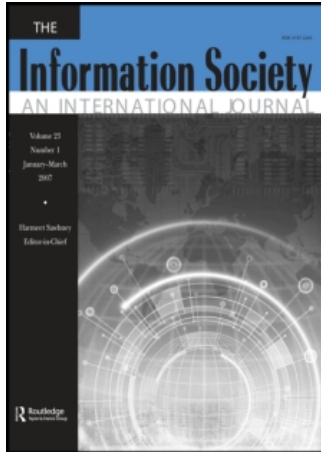


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Mobilising Poverty?: Mobile Phone Use and Everyday Spatial Mobility Among Low-Income Families in Santiago, Chile

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In the last few decades physical mobility has become one of the key elements of contemporary societies. This centrality of mobility also means the development of a new kind of social exclusion caused by the problems of living in a social context in which one has to be increasingly “on the move” to access goods and services. In this article, based on fieldwork conducted with 20 low-income family inhabitants of the city of Santiago, Chile, we study the role that mobile phone usage has in relation to physical mobility in the everyday lives of these individuals. Through an analysis of the pattern of usage and mobility of these devices, we arrive at the conclusion that rather than giving rise to an experience of constant mobility and “anytime–anywhere” availability, the individuals studied face limitations and exclusions that profoundly constrict the potential “mobility” afforded by these devices.

Keywords everyday spatial mobility, mobile phones, poverty, social exclusion, time-space

It has been said that we live in a “mobile society” (Urry 2000). Different kinds of mobilities are at the very centre of the experience of living in contemporary society. From the availability of foreign produced clothes or food to the global adoption of concepts like citizenship or human rights, living in a modern society means having access to a vast amount of nonlocal material and immaterial products, symbols, and ideas. On the other hand, this mobile society also generates new kinds of social exclusion, mainly as a result of physical immobility (on this subject see Cass et al., 2005; Hannam et al., 2006; Kenyon et al., 2002). This is due to the fact that individuals, objects, and ideas that have problems in being mobile are less likely to participate

in a social order in which constant mobility constitutes one of the main elements around which the social dynamic is structured. As Zygmunt Bauman said, “immobility is not a realistic option in a world of permanent change” (1998, p. 12). Being immobile means being left behind, and its negative consequences can be seen from the most banal aspects of everyday life to international indicators regarding social exclusion and human development.

But physical mobility is not the only way in which we can be “on the move” in contemporary society. While bearing in mind that some physical mobility is always needed (Boden & Molotch, 1994), hypothetically a certain amount of this movement can be replaced by the use of media technologies. Among them, mobile phones appear especially important in enhancing the individual’s capabilities of acting-at-a-distance without the need to be physically “on the move.” As the relevant literature in the field, based on research conducted mostly in developed societies, has shown, mobile phones are frequently used to overcome problems related to physical distance and mobility of people, allowing them to enlarge their area of practices and maintain connections outside the immediate space of their homes, work, and other local areas (Brown et al., 2001; Fortunati, 2001, 2002; Glotz et al., 2005; Ito et al., 2005; Katz, 2003; Katz & Aakhus, 2002; Ling, 2004; Ling & Pedersen, 2005; Nyiri, 2005).

But what happens when we shift the focus from developed to developing societies? As a growing body of research based in countries like Jamaica (Horst & Miller, 2006), Ghana (Slater & Kwami, 2005), Rwanda (Donner, 2005), and the Philippines (Pertierra et al., 2002) has shown, the meaning and usage of mobile phones among these populations do not follow the same trends as in the developed world. Such research offers consistent evidence that we cannot simply apply theoretical models produced elsewhere to the understanding of the dynamics and meanings of mobile phone usage among low-income groups. This research shows how “mediated communication takes

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place at a specific time and place, imbuing it with all the contingencies that it implies" (Aakhus, 2003, p. 40).

In this article we pursue one broad research question in relation to mobile phones in Chile: Can we find any relationships between mobile phone usage and the levels of spatial mobility among low-income population? We consequently analyze mobile phone use in the everyday life of a group of low-income families in the city of Santiago, Chile—the country with the highest penetration per capita of mobile phones in Latin America—focusing particularly on the relationship between this usage and their everyday physical mobility.

FIELDWORK AND METHODS

We conducted fieldwork over 10 months in 2004 in an urban location in the city of Santiago, Chile. We studied 20 low-income families, inhabitants of a social housing estate, "Tucapel Jimenez II," located on the western edge of the borough of Renca, which sits on the northwestern edge of Santiago. It has been inhabited since June 2002 and is composed of 876 flats.

Around half of these 20 families came from different shantytowns or *campamentos*¹ in the borough of Renca. The living conditions in these *campamentos* were very basic, especially in terms of the quality of housing and in terms of access to social services such as health and education. The other half of the families used to live in Renca or in other neighboring boroughs and had previously lived with their extended families (especially parents) in highly overcrowded houses, a condition known as *allegamiento* or backyard accommodation.

The families under study can be characterized mostly as young adult couples (with an average age of 35) who have on average around 2.8 children with an average age of 10. None of the parents has university or technical education and only 68% finished secondary education. For this reason, the majority work in jobs such as security personnel, taxi drivers, blue-collar workers, etc., and the levels of integration of women into the formal labor market is still very low. Only in two families did both parents have permanent jobs.

In terms of methods, the research was based primarily on in-depth interviews and observation. It mainly consisted of three stages of interviews with all the adult members of the 20 families selected, talking about their life in the housing estate, especially in terms of their adaptation to their new living space (at the moment of the fieldwork they had only been living there for a year and a half) and their use of media technologies in this process. This material was complemented with more general information about the housing estate and the living conditions of low-income population in Santiago, in order to set a general framework for the analysis.

NEW TECHNOLOGIES FOR A NEW LIFE

It is not difficult to see the movement to the housing estate as the starting point of a new life for these families. In many ways their former places of living, both shantytowns and a situation of *allegamiento*, resembled to a great degree the living conditions in rural communities rather than the kind of life associated with urban environments in contemporary societies. They lived on some sort of small and relatively isolated islands in the middle of a far bigger urban environment.

This relative isolation was worsened by their lack of the key technology of urban personal communication: the landline telephone. While they gained access relatively rapidly to other media technologies, such as television or radios, landline telephone was much slower to arrive at low-income households. As data from the Chilean Census show, in 2002 only a small proportion (4.9%) of the poorest 20% of urban households had access to a landline telephone (Larrañaga, 2004). But the slow acquisition of this technology was not only caused by their low incomes and the reluctance of telephone companies to provide telephone lines to low-income areas. There were other, more personal, reasons too.

Most of the families under study used to live in close spatial proximity with the members of their social networks, especially relatives, a situation that is quite common among low-income city dwellers in Chile (Espinoza, 1999). In these circumstances, it was not strange for them to perceive the telephone as relatively unnecessary, as some sort of luxury.

David (33 years old), Alicia (40 years old), and their three children were one of the families under study with a better financial situation. Before coming to the housing estate they used to rent a small flat in the borough of Lo Prado, located in the same building as David's parents and one brother. Alicia's parents also live nearby. They used to have a landline telephone in the flat, but it wasn't really important for them, as David said:

We used to have a telephone in the flat we rented. I use it more now. When we had a telephone in the house we never called anyone. We paid more for keeping the service than for the calls that we made. We were reluctant to use the telephone because we saw each other regularly. Who were we going to call? We never called anyone. It wasn't important, but now it is important.

This situation was not unique to David's family. For most of the families under study, they were for the first time completely on their own—not only in terms of not having their relatives around in the neighbourhood but also in the basic experience of living in a home only with their nuclear family—after they moved to their flats in the housing estate. Some of them have found this distance to be a distressing experience; others have experienced it as liberating. In

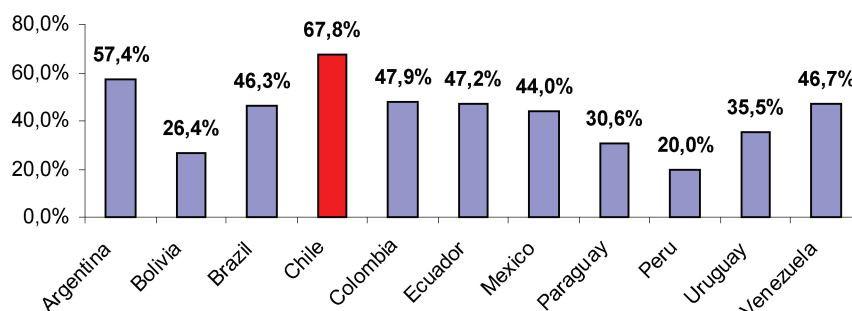


FIG. 1. Mobile phone subscribers in Latin America (2005). Source: World Telecommunications Indicators (ITU, 2005).

any case, now the management of the spatial distance with their social networks became a central issue.

But in overcoming this growing distance they have to deal with another characteristic of low-income city dwellers: their low levels of (and capabilities for) everyday physical mobility. As has been widely shown, both internationally (Church et al., 2000; Graham & Marvin, 2001; Kenyon et al., 2002) and in Chile (SECTRA, 2002; Ureta, 2006), low-income populations move less than any other group of the population. The reasons for such immobility are varied,² but they all produce the result that everyday movement for these individuals, especially if it is not related to work or education, is mostly limited to walking distances.

All these changes were accompanied by the growing availability and drop in prices of mobile phone handsets and services in the country. As can be seen in Figure 1, the percentage of mobile subscribers in Chile is the biggest in the Latin American context, reaching 67.8% of the population in 2005. Along with this, the country has comparatively the lowest rates for monthly mobile telephone services in the region (Barrantes et al., 2006). As a result of both high availability and lower prices, even low-income groups can access mobile telephones to the extent that in 2005, 55% of the low-income population in the city reported that they had access to a mobile phone in their homes (PNUD, 2006).

These relatively low prices, the growing distance within their social networks, and low physical mobility meant that the perception of the telephone as unimportant or too expensive changed radically in their new housing situation. While some of these families had mobile phones before moving to the housing estate, the move itself changed the status of the handsets in their minds from luxury to necessity. Now mobile phones not only represent an expensive toy or a way to be in contact when they are “on the move,” but more centrally mobile phones seem to be the only reliable and affordable way through which the families can have permanent access to their now distant networks, especially the homes of their relatives. This was especially true given the refusal of telephone companies to provide

private landline access to the flats of the estate, at least at the time when the fieldwork was carried out, and the relative scarcity of public pay phones in the housing estate (just 3 inside an estate of 876 flats).

The families under study were acutely aware of this situation. Ines, a married 30-year-old mother of three, used to live with her family in a shantytown in the borough of La Pintana, quite far away from the housing estate. There she used to share the same plot of land with her mother and the families of her two sisters. For this reason the movement to the housing estate was very difficult for her; it was the first time in her life that she was far away from her relatives, and she could not travel to visit them as frequently as she wanted due to their precarious financial situation. In this situation, their mobile phone was the only way for maintaining frequent contact with her relatives.

Maybe if we had another way to communicate, if we lived closer, the mobile would be like a decoration or something not very useful, but it's useful. It's necessary. Through the mobile you know what is happening. You don't worry 'is she all right? Is she having trouble? Is my mother at home? How have things turned out?' With the mobile I have no need to be there in order to know.

For her, as for many others, the mobile phone handset generates a sensation of closeness-over-distance, even if it is not actively used. Relatives and friends are not far away if they can be reached by using mobile phones, especially if people are in a situation of need.

Although the arrival of mobile phones to these homes could imply many changes in the way home communications are managed, especially in contrast with landline phones (for a good comparison between landline and mobile telephones see Lasen 2005), here we concentrate on one particular aspect: the relationship between the use of the devices and the families' everyday spatial mobility.

MOBILE PHONE USAGE IN EVERYDAY LIFE

The perception just described, regarding the centrality of mobile phones, is not matched by a frequent use of these

devices in the everyday lives of the people in this study. Our research suggests that there is, from the beginning, a significant distance between the perception of the mobile phones as important in everyday communications and the actual use that the families under study make of their mobile telephones. As Paola, a 32-year-old housewife and mother of three, told us during one conversation about her use of her mobile phone:

I don't speak on the telephone because we do not have a [prepaid] card, but my mother calls me, sometimes. She's very bad at speaking on the telephone, especially on a mobile because it hurts her to spend her [prepaid] card. For example now she has been calling more often because my daughter is sick. She has called me three times this week, but if there's no reason she won't call me. Sometimes I have 100 pesos [US\$0.20] and I call her on a public phone, but this is once a week, no more.

Paola's husband Carlos, the only source of regular income for the family, was unemployed at the time of the interviews, so they had to restrict most of the expenditures, among them telephone bills. But even in the case of families with both parents working, the situation was not different and the amount of money they could devote to mobile usage was always limited.

The payment system used by most of the families was prepaid cards. Each card cost between 3,000 (US\$6) and 5,000 (US\$10) Chilean pesos and the families under study tended to use one per month. However, it was not uncommon to find families whose expenditure was even less than this, just the minimum of one card every 6 months to enable them to keep receiving calls, as Chile has a "Calling Party Pays" (CPP) system.³

As a result of this low expenditure, there was always a limited amount of credit available for making calls through their handsets. The interviewees, with one exception, reported that their mobile usage was always restricted because of lack of funds. They only make necessary calls with their mobiles. Even in these cases their use of mobiles is highly restricted, forcing them to develop strategies—mainly extremely short calls and the use of *pinchazos*⁴—to keep costs at the lowest possible.

In relation to the first strategy, extremely short calls, Diego (39 years old) recalled in one of the conversations that

Every time I talk I'm quite conscious of time because of the cost, every minute is expensive. I don't relax, even on the landline, there's always something that makes you hurry, seeing the costs. If I talk for 10 minutes I know that I'm paying 300 pesos per minute, that's 3000 pesos. This is what I think, with the cost of everything we are in a hurry. As the cost of living is going up, we are under pressure when speaking on the phone. I have some minutes so I speak to my stepfather, 'Hello stepfather, how are you?' and that's it. With the phone, you have all the time here [he points to his

head], you're controlling yourself, but it's difficult and then they say to you 'why are you this way? You're mean; you only give me one minute.' No, why should we talk [more]? We see each other every weekend, so knowing that he's all right is enough, that there's no problem.

Therefore for him, as for many others, the first strategy for dealing with this shortage of resources is simply to concentrate the information in the smallest amount of time possible. One consequence of this practice is that the time for communication acquires a new meaning for the users of the device. There is an internalization of time as a scarce resource, which Diego displayed by pointing to his head while talking about how conscious he is of time when talking on the mobile. Although this tendency to assign a monetary value to time is one of the defining features of contemporary societies (Adam, 1990; Nowotny, 1994), this monetization of communicative time was new for the families under study, especially in their relations with their relatives and friends, as the following extract from one of the interviews with Alicia shows (40 years old):

[On the mobile phone] you have to talk only the necessary time, no more, enough and precise . . . in fact when you have finished talking you start asking yourself 'did I spend one minute? Did I spend two minutes talking?' It is as if you become more materialistic with the mobile, as if *time becomes more visible*. In fact you lose values that you shouldn't lose, because the question should be regarding the conversation that you had with them and not the time that you spent talking; so it [mobile communication] is not good in this respect. (emphasis added)

As discussed in the previous section, in their former places of residence these families used to live in close spatial proximity to their social networks, especially relatives. Also, their low levels of integration into the labor market and low educational enrollment meant that they spent a high proportion of their time at home, commonly with their relatives around them. In these circumstances the flow of communication between members of the network was extensive and rich. This situation changed with the move to the housing estate and the increasingly telephonically mediated communication with their networks. As Alicia clearly identifies, now communication with relatives does not mean a constant interchange of messages among ever-present ones but the making of expensive phone calls to faraway places, with the result that, as Alicia sees it, communication time "becomes more visible"; it appears on the horizon of experience as a scarce resource. In most of the cases time appears as a concern as central as content, forcing them to reduce communication time to the very minimum necessary to reach a certain degree of understanding.

Along with extremely short calls, a second tactic developed by the families under study to reduce the costs related to mobile use is known as *pinchar* or *pinchazo* (literally meaning "prick"). It consists of calling a known

number, waiting for a few beeps, and then hanging up and eventually waiting for the receiver to call back. Similar practices, for both mobiles and landline phones, have been found in other developing societies such as Rwanda (Donner, 2005) and Ghana (Slater & Kwami, 2005) and also in developed societies such as Australia (Carroll et al., 2002) and Finland (Kasesniemi & Rautiainen, 2002), especially among children and teenagers.

Cristina was 42 years old and single. She lived in the same flat with her daughter, her daughter's partner, and two grandchildren. At the time of the interview she had been unemployed for more than a year, with the result that her financial situation was quite critical, because only her daughter's partner had a regular income. For this reason she needed frequent financial help from her father, who lived in another area of the city. In order for her to be in constant contact with him without spending money on phone calls they have developed a system:

With my father we always use [this system]. I call him, wait for two or three beeps and then I hang up and he said to me 'you are shameless, why don't you spend [money on the telephone]?' 'No dad, because you're not going to give me back this money' [laughs]. I use it only to receive calls. I only use it in emergencies.

But this tactic was not used solely to save money on calls. Ruth (40), who had a relatively good income, told us that she also used beeping to be in contact with her husband, but for a very different reason:

Sometimes [the communication] is just 'pinchazos,' if he's working I beep him once in order for him to call home on the mobile.

So *pinchar* appears to be a practice motivated not only by financial matters but also for the need to be in "permanent contact," even at times when you are not supposed to be talking on the phone, like at work.

This practice, unlike text messaging, "has no content; it rarely stands on its own without some contextual cues to back it up" (Donner, 2005, p. 10). The *pinchazo* needs a previous common understanding, something that is difficult to agree on with people who are not very close. As a consequence, one cannot *pinchar* just anyone. The person with whom you use *pinchazos* has to be someone close to you, usually someone from your closest social network, such as your father as in the case of Cristina or your husband as with Alicia.

As a result of both practices, mobile communication tends to remain within the closest networks, mostly relatives living in other areas of the city, seeming to reinforce the connection with people who are known personally, as a kind of nonpresent "personalized network" (Wellman, 2001) or a "telecocoon," using the term developed by Habuchi (2005), rather than opening up the network to new connections. In this sense our findings are similar

to what Horst and Miller (2005) call "link-up," a form of communication through mobile phones, characteristic of low-income populations, in which "the most important element is not the content of conversations but their use to maintain connections over time" (p. 760). This form of communication is similar to what the Russian linguist Roman Jakobson (1984) identified as the "phatic" function of language that only serves to establish or maintain contact between the speakers, regardless of its particular content. In many cases this way of communication not only complements direct or face-to-face communication, but almost completely replaces it, as seen in the study with relatives and friends who lived in other cities or in other areas of Santiago. Mobile phones frequently constitute not only a tool for managing faraway social networks, but also the vehicle permitting its existence.

This movement from face-to-face to "mobile" mediated communication is not without costs. In practice this change from extended conversation to "link-up" is experienced as a loss of frequency and quality in their communication with their social networks. For example, Rosa, a 32-year-old mother of two, told us:

Sadly as it's pre-paid, I have to be conscious of the time passing. I have to speak very fast otherwise it would be too expensive. This mobile eats up the minutes too fast. . . . I'm always very conscious to just say the necessary and I can't take any liberties. . . . This affects communication, because it is frivolous, too cold, 'Hello, how are you? That's good, bye!,' too fast, too tough and as it's expensive so you are in a hurry. On the landline you can have the luxury of talking longer because it's cheaper. What I say on a normal telephone I have to say in less than half the time on the mobile.

As Rosa clearly recognizes, the very limited use of the mobile phones means that communication becomes more strategically and explicitly goal-oriented; it becomes, in Rosa's words, "frivolous, too cold . . . too fast, too tough."

This perception is not limited to their extended families. When their relationships with their intimate networks became telephonically mediated, people also perceived an impoverishment in the communication:

I call him [her partner] very little, only for urgent stuff, if the mobile rings and it's me he gets worried, the first thing he says is 'what happened?'; so I cannot call him to say 'I love you' or 'have a nice day,' I cannot call him for that. (Alejandra, 36 years)

From a phenomenological standpoint, we can say that in the case under study the mobile systemizes the real world, "replacing meanings with messages, consensus with instructions and insight with information" (Myerson, 2001, quoted in McGuigan, 2005, p. 55). In effect, mobile communications, in comparison with their former situation, impoverish the connections between the families under study and their nonpresent social networks.

MOBILE PHONES AND SPATIAL MOBILITY

In addition to cost constraints that limit use, we see very limited physical mobility of the handsets. This limited mobility can be partially explained by the fact that, as we saw earlier, mobile phones were the only phones present in the homes and often these households had only one handset. Thus, in contrast to developed countries where mobile telephones are the ultimate personal technology (Ito et al., 2005; Ling, 2004), for these households their mobile phones were essentially a family device, not mainly the property of one private individual but a collective good, as Cristian (age 38) clearly recognizes:

The mobile belongs to all of us . . . We bought this mobile when Marcos was at the hospital. When Marcos left the hospital we left it here. Everyone uses it, for example if Paula needs to give a phone number, she gives this number, and I do the same, all of us.

In terms of spatial mobility this collective nature of the mobile means that it cannot move if the family, or at least its central node, does not move with it. In the cases under study this central node was commonly the mother. The mothers are the ones who interface with distant social networks:

Thanks to the mobile I'm in contact with the rest of the world, because my mother now lives in Lo Barnechea [at the other end of Santiago], but thanks to the mobile I can find her and know how she is and if something is happening to her. [The mobile] shortens the spaces, the times, everything. (Patricia, 30 years)

They are also the communication link within a family, especially between a parent absent at work and the children:

It is important, especially here [in the housing estate], the mobile is fundamental, because if I haven't got one I would be completely isolated . . . without a landline I'm already isolated, without a mobile it would be terrible . . . I spent some time without the mobile, because it failed, and it was a complete chaos! Because I needed it urgently sometimes and my children needed me and there was no place to call me, only by intuition I called them sometimes and they were looking for me desperately! (Rosa, 34 years)

Mobiles are their main form of connection to the world beyond the housing estate, at least during the working week, as Pepa (36 years) told us: "With the mobile I feel connected to the world, without it I feel isolated."

Beyond the typical association between males and technology, especially new technology (Faulkner, 2001; Wajcman, 2000), the primacy of mothers' use in relation to mobile phones was even acknowledged by their partners:

When my wife is at home [the mobile phone] is always there, and when she goes out she takes it, it's always with her. I've never carried the mobile [laughs] . . . only when I go

out with her, then I carry it . . . but only in order to answer it, because they are always calling her. (Jonathan, 34 years)

The possession of mobile telephones by mothers does not imply necessarily immobility. Based on previous research (Green, 2002; Ito et al., 2005; Kenyon et al., 2002, 2003; Ling & Haddon, 2001) we could hypothesize that family members, especially mothers in this case, can use mobile phones to enhance their physical mobility outside the home by using the technology to virtually be "at home" while moving about the city.

However, none of the family members interviewed affirmed that they were more "on the move" due to the possession and use of a mobile phone. As Alicia said, "The mobile hasn't changed my routine, because I'm not very good at going out, from one place to the other [laughs]" (Alicia, 40 years old). In practice the family members, and obviously their mobile phones, stay at home. For instance, when asked why they don't use the mobile phone outside the home, Diego, a married 39-year-old father of four, answered:

[Our mobile phone] is here in the house. It doesn't move. It's as if it was here, fixed. . . . It is the telephone of the house. The telephone does not move from here. We never move it around anyway, because we don't go out.

As Diego said, they don't use the device as a mobile for the simple reason that they "don't go out." We thus see that the causes of spatial immobility (low income, the location of the housing estate on the outskirts of the city, low participation of both women and men in the labor market and in formal education, etc.) are not easily affected by the availability of mobile technologies (Ureta, 2006). Since the causes of limited mobility are structural, simple availability of mobile technology is unlikely to change them. Mobile phones could probably play a role in the alleviation of mobility-related social exclusion, but only as part of major socioeconomic and cultural changes.

Therefore in this specific social context the opposite phenomenon occurs. It is not the device that changes the patterns of mobility due to its "mobile" nature, as could be interpreted from a technological determinist position. On the contrary, it is the constant interactions between social and technical elements, among them the technical characteristics of the devices, which constitute the use and meaning of mobile phones for the users and the relationship of this usage to their physical mobility. In this particular case study, these interactions mean that mobile phones are not used in a "mobile" way. In its everyday practice the device is "translated" (Callon, 1986) into a different technology, a much more common one: a fixed landline telephone.

Cristian, for example, was a married 38-year-old father of four children, whose ages range from 10 to 20 years old. He worked as a receptionist in a military complex near the city center, one hour away by bus from the housing

estate, where he has to travel every day. His wife, Andrea, worked as a seamstress in a knitting factory in the west side of the city. For this reason their only mobile phone was very important for managing their family communications, especially with their two youngest children, who arrived home from school earlier than the rest of the family. As a result of this situation, when asked about the mobility of the device, he answered:

[We use mobile phones] not for what they are, because the mobile is the one that can be located wherever it is. For us the mobile is here, like a fixed line. It does not move from the house. We would not use it otherwise. The mobile is here and if I want to call home, I know it will be always here, even when sometimes we all go out we commonly forget it, and leave it here. One good thing about the mobile phone is that you can call anytime and if I'm out you will still be able to contact me, but we don't use it this way. It is not like a mobile phone for us.

For Cristian, as for many others, in their everyday practice the handset "is not like a mobile phone"; it has become something different: a landline telephone. Even though he recognized the advantages of the mobile phone in terms of mobility ("you can call me anytime and if I'm out you will still contact me") he did not use it this way. At this stage of their family, he and his wife had little need to be reachable while "on the move"; they just needed a fast and reliable way to know that their children had arrived home safely.

The relationship between mobile phones and physical mobility is not very different from that observed when landline telephones reached homes in the first half of the twentieth century (De Sola Pool, 1977; Fischer, 1992; Marvin, 1988). As it happened then, in most of the cases, what we found was only a partial replacement of some physical mobility by the use of the phone, both at micro and macro level.

On the one hand, in the case of the micro-movements, or journeys in local areas mainly by foot, the possession of mobile telephones diminishes the need to go out of the flats to use public pay phones.

Before [mobile telephones] communication was not so fast, so direct. Then you had to take time, for example if you did not have a telephone, the [public] telephone was to 2 or 3 blocks away and I had to go there. It was a waste of time as going to call and coming back here takes at least 10 or 15 minutes. Not now, now you use the mobile phone. How much does it take?—2 or 3 seconds to look for the number, to dial [the number] and already you are in communication with another person. (Jonathan, 34 years old)

On the other hand, the use of mobile telephones allows them to save some macro-movements, or movements outside the local areas, commonly involving the use of motorized means of transport, especially avoidance of trips that

would have been unnecessary, through the communication and coordination with nonpresent peers.

[With mobile telephones] I do not have to go to all the places. For example, this morning a friend called me and it saved me a trip! [laughs]. I didn't go and I saved time, because if I had gone there, I wouldn't have found her. It would have been a problem because going there and coming back [takes time], I would have got here late. (Johanna, 50 years)

But this particular translation of the device is not necessarily fixed. As Marianne de Laet and Annemarie Mol demonstrated in their study of the Zimbabwe Bush Pump (2000), technology, especially when it is moved from one environment to another, is fluid, "its boundaries are vague and moving rather than being clear or fixed" (p. 225). Mobile phones were fluid in their translation as landline telephones in the housing estate at the time of this study, and they can be fluid again in the future if the environment changes, especially if there is an increasing integration of these groups into a kind of urban life that requires higher degrees of physical mobility.

This situation can be observed in the case of Ramon, married 39-year-old father of four who worked as a taxi driver. Due to the nature of his work, which obviously required constant physical mobility, he was "on the move" most of the day in different areas of Santiago, especially in the city center. This situation made communication with his family difficult, especially with his wife, who did not work and stayed at home most of the day. He therefore bought a mobile phone in order to be always reachable in case of need.

They can reach me. To reach me is to have me present at the minute I am needed; this is what is important. My work [forces me] to go to many places, [but if my family need me] they do 'pum' [he mimics someone calling and talking through mobile phone] and there I am. That is to say that, if Alejandra [his wife] solves the problem she says to me 'listen Ramon, you know, things are going well' or when things go wrong 'listen to me, you know, you must come back to us now.'

One interesting point in Ramon's case was that his family had one handset. So when he took the mobile phone within him, his wife and kids had to call from one of the public phones in the housing estate. Here the constant physical mobility of one member provided a good reason to use the mobile phone as it was designed, as a mobile device, even if this use precluded its use as a fixed telephone for the household.

Both examples show us how mobile phones are fluid devices, technologies that "originally born to be mobile may change, when the need arises, in fixed technologies" (Fortunati, 2001, p. 87) and the other way around. It is the practical use of the device as mobile or fixed that establishes its degree of mobility. Only when the phone is

needed as mobile does it become one; otherwise, it is translated only as a landline phone, as Ruben recognizes:

[The mobility of the device] it's not so important. For people who use them, who work with them, for them it is important. [If] he has a job and he needs to have a telephone, so they can localize him wherever they are. They need to know where he is, [but] not for me. The telephone we bought is the telephone we leave here, in the house. [For me] it is not important to be mobile, to be [always] findable, no. (Ruben, 36 years old)

In summary, we can see that mobility depends on much more complex circumstances and characteristics than the mere disposition of certain mobile technologies. Therefore, the influences and effects that the use of devices has on physical mobility have to be seen in a much wider context that includes not only the aspects directly related to mobile use, but the diversity of elements related to the everyday life of individuals in urban societies.

CONCLUSIONS

There appear to be no important relationships between the use of mobile phones by the members of families studied and their everyday physical mobility. This lack of a strong relationship can be explained, at least partially, by two key factors: the very limited use of the mobile devices by the households studied, and the structural constraints that limit their everyday spatial mobility.

On the one hand, even though that they recognized mobile phones as a key resource for management of communications in their new living environment, this perception was not matched by a frequent use of their handsets. Given the relatively high costs of service, they were forced to develop certain strategies to keep the phone in use without expending too much on it. These strategies helped them to "win the fierce battle to keep a mobile in permanent operation" (Slater & Kwami, 2005, p. 10), but at the cost of reduced quality and depth of their communications. Mobile communication for them was not the natural replacement of their former face-to-face communication, but a poor succedaneum for situations of specific need. In order to properly communicate, they still had to have face-to-face conversations.

On the other hand, everyday mobility of these families cannot be easily affected by the mere availability of a mobile technology, even if hypothetically these families could use them more freely. To ease the structural constraints, and subsequently to increase their everyday mobility, general improvements in the conditions of life of these families are needed, especially greater inclusion in Santiago's urban society (higher incomes, higher educational enrolment, greater integration of women in the labor market, better access to means of transport and urban infrastructure, etc.).

In this context it seems right to ask, what is the need for mobile phones if they are not used in a "mobile" way? What we found here, and in accordance with other studies (Fortunati, 2001; Lasen, 2005), is that above all mobile phones create accessibility over distance, especially in a time of need. This connectivity is not between increasingly mobile "urban nomads," but between people who live their lives in a more or less limited number of fixed localities and need a fast and dependable way to be in contact with each other. As shown in the previous section, this situation makes them practically and symbolically translate their mobile phones into landline telephones, because this is the communication technology that they need at this stage in their development.

Although our analysis cannot claim to be representative of any general population, and more research on the subject is needed, we can conclude from the analysis presented here that the use of the mobile phone by the members of these families clearly shows a new face of their still incomplete integration within contemporary Santiago's society. For these families, mobile phone space is not the space of mobile freedom that advertising images and marketing campaigns present. It is a contested space, a space of inequalities and exclusions, as much as other spaces of the city can be. It is an unequal space where these families are situated, but over which they have little control or autonomy. Their immobility and exclusion in concrete urban space have a parallel in the space of mobile phone communications. They are there—on the housing estate, with their mobile telephone handsets—but their capabilities to move both in physical and/or communicational ways appear limited and constrained: always waiting for someone to come or, in this case, call.

NOTES

1. Like Brazilian *favelas* or Argentinean *villas miseria*, *campamentos* are neighborhoods made of low-quality housing, characterized by an illegal occupancy of land, and commonly located, but not always, in the outskirts of cities.

2. Such as less available money to spend on public transport, little access to car and other means of private mobility, a location in areas with little access to the networks of transport, little integration of women to the labor market, etc.

3. That means that the mobile subscriber does not pay for incoming calls, just for the ones that he/she made.

4. One interesting point to make here is the almost inexistence of text messaging in the communicative practices of the individuals under study. Only two people mentioned text messaging as something that they usually do, while most of the people didn't even mention this practice when they were asked about how they deal with the costs involved in using the telephone. There are many possible causes for this lack of use (literacy limitations, antiquity of the devices, etc.), but it is interesting to note the difference with more developed societies or other developing societies, like the Philippines (Pertierra et al., 2002),

in which text messaging is by far the most popular option to avoid the high expenses of using mobile phones.

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