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Carving a Walled Village to Imprison Friends

-- An ethnographic account in the cyberspace of Ingress

Lucia L.S. Siu

Abstract

This paper investigates how new forms of classical social cohesion, as illustrated by Emile Durkheim, can be found in the mobile gaming community of Ingress. Ingress was a global game developed by Google that ran on mobile phones using location-based technologies. Gamers from two factions had to travel, cooperate and combat across actual geographical space to play. The paper investigates how the gaming community simultaneously possessed global connectivity and cultures of local enclave communities. It contains ethnographic records of a group of gamers from the satellite town of Tuen Mun, Hong Kong. The group used to build a symbolic wall to enclose an area of 40 square kilometers across physical urban space that materialized internal social control. The group used to have a subculture that glorified self-sacrifice, chastised internal members from liberal scoring, and established a hierarchical social order. The case demonstrates a version of “neo-mechanical solidarity” in an enclave community built upon a mixture of physical and cyber interactions. It also reflects real-world problems in commuting infrastructure, social isolation, and urban planning policies.¹

Key Words: Online community, Ingress, neo-mechanical solidarity, enclave community, global connectivity, social control, location-based mobile game, town planning, centre and periphery.

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