

ŁUKASZ ROGOWSKI

**MOBILITY AS A POTENTIALITY:
WAYS OF UNDERSTANDING MOBILITY
FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF NEW TECHNOLOGIES
AND THE PARADIGM OF MOBILITY**

Mobility as a concept, a process, and a social practice is gaining steadily increasing significance in the world of today. Too often, however, is the understanding of mobility simplified and boiled down solely to the practices of individual or collective movement. For this reason, the purpose of this article is to point out that mobility is social in character, and as such is socially constructed, as will be described on two levels. The first of these is reflection over the manner in which mobility, and particular mobile technologies, are contributing to changes in how social phenomena and concepts are understood. The second objective is to describe social ways of understanding the concept of ‘mobility’ in regard to new technologies, and to indicate that it is treated not only as a practice, but more as a potentiality—an attribute characterising measures taken by diverse actors in society. However, in order for this to be possible, it is essential to refer to the fundamental attributes of the mobilities paradigm as a theoretical perspective of the phenomena under investigation.

**I. THE MOBILITIES PARADIGM
AS A THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE OF
THE DESCRIPTION OF CONTEMPORARY
SOCIAL INTERACTION**

Sociology (and more broadly, the social sciences and social research) as understood traditionally is perceived as static.¹ On the one hand this means adopting a specific epistemological perspective, in which the motionless researcher strives to learn about the motionless object of their interest; on the other, it shows an underestimation of the significance and role of various types of form of mobility and movement as marginal phenomena and rather as interludes between activities providing greater research interest.

¹ Ł. Rogowski, *Wideozwiadanie. Badania miasta w perspektywie paradygmatu mobilności, Kultura i Społeczeństwo* 3(91), 2016: 85.

A response to such a stance is the *new mobilities paradigm*.² Defining it with the term paradigm suggests that it is not only a trend of interests in new social and cultural phenomena, but a more comprehensive theoretical and methodological proposal. The task it sets itself is to investigate 'movement, blocked movement, potential movement and immobility, dwelling and place-making'.³ However, this goal is based on more general assumptions: mobility is treated here not only as specific activity, but also as the arrangement of actors and events that constitute economic, political and social relations.⁴ This means that entirely new social phenomena may arise within the areas investigated, unnoticeable when taking a static viewpoint of social reality. The methodology of mobile research, which has developed and applies research techniques tailored to the paradigm in question, plays its part in this. This also allows for the distinguishing of new dimensions of social phenomena understood and investigated traditionally, for example when mobility is treated as an unevenly distributed resource,⁵ and as such a new aspect of social inequality. In this understanding, the mobilities paradigm approaches the perspective proposed by the theory of social networks while also coming close to social network analysis. However, it pays greater attention to the flows of actors and goods than to the nodes between which these flows take place. What is common to both of these perspectives is the conviction that spatial proximity is by no means the most important element determining the formation and course of social relations.⁶

This does not mean, of course, that the significance of space is negated in mobile processes. They are always located and materialised.⁷ As such they remain in a relationship with the physical aspects of the space in which they are realised, which determines both the course and the diversity of the forms of mobility. It is not only a matter of walking or driving, but also for example climbing, and analyses of means of transport or the infrastructure organising the movement. In broadening the scope of how mobility is understood, Monika Büscher, John Urry and Katian Witchger indicate five types: corporeal travel (related to people), physical movement (objects), imaginative travel (based on conversation or imagery), virtual travel (applying technological mediation, for example in computer games) and communicative travel (connected to the exchange of information between people, for example via letters, postcards, or texting).⁸ As thus depicted, mobility applies not only to people, but also to objects, pictures, information or waste.⁹ The mobilities paradigm is therefore

² M. Scheller, J. Urry, The new mobilities paradigm, *Environment and Planning* 38, 2006.

³ M. Büscher, J. Urry, K. Witchger, *Introduction. Mobile methods*, in: eidem, K. Witchger, *Mobile Methods*, New York 2011: 2.

⁴ Ibidem: 4.

⁵ J. Frith, Splintered space: hybrid spaces and differential mobility, *Mobilities* 7(1), 2012: 134.

⁶ Y. Takhteyev, A. Gruzdz, B. Wellman, Geography of Twitter networks, *Social Networks* 34, 2012: 73.

⁷ M. Scheller, J. Urry, op. cit.: 210.

⁸ M. Büscher, J. Urry, K. Witchger, op. cit.: 5.

⁹ J. Urry, *Socjologia mobilności*, trans. J. Stawiński, Warsaw 2009: 11.

comprehensive in character insofar as it expands the set of actors in society that is investigated by the social sciences.

II. MOBILITY AND MOBILE TECHNOLOGIES AS AN ELEMENT SHAPING SOCIAL MEANINGS

A conviction lying at the fundamental assumptions of the mobilities paradigm is that a dependence exists between the new forms of coordinating people, places and events on the one hand, and technological development on the other.¹⁰ This is obviously about all of those situations in which technology contributes to the course of processes of movement, which is linked to new vehicles, the new infrastructure used by them, and to new ways of coordinating the transport of people and goods. However, more importantly from the point of view of this article, it also means the changes in how social phenomena are understood, depending on transformations in mobility and mobile technologies. One could follow here in the footsteps of Neil Postman, who claims that technologies are changing the ways in which concepts are understood.¹¹ And therefore also in regard to new forms of mobility of information, knowledge, meanings and images mediated by technology. This is why it is worth indicating the three most important areas seen in literature and describing the relations between technology, mobility, and social meanings.

For a start, the transformations in mobility are altering the ways in which space is understood.¹² The starting point here is the ability to communicate independently of physical connections and cables. This is undoubtedly revolutionary, since such long-distance sending of information has not only streamlined processes of communication, but has also contributed to change in people's awareness. It is no longer physical proximity that is the basic condition for connectedness and communication, but the quality of the technological connections. In this manner as well social bonds have—alongside geographical-spatial determinants—turned towards technological determinants. These phenomena, although already present at the developmental stage of new media and the Internet, achieved their culmination together with the development of mobile technologies, described with good reason by Lee Raine and Barry Wellman as the 'mobile revolution'.¹³ They draw attention to three issues crucial from the point of view of modification of the perception and meaning of space coupled with the development of mobile technologies. Firstly, the location of a specific individual becomes the point of reference for other locations. 'Here' is

¹⁰ M. Scheller, J. Urry, op. cit.: 1.

¹¹ N. Postman, *Technopol. Triumf techniki nad kulturą* [*Technopoly: The Surrender of Culture to Technology*], trans. A. Tanalska-Duleba, Warsaw 1995: 20–21.

¹² D. Hemment, The mobile effect, *Convergence* 11(2), 2005.

¹³ L. Raine, B. Wellman, *Networked. The New Social Operating System*, Cambridge–London 2012, loc. 2255–2971 (book in mobile format).

synonymous with the place I happen to be in together with my smartphone. Secondly, movement in space with the smartphone results in a certain level of disregard for what is happening in the immediate physical environment. Mobile technologies are thereby intensifying the so-called Walkman effect,¹⁴ where one focuses not on stimuli originating from the immediate physical-spatial environment, but on the sensations delivered via technology. As such, mobile technologies are causing isolation from space and ‘being-somewhere-else’ rather than immersion within the space. Thirdly, thanks to mobile technologies, space is beginning to comprise so-called *soft locations*. This means that via constant connectedness independent of physical limitations, it is becoming possible to instantly coordinate locations, particularly when two (or more) people are arranging to meet. Space thereby does not necessarily have to be defined and located specifically, but is negotiated in real time and can undergo micro-coordination.¹⁵

One can speak of *soft time*¹⁶ in a similar manner; and it is precisely time that is the second element undergoing change in meaning together with the changes in mobility and the dissemination of mobile technologies. Soft time is negotiable time, providing greater leeway for being late (since it is easier to inform others) or for rescheduling. In such situations, when time and schedule are not set from above, but rather from below and negotiated as required, mobile technologies can even take the place of traditional wristwatches.¹⁷ Soft time is taking the place—also thanks to mobile technologies—of *dead time*.¹⁸ It is acquiring value and becoming productive—or at least gaining an impression of productiveness—at every place and during every activity. Even the most trivial and fleeting of actions, including travel on urban public transport (indicated the most often in this context), are filled with meaning thanks to the usage of mobile technologies. Such filling and ‘animation’ of time harmonises with the more general assumptions (mentioned above) of the mobilities paradigm. The restitution of the social significance of movement is also a result of meaningful time filling up such practices.

Thirdly, the new forms of mobility and mobile technology are contributing to change in ways of understanding identity and subjectivity, and how these concepts function. On the one hand this applies to the individual and micro-social level. Elements indicated here include such as: the way technological development is contributing to individualisation;¹⁹ greater potential for

¹⁴ S. Hosokawa, The Walkman effect, *Popular Music* 4, 1984.

¹⁵ R. Ling, J. Donner, *Komórka. Komunikacja mobilna [Mobile Communication]*, trans. T. Płudowski, Warsaw 2012: 45.

¹⁶ L. Raine, B. Wellmann, op. cit., loc. 2641–2650.

¹⁷ D.M. Sutko, A. de Souza e Silva, Location-aware mobile media and urban sociability, *New Media & Society* 13(5), 2010: 809.

¹⁸ J. Frith, Splintered space: hybrid spaces and differential mobility, *Mobilities* 7(1), 2012: 136.

¹⁹ M. Scheller, J. Urry, op. cit.: 221–222.

eliminating gender inequalities compared to fixed-line technologies;²⁰ and changes in ways of understanding intimate relations initiated and realised through the intermediation of mobile technologies.²¹ On the other hand, the issue in question refers to the macro-social level, taking particular account of political determinants as broadly understood. Attention was drawn to this aspect—in a broader context, and not only that of mobile technologies but also new digital technologies in general—by Manuel Castells, describing the Internet's contribution to the political changes in the Middle East.²² The added value of mobile technologies here applies mainly to the visibility given to events directly at their place of occurrence.²³ Virginia Nightingale²⁴ defines measures of this kind with the term *mobilism*—referring to that form of civil activism that makes use of mobile technologies for the public dissemination of political content and coverage of political events. Politics is obviously understood broadly here, that is not only as its institutional manifestations, but also as the activity of—for example—social or emancipatory movements. There is no doubt that *mobilism* is changing the understanding of politics, emphasising its grassroots and civil aspect.

One can see therefore that adopting the assumptions of the mobilities paradigm—of greater significance for movement and the development of mobile technologies—is contributing to changes in the social understanding of concepts and phenomena. One could even assert that, within the paradigm in question, certain theoretical assumptions regarding how the contemporary social world is described are being overturned. Anthony Giddens indicates the separation of time and space as one of the main features of late modernity.²⁵ In the meantime, in the mobilities paradigm, time and space not only remain constantly interconnected, since together they determine the ways of experiencing and understanding mobility, but their affiliation is even tighter. This perspective is described interestingly by Nikhilesh Dholakia, Ian Reyes and Jeniffer Bonoff.²⁶ In these authors' opinions, in the defining and understanding of mobility, of equal importance to space and place is the pace. This applies, among other things, to such aspects as the rules of entering into interpersonal relations, the

²⁰ Ch. Mörtberg, Heterogeneous images of (mobile) technologies and services: a feminist contribution, *NORA: Nordic Journal of Women Studies* 11(3), 2003.

²¹ G. Khunou, Making love possible: cell phones and intimate relationships, *African Identities* 10(2), 2012.

²² M. Castells, *Sieci oburzenia i nadziei [Networks of Outrage and Hope]*, trans. O. Siara, Warsaw 2013.

²³ L. Rhue, A. Sundararajan, Digital access, political networks and the diffusion of democracy, *Social Networks* 36, 2014: 43.

²⁴ V. Nightingale, The camera phone and online image sharing, *Continuum: Journal of Media and Culture* 21(2), 2007.

²⁵ A. Giddens, *Nowoczesność i tożsamość. Ja i społeczeństwo w epoce późnej nowoczesności [Modernity and Self-Identity. Self and Society in the Late Modern Age]*, trans. A. Szulżycka, Warsaw 2006: 23.

²⁶ N. Dholakia, I. Reyes, J. Bonoff, Mobile media: from legato to staccato, isochronal consumptionscapes, *Consumption Markets & Culture* 18(1), 2015. Although the authors refer mainly to music media, their proposals may be extended over other forms of media.

possibilities of recording information, the degree of centralisation, or the capacity for the personalisation of devices, and so on. The different paces of technology and mobility described—*legato*, *staccato* and isochronous pace—are therefore based on the observation that the manner of using technology is connected to the sensing of the pace that it offers, manifested in relations in time and space.

III. UNDERSTANDING MOBILITY IN THE LIGHT OF EMPIRICAL RESEARCH

Being limited to the practices of individual and collective movement is not the only simplification in mobility studies and analyses. Another is the lack of interest in how mobility is actually understood by those participating in the life of society. Researchers can, as a result, get drawn into a trap—particularly in the context of qualitative studies—when they unwittingly combine the different semantic fields attributed by respondents to mobility and mobile technologies.

Because of the above, I would like to expound upon the theoretical assumptions presented above and conclusions from desk research with data and analyses from my own research studies. I present below four main ways for understanding mobility, as related above all to new technologies. Such thematic scope does not, of course, exhaust the issue; however, it is based on the assumption mentioned earlier about the inseparable relation between mobility and new technologies. The description of how mobility is understood in relation to new technologies could therefore constitute an introduction to a broader grasp of the topic of social meanings of mobility. Simultaneously, it is already becoming possible today to notice the fact that mobility is perceived not only as an attribute of a device, infrastructure, or one's surroundings, but also as potential that depends on the actions taken by the actors.

I draw the data presented here from a research project on the possibilities and limitations in using mobile banking in Poland, conducted in 2014–2015 by the Institute of Sociology of the Adam Mickiewicz University, and financed as part of the Santander Universidades programme, in which Bank Zachodni WBK supports scientific research and higher education. The research applied ethnographic methodology, anticipating close collaboration with all 36 study participants. For around one month, each participant remained in contact with the research team, thereby enabling determination of not only declarations but also unconscious behaviour and habits related to using mobile technologies. The research process began with a brief preliminary conversation with the respondent, following which the respondent—for the next two weeks—filled in an everyday diary, describing the ways in which they were using mobile technologies. Every day the respondents were texted several short questionnaires, their purpose being to identify the way in which the respondent was using mobile technologies at that particular moment. In addition to these measures, the respondents had applications installed on their smartphones monitoring their usage of technology. All these procedures were aimed at facilitating and streamlining the in-depth interviews conducted to summarise the research process: on the one hand, by making respondents contemplate the

ways in which they were using their smartphones, and on the other—by providing additional materials (for example reports of data from a monitoring application) used during the said interviews.

The analyses presented below pertain to the in-depth interviews that were conducted. The said interviews covered four thematic blocks: technologies and mobile technologies; technology management; smartphone and mobile activities; and mobile banking. In this article I refer above all to the first of the above blocks. The interviews were transcribed and then analysed using the program MaxQda. Typological methodology was used in the analyses.²⁷

1. Portability

A key attribute—and the most important of a device defined as mobile—is, which is obvious and is suggested by common sense, the ability to carry it around; its portability. A mobile device could be said to ‘accompany’ its user [04_F43_DM_HU]²⁸ irrespective of the environment in which the user happens to be. Seen in this manner, mobility is independence from the situational context, the possibility of functioning in various situations; it means submitting to the will of the user. This emphasises the subjectivity, the empowerment of the user, that the user decides on what terms they will use the device.

One can point to two most important features contributing to a device’s mobility in the context of its portability. The first of these is the device’s size and weight:

Mobility makes me think of something light, something small, which... which simply won’t encumber me in some way or... well, I simply chuck it into my bag or my pocket, and it’s with me the whole time. That’s what it makes me think of. I think that a tablet, if we had one, then that too, I’d class it this way as well [35_F26_W_NU].

Size and weight are attributes that determine whether one can make unconstrained use of a device in terms of its handiness. This also takes into account the need for the device ‘not to be an encumbrance’—not drawing attention when not in use, in such situations becoming in some sense invisible, and as such undetectable to the body.

The respondents indicated circumstances which, in regard to size and weight, define a device’s mobility potential. The first of these is tiredness [02_M32_DM_HU]. A mobile device should not force one to make exceptional effort when carrying it around—both in regard to its shape and its weight. Thus the significance of handiness during the actual situation of carrying it around is

²⁷ By the consent of Bank Zachodni WBK, the articles draws here on fragments prepared by the author of an unpublished research report on mobile banking in Poland: K. Chajbos, B. Mateja-Jaworska, D. Mroczkowska, W. Rapior, Ł. Rogowski, A. Szymańska-Palaczyk, M. Zawodna-Stephan, *Możliwości i ograniczenia w korzystaniu z bankowości mobilnej w Polsce*.

²⁸ References to the respondents’ comments are marked as follows: no. of interview_sex and age of respondent_place of living (DM = big city, MM = small town, W = rural)_category of mobile app user (M = Male, F = Female, HU = hard user, LU = light user, NU = non user).

emphasised once again here. The second circumstance concerns the space taken up by the device:

Well for me it would be going too far, if we're talking about something that's mobile, that doesn't take up so much of my personal space to interfere with somebody sitting next to me; I used to spend a lot of time in trains, travelling, and those four seats in a compartment, and you know how much space there is when sitting there. If I were to open up a 21-inch laptop there, I'd be encroaching upon the space of the person next to me, who'd have the right to feel reasonably at ease there, so I think that this mobility there is also somewhat limiting [32_M32_MM_NU].

In other words mobility as an important attribute for the actual user cannot be something interfering or hindering in what others are doing. Considered from the point of view of a device's size and weight, the borders of mobility should therefore converge with the borders of the user's corporeality. This is particularly significant when we refer to mobility as using devices outside of our home space—and so in such a manner when we are unable to explicitly define the conditions of these actions. In this context, it is important to retain a certain 'minimalism of mobility'.

The second important feature—alongside size and weight—that affects a device's mobility in the context of its portability is the state of the battery:

[With a] mobile device, the most important issue is that it operate disconnected from a power source; if it has to be connected to mains power, then it is not mobile [23_M32_W_LU].

In this sense the potential of a device's mobility is, at least partially, dependent not on the user, but on the infrastructure ensuring access to power. Just as the age of a device can result in changes in the 'level of mobility'—the older the battery, the lower its capacity for recharging, and the shorter the time during which the device can operate without being connected to a source of power. In extreme situations, the battery's condition may mean that the device completely loses its mobility potential, despite fulfilling the criteria of size and weight described earlier:

When, for example, the battery fails, when every few minutes you have to recharge it, then it practically becomes a desktop computer because it has to be connected to a source of power the whole time [04_F43_DM_HU].

The two features described above—that is, the size and weight, and the condition of the battery—result in the emergence of users' own ways of maintaining mobility potential. The feature of size and weight is linked above all to the choice of place where a device is used:

I've found a comfortable place for sitting. I don't like using a laptop on my lap, and prefer at a desk or bench of some kind [35_F26_W_NU].

Size and weight also concerns the aspect of maintaining mobility, which may be defined as managing the arrangement of one's own body:

I always lie on my stomach and... And whenever I have to go out or something, I'd have to set it aside again then later pick it up again and set it aside, so for me it's a little bit... And I thought it

would be better there. Well, I always move when I want something. I know I won't tear out any cables, and I guess that's what it's mainly about [36_M19_W_NU].

This is connected to the fact that, depending on the place and space, the convenience of using mobile devices varies. Therefore we sometimes search for the best possible arrangement in the relation between device, space and body, with the assumption that matching all three of these aspects to one another contributes to the user's comfort.

As far as the battery is concerned, on the other hand, a way for maintaining mobility is to ensure access to power sources. This applies above all to the situation in which one of the criteria for assessing and organising time and the day's schedule becomes the matter of having appropriately charged batteries in mobile devices. Night, as a time of rest not only for people, but also for devices, becomes the natural and obvious period set aside for recharging batteries [03_M24_DM_HU]. Respondents also spoke of how hardware used in recharging (chargers, USB cables) are becoming a natural part of one's everyday equipment. What is important here, however, is that such hardware is referred to as being carried around rather than as being used—in particular in regard to tablets or smartphones (the batteries of which tend to be longer-lasting than those in portable computers). One can also get the impression that the matter of batteries, battery life, and access to a power source is linked more to one's mental comfort than a real need arising when smartphone batteries go flat.

2. Accessibility

The criterion of accessibility applies largely to attributes that characterise the digital media in general. This is above all about interactivity and changes made in real time, which set such media apart from the analogue (mass market) media, sometimes experiencing technological or institutional delays in the flow of information. Accessibility as a criterion of mobility may be understood in three ways. First of all, accessibility means connectedness with others:

You're reachable by phone the whole time, can be contacted the whole time. If, let's say, I were to need something and you'd be able to guide me, so that I'd find something, even in my PC, then at that moment as well. Perhaps I haven't worded it well, because I'm not talking only about Internet access, but it's simply the mobility—that I'm accessible the whole time. That's what it is. And a mobile device makes me accessible to others with whom I'm not necessarily in direct contact. [15_M22_DM_LU].

A mobile device is a device enabling constant contact; not only in the sense of the Internet, but also being connected to mobile networks enabling telephone calls, text messaging, and multimedia messaging. Steady contact at any time of the day or night is thereby ensured—whenever the user has at hand a mobile device that is turned on. In this sense it is worth emphasising that such a way of understanding mobility as accessibility applies to private persons rather than to businesses or institutions. In regard to the latter, contact—not without reason—is largely based on landline telephones, since their accessibility is determined by predetermined working hours and days.

Secondly, accessibility means spatial proximity:

Mobility is determined above all by being at hand right away, that I can send an e-mail now, can browse the Internet on any topic, when I need something quickly, e.g. a shop with the tools that I need as I've gone to fix some damage – I'm talking about my work, what I do [17_M32_MM_LU].

In this sense accessibility is, in other words, speed of action, being able to always take action on one's mobile device when such a need or necessity appears. This manner of accessibility could also be described as handiness. There is also here the demand of accessibility in the sense of connectedness.

The third way of understanding accessibility is topicality and universality:

You should have everything in one place. All the technologies it has should be possible in any single place [25_M37_DM_NU].

This means perceiving a mobile device as a conglomerate of various functions available via the possibility of installing applications. This is not only about communicational functions, but also about those that are connected to non-communication aspects of functioning on a daily basis (playing music, using a torch, etc.). In this sense the mobile device is becoming a kind of tool box, the functionality of which depends on the technological capabilities related to the creation of applications.

A way of maintaining mobility thus understood is to carry out updates [01_F22_DM_HU] – both in regard to software installed on a device, as well as the files stored in its memory. In this sense, updating would be connected, for example, to the periodic change of music files in one's smartphone. It could also involve the updating of contact details (for example telephone numbers) or the deletion of files no longer needed (such as failed photos).

At the same time it is worth drawing attention to the fact that the accessibility as described earlier, in the sense of constant communicative abilities, can generate a specific kind of tension in users—both in the positive and the negative sense. The state of 'being accessible' is simultaneously a state of being contact-oriented, of anticipating contact at any moment.²⁹ As such, this situation may generate actions of the opposite kind: not so much maintaining one's mobility as neutralising it, narrowing its scope. This covers all of those moments when the user deliberately turns off accessibility/contact: by turning off their smartphone or putting it into silent mode, by logging out of the network, or even by searching for locations where there is no mobile network coverage. Users thereby cut themselves off from contact with others that may, at a particular moment, be undesirable.

²⁹ B. Mateja-Jaworska, Ł. Rogowski, Zmęczenie w sieciach społecznych, *Kultura Współczesna* 3(91) 2016: 134–149.

3. Internet connection

The third way of understanding mobility is largely similar to the previous one, and also concerns accessibility and connecting to communications and IT networks. However, it is frequently mentioned as separate, and at the same time it also differs in terms of quality from that described previously, and as such is worth being treated as another, separate way of understanding mobility. It applies to those situations where the criterion of defining a particular device as mobile is its connectedness with the Internet:

A mobile device is the kind of device that must connect with the web—otherwise it's losing out in mobility, so on the one hand we have to expect that the signal's there, and on the other, that we're able to get to that signal [13_M53_DM_LU].

In this sense mobility would mean independence from fixed-line Internet infrastructure, which could be achieved in two ways. Firstly, making use of the capabilities of wireless networks, connecting to them in various places. However, this requires one either to have the data required for accessing these networks, or to rely on open networks that may provide less secure usage. Secondly, and more importantly, would be using Internet packages assigned to mobile devices, and above all to the SIM cards in smartphones.

At this point one could indicate the varied gradation of mobility thus understood, which may largely depend on the technological capabilities offered by the actual device:

Well just now I can say that I have two mobile devices, meaning definitely my telephone and a tablet, although the tablet less so, because for the tablet I need WiFi or Internet that I make available for example from my phone, while my telephone is really mobile the whole time. And that's the kind of tablet I have, it's not the kind that has constant Internet access. So it's necessary there... and basically if I have a computer, it's the same as when I have a laptop, maybe if I were to have WiFi and a phone, although it's more practical to take the tablet than the computer [21_F23_W_LU].

In none of the dimensions of the criterion described here is it about connectedness for the sake of the connectedness itself, but about the user—thanks to being connected to the Internet—being able to carry out actions as and when needed, and to use applications that require an Internet connection.

Managing the scope of the Internet connection is also a fundamental means of expanding mobility as thus understood. A wireless network at their place of residence is, for most respondents, something they take for granted. This also makes it possible to economise on the data contained on the SIM card in the Internet package:

I have WiFi at home, and when I don't have such access I try not to use it [19_F20_MM_LU].

Bearing in mind that some respondents claim their mobile devices are only connected to the Internet when they are within reach of wireless networks, one could also say that the device's mobility potential is changing in this way. The different ways of understanding mobility are in this sense applied as if

alternatives: accessibility and taking a device beyond one's home results in being cut off from the Internet due to moving beyond the coverage of known wireless networks; and vice versa, connecting to the Internet via WiFi reduces the significance of a device's portability. Importantly, users rarely mention mobile Internet, usually offered by mobile networks as the main way for accessing the Internet; fixed-line Internet still dominates here.

4. Comparison with analogue/ fixed-line

The last way in which respondents understand mobility does not—unlike in the ways given earlier—concern the indicating of specific attributes and functions linked to mobile devices. Instead, it is connected to their comparison with other ways of understanding technology: analogue or fixed-line ways. In other words, mobility is an attribute that does not have the features of fixed-line / analogue devices, or that has them but in a different concentration or different manner. Three detailed ways in which mobility may be thus understood can be identified. The first of them is that of differences in the method of writing and using:

Because in a computer I have a keyboard that's great to use. With a tablet it's the same, and despite there being such a large touch panel here, even when writing something a keyboard pops up, and mine's great—it's an Asus—in that it has an additional docking station with keyboard, an additional battery, so that's also great, and that helps with writing certain things, among others including answers to e-mails. As for the telephone, well if I answer an e-mail on my phone, then it's really just a very short message, that I'll write later and get in touch at another time [32_M32_MM_NU].

It is the form of the interface that matters above all here—the differences between the traditional keyboard and touchscreen typing. In this context as well one could indicate a scale of mobility: from laptop computers equipped with keyboards to smartphones and tablets handled fully via touch. Between them we have hybrid devices combining different forms of interface (for example a tablet with an attached keyboard with the traditional keys). A key aspect here is the fact that a touch-based interface hinders the precise usage of applications. It is intended for the quick entering of brief messages rather than carrying out precise actions. This also affects the types of game that are designed for mobile devices [03_M24_DM_HU], which tend to be of a kind not requiring precision. The touchscreen interface of mobile devices therefore narrows down the scope of the actions made, forcing certain actions to be carried out on devices of another type.

The second attribute connected to the distinction between mobility and analogue/fixed-line is, to a certain extent, the opposite of the first. Whereas there was mention above of difficulties in using the interfaces characteristic of mobile devices, this time it is about ease of handling and facilitating usage:

I really like reading books, but it's actually very convenient to read books in electronic form, because—for a start—if I want to buy a book I have it right away, and in addition then you practically have them available in promotions, for a few zlotys. Back at the very start, when you didn't have these books, I used to download pirate versions. I don't do that any longer because you

can get the originals, above all better done. As for going to a library, I used to be constantly paying fines as I was always late taking the books back; and now I no longer have that problem. Now, whatever I want, I download, buy, or just now there's an option that's appeared by which you can buy a subscription for an unlimited number of books [43_M43_HU_DM].

The differences between hindrances and convenience are linked to the scope of the users' activities. Difficulties appear when a user enters more intensive relations with a device, relations demanding accuracy. Facilitation on the other hand applies to those moments when the user's role is more passive—as in the case cited about reading e-books. A reader, as a mobile device, offers options unavailable with traditional books, including ease of purchase.

The third feature setting mobile devices apart from others is linked to the 'scope of aura-ness', or in other words, the overall way in which the form used for presenting content is perceived:

I'll never take a mobile or tablet to church, firstly because I'd feel weird, and secondly because I cannot imagine speaking from a book of prayers on the tablet or mobile phone at church... Obviously when you're on a bicycle or you stop at some place then it's useful, because you have the phone while prayer books are not always that slim, in general they're thick books, so it's not always a format for your pocket. Then the book form always ensures a kind of sacredness, something that relates to something, that derives from... you realise that it's from the distant past, and where it has that Church tradition and spirituality, which you don't have in a mobile [32_M32_MM_NU].

This is connected in general to the firm belief that there are situations and activities for which electronic media (including mobile) are not very suitable, while there are also those where traditional media (for example on paper) are more suitable. This is not a matter of functionality, but the more general character of the medium, related for example to respect for certain situations and activities. This is based on an assumption of the exceptionality of certain situations, the way in which they are excluded in a way from everydayness, as for example in the sacral activities referred to in the citation. In such cases, using mobile devices (and electronic devices in general) could be problematic both from the point of view of the user (thereby losing the sense of specialness in the activities being carried out), and for those around the user (among who such usage could evoke a negative emotional response).

IV. CONCLUSION

The ways of understanding mobility presented above apply mainly to new technologies. Such an approach is justified when the main emphasis in the article has already been placed beforehand on the technological determinants of mobility and their impact on social meanings. It would be an empirical challenge to verify the degree to which the ways of understanding mobility given here remain topical, including in its other forms and manifestations.

However, what I find most significant in the analyses here is not so much the detailed meanings attributed to mobility as rather the certain more general manner of treating it. After all, in each of the cases described—

portability, availability, connection with the Internet, and comparison with fixed-line—mobility is the resultant of the relations between technology and the device on the one hand, and the device's user on the other. Such a web of relations takes many more detailed dimensions into account, as referred to above. Mobility is therefore dependant, among other things, on the relations with the body, on the spatial context, on the presence of others, on the technological infrastructure, on one's network of contacts, and on the interface.

This is precisely why mobility should be understood in empirical research not as a constant feature, but as a potentiality. There are two ways in which this can function. Firstly, mobility as a potentiality is activated or blocked in selected situations, depending on the social and situational context, and the actions taken by the users. Secondly, mobility as a potentiality also functions as a state of awareness and the user's attitude towards technology and the context of its usage.

In this depiction, then the possibility of activating mobility when it is needed is of greater importance than the fact itself of its realisation and utilisation. When seen thus, mobility departs from the essentialistic assumptions frequently adopted, and heads in the direction of the 'anti-essentialism of mobility'. It is therefore treated not as an attribute of a device, but as an attribute of the social situation. In this sense, mobility as a potentiality also emphasises the empowerment of the users, while management of mobility may be treated as an aspect of post-modern social competences.

Lukasz Rogowski
Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznań
lukasz.rogowski@amu.edu.pl

MOBILITY AS A POTENTIALITY: WAYS OF UNDERSTANDING MOBILITY
FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF NEW TECHNOLOGIES
AND THE PARADIGM OF MOBILITY

S u m m a r y

The paper refers to the new mobilities paradigm as a perspective of describing contemporary social phenomena related to mobility and movement. It points to the interdependence between new forms of action taken by social actors and technological development. Three dimensions of the relationships between technology, mobility and social significance are described: the understanding of space, the understanding of time and identity of an individual and an agency. The most important assumption of the paper is that mobility is socially defined. Based on the results of a qualitative empirical research, several ways of social understanding of mobility are identified: portability, accessibility, internet connectivity, comparison with analogue/stationary systems. As a result, mobility has not been shown as a permanent social characteristic, but as a potentiality.