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**Citation:** Saker, M. & Evans, L. (2016). Everyday life and locative play: an exploration of Foursquare and playful engagements with space and place. *Media, Culture & Society*, 38(8), pp. 1460-3675. doi: 10.1177/0163443716643149

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# **Everyday Life and Locative Play: An exploration of Foursquare and playful engagements with space and place**

**Michael Saker**

**Leighton Evans**

## **Abstract**

Foursquare is a location-based social network (LBSN) that combines gaming elements with features conventionally associated with social networking sites (SNSs). Following two qualitative studies, the paper sets out to explore what impact this overlaying of physical environments with play has on everyday life and experiences of space and place. Drawing on early understandings of play (Caillois, 2001; Huizinga, 1992), alongside the flâneur (Benjamin, 1991) and 'phoneur' (Luke, 2006) as respective methods for conceptualising play in the context of mobility and urbanity, the paper examines whether the suggested division between play and ordinary life (Apter, 1991; Caillois, 2001; Huizinga, 1992) is challenged by Foursquare, and if so, how this reframing of play is experienced. Secondly, the paper investigates what effect this LBSN is having on mobility choices and spatial relationships. Finally, the novel concept of the 'phoneur' is posited as a way of understanding how pervasive play through LBSNs acts as a mediating influence on the experience of space and place.

## **Key Words**

Foursquare, location-based social networks, locative media, pervasive play, *flâneur*, phoneur, spatial practices

## **Introduction**

It has been suggested that mobile social networks are 'reshaping offline social geography' (boyd and Ellison, 2007, p.224). Dodgeball was a pioneering example of this reshaping. In operation between 2003 and 2009, Dodgeball 'allowed users to let personal networks of friends know when they were at their local bars and restaurants via their mobile phones' (Humphreys, 2010, p.756). Significantly, this communication was achieved without the need to individually contact each corresponding person. Users would instead send 'one text message (called a 'check-in' message) to Dodgeball, which then broadcasted the message to their friend networks alerting them where they were and that they were interested in meeting up' (ibid). From her studies, Humphreys (2007, 2010) found this early mobile social network altered the way participants engaged with and experienced their environments, imbuing space and place with a sense of familiarity, as well as altering their pathways through the city.

The transition to a mobile web, where computation moves "out of the box and into the environment" (Hayles, 2009: 48), has produced further examples of locative media (Wilken, 2012). Smartphones, with their advanced capabilities, and location-based social networks (LBSNs), allow for the development of what de Souza e Silva (2006) refers to as 'hybrid space'. This 'hybrid space' emerges when digital and physical spaces are combined, giving rise to new embodied experiences and social connections in place (de Lange and de Waa, 2013; de Souza e Silva and Sutko, 2010). Foursquare, a popular and prominent LBSN incorporating elements of play with features traditionally associated with social networking sites (SNSs), is a good example of this. If space is understood as being socially constructed through use (de Certeau, 1884; Lefebvre, 1991), by allowing people to engage with public space in a digitally mediated and playful manner,

Foursquare has the potential to produce different understandings of place (Evans, 2014 and 2015). This potential is the focus of the paper.

Developed by Dennis Crowley and Naveen Selvadurai in late 2008, Foursquare was launched in March 2009, at the annual South by Southwest (SXSW) festival. It presently has '[more] than 55 million people worldwide, who have left more than 70 million tips and checked in over 7 billion times' (About Foursquare, 2015). Over the years Foursquare has changed substantially. The most significant of these changes is its move away from its defining feature, 'real-time location sharing with friends' (About Foursquare, 2015). In 2014 a separate application, Swarm, took this element over, leaving Foursquare to focus solely on place-based suggestions. Prior to this, Foursquare diversely worked as a mobile social network, an environmental guide, 'a personal memory tool' (Frith, 2014, p.2), and a location-based game. The 'visualization of space' (de Souza e Silva and Sutko, 2010) and surrounding social connections meant Foursquare could coordinate various social interactions (see Frith, 2014). Foursquare also functioned as an environmental guide, offering users personalized place-based recommendations, algorithmically rooted in previous check-ins. Users could pen environmental "tips", just as they could read the "tips" left by others. The archival affordance of check-ins meant Foursquare acted as a 'memory tool that people [could] use to archive their past mobility' (Frith, 2014, p.892). Accumulative check-ins could then be accessed, as well as visualized, through the accompanying website. Lastly, Foursquare was 'designed to "turn life into a game"' (Frith, 2013, p.248) respectively awarding points and badges for check-ins and combinations of check-ins. Acquired badges could then be accessed through the application's interface. Mayorships were also given to users who had checked-in to a venue more than anyone else in the last 60 days.

Drawing on two original qualitative studies, the aim of this paper is to understand what effect the playful side of Foursquare is having on experiences of space and place. Firstly, the paper examines whether the suggested division between play and ordinary life (Apter, 1991; Caillois, 2001; Huizinga, 1992) is challenged by Foursquare, and if so, how this is experienced. Secondly, the paper explores what impact Foursquare's gaming elements are having on spatial flows and spatial relationships. This is accordingly divided into two sections. The first section explores whether participants frequent places they otherwise wouldn't as a consequence of the playful engagements with place that are part of the game aspect of Foursquare, as well as if they move through their environment using different routes. The second section explores the specific game mechanism of 'mayorships', and what impact this deliberate, heavy usage has on spatial relationships. In either case, the extent to which Foursquare disrupts ordinary spatial flows and allows participants to playfully engage with their environment will indicate whether play does have a substantive effect upon spatial understandings. In the following section the conceptual framework surrounding this research will be outlined, beginning with a discussion of media technologies and their use in urban space. Foursquare will then be situated in relation to traditional theories of play (Apter, 1991; Caillois, 2001; Huizinga, 1992), before drawing on de Souza e Silva and Hjorth's (2009) understanding of the *flâneur* as a 'method for conceptualizing the role of play in contemporary urbanity' (p.606), alongside Luke's (2006) notion of the 'phoneur'. The methodological designs underpinning this research will then be detailed, before the findings are presented and discussed.

### **Locative media, urban space and play**

A body of research analysing how locative technologies mediate the relationship between technology use and physical spaces has emerged over the past decade (see Crawford and Goggin, 2009; de Souza e Silva and Frith, 2010; de Souza e Silva and Sutko, 2011; Wilken, 2008, 2012; Wilken and Goggin, 2012). Mobile media has been posited as altering the way users relate to physical space in a confluence of location and digital networks that mediates geographic places (Campbell and Ling, 2008; Gordon et al., 2013; Martin, 2014, p.180). The ubiquity of connectivity with mobile communications (Okazaki and Mendez, 2013), the perpetual contact with social ties (Frith, 2014) and continual potential of social accessibility creates a continual co-presence (Ling and Horst, 2011) and the possibility of instant interactivity with others (Campbell and Kwak, 2011) are the features of mobile web use that create the possibility and affordance of a transformed experience of place when using mobile media. Gordon et al. (2013) argue that location-based services mediate conceptions of space and geography while contributing to changes in understandings of participation in public life for users. In this vein, Hjorth's (2011) two-year ethnography of mobile media users in Seoul illustrated the renegotiation of privacy and place in light of mobile media use. Hjorth focused on the ways that users grapple with locative media and how using applications to move through and navigate urban space is in a continual trade-off with concerns over privacy. Privacy is not the focus of this paper, but rather the notion of renegotiation of place, through the mechanism of play and locative games.

Farman (2012) makes explicit the renegotiation of place through play. In his view, locative games create a distinct sense of embodiment in pervasive computing spaces (Farman, 2012, p.94), making the link between the renegotiation of place through play explicit. In LBSNs, tangible computing is allied to social computing (social networking)

and location services embedded in tangible devices, with activity using these devices resulting in the production of an embodied agent: an intelligent agent that interacts with the environment through a physical or virtual body (Evans, 2015, p.20). Farman (2012) considers embodiment and space as being co-constitutive, and mobile computational devices are entities that can reconfigure the way that users can embody that space of which they are co-constitutive. Space is always constructed simultaneously with embodiment in that space (2012, p.18). In this view, a LBSN with an element of play will, along with the embodied agent playing that game, reconfigure the way in which the player can embody space and locate themselves in digital and virtual spaces simultaneously.

The potential of integrating play with ordinary life at the same time means this paper is aligned with research that questions play's suggested separation from 'ordinary life' (de Souza e Silva and Sutko, 2008). Conventionally speaking, play has been seen as separate from ordinary life (Apter, 1991; Caillois, 2001; Huizinga, 1992). For Huizinga, play is famously contained within what he terms the 'magic circle'. This concept stresses that the play of any given game must occur within a spatially and temporally enclosed area, or playground, and is as such detached from ordinary life. As Huizinga (1992) suggests, '[play] is distinct from "ordinary life" both as to locality and duration' (p.10). 'As a player steps in and out of a game, he or she is crossing the boundary - or frame - that defines the game in time and space' (Salen and Zimmerman, 2004, p.95). This is a sentiment markedly made by other game scholars. Caillois (2001), for instance, similarly proposes, '[play] is essentially a separate occupation, carefully isolated from the rest of life, and generally is engaged in with precise limits of time and place' (p.6). It is this suggestion then that leads to the first research question: to what extent does Foursquare challenge

the suggested division between play and ordinary life (Apter, 1991; Caillois, 12001; Huizinga, 1992), and what effect might this be having on experiences of space and place? While the impact locative media might be having on traditional approaches to play has been explored elsewhere (see de Souza e Silva and Hjorth, 2009), oftentimes such research isn't grounded in empirical research. This is a significant issue addressed by this study.

Moving forwards, for de Souza e Silva and Hjorth (2009) understanding how playful acts mediate understanding of place is aided by considering the municipal perambulations of the *flâneur*. *Flânerie* grew out of nineteenth-century Paris, a period that witnessed the construction of glass-covered arcades (Geist, 1983). In its most basic form, *flânerie* consists of the intermingling of scopophilia and movement (Gleber, 1999; Shields, 1994; White, 2008). As Tester (1994) explains, 'the activity of strolling and looking ... carried out by the *flâneur*, is a recurring motif in the literature, sociology and art of urban, and most especially of the metropolitan, existence' (p.1), which 'could hardly have assumed the importance it did without the arcades' (Benjamin, 1983, p.36). In an embodied sense then, what the *flâneur* highlights is the various ways in which any given space is itself constructed precisely through the engagements that make it up, evoking the *lived* space of Lefebvre (1991) as well as the observed "stories" of de Certeau (1984), as written "down below" by the pedestrians.

In light of the transition to the mobile web, Luke (2006) updates the concept of the *flâneur* with the 'phoneur'. 'Unlike the *flâneur* that was ordered by the visual, the 'phoneur' is structured by the information city's ambience, whereby modes such as haptic and aural override the dominance of visual' (de Souza e Silva and Hjorth, 2009, p.608). Drawing on



the work of de Souza e Silva and Hjorth (2009), the 'phoneur' can be read as an alienated figure, 'stalked by corporate hunters' (Luke, 2006, p.191) through the mobile web, and distanced from his or her environment by an informational city that approaches all 'phoneurs' as being ever-present consumers. The political economy critique is important, but in the context of this study such a critique does not extend to the main consideration regarding an understanding of location and space as an embodied user. The question of how LBSNs and location-based play impact the 'phoneur's' experience of the city is a question of how the use of LBSNs can deepen spatial connections, rather than usage being another conduit to consumerism. From this position, the focus becomes a question of how the 'phoneur' might approach space and place under the auspices of location-based pervasive play. It is this consideration then that leads to the second research question, which is divided into two parts: what impact is Foursquare and its playful side having on spatial flows and spatial relationships? While there are some important studies that have qualitatively examined Foursquare in this context (Cramer et al, 2011; Frith, 2013), there is nonetheless still a lack of empirical research in this area. Furthermore such research isn't framed by earlier theoretical approaches to play, which is important in terms of developing an understanding of this phenomenon. This gap is accordingly addressed through this research, which examines what effect the 'playful' side of Foursquare is having on experiences of space and place.

## **Method**

This paper reports on two original research projects designed to explore the spatial and social experience of Foursquare users. The first project was conducted between September 2011 and May 2012, using mixed methods including online surveys, face-to-face interviews, Skype interviews and email interviews of 65 users of Foursquare

geographically spread across the globe. The second project took place between August and December 2012, with twenty-two Foursquare users interviewed, all of whom resided in the southeast of Britain. Both research projects involved a post-research thematic analysis through the careful reading of full interview transcriptions, highlighting material that was of interest to the underlining research questions. An interpretive stage was subsequently employed to draw out meaning from the marked material, before interpretations were hierarchically ordered in terms of their significance.

### **Ordinary life and play**

This research found that a division between play and ordinary life (Apter, 1991; Caillois, 12001; Huizinga, 1992) was questioned by Foursquare. This position is itself is illustrated by Sarah, who is registered as disabled with myalgic encephalopathy (M.E), an early adopter of Foursquare and, by her own admission, completely “obsessed” with it. From her point of view this LBSN totally changed her life. The overlaying of space and place with play gave her the motivation to leave her house through a desire to acquire new mayorships that was linked to her desire to overcome M.E.:

I’m registered disabled with M.E. and I’m mainly housebound. I liked the look of Foursquare, and started using it as a sort of incentive to get out; like a pedometer makes you want to walk more steps, using Foursquare made me want to break my boundaries a bit; try and go out a bit more than what I did ... So Foursquare was just an incentive to get out and get mayorships, and to tell friends and family that I’m out, rather than having to ring them and say I’m at such and such a place today, they can instantly see, when I published my check-ins, where I was and that I was getting out. (Sarah, second project)

In this example, the playfulness of Foursquare evidently isn't separate from Sarah's ordinary life, as the attainment of various mayorships through the accumulation of check-ins symbolises something beyond the 'intrinsic meaning' (Caillois, 2001, p.7) of the game. Here two different assemblages coexist both separately and together. Engaging in the ordinary space of day-to-day life is also an engagement in the space of play. For Sarah, the effects of Foursquare transcend the 'magic circle', as well as Apter's (1999) suggested 'frame' standing between 'the "real" world ... its problems' (p.15) and play, as her problems within the 'real' world are themselves eased precisely through this playful engagement with space and place. This point is further cemented in the following extract, as Sarah discusses occasions when she hasn't wanted to venture outside, but the gaming element of Foursquare has motivated her to do so:

I'm so tired and so exhausted all the time with my M.E. I just can't be arsed, you know, I'll save my energy, but then I think, no, I'm nearly the mayor of this place or I'm close to getting one hundred check-ins at that place. Like my local pub, I recently got my hundredth check-in there; I knew I was getting close and I would think I'll just go for a quick drink. It is so easy to stay at home, but then I think about Foursquare and ousting my fiancé or something. (Sarah, second project)

In these examples the play of this LBSN isn't 'distinct from' Sarah's "ordinary life" (Huizinga, 1992, p.10), but rather tantamount to a kind of motivating force within it, pushing her to go out and playfully engage with her environment. For Emily, a 37 year old moderate user of the app, the gaming elements of Foursquare, when annexed to her desire to win, has likewise pushed her to go out more than she perhaps would otherwise.

I have thought maybe more about going for a drink, but thinking I'm too busy, but then thinking actually if I went I'd get more points ... because obviously by doing that and going to different places, then you will ultimately get more points, and then I am ultimately still winning. I'm not allowed to play board games with some of my friends because I'm too competitive. (Emily, second project)

Mark, an 18 year old student and early adopter of Foursquare, likewise relates to a comparable sense of motivation:

I started wanting to go out more, to check-in to places and to get like points and things like that. I think it's made me want to go out a lot more for some reason. (Mark, second project)

In Mark's account, the gaming elements of Foursquare meant that his engagement with the game led to him going out more 'to play'. When examining play in the context of Foursquare then, there is no longer a designated 'place for play' (Caillois, 2001, p.6). Instead every place has the potential for precipitating play, just as play can take place at any time. This is itself important given Huizinga's (1991) postulation that '[all] play moves and has its being within a play-ground marked off beforehand either materially or ideally, deliberately or as a matter of course' (p.10). Understandings of play therefore need to be reframed in order to accommodate for this development. Importantly, however, this does not mean all urban environments are automatically transformed into playful spaces, for all participants, but rather they can be. Instead, for those who choose to engage with this LBSN, what Foursquare enables is a different understanding of play,

and with it a different relationship with 'magic circles', one that is more mobile, malleable and predicated on the active character of space (de Certeau, 1984; Lefebvre, 1991). As de Souza e Silva and Hjorth (2009) importantly note, 'following Lefebvre, we might conceive spaces not only as social but also as playful, since play is an intrinsic social movement emergent by the relationships between people' (p.604). It is precisely though the active and constructed character of 'lived spaces' (Lefebvre, 1991) that Foursquare produces this updated approach to play. For the participants who decided to use it in this way, the overlapping of 'real' world environments with digital space effectively allows the dexterous oscillation between both 'real' and 'playful' symbolic assemblages. At the same time, this process then leaves a trace of play on the fabric of ordinary life.

In sum, this research demonstrates that Foursquare can orient some participants towards a particular revealing of place (Evans, 2014, p.3) as somewhere to be 'acquired' through the affordances of its game function. In these instances, that drive, or will-to-check-in, leads to behavioural changes that are perceived as being positive by the participants in question. For example, the significance assigned to the acquisition of any given mayorship for Sarah, illustrates that this form of spatial interaction isn't alienating, or another route to consumerism. Instead it allows her to forge a different and more playful relationship with space and place.

### **Locative play and spatial flows**

This research found that just as the Arcades saw the *flâneur* appropriate space and place in a poetic and altered manner (Benjamin, 1999), Foursquare, with its overlaying of space and place with digitally mediated play, altered how participants moved through their environments:

We went out of our way to go past Wembley Stadium so I could get a football badge. (Amy, second project)

I remember there was one specific day, where it went mental. We went on a massive walk around the city, checking in at the parks as we walked through them, we would specifically go to places, extra shops, just to check-in. That was a particularly slow day that allowed us to do that, but it was a good laugh. (Paul, second project)

In the second extract, Paul, a 23 year old causal user, explains how Foursquare 'encouraged' him and his friends to go to 'extra places' they hadn't been to before, with a corollary to this being that the pathways they used were correspondingly different. Similarly, Amy, a 37 year old early adopter, found her desire for badges meant she would often travel to places that were 'out of' her way. In the following extract Samantha, a 24 year old self-confessed 'serious user' of Foursquare, details an analogous experience:

There was one day when we went to town, we went shopping, and literally every shop we went into we checked-in. We checked-in to West Quay, we checked-in to every shop, then we went for food, we went for lunch, and then we went to a bar, checked-in there. It was just constant. Trying to get the points. (Samantha, second project)

Significantly, both Paul and Samantha found this kind of spatial engagement to be more pronounced when they initially began using Foursquare, which suggests that this kind

playful spatial engagement might also be rooted in novelty. Henry, a 37 year old casual user, who was interested primarily in spatial exploration through the Foursquare application, touches on a similar point:

Well at the beginning, it is because it's a game. You get the points and the badges. So in the beginning I was quite hooked on the game, so I wanted to be the first one of my friends to get the most points, so I was checking in everywhere that I went. I got over that. It was only really the first few months I used it like that. Now I really only check-in to places that are interesting or exciting, or if something exciting is happening like, for example, when I'm going on holiday I'll check-in at the airport and say I'm going to Spain tomorrow, and if I'm on holiday and I'm in a really nice restaurant or a good place then I'll check-in to those places, but I wouldn't just check-in to Starbucks, today, without you here. (Henry, second project)

In the following extract Samantha explains the reasons why her use of Foursquare has also lessened:

I'm not a student anymore so I don't go to as many different places, and I'm not going to check-in to work every single day or something like that. When I first started using it there was a lot of competition in our group of friends; who could get the most points, trying to get each other's mayorships and things like that, so that's what made us use it a lot more. (Samantha, second project)

Just as the *flâneur* drifted through the city without a pre-set path, appropriating the sprawling streets as a visual canvas to create upon, for some participants the use of

Foursquare saw them then move through their environments following different routes, just as they would go to venues and locations they otherwise wouldn't have visited. For these participants their movements through the city accordingly became less orientated towards specific locations, and more open to spontaneous adjustment through the digital mediation of play. As a result these participants then found that they were less interested in consuming what these places had to offer (for social capital or other forms of cultural capital, Bourdieu, 1984; Evans, 2014), and more interested in the places themselves, in terms of their symbolism and relation to the game.

### **Locative play and spatial relationships**

In her study of the mobile social networks Dodgeball, Humphreys (2010) concludes that it helped transform 'public realms' into 'parochial realms' through a process of 'parochialization': '[despite] not knowing the venues or city as well as they knew their home city, an unfamiliar place could become a parochial realm by sharing locational and social information through Dodgeball' (p.773). By sharing this information, her participants developed a different kind of relationship with their environment, one importantly rooted in a sense of social and locational 'familiarity'. Likewise this research found that participants also used their smartphones to develop a sense of locational familiarity. However, in this instance the familiarity stemmed from play and the attainment of mayorships through Foursquare, in contrast to the familiarity procured by Dodgeball, which was pre-eminently social, with various social nodes transforming space and place. Foursquare is notably more locational, in that its effects aren't necessarily tethered to relationships between people and their spatial correlation, although they can be, but rather the relationships between people and places. This more playful 'parochialization' is therefore 'qualitatively distinct' (Hunter, 1985, p.235) from the



'parochialization' of Dodgeball, producing new forms of spatial engagement, predicated on loyalty, repetition and possession, as opposed to physical awareness of nearby social connections.

The check-in as a mechanism for 'playing the game' of Foursquare illustrates this:

The points, badges and mayorships. It's like a little contest in our group. I'm disappointed when I forget to check-in because I missed out on the points!

(Frances, first project)

Well, mostly because I'm there and want to check-in, especially if I plan on going there again, i.e. my house. You also get points for creating a location. Yay points!

(Frances, first project)

Points! Like I said the video game achievement junkie reflex is kinda strong. Plus in some ways it's like being the first person to climb the mountain - I was there

FIRST. (Martin, first project)

Frances, a 22 year old frequent user, and Martin, a 21 year old lapsed user, both 'heavy' users interested in the game aspect of Foursquare, illustrate how the collecting of points and badges, and competing for "mayorships" of venues with other players is a key motivation for using Foursquare. Here, both the casual use of the application when "there" (Frances) and the need to accomplish firsts within the social network environment comprised of other users. This need to be visible through the game mechanism is further exemplified:

Yes, there were "hot" places with many people checked-in. And I myself got interested in those places as well. (Belinda, first project)

Belinda, a 23 year old causal user, shows how the check-in facility influences the behaviour of users, in that this user becomes aware of "hot" places through others checking-in to that place. A detailed comment offers more depth to the idea that using Foursquare as a behaviour can be commensurate with a new mode of understanding places:

A good example of this was I recently took a road trip with a friend to Sacramento from Ventura. Our goal that day was to get her the overshare badge and both of us as many points possible. It made the drive up more fun and I was checking Foursquare constantly for fun stuff to check-into like "In A Car", which I am now the mayor of, Zombie Sheep Herd, etc. I was super pissed when the servers went down on our drive home. (Frances, first project)

Frances shows how she took a day of her life to earn a Foursquare badge, the "overshare" badge earned when one checks in to 10 different places in 12 hours (Foursquare, 2011). The trip (the places, the time, where and what kind of place was visited) is not reflected upon, and there is exasperation when the process cannot be continued due to a technological failure. Moreover, Frances takes pride in checking-in to the car they are travelling in, a place that is mobile and has been designated as a place only to earn the badge and points for the game.

While the evidence from the two empirical studies points to the game aspect of Foursquare having an integral role in spatial relationships, there is also evidence that this effect is not permanent.

Then the competition starts in, and the videogame "achievement junkie" bit kicks in. I've cut down a LOT on the use lately - some of that is the novelty is wearing off,

and some is because I don't GO too many places that I'm not already mayor of.  
(John, first project)

It was an innovative and fun application to keep up with friends through friendly competition. (Paul, first project)

Both John, 21 years old, and Paul, 25 years old, identify themselves as casual users of Foursquare, and their responses reiterate the gaming aspect of Foursquare as an aspect of understanding place. Both participants are previous users of Foursquare; they used the LBSN, but found it dull and decided to end use of the application. For both, the gaming aspect (which has been argued to constitute a reduction of place to resource) was the key driver for using the application, but the limited value of this in the long-term meant that the application has a limited appeal to the users. As John states, if you do not go to many places, then that gaming aspect becomes old very quickly and once the novelty is gone it is time to move on to something else. For these participants, mayorships underline spatial familiarity, which accordingly emphasises loyalty to specific places. Samantha explains how she feels when one of her mayorships is stolen:

You just feel like you're loyal to that place, and, I don't know, it's more you realise how much you liked it when you've lost it, when you get that email saying so-and-so is now mayor, and they've taken your mayorship, and you're like "oh no that's mine". (Samantha, second project)

For Samantha her mayorships serve to signify that she is the habitu  of these venues; that she has a relationship with them that is in some way deeper than with other patrons.

Likewise, Richard, a 30 year old casual user, echoes a similar sentiment while discussing being the mayor of his favourite café:

You kind of have a sort of smug feeling of yep I am the regular; I am customer number one. (Richard, second project)

For Richard the 'loyalty' that certain mayorships represent is also wrapped up in its connection to a specific period of time. This is particularly true of a pub that used to be his local pub while he was at University, a place he was proud to be the mayor of:

We used to go to a bar called Varsity, very regularly, back at university, and I was lucky enough to become the mayor. There weren't any discounts or prizes, or things like that. I guess it's more that it is somewhere you go quite often and it's nice to have that recognition, to see yourself with that little crown. It was a shame when I finally lost it, because we'd finished university; we weren't that close anymore, so that was like the passing of an era, losing that mayorship. (Paul, second project)

Whereas Dodgeball 'parochialized' the environment for its users by making them aware of the social connections that surrounded them, Foursquare (in the form of mayorships) saw participants become more aware of the environments they most often frequent. As a consequence of this, participants would feel differently about these environments, with their concomitant feelings strengthened, as is the case in the examples detailed above. Contra this, the process of 'parochialization' for Dodgeball is evidently less rooted in a specific site, as the physical place of said connection isn't itself as important as the social

nodes that overlay it. As a means to underline their loyalty to a certain place, as well as to maintain their mayorships, participants then desired the repetition of this process. This is highlighted by Paul's actions in the following extract, when he was informed by Foursquare that he was close to losing his favourite mayorship:

I think at one point I got a message saying someone has almost taken over as the mayor and I thought right, that's it, walked down, checked-in and had a drink, that'll show them ... The funny thing is, varsity was so close to my house that I could check-in from my house, but out of some unknown, weird morals, I felt like that would be cheating, so I felt like I should actually go there to check-in. (Paul, second project)

This again highlights the importance Paul placed on this particular place, as well as his symbolic connection to it, one that saw him not wanting to 'cheat' and check-in from his flat, but actually make the effort to physically enter Varsity, purchase a drink and then check-in properly. Richard also experiences a similar situation owing to his desire to 'hang on' to the mayorship of his favourite café:

The number of times I have come here to just hang on to the mayorship ... If I'm going to come here anyway maybe I'll come a little bit earlier, you know ... It adds some small amount of utility to the decision that there is this minor perk. (Richard, second project)

What is apparent then is that Foursquare can strengthen the relationship participants experience between themselves and the physical places they regularly inhabit. This

process then elicits a different understanding of ‘parochialization’, one that isn’t so much marked by a sense of locational familiarity stemming from social connections, but rather places, with the places in question being symbolically transformed in the process. For these participants, their mayorships seemingly confirm that they are the *real* habitué of this or that place, with their symbolic and digital loyalty producing a desire to maintain this status through repetition.

Interestingly, this playful ‘parochialization’, with its need for repetition, leads participants to not only experience a deeper sense of connection and relationship with the places they are mayor of, but also some degree of possession over them. This illuminates the blurred boundaries between play and ordinary life when considered through Foursquare.

I’ve got it now, it’s mine. I want to keep it. (Adrian, second project)

I’m in there quite often ... It is my *special* little place! (Amy, second project)

The attainment of these mayorships sees both Adrian, a 37 year old casual user persuaded to use the application as it made his movements more visible to his wife, and Amy, not only feeling more loyal to these places, but also precipitates a form of ownership, stemming from the digital possession their respective mayorships indicate. This feeling of spatial ownership then leads these participants to experience a sense of loss when their mayorships are subsequently “stolen” by other users, meaning they experience space and place differently.

## **Conclusion:**

This paper has examined the impact Foursquare and its gaming elements are having on spatial practices, as well as more broadly, how location-based forms of play might presently be affecting day-to-day interactions in ordinary space. In conclusion we present a new concept of the 'playeur' as being a more suitable method for approaching what impact the use of Foursquare has on the spatial practices of its users. In doing so, this paper builds on the work of Humphreys' (2007; 2010) study of Dodgeball, alongside de Souza e Silva & Hjorth (2009) understanding of the flâneur, and Luke's (2006) dystopian 'phoneur'.

The concept of the 'playeur' makes explicit the temporal-contingent possibilities of locative play with spatial media, and offers that affordance an identity that is congruent with other accounts of understanding place and social ties with LBSNs (Evans, 2014, 2015). The 'playeur' is the 'phoneur' who not only employs his or her smartphone to alter how the urban terrain is traversed, but also does so under the auspices of location-based play. Unlike the 'phoneur', whose experience of space is structured by the information city's ambience (de Souza e Silva and Hjorth, 2009, p.608), for the 'playeur' experiences of space are co-constructed by this ambience and the engagement with physical space through play. Traditional understandings of play that suggest play and ordinary space are separate (Apter, 1999; Caillois, 2001; Huizinga, 1992) are accordingly challenged by Foursquare. For the 'playeur' ordinary space is no longer simply 'ordinary', nor is it only a space of consumption, but is also playful and open to engagement. This research therefore provides qualitative support to the proposal that the boundaries between ordinary space and play are blurred (see de Souza e Silva and Hjorth, 2009).

While the 'phoneur' can be read as an alienated figure (Luke, 2006, p.191), the 'playeur' is an engaged actor who develops relationships with space and place through intentional playful activities. In this vein, the 'phoneur', as a concept for approaching mobile phone use in urbanity, with its focus on consumerism, is reassessed in light of Foursquare, with this focus effectively lessened through the inculcation of digitally mediated play. The development of 'hybrid space' (de Souza e Silva, 2006) has allowed the 'playeur' to symbolically rework quotidian structures. As a symptom of this symbolic oscillation, and while rooted in a desire for points, badges and mayorships, the 'playeur' moves through his or her environment following modified routes and inhabiting new places. In contrast to the 'parochializing' (Humphreys, 2010) effect of Dodgeball, which saw unfamiliar environments made more familiar as a result of users being cognizant of surrounding social connections, Foursquare's mechanisms of mayorships serve to make the 'playeur' more aware of the places most often frequented. This process then deepens existing spatial connections and leads to the 'playeur' going back to these places more often, especially if particular mayorships are under threat. The emergence of the 'playeur' then, is contingent upon mood or orientation towards making those links (see Evans, 2015), the affordances of the application with regard to gaming, and the physical location of the user.

Undoubtedly in the case of Foursquare the gamification model was critical to this initial use of the application. After five years, this is no longer needed and Foursquare is now an application for navigation. As we stand on the precipice of wearable technology the check-in and manual searching has become passé embodied practices. If one had a location-enabled smartwatch, glasses or clothes then the spatial information on place received will be through an interface that provides information instantly and



contextually. The historical moment of Foursquare, LBSN in the form of Foursquare or similar applications and the haptic, embodied use of mobile devices is coming to a close, and with it so too is the notion of marking location, sharing location and understanding location as place in this manner. However, the 'playeur' will undoubtedly resurface as new interfaces are configured towards play and gamification. The combination of play, the orientation towards play and the desire for understanding of place through play enabled by digital media will therefore re-emerge in a new technological form. In this way, the concept of the 'playeur' becomes both explanatory and a predictor with regards to new digital media. How the 'playeur' is remediated and remade by new media will be a fruitful area for future research.

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