

The Impact of Mobile Technologies on Public Space

Tali Hatuka and Eran Toch, Tel Aviv University

This presentation underscores the centrality of individual technological devices, particularly mobile phones, in structuring contemporary social interaction in public spaces. It illustrates the need to re-think the relationship between ICTs (Information and Communications Technologies) and practices of sociability in public spaces. Based on surveys of users of mobile phones (basic cell phones and smartphones), we explore the practices and actions of subjects in public spaces. Empirical analysis shows that the use of cell phones and, particularly, smartphones is gradually modifying the normative constraints associated with place and social codes, simultaneously enhancing both a sense of freedom and estrangement.

Based on our findings, we suggest the concept of portable private-personal territory (PPPT) to better understand the personal space individuals develop with the support of technology. We suggest that the PPPT is a socio-spatial condition that modifies interaction rituals in public space and thus should be addressed by policy makers, planners, and urban designers in future spatial development. Finally, we conclude with a reflection on the future implications of PPPTs for public spaces and cities.

Keywords: public spaces, privacy, social interaction, ICTs, mobile computing, mobile phones, perceptions, social codes, boundaries