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Digital Multilocality – A novel and experimental digital mixed methods approach to research multilocal work between cities and mountain regions

Digital Humanities and Economics

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Abstract

Digital technologies such as laptops and smartphones allow to work in multiple locations, even between urban centers and rural peripheries such as, for example, mountain regions. In this study, we analyzed the work practices of six multilocal knowledge workers that mainly work in a city and temporary seek to work in a Swiss mountain region. In doing so, we focused on how they work in both workplaces using marginality to work and how they create urban-rural linkages through the use of ICTs.

We analyzed their engagement with digital technologies at both workplaces using a novel mixed methods approach that combines heterogeneous data sources of geolocation tracking, quantitative digital work tracking (applications used on smartphones and laptops), qualitative digital diaries and semi-structured interviews as well as ethnographic walk-along observations.

The combination of these different methods in one single mixed methods approach required careful planning, organization, data collection, data analysis and the consideration of ethical considerations with the utmost carefulness.

The results give a differentiated picture of the multilocal work practices between different locations, which a single method would not accomplish to the same extent. We were able to explore the data in more depth by closely linking the individual methods with each other, which made it possible to analyze the phenomenon of digital multilocality in greater detail. In particular, the bridging of quantitative and qualitative methods could offer more rigor in this regard. Nevertheless, there are numerous risks associated with such an experimental and exploratory approach.

This study reveals entirely novel methodological insights into a novel combination of digital and analog methods.