

Workshop on Combining Ethnography and “Big Data”
Tuesday, June 4th, 9:30 am-12:30 pm
Ofek Room, DISI

The experiential learning methods of ethnography have become increasingly attractive to people working with digital technologies. Ethnography, as a way to spark ideas about how people might use technology, has for some time now been acknowledged to be important to the design moment in IT development. The value of ethnography as a basis for a deeper and longer engagement between technologists and the people who use technology is also increasingly recognized.

Much attention in Computing Studies world is currently directed to “Big Data.” This is the idea that the digital traces left by those who use social networks and other forms of digitally-mediated communication can be a rich resource for research on human behavior.

As ethnographers of information committed to field study of documents and social interaction, we share much of the positive sense of the possibilities of working with Big Data and in the “Data Science” and other academic programs now being fashioned around it. We also have concerns about some forms of BD scholarship, such as those that argue for abandoning the search for causative explanations in science in favor of an interest in mere correlation, or those that argue for ignoring existing efforts to comprehend social behavior, as they are “prescientific.”

In this workshop, we will examine the possibilities of combining ethnographic and Big Data approaches into even more holistic understandings of digital phenomena.

Workshop facilitators:

Dr. Kalpana Shankar, Lecturer and Information Studies Scholar,
School of Information and Library Studies, University College, Dublin,
Ireland

Dr. David Hakken, Information Ethnographer, Director of the
Social Informatics Program, School of Informatics and Computing,
Indiana University-Bloomington, USA, and University Fellow, University
of Trento

Participation in the workshop is free but limited to 25 people. Please sign up by sending an email to: dhakken@indiana.edu
Preparatory readings for the workshop are available at:

<http://disi.unitn.it/~dandrea/workshop/>