OVERVIEW
ePlace is an interaction environment for fostering social interactions in electronic marketplaces. It incorporates a novel, spatially organized, and interactive site map. The map provides visibility of people, activities and social interactions and incorporates access mechanisms for social interactions like chat and social navigation. We present its design, identify the four design constraints, and sketch scenarios of use.

DESIGN PROBLEM
As the Web is increasingly used for collaboration, there is much interest to develop social interaction environments. However, most efforts have taken a tools focus rather than a broader socio-technical focus. Prior CSCW and HCI research have shown the importance of a setting for social interactions and the need for tools and social practice to co-evolve. We apply these insights in creating an interaction environment that visualizes social information and facilitates social interactions in online marketplaces. Marketplaces are where people gather to interact and conduct transactions.

EVOLUTION OF DESIGN GUIDED BY FOUR DESIGN CONSTRAINTS

SOCIALITY

SCALABILITY

SPATIALITY

IMAGEABILITY

Components of Cognitive Map
Koolen lynch 1989, Image of the City

LANDMARK
Point of reference for salient information

DISTRICT
Areas with common characteristics

EDGE
Strong demarcation of areas

NODE
A spot

PATH
Relationship between nodes

Features of Global Map Components
In an electronic marketplace Web site

LANDMARK
Marketable information, transactions, people, activities, and social interaction

DISTRICT
Determines groupings, affinities or similarities

EDGE
Demarcates disjoint collections

NODE
Locates the placement of a Web page

PATH
Shows temporal, logical, and physical relationships of a group of nodes

SCENARIO SKETCHES

Visibility of People

Different Site Maps
The site map can encode the identity of the Web site.

Social Navigation
Visualization of choices based on current and past user’s actions

Navigation
Landmarks are navigable objects. The browser’s content and the user’s location change when users click on them.

Buddies - Shopping Together
Clicking on a buddy’s landmark allows the user to move to the Web page where the buddy is located.

Conversational Interface
Visualization of the result of a natural language query

Access to Sales Representatives
Visualization of people queued up to talk to a business sales agent.