

Chapter 27

CONNECTOR: A Geolocated Mobile Social Service

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ABSTRACT

The widespread and availability of increasingly powerful mobile devices is contributing for the incorporation of new services and features on our daily communications and social relationships. In this context, geolocation of users and points of interest in mobile devices may contribute, in a natural way, to support either the mediation of remote conversations as the promotion of face-to-face meetings between users, leveraging social networks. The CONNECTOR system is based on geolocation data (people, content and activities), enabling users to create and develop their personal relations with other members of the CONNECTOR social network. Users, maps, sharing features and multimedia content are actors in this social network allowing CONNECTOR to address the promotion of geolocated social networks driven by physical proximity and common interests among users. This chapter discusses the work undertaken for the conceptualization and development of the CONNECTOR system. Preliminary evaluation results along with usage contexts are also presented. The chapter concludes with a discussion about future developments in geolocation and personalization in mobile communication services.

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-60960-042-6.ch027

INTRODUCTION

In this project, concepts such as “community”, “social network”, “aggregation” and “sharing of common activities” gain a special relevance. Socialization, a central issue in the aforementioned concepts, is supported through processes of communication based on different types of interaction: face-to-face interaction, mediated interaction and quasi-mediated interaction (Thompson, 1995). In traditional societies, where face-to-face interaction is dominant, socialization processes tend to be performed between people who know each other well, while in contemporary society individuals often interact with others, known or unknown through technological mediation: “today we interact more with our television screens and computer monitors than with the neighbours or members of the same community.” (Giddens, 2004, p.101).

During the 70s of the XX century major technological developments in telecommunication and personal computer technology raised a new type of society, the network society (Castells, 1997) allowing the emergence of a new type of communication: Computer Mediated Communication (CMC). According to Wellman and Hampton (1999) network societies have more permeable boundaries; interactions often are with persons physically distant; social ties are supported between multiple networks; and hierarchies tend to be more flat and recursive (Wellman & Hampton, 1999; Wellman, 2000). The nature of CMC has some implications in terms of social relationships: it supports communities either with a broad spectrum of interests or with specialized concerns; CMC is useful to keep in contact people connected by weak ties; and proves to be useful in supporting both instrumental exchanges and complex interactions (Wellman & Hampton, 1999).

With the advent of the Web 2.0 CMC has been, in a large extent, supported by social networking sites, such as Facebook, or MySpace where users articulate a list of contacts with whom they share a relation (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). In social

networking portals the emphasis is in the articulation, and visibility, of a person’s social network and interactions tend to occur predominantly with people already integrating the users’ extended social network (e.g.: friends; and friends-of-my-friends) (Boyd & Ellison, 2007).

Nowadays, communication overcomes distance with increased support for mobility.

With the invention of the telephone in 1876, it was possible for the first time in history to have real-time conversational interaction at a distance. (...) Over the years, the telephone has dramatically changed how people live their lives and see their world. (...) The telephone and its latest mobile incarnation have a unique place in the history of humanity’s development. (Katz & Aakhus, 2002, pp.1-2)

In contemporary societies mobile communication has become mainstream and even omnipresent. Despite these developments individuals still feel the need to meet each other in a situation of face-to-face communication - Boden and Molotch (1994) describe this need by *the compulsion to proximity* – people subject themselves to extensive travel to be in situations of co-presence and experience face-to-face communication.

What kind of relation do we have between mobile communication and the *compulsion to proximity*? Has the compulsion to proximity a relation with the perpetual contact promoted by mobile communication?

It is important to emphasize that mobile communications are experiencing a new world – the *wireless world* - and a new age – the *age of perpetual contact*:

The spread of mobile communication, most obtrusively as cell phones but increasingly in other wireless devices, is affecting people’s lives and relationships. Cell phones speed the pace and efficiency of life, but also allow more flexibility at

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