

Mini Track:
'Mobile computing and public services in delicate or emergency situations'

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The police, the fire brigade, the guards, the nurses, the social workers, the paramedics all work in ever-changing circumstances. Their main skills lie in managing the particular situation, be it a delicate family situation, or a traffic accident. Their attention is focused on those in need, on the immediate demands. At the same time, however, they must record events and find information to bring the particular incident into its context. To coordinate the efforts, standard operating procedures are enforced, but also much communication is needed, as each case is different. In larger scale crises, emergency management requires constant information of what is going on. Accountability for actions is a requirement, also after the event, for example in a court of law.

Our area of interest is thus in public services in delicate or emergency situations. The particular perspective we have chosen for this area is that of mobile computing. The people in our target groups all work on the field, away from their offices. Being on the move, in rapidly changing circumstances, sets specific requirements for the mobile phones, PDAs, bar code readers, and other mobile communication and computing devices they use. Also the interplay of these with other tools in use, such as the traditional paper and pen, or the ingenious small whiteboard and felt pen that the Swedish police use in their cars, is important for accomplishing their work.

This Minitrack on Mobile Computing and Public Services in Delicate or Emergency Situations is now

organized for the first time, in HICSS-37. It is part of the Decision Technologies for Management Track. The submitted papers went through an extensive reviewing process. The reviewers were scholars from all continents, working in mobile informatics, HCI, and CSCW. Of the seven submissions, we accepted three papers to be presented at the conference and published in the proceedings. The accepted papers present a variety both theoretical perspectives and empirical findings.

The paper by Vuokko addresses the occasion for redefining power and control relations during a pilot implementation project. They studied home care workers who were required to report by using PDAs and barcodes. They show how the very obvious control tools were translated into personal time and task managers.

Kostakos and O'Neill turn the issue of mobility upside down and present the idea of turning public places into pervasive computing environments. They then discuss the social requirements and constraints for the public pervasive computing systems, using emergency situations as an example.

Theorising about mobility is still in its infancy. Pica, Sørensen and Allen explore the relationship between the work activities, their context, and mobile information usage in terms of active vs passive environments and structured vs unstructured work. They illustrate their discussion by a field study of two groups of police: crime officers and community police.