'Do you really talk about emotions on the phone..?': Content of Distance Communication as a Structuring Moment of the Modern World Society

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Introduction

Distance communication tools as a mean of spanning and sustaining personal networks, as well as network analysis and the metaphor of a network have long been a focus of transnational studies (Vertovec 2001). There have also been attempts to make these concepts and objects of study fruitful and interesting to the world society approach. Despite the fact that the two approaches emphas different ent dimensions of the issue, they are not necessarily contradictory. If we define society as "the inclusion of all possible contacts" (Luhmann 1984: 33) the network perspective can be informative for the model of the modern world society (Stichweh 2006; Holzer 2005). Transnational studies investigate the exact forms and contents of social networks, which can tell the world society approach adherent about their local density and heterogeneity, connectivity and clustering and thus about the structure of world society (Stichweh 2003). Illustrative is the assumption that the modern world society is characterised by universal accessibility – in principle, anybody can be an addressee (and a source) of communication (Fuchs 1997). However, there can be many societal barriers to the possible scope of a social relationship – it is who the participants of social exchange are. From this perspective, distance communication tools – their form and availability – determine the exact form of social relationships yet their nonexistence does not question the existence of the modern world society (Holzer 2005: 320p). Distance communication tools make the social networks possible, insofar they allow the disembedding of communication from physical co-presence (Lübbe 1996). Yet, social networks do not emerge in a vacuum but they are predetermined by particular social specifications on which kind of communication and with which addressee is relevant. Therefore, neither the scope of social networks directly, nor

the availability of distance communication tools, structure the world society. Rather, other factors, for example 'mental maps' of the social world and in particular, the way potential contacts are localised, determine the world society's structure. Watts (2003) identified geographical location and profession as two such key factors for selecting communication partners.

However, with few exceptions (Knorr-Cetina/Bruegger 2002), no studies look at structures and dynamics of the modern world society from the microperspective of individual behaviour (Herkenrath et al. 2005). The world society approach has so far given little attention to the question of the defining qualities of the world society, focusing rather on its quantities. The qualitative studies have been a domain of transnational approaches, which, however, scarcely think in more global terms. Moreover, there is more confusion than consensus on the role of long-distance communication tools for the formation and structures of globally spanning social networks. The world society approach sees the spreading of new communication technologies as a substitute for the geographical mobility of people (Stichweh 2005), which might be true in terms of getting in contact with people over geographical distance but is controversial with respect to networks already existing. Another interpretation, which can be located within the transnational approach, is that Internet based exchange platforms play a key role in creating new social interconnectedness and the emergence of 'new imagined communities' (Baym 1995; Jenkins 1997; Miller/Slater 2000; Georgiou 2002; Panagakos 2003) or 'global village' (McLuhan/Powers 1992) or 'world polity' (Meyer 2005). In turn, the distinction between mobility and immobility (Bonß/Kesselring 2001; Kesselring 2001), and 'here' and 'there' is said to be irrelevant; borders seem to disappear and the new space opens out in which the old social order has been replaced by relational complexity (Urry 2004). The opponents of these approaches point to a simplified understanding of space in which the local and the global, as well as place and space are dychotomic, and to the neglected role of various non-spatial boundaries (Berking 1998; Berger 1999; Berker 2003; Massey 2005; cf. Nowicka 2006a). Focusing on individual life courses, some authors (Escobar 1996; Dutton 1999; Jordan 1999; Smith/Kollock 1999) critic pessimistic approaches that perceive in the development of computer mediated communication a danger to mutual trust and collective identity (Tarrow 1998). They also contradict the technological optimism and the opinion that ITC can replace face-to-face interactions (Schwartzman 1989; Boden/Molotch 1994).

There is thus a great need for a grounded empirical research on the exact structures of the modern world society and the involvement of the media of distance communication. The following paper wants to make a contribution to this subject by focusing on the group of transnationally mobile professionals and their small-scale social networks. A rich literature on migrants and diasporas has enhanced our understanding of practices that stretch beyond one locality, and captured how migrants negotiate significant aspects of their lives across borders (Dezalay 1990; King 1990; Glick Schiller et al 1992; Basch et al. 1994; Chan

1997; Cohen 1997; Smith/Guarnizo 1998; Vertovec/Cohen 1999; Faist 2000; O'Riain 2000; Colic-Peisker 2002; Hannerz 2003, to name a few). However, this growing literature has focused on enforced migration, large communities, identity formation and integration in host societies, and little interest has been given to the more informal and interpersonal connections established and sustained by mobile professionals. Further, the premature conclusion that, in the era of distance communication tools, mobility and spatial dispersal do not have any negative effects on individuals' social networks needs to be tested against the empirical data.

The research which focused on family networks has addressed the relationship between spatial ruptures and the negotiation of changes in the gender division of labor, gender relations and ideologies and intergenerational relations within the family (Landolt/Da 2005) but not on the relationship between spatial distance and proximity, use of distance communication tools, and forms of social interaction with family and friends. Similarly, the research on mobile professionals has focused on the consequences of their mobility for family life and the forms and geographical spread of their social networks (Pelizäus-Hoffmeister 2001; Schneider et al. 2002) or on general patterns of sociability, especially on inclusion of foreigners and locals into the networks (Kennedy 2004). There is scant debate on the spatiality of family practices (Kivisto 2003), in particular on the relationship between mobility and changing notions of home and away (Nowicka 2007).

In the following, I consider mobility and distance communication as two aspects of social networking and ask how they complement each other. I look at how the mobile individuals handle their relationships under the condition of geographical dispersal. In particular, I investigate two types of relationships my interview partners sustain with their immediate family (spouse, children, parents and siblings) and friends. These two situations were distinguished by my interview partners according to how physical and emotional distance and proximity interplay.

Further, I look at how distance communication tools' contribute to maintenance of informal social networks. I argue that content of transmitted messages is crucial for sustaining such networks. Under the conditions of almost unrestrained access to high quality distance communication media (due to diminishing financial costs), other factors such as time efficiency structure the world society. Also, other 'residual boundaries' (Berker 2003) to social networks can be identified, such as language, territorial bond, or cultural and life style differences. These should be understood not as barriers to connectivity but as the structuralising moments of the modern world society.

I begin with picturing the context of the empirical study and the description of the sample studied. In particular, I discuss the individuals' mobility practices and their inclusion in complex institutional arrangements and the way their lives are internationalised. I briefly describe their access to distance communication

tools. Focusing on distance communication, I do not lose sight of motivation for travel. This brings me to the first claim that communication in distance and proximity are not interchangeable. I carry on analysing each of the relationships' type and the roles the geographical distance and proximity and distance communication have in them. In the last section, I summar the identified transnationalisation of social networks and individualisation of life styles and their temporal fragmentation. In conclusion, I combine these results with the findings on distance communication and ask how distance communication can soften or sharpen the effects of physical distance for remote relationships.

Mobile Transnational Professionals and Their Environment

For a growing number of professionals mobility belongs to their daily routine. Highly-skilled workers move to undertake a job abroad when in danger of unemployment at home, to pursue their careers or to perform their work tasks. They are involved in overlapping multiple social worlds and interpersonal networks, both private and professional, which are the outcome of their mobility and which can also be a reason to become or stay mobile. Every relationship of mobile people is potentially temporally remote: they may be present at home for three weeks and then leave for six weeks to come back and stay a month. The relationship to their spouses and children, but also to clients and work colleagues takes place in momentary proximity and it is affected by their regular absences. Their geographical mobility may thus mean to them a change in forms and intensity of contact to their nearest and dearest.

The particular group I studied is highly mobile employees of an international organisation, one of the specialised agencies within the United Nations system (later on referred to as the IO). The study was conducted between December 2002 and September 2004 and relied on two-to-three-hour-long problem-centered interviews, accompanied by a short questionnaire. I did not restrict my research to any particular location but spoke to the interviewees in their places of their residence and at their business travel destinations. If a meeting was not possible, we phoned, which was the case five times. I interviewed six women and seven men between 31 and 64 years of age. At the time of the interviews, nine people were married, two of them for the second time. There was one widow and one single person in the sample. One interviewee indicated having a steady life partner and another having a girlfriend. Ten people have children; five of them have (also) adult children who do not live with them anymore (some of them live in a different country). All interviewees have higher education, and most of them completed university with an M.A. degree. Spouses of eight interviewees were professionally active, two of them worked from home, and one was retired.

All of them are migrants and frequent travelers. One group can be distinguished. This is the group of those who travel between 100-170 days in a year, to five to seven countries in which they conduct projects (usually over five to seven years). Such short trips are one to four weeks long (only one interviewee travels only to one country in Africa but for one to three months). These individuals reside generally longer (5-15 years) in one country, usually in the USA, but also in Eastern Europe. A second group consists of individuals who undertake three to five years long assignments in a third country, from where they also travel, but less extensively (usually once a month to neighboring countries, and three times a year to the USA). However, in the course of their lives, the two options of re-settlement and extensive mobility mix: some individuals had traveled extensively for a couple of years and then undertook a foreign assignment. On average, the interviewees re-settled two to nine times between countries and continents. My interview partners come originally from South America, Turkey, the Middle East, the USA, Western (continental) Europe, non-continental Europe and Central and Eastern European countries. They were residents of all continents, and they travel (or used to travel) to various continents, except to Australia. Importantly, the migrants do not separate from their spouses and children but move with them to another country. The IO provides extensive support to these families through job searches for spouses and care and schooling opportunities for children.

Distinctively, they dwell in a de-nationalised environment. The disembeddedness from nation-states is the result of immersion in the organisational networks of the United Nations system, with its own pension and health programs, as well as exclusion from national taxation schemes. Unlike migrants living in diasporas, my informants go abroad alone or with their immediate family only (when re-settling); and they tend not to sustain links characteristic to 'transnational social spaces'. Typically, 'transmigrants' uphold close relationships to communities of origin while being well-integrated into the host society. For example, they contribute financially to the development of their hometowns, and are engaged in local politics (Glick Schiller et al. 1992; Basch et al.1994; Pries 2001). This is not the case in my sample. While my informants wish to maintain close links with family and friends at home, it is not their main concern to sustain cultural bonds with the home country. Also their dependency on home-bonds and on local ethnic groups is very weak (which seems typical of highly qualified and middle class professionals – cf. Kennedy 2004).

The technical networks of the organisation guarantee to the individuals an almost unlimited access to the modern distance communication tools, which can be used for business and private purposes: videoconferencing, satellite phone connections, or mobile computers with Internet access. The IO owns a satellite network for remote communication. It permits reducing the costs for the whole organisation but also for its employees, who are allowed to use the connections, above all phones, for private reasons. For example, they may call via the main

board worldwide, paying only for a basic outgoing connection. The IO has a well developed Intranet. Many of the internal transactions and processes take place electronically. The IO's field offices are equipped with special rooms for visiting employees who can use a docking station, Internet access, printers, etc. All the mobile employees are equipped with laptops. In this context the choice of the form of communication belongs to the individual.

The availability of distance communication tools in the offices may be the reason why most of my interview partners are not too well equipped at home. Many of them take their business laptops home, and usually they own a personal computer but they use Internet from home only occasionally, typically for shopping or as a source of information (for example route planners or telephone books). Many of them do not carry a mobile phone with them, and if they do they try to switch it off as often as possible, and do not take business calls after hours. On the other hand, the limited private use of such equipment is a result of their protection of their private sphere. Usually, the mobile individuals have even less time at their disposal than their immobile colleagues, and they try to spend this time entirely with the family. They dedicate their spare time to their hobbies, which they carry out either at home or outdoors. Many like gardening and taking of their house, or do individual sports. This precious time should be exclusively devoted to those who are closest to them.

Motivation to Travel or: From Whom Are You Remote?

One of the most important questions for my research was why people are mobile. In the context of this paper, this question is relevant as far as the individuals' decision to become or stay mobile means a choice of from whom they are remote. They conduct projects in distant countries. This means their clients are remote. When deciding to travel, they decide for a physical proximity to them. At the same time, they become remote to their families, who stay at home. A closer look at the individuals' motivation to travel demonstrates some of the issues of remote communication, which I discuss in greater detail when focusing on my interviewees' private relationships.

One reason why my interviewees decide to travel are the deficiencies of distance communication tools. It is expected that physical mobility can be replaced by virtual mobility, it means that instead of traveling, the individuals use distance communication tools to manage their tasks in far destinations. The IO makes three options available to it's employees: they can choose to move to a third country where they stay three to five years and perform their work while residing there; they can undertake an assignment which enables them to reside in the USA, where the IO's headquarters is located and from there they travel regularly to the countries where they participate in projects. They can also choose to stay in their place of residence (usually in the IO's headquarters location) and do their

work from 'behind the desk'. All three options are equally supported by the IO. It means someone who does not want to travel (due to family circumstances like a birth of a baby or health problems) can find another, qualitatively equal, assignment within the organisation that does not require them to travel.

However, all the interviewees agree that travel is necessary because nothing can replace personal encounters with people and places. They say "no best equipment can replace traveling" (I1: 51; I4: 57)[1]. They see several reasons for this: First, people – their clients and cooperation partners – are used to communicate face-to-face and they do not want to rely on videoconferencing (I4: 57). More importantly, however, one can benefit more from the "personal touch" that face-to-face meetings give. Further, the interviewees believe that:

"You can use videoconferences when there is kind not a very difficult or controversial issue to be discussed which are also on the further agenda, when you have to convince people then it is better to meet people face-to-face it is videoconferencing are great just to update, to get people informed, but if it is a very critical issue, when you have to convince people then I would still say face-to face discussion in order really to have very detailed discussion." (I3: 36)

They admit that videoconferencing is an improvement to telephone conference or e-mail because one can see people, their faces, expressions, behaviour, and their body language (I3: 152). Observing body language is necessary to understand their motivations and decisions (I3: 57). Yet travel and personal encounter involves another aspect: one meets not only people when traveling, one meets places (I6: 26). Lenka[2] says that she meets people who are not her direct clients or counterparts with whom she could not communicate by e-mail, phone or videoconference but who are affected by the projects she supervises. When she sees what she contributed when preparing the project, a bypass constructed or a bridge built, and when she talks to people who use this infrastructure and thank her for this contribution, she feels satisfaction. She feels rewarded for her efforts and it compensates for her hard work. She is then motivated to continue (I6: 40). Reiner confirms this saying that one gets a much better understanding of the situation of a particular person (a client, an addressee of a project) when visiting a project site. Being physically present in the "field", he talks to people, for example taxi drivers, with whom he otherwise would not have a possibility to communicate. He also observes beggars on the street or passing people laughing, and these impressions cannot be replaced by talking, he stresses (I2: 57). Rainer's words point to the very important issue that communication is not only about talking and that the forms of communication are not exchangeable. The issues, problems and situations he and his colleagues deal with, when supervising a

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1   The numbers in brackets stand for interview and paragraph number respectively.
2   The names of all the interviewees and of geographic destinations have been changed to assure anonymity.

project, are too complex. Not only it is necessary to see people's faces when they talk to get a full picture of their reactions but it is often necessary to talk to other people, and to see their environment. Therefore, videoconferencing is a poor substitute for travel, and can be used only when travel is not possible for some reasons (I2: 65).

His words make clear that distance communication disconnects people from their environments. When communicating by phone or Internet the partners do not get an impression of how the other lives, how the other fits into the surroundings, and how the location may influence this person. Being physically present in a place gives one a much better understanding of the situation of a particular person. When in place, you can talk to many people, recogn their moods, and get an idea of people's living conditions. You can participate in the stories of others. This knowledge increases the satisfaction my informants feel when performing their professional tasks. Otherwise, they experience others as anonymous recipients of their decisions, who are 'caught in the moment', without their own personal histories, immobilised and atemporalised, extracted from spatial and temporal contexts. We can say thus that the spatial distance increases the emotional distance between people by the means of abstracting them from the particularities of place.

The same does not apply to the communication between the co-workers within the IO, either those who sit in a neighboring office or building or who work in another country. Contrary to what has been said so far, the interviewees use mostly e-mail to communicate within teams, and they rarely meet personally. Besides e-mail, phone, and sometimes also audio-conferencing are the tools used to contact colleagues (I1: 23), depending on what needs to be communicated. Usually, teams exchange documents and other information, and coordinate meetings; seldom, they discuss problems on the phone. One of the reasons for this difference may be a clear division of tasks and responsibilities between the work colleagues, which makes their behaviour predictable. The risk of misunderstandings and the anxiety that they could negatively influence a relationship is much lower in this case. There is no necessity to establish trust since the roles assigned to partners govern their relationships. Should a conflict nevertheless occur, there are conciliation mechanisms in place in the organisation.

Private Social Networks

My interview partners live with the constant anxiety that they may lose contact with their friends when they resettle. Many of them moved out from their parents' house as students and never came back, as a result of having moved to another country right after graduation. Since then, they rely on distance communication tools to keep in touch with their family and friends:

"You know, we live in such a world practically without borders. One day I am at this continent, the other day somewhere else…It is natural that we do not end friendships. Of course, we do not see each other so often, but we contact per e-mail, we talk on the phone. It is not like in nineteenth century when you went to America, got on board of such damper and you cried because you thought you go forever." (I12: 52)

Those who travel over one hundred days a year use distance communication tools to stay in regular contact with the immediate family: wife, husband, and children. The availability of distance communication does not make their mobility unnecessary. It makes it possible. Knowing that they can communicate when traveling, bridging the distance to their nearest and dearest, it is easier for them to decide to leave home for a time.

Families under the Condition of Remoteness

Despite this, the interviewees complain that their contact with family is quite irregular due to mobility. The temporal dimension is of key importance to mobile individuals. First, their contacts to their nearest and dearest suffer due to (real or experienced) time shortages and squeeses (Southerton et al. 2001) anyway. When they are not on trips, they work long hours and have little leisure time available for activities with their families. When they are away, this possibility does not exist at all; they just manage to call their spouse at the end of their work day only if time zones allow for it. Secondly, every trip fragments the private time they spend together with the family, in physical proximity, when the family members hug, kiss, play together, go shopping, or get involved in hobbies. This time is divided over the year into short periods. Thirdly, time delays are a problem to individuals. Often, it is easy to maintain contact either by e-mail or telephone, one can be reached almost in every location. However, not just the fact of information exchange, but immediate reaction, is important. Reiner says he carries a mobile phone with him case his wife needs to get in touch with him:

"I do that because I would like to be in touch, I don't want to miss anything important and also I would like to be contactable in cases of emergencies. Before 1990 when I was in Africa it was really difficult to stay in touch. And I was out of touch with my family for a week or more. That was not really very good – when the child was sick or your wife wasn't able to find a certain file or there was something urgent…It gives the impression that she had to manage on her own. That was quite a problem. It is much less so these days. But still it is an issue. This traveling, the amount of traveling I do is a burden on a family." (I2: 53)

The reaction time is important insofar an immediate response carries an emotional message with it. A delayed reaction makes an impression of less involvement

and understanding of the problem and its urgency. Someone who replies with a delay misses a great dose of immediate and strong emotions on a particular, controversial or difficult, issue.

Scarcity of time disrupts the seemingly trivial personal contacts because it disturbs the daily routines. Routine interactions play a significant role in the maintenance of close relationships and defining the roles in each relationship (Duck 1988). How important they are becomes visible first when mobile people decide to change their work assignment to travel less. This is often the case for young mothers, but also other interviewees use this option (I5). Many decide to reduce the number and duration of trips when it becomes a clear burden on their families, like Martin (I3) who reduced his amount of travels by forty percent when his wife gave birth to their daughter.

However, the interviewees differ in their judgment on whether irregular contact is more destructive to relationships with their direct or extended family or to friends. Some claim that their families suffer dramatically from their physical absences referring to their spouses and children. Others say that no matter what, the family members maintain their close ties; they usually mean their parents and siblings. Relationships with the extended family are usually not considered too problematic. Sporadic visits to family members and regular phone calls are sufficient to maintain contact and there is little danger of weakening ties. All the interviewees bridge the distance to their parents with the help of the telephone. Ludmila calls them regularly in spite of the costs because this way she feels comfortable – "I try not to set barriers myself", she says (I7: 51). For those whose friends and families live in the USA, regular contact is even easier because it is cheaper – they use the IO's satellite system to make private calls. One can call for free via the IO's satellite in the US; calling the local number is then free of charge, and long-distance connections are much cheaper than through commercial networks (I4: 109).

Men tend to see their relationship to their parents and relatives as less difficult than women do. Women tend to be more sensitive about distance between family members and often regret being far from their parents. Although their relationship remains intimate, they miss daily contact with their parents; they are worried that they may not be present in case of emergency, and they miss parental advice and warmth. "You cannot call Mum non-stop when you cook and you are not sure what to put in a pot", says Lenka (I6: 70).

Due to physical distance, individuals need to be more flexible in their life arrangements, and they also need to be well organised. They also need to flexibly react to any possibility to meet their extended family members face-to-face: many interviewees combine business travels with visits to their parents (I5, I11). Visits to the parental home of both partners are, on the other hand, arranged so that the time is divided equally between both families, thus requiring certain regular schedule. Many of the interviewees say, they always spend summer holidays in the country of a husband, and winter in the country of his wife's family, and

then one week a year by themselves in a third 'neutral' country. Not without importance is their wish to let their own children get to know their grandparents, as well as the country and culture of their parents' origin.

Friendships and Mobile Life-Styles

When asked to describe their social networks the interviewees indicated the nationality and place of residence of their friends, which allowed them to draw their 'social maps'. Most of interviewees stay in touch with friends from school or university. The closer the ties used to be, the better the chance that the friendship survives the distance, note the interviewees (I5: 125, 141). Typically, they accept that their friendships evolve with time and see it as a normal development. They relate this change in the nature and form of a friendship and the intensity of contacts to an evolving life situation rather than physical distance. Reiner who has lived abroad (in several countries) for over thirty years says that one develops different interests and different perspectives, so: "after a number of years" he discovered he "might not have much in common" with his old friends and relatives (I2: 81). In particular, the experience of mobility, frequent changes of residence and exposure to many different cultures disembedds the interviewees from their old networks. Some of my interview partners, however, point to the role of physical absence from friends. Rodrigo believes that after some ten years of being outside of the home country one has to accept that certain contacts, especially those based on professional interests and business co-operation end. It is possible to maintain the interest in one person's life over a longer time but this link has to be emotional; in other cases a friendship ends (I13: 86). Steven, on the other hand, considers mobility as a positive factor in shaping his own social networks; because of frequent changes of residence, he gains possibilities to decide with whom to stay in touch with and with whom not (I4: 121).

Generally, the interviewees judge keeping contact with friends as requiring a lot of effort. Some friendships end with time because the contact is not as regular as it used to be or because not many people are able to express emotions when talking on the phone only or writing e-mails (not to mention that not everybody has e-mail access, though these days it is rarely a problem because everybody has a telephone). The interviewees emphas that direct unmediated contact is the most important to them and their friends (I1: 49). Diego says it is perhaps easier to maintain contact with friends in the age of Internet and e-mails – but, in practice, keeping in touch regularly is difficult. Thus, he re-defined true friendship:

„True friends is that you may not see each other for four, five years, you may actually only once or twice a year write a short note, and then you see each other after four years and it is as you never stopped seeing each other. Because things start clicking immediately. And that is very rare, it doesn't happen very often but when it happens, at least in

my definition then you know it is a real friend. And then it has to work both ways as well." (I10: 98)

A friendship under condition of spatial dispersal is also affected by temporal ruptures. This has tremendous consequences for the mobile individuals. Mobile people have to re-establish their relationships to friends again and again. They need to make effort to ensure that people do not forget them, that they stay integrated (I4: 65) despite being absent. Both parties in this relationship need to be patient: Ludmila says that her friends are tired of waiting to organ a party on the particular weekend that she happens to be back in town. Her foreign language teacher resigned from their meetings because she was away too often, and the irregular lessons were of little benefit to either of them. The interviewees usually give up hobbies, which they would share with a group, like team sports or playing in a music band (I3: 86). Rather, they find hobbies which they can do alone, without a need to coordinate the activity with friends. For example, they go to a gym, read books, take care of their own garden, or go jogging regularly (I2: 47). Mobile individuals prefer to spend their time at home and to dedicate their attention to their immediate family. "When you travel, your favourite place is home", says Lenka (I6: 98). Their social engagements are reduced to sporadic informal meetings. All of my interview partners have resigned from memberships in associations. Tolga, for example, is no longer a member in the society which supports young people from her home country. Although she thinks it is a very important activity, she is only able to be a passive member. This option is satisfactory neither to her nor to the society. Life styles of mobile individuals become individualised, and their social practices are fragmented for longer periods of time.

However, the role of spatial ruptures can be relativised when we look at other important events in interviewees' lives. Such "growing apart" between old friends is not confined only to relationships in which one or both friends are mobile. Many adult persons experience friendship as significantly structured by the challenges of everyday life: coordinating couples' activities, aligning family compositions, pursuing careers, and matching different schedules (Sigman 1991; Rawlins 1994: 285). These can be reinforced by extensive mobility. However, many interview partners stress that their circle of friends and acquaintances has changed because of the demands of family life, especially children. When children are born the circle of friends evolves. First one has less spare time, is more constrained, or cannot stay late in the evening. Second, one chooses friends who also have children so that when meeting them, the kids can play together (I5: 73). Martin, the young father and a father-to-be for the second time, notes with some sadness that his criteria for meeting people are driven almost exclusively by children (I3: 92). On the other hand, when one has children, it becomes more important to maintain contact with the family in the home country. Although some ties may become weak, other are refreshed and reinforced.

Another aspect relates to certain homogenisation of social networks. Their friends are typically transnational professionals as well; many work in the IO, they are also expatriates. Martin estimates that some one-thirds of his friends are international (I3: 56). Lenka's friends are mostly international, too: they are either colleagues she met in the IO or in embassies or in the neighborhood (I6: 84). She notices that "somehow foreigners stick together" (I6: 86). Atanas estimates that only 10 percent of his neighbors are "local" people, the rest are migrants like him (I12: 46). Tolga mostly meets parents from the international school her children attend (I5 110). But these "people come and go", says Lenka (I6: 80). She lost many friends because they moved on, and she stayed, at least for a time, or the opposite. It is characteristic of this group that their friends are often as mobile as they are.

Physical and Emotional Distance: What Can and What Cannot be Said

The problem of keeping in touch over longer time and distance is about the content of a transmitted message: about what can be said on the phone, what can be written in an e-mail, and what has to be said when looking into somebody's eyes. The interviewees emphas that e-mails are good for exchanging and informing. They transfer photos or interesting articles (I2: 85), they update friends about the most important events, and they coordinate meetings with them. Martin, for example used to send e-mails like postcards, but "those days are over". He is flooded with e-mails and has no time to answer them. He says "the whole communication traffic is getting too much and it doesn't reflect the substance. It is really hell" (I3: 152). Only when he plans to go to a country where some of his friends live, does he send them a short e-mail and agrees on the time and exact place of a face-to-face meeting. Everybody accepts this and he thinks it does not affect the relationship too much (I3: 156). He regularly forwards them some pictures to keep them updated on the recent developments in his life. "This is nice and helpful", says Reiner, who prefers to call people. He says he is not too good in writing, and neither is his mother nor his siblings. Tolga agrees: she talks regularly to her friends back in Turkey. They chat about children and work. This is much more interesting and allows for more possibilities for spontaneous response than e-mail (I5: 73). However:

"A real serious communication by phone is very limited. Do you really talk about your emotions or really things that are important for you over the phone? You talk about the weather, how are the kids, Hmm....pretty much superficial things or let's say logistical things also. But not really the real stuff." (I2: 83)

Each tool is suitable for different purposes, and it enables a different kind of communication. The best is the face-to-face meeting (I8: 195), because most elements of communication are non-verbal. One can read the emotions of the other and show emotions and make sure they are understood correctly. The second is voice: on the phone one can hear the person and recogn the tone of his or her voice and also their reactions – joy, sadness, and anger. E-mail is like a letter: one can deduct only some moods from the choice of words (I6: 76). The last is therefore the least personal (I9: 64) and therefore the interviewees use e-mails for simple messages, coordination of meetings, and short updates. Despite the fact that e-mails give the recipient the freedom of replying when it is the most suitable to her or him, there is also a danger that e-mails will disappear in the traffic. Especially when business e-mails are a priority, personal messages to friends often go unanswered for a longer time (I8: 191). The interviewees point to an important feature of e-mail communication which is the possibility of control. The receiver can always decide when to answer and can think over an answer (I8: 193). One can plan when to write to whom and what. E-mail remains thus a tool of communication in business and has only a supplementary role in the private life of the interviewees. They tend to communicate primarily on the phone with their families and friends. The possibility of immediate response seems to be an important factor in the choice of this media of communication.

The interviewees tend to 'return' to traditional forms of distance communication. In spite of having access to modern systems, they would rather phone (Vertovec 2004). They often decide to hand write Christmas greetings to give the message a personal touch (I9: 66) instead of sending an e-mail. They mostly use the IO's networks, though they rarely carry their laptops home or have a business mobile phone. They separate business and private life, try to avoid bringing work home and would rather spend their spare time outdoors, gardening, jogging or meeting friends instead of using a computer or Internet. They do not have private e-mail accounts (I2: 87), they trust that the IO will not control their e-mails flow. Very few interviewees use Internet at home. So, then for shopping (I6: 149, I3: 78), especially for rare things like special cameras or gifts for relatives in another country. Sometimes they use search engines to plan their travel.

The choice of media of communication relates to the type of attachment connecting people (Döring/Dietmar 2003). The more intimate the private relationship, the richer, synchronic and more personalised is the medium chosen, for example telephone for family talks, especially when emotions are to be shared. E-mails are chosen when delay in time is an advantage or when practical issues should be discussed. In business, written media are chosen to minim the risk of misunderstandings and secure transmission, but only when a relationship has already been established. When making contact for the first time, and when complicated issues which require proving the partner's understanding of the situation, and to assure the partner of own trustworthiness, richer media like videoconfer-

encing are used. When one's roles are clearly defined and for coordination in teams, e-mails seem to satisfy all participants.

Conclusions

The empirical findings prove that mobility influences individuals' life courses and patterns of socialisation. However, this influence is quite ambivalent. Several other factors, for example birth of a child, may have a comparably large impact on individuals' social networks and daily practices. Mobility is relevant as far as it leads to a geographical spread of families and friendship networks, and a shift in temporal dimension of social practices. Several processes could be identified as a consequence of mobility. First, the analysis of the empirical material shows that practices and also social contacts of the interviewees become individualised. The interviewees tend not to participate in group activities, but rather meet irregularly with individuals whenever they have time. Secondly, their social networks are transnational, in terms of the nationalities represented and the locations involved. Though often enjoyed, the transnationalisation of social networks is not an aim of the interviewees. It is enforced by institutional settings like the IO, international schools, or expatriate communities, and mobility, which makes them spread around the globe.

One aspect of transnationalisation is that the interviewees social with people like themselves, people who have a similar background and life style and who can better understand them easier than their sedentary neighbors or colleagues. The specific experience of mobility, the frequent absences from home and lack of time lead to the situation when the individuals feel emotional distance from their local communities and also to those whom they left behind. Their relationships are in constant danger of misunderstandings and conflicts, resulting also from language barriers. In the place, where the individuals settle for certain periods of time, their attachment to people and their surroundings is temporary, and they tend to develop new acquaintances mostly among their international colleagues and neighbors. Often, they avoid socialising with work colleagues, who often take more of the role of a guide in a foreign country than of a good friend. Despite the fact that the foreigners stick together, individuals of the same nationality are more likely to get together (I6: 88). New friendships usually follow their own rules. Much of how they develop is accidental; also, "the chemistry between people" (I4: 97) is more important than other factors.

The spatial distance from old friends and to families enforces a certain flexibility in the mobile individuals. They use every occasion to visit their nearest and dearest. On the other hand, they may also establish a greater regularity in their long-distance contacts, for example to fairly distribute their attention to families in more than one country. The pressure of mobility often causes social networks of mobile people to be very fragile, despite the fact that they are constantly con-

cerned with keeping in touch with people. Many friendships end with time; they break down as a result of a lack of common daily activities, and the imperfection of distance communication.

Distance communication tools are believed to mitigate the negative effects of mobility and spatial ruptures. However, the literature has focused on the geographical dispersal and technical connectivity. The interviews with the mobile transnational professionals confirm that they use distance communication tools daily for bridging the spatial distance. Yet they are often less successful in bridging emotional distance. Distance communication has several limitations. Not the accessibility of media but the comfort of its usage, its quality or language are among the barriers to communication. Temporal aspects, however, seem to be even more important. Pressure for coordination, temporal fragmentation of social practice, and shortages of time spent in physical proximity matter much to individuals. Especially in emergency and conflict situations temporal delays in response to problems are a serious issue to mobile people.

Mobility does change the form, scope and content of social networks. Paradoxically, however, the social networks of the mobile individuals may not be dramatically different from the social networks of less mobile professionals who work in any company operating transnationally, and who travel for private reasons only. Mobility seems to rather restrict their networks than to enlarge them. The internationalisation of social network may be related to profession to a greater extent than mobility. One thinks here of transnational social networks of scientists (Berker 2003; Scheibelhofer 2003) or journalists (Pelizäus-Hoffmeister 2001) but also of other, more sedentary groups (Mau 2007).

When establishing new acquaintances my informants rely on face-to-face meetings, which may accidentally give rise to a friendship. They are quite traditional technology users; they do not enlarge their networks with help of distance communication tools. Possibly, their mobile life style hinders them in this aspect – they are steadily confronted with new places and people (despite that they may not communicate with them), which is quite stressful. Their non-travel time is a quality and relaxing time which they dedicate to dwell in familiarity and coziness of own house and family.

The relationship between physical movement and the use of distance communication tools is quite complex. One thing determines the other – mobile people who are absent try to be present from a distance and rely on phone or e-mails to achieve it. The deficiencies of distance communication tools may however increase their motivation to travel to project sites. Possibly, their physical mobility hinders their 'virtual' mobility, when they choose to visit their parents despite a large geographical distance rather than increase the frequency of phone conversations.

When focusing on interviewees' practice of communicating from a distance, I could observe a split into the two separate worlds, in which my interview partners live: a 'virtual' one, where business and private coordination is managed

(however often with some difficulty), and a 'real' one, where intimate or difficult business matters are shared. The 'virtual' world is characterised by an increasing simplicity; on contrary, the 'real' world is very complex. This division is not the same as the one of private and public or private and business spheres. The division between them is marked by change in content and quality of transferred messages. In the first, messages tend to 'disappear' in huge information traffic, many of them remain unanswered, and despite the flow of information taking place, communication often does not. In this world, certain functions are exercised: coordination, documents and information sharing, updating, scheduling, etc. The tool chosen depends on type of the task which needs to be performed: e-mails for co-ordination of meetings, audio-conferencing for agreeing with a group of people, videoconferencing for solving minor problems and updating, the telephone for exchanging reactions, etc. Location matters here little. 'Real' life is handicapped by extensive mobility. When a person relocates over a long distance, there is an anxiety that the intimacy of relationships with those left behind will deteriorate. The distance communication tools are a poor replacement for physical proximity, as they do not offer the same 'richness' of communication (Jaffe/Aidmann 1998: 180). In this world, physical and temporal proximity gain in importance as a factor influencing intimacy in the relationship.

The distance communication tools are an important component of each remote relationship. However, their power to mitigate the physical distance is imperfect, and this, as I claim, because they insufficiently alleviate the temporal aspects of social practices of mobile individuals. They may have power to 'reduce' the geographical distance between family members and friends in the sense that geographical distance does not necessarily mean loss of intimacy and emotional detachment. Yet the temporal aspects of each relationship remain affected by physical distance in such a way that intimacy and emotional proximity are in danger. Remote relationships are affected more by time shortages and temporal ruptures, which enforce more effort in assuring synchronisation and coordination than by physical distance. The temporal aspects determine an individual's membership in social groups, both in small scale networks as well as larger communities, which has to do with participating in the spatio-temporal trajectories more than being physically present in a place.

We may also look at mobility not as a reason for spatial dispersal of social networks, and distance communication not as a mean of mitigating the negative effects of spatial ruptures but look at both as means of sustaining social networks. If the fact that certain networks are more durable than others is the result of the constant effort put in their maintenance, this is the result of a conviction of all parties involved that this effort is worth it. Kinship networks are quite durable because mobile individuals take the effort to sustain them, also in situations of physical distance, by means of travel (if possible and/or necessary) or by means of distance communication (if possible and/or necessary). Professional networks based on varying interests and commonalities may not be worth such an effort

because both, mobility and communicating at a distance are not easy. They are both time and energy consuming.

When we then finally try to think of mobile professionals' social networks in terms of their structure, we need to go beyond geographical patterns of distribution of network members. Transnational social networks are quite complex in terms of their geographical distribution as well as their temporal structure. We can identify their internal transnationalisation at the level of the nuclear family (binational marriages are quite common), as well as within a single locality (expatriate communities and international neighborhoods, international work environment); we can also recogn their pluri-local spread at various levels – family networks dispersed across continents; friendships between people of different nationalities residing in various countries; professional networks stretching beyond borders of one organisation and one country. We also need to consider durability and intensity of such connections, and how they vary in time. The interplay of geographical mobility and use of distance communication tools determine the exact form of these connections insofar as they influence the temporal patterns of social life.

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