Perspectives

Journeys in the network society: spiders, ants and archipelagos[1]

Jornadas na sociedade em rede: aranhas, formigas e arquipélagos

Viajes en la sociedad red: arañas, hormigas y archipiélagos

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Keywords:

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Abstract

This viewpoint paper aims to analyse the increasingly crucial role of networks in leisure and tourism. It considers different ways of understanding networks, drawing on the work of Tim Ingold and Randall Collins. In particular, it assesses the use of different metaphors for network builders, including Ingold's reflections on ants and spiders, and introduces the idea of archipelagos as a conceptual frame for networks. Since Manuel Castells coined the phrase 'network society' in his 1996 opus, the rise of the Internet and social media has made his vision a global reality. We are increasingly connected to people and places across the world, and this has also transformed the way that we work, travel, and enjoy leisure. This paper considers the role of networks in contemporary society and how these are conceived in the fields of tourism and leisure. One paradox of the network society is that broadening connections serve to narrow our view, reflected in research networks by the increasing dominance of English and an Anglo-Saxon research culture. We pay attention to the relationship between different network forms and effects, and what 'makes things happen' in networks. Building on Ingold's (2008) metaphors of the ANT and the SPIDER as network-makers, we introduce the Archipelago as a new way of thinking about networks that reflects the reciprocal creation of network value.

Palavras-chave:

Turismo;
Lazer;
Redes;
Contemporaneidade.

Resumo

Este artigo de ponto de vista tem como objetivo analisar o papel cada vez mais crucial das redes no lazer e turismo. Ele considera diferentes formas de compreender as redes, baseando-se no trabalho de Tim Ingold e Randall Collins. Em particular, avalia o uso de diferentes metáforas para construtores de redes, incluindo as reflexões de Ingold sobre formigas e aranhas, e introduz a ideia de arquipélagos como um quadro conceitual para redes. Desde que Manuel Castells cunhou a frase "sociedade em rede" em sua obra de 1996, o surgimento da Internet e das mídias sociais tornou sua visão uma realidade global. Estamos cada vez mais conectados a pessoas e lugares em todo o mundo, e isso também transformou a forma como trabalhamos, viajamos e desfrutamos do lazer. Este artigo considera o papel das redes na sociedade contemporânea e como estas são concebidas nos campos do turismo e lazer. Um paradoxo da sociedade em rede é que a ampliação das conexões serve para estreitar nossa visão, refletido nas redes de pesquisa pela crescente dominância do inglês e de uma cultura de pesquisa anglo-saxônica. Prestamos atenção à relação entre diferentes formas e efeitos de rede, e o que "faz as coisas acontecerem" nas redes. Com base nas metáforas de Ingold (2008) da FORMIGA e da ARANHA como criadores de redes, introduzimos o Arquipélago como uma nova forma de pensar sobre redes que reflete a criação recíproca de valor da rede.

Palabras clave:

Turismo;
Ocio;
Redes;
Contemporaneidad.

Resumen

Este artículo de opinión tiene como objetivo analizar el papel cada vez más crucial de las redes en el ocio y el turismo. Considera diferentes formas de entender las redes, basándose en el trabajo de Tim Ingold y Randall Collins. En particular, evalúa el uso de diferentes metáforas para los constructores de redes, incluyendo las reflexiones de Ingold sobre las hormigas y las arañas, e introduce la idea de archipiélagos como un marco conceptual para las redes. Desde que Manuel Castells acuñó la frase "sociedad red" en su obra de 1996, el auge de Internet y las redes sociales ha convertido su visión en una realidad global. Estamos cada vez más conectados con personas y lugares de todo el mundo, y esto también ha transformado la forma en que trabajamos, viajamos y disfrutamos del ocio. Este

artículo considera el papel de las redes en la sociedad contemporánea y cómo se conciben en los campos del turismo y el ocio. Una paradoja de la sociedad red es que la ampliación de las conexiones sirve para estrechar nuestra visión, lo que se refleja en las redes de investigación por el creciente predominio del inglés y una cultura de investigación anglosajona. Prestamos atención a la relación entre las diferentes formas y efectos de la red, y lo que "hace que las cosas sucedan" en las redes. Basándonos en las metáforas de Ingold (2008) de la HORMIGA y la ARAÑA como creadores de redes, introducimos el Archipiélago como una nueva forma de pensar sobre las redes que refleja la creación recíproca de valor de la red.

1 INTRODUCTION

Globalisation has been brought back to the forefront of debate as Donald Trump's tariff wars rage. In the UK, Chief Secretary to the Treasury Darren Jones argued that globalisation has "come to an end", with countries now forced to pursue their own agendas to weather the economic uncertainty (BBC, 2025). Trump's move has certainly up-ended the global consensus established in the mid-20th century through the World Trade Organisation. Ironically, what Trump's move has also highlighted is the growing connectedness of the global economy. Countries are increasingly dependent on goods and services from elsewhere in the world to keep their economies running.

Most attention surrounding Trump's tariffs move has been attracted by trade in goods and raw materials – particularly cars and the steel needed to make them. But Trump's tariff calculations also include the value of trade in services, such as finance, insurance, and, of course, tourism. Suddenly, economists are looking at tourism in a new way. Rather than being just an important source of revenue for many countries, it has also become part of the balance of payments deficit that Trump wants to tax. Trump's tariffs have more than just economic effects. They also have cultural, social, and psychological ones. There was a 23% drop in Canadian overland travel to the U.S. in February 2025 and a 2.4% decline in air travel. Total US air arrivals declined by a further 9.7% in March 2025. Many Canadians are also changing their future travel plans, with bookings down 76% for April. The consultancy Tourism Economics has predicted a 5.1% decline in travel to the USA in 2025 as a whole, with spending falling by 12.3%, or a $22 billion annual loss in travel revenues.

Globalisation may be changing, but the networks that globalisation processes have created are increasingly important in linking people together across the globe into what Castells (1996) termed the 'network society'. We are increasingly bound to people who are physically far away from us through shared experiences, be it Trump's tariffs, the stock market plunge, or Covid-19. These experiences are shared through the media so that local or national events are now instantly global, in what Castells called 'timeless time'. This also has the interesting effect of creating experiences that are shared more rapidly through the media and our personal media devices than through physical personal contact. Castells points to a growing schism between the instantaneous, global 'space of flows' in which global finance and politics operate, and the physical 'space of places' in which everyday life is lived.

The gap between the space of flows and the space of places is what facilitates the movement of hundreds of millions of international tourists every year. The wealthy can move to the other side of the globe with increasing ease, but travelling to the other side of the city to see how the other half lives is apparently less attractive. This gap leads to increasing inequality, which in turn has other undesirable outcomes in terms of disadvantage, health, and crime. It also means that billionaires like Trump and Musk are increasingly out of touch with the real world the rest of us live in.

This division makes it increasingly important to think about connections – who is connected to whom, and in what way? How do these connections impact the economy, society, and culture? How does power play out in a networked society, where traditional structures are no longer as clearly visible? This paper delves into the structures and consequences of the network society, highlighting the ways that these affect our everyday lives and how we practice tourism and leisure.

2 UNDERSTANDING NETWORKS AS PRACTICES

Networks are all around us, and on a daily level, we pay little attention to them. The electricity network becomes visible when there is a power cut, and the physicality of transport networks becomes more evident when they are disrupted. Networks allow people, resources, and ideas to flow, but the structure and composition of the network have an important influence on how things flow and who benefits from those flows.

Social networks are particularly interesting because of their tendency towards differentiation. Social networks are composed of groups of actors that tend to come together to interact. We usually think about such interactions as taking place at the nodes in a network, but Tim Ingold (2017) argues that social networks have 'knots' rather than nodes:

> A knot is formed when a strand …is interlaced with itself or another strand and tightened. Knotting is the fundamental principle of coherence …the way in which tension and friction generate forms, which 'make things stick'….
>
> Knots don't have insides and outsides; they have interstices. We need to pay attention to things in their ongoing differentiation. (p. 10)

This 'ongoing differentiation' in networks raises questions of structure, power and organisation: what makes things stick, and what makes things happen in networks? This depends largely on the type of network. Ingold (2008) draws on the analogy of the spider and the ant to distinguish between approaches to the study of networks. The spider, sitting at the centre of a web that is effectively an extension of the body, has a different view on agency than the ANT (capitalised in a nod towards Latour's Actor Network Theory), who sees the network as a collective endeavour:

> Every ant in the colony is part of the action and carries it forward in its own way; it is, if you will, an *act*-ant'. 'So if you want to assign responsibility for what is going on', interjects SPIDER, 'you could not lay it at the door of the individual or the collectivity. It is rather spread around the entire network'. ANT waves his antennae in approval. 'Exactly so. That's why I say that the individual act-ant is not an agent. Rather, agency – that is, what makes things happen – is *distributed* throughout the network'. (p. 210, emphasis in the original).

For the SPIDER, on the other hand: "my web, to the contrary, are themselves spun from materials exuded from my own body and are laid down as I move about. You could even say that they are an extension of my very being as it trails into the environment – they comprise, if you will, my 'wideware'." (p. 211). For the ant colony, the network is made up of the collective activities of individual members, which together produce a networked sociality that is greater than the sum of the parts. The spider, on the other hand, sits at the centre of the network, and all resources are directed to them. These two extremes provide very different models of how networks work, both in terms of the work input and the distribution of benefits.

But social networks are not just about flows: they also develop memory through repeated actions of the members that create meaning for the network members and the network as a whole. The role of ritual in holding social groups together has long been a focus of anthropological enquiry, and there is now more attention for this aspect of social systems among sociologists in the form of social practices. As Ingold (2017) notes, making things happen in networks requires attention, and ritual is a means of organising and focusing attention. Repeated ritual activity builds a depth of meaning for the participants and develops knowledge and skills related to the ritual.

The concept of ritual has been linked to the study of leisure and tourism practices by Bargeman and Richards (2020). They argue that a practice approach is a useful means for overcoming the actor-structure divide in social enquiry, because practices involve the creation of social structures by the actors themselves, and can also include the material culture and natural systems with which they interact. This is also useful for the study of complex networks: "To explain the dynamics and the growing complexity of consumption behaviour implied by the network society, an integrated practice perspective could provide richer insights into such complexity by providing a more holistic view" (Bargeman & Richards, 2020, p. 10). This holistic view also encompasses the growing attention for relationality, and the way in which the choices of others influence production and consumption in a rapidly changing network of relationships.

To help explain how things happen in social practices, Bargeman and Richards (2020) integrate Shove's model of social practice elements with Collins' (2004) concept of Interaction Rituals. This provides an integrated practice approach that helps explain not only how practices are structured, but also what makes things happen in practices. Social practices require resources to be brought together using skills to give those resources meaning, so that the attention of the group is given a common focus. This is what Ingold (2017) refers to as "attentionality", which Collins (2004) also argues is an important part of rituals that generate "emotional energy". The flow of emotional energy is what induces the group to keep repeating the interaction ritual. The same principle can be applied to leisure and tourism experiences: if we get a positive feeling about an experience, we will be likely to participate again, and repeated participation builds up our leisure skills.

This social practice approach can also be applied to networks, and in a wider sense to the network society. Within a network, interaction rituals provide the space and time in which the meaning of the network is reproduced through exchanges of information. We recognise and are recognised by other members of the network, which in turn supports the differentiation of the network and its members. Collins also argues that the position of individuals in the

ritual is important. Those who are more central and more intimately involved in the ritual will gain more emotional energy than those on the fringes. This explains many elements of observed leisure behaviours, such as the "mosh pit" (Riches, 2011) or groups of football supporters (Cottingham, 2012).

One of the interesting aspects of Collins' model of interaction rituals is that he insists on the need for physical co-presence in order for emotional energy to be generated. This seems to ignore the recent growth of virtual experiences, particularly since the Covid pandemic. The question of whether virtual experiences can perform the same function as physical ones is also crucial for networks, because the network has to be maintained in the absence of physical co-presence as well as when the network members come together. For most networks, this involves regular communication to keep members informed of activities and to build anticipation for future physical meetings. But particularly since the pandemic, it usually involves regular virtual meetings as well. Webinars, hybrid meetings, and conferences have become a staple of many networks. Which raises the question whether virtual network maintenance is as effective as physical co-presence in ensuring network solidarity.

In the wake of the pandemic, we attempted to compare the effects of virtual and physical co-presence in a project conducted for the World Leisure Organisation (Richards, Dimitrova & Simons, 2023). We compared leisure experiences in both physical and virtual settings to assess the differences in participant experience and outcomes. Looking at a range of events, including Carnaval in Brazil and the Netherlands, we found that the outcomes of a digital or hybrid event can be similar to a physical one, provided they can create expectations among participants and allow them to interact with each other and reflect on their experience. This is because the experience of an event depends not just on the lived experience itself, but also on the context in which it occurs (Richards & Marques, 2024). During Covid, for example, the context of live events changed, and so did the expectations of participants. Excitement could be generated by a virtual form of Carnaval, even in the absence of the physical event. However, the explosion of post-pandemic event participation underlines that live and digital experiences are not the same – people still miss the presence and "liveness" of physical events.

This is important for networks because it confirms the importance of physical meetings for network maintenance. In a recent paper on the value of event networks and platforms, Richards (2021a) highlighted the role of network meetings as a source of network dynamism. Events in a network provide opportunities for both framing network activities by providing a platform that focuses attention of network members (and others), but also by stimulating flows of information and resources through and around the network (Figure 1).

Figure 1 - Value creation processes through events and platforms
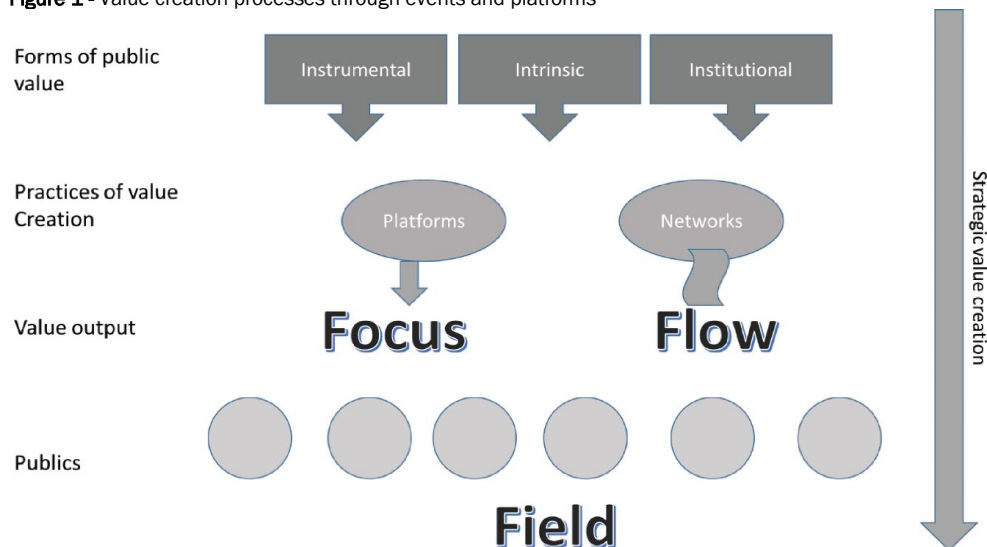
Source: Richards (2021a).

The desire for physical co-presence exhibited through network meetings also helps explain one of the apparent contradictions of the network society. Even though we are becoming increasingly digitally connected and spending more of our working and leisure lives online, we still crave physical meetings. The demand for physical travel is at an all-time high, even though we can arrange digital meetings for work or FaceTime with friends and family. This is because, rather than replacing physical meetings, virtual encounters can actually strengthen the desire to meet physically. We are reminded of people who are far away, whom we miss, and whom we would like to be close to

(Richards, 2010). Ironically, as globalisation destroys space and compresses time, the role of geography and place becomes more and more important.

The network society is therefore important in terms of the practice of tourism and leisure. In this paper, I want to consider some of these implications, both in terms of practice and the way we research tourism and leisure.

3 FROM PRACTICES TO REAL-LIFE NETWORKS

3.1 Flows of information and resources

As Castells rightly predicted, we are living in an information age in which the flow of data is increasing exponentially. The growth of data centres highlights the challenge of keeping information flowing around the information networks. According to Statista (2024) "the global power consumption of data centers is forecast to more than double between 2022 and 2026. This surge is driven by the growing demand for data center internet services, combined with the increasing integration of artificial intelligence (AI) technology". These flows need to be sustained by networks, and aging infrastructure networks are key challenges in most countries.

Social networks also have to deal with a growing flood of information. Academic publishing is a good example of the effects of the information boom. The volume of papers published by Brazilian academics almost doubled, from 15,000 in 2009 to almost 30,000 in 2018. Much more of this information is more accessible than in the past. For example, 89% of the papers published in Brazil are now open access (McManus *et al.*, 2020).

The flow of information is not just a qualitative issue, but it also has qualitative implications. In academic publishing, for example, increased globalisation of the market has led to growing domination of English as the language of academic research. The expansion of English has, in turn, drowned out publications in other languages, reducing the opportunities for scholars to publish in their own language (Richards, 2021b). This is a challenge because, as McManus *et al.* (2020, p. 19) note:

> Supporting native languages in science, which may have specific research-related terminology, is important where dissemination and popularisation of scholarship in domestic languages are needed.

International networks are important for academic publishing, as McManus *et al.* (2020, p. 19) found:

> Publishing in collaboration with foreign partners is also well documented as affecting citation impact … but as seen here, this has begun to stagnate or fall. This is a warning light for Brazil and also may reflect that the scientific park in national universities has begun to become obsolete, making these collaborations more difficult. These collaborations also provide data, resources, equipment, and theories essential for the advancement of science, especially in emerging economies. Studies show that an increase in funding for research is accompanied by an increase in the number of international publications …and that this is linked to an increase in quality.

All international collaboration involves challenges of dealing with language. Even when the language appears the same, for example between Portugal and Brazil, differences in content and meaning have to be dealt with. When the languages are different, the default for most international networks is to operate in English.

But operating in English also has its problems. Non-native speakers are put at a disadvantage, and a lot of effort goes into translation and editing. This is another business model discovered by the large international publishers, who will gladly improve your manuscript – at a cost. The international dominance of English in the academic field is increasingly being recognised, as are the distortions that this causes.

The ATLAS Events Group decided to investigate this issue through the Multi-Lingual Event Management Project. This set out to find the 'missing body of knowledge' for event management in languages other than English. We found that in this field, only about 10% of these non-English sources are covered by Scopus. This means that the literature in languages other than English visible to scholars is just the tip of a vast iceberg of hidden knowledge. There are also biases in what is available, for example, the coverage of different languages. This research mirrors the findings of studies of academic abstracting in general, which indicates that a significant body of research in other languages is missing from WOS and Scopus, although it is often picked up on Google Scholar (Martín-Martín, Orduna-Malea, Thelwall & López-Cózar, 2018). The proportion of non-English sources abstracted is, however, falling. For example, WoS indexed 73% of the Brazilian academic production measured by SciELO in 1998, but this had fallen to under 55% by 2012 (McManus *et al.*, 2020).

But there is a potentially more serious effect, which is the exclusion of certain types of knowledge. Because journals increasingly adhere to Anglo-Saxon models of research and publishing, alternative approaches are in danger of

disappearing. It also means that publishing in fields like tourism tends to be dominated by native English speakers, who also tend to have a very Anglo-centric view of the world. Few native speakers of English work in languages other than English (because they don't have to), and this is an impoverishment for them, and for the rest of us.

4 QUESTIONS OF POWER

The dominance of the English language is one example of the workings of power within academic networks. Of course, there are many others. One of the classic subjects for network analysis is the authorship of academic papers, because the data are readily available and such analyses find a ready audience among vain academics.

David-Negre, Hernández, Picazo-Peral & Moreno-Gil (2025) recently analysed the Ibero-American network of collaboration in tourism research through co-authorships. They found (perhaps not surprisingly) that the US and the UK act as the best linking countries for English language journals, but also that Spain and Portugal provide connections for authors publishing both in Ibero-American and English-language journals.

This also highlights the issue of multiple authorship for papers. Bob McKercher recently indicated in a Trinet post that the number of authors per paper has been increasing in the tourism field in recent years. Questions were posed as to whether this was a problem. Correia, Rodrigues, Kozak & Raposo (2024) recently argued that no article should need more than three authors. However, there are logical pressures moving in the direction of multiple authorship, including the advantages of effectiveness and efficiency in writing papers, and the benefits of cross citations afterwards. But one important factor that is often overlooked is that many academics are increasingly working in collaborative projects. This is actively encouraged by institutions such as the European Union, where you usually need at least three partners from different countries to submit a research proposal, and the average number of project partners is much higher. In fact, network formation is encouraged by these funding structures because evidence of previous collaboration among project partners is seen as a positive sign.

Publishing outputs from such projects poses interesting challenges for the research teams involved. Should the number of authors be streamlined in some way to remove any questions about the contributions of the various authors to the paper? Or should all the participants be included, with a long list of authors as a result? For the Multi-Lingual Events Management Project, we chose the latter approach, for the simple reason that all the partners made a substantial contribution to the conception of the project and the collection and analysis of the data (Richards *et al.*, 2023).

The growing number of authors on tourism publications also underlines the fact that networks provide links that are important for generating a flow of ideas and resources. How these flows operate also depends on how the network is organised and who dominates the network.

5 NETWORK ORGANISATION AND POWER

We are used to viewing networks, as in the case of the SPIDER and the ANT, in terms of the links they make between nodes or actors. But the form of links and the types of actors in the network also recursively affect network organisation.

For example, many SPIDER-like networks are based on a central hub that disseminates information to the nodes in the network. This type of structure tends to focus attention on the hub, at the cost of peripheral nodes. Such networks tend to revolve around a small number of key figures, who in the case of academic networks will tend to be leading professors and researchers in their field.

The actors within networks can also reformulate or reorganise the network to change their position and to alter how the network functions. A good example of how networks can be organised as tools to achieve specific goals is provided by the Dutch city of Den Bosch, which is where the famous medieval painter Hieronymus Bosch was born, worked and died. One of the strategies developed by the small city of Den Bosch was to try and link themselves more strongly to the painter, to use his work and images as a means of strengthening the image of the city (Richards & Duif, 2019).

One of the main challenges that the city faced in mounting a major exhibition of work by Hieronymus Bosch was that it had none of his paintings. These are scattered across the globe in art museums in major cities such as Madrid, London and New York. In order to try and secure the paintings, Den Bosch initially used the power of knowledge networks as leverage for the development of a cultural programme for the 500th anniversary of Bosch's

death in 2016. They created the Bosch Research and Restoration Project to analyse Bosch's paintings and to restore them. They approached the museums holding paintings by Bosch, and offered them membership of the Bosch Cities Network. Cities that joined the network could have their paintings researched and restored for free. This offer proved irresistible for many museum directors, who not only joined the network, but also agreed to loan their paintings to Den Bosch for an exhibition in return. In addition to the international Bosch Research and Restoration Project and the Bosch Cities Network, Den Bosch also created local and regional networks to support the organisation of the retrospective exhibition in 2016. The Bosch Heritage Network brought together heritage organisations in the city to provide a range of experiences related to the history and heritage of the city during the time of Hieronymus Bosch. The Bosch Grand Tour linked museums in the region in a series of exhibitions themed on the work of Bosch, providing a means of spreading the benefits of the events regionally, and therefore helping to underpin a claim on regional funding (Richards & Duif, 2019).

One important lesson from the Bosch network examples is that by claiming a position in a network, or by developing new networks with a specific purpose, you can create a position of network power. Den Bosch had little power as a city with no paintings, but it created a strong claim to network centrality by appealing to the legacy of the city as the home of Hieronymus Bosch. The 2016 programme added to this power by developing a feeling of nostalgia about the paintings returning home after a 500-year exile. The idea of Den Bosch as the 'home' of Hieronymus Bosch proved particularly important in dealing with competition from Madrid, which as the owner of four Bosch paintings has its own claim on the legacy. But the idea of Den Bosch as the place where Hieronymus was born, worked and died, was a strong part of the Den Bosch claim. The fact that Den Bosch was a small city pitted against the global metropolis of Madrid also helped to create a 'David and Goliath' feeling to the rivalry. In the end, the fact that Den Bosch had built the networks and had a strong claim to a central position in those networks weighed more heavily than the global reputation of Madrid. Even though Madrid staged its own Bosch exhibition on 2016 (Prado Museum, 2016), the Den Bosch event is remembered for the effects that it had in a small provincial city. In Madrid, it was simply another blockbuster exhibition staged by the Prado.

6 CREATIVE CITIES AND NETWORKS

As the Den Bosch example shows, networks can be important for cities in providing external linkages that bring flows of knowledge and resources. But the role of networks is also important within cities as well.

The Den Bosch case also revealed the schisms that can develop between different networks within the city. At one stage in the development of the Bosch Programme, for example, a revolt was staged by the city's museum directors, who were unhappy that funding was apparently being diverted from their institutions to the Bosch Programme. They wanted to stick to a traditional, museum-led model of urban programming, rather than the open networks being developed by the Bosch 500 Programme. This type of institutional jealousy is typical of major programmes such as the European Capital of Culture, where one-off events are seen as a threat to the power of established, permanent institutions (Richards & Palmer, 2010).

This phenomenon also highlights the layering of the cultural or creative city, between the established 'upperground' and the grassroots 'underground'. Cohendet *et al.* (2010) argued that the upperground of the creative city consists of the formal institutions such as museums and art galleries, and cultural policy and funding organisations. These institutions exercise control over resources, but also utilise the legitimacy of formal institutions as a form of power. In contrast, the underground is populated by what Castells termed 'programmers', the producers of information and cultural output. The programmers have little power and few links with the formal networks of the upperground, reducing the flow of resources. There is little direct contact between the upperground and the underground, except via the intermediaries (or in Castells' term, 'switchers') who populate the 'middleground'. These intermediaries link the production of knowledge and culture in the underground with the market through the creation of new formats or business models. Most prominent among these are festivals, which act as platforms for the display and consumption of culture produced in the underground, making it visible to global markets. Although the networks of the upperground, middleground, and underground seem separate, they are in fact mutually dependent. The upperground draws legitimacy from the role of leading cultural institutions in furthering cultural democracy and 'civilising the masses' (Smith, 2014). In the upperground, the authenticity of experience is secured by expert curation and the aura of the originality of objects. In the underground, legitimacy is provided by cultural 'scenes' (Silver, 2017) in which authenticity is underpinned by grittiness, 'street cred', and non-commercialism. The role of the middleground is to link the opposing worlds of the upperground and the underground through a process of translation, in which authenticity is underpinned by originality and creativity, the freshness of creative gems 'discovered' in the under-

ground by the intermediaries from the middleground serving to dazzle the normally stiff traditionalists of the upper-ground. The middleground of festivals, small-scale commercial galleries, and art entrepreneurs valorizes the creativity of the underground through a process of discovery, storytelling, and authentication, increasing its symbolic resonance (Colbert & Courchesne, 2012) and increasing the value of underground culture. The middleground enhances this resonance by channelling information flows and providing platforms to focus attention on culture 'discovered' in the underground. This at least partly accounts for the growing popularity of festivals and events, which often serve as vehicles for discovering and framing new talent (Jarman, 2021).

The driving force of this creative system is the use of networks to develop differentiation and specificity in a globalising urban field. As ETH Studio Basel *et al.* (2015, p. 29) applied to cities: "In a certain sense, the city is therefore a particularly finely calibrated reflection of the impact and organization of power. Any attempt to uncover the specificity in this force field involves laying bare the vectorial forces that have the capacity to generate and establish identity-creating forms for a city, which will promote its success in this place and time. In many cases, the organization of that power system becomes a decisive component in the formation of differences and specificities." In other words, the development of networks in and between cities becomes essential for the creative and cultural reproduction of urban culture and the development of distinctiveness (Turok, 2009).

The distinctiveness of the city is a result of the interplay between different layers in the cultural system of the city, but also the links between the city and other places. All cities possess networks that join them to other cities and ensure flows of knowledge and resources, or what Bathelt *et al.* (2004) have termed 'pipelines'. Cities can maintain their position in the global network of pipelines by generating 'buzz', which puts them on the global map. The buzz of cities is usually sustained through the underground, which generates a 'cool' atmosphere. The buzz is utilised by informal networks linking figures in the underground to their counterparts elsewhere (as often happens in the music scene or the street art scene), by the intermediaries in the middleground seeking to bring elements of buzz to the attention of the market and the underground, and by the upperground through processes of formalisation. These processes are currently being investigated by Peter van der Aalst (2024), who is examining the development and formalisation of street culture in processes of creative placemaking in cities in the Netherlands.

Figure 2 - The scenes and networks of the creative city
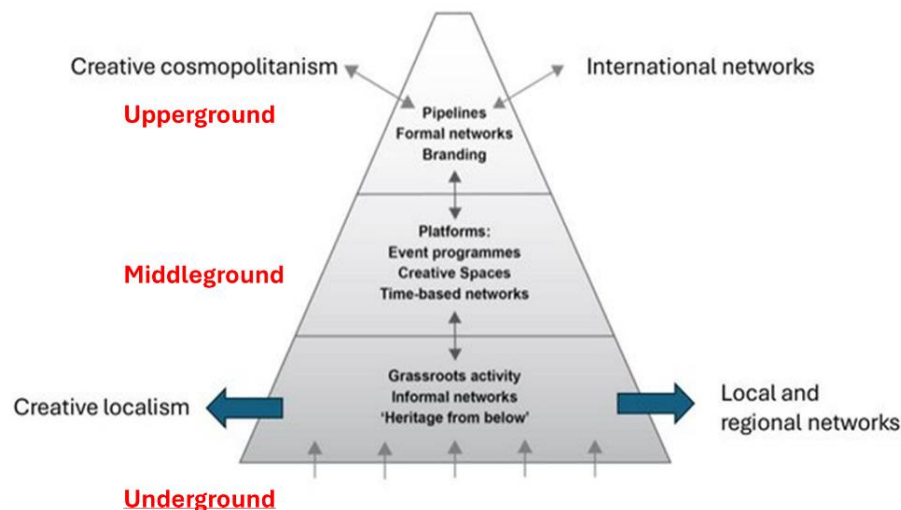
Source: Richards (2024).

The linking of different networks at various levels of the urban system has also been analysed by Richards and Colombo (2017), who investigated the role of the Sónar music festival in creating a global electronic music network. Sónar was established in 1994 by a group of musicians who were keen to give a higher profile to the underground electronic music scene in Barcelona. They managed to gain support from the Municipality of Barcelona, which wanted to support the 'cool' and avant garde image of the city, as well as developing innovative music programming to help redevelop the inner city. Sónar became popular with locals and tourists as a summer festival in the city centre that also featured DJs and parties in large peripheral venues at night.

As well as building a local network of musicians, DJs and producers to support the festival, Sónar also developed international links to bring talent to Barcelona. This also led to the development of local versions of Sónar in other

cities, starting in Europe and spreading to North America, Latin America, Asia, and Africa. Rather than undermining the main Barcelona festival, these satellite events helped to confirm the authenticity of the original event, which became the 'hub' through which all Sónar knowledge and resources had to pass. Richards and Colombo (2017) also identify the creation of 'network value' in the festival, or "the value that can be created through the linkages provided by a network, above the value created by the links available to individual network members alone". Value creation in the network is therefore not a SPIDER-like zero-sum game, but a creative process in which network members can generate value through and for the network. For example, David Jarman (2021) looked at how a network of fringe festivals creates value for the actors involved. Fringe festivals often rely on a flow of artists to develop their programmes, and the critical mass of the network helps to draw artists to the individual festivals. The festivals themselves can also use the network to support artists who want to participate in multiple events, also helping to reduce costs both for artists and the events. A network can therefore create value by doing things that the individual members of the network cannot do alone. But the individual members can also learn how to use the network to their best advantage, ensuring that flows of resources and knowledge pass through them, benefitting their event as well as strengthening the network as a whole.

7 THE INFORMALISATION OF NETWORKS

One of the consequences of the network society has been to support the growth of informal networks. This is extremely important in view of Putnam's (2000) concern about the 'death of association' or the decline of formal social structures, such as clubs and associations, which he saw as undermining social capital. But the traditional 20th-century forms of association in leisure have increasingly been replaced by informal networks, and this trend is being strongly influenced by new technologies. For example, there is now a substantial 'Casual football' network in the UK and other countries, where players can just turn up and play without commitment to a team. This is run through a website that lets players pay and book a spot in a team, the other members of which they may not have met before (England Football, 2025). This system provides similar opportunities for sport participation as traditional sports clubs, but without the need to turn up at the same time every week. It is therefore more adjusted to fragmented and flexible leisure lives.

Of course, informal networks have long been important in countries like Brazil, where the resources necessary to support formal organisations are limited, and where levels of social trust in institutions are low. One of the results of this is the growth of informal networks, which stretch into the informal economy (Ulyssea, 2018), informal settlements (now a target of 'favela tourism' - Haferburg & Steinbrink, 2017), and even informal currency systems (Fare & Ahmed, 2017).

As de Souza Santos (2022) notes, in Brazil, the situation is even more complex in tourism because of the frequent mixing of formal and informal employment. People often rely on a mix of formal links provided by employment with their own informal side hustles. As de Souza Santos (2022) describes in the case of a street vendor in Ouro Preto, tourism jobs can also provide the networks that make employment abroad possible. But often the competition for tourist business is fierce, and real opportunities are scarce. "Cooperation and competition mark social relationships in Ouro Preto as well as in many other places with unsteady income and limited resources."

8 DEALING WITH COMPLEXITY

One of the consequences of the rise of informal systems and bottom-up networks is growing social complexity. Bargeman and Richards (2020) argue that a more complex reality requires an understanding of not just the actors in social systems, but also the structures or contexts within which they act. In an increasingly complex world, it is also important to study the emergence of new social structures and behaviours that help us deal with complexity. We can think, for example, about the emergence of curation as a strategy to deal with the overload of choice in leisure and tourism consumption (Richards, 2024).

One example of curation has been the growth of urban tourism in Europe. The advent of budget airlines, accommodation platforms such as Airbnb, rising consumer spending, and leisure time have all collided to produce an incredible increase in demand for city trips. This has meant the development of a 'mass cultural tourism' market in many European cities, leading to tourist pressure on accommodation, rental properties, and prices. Much of this can be traced to what Poon (1989) originally terms the 'new tourism' based on new information systems, but in the specific context of cities we have seen the growth of 'new urban tourism'. This is characterised by a search for off-the-beaten-track experiences and a blurring of boundaries between tourists, day visitors and residents (Pappalepore & Smith,

2016) engaged in a range of emerging leisure practices, such as bike tours, graffiti, food trucks and craft beer (Richards, 2021c). Such rafts of new leisure practices are evident in cities around the world.

It seems that cities, written off by Alvin Toffler in the 1970s, have enjoyed a renaissance that has turned them from productive centres into leisure consumption zones. Cities that had been characterised as dangerous and dirty suddenly became 'cool'. But what makes a city cool?

If we look at the listings of the World's Coolest Neighbourhoods, produced by Time Out, it seems that cool often equates with hipster coffee bars, craft beer, and the alternative culture of the underground. Increasingly, this cool atmosphere is developed through different forms of curation. Time Out makes a selection of the coolest neighbourhoods based on aesthetic considerations, and these become the trendy places to go.

These places are 'scenes' that offer a network of amenities that satisfy needs, but which also confer the status of taste and coolness on their visitors. This effect has become stronger as social media has become one of the dominant means of communication. We now have 'social curation' of places by visitors, who advise their fellow travellers on where they should go. This digital selection process leads to interesting new phenomena in the physical world, such as the TikTok queues in Amsterdam (Richards, 2024), which have visitors flocking to food outlets posted by other tourists.

The rise of social curation means tourists are guided to places through a network of fellow tourists who share their experiences and recommendations. However, the interactions in these networks are still poorly understood. Wang (2023) argues that a new sense of place is being developed through site-specific media communication. This does not change the physical place directly, but it shapes the perceptions of 'internet-famous cities', translating the "attention dividend" into a "momentum of development" in city branding.

This process is stimulated not just by the tourist offices of the cities themselves, but by an entire network of visitors and media users. Wang (2024) analyses the case of the city of Zibo, which was promoted by local government by activating "tourist friends" to become "community citizens", who quickly started posting comments such as "I would call it the coolest city of 2023" and "This copy is well-written, encompassing the cultural context, natural wonders, warmth, and literary flair." The new mechanisms of brand value co-creation involve a value co-creation network of local residents, visitors, local authority marketeers and the media.

The curation of the city is therefore becoming an increasingly networked activity, moving from the authorised versions provided in the past by guidebooks and tourist offices towards algorithmic and social curation. In these new models, the city is not just a point or node in the network, but a site of production and reproduction of meanings, which are also shaped by other parts of the network. Perhaps we need to develop a new metaphor of the network that moves beyond the bottom-up ANT trail or the top-down SPIDER web?

9 VIGNETTE: FROM NETWORKS TO ARCHIPELAGOS: LACEMAKING IN FLORIANÓPOLIS

This rapid review of the network society shows that there is a lot we don't know about networks and how they function. The temptation, as Ingold shows, is to use metaphors to understand the way in which these largely invisible practices work. Ingold uses insects, the spider and the ant, as models of network building, maintenance and purpose. In earlier work, however, Ingold also pointed out that network nodes are perhaps better seen as 'knots', which acquire mass and significant as the strands linking them are pulled tight and interwoven. This contains the idea that the practices of the network society in themselves are part of the formation of networks, because networking practices and interventions turn the network into a denser 'meshwork', as Ingold puts it, pulling on the strands of the mesh. These seemingly small movements can., over time, have a significant effect on the network as a whole.

This process of knotting is familiar in Florianópolis, where the tradition of lace making was imported from the Azores and is still an important part of the contemporary intangible culture (Netto & Fialho, 2014). This practice is supported by networks of (predominantly) women, who come together to knot strands of thread into intricate patterns, reproducing intangible culture handed down over generations. The threads they weave link the island of Florianópolis to the islands of the Azores, and in turn to the origins of lacemaking in Portugal and ultimately Flanders. The role of the Azores as a stopover on this cultural journey is underlined by one of the original names for the Azores archipelago – the "Flemish islands". The Azorean diaspora is today seen as an asset by the Azorean government (Leal, 2002), and the knowledge of lacemaking from Florianópolis was recently re-imported to the Azores to help support this element of intangible culture (de Alencar, Lopes & da Lucas, 2021).

The role of the Azores in this network story also highlights the fact that the islands were much more than a simple node in this emerging trans-Atlantic network. The development of intangible culture, of traditions, takes time and space. One can express this, as Ingold does, as a series of knots, but perhaps a more fitting metaphor is that of the archipelago. An archipelago represents a series of islands, or 'small worlds', connected to each other, but isolated at the same time. This is an environment in which traditions can thrive and grow, fed by endogenous cultural practices.

As in Ingold's knotting model of networks, there are tensions in the links between the archipelago and elsewhere, which create opportunities and challenges. The Azores, in the middle of the Atlantic, also became a focal point in Portuguese maritime networks. The islands were vital as places where supplies could be replenished, and also where information could be exchanged. This function is still evident today in Peter's Bar on the island of Faial, which has long served at the last 'post office' for solo trans-Atlantic sailors. Peter's bar has, over the years, built up a series of traditions related to this role, which involve leaving a painting in the harbour and leaving a flag in the café. In this way, decades after the arrival of email, the intangible heritage of the 'post office' role of Peter's Bar is conserved through the practices of the sailors (Silveira & Santos, 2014).

The development of these types of intangible heritage would not be possible without the possibilities provided by the islands that make up the archipelago. Each island feeds the collective culture, and also increases the importance of each member of the island network. The collective resources of the archipelago support practices such as lace making. The small world of the archipelago also serves to feed a raft of other traditions, which explains why there are now many creative tourism possibilities in the Azores (Duxbury, Rahim, Silva & Castro, 2024). The islands of the archipelago are not simply nodes in a network, or knots, as Ingold would have it, but spaces which are intimately linked to each other as well as the outside world. Tensions between the internal and external connections are, as Ingold suggests, what keeps the network together.

The cultural coherence shaped by the Archipelago probably also played a big role in the decision by the Portuguese to send Azoreans to populate Florianópolis. Already toughened by isolation and with the cohesion of island life, the settlers transferred their intangible culture, including lace making and whaling, to their new home. The signs of this culture still abound, including the lace makers and the traditional boats once used for whaling. The ability to change and utilise this heritage is also reflected in the Florianópolis Declaration passed by the International Whaling Commission in 2018 to give indefinite protection for the world's whale population. Whaling is still part of the intangible culture of the Azores and Florianópolis, but now enjoyed by tourists on whale-watching tours. These days, one could see Florianópolis as a 'cool neighbourhood', with whale watching as well as other curated elements of 'new urban tourism'. The city hosts an annual craft beer festival, 26 breweries and craft beer outlets, 16 food truck locations, and a listing as the "Perfect Place for Top Street Art" (https://dare2go.com/florianopolis-perfect-for-top-streetart/).

Perhaps the model of networks as archipelagos is more fruitful than the models of knotting, or the spider and the ant suggested by Ingold. It certainly comes closer to how social networks, and in particular knowledge networks, function. The mapping of publication networks, for example, shows a series of knowledge 'islands' that cluster together, producing a series of small worlds in which knowledge is exchanged and embellished. This may also explain why the archipelago model is being increasingly widely referenced, for example, as a 'national treasure' for Finland (Ministry of Agriculture & Forestry, 2025), or as a model of urban social experience in Poland (Błaszczyk, Banaszak, Kajdanek & Pluta, 2017).

10 BY WAY OF CONCLUSION: CHALLENGES IN RESEARCHING THE NETWORK SOCIETY

Perhaps because we are increasingly surrounded by networks and platforms, we seem to take their functioning for granted. There is a lot of tourism and leisure research that looks at the behaviours stimulated by networks, such as leisure activities in a particular 'scene' or the effects of Airbnb on cities. But there is relatively little research on how networks themselves function. This brief review suggests that we need to look beyond the mere structures of the network towards 'what makes things happen' in the network (Bærenholdt, 2017).

Networks are not static connections between a series of points, but dynamic environments in which the iterative movements of actors create tensions which are eventually resolved through events – which Sewell (1996) conceives of as a gap between expectation and reality. Because the normal, everyday fluctuations in the network are relatively small, they often go unnoticed. But the sudden resolution of the tensions produced in the network produces events – or what Žižek (2014) conceptualised as an effect that seems to exceed its causes. This often happens because we focus on a specific node or point, rather than seeing what is happening in the network as a whole. In the same

way, looking at the Sónar Festival in Barcelona without considering the whole network that feeds and is in turn supported by it, misses the process by which network value is generated.

In thinking about how networks work, Ingold employs the metaphors of the ANT and the SPIDER to illustrate different structures and dynamics. But perhaps rather than a simple dichotomy between the top-down and bottom-up models, we need to think in different and more complex ways about network structures and dynamics. The history that links Portugal and Flanders with the Azores and Florianópolis illustrates the complexity and reciprocity of networks. These links are built not just top-down or bottom-up, but through the relational reciprocities of network elements. The model of the Archipelago as a collection of spaces in which things happen because of links to global elsewheres and their transformation through local culture is perhaps an interesting one to examine in the future.

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