

**Report to SIGUSE re:  
SIGUSE Funding: International Conference Travel Award, 2006**

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Conference: **SUNBELT 2007, Corfu, Greece**

Presentation: ***Leisurely Learning and Linking: Community in Irish Lacemaking***

I'd like to thank SIGUSE for supporting my attendance at SUNBELT 2007. This conference takes place annually, with conferences alternating between east and west coasts in the United States and then every third conference taking place in Europe. SUNBELT was held in sunny Corfu this year, attended by over 500 delegates from fields ranging from Sociology to Computer Science. Conference attendees shared the common goal of learning more about social networks and their analysis.

My learning was threefold. First, I gave an *Interactive Presentation*, alongside distinguished professors from such prestigious institutions as Harvard School of Business and MIT. My presentation focussed on the networking of Irish lacemakers (abstract below), a project which began with the assistance of SIGUSE funding through the Elfreda Chatman Research Proposal Award in 2006.

Second, I attended a workshop, called *Networking for Newbies*, offered by Barry Wellman/Alexanda Marin from the University of Toronto, Canada. This workshop is traditionally offered at SUNBELT to help researchers who are new to network analysis learn the basics of network analysis terminology, approaches to network analysis, and potential for integrating their own research with work in this field. The workshop was very helpful and has provided me with a foundation for future SUNBELT workshops and network exploration.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, I had the opportunity to meet other researchers from a wide range of disciplines who are investigating community and social networking through both qualitative and quantitative approaches. The conference has opened up a whole new area for me, and I anticipate that this will prove fruitful in my own research, particularly in my ongoing research into information behaviour in the context of leisure. Additionally, I anticipate sharing what I have learned with students and colleagues, so that they may also benefit from these interdisciplinary links.

Again, I thank SIGUSE for this valuable opportunity. I would recommend SUNBELT to others. My understanding is that the next SUNBELT conference is planned for Florida next year.

**Presentation Abstract:**

***Leisurely Learning and Linking: Community in Irish Lacemaking***

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This paper explores the social world of older adults involved in the hobby of lacemaking and the connections they develop within and beyond this community. In Ireland, the government has recently identified older adults as an information poor group at risk for social exclusion (Information Society Policy Unit, Department of the Taoiseach, 2002). The Library Council of Ireland's Joining Forces report (2000), a landmark study of Irish culture and the future of Irish libraries in meeting the needs of the public, and Ireland's National Economic Social Forum ([www.nesf.ie](http://www.nesf.ie)), have similarly prioritized development of social inclusion for older adults.

Irish lacemaking, once a common and important means of economic support in Ireland, is now promoted and practised in lace guilds as a leisure activity. Lacemaking may be characterized as serious leisure, that is an amateur or voluntary activity in which the hobby forms a central life interest, with participants actively acquiring and expressing special skills, knowledge and experience (Stebbins, 1996; 1997). Information skills development and information exchange are key features of lacemaking, with a variety of information and technical skills needed to navigate the complex maze of resources which support this hobby. Lacemakers are frequently older women, who are often retired and have time to devote themselves to hobbies.

A group of Irish lacemakers were observed as they interacted at lacemaking events hosted by their lacemaking guild. From this group, twenty participated in interviews about their lacemaking, social connections within and beyond their guild, and the role of lacemaking in their lives. By examining social connections in the lacemaking community, we can learn about the various links lacemakers form with one another and how these links support their information seeking behaviour. This analysis may help us understand the processes of learning and civic involvement and inclusion through the hobby of lacemaking.

**Available Online at: <http://nicomedia.math.upatras.gr/conf/Sunbelt2007>**