

Siarhei Liubimau

**EDITOR'S NOTE:
A CRITICAL THEORY OF THE 'PUBLIC'
FOR DIGITALLY MEDIATED URBANIZATION**

The growing digitalization of human agency and habitat, as well as proliferation of user-generated data, have significantly transformed the horizons and challenges of research in the social sciences and humanities. The most obvious and persistent factor in this change is a rapid growth in access by various knowledge-producing actors to technologies of information creation and transmission. In this way, digitalization has launched a process of the re-definition of the autonomy of academia and of academic research as practice in relation to other practices of knowledge production and transmission. One can notice that in academia the most intensively explored development horizon within this process is an orientation towards quantification and the computational analysis of collective human behavior. In this orientation, the very nature of big data and of the quantification process is often unequivocally presented as a public asset that simply has to be mastered and used. There are already arguments about digitalization and big data as, on the one hand, fragmenting the public sphere as well as privatizing the knowledge of society about itself and, on the other, creating new modes of collective action and thus challenging hegemonic agendas. However, there is a lack of a systematic theorizing of the influence of digitalization on the meanings and practices of the 'public'.

The goal of this journal issue is to explore notions and practices of 'public space', which emerge due to proliferation of digital data about spaces and spatial relations — from 'accessible' and 'transparent' to 'deliberated' and 'identity giving'. And, further, to discuss these notions and practices of 'public space' from the angle of the particular traits of reality that mark the turn to the digital humanities — new modes of data, new study methods, new types of researchers, as well as new types of recipients of research results. All materials collected for this special journal issue have at least three traits in common. Firstly, they respond to the historical situation, in which proliferation of digital data is not anymore considered as solely an instrument of democratization, but equally as a tool for manipulations, domestication of social activism, and tighter control. Secondly, each of the issue's materials presents its own kind of argument against technological determinism as a mode of thinking, in which invention and application of digital tools (to conduct research on spatial relations, to create new public arenas for deliberation, or to plan and program already existing spaces) are seen as a solution without examination of how exactly those tools are institutionalized and put into practice by already existing social forces. Thirdly, they all provoke de-familiarization with and rethinking of spatial forms and practices, with which public space has been associated before the Internet. Digitalization and various modes of landscapes' formation with the public purpose thus emerging (from voting or polling regarding urban planning cases to finding spatial evidence for a disputed military or political case) indeed provide a rich material for rethinking the public space in terms of how it is practiced and infrastructurally organized.

Hence materials of the journal issue from their different argumentation itineraries reach the point of intersection of three crucial questions (and of three study fields) in academic research in social sciences and humanities. First, how do digital information and communication technologies redefine key notions with which society is described and made sense of? With a more applied supplementary question of how ICT could be used to accelerate our attempts to understand and re-organize our current mode of collective living? And this is the perspective of communication studies. Second, how do digital tools to collect ever new information on space uses, as well as the tools to process this information for representation and planning of geographical space, alter our notions of [urban] geography? In a more direct way it translates into question of how established before the Internet notions of landscape, site, arena, city, urban planning, urban governance, etc. are being altered by the application of digital

tools in the practice of research, planning, design and management of cities and urban space? This is the perspective of urban studies. And third, how does the very availability of vast amount of digital data (from satellite photography to user generated content) challenge our expectations from research process and research outcomes in social sciences and humanities? In a more applied fashion, what is the added value of academic research in a situation of unprecedented availability of information on individuals, communities, institutions, infrastructures, historical sites, human interactions, and all other forms and results of human activities just for free online? And this is the perspective of reflexive digital humanities.

The paper by Aliaksandra Baravikova, which opens the issue, provides a profound overview of the existing utilizations of QGIS (Qualitative Geographic Information System) in the current context of the optimism of data-driven research on cities. By referring to a wide range of studies in various disciplines, she grounds the discussion on relations between qualitative and quantitative methods in urban research in the ways how GIS research software is embraced or contested by particular scholars. Her focus is mainly on the arguments and on the research outcomes of the proponents of qualitative methods. This way Baravikova shows which modes of spatiality beyond Euclidian geometry are made visible and intelligible by the studies conducted with QGIS software (from mental maps and recorded individual behavior in particular urban areas to urban problems caused by processes on different geographical scales simultaneously). On the one hand, this paper is a summary of how qualitative urban scholars inventively adjust their methodological approaches to the situation of datafication of urbanism. On the other hand, it shows how usages of QGIS enable a critical stance towards the boom of digital content.

Gintare Norkunaite and Arne Kunkel equally focus on one of cases of non-Euclidian representations of space — on participatory mapping as a tool of urban planning. They discuss the ways in which participatory mapping makes it possible to engage a community in data gathering in order to gain more reflexive and publicly relevant knowledge of a particular area. In their contribution, the authors continue the already established discussion of power relations inherent in cartography as a process and in the map as an outcome. As they show, the goal of engaging the studied community into the study process becomes increasingly prevalent in the course of digitalization and the spread of customized digital mapping tools in particular. Those tools create a base for democratization of the process of urban planning, of researching and representing space and relations in space: some types of mapping software essentially

rely on crowdsourcing of data represented on geographical maps (images, hyperlinks, notes, etc.). Further, Norkunaite and Kunkel discuss and reflect on two workshops co-designed by them together with other colleagues within the DAAD applied urbanist summer school “Mapping Visaginas”, organized by the European Humanities University in the fall of 2015. The authors suggest the ways of how participatory mapping can be a tool to get more accurate and reflexive knowledge about the area, to activate the studied community, and to distribute power more equally among the cartographers and respondents.

A similar analysis of mapping as crowdsourced process is developed in the paper by Yuliya Ilyuk. She studies technologies and narrative tactics used by the digital investigations agency Bellingcat in order to reconstruct a particular event — the crash of Malaysian Boeing MH17 in Donetsk oblast in July 2014. This way her contribution is an interesting and reliable addition to the increasingly popular and relevant studies of forensic architecture. Ilyuk shows how multi-sited mapping of the landscape of the plane accident by digital activists becomes a key public arena for negotiating and contesting the meaning of the military conflict in Eastern Ukraine. By reconstructing the mapping methodology and the types of data used by Bellingcat, she shows how digitalization constitutes a technological base for redistribution of power in representations of space (with growing role of crowdsourcing and of digital activists) and for the spread of new modes of narration of events (with the central role of live public demonstration of how the mapping process is collectively carried out). In the latter respect she conceptualizes the regime of technological and political transparency established in the result of such investigations as a public value, which is characteristic of the current conditions of digitalization and boom of user generated content.

Iryna Lunevich in her chapter discusses changes in the Moscow urban planning and governance process due to digitalization, and, in particular, due to the introduction of the “Active Citizen” platform for referendums. By examining the work of this digital platform, the author criticizes technologically deterministic assumptions that digital tools for public participation will automatically activate city dwellers and will make them better represented in the urban planning process. She adheres to the SCOT (Social Construction of Technology) approach in order to reveal practical meaning, opportunities and consequences of this platform in Moscow for different user groups related to it. This allows her to focus not only on the intrinsic features of the studied artifact, but also on the process of how such an artifact redefines communication and power relations between the groups in the field, where it is introduced. Lunevich

thus discusses that democratic participation in urban planning is not defined technologically. On the contrary, certain effects of technology, such as, for instance, gamification of polling, might hollow out the participation process and make it even less democratic. And, respectively, it might make urban dwellers rather reactive than active in relation to disputed public cases. She concludes that thorough analysis of existing interpretations and of institutionalization of digital participation tools is needed in order to identify their precise impacts on the process of urban planning.

The outcomes of the publication hence are twofold 1) the identification of those dimensions of urban processes in digitally mediated societies that are practiced and contested as 'public space' and as 'public space' making; 2) the elaboration and discussion of concepts and methodological approaches to study and interpret these dimensions of urban processes from the critical theory perspective. The critical theory perspective in this case means socially grounded critique of technological determinism. In case of each paper such critique equally has enabled co-articulation between the techno-economic base and a technological bias, on the one hand, and meanings of collective actions and political identities on the other.

One of the most powerful tendencies in critical urban studies today is to question boundaries of the city. And, therefore, to study urban processes not as contained, but as determined by their relations to wider geographies of power, material resources, connective, productive or extractive infrastructures, everyday cultures, environmental vulnerabilities, etc. Initially this tendency embodied the attempt to study distinct geographical locations in perspective of global inequalities. However, the rapidly expanding digital layer of human relations to geographical space is another reason to re-think the boundaries of cities the way we have known them from the 19th century (city as a bounded unit, with concentric circles as historical stages of its growth). In contrast to earlier portrayals of the Internet as a space, alternative to physical reality; current technological and business tendencies show that pressures to depict, organize, measure, valorize, scrutinize geographical space and spatial relations (with human body in the center) are one of the most solid driving forces for the further expansion of the digital domain. And this tendency of anchoring digitalization to already existing physical material environment is likely to continue. This makes especially relevant the attempts to identify and critically discuss those forms of spatiality which emerge today as a result of collective attempts to use newly available digital tools for creating a public asset — be it a highly strategic

multi-sited forensic landscape (Ilyuk), a contextualized participatory mapping solution (Norkunaite and Kunkel), a voting technology becoming a field for re-evaluation of practices of urban planning and governance (Lunevich), or methods and strategies to make spatial research software more accurate and socially aware (Baravikova).

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