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THE SKILL OF TRAVEL: NETWORKS INTO NEIGHBOURHOODS

Abstract: This paper explores the social potential of the complementary flows of people and resources between central and peripheral locations. Tourism generates travel from central to peripheral locations while the search for employment creates travel to centres. The latter generates critical reverse flows of remittance, the former communicates the experience of travel through increasingly convergent digital technologies of video camera, picture-phone and the travel-blogs of ‘gap year’ backpackers. The skill and reward of travel is partly in communicating back to your base.

The paper will argue that the coordination of these movements and flows in both directions creates new skills and networking capabilities across groups of friends and relatives. These in turn deliver new networked relationships which bind distant locations into virtual neighbourhoods.

Such exchanges have also created a new sense of connection between Western tourists and the communities they have visited in the tsunami-affected regions of Asia. The response to the disaster contradicts assumptions about ‘compassion fatigue’, and the paper suggests that the forms of adjacency created by such exchanges have transformed ‘strangers’ intro ‘people like us’.

The paper explores the distributed and collective nature of the skill set generated by the creation and maintenance of remittance and tourist infrastructures and how these can be harnessed for other uses in both recovery and development.