ICT use in evolving and floating atmospheres

Attitudes to ICT use in various public spaces in the Netherlands

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Abstract

The use of mobile information and communication devices has spread rapidly into all aspects of public life, frequently bringing about situations of tension due to conflicting norms and expectations among users of public space. Although some studies have investigated the interactions between public space and ICT use, most of them approach spatial contexts in an undifferentiated and absolute way. In contrast, by focusing on atmospheres in public settings and by engaging a relational approach, this study shows the dynamic and shifting ways ICT behaviour unfolds in public networks where atmospheres bring humans, activities and materials together in unique assemblages. This study draws on a qualitative diary-interview research in which Dutch respondents reported and reflected upon their own ICT experiences in specific space-time situations.

Keywords: ICTs, atmosphere, practices, space-time situations, public space, mobility

1. Introduction

The use of mobile information and communication (ICT) devices has spread rapidly into public life, raising new questions about the nature and functioning of public space as it challenges and redefines the conventional boundaries of proximity/distance and private/public (Höflich, 2006; Sheller, 2004). As the presence of mobile ICTs in public steadily grows, awareness of how the use of these devices is surrounded by norms and expectations is on the rise. A recent study commissioned by Intel (2011), which investigated 'mobile etiquette' in several Western societies, highlights people's claims of increasingly witnessing public misuse of ICTs and signals a widely shared wish for a new and clear code of conduct in this time when mobile technologies have become an integral part of our public lives. Many authors connect these observations to the acceleration of the trend towards individualism and public privatism, arguing that public ICT use contributes to the transformation of public space into 'common living rooms' (Kopomaa, 2000), where people act in 'mobile cocoons' (Harris, 2003, see also McQuoid & Dijst, 2012; Fortunati, 2002). In these concerns, the central theme seems to be the tendency of ICT mediated communication to contradict assumed social roles and relationships in public and to expose the private to the public, leading to new forms of 'tyrannies of intimacy' (Sennett, 1974).

Although some literature addresses the normative aspects of ICT use in public space (e.g. Humphreys, 2005; Monk et al., 2007; Hampton & Gupta, 2008), most studies approach public space in a general and abstract way. They are general in their undifferentiated and non-situational

approach of public space, and do not pay attention to the diverse ways in which types of public space exist and are lived. The few studies that are more sensitive to the typical and differentiating elements of public space, often focus on just one type of space, such as public transport or restaurants (e.g. Ling, 1997), and therefore offer fragmented understanding and limited opportunities to compare different types of public space. Moreover, many studies are abstract in that they view social norms and expectations as essential and fixed properties of public locations, ignoring the fact that they arise in concrete situations of different and subtle forms of togetherness. This study therefore focuses on the specific and varied interactions between social and material actors in public space and, through comparison of different types of spaces, attempts to understand how these interactions affect the way people experience and evaluate ICT use in different public contexts. Rather than focusing on physical contexts, this study emphasises the role of practices that unfold in public spaces, because it is through practices that public space is lived and becomes diverse, meaningful and normatively significant.

Largely neglected in current research, but highly significant in the unfolding of practices and the creation of normative expectations, are *atmospheres*. An atmosphere is an affective quality, a 'sense of space', that emanates from the assembled social and material resources being present while exceeding them in a transpersonal and irreducible intensity (Anderson, 2009). They are ubiquitously yet forcefully present as a backdrop of our actions, modifying our possible courses of actions (Duff, 2010). Only recently have atmospheres and affects produced in space gained increasing attention (e.g. Duff, 2010; Bissell, 2010; Thrift, 2004) and attending to these concepts provides a richer and more powerful understanding of how people experience spaces and how these experiences frame their evaluation of others' behaviour.

Therefore, the aim of this study is to better understand the normative expectations that surround ICT use in unique public situations by situation them in continually emerging and re-forming atmospheres, which arise in processes of interaction and assembling (Dijst, 2009; Latour, 2005). To this end, this study draws upon activity-diaries and follow-up interviews that were designed to let respondents report and reflect upon their own and co-present others' ICT practices in situations they found themselves in. The next section discusses recent literature on the creation and functioning of affective atmospheres and situates ICT practices within this framework subsequently. The third section presents the methods used in this study, while the fourth section discusses the main findings. The paper ends with a conclusion and discussion.

2. Literature Review

In contrast to the home territories of the private realm, the public realm can be characterised as being principally the domain of diversity, heterogeneity and weak social ties (Lofland, 1998; Hampton and Gupta, 2008). People in public space might experience themselves being present in a 'world of strangers', which besides unfamiliar humans also includes unfamiliar things, practices and ideas. When we move about and develop practices we act not in isolation but constantly relate to and interact with these present actors, in which we find enabling and constraining powers. These actors come together in evolving and adaptive networks of fluid and dynamic relationships as only through processes of mobilisation social and material realities become meaningful and are we able to define our actions, roles and boundaries (Büscher and Urry, 2009; Murdoch, 1997). It is in these mobile networks that atmospheres are brought about, as 'atmosphere is in the relationship of people and objects. It is something sensed often through movement and experienced in a tactile kind of way' (Urry, 2007: 73). These atmospheres are of an unfinished quality, never static or at rest, continually forming, re-forming and fading away as, through movement, encounters and assemblages between human, material and contextual bodies are perpetually in a state of emergence, multiplicity and indeterminacy (Anderson, 2009; Anderson and McFarlane, 2011).

Atmospheres are affective qualities because they are bodily felt and experienced in lived sensations and produced through mainly nonrepresentational interaction, for which reason some authors speak about 'affective atmospheres' (Bissell, 2010; Duff; 2010; Anderson, 2009). These authors not only refer to how individuals become *affected* by space, but also emphasise how spaces produce a kind of *collective* affect. These collective affects emerge from the subjective and reflexive experiences and interpretations of each individual within the present setting; however, they are not bound and reducible to these individuals but exceed and transcend them. Therefore, atmospheres are autonomous, belonging to collective situations, although, at the same time, atmospheres are indeterminate with regard to any subject/object distinction as they can be felt in an intensely personal way and are inextricably part of subjective narratives (Anderson, 2009).

Atmospheres are more than a passively experienced *Stimmung*, they also actively produce space and frame and direct activities enactable within settings. Duff (2010) argues that recently scholars have recognized that affective atmospheres actively modify the range of potential behaviour during encounters between bodies. He therefore distinguishes two experiences of affect, stating that 'affect […] describes both the distinctive set of feeling states realisable within a particular place as well as the store of action-potential, of expressions, capacities and practices experienced in that space' (2010: 885; see Bissell (2010) for an illustrative study on affective atmospheres in railway carriages).

Although atmospheres are present everywhere, they differ in quality and intensity, having different consequences for normative expectations with regard to social behaviours. The notion of *focusness* is a powerful tool to connect these differences with the activities that unfold in spaces. Campbell (2007), drawing on the work of Ervin Goffman, develops the concept of focusness to refer to the extent in which a social occasion demands collective involvement of its members. In his study on perceptions of mobile phone use he differentiates various public locations according to their focusness and concludes that the more locations are focused, the more mobile phone use is perceived as annoying. More specifically, he found that restaurants, class rooms and theatres are among the locations where mobile phone use frequently gets on people's nerves, whereas people's attitude towards the use of these devices is more relaxed on sidewalks and in public transport and stores (see also Wei & Leung (1999)). However, Campbell conceptualises the concept of focusness too much as a space-specific attribute, trying to differentiate between *locations*. Instead, this paper explicitly connects this concept to activities and collective affects in order to take into account the ambiguity and changeability of interactions between social and material actors that, although they might unfold in the same physical space, can lead to varying normative expectations.

Settings focused on a collectively shared activity can be characterised as having a strong sense of togetherness, where members become connected to each other in a strong collective atmosphere based on shared experience and responsibility. Such collective atmospheres thus can be easily damaged when setting-members get involved in other, competing activities. Non-focused settings, on the other hand, provide opportunities for more individualised activities and personal experiences and therefore the creation of individual *micro*-atmospheres within the boundaries and requirements of the collective atmosphere. For example, the aggregate of people relaxing, playing, dining and enjoying the scenery in an urban park at a summer evening brings about an attractive vibrant yet relaxing and comfortable atmosphere shared by all users of the park. Within such a collective atmosphere one could read a novel or have a personal conversation which creates an intimate and exclusive individual micro-atmosphere to dwell in. However, these collective and individual atmospheres do not develop parallel to each other, but rather facilitate and influence each other in an interactional and fluid manner. This emergence and existence of atmospheres can be illustrated by Figure 1, which shows different lines of smoke, each having its own individual source and colour, coming together and forming new compositions and colours in the body in which they become absorbed and united.

Figure 1. Atmospheres as coloured smoke
Source: http://kiara2811.deviantart.com/art/Coloured-Smoke-195830918

Based on what has been said, two main reasons for perceived annoyance caused by ICT use can be distilled. First, ICT use might negatively impact the collective atmosphere that is needed in order to sustain shared events and experiences. Authors on the social implications of ICT use suggest that its perceived conflict with normative expectations is frequently a matter of different social faces (roles) this use implies (Ling, 2005; Geser, 2004; Palen et al., 2001). People communicating with external others are both present in the space they bodily occupy and the virtual space they communicate in. This acting and interacting at two concurrent stages, both having their own norms and behavioural requirements, reconfigures the relationships between actors present in the setting, potentially bringing about a situation of tension. Second, concerning individual micro-atmospheres, which are more important in non-focused settings, people might assess ICT use as disturbing because it distracts attention which is needed to satisfactorily perform an intended activity. Mobile phone conversations are often perceived as more noticeable and intrusive than face-to-face conversations (Monk et al., 2005). Furthermore, ring tones' length, volume and tune as well as the length of mobile conversations are regularly regarded as intrusive (Wei and Leung, 1999). Moreover, the discussion of private matters on the mobile phone might make people feel as though they are being drawn into the intimate zone, the separate individual atmosphere of the person having the conversation. Especially activities that require a high level of active and continuing concentration of attention might be subject of distraction (Kenyon and Lyons, 2007).

When ICT practices contradict with the normative expectations of present collective atmospheres or the desires for more individual atmospheres, giving rise to a situation of tension, a *process of negotiation* starts between involved actors. Besides instantly giving in or simply ignoring co-present others, people might search for another space or choose to reassemble the present setting. Ling (2005), for example, observed how mobile phone users change their body language from relatively open to more closed, trying to create a private zone through a temporal retreat from the setting by turning their backs or looking away from others. At the same time, the ICT user has also to negotiate with the person he/she electronically interacts with, especially when he/she is in a receiving position and thus has less control over the moment of interaction. In a sending position the communication

mode (voice calls, SMS, e-mail, etc.) is an important aspect in the negotiation process as each mode has its own characteristics and meaning in both interproximate and electronic interaction. On the other hand, co-present others may choose to provide the ICT users with some privacy, behaving according to what Goffman terms the norm of 'civil inattention'. In cases where bystanders become more annoyed, much applied follow-up strategies are changing seats, exchanging glances with other bystanders to create mutual understanding or displaying annoyance to the ICT user.

Rather than being necessarily vocal, negotiation processes mainly evolve by using body language, as Goffman (1963; 1971) and Lofland (1998) demonstrated. Moreover, but largely neglected in current research, in these processes people not only negotiate with people but also with situational materials as they are imbued with meaning and provide tools to transmit information and to reassemble the setting. Objects, for example, can be employed to erect temporal boundaries and to defend personal space, such as in the positioning of furniture (cf. Ling (1997) in his study on ICT use in restaurants) and in the use of personal music players to 'sound out' annoying conversations (cf. Bull, 2006).

To conclude, situations of tension experienced in the confrontation with ICT use in public space often closely relate to the atmosphere of the settings. These atmospheres arise in an interaction process in which activities, level of engagement and attention, objects and normative expectations come together. Placing ICT practices in such interaction processes therefore leads to a better understanding of the situational uniqueness of ICT uses, experiences and negotiations in various public spaces.

3. Methods

This study draws upon data gained from diaries and open interviews, a combination of methods referred to by Zimmerman and Wieber (1977) as 'the diary–interview method'. Respondents were asked to record their ICT use and experiences with co-present others' ICT use in a diary during two days, followed by an interview in which respondents were asked to reflect on the recorded situations. Participants thus became actively involved in selecting real-life, everyday and space-time specific ICT situations. Moreover, the use of the diary stimulated participants to become aware of and think about their own ICT behaviour, experiences and attitudes when they found themselves in the midst of ICT situations. Twelve respondents participated in the research, 8 men and 4 women. The respondents were aged between 16 and 52, five of them being students, the others employed in a wide range of professional jobs.

In the diary, participants were asked to note down their visits of and activities in public places every 15 minutes during a 'typical' weekday and a weekend day. It was expected that these two day types would differ in the visits of public locations and the performance of activities, assuming that weekend activities are more leisure-oriented. Participants could choose locations from a list that was based on the broadest definition of (semi-) public space, covering all settings except home, work and school/university. Furthermore, the diary incorporated questions about ICT devices and functions used in these locations by both the participants and co-present ICT users, the level of disturbance experienced in others' ICT use and the degree of urgency of the participants' own ICT use. Using this diary data as input, participants were asked in follow-up interviews to describe the recorded situation in more detail, to elaborate on their experiences and affective responses and to reflect on negotiation processes. In addition, as the two-day diary was assumed to inform only on a limited range of public places, photos of various public settings were used to let participants think of their imaginative roles in situations they had not experienced themselves.

4. Results

Gluing atmospheres in shared events

Listening to music during a concert, watching a movie in a cinema or watching a play in a theatre are among activities that, according to the participants' accounts, are surrounded by normative expectations that are evident, shared and relatively strict. These types of activities bring together people who intentionally chose to attend and experience the event, and this coming together shape normative expectations as to how to behave, as Helen (52 years) illustrates:

> 'People make a deliberate decision to go to a theatre because they have the intention to listen what is being performed, therefore people should do so as well. Otherwise they had better not to come. But I think I don't differ much in opinion from the average Dutch person.'

These types of activities often require a high and extended level of individual and collective attention. Many respondents hint at how ICT use may endanger the individual attention by distracting tones, lights and bodily movements of exclusion. Moreover, respondents stress the inappropriateness of ICT use from a collective perspective, referring to the typical atmosphere they find themselves inextricably connected with. They approach active use of ICT devices as a sign of disconnection and disinterest, which breaks the 'gluing' sphere of shared presence and experience in an exclusive setting. Such affective environments are created through active engagement and mutual response in a web that necessarily includes all present members in order to be satisfactory. This is what Richard (38) approvingly refers to when he recalls a Dutch cabaret artist responding to a situation in which someone from the audience received a phone call:

> '[The artist] plainly asked: "What is more important than me? Who was calling you?" I don't know how it went on exactly, but is it was really awkward. Yeah, in fact, that is the most basic attitude: Whom are you coming for? "Am I allowed to be part of the background?", that was what he asked. (…) "Or are you coming for me, are you interested in what I am doing here?"'

Jeff (27) explicitly connects the use of ICTs in cultural settings to the issue of 'respect':

> 'In my opinion one is not allowed to make phone calls in museums. […] It is about concentration. When you are looking at a painting, for example, to art, you are looking at it concentrated and quietly. It is also possible to talk about it with someone else, as I always do: "What do you think of it. I don't like it." That's possible, but phoning?... My opinion is… It has very much to do with respect, in my opinion. And not only respect towards persons […] but also towards art. This is also the case with films. When you are watching a film you are not allowed to make calls. That's simply disrespectful towards the film. […] It has everything to do with respect.'

This account shows that, besides the presence of other people, normative expectations also arise in connections with material objects. It is an example of how a mutual exchange of ideas and experiences between the individual, the object, the artists and ideas the object represents brings about a transcendental connectivity, which is easily damaged when a connection with an external reality is created.

While notions of active engagement, shared interest and experiences, and mutual respect can be attached to events in settings such as theatres, cinemas and concert halls to describe their atmospheres in a general way, the participants' accounts reflect a wide variance of atmospheres in these settings when it comes to a more detailed characterisation. Elements that contribute to a specific perceived atmosphere are the level of interaction between performer and audience (e.g. the one-way flow during a classical concert versus the more interactional nature of some cabaret), the level of average rumour, composition of the audience in terms of number, age and social-cultural background, and the status of the location (e.g. a luxurious, well-known hall in the capital city versus a shabby building in a small village). The combination of these situational resources results in a certain colour and intensity of atmosphere which affords present people the possibility to feel and respond in a particular way, thus framing their 'action potentials' (Duff, 2010).

The particular colour of the atmosphere forms a new situational resource for the evaluation of ICT use. To illustrate this point, Jeff and Thomas (21) mention with regard to classical concerts in the Amsterdam Concertgebouw that the combination of the performances being intensely and exclusively audio-concentrated, the ambiance of the renowned and respectable venue, and the audience being supposed to be greatly upset by any kind of ICT use makes them highly reluctant to use mobile phones. They would only text in cases of urgency here. In contrast, respondents note that during more popular concerts and festivals ICT use is far more accepted, which results from their noisier and less formal character, the presence of a more diverse audience and the livelier and more direct interaction with the stage. Moreover, some kinds of ICT use here (especially texting, filming and taking photographs) seem to be of particular importance in practices that intensify and sustain atmospheres by sharing it with others or capturing precious moments to return to it later.

Private togetherness
The fully focused settings of shared events are at the same time settings of *private togetherness*, by which I mean the different quality of togetherness that people perceive in their relationship with familiar others (family, friends, colleagues, etc.) with whom they are together (close others) compared to the weaker felt togetherness with co-present strangers (distant others). Within the collective, groups of close others form separate social entities which are private in that reasons to attend the event, desires for being touched by it and the experienced excitement remain to belong exclusively to these entities and their micro-atmospheres. The significance of these micro-atmospheres can be illustrated by Thomas, whose story reveals that he experiences a concert together with a date quite differently compared to occasions when he is in company of his family. When together with a date, this private and romantic micro-atmosphere creates its own affective environment, which is however not able to sustain without the collective affect of the very concert. Its specific consequences for ICT use become reflected by his statement that he certainly would not use any ICT function when together with a date in fear of ruining the relationship with her, whereas he allows himself to respond to text messages under normal conditions during concerts.

Whereas in the shared events described above opportunities for private togetherness are relatively limited, less focused settings afford more possibilities for micro-atmospheres to evolve. A type of setting that is neither fully focused nor entirely non-focused is the restaurant. With regard to culinary restaurants, they are often seen as an extension of the private sphere where people expect to be able to dwell in a 'respectful' setting with their relatives or friends, made possible by the symbolic boundaries that come with the positioning of furniture and the social mechanism of civil inattention, and intensified by a stylish and friendly ambiance. In such settings, respondents tend to strongly disapprove of ICT-mediated communication, stating that these practices contradict with the enjoyable being together and the respect for both the culinary food and co-present others. This belief is expressed by Susan (22):

> 'I also get annoyed when someone sends a text message to someone else when we are having dinner […] Then I think: "We are having dinner together, aren't we?" […] In environment such as the restaurant you must be available for the persons you are together with. […] It's a kind of intimate sphere, you are exclusively present to them for the time being.'

Interestingly, similar to cultural facilities described earlier, the presence of distant others is a fundamental requirement to bring about the restaurant-specific collective affect and to let micro-atmospheres flourish, however, there is a larger affective distance out-group other because there is no single, central activity, although they share the desire to have dinner in a pleasant environment. While in-group interaction is mainly conversational and requires active involvement of its members, the relationship with distant others is conditioned by passive and largely semiconscious non-conversational interaction. The respondents experience ICT-mediated communication in both type of relationships as violating, however, in their own way. ICT-mediated (voice) communication in the relationship with distant others often makes this relationship *too strong* by attracting attention due to its perceived inappropriateness or loudness, whereas in in-group interaction the communication

between members becomes *too weak* to be sustained due to attention being diverted to an absent reality. Therefore, the type of communication is highly relevant in assessing ICT practices as most respondents state they do not evaluate non-voice/sound communication by distant others as problematic in such settings.

Respondents often contrast the atmosphere of the culinary restaurant with the atmosphere in fast-food restaurants, lunchrooms and snack bars, referring to the heterogeneity, fastness and clamour in the latter type settings. They are much more aimed at offering people quick meals than at being a place for enjoyable togetherness for a longer period of time and the high degree of openness and mobility makes it easier to be connected to an external reality. In addition, many respondents point to 'noisy' elements such as the presence of screaming children and loud background music that makes ICT use less noticeable and more acceptable. With regard to cafes and pubs, many participants argue to see much ICT use as paradoxical in such environments. On the one hand, they see phoning and texting as common practices in current times and say to use mobile phones also themselves, but, on the other hand, they nonetheless regard these practices as contradicting the atmospheres of relaxation and the conviviality of face-to-face contacts, intuitively linking individual ICT use to non-participation and individualism. Most respondents say they accept phoning and texting, but only when these uses are accompanied by strategies of excusing and walking away, as failing to employ them is labelled as rude.

Floating atmospheres
Practices of exclusion and distancing are thus important resources in the evaluation of ICT behaviour in public space. In case they have to make or answer a call or text, most respondents state to turn their body or search for a more remote space in pubs, to walk outside or to the toilet when present in a restaurant or to go to the train platform when present in a train. To give an example of the last, Ruth's (43) account provides a good illustration of this move between atmospheres in search for an atmosphere that better affords her ICT practices:

> Interviewer: 'You wrote down here that you walked to the platform?'
> Ruth: 'Yes, I always do so because I see it as disturbing when other people phone in the train, just in the carriage itself. Then I'm worried to do it myself. […] [But] it is not very pleasant to phone there because all that noise of the train; it is less quiet.'

This movement between atmospheres thus is the outcome of a negotiation process that took place between Ruth's own social norms, others' behaviours and the physical suitability of places to locate her phone call in.

As people can step out of an atmosphere and move into another, atmospheres themselves are mobile as well. Some respondents refer to situations in which another, ICT-mediated atmosphere stepped into the setting they found themselves in. As Helen recalls a moment at a wedding party when someone calling her mother to try to put right a private quarrel suddenly changed the enjoyable sphere:

> 'It was at a wedding party, it was partially in the open air and we stood together in a group. It was summer and the weather was lovely, and then, she turned, but I think she could have walked away 50 meters, or at least out of earshot, but no, she walked away one or two meter and then it [the conversation] began. The first thing I thought was: "Why at this moment?"'

Moreover, atmospheres are mobile in that they are not necessarily confined to locations in which they are evoked, but are transferable and able to travel along with people moving about with their experiences. Brian's (50) account, for example, indicates how experiences of a theatre performance travel with him as he refers to his uncomfortable feelings caused by people phoning with their relatives and friends during the break or after the performance to share experiences with them, instead of with those with whom they shared attendance:

> Interviewer: '*But people probably didn't make calls there [the theatre]?*'

Brian: 'No, but they do in the foyer. Then they call, even between the parts. […] Then they call to tell how great everything is.'

Interviewer: '*What do you think about that? Have you ever done it as well?*'

Brian: 'No, you won't see me calling. I have my objections to it. Then I think: "Why can't you wait half an hour or an hour till you are at home. […] Why would you break the atmosphere by all these non-sense talks?"'

So, in this case, the atmosphere of enjoying a play together is brought into a neighbouring, the less focused space of the foyer, and fills this space with focused and normatively significant content. This example stresses the possibility to extend spaces and events in processes of prolonging experiences and sensations, which direct the way people move through other spaces and evaluate practices taking place in those other spaces. These practices of actively continuing the affective relation with former events become fragile in more heterogeneous public spaces where people become confronted with a wide array of other activities and competing signals. This can be illustrated by Jeff's story when he explains how mobile phone use damaged his specific public train atmosphere that combined the relaxation of the quiet train carriage and the memory of the enjoyable meeting he had with good friends before:

Jeff: 'To me, the extent to which it [ICT use] is annoying largely depend on my mood and also the moment of the day. […]'

Interviewer: '*Can you explain that?*'

Jeff: 'For example, in the evenings, when you are sitting in the train quietly, it is delightful, coming from somewhere. For example, I travel regularly from Utrecht, coming from friends. It's about 40, 50 minutes by train […] Not necessary to change train, … quiet environment. But then suddenly three people enter the carriage, talking on their phones. Really, those conversations you don't want to hear.'

Atmospheres in public transport

Spaces of public transport can be characterised as spaces with a high level of 'private togetherness' as generally travellers are involved in different, individual activities, dwelling in a personal 'bubble'. This heterogeneity of activities in relatively small and confined spaces makes public transport settings highly sensitive to situations of tension because these spaces might be subject to different representations, each having their own consequences for levels of perceived ICT use-caused disturbance. Steve's (44) train space, for example, represents his work environment. As soon as he has settled in the train his office hours start, facilitated by his mobile phone and laptop to carry out footloose tasks. Here, he transfers his first-class seat into a personal and flexible mobile office, which practice is further made possible by the wider collectively assumed normative expectations in the first-class carriage. Lengthy and loud (phone) conversations, revealing private client data and looking on neighbouring screens are widely disapproved of, which helps to create an undisturbed and comfortable workspace.

Jeff, on the other hand, says he always reads novels while travelling by train, which makes him experiencing trains as sites of relaxation and excitement next to his busy study routines. Ringtones and phone calls violently intrude upon this experience, forcing him to listen to phone conversation as he states he lacks the capacity to return to his novel for as long as the call takes. Susan (22) also associates the train with home and relaxation, which according to her emerges out of the ambiance of the railway carriage:

'I've got the feeling that [the train] is aimed to make you feel like home. […] And that is the reason why you also do more personal things there. […] But, the metro is just a means of transport. And when you enter the metro in the evenings, there is very bright light, hard material, and in the…, when you enter the train the material is just somewhat softer. It provides a homier feeling […] And in the underground you are often sitting opposite of each other, at both sides. Then somebody else is situated closer than is the case in the train. The train is somewhat more comfortable. It gives you more privacy.'

Mood and feeling are thus highly significant in her sense of place in the train and the metro, and are largely evoked by her relationship with the material environment. These different senses of place result in different attitudes towards mobile phone use as she becomes more annoyed by it in the

'homier' atmosphere of the train. Additionally, Jeff mentions other differences between public transport modes, hinting at the importance of landscape and the context of urbanity/rurality in experiencing travelling and ICT use:

> Jeff: 'Actually, the tram is more informal, in my opinion. […] That's perhaps because you are in the tram just shortly. And normally, you don't seat yourself in order to read a book or to do some work.
> Interviewer: *'So what about acceptability?'*
> Jeff: 'The acceptability is much higher. The tram is also a very urban thing. That's important as well. You are in the city and that also plays an important role […]. When you are travelling through a beautiful, flat landscape for example, covered by snow, and someone is talking furiously through his mobile phone, that is more annoying. Yeah, that's different from passing over the Weena, one of the main streets of Rotterdam.'

Although corporeally present in the carriage, he seems to be affectively more connected with the landscape outside the carriage in the case of the train. The landscape thus moves into Jeff's micro-atmosphere, becoming integral part of it and a significant reference in the evaluation of ICT practices.

With regard to time, noisy ICT use becomes increasingly annoying when it is perceived as lasting longer than necessary. Besides, the level of annoyance relates to the duration of the trip, as Jeff argued in the previous quote. In terms of clock time, regular commuters mention the highly routinised and standardised practices in public transport during the early mornings. Steve and Ruth, for instance, describe how in the mornings the train carriage is a silent place where commuters wake up, read their newspapers and get started with their work by reading e-mails, making the train carriage a location of rather homogeneous actions and strict normative standards with regard to sounds and voices. At their return to home, they witness the train becoming livelier and more diverse in passenger composition, activities and conversations. Here also, parts of the home or work atmospheres seems to float into the train carriage, as the previous activities of sleeping respectively working still have an impact on the train atmosphere, although in a decreasing intensity.

Atmospheres of shared noise
Free and open spaces such as streets, parks and natural areas are widely regarded as locations where ICT use very rarely give rise to situations of tension. Especially places that are embodiments of openness and 'public-ness' are seen as sites where all kinds of ICT use are acceptable and without problems, as Jeff puts it:

> Jeff: 'To my opinion, when you are in the city you are allowed to phone and to do everything you want on the streets. Yeah, that's right.'
> Interviewer: '*Why?'*
> Jeff: Degree of openness, that's it. That, the street is of course the most public that does exist. […] For example, the waiting room of the doctor's surgery isn't that public, and the more public, the more accepted.'

Thomas, contrasting the atmosphere of a quiet train with a huge train station at which he arrived afterwards, stresses the significance of audible aspects:

> 'Thereafter I arrived at Utrecht Central Station. There you hear all those announcements and all those people talking to each other. So when they are phoning or listening music, it doesn't matter at all. Because you are in space of loud sounds. […] The train station is a meeting place.'

Most respondents view streets, trains stations and shopping malls as locations where they become absorbed in the crowded and noisy city life, where heterogeneity and busyness create an 'atmosphere of shared noise' that makes all kinds of ICT use fully accepted and inextricably bound up with this urban condition. It are also spaces of freedom and choice, where in a very high degree of private togetherness people can easily establish micro-atmospheres. Michael (16), for example, says to always listen to music on his personal music device which affords him to carry his favourite songs with him when he walks over streets, travels by public transport or visits shops. Even when he travels with his friends he remains connected to his music through one earplug. It makes him feel

comfortable in public and, additionally, he says to simply turn up the volume as he notices disturbing mobile phone conversations or other music.

However, this experienced freedom and the seemingly abundance of opportunities to utilise it for own purposes, not always make open spaces free of ICT-caused tension, as representations of these spaces and desires to establish particular atmospheres can also differ to a large extent as a consequence. For example, Laura (50) tells to enjoy her regular walk with her dogs along the beach of the river near to her village. But she complains about youth using these beaches surrounded by loud music, which hinders her to enjoy the scenery and relaxation of the river:

> Laura: 'Very loudly, so that you hear it at least over 30 meters. And then that awful music... [...] And they are actually not sitting on the designated beach area, but just a little outside it. Yeah, then they are officially obeying the rules.
> Interviewer: *'It isn't allowed on the designated beach?'*
> Laura: 'They are allowed to listen to music, but normally and quietly. But they just are sitting outside the lines, so that it is their own responsibility [...] It's the youth: the louder, the more pleasure they attach to it.'

5. Conclusion and discussion

This paper has sought to explore the complex ways in which ICT practices are embedded in public settings, inspired by observations of people's growing discomfort about perceived ICT misuses and increasing concerns of the functioning of public space in society. Many current studies on the interactions between ICT use and public space investigate ICT behaviour and associated norms as spatially determined. Moreover, they are too general and abstract, overlooking the diverse and subtle ways public spaces are lived and failing to compare between types of space. In contrast, by focusing on atmospheres and by engaging a relational approach, this study investigated the dynamic and shifting ways ICT behaviours unfold and normative expectations arise in different affective atmospheres. For it are these atmospheres that define how we feel and experience space and that frame our actions, however, rather than being a force that just determines human behaviour, atmospheres arise in a constant interaction with people, activities and materials, continually forming and re-forming.

This study demonstrated the mobile nature of atmospheres, arguing that they are not intrinsically connected to the spaces they emerge in but that they can transcend and *float* between spaces. Atmospheres do not stop abruptly when people leave a certain space but they can travel with people in a cocoon of subjective experiences as people move through other spaces after a meaningful event. Respondents in this study, for example, mentioned how they desired to prolong their sensations of being entertained during theatre performances or their experiences of cheerful togetherness with friends in their travelling to home. This affected their normative expectations with regard others' ICT use, arguing that they evaluated mobile phone conversations or loud music more negatively after such meaningful and strong experiences than in more 'neutral' circumstances, because they distracted attention annoyingly or provoked contradicting associations. In such cases people thus create a 'chain' of atmosphere, as a people tie the atmosphere of an meaningful event to their paths through subsequent spaces and times, travelling with them through other atmospheres. These practices of chaining bring about new questions about the length and fading away of these chains, the strategies people develop to extend chains (e.g. the choice to move by car instead of by public transport after events), the interactions with people that lack the same experience and how new atmospheres arise out of the confrontations of different representations of space.

By engaging with the notion of focusness, this study showed how public settings differ in sense of togetherness, which makes atmospheres vary in quality and intensity. In focused settings there is often a strong and widely shared sense of togetherness that arises in conjunction with a common

and gluing activity, which results in a strong and articulated atmosphere. In such settings, ICT use is frequently reported to break the atmosphere, being perceived as a sign of disinterest and disconnection in shared presence and experience. Therefore, in the negotiation process, people verbally or non-verbally negatively responding to others' ICT use often believe that they do so on behalf of the 'collective', defending the shared affect. In less- or non focused settings, on the other hand, the sense of togetherness is much weaker, which facilitates a higher degree of private togetherness, i.e. the existence of more individualised and private micro-atmospheres within collective affects. Members of these settings might desire to retreat and dwell in a personal zone or sphere that allows and supports their own individual activities and experiences. Here, ICT use might violate both individual and collective atmospheres. ICT use might distract attention from individual activities by sounds, voices or irrelevant matters and lead to a separate, inter-individual negotiation process. But at the same time, people present in less-focused settings still relate to each other on the basis of collectively shared norms, for example the principle of civil inattention, for which reason particular ICT use can mobilise more collective forms or annoyance. However, we have to be cautious with distinguishing between collective and individual atmosphere as, in fact, they facilitate and influence each other in an interactional, fluid and ambiguous manner.

This study showed also the crucial role of materials in the emergence of atmospheres and the evolving of negotiation processes. The results, for example, showed the significance of art in museums, the furniture in restaurants and the positioning of seats in public transport as situational resources of particular feelings and moods and resulting perceived levels of potential annoyance caused by ICTs. Furthermore, materials serve as important tools in people's strategies to create comfortable personal zones in public spaces, for example by looking for physically isolated places to phone undisturbedly or by 'sounding out' annoying conversations through the use of music devices. These findings provide policymakers with a better understanding of the role of material ambiances and designed environments in people's attitude towards ICT behaviours. At the same time, however, this study emphasised that policymakers and urban designers should not focus too much on design and physical contexts as normative expectations come with specific activities unfolding in space. Changes in activities might thus lead to changes in attitudes towards ICT behaviours, although taking place in the same location. Therefore, in discussions on the desire for more clear rules or adaptation in designed environments, ICT use should be approached in a way that correspond with its situational characteristics in space and time.

The explorative nature of this study has shown the importance of atmospheres, yet more research is needed. Further qualitative research may contribute to our understanding of the complex and dynamic interplay between personal ICT practices, reflections on other's ICT use and the meanings of public space in the full lives that are lived in the everyday life on a micro-level. On the other hand, quantitative research, although one has to be wary of the dangers of broad categorizations, can provide insight into the activity-based used of public space and normative ICT practices on a macro-level, making findings also more accessible for policymakers. Since this study draws on a very selective group of respondents, further research should select representative groups of participants on which findings can be generalised and compared between generations, ethnicities and even between countries. Finally, and most importantly, the concept of atmosphere needs further conceptualization, as it is an emerging, but still an early phase theme in social research and much is still to discover in people's relationship with atmospheres in following and researching them in their everyday mobile lives.

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