in the previous chapter). People are enmeshed in social dramas wherein travel depends upon negotiation, approval and feelings, and have social and emotional consequences. When we also take into account that many family events are more or less obligatory then we begin to explain how tourist travel has little to do with simple personal choice. In many instances ‘guilt trips’ set in motion physical trips:

… I don’t like going [to the family in Italy] I must admit. I’m not a massive fan of going. But I did….my mum wanted me to go … Yeah, because I get the old guilt trip and then I feel like I have to go (No. 22, male doorman, early twenties).

Indeed if people are absent at a compulsory family get together, it will be noted and their social face is likely to be damaged:

… [my partner’s] family are very rigid in the fact that there are certain days of the year like Easter, Boxing Day where it’s a kind of compulsory family get together, so you have to make that effort to go down there. Your absence would be noted if you weren’t there (No. 3, male architect, early thirties).

For many people, being in a relationship means travelling a lot: they are likely to have two sets of parents, brothers and sisters, uncles and aunts, grandparents as well as friends. This indicates that we cannot understand long distance travel patterns if the individual is taken as our unit of analysis (which is the case in most transport research). Individuals are enmeshed in networks that both enable and constraint possible individual actions. This also means that weekend touring can be especially stressful:

… we’ve got different groups of friends, her friends and my friends who live in London. And I actually hate going to London because
we’ve got so many friends that are down there, so when you go down there you feel you have to try and see everyone, and at the end you come back on the Sunday and you wish you had another couple of days off. It just never feels like a weekend when you go down there. And there will always be arguments because someone will find out that you’ve been down to London but you purposely haven’t told them because you know you can’t fit them in (No. 5, male architect, late-twenties).

This illustrates how such travel and visiting are effectively networking, sometimes enjoyable and stimulating, sometimes tedious and tiring. Social life conducted at-a-distance and tourist travel is certainly not cost-free with regard to both money and time.

7.8 Movement and (in)flexibility

… I was discussing with my wife last week that it would be horrible not having a car because of the weekends. We don’t use the car during the week very much. When it’s local we cycle. Then at the weekends it’s fantastic. It means it’s achievable (No. 8, male architect, mid-twenties).

Most national long distance travel within Europe is car based (Hubert and Potier 2003). This is so amongst our interviewees, because long-distance travel by car is thought to be cheaper and more flexible. As a male architect says:

I’m always [travelling] with my wife and if there’s two people in a car it’s always the cheapest I find. I think the train’s very expensive. Probably the main reason is the convenience because you have your own timetable, you can go when you want to, you can come back and you can go exactly where you need to be. And often we use the car when we get to the destination (No. 8, male architect, mid-twenties).

Another makes a similar argument:

We try to use the car if possible, it’s much more flexible and cheaper I guess. When we go and visit parents it is always pretty much by car. It is rare that we use the train for that. I use the train for work but I find that pretty good value. … [My partner’s] dad and my parents live in rural areas and once you get there you need to have that access to a car to get around. You couldn’t drive down to where my mum and dad live and get a train anywhere. You’d have to get the train to Shrewsbury, which is the main town, and they would have to come and pick you up from the station, it’s about six miles away. And the rest of the weekend you’d spend asking for lifts or whatever (No. 3, male architect, early thirties).
So long distance travel by car is cheaper than by train because these people undertake such journeys with friends or partners (unlike in America where Putnam, 2000 reports that people drive alone on 70% of all car journeys). They can share the cost of the petrol while there is no rebate when travelling together on trains. In this sense cars are economically flexible. This also explains why respondents in relationships especially found long distance travel by train ‘very expensive’. While most people find commuting by train ‘pretty good value’, this is not so with long distance travel undertaken with others.

These respondents also praise cars for affording temporal and spatial flexibility with regard to route and time schedule. Cars avoid much of the timetabling involved in most public transport. It is possible to leave late by car, to miss connections and not least to travel in a relatively timeless fashion. This is desirable since weekend trips often involve visiting people in more than one place. The flexibility of cars and inflexibility of trains are very pertinent in remote or rural areas where public transport often is insufficient. Some argue that their social life would suffer dramatically without a car because public transport is time-consuming and draining. A woman from the suburbs of Manchester with parents in Wirral explains the ‘pains’ she would have to endure if travelling there by public transport:

Well, yes. I would have to get from the house on the bus, then to Manchester, then from Manchester to Liverpool. Then I’d have to get another train over from Liverpool to the Wirral. Then there’d have to be another bus. It would take me at least two hours if not more. So the car is just so convenient. I don’t know what I’d do without a car … I would see them less, if I didn’t have one (No. 18, personal trainer, mid-thirties).

So without the car she would meet her family less often. Here the car is an indispensable part of network capital. The social fabric of this family would suffer without extensive car use (and this presents a major challenge to those providing public transport).

For most of these youngish people without children, cars are not essential for their weekly life. However, it is ‘horrible not having a car because of the weekends’, because it is difficult to meet regularly with distant others if relying upon public transport. Most respondents regard trains as expensive, unreliable (especially at weekends because of engineering work) and rigid with regard to route and time schedule. In societies where public transport is perceived as inflexible, cars are crucial for connecting distant connections. While cars are environmentally costly, they seem to be viewed as necessary for sustaining much social life.

However, sometimes trains can appear flexible and cars inflexible. A few respondents praise trains for their material affordances in relation to long distance travel, such as relaxing,
sleeping and reading (see also Lyon and Urry 2005). An architect who normally drives to work explains why he travels to London by train:

[I like trains] because I read. I take lots of things to keep my mind occupied. …it is a lot more satisfying than driving, easily. I mean you can arrive there with your head spinning from too much driving, dehydrated, needing the toilet (No. 4, male architect, early thirties).

Compared with train journeys where one can sleep, read, talk, eat, text, write, email, drink or relax after a good dinner or pub visit, cars seem constraining and demanding (not least for the driver). Indeed one architect who applauds cars later expresses ambivalence:

I find the drive down to London quite …in some ways I am kind of contradicting what I said, but the trip down to London is a bit of a bind. It is a 4-hour car journey and the petrol costs are actually quite high for that. If … [tickets] were a lot cheaper, I think we definitely would get the train down there more often (No. 3, male architect, early thirties).

And when asked whether he prefers train or car journeys, he replies:

I actually quite like train trips. I quite enjoy….it is much more relaxing to get a book, to be able to read, to listen to music if you want to do that, but it is just a lot more comfortable I think than driving a lot of the time, although you do have if you’re driving the flexibility of being able to stop if you want to (No. 3, male architect, late twenties).

It is thus wrong to see cars as inherently flexible and public transport as inherently inflexible. The respondents that commute to work by train partly do so because it allows them to relax, read newspapers, listen to music on their MP3-player, text message and make light office work, such as updating the personal diary, reading documents and journals. In major cities such Manchester and Liverpool with extensive public transport, congestion and few parking spaces, buses and especially trains are often more flexible for commuting to work. There is nothing we may note flexible about a car caught up in daily congestion. But even for city-dwellers cars are immensely flexible when touring rural areas, smaller towns and multiple places within a short period of time over a weekend.

7.9 Tourist travel and migration

In Chapter 3 we discussed how tourist travel and migration are complexly folded into each other. Around one third of respondents express the desire to migrate, often to ‘hotter
climates’. These desires are to a large degree a result of tourist travel. They yearn to live in Southern France, Southern Spain, Thailand, Australia and Canada; these are places they fell in love with through (repeated) tourist visits. One respondent elucidates how he and his partner regularly travel to his parents-in-law’s second home in Spain where he feels ‘at home’ and plans to live in the near future, because of the laidback culture, the many hours of sun and the sea (No.11). Another explains how he goes on holidays abroad in order to become a qualified diving instructor so that eventually he can set up a diving business in Canada or Thailand (No. 15).

None of the people that plan to migrate express the fear that they will lose contact with friends and family. They believe that migration these days is easy because cheap flights, text messages and emails have made the world much smaller. Thus migration no longer implies lost connections:

In today’s day and age and society, it would be a lot easier to emigrate than it would have been, say, 30 years ago, because if you did that 30 years ago … it’s very hard to communicate, it’s very hard to travel and see people. I think you’d be quite isolated if you did that, whereas like you say through today’s technology and things, you are a phone call away, a text away, planes flying almost every… all around the world now (No. 15, male fitness instructor manager, mid-thirties).

This respondent wishes to migrate to Thailand or preferably Canada because his family have ‘seen and heard how nice it is. So I know that if I settled there, they would come over …. So yeah definitely the location has to be somewhere feasible for people to come out and see’, that is, to keep the networks alive (No. 15, male gym manager, mid-thirties).

7.10 Conclusion

This chapter has examined why respondents travel. We began with documenting the significance of long distance leisure travel, showing that on average the respondents make almost one longer UK journey each month and more than two journeys abroad each year. While leisure travel is still concerned with traditional tourism, it seems that more travel is concerned with networking and meeting up. At least a third of their journeys abroad and the vast majority of UK journeys are predominantly about co-present meetings with significant others.

While communicative travel is crucial to dispersed social networks, its substitution effect upon corporeal tourist travel is so far small, because it connects far-flung networks in spaces of enjoyed co-presence. This makes travel essential for many:
[Travel] is essential. I don’t think we could go on just by making emails and phone calls. It is very necessary for us to go and see friends and family … I think it would be emotionally bad for us if we didn’t. We need to travel (No. 10, sales adviser, late-twenties).

Throughout the chapter we have shown how leisure and tourist travel are not isolated exotic islands but significant sets of social and material relations connecting and reconnecting disconnected people in face-to-face proximities where obligations and pleasures go together. Long distance travel is increasingly necessary to fulfil social obligations, such as attending weddings, stag nights, hen nights, birthdays, Christmas parties, funerals, reunions, visiting and having quality time with significant others. To be able to travel is thus crucial for social capital, for the ability to sustain intimate bonds with, and meet obligations to, close yet faraway people. So contra Putnam, we have shown how travel can produce social capital in societies with dispersed social networks. Transport policies thus have crucial implications for the production of social capital. Unreliable, slow and expensive transport has detrimental effects upon a given society’s social capital. When asked what consequences higher prices for petrol and train tickets will have for their essential travel, the same person provides an ambivalent answer:

I think it would reduce [our visits to our family] because of the costs. I would have to limit the amount of times I would go and see them. But saying that it costs me quite a lot to go over to Ireland, buying 2 plane tickets to go and see my girlfriend’s family. So even though it’s quite expensive to go and see her family, it would be the same essential scenario. So we’d still make the time and spend the money to do it because it’s something you have to do…. you feel obliged to go and see the family. So definitely the obligation is there to go and see my family regardless of price, regardless of time (No. 10, sales adviser, mid-twenties).

This quotation highlights that people are forced to undertake necessary and obligatory travel even with high costs. Travel is for many people a necessary evil. By contrast with sightseeing- or sunbathing-type tourism, necessary and obligatory travel appears less determined by price as it cannot be disregarded or substituted without significant consequences. Even with higher prices and poorer services, most people will still undertake necessary travel.

Whereas sightseeing used to be a fitting basis for leisure and travel theory, networking is now more significant. Networking highlights how travel is a social practice that involves embodied work of scheduling, travelling, visiting, guiding, hosting, cleaning and so on (networking is effectively work); that travel patterns are relational and embedded within social networks and their obligations; that travel involves tools such as emails, mobile phones, Web Pages, cars,
trains and planes; and that tourist travel produces social capital. So without denying the multiple pleasures of travel, we suggest the analysis of obligations, social networks at-a-distance and social capital should be central to twenty-first century tourism and travel theory. The pressing question of course is how this socially necessary travel can also be environmentally sustainable.
8. Coordinating networks and travel

The last chapter showed that much travel stems from various compulsions to proximity, the desire and need to be corporeally co-present with significant others living elsewhere. This chapter empirically examines contemporary coordination systems that enable such occasional meetings. We have argued that little research has paid attention to networking practices of coordinating networks and travel. Elaborating upon Chapter 3 and 4, this Chapter examines how corporeal travel and communicative travel fold into each other, and how emails and mobile phones enhance corporeal travel. We show that one reason that corporeal travel and communicative travel both increase is that communications are intricately tied up with coordinating travel. How the respondents organise their travel and co-presence with network members through the Internet, emails and mobile phone calls is examined in this chapter.

Elaborating upon Wellman and Simmel (discussed in Chapters 2 and 4), we begin with noting that mobile phones are now as ubiquitous as pocket watches were a century ago. They are symbolic of current notions of time because they afford a mobile, networked social life, what Wellman calls ‘networked individualism’ (2001). First then, we show how the respondents routinely mediated communicative co-presence on the move. Second, we explore how network meetings are coordinated and depend upon network capital. Paraphrasing Simmel, we note how social networks will fail to meet up if their mobile phones run out of battery power. Third, by comparison with pocket watches and landline phones, we argue that mobile phones and emails under specific circumstances ‘afford’ fluid and flexible meeting cultures that are less dictated by fixed appointments and clock-time (Gibson 1979). This research thus indicates that clock-time and punctuality are supplemented by what we can term instantaneous and flexible network time.

8.1 Mobile phones and communications on the move

In Chapter 3 we discussed research showing how widespread mobile phone ownership affords small worlds of communicative co-presence in midst of absence, distance and disconnection. Absent others are always a call or text message away so people can be in communicative propinquity with significant others even in seas of strangers (Roos 2001; Molz 2004). Nowhere seem people more busy calling and texting than when in motion or transit, and modern cities are thus no longer characterized by isolation but by connectivity, by private worlds of perpetual talk at-a-distance. Trains, buses, cars, streets and waiting lounges are now
places of much communicative co-presence and travel time can be made more productive (Lyons and Urry 2005).

The interviews reveal how these respondents routinely conduct mediated communicative co-presence on their lonely route to the supermarket, to home from work and while on longer journeys:

I will sometimes walk into work if the weather is not great, or if I walk up to Sainsburys which is a mile away from the house, I will always take my phone and I will always phone somebody while I’m on that walk just to have a chat and so it’s not such a boring way (No. 11, male sales adviser, late twenties).

People may be physically isolated in the city but they are communicatively connected to their networks, so on one level the city experience is less lonely (and insecure) compared with when Simmel wrote. A doorman brings out how he and his mother transform lonely travel time into social time by calling each when commuting to and from work. As a result, they have more or less daily exchanges despite living far from each other and working different hours:

On my way to work I’ll always ring my mum. For me it’s a 10 minute walk to work so I think I can ring them and have a chat to them for 10 minutes, so I’ll normally do that … whereas my mum, when she’s driving home on a long distance business trip, she’ll always ring me then when she’s in the car. She’s got one of those… .you know the speaker things in cars, so she uses that ….obviously because she can keep on driving (No. 22, male doorman, early twenties).

That cars are particular good places to talk is stressed in the following quotations:

I make my phone calls more at weekend …. Maybe, for instance, I’m going to Preston, so I think right, I go down the diary and I’ll just make my calls whilst my husband’s driving … people who I think I have not caught up with or not managed to get to, I will do it whilst we’re on the journey so I’m not wasting time at home … (No. 19, female porter, late thirties).

I always speak on my headset now on the way home [from work]. I am always on the phone on my way home, always … I just feel it makes use of the time really …I do now and again text while I’m driving (No. 14, male sales manager, mid-twenties).

Much research stresses how cars isolate people in private cocoons with no contact to the outside world. Yet now that mobile phones have become ubiquitous travel partners people are in a sense never alone and they coordinate many of their calls to take place while on the
move. Thus cars, buses and trains become places of much communicative travel and this connects them to the outside world.

Thus we might describe this as a pattern of networked individualism. When networks are stretched out and overlap little there is less likelihood of quick, casual, unplanned meetings and fewer possibilities for walking in order to meet up (by western standard). So people need to travel to maintain their networks and they thus rely upon cars or public transport. In Chapter 7 we saw that respondents make some 10 longer UK journeys primarily to visit significant others and attend obligatory events. Much time thus has to be spent communicating with people to coordinate such co-presence, and this necessitates what we have called network capital (Axhausen 2005).

Network capital involves access to communication channels. The architects daily ‘surf the web’ professionally, and for news, cultural events, cheap flights, travel information, and so on. And they email, both professionally and socially, making some eight private emails daily. By comparison, the two other occupations email less both professionally and socially; they receive some seven private emails weekly. Our research shows a correlation between professional and private emails: people that email much professionally also email much socially and vice versa.

All respondents own a mobile and so do their friends and most family members. Most are turned on and at-hand for 24 hours; they are only switched off, silent at work and occasionally when socialising. The respondents disagree whether it is reasonable to use mobile phones when meeting socially but they agree that many do. When people turn their mobiles off they fear missing out:

I suppose you’re afraid….I think just having the phone turned on just makes you sort of know that you definitely won’t miss out on anything. For all you know a friend could phone you at work and ask you if you want tickets for a football match that night or something, and obviously if you didn’t have that phone with you, you’d be speaking to them the next day and they’d be saying I had tickets for last night. So it gives you opportunities that you maybe wouldn’t have had before (No. 11, sales adviser, late twenties).

All respondents make calls and text messages with their mobile. The youngest in the sample use their mobiles most, but there are no major differences between the three subgroups. Mobile phones are crucial networking tools and are used as calendars, address books, telephone books and indeed watches (pocket watches are now often fashion gadgets). They produce and/or store music, games, photos, articles and messages, and these are circulated
amongst network members, sometimes over great distance. Mobile phones are thus multitasking technologies much more complex than one-dimensional landline phones.

Mobile phones have become ‘travel partners’ to such extent that people feel incomplete if leaving without them:

I’ll know about it if it’s not there because you know you can’t leave the house and you think something’s missing. It’s got to be with me definitely. It’s got to be with me (No. 10, male sales adviser, late twenties).

They describe their mobile phones as prosthetic, as physically coterminous with their bodies. They allow them to be proper social beings. Without them, they are lost:

I’ve lost it once. This sounds so bad, but it was the worst week of my life. I didn’t have a clue what I was doing or anything … the worst thing was all my numbers were on it (No. 22, male doorman, early twenties).

More or less everyone expresses, not without a little shame that their present life depends upon mobile phones because they are ‘great social tools’. As an architect says:

I hate to say it … I got my first mobile about [19]99 … [they used to be] extravagant, frivolous. But as soon as I got one I suddenly realised that I just couldn’t live without it. It’s been a great…yeah it’s a hell of a social tool (No. 4, male architect, early thirties).

Mobile phones are no longer extravagant and frivolous but necessary evils; they are a natural part of the human body, always at-hand. So when people misplace their mobile they are disabled. They can no longer talk with absent others and they are disconnected from their network. Mobile phones are network’s ‘lifelines’ because youngish people remember few numbers now that mobiles and not human memory stores them. So a landline connection cannot substitute for a lost mobile phone. When people lose their mobiles they are lost in inconnectivity and they are likely to have fewer face-to-face interactions as a result.

8.2 Coordination tools

Chapter 6 and 7 examined how respondents use communications to simulate face-to-face co-presence. But the significance of mobile phones and email to coordinate meetings and travel are striking from this research.

This is particularly so with email:
Today there was an acknowledgment of the Travel Lodge booking that I did. Another one was we’ve had a tournament cancelled and obviously it was distributed to the team …another one I got today…I always get together with my girlfriends from school on a Thursday evening, so it was making arrangement … I don’t chat, I don’t gossip on email. It’s all arranging (No. 1, female architect, early thirties).

So for this female architect, who coaches a youth sports team, the typical email involves coordination. Like most others she books holidays, flights and accommodation on the Internet, because she finds it cheaper and less time consuming than making the trip to a travel agent. Every second week or so she undertakes a longer journey with her partner or the team27. She also uses the Internet to arrange matches and tournaments across the UK. And she coordinates her weekly meetings with local friends by email.

Distant connections often require coordination by email, especially if many people are involved and long distance travel is necessary:

You do find a lot of emails are for weekends that you organise…Yesterday I had an email because my wife and me are organising a weekend to go away to the Cotswolds, so we are renting a cottage. There’s six of us, eight of us going. So obviously there’s a lot of emails coming in, being sent round, saying I can do such and such a weekend … . And then you get one back saying it’s going to cost us, you know, £100 each for the weekend, can you send the money, post a cheque to me (No. 5, male architect, late twenties).

Emails are time-effective since one message can be sent to multiple people and they can then reply to the whole network with additional information, without distorting or deleting the initial or succeeding emails. Dates and venues are thus remembered and accessible for recollection in mailboxes, preventing much additional coordination at a later stage. Everybody within this network thus shares and has equal access to the same information and we may

27 Virtually all the interviewees that occasionally use the Internet to secure cheap air ticket with budget airlines such as Ryan Air and Easy Yet, and they all agree that the Internet is much better value than going to a travel agent. Indeed the Internet is sometimes said to produce more tourist-type travel:

Yeah, it’s so much easier [with the internet], just at the flick of a button…. It was about a month ago when I was thinking I’ll take Sharon away to Rome for our anniversary, and for 2 of us, 2 return flights and 4 nights in a hotel in Rome was £190, and you know….say 10 years ago you would never get anything like that. You wouldn’t be able to just go on get a flight from there, get a hotel from over here, and see what happens when I get there (No. 21, male porter, mid-twenties).

The popularity of the Internet as ‘market place’ for travel and tourism means that many short distance trips to the ‘local’ travel agent are saved. However, besides tickets for travel and holidays, the interviewees seldom substitute shopping trips with Internet shopping. So people with easy access and knowledge of using the Internet are often likely to travel cheaper than people who may well be poorer who have to rely on travel agents.
therefore hypotheses that the task of organizing is more equally distributed. And this seems to produce more meetings:

It makes it easier to meet up with people because, there is less effort involved in writing a small message and sending it out to a number of people in terms of coordination and getting people together. … For instance, when it was my stag do a couple of years ago my best man did it all by email and it worked wonderfully well because you get this kind of coordination of dates when people are available, when they are not … So rather than that kind of confusion that occurs when you are going from one person to another and then going back … you have got this situation where everything is … transmitted to everybody from one source (No. 3, male architect, early thirties).

Text messaging provides some of the same affordances:

Well last week I organised 20 of us to go to a greyhound meeting. I didn’t speak to one person; it was all done by text message. I didn’t speak to one person … I just write a message, sent it all to everyone, I said if you want to come, send me a reply, I’ll book you a ticket. Everyone replied, I booked a ticket and we all turned up and that was it (No. 22, male doorman, early twenties).

This flexibility and ability of emails and text messages to travel contrast with telephone calls that always involve one-to-one talk and therefore do not produce an entry in an archive. Group coordination by phone talk requires a central hub where all information passes through, so one person is in charge of synchronizing busy and fragmented diaries. This is a time consuming and certainly not cost-free task, as each links often calls, or has to be called, more than once so as to achieve coordination. Emails and text distribution lists have made it easier and cheaper for dispersed networks with highly desynchronised diaries to arrange meetings.

Gibson’s (1977) notion of affordances highlights how certain technologies enable/produce some actions and not others. We discussed how text messages afford collective, non-centralized coordination that make group coordination smoother than with one-to-one communication. Yet it is sometimes neglected how affordances are context dependent, it matters where they are placed and how they performed. Communication technologies afford possibilities but do not determine how people perform them. They are preformed and performed (Larsen 2005). This is also the case with coordination tools. As one respondent reflects:

If you are walking, it is easy to phone. If you are on a train, it’s warm and you don’t have to wear gloves, then it’s easy to text. It’s just
where you are at the moment of communicating (No. 2, female architect, early thirties).

Place matters much with emailing because it requires a computer and Internet connection, and currently most have access to the Internet at work or at home (except of course with wireless communications and place-independent blackberries). The architects coordinate much of their social life by email because they have access to personal work emails and work computers with Internet connection. Much of the architects’ private emailing takes place at work:

I’ve got Internet access at work … I can use that any time. It’s supposed to be for work but we all use it for other things as well. I’ve got Internet at home but not broadband though … because we have both got Internet at work so we don’t spend too much on it (No. 7, male architect, late twenties).

Many of their other friends, especially those from university, also have access to email at work:

… most of my friends from university have email at work, so while they are at work they will email me saying let’s do something at the weekend (No. 1, female architect, early thirties).

The rest of our respondents do not have such ‘access’ at work and they email less and prefer mobile phones to coordinate their social life as a result. Emailing for them is intermittently performed to communicate with significant others at-a-distance predominantly (see Map 1 and Map 2).

Despite working in open offices, architects email privately because emailing - unlike ‘noisy’ phoning - is ‘covert’ in networked computer landscapes. The much travelled architect ‘mapped’ in Chapter 6 says:

You would be on the phone and people are watching the time you are spending talking…. Whereas with email it is a lot more covert and I think people spend a lot more time on the email, even I do. You know,

28 However, emailing at work is primarily quick coordination, gossip or joke emails rather than the letter-kind emails examined in Chapter 6. As one architect says when asked if she emails at work:

Sometimes my brother writes… he has been quite low recently, so sometimes he just comes on line for a few moments… where are you both? I say I am here, we’re busy, just to find me sort of thing, talk to you later that sort of thing. I dunno, sometimes I get very long emails I just don’t have time to read. In the evenings or weekends I write long letters to my friends. So I don’t really use working time unless it’s just a couple of lines. Oh one friend of mine she was asking me questions, I need to know it now, I want to invite my mother from Russia so what do I do? How much money do I need in my account? So I replied immediately (No. 2, female architect, early thirties).
you are all supposed to be working but you’re all communicating, and you can have a big social event if you like. … At the moment I’m trying to arrange a snowboarding holiday, and there’s about five or six of us all over the country, and you can have a little chat during the day. It’s almost like you’re down the pub having a bit of a social chat over a beer (No. 4, male architect, early thirties).

While at work he coordinates a big social event with dispersed friends while they are also at work. Here the distinction between coordination and meeting blurs as the coordination event produces communications to such an extent that ‘it’s almost like you’re down the pub having a bit of a social chat over a beer’.

Architects also email colleagues and friends around the corner. Here the clandestine nature of emails is also valued. One explains how he occasionally goes for secret lunches to gossip and discuss office politics with a few carefully selected colleagues. By coordinating them by email they can better leave in silence. The architects’ emails thus travel both short and long distances, while the other respondents mainly travel long distances (see also Chapter 6).

Email has largely substituted for phone calls when it comes to coordinating much social life amongst these architects:

> It’s taken over from the telephone definitely, because I don’t take hardly any personal calls in work time, and it would have to be urgent to do that really … It’s the speed at which you can do it, but also again the distribution lists. You don’t have to phone four people up. The same information gets to all people at the same time (No. 1, female architect, early thirties).

Here email distribution lists are praised for being flexible, time effective and almost instantaneous, as the same information gets to all people at the same time. However, emailing is only immediate if people are more or less continuously on-line and respond promptly to messages. Therefore, the architects continuously check their email accounts, so each time an arrival is announced they check the inbox to see whether it is something interesting: ‘so there’s this kind of intrigue about who it could be, when that little envelope pops up on the screen, it’s like who is that, is it a friend, a joke or something, or is it work related’ (No. 3, male architect, early thirties).

So many smaller ‘breaks’ during the day are tied up with private emailing, as good emailing conduct involves quick replies, to make it as immediate as possible. Another aspect of this conduct is to employ a precise, fast and instrumental language and whereby to distance emails from telephone conversations where the exchange of pleasantries and news are expected. One architect explains why email is so effective at coordinating meetings:
You don’t have to talk round it. You can merely put in one line and you get an answer back in one line. There’s no talking about how are you. There’s no chitchat … whatever is in your head, you type and it’s gone. By the time you’re thinking what else you forgot to ask, and replies come back. That’s the beauty of email. It is quick. Literally one line …. “What are you doing at the weekend”? If I picked up the phone, I can’t just pick up the phone: “What are you doing at the weekend?” I’m going to have to say: “How are you and what have you been up to”? And you get into a full conversation (No. 5, male architect, late twenties).

Partly along similar lines, another stresses that

… you write emails at the drop of a hat. Like you’ve got 5 minutes to spare. … “Oh Chris has replied”. Oh I’ve got something to tell him and I’ll just sit down and type it. You would never have spent 5 minutes “oh what shall I do, I’ll write a letter. Email is not time consuming. I don’t have to go and put it into an envelope, buy a stamp, post it, you know … you send a letter and it might come back 5 days later with a reply. But with an email you can do a one liner and then 2 minutes later even though they are in Egypt they reply. It is more like a conversation (No. 4, male architect, early thirties).

While emails afford timeless travel through space, it is only when people make ‘drop of a hat’ or ‘one line’ messages rather than wordy letters and reply promptly that emailing is fast and resembles face-to-face conversations. The fast-paced, flexible nature of much email stems only partly from affordances but also from the specific cultures of performance and writing.

Effective and fast group coordination by email thus requires that all network members email at work or at least check it daily from elsewhere. This is particular the case with short-term planning. As this female receptionist from Manchester says:

When I’m living in Devon with my parents, I don’t tend to email my friends that are in the local area because I see them more often and I speak to them on the phone more often. So there’s no need to email. By the time she’s read her email, I’ll have seen her three times (No. 12, female receptionist, early twenties).

The architects also email much less in the evenings and weekends because at this time they are seldom on-line and they can speak freely on their phone, so they use mobile phones and especially text messages to reach each other instantly. Often people text message each other because calls can be disturbing for the receiver and a text message is more rich and precise in information than a recorded message in case the phone is put on silent mode.
People without access to email at work find emails slow and inconvenient because they are not as ready at-hand as mobile phones are:

[I] use my mobile phone a million times more [than emails]. I just think it’s easier, a lot easier, than logging on and ….you’ve got your phone there, it’s easier to use (No. 14, sales manager, mid-twenties).

The doorman who recently organised a trip for twenty people to go to a greyhound meeting explains why he used text messages rather than emails to arrange this evening:

Because I don’t know if they check it [email]. It’s the instant factor of it that I like more than anything, the fact that they get it straight away. They don’t have to go and check their emails and I don’t have to go and check mine to get it back …My phone … beep[s], and I can sort of write down who’s coming …And that’s why I use text messaging, because it’s instant. And my phone is always with me (No. 22, male doorman, early twenties).

Those respondents who are not architects only check their emails twice a week on average, which makes short-term coordination by email too slow and risky.

Texting can also afford secret gossip and coordination. Many youngish people have developed striking texting skills and with their mobiles ‘on silent’ they text inaudibly in the most unlikely places. This ensures that texting is instant:

You can just sort of drop your hand under the desk and…Well I don’t have to look at mine, I can text without looking … [for instance] … I was sat in a lecture. My lecture was about to finish so I said meet me at 1 … by the time I got there he was there (No. 22, male doorman, early twenties).

### 8.3 Fluid coordination

The strict punctuality that Simmel observed in early modern cities and meeting cultures partly dissolve in ‘liquid modernity’ (Bauman 2003; Geser 2004). The objective clock-time of pocket watches are supplemented with negotiated network time of mobile phones. Now people cannot only be on time or running early or late, but also refuse or bend clock-time by texting that they are running late or suggesting a new place or a later time. While some respondents are annoyed that many have become sloppy with being on time\(^{29}\), people get

\(^{29}\) As one respondent says:
away with it if they inform others that they are behind schedule. ‘I think because everybody carries their mobile with them, it doesn’t matter if you are late for something’ (No. 16, fitness instructor manager, early thirties). There is now it seems less an obligation to be on time as to inform those ‘waiting’ that one is, or just might be, late. This is particularly evident on trains where every announcement of even a minor delay makes most passengers reach out for their mobile. All respondents feel obliged to inform those waiting that they are late, so that they do not worry and perhaps can do something else in the meantime.

Whereas coordination traditionally finalised with the departure, it is now continually negotiated and performed on the move. This contrasts with the pre-mobile phone days where fixed appointments were the only choice. One female architect reports how her group of friends often only make loose prior arrangements with regard to time; they use mobile phones to work out what we might call ‘flexible punctuality’:

But flexible definitely because sometimes I won’t arrange a time … I mean obviously a vague like I’ll meet you in there, but then I’d make a text as I get a taxi and say I’ll be there in 10 minutes, whereas in the past you would have to phone earlier in the evening saying I would be there at 7 o’clock (No. 1, female architect, early thirties).

And another says:

Yeah. It’s usually a loose arrangement, say meet up roughly 8 o’clock in this bar, but most of the time that changes. Because you’ve got mobiles, you can do that…I’m running late or we’ve decided to go to a different bar, meet us in this bar or whatever (No. 12, female receptionist, early twenties).

When these youngish people arrange to ‘go out’ they set a day (often by email) but they seldom arrange a specific time. Rather, they agree to ‘speak’ on that day to finalise the finer details and that email, call or text is likely be followed up by a last-minute call or text confirming that one is leaving the house or stuck in traffic or has found a better place to meet up. A male architect summons up:

You arrange a day, it happened last week, myself and [partner] were going out with another couple so she asked me two days before what time we’re meeting, and I said “I don’t know yet, we’re just going

Well I am a much organised person and although I don’t keep a diary, I don’t miss appointments, but for a lot of my friends it is an opportunity for them to change their plans regularly. If they didn’t have a mobile phone, then they would have to do what they organised. That’s a personal hate of mine (No. 8, male architect, mid-twenties).
out’. I’ll speak to [friend] tomorrow, later. And then it can be three or four text messages or telephone calls before we know where we’re meeting (No. 6, male architect, late twenties).

This also means that much meeting coordination involves both email and mobile phones. This is especially so with long distance travel. The initial coordination is often by email while mobile phones take over when the journey begins:

It was a long weekend. We do it once a year …, all my friends from back home, we meet up in one place and we do poker nights …. The date was arranged by email but [not] the finer details … when I was coming down, I’d be texting my brother and my friends to say can you pick me up from here. If he can’t do it, I’ll text the next one and so on …. I had to pretty much do it all when I was travelling on the train. So I spent five and a half hours going there, so all the time while I was on the train I was texting and talking (No. 10, sales adviser, late twenties).

To provide another example:

When I got to London it was either text or calling to say: “I’m about to reach London, where do I go” and then once I reach London it’s like: “Right I’m in London, I’m at Archway, where the bloody hell are you type of thing” (No. 9, male architect, early twenties).

So in many cases there is a clear division of labour between emails and mobile phones, a division that is tied up with their different affordances.

Yet sometimes mobile phones seem to rule out the need for preceding coordinating:

Saturday Liverpool played Manchester United. A whole group of us met up, I’d say probably about eight of us in the morning. And these people were all coming from different cities … and we’d made no arrangements. I remember thinking that “oh all I know is that they are coming to the match”. So the first sign I hear of anyone going to be in the city is a text message at about half past ten saying we’re in Wetherspoons pub, where are you, because otherwise they could be in any pub, we don’t have a regular place to meet. So I have a text from there, so I get the train into town, other people start getting the same kind of text messages, and before you know it, everyone’s met at the same place. And so without the mobile you would really struggle … So it’s a lot more fluid (No. 3, male architect, early thirties).

So it would be fatal to forget to bring the mobile along or let it run out of battery power. This illustrates how flexible coordination is fully dependent upon systems and how it would be impossible to be part of such networks without a functioning mobile phone.
Sometimes coordination also takes place during meetings, when people have already met up in bars and pubs. Some of the respondents (especially the younger ones and singles) do not go out with one group but rather a larger mobile phone connected network of both strong and weak ties. They text each other about ‘happening’ places, parties and interesting people, and they are therefore likely to meet up with people that they did not begin the evening with:

If I’m in one bar and they’re in another, I might text them and say it’s not very good here, really quiet or really busy, we’ll come….where are you and you’ll go oh I’m in Varsity and it’s really really good. So I’ll go to Varsity then. It’s just like having a constant network between all of you (No. 22, male doorman, early twenties).

Another respondent says:

If I’m out in the pub round here, there’s a good chance that somebody will ring me up from another pub across town, and “say oh yeah we’re having a drink” …or somebody coming into town and wants to meet up with you (No. 4, male architect, early thirties).

So going out in such fashion involves continuous coordination, negotiation and movement with people present as well as (temporally) absent others. This provides great opportunities to meet new people and come across what are deemed to be happening places. Texting is often impromptu and informal, and one text will often be send to several people. This also enables fluid meeting cultures with recurrent circulating invitations to join in:

It might be like you’re sitting in the office or five or six offices around Liverpool and say we’re all going out for a drink, do you want to come. And it happens instantaneously sort of thing. It is more manageable because you’ve got that instant communication (No. 4, male architect, early thirties).

With widespread mobile connectivity, there is no need to wait for people to return home before an arrangement can be made and remade. Our respondents explain how they often call friends to inform that they are in the neighbourhood and fancy meeting up for a quick beer or coffee. ‘You can arrange more things spontaneously, whereas if you suddenly finish work and you fancy a pint, it is a lot easier to get hold of someone and say are you around, do you fancy a quick pint before you go home, whereas a few years ago it would have been a bit difficult’ (No. 6, male architect, early thirties). Such youngish people without family responsibilities have plenty of time for impulsive socialising with (weak) ties and informal mobile phone cultures ensure plenty of invitations at-hand.
8.4 Informal coordination and weak ties

We discussed in Chapter 3 research suggesting that interface-to-interface interaction prompt more ‘courageous selves’. The impersonal, informal nature of group messages means that there is less chance of ‘losing face’ when flirting, contacting or inviting people out by text and email than by phone and especially in person, where there is no time to perform courteous rejections and mask blushing faces (Oksman and Turtiainen 2004: 326; see also Henderson and Gilding 2004). As one respondent says:

Of course writing is a more flexible way of communicating because you don’t have time to think when you are on the phone … it is easy to control your reaction. You kind of take a deep breath. Gosh I was nearly in tears on Friday and if it would be on the phone, oh pathetic. But my emails were quite sharp, very dry, there were no emotions there (No. 2, female architect, early thirties).

One architect explains how he recently invited some new friends for dinner by email because it will be awkward if they have to ‘perform’ a quick unrehearsed decline while on the phone:

I emailed out to some friends last week to come over for dinner next weekend, and because it is done by email, it’s not quite so… I don’t want to put them in a position where…oh I’m not sure, I’m not sure. It’s easier to give them that time to think about it and come back with answer (No. 3, male architect, early thirties).

It was also stressed that it was easier to find and contact an old friend by email than by phone, because it is less intruding to email and less ‘damaging to face’ to be rejected by a non-replied email than by an awkward phone call with much silence. As one architect says:

I haven’t seen him since I left school which was 10 years ago, because we’ve got a 10 year reunion this year. I was quite good friends with him, but never had his mobile phone number, never had his email address, and didn’t know where he was. He’s an actor and he’s just come out in a blockbuster movie. And because of that I was able to track him down, his email address. Out of the blue I just felt I could write him an email just saying best of luck, delighted to hear … I felt again email made it easy for me to just turn around and say look I know I haven’t seen you in nine years, but delighted for you and I hope it goes really well for you and just….email, hopefully talk to you soon (No. 5, male architect, late twenties).

This research thus shows that people are bolder in whom they invite when they can hide a little behind the informal and/or collective nature of emails and especially text messages. In
Chapter 2 we discussed how Granovetter showed the strength of weak ties for successful job searches (1983). Mobile phones, with their multi-destination messages, multiple contacts and informality, are perfect tools for distributing casual invitations to ‘join in’ and information about ‘happening’ places to these weak ties. The young student architect explains how he sends cinema invitations by text every week to a large network of people at the college where he lives, and people just text if they wish to ‘join in’ (this also preclude the potential awkward experience of having one-to-one phone conversation with a ‘weak tie’). The significance of ‘weak ties’, informal co-presence and ‘new faces’ seem to increase dramatically in the era of text messages and emails, as the research reviewed in Chapter 2 also suggests (see also Wittel 2001; Kavanaugh, Reese, Carroll, Rosson 2005).

8.5 Conclusion

This chapter has shown that transport and communications are complexly folded into each other. We can say that transport and communication technologies have become ‘travel partners’. This can be viewed as a process of co-evolution, between new forms of social networking on the one hand, and extensive forms of physical travel now often enhanced by new communications, on the other. These sets of processes reinforce and extend each other in ways that are highly difficult to reverse. This also means that crucial to the character of modern societies is something we in Chapter 4 termed ‘network capital’, comprising, most importantly, access to communication technologies, affordable and well-connected transport and safe meeting places. Without sufficient ‘network capital’ people are in danger of social exclusion as social networks have become more far-flung.

The social sciences often neglect the technological systems that in part afford what sociologist like Giddens and Beck calls ‘individualisation’ (see Chapter 2). Drawing on Wellman’s notion of ‘networked individualism’, we have shown that with more individualisation, there is paradoxically much dependence upon ‘coordination systems’. It is difficult to escape these ‘systems’ of transport and communication since they coordinate social networks and sociability with significant others.

It was also shown how mobile phones are as symbolic of contemporary modern societies as pocket watches once were. This transition corresponds with a shift from punctuality to a fluid ‘networked time’ where punctuality is negotiated on the move now, especially now that transport and mediated communication is connected through mobile phones. Whereas trains and pocket watches were early modern twins, mobile phones and cars are the late modern ones, both raging against past rhythms and timekeeping. This research suggests that the
striking popularity of cars, email and mobile phones are tied up with how they bend modern
timekeeping and afford a flexible, mobile social life, in an era where many networks are
dispersed and coordination and travel are necessary for basic social life.

In the next final chapter we discuss in detail the implications of these empirical chapters for
travel research and policy.
9. Conclusions and implications for transport policy and research

9.1 Travelling in a shrunken world

This research has thus established the centrality of travel to social networks. In particular the respondents take for granted the historically low costs of travel and communications. They have developed social patterns which take advantage of these new spatial structures. While the discussion on commuting and global business travel has long since accepted that there are significant negative elasticities of travel demand, especially for miles travelled, with respect to generalised cost reductions, the discussion of leisure travel on the other hand, and social network structures have tended to ignore this possibility, if for different reasons. The policy discussion of leisure travel has often adopted a language which questions the necessity of such travel, in spite of the fact, that it makes up the relative majority of trips and miles travelled in major industrialised countries (see Table 5 and Table 6).

Table 5 Share of trips by trip purpose [%]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Trip purpose</th>
<th>CH</th>
<th>Germany</th>
<th>UK</th>
<th>USA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Leisure</td>
<td>39.5</td>
<td>35.0</td>
<td>26.5</td>
<td>26.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work/School</td>
<td>35.5</td>
<td>18.2</td>
<td>25.3</td>
<td>25.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shopping/Private business</td>
<td>19.1</td>
<td>34.8</td>
<td>31.3</td>
<td>37.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Escort</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>12.6</td>
<td>10.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6  Share of miles traveled by trip purpose [%]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Trip purpose</th>
<th>CH</th>
<th>Germany</th>
<th>UK</th>
<th>USA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Leisure</td>
<td>44.8</td>
<td>38.3</td>
<td>33.7</td>
<td>32.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work/School</td>
<td>35.0</td>
<td>29.7</td>
<td>32.0</td>
<td>31.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shopping/Private business</td>
<td>11.2</td>
<td>21.7</td>
<td>19.7</td>
<td>27.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Escort</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>7.6</td>
<td>8.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
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<td>Total</td>
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<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Our respondents’ stories and answers make it clear that leisure travel is anything but unnecessary. It is central to their social life and the building and maintenance of their social capital, and by extension of social capital more widely. Their answers also bring out how business and leisure are not useful as exclusive categories when asked to locate their travel experience. Single journeys often accommodate various purposes, so that an exclusive categorisation becomes arbitrary and misleading: what for example is a business journey, so arranged to permit employer-subsidised attendance at a family wedding?

We also found that the respondents employ different modes of contacting, meeting and talking with their network members. The various forms of telecommunication are extensively employed to plan, co-ordinate, schedule, reschedule and debrief face-to-face meetings. Their usage is co-evolving into a direction where firm commitments in advance to places, times and participants are replaced by more fluid forms, in which the final group, place and time coalesce out of many short interactions: some involving whole groups through email, some one-to-one exchanges of SMS or phone calls.

The current scale of social network geographies, which we have documented, cannot be judged by accurate comparison with the past. However, we found very many ways in which the respondents combine local contacts with friends and family, with very significant locations far away. The average distances are substantial and this is so across the three occupations and industries sampled. The distances are managed by combining mediated contacts (phone, SMS, email) with visits which tend to become rarer but also of longer duration as distances grow. Overall it seems that the size and the variance of the social network geographies have increased.
The lack of historical comparison makes it difficult to say if this process of growth has slowed or has even come to a standstill. One would expect that the process will follow a hysteresis type pattern (See Figure 4). Initially the process will be slow, as people have to restructure their social networks to reap the benefits of the lower generalised costs (i.e. time, money and comfort in widest sense). Given that their personal social capital is embedded in these relationships one would not expect fast change. As the social capital encompasses both the joint history, commitments, references and understandings of the network members, as well as their joint ability to perform, act and enjoy people will be loath to risk this too quickly. It is only after they have learnt that relationships can be retained and developed at the desired level of quality over a distance that the spatial growth process will start in earnest. Travel becomes essential for the social capital structure of a given society. In the figure this process is identical with the historical trend of decreasing generalised costs, as we have observed it over the last two hundred years. In the cross section we would expect that there is similar association of higher incomes or better access to the infrastructure networks with larger social network geographies. Forced or necessary migration, which often affects poorer member of society, is likely to obscure this in the cross-section, making it more difficult to detect unless controlling for the personal biography of the respondent. It should also not be forgotten, that social networks enforce norms of behaviour, which might be at odds with wider social patterns, something that is found at places in the interviews.

Equally, if a network finds itself in a position of increasing generalised costs, one would expect an initially slow adjustment, which will only accelerate, when the network cannot ignore the growing costs anymore. This hysteresis pattern should be observable over the life course of people and their networks, as normally incomes rise until some point, which makes travel and communication more affordable, but from some point both financial resources decrease and the ability to travel effortlessly declines.
If we assume that the patterns identified in our sample of young adults, mostly before the child-rearing part of their life, will be maintained in at least attenuated form, as well as spread more generally in the population, then transport policy finds itself in a very difficult position. Currently, these patterns are particularly prominent for respondents who had to move for education or training, but it is not limited to respondents with high prestige jobs. The history of personal trainers showed the significance of training on cruise ships and the importance of this experience for their future networks. Furthermore, even people who themselves have not moved much beyond their place of birth can be part of such far flung networks through relatives, friends or acquaintances, who have moved or in some cases returned.

9.2 Policy implications

The research reported here changes our perception of travellers and therefore of their problems. Transport planning bases its analysis on individual utility maximizing agents, even if the analysis allows for some impacts of joint decision making within each household. These agents interact in markets and upon the infrastructures provided, operated or regulated by the state or private providers. The perspective of most planners is therefore focused on (a) the
traveller as an economic agent, working, shopping and consuming services and (b) on the
demand peaks of the infrastructures, which constrain the choices of the travellers and generate
a large share of the externalities associated with travelling (Brilon and Zurlinden 2003). The
alternative view or at least supplementary view arising from the research undertaken here sees
the traveller as a network-based actor, whose actions and choices more often than not are
negotiated with personally significant third parties. These choices reflect the exchange
processes typical of social networks and cannot therefore be captured well with the
assumption of individual utility maximizing behaviour.

In the traditional analysis leisure travel is often seen as a minor residual category. Sometimes
the analysts even deploy moralistic terms, such as superfluous, voluntary or wasteful to
describe it. It is clear though from our research that leisure travel is in most cases nothing but
not essential and will remain so as long as travellers need face-to-face contacts to build,
maintain and develop their social networks and capital.

The mapping of the social network geographies for the named contacts has demonstrated the
spatial reach of respondents. Even if we allow for the fact that our research instrument was
only able to capture parts of the networks in the given time, it is noticeable that respondents in
all occupation categories possessed strong long-distance links. The respondents do not live
exclusively local lives. They mostly have national frames of references, some international
ones. Our research could not explore the implications of these larger frames for the idea of
(local) community and even more importantly for the lived reality of local community. Local
residents who are often or even always absent might be expected to be less effective members
of local communities (see Putnam 2000, for an aggregate analysis of this crisis of local
communities).

The non-local lifestyles that we discovered might have a further link to this perceived crisis of
local communities. The literature (for a review see Axhausen 2001) reflects a perceived lack
of neighbourhood, but also a sense of physical insecurity. What has been termed localised
anomie could be seen as a social externality of these large social network geographies. The
travellers as residents spend resources to regain, for example, their feeling of security by
investing in additional alarm and safety installations or by moving to guarded environments
or by collectively supporting large systems of video surveillance within the public domain.
Along the same lines of reasoning, one can ask to what extent the weakness of local
democracy is a result of these partially non-local lives.

Overall the patterns we discovered are likely to be typical of a trend towards larger and
continuously growing geographies. This assumed trend is in line with result of mainstream
transport policy: improvement of accessibility through lower generalized cost of travel, in particular higher speeds, while controlling and limiting the externalities of travel. For a continuation of this policy our results would not suggest major changes. A further reduction of the generalized cost of travel would allow travellers to expand their geographies even further. Given their interest in fast and reliable travel for their frequent, if time-constraint weekend journeys, such travellers might even have a higher than usual willingness-to-pay for reliability and speed even if airlines had, for example, to charge for duty paid on their fuel.

If a transport policy were developed to control the well-known environmental externalities of travel and the social externalities suggested above, then our research reveals many hurdles to policy implementation which an economic and engineering analysis would not. Such a trend reversing policy would have to increase the generalised costs of travel either directly through higher taxes, rationing or lower speeds, or indirectly through higher capital requirements for private vehicles matching more demanding technical specifications\textsuperscript{30}. The initial hurdle is that the population might not be willing to support such a trend reversing policy in the first place. Beyond resentment against increased and maybe uncompensated higher monetary costs of travel, the population will see the negative implications of this for its social life and social capital. As any reconstruction of this social capital is anxiety-inducing, costly and time-consuming the population would need to be offered a very convincing case for such a transformation away from current patterns.

The speed of implementation would be crucial here. A policy of sustained generalised cost increase for private transport would need to be accompanied by a regulatory framework generating a fast, reliable, comfortable and affordable public transport services, which are spatially widespread and as effective as the car in sustaining a complex rich and networked forms of life. We would suggest that flexibility is a key notion here; that public transport would have to be as flexible as the car with regard to information, pricing, routing-ticketing, multi-trips, multimember journey groups and the carrying of luggage/bags. The current practise of reducing service levels on weekends, and Sunday engineering works in particular would need to be retought.

Such a policy would also need to explore the contribution of ICT-mediated communications in this reconstruction. Such communications can replace some journeys and therefore affects the regularity of contact. This will be especially important if the richness of the senses

\textsuperscript{30} At this time all alternative technologies discussed to reduce emissions will increase the costs of a like-for-like car. It is clear that the travellers can compensate here by choosing smaller or less well specified cars.
encountered face-to-face are more effectively simulated through skyping, web-cams and conferencing features.

We also found that journeys often fulfil a number of different purposes, including family life, business, sightseeing, socialising among colleagues or local social contacts. This opens up new opportunities for tourism and tourism policy. On the one hand, the pricing structures and services of hotels and local transportation providers should try to cater for this these multi-faceted visits, while on the other hand tourism policy statistics should seek to capture, measure and map these currently mostly privately accommodated visits more effectively (certainly by avoiding simple exclusive categories). Dienel, Meier-Dallach and Schröder (2004) even suggest that one should link visitors and locals socially, so as to increase the loyalty to a particular destination. While this often happens already, as owners and staff develop relationships with regulars, one could give these processes higher attention and support.

This report has not much explored how social exclusion fits into its explanatory scheme except to point to the centrality of the concept of network capital. While this acceptable for such an exploratory study, future work would need to address this (see Cass, Shove, Urry 2003, 2005). Social exclusion we would suggest results for those groups whose social networks are closed and which do not provide (enough) links to the outside social world. As a result of the limited network capital such groups find their resources are not strong enough to provide an appropriate style of life so resulting in precarious lives dependent on state or voluntary help. The greater the significance of new forms of network capital the more it is necessary to access such capital even to stay in the position to live a dignified live.

9.3 Research implications

Neither transport nor sociological research have in the past examined the links between social networks, location choices and travel. Past benchmarks or longitudinal observations are therefore missing. From our perspective it would seem necessary to fill this gap through new survey work. In terms of content two groups of items are important: (a) those capturing the social content of the activities and their participants and (b) those describing the social network geographies. There are groups, which would need special attention, and benchmarks beyond those capturing travel and their underlying social geographies.

The social content of an activity has many layers, which will differ for the various participants or beneficiaries of an activity, which do not have to be necessarily present. From the transport perspective the following items would be a start:
• A more detailed coding of the activity, maybe at the level of detail typical for time-use studies
• A description of the social purpose of the activity and of the obligations fulfilled with it
• Composition of the party travelling together to the activity
• Composition of the party participating in the event(s) and having meaningful interactions with the respondent
• Home locations of the fellow travellers and participants, or alternatively their location prior to the trip or activity
• Distribution of the travel and activity costs among the participants and beneficiaries.
• The planning horizon of the activity
• The secondary activities undertaken during the trip and the activity, if any.

Individual items of this list have been included in diary surveys elsewhere (see Löchl, Schönfelder, Schlich, Buhl, Widmer and Axhausen, 2005; Axhausen, Löchl, Schlich, Buhl and Widmer 2004; Schlich, Simma and Axhausen 2002; Axhausen, Zimmermann, Schönfelder, Rindsfüser and Haupt 2002). Still, their final form would need to be developed in a series of tests.

The items included in our face-to-face interviews about the social network and the frequency and location of contacts could be included in larger scale surveys, probably after some suitable adjustment:

• List of relevant contacts and their home locations
• Frequency of contact by mode (face-to-face, email, phone, SMS, letter, chat etc.)

For selected face-to-face meetings one could furthermore include the items discussed above, while querying how and where the accommodation was provided for overnight stays.

The required benchmarking will aim to draw representative samples to allow the characterisation of the current situation and latter the determination of trends. Never-the-less, certain groups deserve special attention, as they either contribute disproportional shares of the total mileage travelled, or because they are deemed to be at risk of social exclusion. The following types fall in the first category:

• Household and families divided between different locations for the bulk of the time, e.g. couples regularly working/living in different towns; parent with children boarding away for their education
• Households regularly circulating between different locations, e.g. the switch between a pied-a-terre in town and a home in the country; long term stays at holiday homes in the UK or abroad.

• Migrant families and their travelling to the place where the parental generation grew up

• Migrant families travelling to the location, which defines the post-migration centre of gravity of their networks, if they live away from it

• Diaspora families returning to the ancestral country of origin

In each case, we should see above average travel budgets and mileage for their income group. In each case we would expect that the social networks at the different places shapes the travel of the groups with respect to timing, duration and form. Think for example of festivals such as Dewali for Indians, Thanksgiving for US Americans, but also something as simple as the Annual Fair, which will serve to reunite people from the same village or town.

The policy discussion mentioned that we lack information about the size of the market areas of firms and institutions and about the level of local trust and civic engagement. For households the British Household Panel Study would be an appropriate platform for initial work on these topics (http://www.iser.essex.ac.uk/ulsc/bhps/).

Finally, the emphasis on the social context and content of travel should not lead to the conclusion that travellers do not travel alone. To be able to assess the size of the social network geographies and of their impacts it will be necessary to capture the complete activity space of travellers. The methods for this are available, as demonstrated by various long-duration travel diaries (Schönfelder and Axhausen 2003a, b), as well as by long-duration observations with GPS- or GSM-based units.

9.4 The next questions?

The following are some of the immediate next questions which should be addressed before one can integrate social network information into transport policy thinking, modelling and evaluation:

• Is it possible to obtain valid information on social network geographies reliably from large representative samples?

• What is the social content of the activities undertaken?

• How strongly does the social content of an activity explain the form of the associated journey (timing, mode, location)?
• Is there a link between the social network geographies of residents and the level of local anomie, if any?

• Is it possible to model these effects efficiently and reliably in microsimulation models of travel demand?
10. References


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New Technologies and New Visions, 31 August:


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Appendix A  Pre-interview questionnaire

Lancaster ………………

Dear …………

We are very pleased that you have decided to participate in an interview on the ………………… at ……… at the following address:………………………… .

………………………………………………………………………………………..

We kindly ask you to complete the following questions before the interview and bring them along to the interview. Please consult your latest telephone bill to get an idea of your phone call and text messages patterns. Moreover, if possible, bring a few photographs or other souvenirs from one of your most recent ‘meetings’ with friends/partner/family that involved a longer journey.

1 Residential Biography

Please list the places where you have lived during your school days:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>City/town</th>
<th>Area of city/town</th>
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</table>
Please list the places where you have lived the last 10 years, and with whom (parents, partner, friends, etc.)?

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<th>Year</th>
<th>City/town and area</th>
<th>With whom</th>
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</table>

2 Communications and Travel

Please tick or write number:

Do you have access to the Internet at work: yes ( ) no ( )

Do you have access to the Internet at home: yes ( ) no ( )

If yes, do you have Broadband at home: yes ( ) no ( )

Do you have frequent access to a laptop: yes ( ) no ( )

If yes, is it provided by work: yes ( ) no ( )

Do you have an email account: yes ( ) no ( )

If yes, how many names do you have in your email address book(s):

Personal contacts……………………………………………………

Professional contacts………………………………………………
Do you have a mobile phone: yes ( ) no ( )

If yes, does your work pay for your calls: yes ( ) no ( )

If yes, how many names do you have in your mobile phone address book(s):

Personal contacts……………………………………………………………

Professional contacts…………………………………………………………

Do you shop regularly on the Internet: yes ( ) no ( )

If yes: everyday ( ) every week ( ) once a month ( ) once every three month ( ) once every half year ( ) less ( )

Do you search for information on the Internet in relation to your job: yes ( ) no ( )

If yes: several times a day ( ) everyday ( ) every week ( ) once a month ( ) once every three month ( ) once every half year ( ) less ( )

What do you mainly search for?

.................................................................................................

.................................................................................................

Do you search for information on the Internet in relation to your personal/social life: yes ( ) no ( )

If yes: several times a day ( ) everyday ( ) every week ( ) once a month ( ) once every three month ( ) once every half year ( ) less ( )

What do you mainly search for?

.................................................................................................

.................................................................................................

How often do you chat (in chat rooms) on the net?

If yes: several times a day ( ) everyday ( ) every week ( ) once a month ( ) once every three month ( ) once every half year ( ) less ( ) never ( )
Do you have a personal diary: yes ( ) no ( )

If yes, now often do you use it: everyday ( ) sometimes ( ) seldom ( )

Do you have access to a car on a regular basis: yes ( ) no ( )

If yes, do you drive to work: everyday ( ) occasionally ( ) no ( )

Do you have a travel pass or travel related bonus card of any sort: yes ( ) no ( ). If yes, please specify:

A……………………………………………………………………………………………

B…………………………………………………………………………………………

C…………………………………………………………………………………………

Do you have membership to any leisure club or prof. association: yes ( ) no ( )

If yes, please list up to five of them:

A…………………………………………………………………………………………

B…………………………………………………………………………………………

C…………………………………………………………………………………………

D…………………………………………………………………………………………

E…………………………………………………………………………………………

Have you been abroad in 2004: yes ( ) no ( )

If yes, have many times for:

Business……………………………………………………………………………………

Leisure/holiday/visit friends or family………………………………………………

Mix of both………………………………………………………………………………

How you undertaken longer trips (more than 100 mills) within UK in 2004: yes ( ) no ( )
If yes, have many times for:

Business .................................................................

Leisure/holiday/visit friends and family........................................

Mix of both........................................................................

3 Non-local friends

Please write the names of the places (towns, cities or countries) where you non-local friends live?

1 .................................................................

2 .................................................................

3 .................................................................

4 .................................................................

5 .................................................................

6 .................................................................

7 .................................................................

8 .................................................................

9 .................................................................

10 .................................................................
Appendix B  Interview guide

A Background
1. Name
2. Age
3. Occupation
4. Income/education
5. Place(s) of residence
6. Why do you live here (work, friends, home town and quality of life)
7. Single, married, or in relationship
8. Where is your partner living? Have this relationship ever been a long-distance one

B Residential Biography
- Let’s talk about grid 1 of pre-interview form – ‘Please list the places where you have lived during your school days’ – which you filled in before coming here.
- Let’s talk about grid 2 – ‘Please list the places where you have lived the last 10 years, and with whom (parents, partner, friends, etc.)?’ – of pre-interview form.

C Communication and Transport
Let’s talk about your answers to this part of the pre-interview form

D Internet
- How often are you online?
- What are you mainly using the Internet for?
- Have you met new people through the Internet?

E Email
- How often do you check your email account?
- Do you subscribe to mailing lists?
- How many emails do you receive daily (‘professional’ and ‘private’ ones)?
- Give an example of an email that you have received recently? How often do you get random emails (jokes, competitions, job advertisement) from friends of friends or colleagues of colleagues?
- How many ‘professional’ mails do you send on an average day? (Repeat with private emails). Is it to people working/living nearby or far away? Is it to single people or ‘lists’?
- Can you give an example of an email that you have sent recently? (Perhaps repeat)
- Do you always reply to emails? Is there something as good emailing conduct?
What functions do emails play in your private/professional life, and how important are they?

**F Telephone/text message**
- How many hours a day is your mobile phone turned on? When do you turn it on/off?
- Where do you make most mobile calls? Is it the same with text messages?
- How many mobile phone calls/text messages do you make/send daily? Is it to people living nearby or faraway?
- Could you provide me with an account of a recent (mobile) phone conversation? (Perhaps repeat)
- Has the mobile phone changed the way you meet up with people?
- Could you imagine your present life without a mobile phone? What would the social consequences be?

**G Travel patterns**
- Describe one of your last longer journeys within UK (why, where, mode of transport, duration) (Repeat if possible)?
- Describe one of last journeys outside UK (why, where, mode of transport, duration) (repeat if possible)?
- Have you ever felt obliged to travel to an event (birthday, wedding, funeral and so on)? Are there events that one is obliged to attend even if they imply much travel?
- Have one of your friends or family members failed to turn up to an event because of distance or price of travel? What were the consequences?

**H Work**
- How long time have you worked here?
- Why do you work for this company in Liverpool/Manchester/Lancaster?
- How do you commute to work? Please describe a typical day?
- Do you travel in relation to your work? If yes, how many shorter trips do you do each week or month?
- I can see that you have been on X longer domestic trips and X international journeys in relation to your work. Describe your last two journeys to attend meetings. Where was it, what was the agenda, how did you travel and so?
- Do you socialise/network with your colleagues or other people in your profession? If yes, how often do you meet up, where do you meet? Is networking central to your professional life?
- Where do you think you live and work in five years time, and why?
- Would you be prepared to move to a foreign country to work?

**I Friendship**
- I would like you talk about one or two of your oldest friends:
  1. where they live,
  2. what they do
  3. where, when and how you first met,
  4. how you keep in touch (by phone/email/letters/mobile/meetings),
  5. how often you communicate,
6 how often you met in the last year,
7 where meetings take place,
8 how you travel there,
9 if you meet them at special events (e.g. reunion parties) and places
10 if you meeting enough or too little, and why?

- Are the majority of your friends living in Liverpool/Manchester/Lancaster
- Let’s talk about your non-local friends (pre-interview form). How do you know them? How do you stay in contact? Have you lost contact with friends because of residential mobility?
- Talk in detail about one or two of your most recent friends:

  11 where they live,
  12 what they do
  13 where, when and how you first met,
  14 how you keep in touch (by phone/email/letters/mobile/meetings),
  15 how often you communicate,
  16 how often you met in the last year,
  17 where meetings take place,
  18 how you travel there,
  19 if you meet them at special events (e.g. reunion parties) and places
  20 if you meeting enough or too little, and why?

- Do you belong to different networks of friendship? Do your friends ‘know’ each other? Can you specify the different relationships you have with your different friends?
- Are there obligations of friendships (call once a week, attend birthdays and so on)?
- Assume that travel prices increased by 50% and 100%. How would that change your meetings with friends?

**J Family life**

- Describe where your family live (parents, sister, brother, grandparents)?
- If close, how important is it for you to live close to your parents? If faraway, is this a problem?
- How often do you ‘meet up? How much travel does it involve? Do distance and cost affect regularity of your family meetings?
- Are there particular events where you family always meet up? If we take the last ‘family meeting’: where was it, who decided, who was present, was there pressure for you to attend?
- Assume that travel prices increase by 50% and 100%. How would that change your meetings with your family?
Appendix C  Post-interview questionnaire

Important people

Please list up to 10 people (partner, friends, workmates, colleagues and family members) that you consider most important for your social network.

For each person please answer the following questions:

*The initials of the person:*

........................................................................................................................................................................

*Your relation to the person:*

........................................................................................................................................................................

........................................................................................................................................................................

........................................................................................................................................................................

*Where they live (city and area):*

........................................................................................................................................................................

*How you first met (you can tick more than one, and make comments):*

1  My family ( )
2  At school
3  Through an old friend ( )
4  Through a new friend ( )
5  Through partner ( )
6  Through a workmate ( )
7  At work ( )
8  At a meeting/conference/convention ( )
9  On a holiday ( )
10 Through a leisure activity ( )
11 On the Internet ( )
Comments………………………………………………………………………………

.....................................................................................................................

.....................................................................................................................

When did you meet? .......................................................................................

How often do you talk on the phone together?

1 Everyday ( )
2 3-4 times a week ( )
3 Once a week ( )
4 Once a month ( )
5 Once every three month ( )
6 Once every half year ( )
7 Once a year ( )
8 Never ( )

Comments…………………………………………………………………………..

..................................................................................................................

How often do you email each other?

9 Everyday ( )
10 3-4 times a week ( )
11 Once a week ( )
12 Once a month ( )
13 Once every three month ( )
14 Once every half year ( )
15 Once a year ( )
16 Never ( )

Comments…………………………………………………………………………..

..................................................................................................................

How often do you text message together?

17 Everyday ( )
18 3-4 times a week ( )
19 Once a week ( )
20 Once a month ( )
21 Once every three month ( )
22 Once every half year ( )
23 Once a year ( )
24  Never ( )

Comments……………………………………………………………………………………………

........................................................................................................................................

How often to you meet up face-to-face?

25  Everyday ( )
26  3-4 times a week ( )
27  Once a week ( )
28  Once a month ( )
29  Once every three month ( )
30  Once every half year ( )
31  Once a year ( )
32  Never ( )

Comments…………………………………………………………………………………………

........................................................................................................................................

........................................................................................................................................
Appendix D  Distances and Locations
Table 7  Distances to significant others

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interviewee</th>
<th>Number of non-local friends named</th>
<th>Number of family members named</th>
<th>Mean distance to family members</th>
<th>Number of most-important people named</th>
<th>Mean distance to persons named most important</th>
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<td>Mean distance to non-local friends</td>
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<td>to all but the one furthest away</td>
<td>to all but the one living closest</td>
<td>to all</td>
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<td>Number of family members named</td>
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<td>Mean distance to family members to all but the one furthest away</td>
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Table 8  Location of significant others (continued)

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