



Cultures of Mobility

An overlooked aspect of contemporary travel and mobility is how people become temporary members in new and existing communities. For Cultures of Mobility we were commissioned by France Telecom to help them develop new ways of thinking about and delivering mobile telecoms services to new markets. Our aim was to look beyond common stereotypes of mobility, such as commuters and frequent flyers, and look at how people participate in short-lived collectives .

We focussed our study on two communities: a collective of migrant workers on a strawberry farm in the South East of England, and a selection of mobile home enthusiasts from France. Both groups were involved in a 'slow' migration over 6 months of the year, whereby they establish a second home which they revisit year upon year.



A self-portrait probe camera: part of the Cultural Probe kit.

To understand and gain insights into how the two communities live in a nomadic way we carried out a number of 'Cultural Probe' studies with them. Participants were given specially designed kits of items to encourage them to reflect on their situation and everyday lives. The Cultural Probes we developed for this project included a self-portrait camera, a sound recording device to collect ambient audio, and a calendar for community members to record their daily activities.

The principal outcomes of the project included a collection of concept designs for new telecommunications products and services to help France Telecom better understand how they can support the lives of people who enter into new communities and communities on the move. The concept designs were produced in the form of two successive workbooks. The first contains thirty concepts exploring different dimensions of

mobility. This was followed by a second workbook describing five further design concepts in greater detail.

We also hired filmmaker Xio Xio Sun to help us understand the farm working community. Her documentary film revealed the rich relationships the workers form with the surrounding community, the farm, their homelands and each other. The film went on to win an award at a prestigious film festival.



A design workbook used to communicate our research.



A film still from an award winning documentary film by Xio Xio Sun.

Cultures of Mobility was funded by France Telecom.

