

The Changing Urban Landscapes of Media Consumption and Production

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ABSTRACT

Questions of change have always been at the forefront of the social sciences. The article addresses the question of the adequacy of media and communication studies theories through looking at change in both a concrete environment and more generally in terms of linking this example with wider debates concerning social changes in the world of work. The example stems from a study on Wi-Fi cafe environments, in which work does play an important role. To introduce this topic, the article begins by discussing cafe environments overall and Wi-Fi cafes in particular, as well as the seemingly old-fashioned concept of telework. It then briefly presents the study as such, before discussing possible frameworks: the question of the public sphere on the one hand and of concepts such as 'digital boheme' to describe emerging work forms on the other hand. The latter is taken to be the more appropriate framework. This is also the answer to the question of which media and communication studies theories appear to be adequate for analysing such changes. I

Key Words digital boheme, media appropriation everyday life, media use environments, Wi-fi cafes, work forms

Introduction

Any academic discipline should ideally be self-critical and reflective about their theoretical approaches and empirical studies, since a renewal of

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frameworks might become necessary. A delicate balance between stability and change often emerges. This obviously also applies to media and communication studies. Therefore this special issue of the EJC asks whether the concepts of amateur and professional media on the one hand and production and consumption on the other hand are still appropriate markers for our theoretical and empirical reasoning. The timing for these questions is indeed fitting, since in recent years there has been both a rise of so-called new (digital) media as well as in approaches (with many new labels).

This particular article aims to question the new on yet another, albeit related level: it will address the question of the appropriateness of existing concepts by asking about their *relationship to other frameworks*. More concretely, the focus here is on the question of media use environments and on work forms and their interrelationship.¹ Another focus of this study is in terms of *the media being studied*: it is the Internet, and more specifically wireless access thereto. This again is looked at in *specific environments*: WiFi cafes. All of this will be used to reflect on the appropriateness of the frameworks we currently use to study media and communication and whether they are still adequate for the changing environments and phenomena at play.

The specific approaches used here stem primarily from media use and appropriation studies. Therefore the analysis firstly assumes that *everyday life* is the time and place to research media appropriation processes. This also implies that media use is seen as embedded in diverse aspects of social life and should therefore be researched therein and not separately.² Secondly, another concern is with the *discursive environment* that certain media appropriation processes and uses are embedded within and shaped by. Thirdly, the following arguments are based on the assumption that the everyday is a *spatially constituted field of practice* with a special focus on the meeting of city and virtual spaces.³ This follows a line of studies that Stephen Graham calls 'urban ICT studies' (2004: 3) or what Gumpert and Drucker tend to label 'urban communication studies' (see Burd et al., 2007). These combine theories and empirical evidence of the urban with concerns about information and communication technologies and their current developments (both on the theoretical as well as the empirical level).⁴

The article comprises of several parts: the first part introduces the context of the study in question (i.e. the general phenomenon of Wi-Fi; the cafe and the question of telework). The second part introduces the case studies (Wi-Fi cafes in Berlin) and presents some of the findings with an emphasis on the question of work in such places. Last, but not least, the article will close with a more general assessment of the work question in relation to wider shifts in media and communication research.

Context of the study: Wi-Fi, cafes and telework

Wi-Fi and Wireless LAN (WLAN) have become common terms in our everyday language. While not quite the same (Wi-Fi is a specific standard of a Wireless LAN), they both tend to connote access to a wireless network. In everyday life terms this suggests easy (and wireless) access to an Internet connection. In recent years these kinds of connections have risen in use both in private homes as well as in more public places. Despite their relatively remarkable rise, they have not seen any sustained public debate about either desired forms or possible consequences. Instead, what has risen is the pressure on politicians and policy makers to implement (free) Wi-Fi in their constituencies (cf. Jassem, 2007). Many cities, for example, tried to get the 'Wi-Fi city' label first. Even whole countries have tried to compete for such a description.⁵ In other places, such as Berlin, Wi-Fi is still much more scattered and left to private business to develop. Whether 'this new information superhighway will have the potential to change communities, careers, education, livelihoods, cultural transmission, and so on' (Jassem, 2007: 222) is questionable. But the belief in its power is widespread. Alongside simple marketing effects, for example, cities are hoping to gain economic value through these projects.⁷ Many argue that properties increase in value in areas with Wi-Fi provision, that the quality-of-life is getting better and that society will profit when, for example, the education system benefits from the free Wi-Fi. Whether this is, (a) true, and (b) enough to uphold such services in the long run remains to be seen.

Additionally, there are attempts to provide free access by wireless enthusiasts (e.g. NYC Wireless⁸ or the Germany-wide initiative called Freifunk).⁹ Freifunk is asking their users to each share their resources. Through open source software and basic sharing of existing access lines, meshed networks are being developed and users participate in an, eventually, city-wide Wi-Fi network. The proclaimed aim is a democratization of communication media and better local social networks through the sharing of Wi-Fi resources that further the development of more open networks.

On a rather different scale, one finds commercially oriented endeavours, which have also increased radically in the last few years. These are mostly based in individual cafes or coffeeshop chains such as Starbucks. Additionally, hotels, airports, train stations or some organizations have also begun to offer their own services. Next to the differences between the 'ideological' background of different services, the level of access (to whom access is given and at what cost) as well as their uptake, appropriation and visibility differ substantially. Freifunk, for example, is rarely detectable in public city-spaces.¹⁰ The commercially-oriented schemes, on the other

hand, are beginning to change public city life simply through the visibility of Wi-Fi use that impacts on non-users and users alike.

As an academic subject, these Wi-Fi projects have received some, but not much attention. Quite a bit of it deals with the more technical aspects. One of the exceptions on the social studies side is the work of Susan Drucker and Gary Gumpert, who have repeatedly sought to combine the forces of urban and communication scholars (e.g. Burd et al., 2007; Gumpert and Drucker, 2004). Prolific writers and fighters for the cause of urban communication studies, they repeatedly refer to Wi-Fi as one of the current phenomena, but their overall aim is wider. Therefore they have delivered little in terms of actual Wi-Fi studies. Another noteworthy exception is Laura Forlano, who has been both a member of NYCWireless and wrote her PhD on the subject, primarily in relation to the question of how these networks and political advocacy relate (e.g. Forlano and Dailey, 2008). Another prolific writer in the field is Adrian Mackenzie (2005), who asks, for example, how the image of movement comes together with the movement itself (of both technologies and people). More specifically in relation to coffeehouses, examples of research are few and far between. The work comes once more from the US, where Keith Hampton and Neeti Gupta have conducted a first systematic study (Hampton and Gupta, 2008). Their findings will be referred to below.

Another reference point concerns the notion of the cafe as a particular environment. The idea of a cafe contains notions of sociality (meeting with friends, being seen, seeing others, engaging with outsiders), but also very much of individuality.¹¹ Cafes (or coffeehouses as they are called in other contexts) have always been spaces where people go alone or to meet others. Those by themselves have often used cafes to access different kinds of media: newspapers (often provided by the cafe), books, less often television (mostly in sports bars). Nowadays, mobile phones are also often used in these environments. Cafes have also always been places of social interaction, with people both known and unknown. Early cafe culture has inspired ideas about public life, public opinion formation, democratic sociability (e.g. Habermas, 1990; Oldenburg, 1991)- The main reason behind this was a certain levelling of social class, i.e. in a coffeehouse everyone could in principle participate in the debate (Ellis, 2004: 59; Sennett, 1994: 112-14). The cafe has therefore always been seen as a place for intellectuals to meet. French existentialist philosophy, for example, is difficult to imagine without cafe culture. Related to this is the emphasis on the artistic audience. Painters, actors, as well as writers were all important figures in cafes, so much so that there was a genre called the 'coffeehouse literature'

(Rossner, 1999; Weigel, 1978: 54). But alongside having been places of liberation and artistic endeavours, cafes were also seen as places of danger, since they combined play with resistance.¹² Hence there was an always present possibility of political unrest. Early party politics, for example, took place in cafes (cf. Rossner, 1999: 117) and also managed to easily enter the public sphere thanks to those journalists present.

The overall attraction of the cafe can be explained by its image as a place of freedom, where nothing in particular had to be done (but much could be done).¹³ Hence the cafe is not a place for work as such, but it has always been a place for the exchange of ideas — and thereby work was often indirectly present (Thiele-Dohrmann, 1999: 142). For some, however, the cafe was indeed their actual workplace, since the environments in which they lived did not allow for work (too crowded, too cold, etc.). This aspect is currently revived in the Wi-Fi cafes — as is the broader question of what kind of work is permissible in this environment without its freedom being threatened.¹⁴ This is often embedded in talk about the decline of cafe culture, fuelled by the fear of an increasing lack of spaces to productively encounter the stranger and of a growing lack of spaces not dominated by work.

Although it represents a very different context, similar debates have dominated discourses around a related (1990s) phenomenon: telework. The main similarity lies in the idea of work outside of its 'expected' context and the resulting debates taking place. In telework, this includes negotiations with the employer, but also with the local environment (e.g. about what is legitimate work and when — see Laegren, 2008) and especially within the home itself (and oneself).¹⁵ The hopes attached have also not changed much: that new forms of work might allow more flexibility in arranging different aspects of one's life; that independence will increase; that one can choose one's place of home and work (Laegren, 2008). In many ways, work in Wi-Fi cafes could therefore be described as a current interpretation of telework.

The study

The study actually consists of two case studies. Neither is presented in detail here, since the concentration is on a sub-set of questions that have emerged from the research.

I begin with a brief summary of the overall project. Since 2006 (with prolonged periods of no engagement in either place), I have studied two Wi-Fi cafes in Berlin. They are both based in districts in inner-city Berlin, in places that are well liked by tourists and the student population alike

(since they provide lively environments with other cafes, shops, galleries, etc., close by). Nonetheless, the two environments also differ substantially. One cafe is based in the former West, in Kreuzberg, a well-known part of the city that has a long history of slight political unrest and catering for youth culture. Kreuzberg has changed relatively little in recent years (at least in the area around the cafe). The other cafe is based in the former East, in Mitte, one of the parts of town that have seen many substantial changes in the last 20 years. Massive gentrification has taken place and the neighbourhood has exchanged much of its earlier population for a relatively young and 'hip' crowd. The cafe in Kreuzberg is a cafe-bar that opened in the 1980s. It was one of the first to introduce free Wi-Fi access in their establishment. This was in 2003, albeit with some restrictions to prevent Wi-Fi dominating the cafe (Anon, 2005). The cafe in Mitte only opened in 2005 and was, from the beginning, labelled as a Wi-Fi cafe (not in its name, but in its function), and also provides Wi-Fi for free. Both cafes have served as places for observations and interviews in this study. Additionally, the study includes a selective analysis of the media reaction to both, i.e. the discursive environment. The material still needs to be fully examined, but some preliminary conclusions can be drawn. The focus in this paper is on the cafe in Mitte, since it has provoked and dominated a certain debate.

The Mitte cafe — thanks to its location at a busy square with lots of public transport — is a clearly visible place (and at the same time allows its customers to observe the street life). Nonetheless, there is no visible suggestion of a particular linkage to the neighbourhood.¹ Instead, it seems to thrive on those transient places in its immediate vicinity (several hostels and hotels, its closeness to major tourist attractions and nightlife, etc.). The busy intersection makes it difficult to have outside seating, but there are some tables outside nonetheless. Inside, the cafe stretches across two floors with several differently and stylishly designed corners (stylish in a laid-back fashion). There is a large bar in the middle of the ground floor, which offers snacks and cake as well as beverages. The principle is based on self-service (most cafes in Berlin have a waitressing service, but the self-service supposedly helps users to feel more at home). The place also serves as a bar in the evening, but its busiest time is during the day.

The free Wi-Fi service in this cafe was there from the beginning. It soon made name for itself as a Wi-Fi cafe, where taking your laptop was not only not frowned upon, but rather expected.¹⁷ This was further underlined by the cafe's widespread appearance in the media in the year after its opening and its prominent depiction in a widely read book (more about this below). Its clientele consists of a mixture of regulars and passers-by. Many visitors are students, some are tourists (sometimes for a prolonged stay

in Berlin), others are self-employed. It was an 'early adoption locality' — not as one of the first to offer Wi-Fi, but the first to become known as a place where Wi-Fi was a near-must.

The study: appropriation processes

While the appropriation of Wi-Fi usage into the patterns of the existing cafe culture has proven to be rather problematic in the Kreuzberg cafe (with many different rules established and then changed again and with a clear restriction in time and space of use),¹⁸ this kind of difficulty — at least at a more visible level — has not occurred in the Mitte cafe. This was, from the beginning, helped by the way the tables were placed, allowing laptop use.¹⁹ What remains a problem is the lack of power sockets for recharging (although this cafe does provide a few).²⁰ Users can be found to negotiate with other users about sharing the sockets (often the beginning of at least short communication intervals). Next to single users, many people sit together, either working on their laptops next to each other with only brief interactions or as groups (students, friends or business partners) using one laptop to discuss certain materials in a group.

In Mitte, there is no clash between the idea of the cafe and the Wi-Fi environment - quite the opposite. Without Wi-Fi and its users, this cafe would clearly lose an important aspect of its character (and selling-point). It offers the commercial face of Wi-Fi, but is not perceived as such. Rather, it is perceived as offering a kind of community. This is also the projected media image: commentators mention the fact that one does indeed feel rather alone without a laptop;²¹ others proclaim it to be 'the unofficial headquarters of the digital bohème'²² (see below); yet others underline that many people are returning customers.²³ Overall, the cafe is perceived as an open-plan office with living-room qualities. Work is where the Internet can be accessed. At the same time, at least in this specific place, it is important to see and to be seen. On this discursive level, the Wi-Fi and the related practices have been adopted as a natural progression of development, as a chance for new work environments (and forms) to emerge.

Framework 1: public sphere

In their work on Wi-Fi cafes in the US, Hampton and Gupta asked themselves whether the eventual ubiquitous availability of wireless Internet access will lead to 'greater participation in public spaces' as well as 'increased public interaction and possibly diversify the composition of people's social networks' or whether it will create 'private cocoons of interaction' instead,

which only underline already existing close ties, do not further the exchange with others present and thereby further the 'trend toward privatism' (Hampton and Gupta, 2008: 836). The authors locate the Wi-Fi cafe customers empirically between 'placemakers' and 'true mobiles', both of which they found examples of in their study. The true mobiles use the Wi-Fi coffeehouses for the sole purpose of work. Many live close to the cafe and use it simply to have a break from their usual environment; only a few were actually on the move. Their behaviour is characterized by the kind of civil inattention that Goffman already described.²⁴ 'Placemakers', on the other hand, go to Wi-Fi cafes to be sociable. While they, too, sometimes take work there, this is not the primary reason to enter the cafe. Instead, they hang out in the cafe, to make contact. They might also allow people to have a look at their screens, for example, and generally do not shield themselves off. Instead, they offer sociality to both other guests and staff. They are looking for the encounters that are possible in such a place.

Hampton and Gupta's conclusion is that it is too early to say which of the two types is going to dominate in the future. They plead for public access places to offer as open an access as possible to attract the placemakers, which they interpret as much more valuable for a possible enhancement of the public sphere. While their research fits well with many of my own findings, their overall question concerning the potential for broader participation in a public sphere (or the demise thereof) seems to repeat a well-rehearsed media and communication studies framework. It adds little to the understanding of this situation as a potentially new social environment with new challenges. I rather want to introduce the concept of work as a framework that might help to see the new emerging (which appears prominently in Hampton and Gupta's definitions, but not in their analysis).

Framework 2: 'digital boheme'?

The Mitte cafe has managed to attract a particular kind of clientele that is more specifically work-oriented than that in the Kreuzberg cafe and cafes in general. This clearly does not apply to all visitors in Mitte, but to a considerable number. It is also what has shaped the overall image of the place (and potentially vice versa, i.e. the place gradually built up a reputation that then attracted those kind of people it was supposedly catering for). Next to sizeable media coverage for the cafe itself, one book in particular has helped this process: a book with the (freely translated) title 'We call it work: the digital boheme or life beyond the permanent job' (Friebe and Lobo, 2006). In this book, the authors describe the lives of those who have otherwise been labelled the 'creative class', i.e. those people who perform

project-based work on short-term contracts, mostly in media- and arts-related professions (Florida, 2002). Many of these have now come to rely on the Internet as their primary communication and information tool as well as to promote themselves, etc. In the German context, the term 'digital bohème' was happily taken up to describe this growing group of the self-employed.²⁵ The book itself is popular non-fiction and rather playful (as well as subjective), nonetheless it provides some food for thought and presents some dominant discourses.

The authors describe the digital bohème as a new kind of working lifestyle that is actually well worth pursuing. According to Friebe and Lobo, the bohème aspect applies particularly to the freedom in their work, which differentiates their lives from the usual middle-class patterns. The new media play a particular role in terms of the independence from specific spaces and other material resources. Plus it allows a networking beyond the usual patterns.²⁶ The Internet is the digital bohème's lifeline. It is where most of their business contacts happen, it is where they can easily produce and distribute their product or content, it is potentially even the subject they deal with. The examples given by Friebe and Lobo range from Ebay powersellers to bloggers (who earn some money from blogging), to people designing concepts for marketing or someone selling homemade clothes online, as well as journalists, artists or computer scientists. 'Creative' is understood in a wide sense of the word (but not as wide as Florida defines it). It could refer to the marketing of something (and less the production of content) or it could refer to the 'product' that someone offers. A necessary part of the work, however, is the networking, the collaboration with others. Social capital is hence a necessary asset to have — or at least to build up. Friebe and Lobo claim that new group and collective structures emerge that function differently (and away from) traditional offices. These would then be the work environments that combine the best of both worlds (social life at work and collective structures, but also independence and freedom).

All the kinds of work and ways of working mentioned above make it very difficult to place the 'digital bohème' on an axis of amateur and professional. Much of what they produce or do is self-made or at least self-taught. Since much of the information and material used is available at little or no cost, the production structures change. Additionally, traditional forms of education no longer have the same importance.²⁷ As Friebe and Lobo outline, it is not so much 'attention' that is the new currency in online jobs but 'respect'. This is obviously more easily gained when a job is professionally executed. But what would a professional web designer, for example, do differently from an amateur? Where is the line between these

two? The professional might have a longer list of clients and completed projects — as well as more important clients — to begin with. But this is something that can quickly change. Thanks to many of these skills being easily acquired, the distinction between amateur and professional is blurring.

It gets more complex (and more interesting) when we turn to the idea of production and consumption. In principle, these work processes would belong to the sphere of production. In media and communication studies, however, we tend to talk about the production and consumption of media, i.e. only one part of the overall production and consumption process. Even in this more limited sense, production takes place in many of the cases of the creative workers discussed here. The emphasis can be on different kinds of media production or simply on the creation of their own publicity. More indirectly, other important aspects of their work (contacting clients or producing prototypes, etc.) take place online. This is not necessarily media production in any traditional sense — but it is not simply media consumption, either. Consumption, however, is also an important aspect of their work, especially in terms of information acquisition. Where consumption begins and production ends (or vice versa) is again difficult to define.

The framework of work brings with it another problematic: as playfully as the term 'digital boheme' might have originally been used, it implies a certain lightness that the actual working life of the people in these cafes rarely contains.²⁸ Hence Berlin's claim (started in late 2003 by its mayor), that the city was 'poor, but sexy' is only half of the story. Soon after, another term was introduced into the public debate: the *precariat*, elsewhere also described as the 'urban bums'. Both terms put a clear emphasis on the precarious financial, maybe even social, situation most of these people find themselves in, i.e. the terms suggest a more dystopian interpretation of the same phenomenon.²⁹ These are forms of work that might be nicely independent, but not necessarily adequately paid and with a high-risk (high-insecurity) factor. These kinds of jobs contain the risk of not being able to plan, of being 'desynchronized' with the rest of society. They are closely related to risks concerning qualifications, employment and career (certain privileges do not apply; certain steps are not offered) as well as obviously to income. Ultimately, they also carry a health risk. In contrast to the positive image created by Friebe and Lobo, this sounds rather more problematic.

Apart from the terminology, one major difference between the two ways of portraying what seems to be the same situation is the question of lifestyle. In Friebe and Lobo, being part of the digital boheme seems to be a lifestyle choice. It is the choice to choose freedom over security, to choose independence over a regular income, to find new ways of networking

rather than the old schemes. However, the more negative aspects of such precarious employment structures seem to suggest less of a lifestyle and more of a workstyle. The lifestyle (the Bohemian aspect) has become a brand used to sell the workstyle. So the people we find in the cafe described above could instead be described as *precarious digital workers*?° This already sounds less attractive. Instead, this can be seen to be part of the *new spirit of capitalism*, as pronounced by Boltanski and Chiapello (2006). Within this new spirit, project-based work is key and network structures predominate. This also implies, for example, that time has now become the major resource and needs to be used 'efficiently' (Boltanski and Chiapello, 2006: 206). Ownership, too, is now less material, but more based on the person him/herself. While this is the new basis for work, it also implies the emergence of an industry which serves primarily to aid processes of self-fulfilment (Boltanski and Chiapello, 2006: 208). This leads to an increasing blurring of the boundaries between work and private life. In contrast to earlier times, when self-fulfilment was meant to take place exactly through the clear distance from work (thanks to some extent to the movement of the 1960s), self-fulfilment is now meant to take place within the work environment. While it is surely not a bad idea to find some fulfilment in work, Boltanski and Chiapello (as well as other authors) also underline the problematic aspects. These can lead to new forms of oppression, i.e. the new spirit leads to old problems in new shapes. The potentially precarious work situations described above fit well into this pattern.

Outlook

This analysis might be particularly suited to Berlin at this moment in time, but the general trend towards a renewed focus on creative work is not limited to this city alone.³¹ Neither is the phenomenon of work entering public places only happening here. While many cities (including Berlin) are keen to sell a new image as 'city of the cultural industries' (alongside the 'Wi-Fi city' label), this contains hidden strands of developments that politics should equally consider. In opening up their field to these questions, media and communication research might help to contribute to the debates.

The emphasis on the problematic aspects of these kinds of work does not automatically assume that the cafe environment that fosters Wi-Fi use is in itself problematic. Rather, the emphasis here was on the problematic aspects of its discursive framing and the general social development expressed therein. And yes, cafe culture is surely different in such an environment than in a traditional cafe. The difference itself is not negative per se, but the question whether this makes the traditional third place suddenly

into a second place (a work place — cf. Oldenburg, 1991) does remain prevalent.³² The above seems to point to a fourth place instead — a new kind of interaction sphere.

For media and communication studies, these environments and the blurring of the axis of production/consumption as well as the axis of amateur/professional indeed provide a challenge and require at least new emphases (maybe not new approaches). If 'professional' use, for example, moves into more visible public spaces, this has consequences for both the user and the production taking place therein, as well as for the surrounding environments, i.e. other users. In the long run, the border between work and free time might be challenged even further than has already happened (private and public are obviously also involved in this). And, as underlined here, some security is replaced with insecurity, while some freedom might be gained, i.e. work itself is changing.

At the same time, we need to continue thinking about the wider consequences of such changes. Is there a mediatization of cities taking place, of which this is only one small fragment, that we should take a closer look at? And if yes, the existing frameworks need reinforcements from elsewhere, since in this kind of analysis the role of the media is suddenly diminished — and changed. Most media-centric analyses would only cover small aspects of the overall phenomenon. Any media appropriation concept — although in principle interested exactly in the embedded nature of media use — is, therefore, not enough to be able to describe the wider processes at stake here.³³ If media and communication studies find an adequate framework for this, combining existing approaches from elsewhere with its expertise on media and communication, it will be able to adequately contribute to the analysis of the new.

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Notes

1. Work forms in particular reflect social processes that are often media-related, but rarely limited to media. This underlines the need for media and communication studies to always take a look beyond the media themselves.

2. This brings with it many methodological challenges, which, however, cannot be discussed in the framework of this article.
3. The everyday is the point where structure and agency meet, where the micro- and the macro-perspective converge, where the tension between change and stability most clearly finds an expression.
4. Graham argues that 'the hybrid concept of the "cybercity" is used ... to denote the inseparable fusion of relations that are mediated by ICTs with those that are mediated between human presence, and movement, within and between urban places' (2004: 22).
5. Estonia is an often-quoted example of a whole country that early on began to embrace (mostly) free Wi-Fi access in public places (Boyd, 2004).
6. Only very recently, i.e. in February 2009, the city government announced that it would finally implement free Wi-Fi access in one part of the city centre — three years after the plans were initially discussed (cf. www.welt.de/berlin/article3260217/Berlin-macht-das-Internet-kostenlos.html).
7. In the US, for example, many cities set up Wi-Fi networks to bridge the so-called digital divide, i.e. to provide access to those who could otherwise not afford it and thereby include them in public life. In order for business to be attractive, the networks additionally need to be secure. Other plans have included a combination of the city providing free access to the spaces where routers can be set up, while the Internet providers would build the infrastructure and provide an inexpensive service. However, fully municipal programmes seem to be more successful, especially when they can come up with something like a guaranteed base number of subscribers through their city services.
8. www.nycwireless.net/about/
9. berlin.freifunk.net
10. This is quite in contrast to NYCWireless, which initially concentrated on public parks.
11. The choice of cafe, therefore, also represents a choice for a specific self-image. In this context, coffeehouse chains are sometimes regarded as problematic (more similarity than individuality).
12. Even coffee itself- as a potential drug - has been seen as a great danger, while others praised it for its ability to enliven thought processes (see e.g. Thiele-Dohrmann, 1999: 7-10).
13. On top of this, cafes have always been diversely-gendered places, which offer both sexes 'a home away from home,' albeit in sometimes dissimilar ways (e.g. with the additional offer of prostitution).
14. In Berlin in particular, the cafe culture emerged later than elsewhere, i.e. in the late 19th, early 20th century. At that point in time, however, it emerged with a force. Not surprisingly, one of its most favourite haunts was then referred to as the 'Cafe GroBenwahn', i.e. 'cafe megalomania.'
15. Next to telework conducted more or less exclusively from home, other kinds included visits to so-called telecottages or telecentres. These were centres

established mostly in rural areas, which were meant to provide communal access to facilities that supported certain kinds of office work conducted remotely. They first emerged in the 1980s and often included computer (later Internet) access, printing and copying facilities and similar services. Different kinds of schemes for running them were developed. Many first emerged in the Scandinavian countries, but they have spread far since. At the same time, many original centres had to close. While more rural than Wi-Fi cafes, many basic questions are shared.

16. On its website, one gets to know that there is actually a tradition that the cafe is building on: one of the Aschinger beer bars was based in the same premises from the late 19th century into the 1920s. This particular one was referred to in a famous novel about Berlin by Alfred Doblin.
17. There is a clear dominance of Macs vs PCs.
18. Hampton and Gupta (2008: 846) found very similar rules and attempts to keep use at bay in their project. Their interpretation of these attempts, however, differs from mine, since they proclaim these to be problematic. Instead, they want access to be as openly designed as possible for as many 'placemakers' (see discussion below) to find their space. I, on the other hand, would argue for the value of these rules in certain places, where other kinds of sociability are otherwise slightly threatened (this applies to the Kreuzberg cafe in my study).
- 19- On the ground floor, there is one row of high seats against a wall with equally high tables in front of it, which offers itself to users sitting next to each other without having to negotiate a space for their laptops and other materials. While the rest of the cafe has more traditional seating arrangements, these also differ in size, i.e. there are quite a few tables that can easily be used by one person and their laptop.
20. The same kind of 'power plug interactions' have been noted by Hampton and Gupta in their research (2008: 843).
21. www.neon.de/kat/kaufen/reise/berlin/119097.html
22. www.taz.de/index.php?id=archivseite&dig=2006/11/13/aO151
23. www.berliner-akzente.de/jobs_karriere/artikel_86340.php
24. Additionally, the time that they spend waiting for their coffee is the time used for the mobile phone (mostly as a tool for distraction). They also sometimes appear in pairs, but this then tends to be for settling business. Hampton and Gupta (2008) relate these behaviours to the concepts of public privatism and networked individualism.
25. Another prevalent terminology has been 'digital nomads'.
26. Friebe and Lobo go as far as speaking of a new pattern across the city that is based more on where WLAN is available than other resources.
27. However, as outlined elsewhere, many of the people engaged in this type of work are rather well educated on the formal level.
28. This concept has been widely debated in the German context — and widely disputed. Many of the concept's critics see the two authors supporting a neo-liberal framework that does not accept responsibility for the working

- population. It is also about the idea of self-exploitation as well as the question of whether this is not limited to a particular kind of elite.
29. This has also been described by Rambach and Rambach (2001) in their book on the precarious intellectuals. It is a heterogeneous group of people, but the main characteristic is that they are well educated while earning rather little for the work that they do and having hardly any job security.
 30. In a conference presentation on the same study, I once used the term 'branded digital nomad community' to describe the group of people in the Mitte cafe. It does not draw out the work aspect as well, but it emphasizes that they have mostly been labelled from the outside, while this again furthers a kind of identification. None of this, however, is particularly stable.
 31. Alongside the 'creative class' and the 'precarious intellectuals' we also have the 'freeter' in Japan and the 'yetties' (young, entrepreneurial, tech-based, twenty-somethings) in the US.
 32. A move to nonplace or omnitopia would indeed be problematic (Wood, 2009).
 33. One such theoretical-empirical reinforcement would need to address the interrelationship between specific spaces and the virtual (this is also a methodological question).

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