

2nd Trento Workshop on Combining Ethnography and “Big Data”
Monday, June 16th, 10am-12pm; 2-3:30
Ofek Room, DISI

As argued in last year’s call for this workshop, the experiential learning methods of ethnography continue to attract people working with digital technologies. In addition to sparking ideas about how people might use technology, and thus important to the design moment in IT development, ethnography’s is increasingly valued to foster deeper and longer engagement between technologists and the people who use technology.

Even more attention continues to be given to “Big Data” in the fields that study computing. This attention is based on the idea that the digital traces left by users of social networks and other forms of digitally-mediated communication can be a rich resource for research on human behavior.

As ethnographers of information, we are committed to field study of documents and social interaction. Still, we share a 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 who argue that the pre-existing efforts of sociologists and others to comprehend social behavior can be ignored, as they are “prescientific.”

In this workshop, we will update our examination of possibilities to combine ethnographic and Big Data approaches into more holistic understandings of digital phenomena. We will concentrate on what we have learned since we first raised these issues last year in Trento.

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 will shortly be available at:

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