

Unil

UNIL | Université de Lausanne



## Disconnect!

Changing expectations around information communication technology (ICT) products and services in Western Switzerland

**Marlyne Sahakian, Béatrice Bertho and Suren Erkman**

**University of Lausanne**

**SCORAI Conference, Maine: June 17, 2016**

## Research context

Part of a 3-year project underway at the University of Lausanne on understanding **social practices, uncovering norms, and learning how to change** (2015-2017), in relation to household electricity consumption in Western Switzerland.

Mixed methods, among differing socio-economic groups:

- **In-depth interviews and observations with household members (2015-2016)**
- National survey among Swiss households (planned: 2017)
- Participative methods / workshops with household groups (planned: 2017)

## Aim of this paper

Explore notions of **expectations, entitlement and excesses** around the use of Information Communication Technologies (ICT), involving:

- products (e.g., phones, computers, screens, video games, televisions, etc.) and
- services (e.g., access to music, films, social networks, information, etc.).

Introduce notions of **voluntary or imposed restrictions** on ICT usage.

## Conceptual framework

- Recognizing the recursive dialogue between **social context, the material dimension of consumption, and competencies** in everyday practices (Wilhite 2010; Shove et al. 2012).
- Considering over-lapping social practices related to electricity services, including **cleanliness and hygiene, food consumption, lighting, entertainment and connectivity**, and aspirations around “**the good life**”.
- Uncovering the role of **social norms in prescribing practices**, while recognizing that norms can be interpreted in different ways by people, in relation to different social fields (Plessz, Dubuisson-Quellier et al. 2014).
- **Giving significance to emotions** in relation to practices, explicitly soliciting emotive responses to uncover tensions/flows in how social norms are interpreted (Schatzki 1996; Collins 2004; Spaargaren, G. (2011).



## Looking for cracks in the concrete

Finding tensions in order to **challenging norms** and contest (un)sustainable consumption practices – at the risk of reinforcing them! (Bourdieu 1997; Wilk 2002; Sahakian & Wilhite 2014).



*Unil*

UNIL | Université de Lausanne



## Research results



## Expectations around ICTs: current trends

- **Scope:** everything is “directed through” ICT
- **Access :** immediate and endless (mis)information
- **Social connectivity:** instant, across time and space
- **Ownership and experiences:** more sharing (moments, music, films, photos)



## Expectations around ICTs: (re)negotiated...

**In difference spaces of consumption**, e.g., iPhone usage at dinner time, at home vs. restaurants.

**Over time**, between generations and over **life courses** (e.g., moving in together).

**In relation to people**, within the **same family**, and **peer groups**.

For her 14<sup>th</sup> birthday, Alix asked for an iPhone. I ended up saying, OK for an iPhone because your whole class has one so.... And Claire (the older daughter) says, "But mom, it's not fair, I only got my iPhone when I was 17!" And I said, darling, times have changed! (*Sonia, mother of two, Lausanne*)

## Expectations around ICTs: (re)negotiated...

In relation to people, within the **same family**, and **peer groups**.



## Entitlement around ICTs

Having **the right** to ICT services and **a duty** to access them, in relation to **professional and educational needs**.

Not having access as a **social disadvantage** (e.g., doing homework, professional networking, working from home, etc.).

**Having the right to ICT for children**, particularly in re-composed families, and in relation to peer groups.

Having the right to ICT and **continuous access and speed of connectivity** is becoming a new norm, for some.



## Excess in usage

Frequent use of **drug addiction language** to describe ICT usage, particularly in relation to children:

It's truly a drug, it's just incredible. They have pure moments of pleasure (on the iPad), but when you take it away, they become like addicts. (*Mother of three*)

**Changing bodily dispositions** in relation to ICT

**Connecting to disconnect**





# Excess in access and ownership

How much is enough?

**Controlling access** is an issue for many

The difference between what people say, and our observations in the home

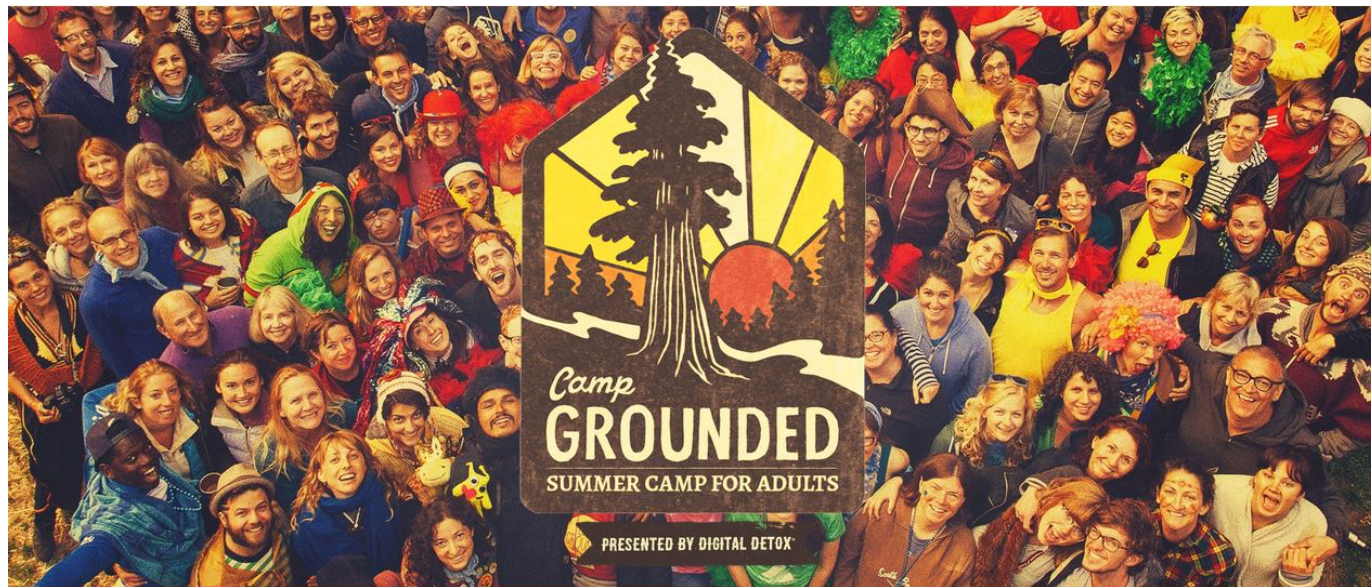


## Restrictions

Being disconnected as a way **to avoid bad habits** (e.g., no wifi in the nightclub), **enjoy the moment** (e.g., power outage) or **prompt a change in habits** (e.g., experiencing less connectivity on holidays).

New sense of time when disconnected, a certain freedom for some. A “**slowing down of the frenzied pace**” of everyday life.

Increasing amount of **adult and children unplugged camps**, where you are obliged to disconnect.





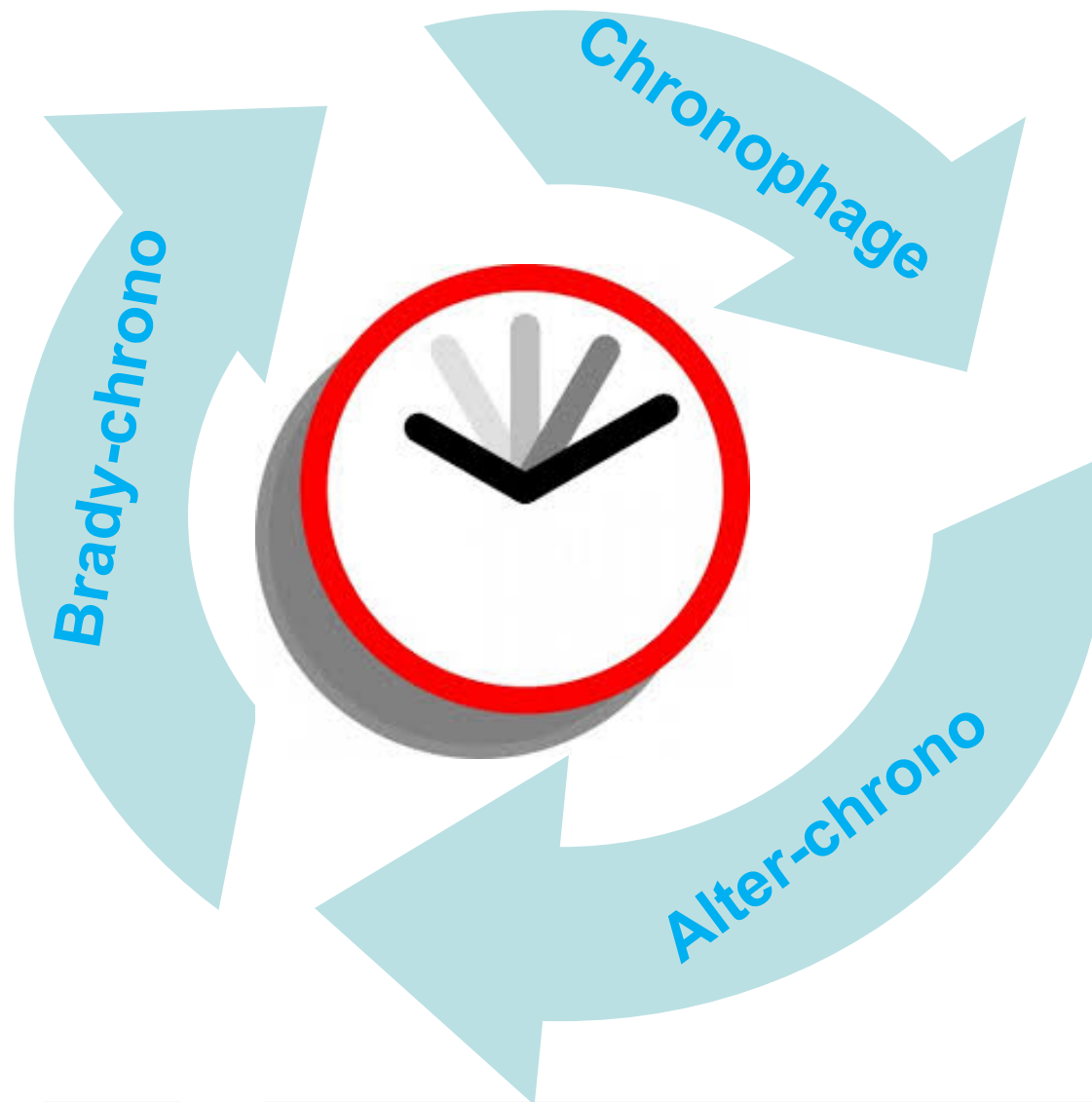
*Unil*

UNIL | Université de Lausanne



## Conclusion and discussion

# ICTs and our changing relation to time



## Summary

- There are **no stable norms around ICTs, norms seem to emerge from the practice**. There is no inter-generational reference or sense of “oughtness and rightness”; but, increasing expectations around more/faster access.
- **Several “cracks in the concrete” or tensions are apparent**, representing opportunities for contesting norms:
  - Conviviality and commensality: **social vs anti-social connectivity**; being connected worldwide/instantly vs. not physically present
  - Connectivity **as access to faster and more information**, films, music, interactions **vs sufficiency or shared consumption**
  - Connectivity as **time saving vs. time consuming**

# The right to be (dis)connected?





*Unil*

UNIL | Université de Lausanne



***Thank you***

**Contact: [Marlyne.Sahakian@unil.ch](mailto:Marlyne.Sahakian@unil.ch)**

| le savoir vivant |

**71**  
NRP

**Managing Energy Consumption**  
National Research Programme