Translocal meaning making: Examining the information practices of migrants from the Philippines to Winnipeg

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ABSTRACT
This poster describes the process of translocal meaning making, a set of information practices by which newcomers from the Philippines to Winnipeg, Canada, came to make sense of and operate within the Winnipeg information context. It describes how newcomers constructed meaning as they migrated to Winnipeg, encountering and incorporating diverse, complex, and often contradictory information and information resources into their daily lives as they migrated and settled in an unknown information context. This 5 step process demonstrates that migrants’ information practices are more dynamic, fluid, and iterative than articulated in previous studies that examine the information practices of migrants.

Keywords
Translocal meaning making, information practices, immigration, transnationalism

INTRODUCTION
Within Information Studies, everyday information practices is a well-known concept suggesting that individuals require and seek information on a daily basis in complex ways and from a variety of sources in order to manage their daily lives (Savolainen, 2008). For new immigrants who may not yet have established patterns or identified information sources, information practices may be incredibly daunting and a very complex process. Mehra and Papajohn refer to the unknown information context to which newcomers arrive as a “culturally alien information environment” (2007). Upon arrival both the information needs that newcomers must satisfy as well as the barriers to accessing this information are high. This poster describes the process of translocal meaning making, a specific set of information practices engaged in by migrants moving from the Philippines to Winnipeg, Canada. This process describes the manner by which newcomers came to make sense of and operate within the Winnipeg information context. It explains how newcomers construct meaning as they migrated to Winnipeg, encountering and incorporating diverse, complex, and often contradictory information and information resources into their daily lives as they migrated and settled in an unknown information context.

METHOD
The process of translocal meaning making emerges from a qualitative study examining how new immigrants from the Philippines to Winnipeg, arriving through the Manitoba Provincial Nominee Program, identify, use, and share information during the migration process and upon arrival to Canada. Data was collected using semi-structured in-depth interviews. Between November 2011 and March 2012, fourteen respondents were interviewed, each arrived through the Manitoba Provincial Nominee Program within one to four years of the date of interview. Two interviews were conducted with each respondent; the first focused on respondents’ pre-migration experiences and the second addressed their arrival and settlement experiences. Data was analyzed using line-by-line inductive analysis facilitated by NVivo software. Translocal meaning making emerges as a main finding from study interviews and is represented visually below as Table 1.

FINDINGS
This study applies a transnational lens (Levitt & Jaworsky, 2007) to make explicit the detailed activities and outcomes of newcomer information practices, in particular drawing out the dimensions and implications of newcomers’ participation within and across local and global social networks, sociocultural and geographical spaces, and across their settlement trajectories. Translocal meaning making is a five step process in which study respondents engaged as they prepared to leave the Philippines, migrated to Winnipeg, and settled in the city. Following Savolainen’s (2006) conceptualization of sense-making as a construct related to information use, meaning making is understood here to be an important aspect of information use that is dynamic and constructive (related to how respondents learn and construct meaning in their lives), as well as tied to social contexts and relationships (social networks). In other words, the process of translocal meaning making describes
how respondents actively and individually engage in producing meaning out of the socially located information that they are provided or encounter throughout the migration and settlement process.

Within Information Studies, Dervin (1992) articulates the most well known framework of meaning making. Her sense-making theory suggests that individuals use information and information seeking to resolve gaps in their understandings of their worlds (1992). Mehra suggests that for migrants “information and experiences address not one particular “gap” in a situation, but gaps in the entire reality of experience based on lack of cultural experience and knowledge” (Mehra, 2004, p. 38). Supporting Mehra’s suggestion that sense-making occurs for newcomers not on a gap by gap basis but much more broadly, this research demonstrates how respondents work to navigate and come to understand novel information landscapes (Lloyd, 2010), drawing from (sometimes conflicting) transnationally located information, narratives, and resources. The term translocal is used to highlight how “spaces and places need to be examined both through their situatedness and their connectedness to a variety of other locales” (Brickell & Datta, 2011, p. 4). This process is called translocal meaning making, because it is embedded in the various situatedness in respondents’ lives and is sensitive to respondents’ meaning making practices over time.

A summary of translocal meaning making practices is described in the table below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Process of translocal meaning making</th>
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<tr>
<td>1. Imagining Winnipeg – Using stories, media, photos, and socially circulating narratives, respondents imagine Winnipeg, their life in Winnipeg, and develop specific expectations about arrival and settlement.</td>
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<td>2. Information disjuncture - DEPARTURE. RUPTURE. REALITY GAP. Upon arrival, almost everything is an information practice. Most experiences are informational revealing how much is NOT known. Information encounters in the new landscape create confusion as respondents realize that what they thought they knew about Winnipeg doesn’t “match” their own impressions of the place they imagined.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Increasing sophistication and understanding of Winnipeg information landscape – Personal experiences and growing familiarity with the Winnipeg information landscape leads to a greater understanding of the local and cultural context and promotes ongoing reflection and reconsideration of Philippines to Winnipeg social imaginaries.</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Re-imagining Winnipeg – Formulated from their new awarenesses, experiences, and their own migration experiences, individuals re-image Winnipeg, the Philippines, and the Philippines to Winnipeg social imaginary.</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Social imaginary of Philippines to Winnipeg migration is re-imagined – As newcomers tell their stories and give advice to would-be-migrants looking to migrate through the MPNP, the Philippines to Winnipeg social imaginary shifts to accommodate new articulations of migration upon which would-be-migrants rely to develop their own migration expectations.</td>
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Each step in the translocal meaning making process is further described below.

**STEP 1**

Previous research suggests that newcomers arrive to new countries largely unaware of the social, cultural, and informational context to which they are arriving (Mehra and Papajohn, 2007). While this was certainly also true for respondents in this study, a significant departure from previous perspectives is that respondents arrived expecting, indeed imagining, that they did know a great deal about Winnipeg, including a basic understanding of the physical environment, settlement process, and what life in Winnipeg would be like. In fact, respondents arrived with very specific expectations about life in Winnipeg and their settlement process. Thus, the first step in the translocal meaning making process takes place in the Philippines as respondents actively imagine their lives in Winnipeg. The process of imagining Winnipeg occurs within a broader cultural framework of globalization and international Filipino migration and is fostered through transnational connections and flows of information.

In his seminal work, *Modernity at Large*, Appadurai (1996) suggests that diasporic connections fostered, maintained, and amplified through various forms of media and technology, such as the telephone and email, have created imagined worlds or “social imaginaries” of places never visited but socially constructed and imagined. He goes on to say, “For migrants, both the politics of adaptation to new
environments and the stimulus to move or return are deeply affected by a mass-mediated imaginary that frequently transcends national space” (Appadurai, 1996, p. 6). In this study, respondents frequently referred to well known narratives about migration circulating within their local and international social networks. These narratives, what Appadurai calls social imaginaries, deeply impacted respondents’ expectations about migration to Winnipeg.

Imaginaries were generated from stories and information respondents received from their social network ties in the Philippines, in Canada, and abroad. Respondents both actively sought and passively encountered information about life in Winnipeg through a variety of means, including: stories about migration told in childhood long before departure and during migration preparation; migration photos sent by family and friends abroad; visits to the Philippines from others already migrated; social media browsing of friends’ sites who have migrated; and conversations with others in the Philippines, Winnipeg, and abroad about migration. These encounters occurred both before and during the migration process.

While numerous media and channels, governmental and institutional messaging about migration, and the historical legacies of colonialism between the Philippines, Spain, and the US contribute to the imaginary terrain through which Filipinos across the globe become transnationally linked, in this study it is the ongoing engagement with respondents’ social network ties in the service of collecting information and preparing for migration that played the most significant role in shaping respondents’ Philippines to Winnipeg imaginaries. Thus information practices, in the form of contact and connections with other migrants already living in Winnipeg, permit would-be migrants to assemble very particular imaginaries and expectations about their own would-be settlement experiences.

**STEP 2**
Once respondents arrive to Winnipeg, many of their pre-migration assumptions and expectations are shattered. This happens almost immediately as respondents see for the first time a physical environmental that does not match the picture they created for themselves prior to migration. Thus, step two of translocal meaning making is characterized by a profound information disjuncture. Upon arrival respondents encountered new information continuously, through the natural environment (vegetation, temperature), the built environment (buildings, streets, geography), and in their interactions with friends and family (through daily conversations, observations of daily life, and specific inquiries of social network ties). Almost all of respondents’ early arrival encounters and experiences were informational in that respondents learned new things continuously, especially from their social networks ties, and largely tacitly through observation, conversation, and mimicry.

Information encounters in the new environment often create confusion and feelings of surprise and disorientation as respondents realize that what they thought they knew didn’t “match” their own expectations of the place to which they had arrived. Respondents came to understand and operate within the Winnipeg information landscape unevenly and iteratively. While moments of information disjuncture continued to occur for respondents throughout their settlement process, they came to be resolved more easily as respondents drew from their growing awareness of the Winnipeg information landscape.

**STEP 3**
In the third step of translocal meaning making, respondents gain increasing sophistication and understanding of the Winnipeg information landscape. Over time, respondents’ direct encounters and experiences with Winnipeg based information landscapes provide respondents with a greater awareness of potential information resources and assists respondents in contextualizing and making sense of the advice they have received, particularly from their local social network ties.

During this step, respondents’ information practices move from general, unspecific, and very dependent on Manitoba supporters to explicit, independent, and considerably more sophisticated. Upon arrival, respondents’ information seeking strategies were often quite general and included various forms of browsing. For example, respondents drove around to find doctors’ or dentists’ offices as well as to orient themselves to the city. Over time respondents’ information resources and practices became more diverse, varied, and sophisticated. Respondents started using official and institutional resources such as the migration settlement sector. These resources were often of great benefit to respondents, particularly in terms of finding career employment. Respondents became increasingly proficient with complex labour markets, government sectors, and housing markets. They came to understand the limits of their own pre-migration knowledge and expectations through their experiences living and settling in Winnipeg.

**STEP 4**
In the fourth step of translocal meaning making, respondents engage in ongoing reflection and reconsideration of the imaginaries and related settlement expectations that they brought with them from the Philippines. Goals and expectations are adjusted or rethought based on growing experiences and a greater awareness and understanding of the local Winnipeg context. Respondents re-imagined their understandings of Winnipeg as they processed and made sense of the growing tacit and experiential knowledge gleaned from their time in Winnipeg. In this way, respondents re-imagined Winnipeg, taking into account their newly formed experiences and perceptions.
In the same way that Winnipeg is re-imagined by respondents’ experiences living in Winnipeg, so too, the Philippines is re-imagined. Respondents draw from their own experiences, as well as local Winnipeg-based narratives about the Philippines to reformulate their impressions of the Philippines.

It is respondents’ multi-sitedness and their travel within and between multiple local information landscapes that informs their particular perspectives and related meaning making practices about both Winnipeg and the Philippines. It is precisely respondents’ co-location within multiple information landscapes that informs a translocal meaning making process that takes into account multiple and sometime conflicting ways of knowing and doing things.

**STEP 5**

In this, the last step of translocal meaning making, the social imaginary of both Winnipeg and the Philippines shifts as respondents contribute their own migration experiences and narratives back into social space. This shift occurs as respondents tell their own migration stories to other potential migrants. These stories reflect a different moment in the history of Philippines to Winnipeg migration as well as respondents’ own articulations of meaning making around this shift in space and time. It should be noted, however, that the notion of shifting social imaginaries is an assumption that cannot be fully verified through this study. Indeed, it is unclear how resilient are social imaginaries in the face of disparate constructions of experience. Salazar suggests that “the analysis of locally produced popular culture suggests that predominant imaginaries can and do change, albeit slowly” (2011, p. 594). Based on most respondents’ assertions that they provided significantly different migration advice (than they were provided) to potential migrants, this research suggests that the Philippines to Winnipeg imaginary does indeed shift over time.

This step locates translocal meaning making socially. Respondents’ interactions with information are deeply individual but they are also fed back into a global sociocultural context as lessons learned and migration stories and advice to be consumed by other would-be migrants. Translocal meaning making is thus constituted both individually and socially. It is embedded in social information and social imaginaries but it is also personal, derived as it is, experientially and emotionally.

**IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSION**

This research examines information practices during travel, transition, and across multi-sited contexts. It articulates a process of translocal meaning making that demonstrates how migrants’ information practices are more dynamic, fluid, and iterative than articulated in previous studies. Conversely, translocal meaning making also demonstrates the ways that information practices are affixed to and embedded within particular activities and locales. It offers a unique perspective on migrants’ information practices, acknowledging the fluidity of individuals’ relationship to information across space and time, and connecting moments of space and time to the knowledges that are produced by migrants and their networks across the migration process. This research suggests that transnational contexts such as migration require distinct lenses and tools to capture the dynamic and fluid information practices of migrant populations in transition.

**REFERENCES**


