

The good life happens offline:

Digital placemaking in Salzburg's Andräviertel

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Introduction and theoretical framing

Recent research on digital placemaking shows that digital, especially place-based media can create a new sense of belonging and attachment to place through the interweaving of online and offline practices. Placemaking is a multifaceted concept that aims to restructure urban public spaces for the benefit of the local community and make them more liveable for the residents (Palermo and Ponzini, 2015). The term dates back to the 1960s, was originally used in geography/urban studies, and has only recently (in 2015) emerged as “digital placemaking” in media studies (Basaraba, 2023). It describes the augmentation of physical spaces with place-specific digital services to maximise the value of this public space. Studies conducted with focus on “digital placemaking” point to the central role that digital media and mediated communication processes play in the development of neighbourhoods and entire cities by generating meaning changing the spheres of action, and ultimately creating a ‘good life’ for the citizens (Halegoua and Polson, 2021; Norum and Polson, 2021; Özkul, 2021).

This is created by people perceiving urban space differently through digital media and appropriating it according to media affordances and their needs and preferences. At the same time, digital placemaking is not necessarily community-driven, nor does it always lead to an increased quality of life for all people equally, but rather encompasses changing power relations and can even reinforce existing inequalities.

For this study we chose a neighbourhood in Salzburg, Austria. We examined how certain perceptions and characteristics of this urban neighbourhood have developed over time, who employs and rejects using which practices of digital placemaking for what purpose. The Andräviertel is often described as 'hip' and 'trendy' and an alternative to other part of the city, which struggle with overtourism.

Using the “Andräviertel” of the city as a specific case, the aim of our presentation is to further develop the concept of digital placemaking. Our guiding research questions are:

1. How does digital placemaking happen in the Andräviertel?
2. Who are the key actors involved and who can use digital placemaking practices to get closer to the "good life"?

3. How does digital placemaking intertwine with other forms of placemaking, and how do power relations affect these practices?

Methodological approach

To address our research questions, we used a multi-method approach: semi-structured interviews, a hashtag analysis, and miniature online/offline ethnography. We conducted nine interviews, applying Bachmann and Wittel's (2006) miniature ethnography concept, considering the environment and interviewees' positionality, and taking field notes to enrich our data. The interview material was analysed in depth using MAXQDA software.

Furthermore, in order to grasp the digital representation and practices of digital placemaking, we conducted a hashtag analysis on Instagram (Highfield and Leaver, 2016). For an overview of the major issues being discussed on social media, we chose three Andräviertel-related hashtags, because “[v]isual social media content can highlight affect, political views, reactions, key information, and scenes of importance” (Highfield and Leaver, 2016).

Results

The analysis of the data gathered revealed insights into how digital placemaking in and concerning the Andräviertel takes shape. Specific practices of digital placemaking can be analysed on three levels (cf. Lefebvre 1993):

(1) Reflecting upon one's own practices related to the Andräviertel

Our results show that succinct demarcation of the Andräviertel as a special place in the city of Salzburg. Interestingly, locals see the appeal of the Andräviertel in the absence of *digital* placemaking practices. Practices of offline placemaking and offline networks which require no digital devices are valued highly.

(2) Representations of the practices of people who aim to actively shape the neighbourhood.

Regarding online representations – such as those of online platforms as well as representation in social media – the results of the platform and hashtag analyses show that the Andräviertel is hardly used as a specific marker. This aligns with the refusal of locals to engage in practices of digital placemaking. Then again, it is surprising as the strong identity of the quarter has not been picked up upon by platforms and businesses. Judgements about the practices of placemaking of other groups, particularly tourists.

(3) Judgements about the practices of others

While the Andräviertel is characterized as authentic and open-minded, the practices of digital placemaking of others are judged harshly. Especially tourists who are viewed as a homogenous mass of superficial people – arriving by bus, taking the same pictures over and over for their Instagram accounts – are criticized and looked down upon.

In conclusion and drawing on the theme of the conference, the good life is associated with offline contacts, little use of digital devices and the strong desire for authenticity, localness and belonging and a strong preference for face-to-face networks.

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