



Members in Profile

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Robyn Dowling

My interest in geography was fostered at high school, and then as an undergraduate at the University of Sydney. Geography was not my first choice of career, but inspirational teaching and sage advice from my honours supervisor, Ron Horvath, saw me head to the University of British Columbia in Canada for my graduate education and it was there that I really came to identify as a geographer. I returned to a position at Macquarie University when I finished my PhD, and I've been here ever since, now as Professor of Human Geography. I've been a councilor of the Geographical Society, and involved in many of its annual honours conferences.



As a teacher of urban geography, I find the links between geography and planning fascinating, for both disciplines rely upon each other in different ways. In my experience undergraduates are drawn to geography through planning – for many planning provides a comforting practical perspective with a more obvious career path. But planners don't plan in a vacuum and geography can teach valuable skills about not only urban dynamics but also about negotiation and balancing competing interests. This intersection between geography and planning is now the focus of my teaching, following the establishment of Macquarie's first undergraduate degree in planning by a team of human geographers.

My research is about the everyday spaces in which we live – specifically focused on people's perceptions and experiences of their houses and neighbourhoods. I try to show how these experiences are far from trivial, but are the fabric of society. I've recently become more interested in how everyday interactions and spaces have become the target of policy. In ongoing work on climate change with Pauline M^cGuirk of the University of Newcastle, we've been exploring how everyday behaviours have become the focus of attempts to reduce people's carbon footprint. A geographical perspective can aid this effort, partly because geographers think holistically but also because of their grounded understanding of social practices. In another ongoing project I'm focusing on ways people get around cities that rely on neither the car nor public transport. Activities like carsharing, for example, mimic the independence of the private car, but are more sustainable in many ways. And that essentially sums up why I identify as a geographer: it's a discipline and perspective that allows us to understand the 'big' issues of the day in a grounded way.