

the
PUBLIC SPACE RESEARCH GROUP
welcomes

Dr. Daria Radchenko, Director of Urban Folklore and Anthropology Research Centre at Moscow School of Social and Economic Sciences, presenting

Redefining city life: social media data and digital anthropology in urban development

July 8, 2020
via ZOOM 
12:00-1:30p EST

Can photos in social media help to make urban life better? Since the early days of the internet as an engaging “space”, encouraging users to create and disseminate content – and of the internet studies – one of the key questions has been that of the relevance of digital traces (or digital footprints) for the study of offline phenomena, be it consumer behavior or political preferences. The outburst of the ‘big data’ approach had added weight to the idea that we do not need sampling as long as we can access any measurements of large groups of people and drive conclusions from the data. In current practice investigating digital traces including user-generated “relatively intentional” data (Boelstorff 2013) has become a convenient method of research.

This approach has been widely criticized for the usage of the data which has not been designed for and by researcher and which is a black box operated by a third agent (see, for example, Thatcher 2014), misinterpreting the social world as “flat” (Hepp et al 2018) and, most frequently, for the limitations of study created by the inequality of access to the digital resources both by users and researchers. Though all of the said above is fair, I suggest to look at the user-generated data from another perspective: that of the agency of the online publics in the offline worlds starting from the point Jose van Dijck suggested (2009). The research based on user data is limited, but if we know and tackle these limitations at an early stage, the data become the voice of those people who were likely never to get engaged in decision-making processes.

The research methodology has been applied for a number of urban design projects of KB Strelka (one of the major strategic urban consultancy in Russia) at the stage of preliminary analysis over five years. It is used rather to settle hypothesis than to answer the questions, yet it allows to see some patterns and focal points of urban life. In the presentation, I’ll discuss the approach and show the how these data can be used in the applied digital anthropology research for the needs of urban development projects.



Dr. Radchenko is also the vice-director of the Centre for Urban Anthropology at KB Strelka since 2015, leading the area of digital research, and holds the position of senior researcher of Russian Academy of National Economy and Public Administration, where she is working on the long-term project on the folklore of social media. Since 2006 she has been working in the field of internet folklore and digital anthropology with a special interest in transmission of vernacular texts and has published over 80 papers on these topics.

ZOOM info:
<https://gc-cuny.zoom.us/j/95080412038>
Meeting ID: 950 8041 2038

