Convenience:
Although much of our contemporary lives are built around what is convenient for us, ‘convenience’ - as a driver of innovation and development within human societies - has not been a subject of much anthropological analysis. The focus has rather been on ways in which different societies view and seek greater efficiency/efficacy, ease, necessity/need, expedience, comparative advantage, and adaptability in their relationships with the socio-material and political-economic surroundings. ‘Convenience’ is common to all of these factors and thus begs the question of its role in the story of human evolution. In this scenario, innovations and ‘progress,’ and their consequences are outcomes of humans trying to increase the level of convenience in their duties, tasks and routines in both small incremental innovations and modifications, as well as large inventive leaps driven by desire for a short cut, a quick fix, an easy solution, a.k.a. what is convenient.

Along this line of thought, we propose further unpacking the role played by convenience in past and present social economies. What is the relationship between convenience and necessity, efficiency, expedience, comparative advantage, and adaptability? How do people in small scale societies understand and operationalize convenience? Can we identify and differentiate the role of convenience in past technological developments? What is the impact of convenience in past and contemporary consumption patterns? How do producers and manufacturers understand and incorporate convenience into their products?

The discussions would also focus on the intended and unintended effects of convenience as a multi-faceted complex phenomenon. Seemingly benign, it is possible that the unfolding and numerous unintended consequences of the drive for convenience become sinister or even malevolent. For example, as pointed out by Foucault, the medicalization of the body within modern nation states, with documentation, archiving, and controlled sharing of individual medical histories, is simultaneously a) a convenient efficient means for delivery of good medical and public health, and b) an emergently convenient and efficient means by which the state and institutions exercise power over the body-politic. The evolution of the
smart phone is another example. Starting from its initial function of wireless communication, cell phones have added many applications to their platform, for texting, email, and games, followed by web-browsing, etc., until it has become a necessity across the world. In the process, increasing research worries about the ‘dumbing down of smart phone-users,’ impacts on social structure, individual psycho-social and physical health, and cognitive functions. Other researchers worry about the impact of demand of the convenience of the world at your finger-tips on environmental and human landscapes: extraction of cobalt and coltan, the use of plastics, the disposal of toxic waste within areas occupied by vulnerable groups. Convenience can hence be a very powerful force for social, economic, political, and ideological amalgamation, aggregation, and centralization, or for division, segregation, and dispersal.

As such then, convenience covers a multitude of human behaviors, developments, and transgressions, that would be ideal for discussion at the SEA. We welcome empirically-grounded papers and posters on topics that explore but are not limited to the following questions:

- Convenience as a behavioral complex, positive and negative impacts of the role of convenience in decision making at individual and group levels.
- Non-moral aspects of convenience, going beyond moral arguments against convenience; role of convenience in different socio-economic and political systems: capitalism, communism, socialism, authoritarianism?
- How what is convenience for the wealthy/elites, mainstream/dominant groups might be inconvenience for the poor/non-elite/minority groups, and vice versa, and how power dynamics influence the outcomes of these tensions
- Analysis of outcomes of convenience on particular societies, past and present. This may include impacts of convenience-driven decision making in archaic, administered, and market economies; in non or pre-state societies, including foraging and pastoral groups (how does convenience drive agreements and/or conflict over sharing foraging or pastoral or agricultural commons – land, water, flora, fauna, minerals).

Different papers could explore the role of convenience in:

- The emergence and reinforcement of division of labor and specialization,
- The growth of exchange, trade, and the middleperson/broker, and the ‘convenience’ fee.
- Determining various forms of producer, labor, consumer, and trader pricing and surplus formation.
- Pathways for transhumance, migration, asylum and refugee seeking
- Fast food vs the rise of slow food (food studies, nutrition, public health)
- Fordist modes of production and the American production-sales-consumption paradigm of the early 20th century where convenience is the product and efficiency is the pitch. (Industrial studies, consumption, STS).
• Health and medical choices by all stakeholders, where pills and surgical procedures are often seen as a more convenient solutions to health issues than lifestyle changes, even though they may be less efficient or efficacious in the long term, e.g. the preponderance of bypass surgery in the US, the growing rate of medically unnecessary C-sections across the world, etc. (Biological and Medical Anthropology).

• Ideas driving political and economic development, e.g. drive towards self-reliance as a convenient way for decision makers to shift the responsibility of development/progress onto the shoulders of the vulnerable or the marginalized

• The consumption of one-time use products or environmentally/socially harmfully products (plastic, coltan, cobalt, strip mining products, fracking products) and the impacts of convenience driving the difficulty in changing consumption patterns (Environmental, labor, ecological anthropology)

• The impact of convenience on building tourism infrastructure and its impacts on local and regional socio-economic and environmental systems

• The convenience of location, costs, and other factors in the emergence of global supply chains and distribution networks

• Convenience as a driving factor in settlement choice, intra-site distribution of resources and services (archaeology, economic and social geography)

• The convenience of low rent informal settlements (slums) and their costly vulnerability to socio-ecological disasters and catastrophes.

• Convenience intersecting with different forms of capital in the formation and reinforcement of inequality

• Convenience driving the interplay of science, technology, and values

**Poster presentations:**
At the annual conference, the SEA always welcomes posters on any topic in economic anthropology. Students and scholars whose work may not fit the central theme of the meeting are encouraged to submit a poster. The special poster session during the meeting is inclusive and a major event of the SEA conference.

The SEA meetings provide a rare opportunity for a focused and coherent program of presentation, with time for critical discussion in a convivial intellectual setting. Papers are selected for a program that allows 20 minutes for presentation and 20 minutes for discussion in a single plenary session over two days; additional abstracts will be selected for the poster session. Each SEA annual meeting also produces a journal issue of Economic Anthropology dedicated to the conference theme. Submitting a paper for the plenary session represents a commitment that you wish to be considered for inclusion in this volume. We encourage archaeologists, cultural anthropologists, economists, sociologists, and scholars to submit abstracts.

*Please note the submission deadline of Wednesday, January 15, 2019 (5 pm Eastern Time).*
Please send your:

a) paper/poster details; and

b) proof of SEA conference registration (pdf of confirmation/receipt) by email to Rahul Oka: rahul.c.oka.1@gmail.com by January 15, 2020.

The submission details should include: Title; Author name/s, affiliation/s and contact information; and abstract/precis of up to 500 words that includes information on research data/methodology. Please indicate your preference for oral or poster presentation. Papers delivered at the plenary sessions should be on the conference theme. Posters can be on any topic within economic anthropology. Also please indicate on the abstract document whether, if your submission is not selected for oral paper presentation, you would be willing to do a poster. The deadline for paper/poster abstract submission is 5.00 pm, EST, January 15th, 2020. You will be notified by January 31st on the final decision regarding your submission.

The SEA has a limited amount of travel funding to support students and un/underemployed PhDs. Please indicate if you would like to be considered for one of these awards, evaluated based on the strength of the submitted abstract, by including "CONSIDER FOR TRAVEL AWARD" at the end of your abstract.

Some recent popular works in the economics of convenience:

The Convenience Economy. CUNA Mutual Group: 
https://www.cunamutual.com/resource-library/convenience-economy


What Marketers can Learn from the Economy of Convenience, by Justin Gray, 2016.  