



Universiteit Utrecht

**MA program New Media & Digital Culture**

# **Urban Mobile Media**

## **The myth and messiness of connectivity**



**Block 2, 2021-2022**



## 1. Course information

Course code and title: MCMV17005 *Urban Mobile Media: the myth and messiness of connectivity*

Instructor: Dr. Michiel de Lange [m.l.delange@uu.nl](mailto:m.l.delange@uu.nl)

Office hours: Any general questions about the course can best be asked via MS Teams. Otherwise, get in touch via e-mail: [m.l.delange@uu.nl](mailto:m.l.delange@uu.nl).

Class schedule: see <https://cursusplanner.uu.nl/course/MCMV17005/2021/2>

MS Teams link and self-enrollment code: <https://bit.ly/30bEgKb>, t9ll3pv.

## 2. Content & learning objectives

In a relatively short timespan our communication patterns and computing habits have been 'mobilized'. Mobile and social media have rapidly become part and parcel of urban life. They shape how we live, work, travel, spend leisure time, and meet. This has profound consequences for our sense of place, social relationships, and our sense of self. Moreover, mobile/social media technologies today are part of the infrastructures, practices, and institutional arrangements on which urban life itself is based. So-called "smart cities" experiment with digital media, like sensors, data, the internet of things and social media dashboards, to help improve urban life. In this course we focus on this amalgamation of telecommunications devices, portable computational devices, and smart and connected objects in urban settings. We investigate how the social is mobilized, and at the same time how mobile media are tied to urban places, situations and developments.

The aim of the course is to enhance your theoretical understanding of key issues in the developing field of urban new media; identify dominant approaches in this field (academic, but also policy, industry and civic initiatives); develop an original research approach for your individual assignment and matching methodology; present your results in written and oral form according to academic standards; and acquire insight into the job market through for instance a guest lecture or event visit.

You will develop an in-depth understanding of the ways mobile/social media technologies shape urban life. You shall become familiar with main themes, concepts and approaches in the multidisciplinary field of urban new media research, and with adjacent fields of research. Furthermore, you will learn to report on research results in both oral and written form, to position yourself academically and develop an original approach to question, analyze and reflect on mobile/social media in relation to city life.

## 3. Course proceedings

The course is based around intensive weekly class meetings, and self study. The course approaches mobile/social media as situated technologies, and explores their connection to urban life. This happens through weekly themes:

Week 1. Mobile media as urban technologies: field & key concepts

Week 2. Past

Week 3. Places

Week 4. Interfaces

Week 5. Data

Week 6. Relations

Week 7. Cultures

In the 1<sup>st</sup> class session in week 1, we will get to know each other, discuss course proceedings and expectations, have an interactive lecture, and – time permitting – do an initial short brainstorm about possible topics for your final paper.

From week 2 onwards, classes are typically structured as follows:

**1<sup>st</sup> hour** - The week teams lead a 30 minute session (presentation + moderated discussion). This is followed by group feedback (ca. 10-15 mins).

**2<sup>nd</sup> hour** – In previous years this hour was for lectures. This year (2021-2022) we will watch the lectures in advance, since they have been pre-recorded last year and the content will not change drastically. This frees up an additional hour to discuss the connections between weekly literature, the lecture, your propositions, and current events or news in the field of urban mobile media. I hope this will be a useful change to develop ideas for your final paper, and to train you to forge connections between concrete cases and academic theorizing (=object+theme nexus central to academic research).

**3<sup>rd</sup> hour** - Seminar sessions. We shall use this time to work on your final paper (individually, in teams, and plenary).

*Expected from you during class*

- Active participation and an inquiring attitude
- Equal contributions to the team assignment
- Contributions to overall group dynamics in a collaborative spirit

*Expected from you outside of class hours*

- Reading of weekly literature
- Watching the pre-recorded lectures in advance.
- Individual writing of weekly and final assignments
- Finding additional literature as part of team assignment
- Convene with your team at least once outside of class to prepare team work

### **3.1 Assignments**

All assignments must contain your name, student number, title, full references. Only the final paper can be posted as a pdf file.

#### **Assignment 1) Individual work - 70% of total grade**

The individual work consists of two parts:

##### **1a. Weekly propositions**

Six out of seven weeks students hand in two propositions (max. 200 words in total, ex. references; so 12 propositions in total; copy-paste them in MS Teams Class Notebook (under "Collaboration Space > Weekly Propositions >wk x"). The propositions must be grounded in the compulsory literature. Propositions are not questions but arguments that spur the discussion. During class you should be ready to present and initiate discussions based on your propositions so have them available at hand.

##### **Tips for propositions:**

Depart from your own research interests and use them to develop ideas for the final paper:

- 1) Analyze and relate the texts to one another, tease out striking parallels or

differences.

2) Critically reflect on the argument(s), method(s) and conclusion(s) of the assigned literature. Try to expose hidden assumptions, methodological biases, flawed analysis or conclusions. Indicate where it needs additional evidence.

3) Provide alternatives or possible solutions to these shortcomings, e.g. by referring to other relevant research, your own observations, cases, literature, authors, theoretical schools.

In short, show that you know how to academically *analyze, criticize* and *create*.

These propositions are a course prerequisite and not graded separately. However, quality and being on time (i.e. demonstrating the ability to efficiently plan your work and adhere to a given deadline) is incorporated into the grade of Assignment 1 ( $\pm$  one point).

Deadlines: each week at least 24 hours before class in your personal portfolio (Class Notebook). The week teams need your input for their discussion part!

Exception1: in week 1, the assignment can be handed in on Friday after class, 17:00.

Exception2: in the week of your team presentation you do not have to post a written assignment.

### **1b. Final paper with a Walkthrough of a mobile app (2500 words)**

In a short academic paper of 2500 words ( $\pm 10\%$ ) you do a walkthrough analysis of a mobile app of choice. This walkthrough should be based on the methodological article we're reading in week 1 (and week 5). We cumulatively work on the paper during class. **Deadline** Wed 26 Jan. 2022 17:00, via MS Teams > assignments.

### **Assignment 2) Team work - 30% of total grade**

In the first week six teams are formed of about 3-4 students. Team tasks:

**2a.** Student teams contribute **a relevant curated text** relevant for the weekly theme. This text should be read by everyone before class. Student teams share the text via Teams on Monday morning 10:00 at the latest + a short 'curatorial statement' of ca. 100 words why you feel that this is important material. The text can be academic, or an industry or policy report, a recent commentary, or otherwise, as long as it is relevant to the weekly theme and overall course. Incorporate this text into the presentation!

**2b.** Each team leads one week with a **presentation + discussion** at the beginning of class. This takes ca. 30 minutes in total (15 mins for each). During the presentations, teams critically discuss course literature and relate it to their own original observations of mobile media use in everyday (urban) life. In the ensuing group discussion, the student team select and moderate from the proposition of their classmates two or three discussion points. This is followed by a short in-class group reflection.

#### *Hints*

Do not provide summaries. Everyone has read the texts. Contextualize texts, place them within relevant theoretical and historical fields. Zoom in on similarities and differences. Scrutinize arguments. Connect texts to everyday life by bringing in

concrete cases, observations, even interviews. Explore correspondence and divergence between theory and practice. Use audiovisual material and pedagogical tools as necessary.

### 3.2 Assessment and feedback

Students are graded on their ability to 1) develop specialized knowledge of and insight into mobile/social media studies, 2) independently identify, analyze, and criticize relevant research problems that relate to current debates in both media theory and media practice, and 3) present their findings to an audience composed of specialists as well as non-specialists in written and oral forms of academic expression.

### 3.3 Course conditions

The course is successfully completed if students meet all of these conditions:

- Students have handed in on time all required weekly assignments. Students who miss more than one assignment on time cannot complete the course.
- Students have participated in the team assignment, with a minimum 5.5 grade.
- Students have handed in their final paper on time, and a minimum grade of 5.5. Students have the right to repair a 4 or higher within 2 weeks after receiving the grade. Only the final paper can be repaired.
- Students have attended all class meetings. If students miss class they notify the instructor in advance and compensate with an extra assignment. Students absent more than once cannot complete the course unless with a specific reason.

## 4. Course schedule

### 4.1 Calendar

Week 1	16 Nov	1. Introduction course & key notions
Week 2	23 Nov	2. Past
	<b>30 Nov</b>	<b>No class!</b>
Week 3	7 Dec	3. Places
Week 4	14 Dec	4. Interfaces
	<b>20 Dec – 9 Jan</b>	<b>Holiday break</b>
Week 5	11 Jan	5. Data
Week 6	18 Jan	6. Relations
Week 7	25 Jan	7. Cultures
	<i>24-28 Jan tba</i>	Non-mandatory individual meetings for the final paper
		<b>Deadline final paper: Friday 4 Feb 2022 17:00</b>

## 4.2 Weekly literature

### Week 1. Introducing 'mobile urban media'

This week provides an initial foray into the key notions of this course: urban mobile media. We see how mobile technologies evolve from being mostly point-to-point communications devices to increasingly often mobile computational devices that connect object-place-person. Through short readings we get acquainted with basic notions and the scope of the field.

Jensen, Klaus Bruhn. 2013. What's mobile in mobile communication? *Mobile Media & Communication* 1 (1): 26-31. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2050157912459493>

Light, Ben, Jean Burgess, and Stefanie Duguay. 2018. "The walkthrough method: An approach to the study of apps." *New Media & Society* no. 20 (3):881-900. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444816675438>

McQuire, Scott. 2016. *Geomedia: Networked cities and the future of public space*. Cambridge, UK: Polity. <http://proxy.library.uu.nl/login?url=http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/uunl/detail.action?docID=4675591> Introduction "From media to geomedia", p. 10-20.

### Week 2. Past

This week provides a historical/archeological overview of communications technologies as the object of (academic) study. We focus on some thematic lineages and recurring discussions.

Alper, Meryl. 2019. "Portables, luggables, and transportables: Historicizing the imagined affordances of mobile computing." *Mobile Media & Communication* 7 (3):322-340. <https://utrechtuniversity-on-worldcat-org.proxy.library.uu.nl/oclc/7955109809>

Weiser, Mark. 1991. "The Computer for the Twenty-First Century." *Scientific American*: 94-100. <https://www.lri.fr/~mbl/Stanford/CS477/papers/Weiser-SciAm.pdf>

Wigley, Mark. 2001. Network fever. *Grey Room* -: 82-122. <http://cast.b-ap.net/arc590s14/wp-content/uploads/sites/28/2014/01/wigley.pdf>

### Week 3. Places

The study of mobile technologies as pervasive and ubiquitous media has been key in challenging the "anytime, anyplace" paradigm in media studies, arguing for the importance of space, place, location and context. We see how digital media are understood as situated media.

Schwartz, Raz, and Germaine R Haleboua. 2015. The spatial self: Location-based identity performance on social media. *New Media & Society* 17(10): 1643-1660. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444814531364>

Wilken, Rowan, and Lee Humphreys. 2021. "Placemaking through Mobile Social Media Platform Snapchat." *Convergence* 27(3): 579–593. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1354856521989518>

Xie, Zhuoxiao. 2021. "Mobile Communicating Place and Place-Inscribed Communicative Mobilities: Shaping Alternative Consumer Cultures in Mobile Media Communication." *Mobile Media & Communication* 9(1): 51–77. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2050157920927451>

#### **Week 4. Interfaces**

In this week we investigate a variety of ways in which mobile/social media interface with urban life. In today's cities our everyday lives are shaped by digital media technologies such as smart cards, surveillance cameras, quasi-intelligent systems, smartphones, social media, location-based services, wireless networks, and so on. These technologies are inextricably bound up with the city's material form, social patterns, and mental experiences.

Mattern, Shannon. 2021. *A city is not a computer: other urban intelligences*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. Ch1 "City Console" (18-50) [pending library access, the text is made available on MS Teams, under tab Files > Class Materials)

Richardson, Ingrid, and Rowan Wilken. 2013. "Parerga of the third screen: Mobile media, place, presence." In *Mobile Technology and Place*, edited by Rowan Wilken and Gerard Goggin, 181-197. Hoboken: Taylor and Francis. <http://uunl.ebib.com/patron/FullRecord.aspx?p=1181063>

Stehle, Samuel, and Rob Kitchin. 2020. "Real-time and archival data visualisation techniques in city dashboards." *International Journal of Geographical Information Science* 34 (2):344-366. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13658816.2019.1594823>

#### **Week 5. Data**

Up to this point the predominant focus has been on digital urban technologies as objects of study. This week we see how urban media can be used as tools for research, and what new questions may arise from that. In other words, in this week we shift from ontology and phenomenology to epistemology (how do we understand the world through our digital mobile devices? what new forms of knowledge and knowing are possible?).

Lupton, Deborah. 2020. "Data mattering and self-tracking: what can personal data do?" *Continuum* 34 (1):1-13. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10304312.2019.1691149>

Powell, Alison B. 2021. *Undoing optimization: civic action in smart cities*. New Haven: Yale University Press. Ch. 2 "Data Cities and Visions of Optimization"

(54-79) <https://utrechtuniversity.on.worldcat.org/v2/oclc/1245464595>

Tavmen, Güneş. 2020. "Data/Infrastructure in the Smart City: Understanding the Infrastructural Power of Citymapper App through Technicity of Data." *Big Data & Society* 7(2). <https://doi.org/10.1177/2053951720965618>

## Week 6. Relations

This week we look at how mobile media shape relations with other people and the self. Students gain a deeper understanding of how social relations and identity are shaped by mobile media.

Ferris, Lindsay, and Stefanie Duguay. 2020. "Tinder's lesbian digital imaginary: Investigating (im)permeable boundaries of sexual identity on a popular dating app." *New Media & Society* 22 (3):489-506. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444819864903>

Jablonsky, Rebecca. 2021. "Meditation Apps and the Promise of Attention by Design." *Science, Technology, & Human Values*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/01622439211049276>

Madureira, Miriam. 2018. "Me, Myself and I: Self-fetishisation in the Age of the Selfie." *Open Cultural Studies* 2 (1):363. <https://doi.org/10.1515/culture-2018-0033>

## Week 7. Culture

Finally, we look at cultural specificities of mobile media practices in urban contexts. To what extent are mobile media absorbed into existing cultural practices, or creating new practices? What similarities and differences can we discern? What tensions, conflicts and clashes arise from the rapid spread of mobile media? Can we speak of mobile media in universal singular terms or should we take into account divergent paths and development histories? How are cultural patterns and desires "mobilized" on a global scale?

Miller, Daniel, Shireen Walton, Xinyuan Wang, Laila Abed Rabho, Patrick Awondo, Maya de Vries, Marília Duque, Pauline Garvey, Laura Haapio-Kirk, Charlotte Hawkins, and Alfonso Otaegui. 2021. *The global smartphone: beyond a youth technology*. London: UCL Press. Ch4 "From apps to everyday life" (79-102) <https://doi.org/10.14324/111.9781787359611>

Nair, Vijayanka. 2021. "Becoming data: biometric IDs and the individual in 'Digital India'." *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 27 (S1):26-42. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9655.13478>

Sugiyama, Satomi. 2015. "*Kawaii meiru* and *Maroyaka neko*: Mobile emoji for relationship maintenance and aesthetic expressions among Japanese teens." *First Monday* no. 20 (10). <https://doi.org/10.5210/fm.v20i10.5826>



## **5. Course materials**

Please check the MS Teams environment for this course regularly for updates and announcements. Almost all compulsory readings can be found in the weekly outline above, and are accessible online. All assignments made by students must be posted on MS Teams.

## **6. Course evaluation**

We are very keen to receive your insights and feedback on what went well or you found meaningful, what perhaps went not so well, and how to potentially improve upon it. We may discuss this in the last week of the course, and you are also requested to fill out the online Caracal evaluation at <https://caracal.science.uu.nl>

## **7. Fraud & plagiarism (the fine print)**

Info: <https://students.uu.nl/en/practical-information/policies-and-procedures/fraud-and-plagiarism>