



Catherine Middleton: Mobile Media Technology

Catherine Middleton

Interviewer: Christina Haralanova

Wi: Journal of Mobile Media 2014 8:01

The online version of this article can be found at:

<https://doi.org/10.65968/PGUG1612>

Middleton, Catherine and Christina Haralanova. "Catherine Middleton: Mobile Media Technology". *Wi: Journal of Mobile Media*. 8.01 (2014). Web. <https://doi.org/10.65968/PGUG1612>

Mobile Media Technology

Catherine Middleton

Interviewer: Christina Haralanova

Dr. Catherine Middleton holds a Canada Research Chair in Communication Technologies in the Information Society at the Ted Rogers School of Management, Ryerson University. Her research focuses on the development and use of new communication technologies, with specific interests in mobile devices and fixed and wireless broadband networks. She is also interested in how Canadians use (or don't use) the Internet in their daily lives. Her research projects have investigated the use of smartphones in organizations, the development of next generation broadband networks, competition in the Canadian broadband market, and Canadians' Internet use. She was the Principal Investigator for the Community Wireless Infrastructure Research Project and is the Co-Investigator on the Canadian Spectrum Policy Research Project. She leads the Citizenship theme in the Graphics, Animation and New Media Networks of Centres of Excellence project, and is the Vice-Chair of the Board of Directors of CANARIE, Canada's Advanced Research and Education Network.

What does mobilities mean to you?

Mobilities is a term that I don't really use, I am interested in mobile technology. My research looks at how mobile technology enables the mobilities that other people are looking at. So if we think about mobilities as the way people move around, move around cities, move from place to place in their life, every where we go now we take mobile communication technologies with us. And what I'm interested in is the ways that those communication technologies support, enable and in some ways, constrain what we want to do. Although we're looking at moving from place to place, often when we get somewhere, we want to be somewhere else. So our mobile devices allow us, through mobility, to reach out to other places. Although the devices are mobile and we take them with us, we often use them when we are stopped. We use them when we get somewhere.

For example, we are at a conference today and there are lots of people here at the conference on Twitter. So they are physically here, but they are using their mobile devices and mobile networks to reach outside, to make this connection beyond the space that we are at. What I am interested in is the devices and the networks that enable this connectivity. Because mobilities enable us to move around, we want to be able to connect to other places. Years ago when you tended to stay in one place, it wasn't so important that you had a mobile phone because people could call you on your landline. Now, we don't know where you're going to be, so if I want to reach you, if I know you have a mobile phone then I can get to you. So the question becomes, how do we ensure that we actually have good infrastructure, good devices, that allow us to do what we want, while we're on the move.

When did you first become involved with mobilities research?

I've been looking at it for a long time. I started close to ten years ago, when I was doing a project on broadband, interested in big fat pipes to get data from A to B. At the time, we really believed that we needed high capacity, yet, simultaneously, BlackBerries were really, really, popular. They were starting to become the device that everybody in middle and senior management had. So, people who were traveling for business and so on had these devices. I didn't set out to study mobility. What I was curious about was the discourse that said we need really high capacity, high quality devices, and that we need the bandwidth that we get with fixed broadband networks while at the same time you had people using devices that provided almost no bandwidth, offered very, very little connectivity using narrow pipes, yet were hugely valuable. So, I started to look and

ask questions as to how people use their mobile devices and that got me into thinking about the ways that networks make it possible to do things and sometimes make it difficult to do things as well.

How do you use mobilities in your research?

I am interested in understanding how we create mobile environments that allow us to move around, and how we develop the technology that supports that. As I said, what I'm really looking at is, what networks are out there and what kind of devices do we use.

When I say, "how do we create these environments," as users, we sometimes forget that we have choices and that we have agency in what we do. Many of us are unhappy with our cell phone pricing, or we're unhappy with the coverage with the service that we have, but typically we say that we can't do much about it. We keep paying the bills, because this is really, really important, essential technology. But, the way that the market works, it is influenced by policies at a federal level, at a provincial level in Canada, and it's influenced by choices that companies make. I think it's important, as researchers and as users of this technology, that we try to engage in a dialogue with the people who provide these services to us and explain that these services aren't always meeting our needs. While clearly companies that sell us mobile devices and the network services are out to make a profit, and that's a perfectly legitimate thing to do, that's what they are supposed to do and they're good at it, there are points where you say could this market work in a way that was better for consumers. Can we find, perhaps more of an equilibrium? If you look at other countries, some of the ways that services are delivered end up being cheaper for end users. Can we look at what's being done elsewhere? Can we

think about how services are delivered and find ways that might include an environment that is still profitable but allows people more choice, more flexibility, and doesn't constrain use? If you think about prices of some services in Canada, some people don't use services because they're too expensive. So, can we find a place that may be better for companies overall, a way to encourage more people to use the services, maybe at a lower price but with a broader user base, for example? Those are the types of questions I'm interested in.