

# Nomadic Cultures Beyond Work Practices

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**Abstract.** In this one-day workshop, we seek to bring together CSCW scholars, designers and practitioners to explore analytical and design challenges inherent in the notion of “Nomadic Culture”. We will discuss how research on mobility contributes to the CSCW community, while highlighting unsolved problems, future challenges and research agendas. We see this workshop as an opportunity develop a more holistic perspective of nomadic culture, and to connect this scholarship to recent research on sharing and exchange platforms as sites of work.

## Workshop theme and rationale

The workshop “Beyond Mobility: Studying Nomadic Work”, which was organised by some of us at ECSCW 2007 reflected a CSCW interest in investigating the rapid emergence of nomadic work practices and argued for an understanding of the “dynamic practical achievement involved in making, making the most of, and working in different places” (Rossitto et al., 2007). Ten years later, we set out to revisit the notion of nomadicity in light of recent research and empirical changes, such as the spread of wireless connectivity and the rise of the so-called ‘gig economy’. In so doing, we attempt to explore the notion of

*Nomadic Culture* as the entanglement of economic, social, cultural and technological practices enabling and constituting nomadism. The shift of focus from ‘nomadic work’ to ‘nomadic culture’ is informed by research undertaken by the organisers in the intervening 10 years, which highlights how nomadism traverses work and life domains.

Chen and Nath’s definition of nomadic culture locates it in the domain of work where they see such a culture enabling the achievement of competitive benefits through workers’ use of ubiquitous computing technologies. Their definition of nomadic culture emphasises those ‘artifacts, beliefs, and basic assumptions’ that underpin organisational culture (2005: 56). In a later article, they suggest that the development of “an effective mobile work environment” is one of today’s most urgent challenges and call for the study of those issues that foster successful mobile work from the socio-technical perspective (Chen and Nath 2008). They emphasise the interdependence of social and technical systems, but only insofar as they “must be jointly optimized in order to determine the best overall solution for the organization” (Chen and Nath 2008: 41). By expanding Chen and Nath’s account of nomadic culture beyond the workplace and organisational benefits, we want to draw attention to the broader ecological system that enables nomadism including, for instance, family members and various life matters. This will be an opportunity to discuss the various trade-offs between organisations and workforce, and the reciprocal demands, adjustments and accommodations inherent in nomadic work practices and styles (i.e. de Carvalho et al., 2017).

Nomadic culture orders action and produces the cultural/technological components that shape everyday practices. For example, as short and long distance mobility become central features of work and life, these mobilities are no longer lived as instrumental means of moving from A to B, but involve the turning of the in-between spaces into “liminoid spaces of transition”, that is, social and cultural contexts in and of themselves (Vannini 2010). Moreover, post-Fordist capitalist restructuring is changing definitions of work and ‘the worker’ as well as work and life practices via outsourcing, deregulation and flexible employment relations, as for example, in the ‘gig economy’. More research is required on the dynamics of nomadic culture, how it shapes or constrains action and interacts with wider social structures from the economy to the state. In this workshop we would like to explore the cultural dimensions of the practice and experience of work as it and other domains of life become nomadic. As some forms of work and other life activities become independent of time and space, the modern industrial work/life (space/time) boundaries and norms are unravelled giving rise to “nomadic culture”. We are interested in how the experience, practice and symbolism of daily work and life, as these are technologically mediated, may be transformative of individuals and their spatial, temporal, cultural and socio-political contexts.

In this workshop we ask what new repertoires of capacities and affordances are emerging, how are these being engaged with and to what effect? For example, in what ways do contemporary technological discourses and practices legitimate post-Fordist capitalism by stressing the ways in which technology can enable more individual autonomy and life flexibility (Gray et al. 2017; Fisher 2010)? And, to what extent and in what ways is the promise of personal empowerment, authenticity and autonomy taken up and shaping nomadic worker's lives and embedding nomadic culture?

As a variety of mobile services, apps and devices have become a pervasive presence in everyday life, a range of dedicated, public or semi-public places are being set up to enable work on the move, or at a variety of locations. This includes, for instance, "COffices", airport lounges and designated areas, or the emerging trend to turn one's home into a workplace to be shared with other people, including strangers, giving rise to the 'HOffice'. These trends change the meanings of places, times, social ecologies and associated social relations. Yet, , as the application area of mobile computing moves at a fast pace, and working "anytime, anywhere" (Kleinrock, 1996) becomes the norm rather than merely a vision, scholarship on nomadic practices seems to have lost momentum. With a few exceptions (Ciolfi et al., 2014; de Carvalho et al., 2017), it seems that HCI and CSCW research are more interested in technological innovations that might underpin practices, than in a practice-oriented agenda examining contemporary nomadic lives (see, for instance, Weilenman & Juhlin, 2011).

This workshop aims at revisiting research on mobile CSCW by connecting the range of practices emerging from the use of technology in the context of nomadic work (i.e. place-making, place-managing, planful opportunism, etc.) to the emerging personal, socio-economical and political contexts in which such nomadic practices are enacted.

Various studies have illustrated how nomadicity can be seen as an emergent and dynamic process that unfolds as people engage in an ecology of practices for the mobilisation of their workplaces (Luff & Heath, 1996; Perry et al., 2001; Brown & O'Hara, 2003; Weilenman, 2003; Rossitto et al, 2014; de Carvalho, 2014). These practices are highly technologically mediated not least via the promise of enabling individual empowerment and flexibility (Gray et al., 2017). The effect is that workers are constantly engaged in the reconfiguration and management of work/life boundaries (ibid.) Nevertheless, although technologies play a very important role, at times facilitating and at times hindering nomadicity, there are other relevant elements that characterise and enable it. Recent studies have elaborated, for instance, on the spectrum of motivational forces at the core of nomadic practices, ranging from choice to obligation, and emerging opportunities (de Carvalho et al. 2017).

This workshop will also provide a context to connect the notion of nomadic culture to the emerging forms of work enabled by sharing platforms and the so-called "gig economy". Over the past decade, scholars have turned to study

networked platforms that act as marketplaces for crowdwork (Kittur et al, 2013; Martin et al, 2016) peer-to-peer exchange (Bellotti et al, 2014; Lampinen et al, 2015), and on-demand labour (Teodoro et al, 2014; Thebault-Spieker et al, 2015). The gig economy has been flagged as an important part of the future of work, and others have critiqued the often-rosy narratives related to working from anywhere at any time (Gregg, 2013). Studies on different types of platform labour have made significant contributions by mapping experiences of those who use these systems to access paid work (Glöss et al., 2016; Rosenblat & Stark, 2016) and depicting the networks of collaboration that emerge despite workflows that assume individuals labouring in relative isolation (Gray et al., 2017). We see these new forms of work as embedding and normalising nomadic culture and aim to deepen our understanding of ‘nomadic culture’ by providing a contemporary perspectives on the social and cultural aspects of work/life time/space and practices.

We invite contributions to this workshop that will contribute to deepening our understanding of “nomadic culture”, as well as highlight opportunities and challenges for design. Contributors may wish to address a range of issues, including, but not restricted to:

- The transition from micro to macro aspects of nomadicity and from place-making practices to trajectories of nomadic lives;
- The transition from a work-centred to a practice-centred research entailing the work and non-work dimensions of people’s lives, and the negotiation and reconfiguration of work-life boundaries;
- Accounts of nomadic practices as emerging from novel spatial and organisational contexts;
- The range of organisational aspects, motivational factors, personal values and expectations underling the flexibility stemming from this way of working;
- The adoption of methodologies and frameworks to investigate trajectories of nomadic lives in changing organisational, technological and personal circumstances.
- The role of the constellations of technologies and digital platforms in enabling nomadic cultures, but also in creating a potential range of problems/issues to be dealt with; An examination of how we might identify those forces, contexts and dynamics that hinder, resist or work against the momentum of ‘nomadic culture’
- The technological, cultural, political and economic rationalities that underpin and legitimise contemporary enactments of nomadic work and the reproduction of nomadic culture
- Methodological innovations in the study of nomadic culture
- Analysis of the relationship between greater merging of human and machine and formations of nomadic culture

- The role of technology as discourse in socially, culturally and ideologically shaping nomadic culture and nomadic worker subjectivity?
- Analysis of how a nomadic culture that emphasises constant technological innovation constitutes the relationships between capitalist goals of competition and profit and individual life aims.
- Explorations of what present and future “Nomadic Culture(s)” might look like, and of the challenges and issues we will be addressing by 2027.

## Important dates

A call for participation will be circulated during March and April 2017. We plan the following deadlines for the workshop:

- May 26th, 2017, submission of position papers;
- June 16<sup>th</sup>, 2017, notification of acceptance;
- June 30th, 2017, submission of the camera-ready papers.

Notification of acceptance will be sent in time to allow participants to organize travel to the UK and to avail of early registration rates. The submissions will be reviewed by the organisers.

## Agenda

The agenda for this one-day workshop will entail activities that promote discussion and exchange of ideas. Participants who wish to participate in the workshop will be asked to submit a position paper (max 4 pages). We plan to accept a maximum of 15 participants.

During the workshop, we will facilitate a conversation between the participants by moving away from traditional presentations. We will invite the participants to contribute to the workshop with either posters illustrating a concept/framework, or samples of data collected during fieldwork, or demos/prototypes. Such materials will be the main subject of the discussion. In the afternoon, we will lead more focused small-group discussions on specific questions/issues, and practical brainstorming exercises to highlight new research ideas and directions.

The workshop activities will aim at generating a shared research agenda and possible collaboration within the EU COST network “From Sharing to Caring: Examining Socio-Technical Aspects of the Collaborative Economy”, which the workshop organisers are part of.

## Marketing strategy

A call for papers will be sent to the main distribution lists such as CHI Announcements, EUSSET, and to national lists such as the German, British, Irish, Finnish and Swedish HCI mailing lists. We will also directly contact communities as, for example, colleagues involved in EUSSET, and relevant social media outlets (e.g. CSCW Facebook group, etc.). We will create a workshop website including a blog to share information and increase the visibility of the workshop. We will also personally contact researchers and designers who are working on these topics in related disciplines to encourage participation. This workshop is organized in the context of the EU COST Action “From Sharing to Caring: Examining Socio-Technical Aspects of the Collaborative Economy”<sup>[1]</sup> which will also be a venue to invite potential participants. If this proposal is approved, we will also seek to obtain funding for one invited keynote speaker.

The organizers will arrange a publication of the position papers in an issue of the International Reports of Social-Informatics (IIRSI) series from the International Institute of Socio-Informatics (IISI) in Bonn, Germany. After the workshop the organizers, together with the participants who wish to participate, will actively seek to publish a dissemination piece in ‘Interactions’ magazine. We also plan to edit a special issue on a selected journal as eventual workshop outcome, thus encouraging participants to join and subsequently submit a contribution for review towards the publication.

## Contribution to ECSCW 2017

This workshop is relevant to ECSCW 2017 as it will provide a context to revisit past and current research on mobility and nomadic practices that has traditionally been core in the community. As such, it will be an opportunity to highlight how this area of research has contributed to the CSCW community, but also to identify unsolved problems, future challenges and research agendas. We see the in-depth discussion that we hope to generate as an opportunity to connect research on nomadic practices to more recent research on sharing platforms as sites of work. This will contribute to develop an understanding of nomadic culture by providing a more contemporary perspective on the social and cultural aspects around workplace sites and co-working practices.

## Organizers

**Luigina Ciolfi** is Reader in Communication in the Communication and Computing Research Centre, C3RI, Sheffield Hallam University (UK). She holds a Laurea (Univ. of Siena, Italy) and a PhD (Univ. of Limerick, Ireland) in

Human-Computer Interaction. Her main research interests are on people's experience of technology in the physical world, nomadic work and life practices, cultural heritage technologies and collaboration and participation in design. She has worked on several research projects exploring interaction with technology in public spaces, heritage settings, and practices of work and life on the move. She is interested in further exploring placemaking and mechanisms of mobilisation of work and non-work activities. She has organised numerous international workshops and has published on these topics in refereed conferences and journals.

**Breda Gray** is Senior Lecturer in the Department of Sociology at the University of Limerick. She holds a B. Soc. Sc. (University College Dublin, Ireland); BSW (University of British Columbia, Canada), MA Management Learning and PhD Sociology, Lancaster University UK. She is Co-Convenor of Gender ARC research consortium between the University of Limerick and National University of Ireland Galway. Her central research interests are in gender, migration, mobilities, changing work patterns and governance. She has published widely on these themes as well as leading and advising on related international and national research projects.

**Airi Lampinen** is a researcher and lecturer at Mobile Life Centre at Stockholm University, Sweden. Over the past decade, her research has focused on social and economic activities in networked settings, ranging from network hospitality and peer-to-peer exchange in local communities to on-demand service platforms and social media. Lampinen holds a PhD in social psychology from University of Helsinki and a BSc (Eng.) from Aalto University's interdisciplinary Information Networks degree programme. Previously, she has been a researcher at Helsinki Institute for Information Technology HIIT, a visiting scholar at UC Berkeley's School of Information and a research intern at Microsoft Research New England.

**Fabiano Pinatti** is an Associate Researcher at the Institute of Information Systems and New Media of the University of Siegen. He holds a B.Sc. and a M.Sc. in Computer Science from the Federal University of São Carlos, São Paulo, Brazil, and a Multidisciplinary PhD developed within a joint project between the Interaction Design Centre of the Department of Computer Science and Information Systems, University of Limerick, Ireland, and the Department of Sociology at the same university. His interests span Human-Computer Interaction, Interaction Design, Computer Supported Cooperative Work, Ubiquitous and Mobile Computing, Mobile and Nomadic Work and Informatics in Education and the focus of his research is on technologically-mediated human practices. He has published several articles on topics related to these fields of research in prestigious international conferences. During his doctoral research he has investigated issues of nomadic work/life practices in the knowledge economy, providing a more nuanced account of nomadicity and associated issues.

**Chiara Rossitto** is a lecturer in Human-Computer Interaction at Stockholm University. She holds a PhD in Human-Computer Interaction from the Royal Institute of Technology (Sweden), and a Masters Degree in Communication Science from the University of Siena (Italy). Her research is characterized by a combination of social theory and empirical investigations of technologies use. Her previous work has focused in the methodological and analytical challenges inherent in studying nomadicity in collaborative work. She has also investigated place-making practices and how they can emerge from the interactions between people, their activities, and their efforts to manage and use constellations of technologies. She is interested in outlining a research agenda exploring an ecological understanding of contemporary nomadic practices.

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